

Types and categories of special educational needs

The 0-25 SEND Code of Practice (2015) identifies 'four broad areas of [special educational] need and support' (see chapter 6 for detailed descriptions):

- Communication and interaction;
- Cognition and learning;
- Social, emotional and mental health;
- Sensory and/or physical needs.

These areas allow schools to gain an overview of their pupils' range of needs. The 0-25 SEND Code (2015) emphasises:

'The purpose of identification is to work out what action the school needs to take, not to fit a pupil into a category. In practice, individual children or young people often have needs that cut across all these areas and their needs may change over time... A detailed assessment of need should ensure that the full range of an individual's needs is identified, not simply the primary need.' (section 6.27)

There is a significant area change from the previous Code of Practice: 'Social, emotional and mental health' has replaced the 2001 Special Educational Needs Code of Practice's 'Behaviour, emotional and social difficulty'. This reflects the change in thinking around causes of 'challenging behaviour' and growing concern about young people's mental health.

There is now only one support code – 'SEN support' – which replaces the 2001 support codes of 'early years/school action' and 'early years/school action plus'.

The School Census

Although Government wishes to move away from assumptions about pupils' needs based upon their difficulty or disability, they still need information about specific categories of need to allow them to predict levels of future resource. This is collected through the statutory 'School Census'.

The Government first started collecting information on individual pupils in 2002 through the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC). In 2006 (for secondary schools) and 2007 (for other educational settings), the PLASC was replaced by The School Census. This statutory census is carried out three times a year (January, May and October). Click [[here](#)] for more information.

Census categories of special educational needs include:

- Specific learning difficulties (SpLD);
- Moderate learning difficulty (MLD);
- Severe learning difficulty (SLD);
- Profound and multiple learning difficulty (PMLD);
- Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN);

- Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH);
- Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD);
- Visual impairment (VI);
- Hearing impairment (HI);
- Multisensory impairment (MSI);
- Physical disability (PD);
- 'SEN support' but no specialist assessment of type of need (NSA).

Since the spring 2015 census, the 'Behaviour, emotional and social difficulties' (BESD) category is no longer an option.

For information about 2014-2015 transitional arrangements for special educational needs categories of need, see Department for Education (2014).