**Supporting Pupils with SEN in the Classroom: Guidance for Teachers**



**Teaching Strategies for Supporting Children with SEN**

Some of the ways of supporting SEN in the classroom will simply be an extension of your general good practice in the classroom, whilst other, more specific strategies may be particularly useful in supporting particular needs.



**1. Creating a Positive and Supportive Environment for All Pupils, Without Exception**

A positive and supportive environment for all pupils should be underpinned by whole-school policies, practices, and culture – such as maintaining a consistent and positive approach to behaviour.

Additionally, you could use the following strategies in your classroom to reinforce this:



**Actively Promoting Pupil Wellbeing**

This includes explicit teaching around wellbeing and mental health (as per the [**statutory health curriculum requirements**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education)). You should also communicate with and respond to pupils in a manner which promotes their wellbeing at all times.

Additional practical strategies, such as introducing a**class feelings board**as part of the class’ daily routine, can have many benefits. Here, pupils can indicate their emotions by attaching their name or photograph to a class chart that is divided into different feelings.

This helps all children consider and express their emotions in a visual way, but especially benefits children with SEMH needs or SLCN. It gives an indication to adults working with them of how they are feeling today, which in turn allows you and your team to adapt your practice (e.g. you might decide to start with a movement break if you have a full ‘tired’ board one morning) or take time to follow up with the individual child. This strategy can also be useful in terms of safeguarding, as over time it can build a picture and allow you to see patterns. For detailed training on children’s and young people’s mental health, click [**here**](https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/courses/mental-health/child-mental-health-training/).

**Positive Relationships**

Prioritising, modelling, and encouraging positive relationships has also been shown to be a valuable strategy in supporting children with SEN. Many children with SEN, especially ASD, report higher incidences of bullying (Rowley et al., 2012), so facilitating positive attitudes to difference – and supporting those children with social difficulties to maintain positive friendships – is extremely valuable.



An [**inclusive school environment**](https://senpolicyresearchforum.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Review-of-inclusion-effects-research-final-Feb-21-.pdf) has been shown to have a positive effect not only on those with special educational needs, but also those without.

**2 Communicating with Colleagues and Parents**

When working with a child with SEN, knowledge-sharing and keeping lines of communication open helps you to support the child in the most effective way, building on previous successes, and responding to changes.

Your SENCo should provide you with detailed information regarding the child’s area of need and agreed outcomes, and copies of any reports and recommendations from other specialists and professionals who may be involved with the child.

Information and observations shared between colleagues are vital in producing a rounded view of the child’s needs and progress. Prior to working with the individual, you should seek information from previous teachers and teaching assistants, both to learn what has been effective and to ensure **continuity of approach** (for some children with ASD or anxiety disorders, this continuity – especially at times of transition – is extremely important.)

Creating and maintaining **open and honest lines of communication with parents** of children with SEN will also help you to develop a more holistic understanding of the child, their strengths, and their difficulties. There is also a [**statutory duty**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25) to communicate with parents of children with SEN at intervals to report on progress, and to discuss future outcomes and targets.

However, some of the most valuable communication comes in more regular, less formal contact. A home-school contact book or diary can be a simple method of establishing a two-way routine of information sharing with parents.



**Talking to the Child**

The most important source of information that should be consulted continuously is the child or young person themselves. It is a statutory requirement that the views and wishes of the young person are taken into account when decisions are made regarding SEN provision, and that they are involved in the decision-making process as much as possible.

They can often tell you where their perceived difficulties are, and evaluate how effective the measures put in place to support them are. For example, it is counter-productive to give a fiddle toy to a child with ADHD if they personally feel singled out by it and perceive this as negative – this will not help to promote focus or reduce anxiety, so it’s important to know how they feel about it.

Using a child’s personal interests can also be a powerful tool to foster engagement and is [**particularly recommended**](https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/shop/good-autism-practice-resources/) in the case of children on the autistic spectrum. These special interests can be incorporated into learning activities or help you to create personalised reward systems.

**3. Continual Evaluation**

As you will know, something that proves successful one term might not have the same impact the next. Indeed, what works for a child in the morning might not have the same impact in the afternoon.



As part of the SEND Code of Practice, the government proposes an **Assess, Plan, Do, Review** cycle of evaluation and adaptation, which can work on a smaller, more regular scale in your classroom.

Your school will most likely have guidelines on how often you need to review SEN outcomes, interventions, or provision plans. By continually reflecting on the effectiveness of what has been put in place, and making adjustments in light of that, you can ensure you are providing the most effective support at that time.

For example, if a child has been allocated the same phonics intervention to support literacy difficulties for some time and is not making the expected progress, then it is probably time to change the approach.

The principles of continued evaluation also apply to your own confidence in supporting pupils with SEN. You may encounter a need or condition which you wish to explore in more depth, or might wish to learn more about a specific intervention. In this case, you should request the opportunity for any specific training you feel would help.



**4. Ensuring All Pupils Have Access to High-Quality Teaching**

Certain teaching strategies, which will already be part of your general practice, will benefit all pupils (including those with SEN) if they are used flexibly and you take into account their needs, making accommodations or introducing scaffolds as required.

When planning lessons:

* Ensure tasks are [**effectively differentiated and ambitious in their outcomes**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4#inclusion) for all students. Organise work for learners with SEN in smaller chunks with plenty of opportunities for revisiting and over learning, where appropriate. This might involve smaller follow-up tasks.
* Use technology where appropriate to scaffold the learner. This may include equipment, apps, or specialist software such as [**Clicker**](https://www.cricksoft.com/uk/clicker), which can effectively support SEN.
* Deploy other adults in the classroom to effectively facilitate learning.
* Incorporate flexible grouping – do not always group children with similar SEN together; allow them to learn from their peers.
* Plan in the use of talk partners – this gives children with SEN access to peer support and the ability to rehearse their responses.

