

What is Assessment?

Assessment is an in-going process for all children. It is important to keep looking carefully at each child's progress and to make sure that what they are doing is at the right level.

People who are working with your child will want to work with you to make sure that they make the best possible progress. They will watch your child at work and at play, talk to him or her and to you to find out what she/he finds difficult or easy. They will also carry out tests at various stages to find out how they are doing compared with children of about the same age.

If your child may have special educational needs, it is important to identify them early. In this way, help can be given as soon as possible.

How can I help?

You know your child better than anyone. If you feel that they may be struggling, talk to people working with him or her about your concerns. Sometimes children are very different at home, and it is helpful for everyone to have the full picture. For example, you might want to share information about your child's:

- language development;
- play;
- social skills;
- independence skills, such as dressing and feeding;
- physical development;
- behaviour;
- likes and dislikes;
- understanding

You may have found that some approaches work better than others with your child. This is also useful information for the professionals working with your child.

Who might be involved in the assessment?

Teachers assess children as part of their everyday teaching. If they feel they need help in understanding a child's difficulties, they will ask for help from the Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), who may also ask for help from outside specialists in:

- learning difficulties;
- communication difficulties;
- behavioural difficulties;
- speech and language difficulties;
- child development;
- visual impairment;
- hearing impairment;
- physical difficulties.

Medical specialists may also be asked for their advice.

What if things don't improve?

If your child has been assessed over a period of time and different ways of working have not helped, statutory assessment may need to be discussed.

What is statutory assessment?

Statutory assessment is a very detailed look at a child's difficulties, strengths and needs to decide whether the child requires more or different educational help and, if so, what kind of help, how much and where this could be provided. This may lead to a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

A statutory assessment can be requested:

- by your child's school or setting;
- by you as the child's parent/carer;
- by referral from another agency, such as Health or Social Services.

In all cases the Local Education Authority (LEA) will write to you to let you know that they are considering whether or not it is necessary to go ahead with statutory assessment, and to give you the opportunity to say why you think your child should or should not be assessed. They have 6 weeks to decide to go ahead or not. If they decide not to go ahead and you disagree, you have the right to make an appeal to an independent Special Educational Needs Tribunal.

Who will be involved?

When they make a statutory assessment the LEA will ask for:

- parental advice – from you the parent/carer;
- educational advice – from your child's school or setting;
- medical advice – from the local health authority;
- psychological advice – from the educational psychologist;
- social services advice – from the local social services department, if they are involved;
- advice from any other agency involved with your child;
- the views of your child about their needs and aspirations.

Six weeks is allowed to gather advice and the LEA has four more weeks to make a decision on whether or not to issue a statement based on that advice. The LEA has two more weeks to let you know that they have decided. They will send you:

- a proposed statement – detailing how the final statement will look, but leaving out the school or setting. The LEA is not allowed to write anything in that section at this time. They must send you a notice setting out the arrangements for the choice of school:

or

- the written reasons why they will not make a statement, usually in the form of a note in lieu. A note in lieu should describe the child's special educational needs, explain why the LEA does not think it necessary to make a statement and make recommendations about the provision for the child. You have the right to make an appeal to the Special needs Tribunal if a statement is not issued.