



EHCP SUPPORT SERIES

Chapter 1

EHCP - Where Do I Start?

A practical starting point for understanding Education, Health and Care Plans and deciding what to do next.

A place to begin

EHCPs can involve unfamiliar language, paperwork and several different services. This chapter breaks the process into smaller steps so you can understand what an EHC plan is, when one may be considered and what you can begin gathering now.



What Is an EHCP?

EHCP stands for **Education, Health and Care Plan**. It is a legal document for a child or young person whose special educational needs require provision beyond what is ordinarily available through SEN support. It can continue, where criteria are met, up to age 25.

Key fact

An EHC plan identifies the child or young person's special educational needs, the outcomes being sought and the education, health and social care provision required to support them (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2015).

An EHCP is not simply a diagnosis document. The focus is on the child or young person's needs and the special educational provision required. A diagnosis can be useful evidence, but the statutory process considers needs and provision rather than relying on a diagnostic label alone.

Study note

The SEND Code of Practice describes EHC plans as being for children and young people who need more support than is available through SEN support. The plan should be centred on the child or young person, their views and aspirations, and the outcomes they are working towards.

What might an EHCP bring together?

- Special educational needs and the provision required to meet them
- Relevant health needs and health provision
- Relevant social care needs and provision
- Outcomes for the child or young person
- The views, interests and aspirations of the child or young person and their family



SEN Support or an EHCP?

Many children and young people with SEND receive support without an EHCP. Schools and colleges should use a graduated approach to identifying needs, planning support, putting it in place and reviewing its impact.

SEN Support

Usually delivered through the education setting.

Support is planned and reviewed according to the child or young person's identified needs. This may include adaptations, targeted interventions, specialist advice or additional adult support.

EHC Plan

A statutory plan maintained by the local authority.

It may be needed where the special educational provision required cannot reasonably be provided from the resources normally available to mainstream settings.

Important

A child does not have to 'fail' for a certain length of time before an EHC needs assessment can be requested. The legal question for the local authority is whether the child or young person has or may have SEN and whether it may be necessary for special educational provision to be made through an EHC plan (Children and Families Act 2014, s.36).

Think about the provision, not only the label. A useful starting question is: what support does my child need to access education, participate, communicate, regulate, learn and make progress - and is their current support enough?



Where Do I Start?

You do not need to have every report, every answer or perfectly organised evidence before you begin. Start by building a clear picture of your child or young person's needs and what is happening in practice.

1. Write down what you are noticing

Think about learning, communication, sensory needs, emotional wellbeing, physical needs, independence, relationships, attendance and participation. Include strengths as well as difficulties.

2. Speak with the education setting

Ask the SENCO or relevant member of staff what needs have been identified, what SEN support is currently in place, how it is being reviewed and what impact it is having.

3. Gather what already exists

Collect useful reports, support plans, school correspondence, assessments, attendance information and examples that show how needs affect everyday education.

4. Notice what is not working

Record where support is insufficient, inconsistent or unavailable, and what happens as a result. Specific examples are often more useful than broad statements.