One of the most powerful tools at your disposal to help support learners with SEN is **your own communication**. SLCN make up the greatest proportion of special educational needs in mainstream schools, so adapting your communication (both spoken and written) can go a long way to supporting those with difficulties.

Some key principles include:

* Keep instructions clear and concise.
* Deliver instructions facing the children.
* Do not issue multiple instructions at once.
* Give children an opportunity to repeat instructions back to you.
* Accompany verbal instructions with visual aids (these can be symbols, images, or text – some schools, especially in the early years and primary sectors, have also introduced Makaton signs to accompany spoken language).
* Where appropriate, allocate other adults to re-word and re-frame instructions and information for those with SLCN.
* Verbalise your thought process whilst modelling activities, including strategies to remember what you need to do.
* Avoid idiomatic language – phrases such as ‘pull your socks up’ or ‘reach for the stars’.



**5. Complementing High-Quality Teaching with Carefully-Selected Small Group and One-to-One Interventions**

You will most likely have learners in your class who need to access particular interventions in order to fulfil their potential, in addition to the high-quality whole-class teaching that you are providing.

**Which Interventions Should Be Chosen?**

Your SENCo will be able to advise as to which interventions would be best to meet the child’s particular needs (learners with ECH plans or High Needs Funding outcomes will often have these documented), as well as advising who best to run the intervention.

Inventions should be allocated for a pre-agreed period of time, accompanied by measurable goals, and regularly evaluated. Some schools will require teachers to produce a provision plan detailing the interventions that are taking place within the class.



**When Should Interventions Take Place?**

All learners have a statutory right to **a broad and balanced curriculum**, so care must be taken to ensure that those children with SEN are not consistently removed from lessons for interventions.

The school day is time-pressured but careful planning on your part can help to ensure that learner’s needs are met, whilst still enabling children to access the same activities as other learners. For example, always utilising assembly time for interventions would deny the child inclusion in a valuable part of school life.

Consistently removing children from wider curriculum subjects – such as art or PE – to have extra intervention on a skill they struggle with not only denies them a valuable part of the statutory curriculum, but also success at subjects they can potentially access just as well as their peers. Instead, they are made to do more of what they struggle with. This could affect self-esteem and engagement, reducing the likelihood of a successful intervention.



Many outcomes can be factored into allocated lesson times with personalised planning (for example, SALT objectives could be covered during adult-led discussions in literacy). Where an intervention needs to take place outside the classroom – for example, a Sensory Circuits session to support focus in a child with ADHD – these can often be factored into transition times.

There may also be particular inventions recommended for an individual with SEN that would benefit the entire class. By making it part of the whole-class routine, the child gets the benefit of the activity but is not singled out or taken out of whole-class teaching to receive it.

Good examples include strategies often recommended for pupils with ADD or ADHD, such as taking regular brain or movement breaks, or incorporating mindfulness practice into the daily routine. These generally improve the wellbeing and productivity of the entire group.

**6. Working Effectively with Teaching Assistants**

Teaching assistants are as essential to supporting learners with special educational needs as teachers. Many are incredibly skilled in delivering specific interventions, as well as providing excellent support within the classroom.

However, the key is to work effectively with teaching assistants, and to plan their support of learners with SEN in order to provide the highest quality support. Teaching assistants should be involved in the continual planning and evaluation process, and should be provided with the time, training, and resources necessary in order to be well-prepared for their role.

In the past, there was sometimes a tendency to support learners with SEN by simply providing them with a TA, whom they worked with almost exclusively, sometimes in place of the teacher.

Past research has shown that this is not beneficial, as it does not help to foster independence, promote inclusion, or offer agency to the learner.  However, if the teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together, providing high-quality, targeted support, this can be a powerful strategy in helping to meet the needs of learners with SEN.

**7. Other Strategies**

The following tips are some relatively simple accommodations that could be made to help support SEN in your classroom.



**Classroom Environment**

Careful consideration to **how your learning space is organised can significantly support learners with SEN** in the classroom and remove potential barriers to success.

Think about:

* Limiting classroom decoration or displays (this can help prevent children with ASD or sensory issues from being visually overloaded).
* Avoiding black on white presentation and varying the background colours (this can aid students with VI, dyslexia, and conditions such as Irlen Syndrome).
* Using a visual timetable throughout the day (children with ASD or anxiety disorders can benefit from this).
* Using visuals for classroom organisation (this will help scaffold spoken instructions, benefiting children with SLCN and ASD, whilst also providing support to younger learners and EAL learners).
* Making a work station available for learners to use **when they need it**(this can help support learners with ADHD, ODD, and ASD by providing a place to access which is quiet).

**Classroom Equipment**

You may be able to support an individual’s special educational needs through the provision of certain equipment. Your SENCO will be able to advise with regards to these, but some examples are:

* Writing slopes (dyslexic learners and those with motor skills difficulties can be helped by these).
* Specialised pencil grips.
* Ear defenders (children with sensory issues including those with ASD can benefit from these, as can children with ADHD or ADD, helping to block out some of the background noise).
* Wobble cushions (these can help ‘ground’ learners with ADHD).
* Task management boards (these can be written, image-based, or a combination of both, and help with structure, self-organisation, and focus – particularly useful for children with SLCN, ADD, ADHD, or ASD.