

Definitions of learning difficulty

All these definitions include recognition of the need for further help with self-help skills and personal care.

Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD)

Pupils with severe learning difficulties have significant intellectual or cognitive impairments. This has a major effect on their ability to participate in the school curriculum without support. They may also have associated difficulties in mobility and coordination, communication and perception and the acquisition of self-help skills. Pupils with SLD will need support in all areas of the curriculum. They may also require teaching of self-help, independence and social skills. Some pupils may use sign and symbols but most will be able to hold simple conversations and gain some literacy skills. Their attainments may be within the upper P scale range (P4-P8) for much of their school careers (that is below level 1 of the National Curriculum).

From: Department for Education (2010) 'Glossary of special educational needs (SEN) terminology'. [Online at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/sen/schools/a0013104/glossary-of-special-educational-needs-sen-terminology>; accessed: 1.1.12]

Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD)

Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties have severe and complex learning needs, in addition they have other significant difficulties, such as physical disabilities or a sensory impairment. Pupils require a high level of adult support, both for their learning needs and also for personal care. They are likely to need sensory stimulation and a curriculum broken down into very small steps. Some pupils communicate by gesture, eye pointing or symbols, others by very simple language. Their attainments are likely to remain in the early P scale range (P1-P4) throughout their school careers (that is below level 1 of the National Curriculum).

From: Department for Education (2010) 'Glossary of special educational needs (SEN) terminology'. [Online at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/sen/schools/a0013104/glossary-of-special-educational-needs-sen-terminology>; accessed: 1.1.12]

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Pupils with ASD cover the full range of ability and the severity of their impairment varies widely. Some pupils may also have learning disabilities or other difficulties, making identification difficult.

ASD recognises there are a number of sub-groups within the spectrum of autism. Pupils with ASD find it difficult to:

- understand and use non-verbal and verbal communication
- understand social behaviour, which affects their ability to interact with children and adults
- think and behave flexibly, which may be shown in restricted, obsessional or repetitive activities.

Abridged from: Department for Education (2010) 'Glossary of special educational needs (SEN) terminology'. [Online at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/sen/schools/a0013104/glossary-of-special-educational-needs-sen-terminology>; accessed: 1.1.12]

Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities

Children and young people with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (CLDD) have conditions that co-exist. These conditions overlap and interlock creating a complex profile. The co-occurring and compounding nature of complex learning difficulties requires a personalised learning pathway that recognises children and young people's unique and changing learning patterns. Children and young people with CLDD present with a range of issues and combination of layered needs – e.g. mental health, relationships, behavioural, physical, medical, sensory, communication and cognitive. They need informed specific support and strategies which may include transdisciplinary input to engage effectively in the learning process and to participate actively in classroom activities and the wider community. Their attainments may be inconsistent, presenting an atypical or uneven profile. In the school setting, learners may be working at any educational level, including the National Curriculum and P scales. This definition could also be applicable to learners in Early Years and post-school settings.

From: Carpenter, B. et al. (2011) The Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Research Project: Developing pathways to personalised learning. London: The Schools Network (formerly Specialist Schools and Academies Trust). [Online at: [http://complexld.ssatrust.org.uk/uploads/CLDD%20research%20project%20\(Final\)%20Exec%20sum.pdf](http://complexld.ssatrust.org.uk/uploads/CLDD%20research%20project%20(Final)%20Exec%20sum.pdf); accessed: 1.1.12]