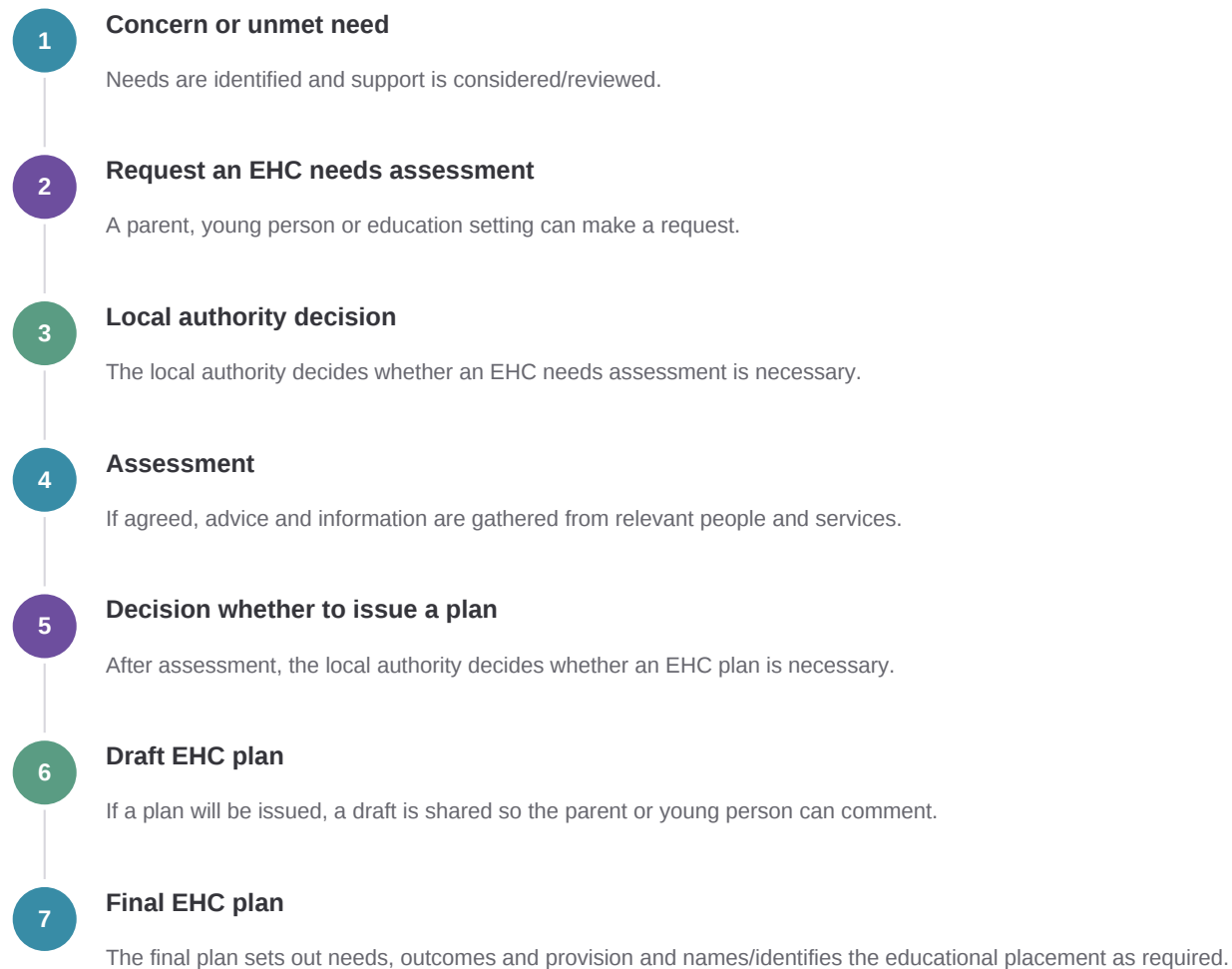
5. Learn about your local process

Your local authority's Local Offer should explain SEND services and routes to support. Your local SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) can also provide impartial information and advice.



The EHCP Journey

The process can feel complicated when viewed all at once. This simplified roadmap shows the main stages. Chapter 2 will look closely at requesting an EHC needs assessment.



Timing note

Where an EHC plan is issued, the overall process should normally be completed within 20 weeks from the local authority receiving the request for an EHC needs assessment, subject to specified exceptions (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2015).



My Starting Point

Use this page to capture what you already know. Short notes are enough. You can add to them later as you gather more information.

What are my child or young person's strengths and interests?

What are the main areas where they need support?

What support is currently in place - and what difference is it making?

What are my biggest concerns about access, participation or progress?

Which reports, assessments or useful examples do I already have?



References & Further Support

About this guide

This resource is written for the SEND/EHCP system in **England**. It is educational information rather than individual legal advice. Law, statutory guidance and policy can change, so check current official guidance when making decisions about a specific case.

Harvard references

Department for Education and Department of Health (2015) *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years*. London: Department for Education. Available at: GOV.UK (Accessed: 22 September 2026).

Great Britain (2014) *Children and Families Act 2014*. London: The Stationery Office. In particular, Part 3 and section 36.

Department for Education (2026) *Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND): Extra help*. GOV.UK (Accessed: 22 September 2026).

Department for Education (2026) *Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND): Overview*. GOV.UK (Accessed: 22 September 2026).

Further support

- **SENDIASS** - free, impartial information, advice and support about SEND. Search your local authority or Local Offer for your local service.
- **GOV.UK SEND guidance** - official information about SEN support, EHC needs assessments and EHC plans.
- **Your local authority's Local Offer** - information about local SEND services, provision and support.

Next in the series

Chapter 2: Requesting an EHC Needs Assessment - who can request one, what the legal test is, what to include and what happens after the request is made.