



## Common SEN Conditions and Educational Implications

This guide provides an overview of common Special Educational Needs (SEN) conditions and how they may affect learning. Every child is unique, and children with the same condition can have very different needs and strengths.

### Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

#### What is it?

A lifelong developmental condition affecting how a person communicates, interacts with others, and experiences the world. It includes what was previously known as Asperger's syndrome.

#### Common characteristics:

- Difficulty with social communication and understanding social cues
- Preference for routine and predictability
- Intense interests in specific topics
- Sensory sensitivities (to light, sound, touch, taste, or smell)
- Literal understanding of language
- Difficulty with changes or transitions

#### Educational implications:

- May struggle with unstructured times (break, lunchtime)
- Group work can be challenging
- May need explicit teaching of social skills
- Sensory overload in busy classrooms
- Difficulty understanding abstract concepts
- May need visual supports and clear routines

#### Helpful strategies:

- Visual timetables and schedules
- Clear, direct language and instructions
- Advance warning of changes
- Quiet space available when needed
- Social stories to explain situations
- Breaking tasks into smaller steps
- Reduced sensory stimulation when needed

### Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

#### What is it?

A neurodevelopmental condition affecting concentration, impulse control, and activity levels. There are three types: predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive-impulsive, and combined.

#### Common characteristics:

- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Easily distracted
- Difficulty organising tasks
- Forgetfulness
- Fidgeting or restlessness
- Interrupting or blurting out answers
- Difficulty waiting their turn

#### Educational implications:

- May struggle to complete work
- Appears not to listen during lessons
- Loses equipment frequently
- Difficulty following multi-step instructions
- May disrupt lessons unintentionally
- Struggles with time management and planning

#### Helpful strategies:

- Seating near the teacher, away from distractions
- Breaking tasks into smaller chunks
- Movement breaks
- Use of fidget tools
- Clear, simple instructions (one at a time)
- Visual timers and checklists
- Positive reinforcement systems
- Additional time for tasks



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### Dyslexia

#### What is it?

A specific learning difficulty that primarily affects reading and spelling skills. It is not related to intelligence.

#### Common characteristics:

- Difficulty learning to read and spell
- Slow reading speed
- Poor phonological awareness (sounds in words)
- Difficulty with sequencing (days of week, alphabet)
- May confuse similar-looking letters (b/d, p/q)
- Strong verbal skills may mask difficulties
- Better comprehension when listening vs reading

#### Educational implications:

- Reading below age-expected level
- Reluctance to read aloud
- Spelling errors that don't follow patterns
- Difficulty copying from the board
- Avoidance of written tasks
- Fatigue from extra effort required

#### Helpful strategies:

- Phonics-based reading interventions
- Coloured overlays or paper
- Assistive technology (text-to-speech, speech-to-text)
- Additional time for reading and writing tasks
- Alternative ways to demonstrate knowledge (oral presentations, recordings)
- Multi-sensory learning approaches
- Pre-teaching key vocabulary
- Reduce amount of written recording required

### Dyscalculia

#### What is it?

A specific learning difficulty affecting the ability to understand and work with numbers.

#### Common characteristics:

- Difficulty understanding number concepts
- Problems with number facts (addition, multiplication tables)
- Difficulty with mental arithmetic
- Problems telling the time
- Difficulty with money and measurements
- Poor sense of estimation
- Anxiety around maths

#### Educational implications:

- Struggles in maths lessons
- Difficulty following multi-step calculations
- Problems with word problems
- May count on fingers for simple calculations
- Difficulty understanding place value
- Problems with fractions and decimals

#### Helpful strategies:

- Concrete manipulatives (counters, blocks)
- Visual representations of concepts
- Breaking down problems into steps
- Use of calculators and multiplication squares
- Extra time for maths tasks
- Real-life, practical maths activities
- Reduced pressure and anxiety around maths
- Number lines and hundred squares





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### Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder - DCD)

#### What is it?

A condition affecting physical coordination and movement, which can also impact planning and organization.

#### Common characteristics:

- Poor coordination and balance
- Difficulty with fine motor skills (handwriting, using scissors)
- Bumps into things or appears clumsy
- Difficulty organizing thoughts and tasks
- Problems with personal organization
- May tire easily
- Can affect speech (verbal dyspraxia)

#### Educational implications:

- Messy, slow handwriting
- Difficulty in PE lessons
- Problems with practical subjects (art, science experiments)
- Slow to get organized (books, equipment)
- May struggle with presentation of work
- Difficulty with dressing (PE kit, coats)

#### Helpful strategies:

- Occupational therapy input
- Allow use of laptop/tablet
- Reduce amount of writing required
- Provide worksheets rather than copying
- Allow extra time for tasks
- Help with organization (visual checklists)
- Adapted PE equipment
- Seating position to support good posture
- Pencil grips and writing slopes

### Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)

#### What is it?

Difficulties with understanding language (receptive) or expressing themselves (expressive), or both. Includes conditions like Developmental Language Disorder (DLD).

#### Common characteristics:

- Limited vocabulary
- Difficulty following instructions
- Problems forming sentences
- Difficulty explaining thoughts or needs
- May use gestures instead of words
- Problems with grammar
- Difficulty with abstract language

#### Educational implications:

- Appears not to follow instructions
- Struggles to answer questions
- Difficulty in discussions and group work
- Problems with reading comprehension
- Written work may be limited
- May become frustrated or withdrawn
- Can be misunderstood as behaviour problem

#### Helpful strategies:

- Visual supports (pictures, symbols, gestures)
- Simplified language and shorter sentences
- Check understanding regularly
- Allow thinking time before answering
- Teach key vocabulary before topics
- Reduce language demands in tasks
- Speech and language therapy input
- Alternative communication methods if needed
- Small group or 1:1 support



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### Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Needs

#### What is it?

This broad category includes conditions affecting emotional wellbeing, such as anxiety disorders, depression, attachment difficulties, and trauma-related needs.

#### Common characteristics:

- Anxiety or low mood
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- School refusal or avoidance
- Low self-esteem
- Difficulty forming relationships
- May appear withdrawn or aggressive
- Physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches)

#### Educational implications:

- Poor attendance or lateness
- Difficulty concentrating due to worry
- Avoidance of certain activities
- Emotional outbursts
- Difficulty working in groups
- May refuse to participate
- Academic progress affected by emotional state

#### Helpful strategies:

- Consistent, trusted adult relationships
- Safe space to go when overwhelmed
- Emotional literacy teaching
- Flexible approach to learning
- Reduced demands during difficult periods
- Clear behaviour expectations with support
- Mental health support (counselling, pastoral care)
- Gradual reintegration if absent
- Positive relationships and praise
- Collaboration with CAMHS or other services

### Sensory Processing Difficulties

#### What is it?

Difficulties processing sensory information from the environment or the body. Can occur alongside other conditions or as a standalone difficulty.

#### Common characteristics:

- Over-sensitivity (hypersensitivity) or under-sensitivity (hyposensitivity) to:
  - Sound, light, touch, taste, smell, movement, body position
- May seek or avoid certain sensations
- Can become overwhelmed in busy environments
- May have "meltdowns" when overloaded
- Difficulty with certain textures (food, clothing, materials)

#### Educational implications:

- Distressed by school environment (noise, smells, lighting)
- Difficulty during assemblies or busy times
- Problems in practical subjects
- May refuse certain activities
- Difficulty sitting still or staying in seat
- Can appear distracted or inattentive

#### Helpful strategies:

- Sensory breaks and movement opportunities
- Quiet workspace available
- Ear defenders or fidget tools
- Reduced visual clutter
- Alternative seating (wobble cushion, standing desk)
- Sensory diet (planned sensory activities)
- Occupational therapy assessment
- Understanding and accommodating sensory needs
- Advance warning of potentially challenging sensory situations





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### Physical Disabilities

#### What is it?

Conditions affecting movement, coordination, or physical ability. Includes cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, and others.

Common characteristics vary by condition but may include:

- Reduced mobility or use of wheelchair
- Difficulty with fine or gross motor skills
- Fatigue or reduced stamina
- Need for medical interventions during school
- Difficulty with self-care tasks

#### Educational implications:

- May need adapted equipment or furniture
- Difficulty accessing all areas of school
- Slower pace of work
- May miss lessons for medical appointments or therapy
- Difficulty in PE or practical subjects
- May need support with personal care

#### Helpful strategies:

- Accessible classroom layout
- Adapted resources and equipment
- Additional time for tasks and transitions
- Laptop or alternative recording methods
- Personal care support if needed
- Physiotherapy or occupational therapy input
- Risk assessments for activities
- Inclusive PE adaptations
- Peer support and awareness

### Visual Impairment (VI)

#### What is it?

Reduced vision that cannot be fully corrected with glasses. Ranges from partial sight to blindness

#### Educational implications:

- Difficulty seeing board or resources
- Slower reading speed
- Eye strain and fatigue
- Difficulty in practical subjects
- Problems with spatial awareness
- May miss visual cues and body language

#### Helpful strategies:

- Enlarged or high-contrast materials
- Good lighting, non-glare surfaces
- Seating position to optimize vision
- Braille or audio materials if needed
- Additional time for tasks
- Verbal descriptions of visual information
- Assistive technology (screen readers, magnifiers)
- Support from specialist VI teacher



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### Hearing Impairment (HI)

#### What is it?

Reduced hearing ability, ranging from mild hearing loss to profound deafness. May use hearing aids, cochlear implants, or British Sign Language (BSL).

#### Educational implications:

- Difficulty hearing teacher or peers
- May miss instructions or discussions
- Speech and language development may be affected
- Lip-reading requires concentration (tiring)
- Background noise makes listening harder
- May appear inattentive or not follow instructions

#### Helpful strategies:

- Seating at front, facing teacher
- Minimize background noise
- Face student when speaking
- Visual supports and written instructions
- Check hearing equipment working
- Use of radio aids/soundfield systems
- Access to interpreter or communication support
- Pre-teaching key vocabulary
- Captions for videos
- Support from specialist HI teacher

### Important Reminders

- ★ Every child is different
- ★ Two children with the same diagnosis will have different strengths, needs, and personalities. Strategies must be individualized.
- ★ Co-occurring conditions are common
- ★ Many children have more than one SEN condition (e.g., autism and ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia). This can make needs more complex.
- ★ Focus on strengths
- ★ Children with SEN have many strengths and talents. Education should build on these while supporting areas of difficulty.
- ★ Early identification matters
- ★ The sooner needs are identified and support provided, the better outcomes children have.
- ★ Reasonable adjustments are a legal right
- ★ Under the Equality Act 2010, schools must make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils, including those with SEN.



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