

# Early Years Graduated Approach - Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

## Universal Provision – Quality First Teaching

### Description of need

- The child is not making the expected progress with minor difficulties becoming apparent in relation to some aspects of the prime areas of learning.
- Some reluctance to follow an adult's agenda/instructions or complete learning activities when asked.
- Occasions of giving up when finding something difficult and needing adult encouragement and reassurance.
- Some reluctance to accept help from others e.g. actively ignoring offers of assistance from adults.
- A negative response when engaging in learning or to themselves on occasions.
- Impulsivity and lack of inhibition which sometimes requires adult intervention and reminders of rules/expectations.
- Appears socially unskilled and not to be able to interact at an age-appropriate level with peers sometimes resulting in isolation from them.
- Some difficulties with pro social behaviours such as turn-taking, sharing and managing conflict when compared to same age peers.
- Evidence of low mood and /or anxiety on occasions or during specific activities i.e. lack of enjoyment, positive displays of emotion and/or engagement with others.
- Agitated during transitions or unexpected changes to the usual routine.
- Sometimes quiet and withdrawn, perhaps in certain situations e.g. when speaking aloud.
- Poor self-regulation on occasions, becoming quickly angry and/or tearful.
- Reticence about attending the setting or distress on transition to it i.e. being anxious about separating from parent/carer(s).
- Adult encouragement/support needed to participate in group activities.
- Seeking adults out for reassurance and/or following adults around setting.
- Some reluctance to explore and engage with new activities/areas or toys/play equipment.

### Assess and Plan

- The key person to liaise with the setting SENCO who can support in identifying strategies and differentiated activities to support the child.
- Record structured observations of the child around specific areas of focus over a period of time and in a variety of contexts. What seems to promote positive behaviour?
- Base assessments around the belief that parent/carers know their children best and that their observations and views are key.
- Work in partnership with parent/carers to establish Assess, Plan, Do, Review (APDR) cycles of intervention with the child. Each cycle should last around 6 weeks and at least 2 APDR cycles should be completed prior to referring to an external agency. This will ensure you can provide sufficient evidence of the strategies/interventions you have tried.
- If a child appears to have very significant needs, contact the [Trafford Area SENCO](#) for advice at the earliest opportunity without waiting for 2 APDR cycles.
- Continue to monitor and record the child's progress using Development Matters in the EYFS and Early Years Outcomes.
- Liaise with your [Link Health Visitor](#) and discuss whether [ASQ 3](#) and/or [ASQ:SE2](#) assessments have been, or should be carried out.
- Consider [early years training opportunities](#) for staff members.

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- Support children and their families to access any relevant universal and targeted services in the community. Information on local services can be found online in the [Trafford Directory](#) and further advice is available from [Trafford Family Information Service](#).
- Support parents to access parenting courses such as the [Incredible Years](#) programme.
- Refer to [Safeguarding Children in Education Information](#) and [Early Help and Multiagency Working](#) published by Trafford Strategic Safeguarding Partnership to consider any immediate care needs or safeguarding concerns that need to be addressed.
- In collaboration with health colleagues (i.e. [Link Health Visitor](#)) consider using specific assessment tools to identify areas of needs and monitor progress, such as the [Ages and Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional \(ASQ:SE-2\)](#).
- Consider whether other areas of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) may be affecting the child's emotional wellbeing e.g. difficulties successfully communicating and interacting with others. Refer to other sections of the Early Years Graduated Approach should this be the case.
- Agree one or two targets with all involved and phrase these as positive SMART outcomes for the child. SMART outcomes should be based on severity, frequency and how realistic it is for the child to be successful. All adults supporting the child within the setting and at home should be aware of planned outcomes and be involved in setting these ('co-production').
- Refer to [NASEN Early Years SEND resources](#) for more information on the co-production of SMART outcomes.

## Do

- The following guiding principles should underlie each setting's approach to supporting Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs:
  - ✓ Behaviour is how children communicate how they feel. It is usually best to start by listening to and working with the underlying feelings.
  - ✓ Children want to be listened to and accepted.
  - ✓ Children do not set out to *be* problems but to solve them. Behaviour is often a maladaptive way of solving problems.
  - ✓ Behaviours which adults are finding difficult to manage are often the child communicating anxiety such as worries over relationships, not understanding others or things that are going on at home.
  - ✓ Children are far more likely to change behaviours if they have some ownership of the solutions.
  - ✓ It is generally easier to learn to do more of what is wanted, or more of something at which they have already been successful, than less of what is not wanted and at which individuals have already failed.
- Intervention in the area of Social, Emotional and Mental Health should always begin with an audit of the setting as a whole, for example see Wiltshire Local Authority's [Supporting Positive Behaviour Audit](#) and Essex County Council's [Early Years Environment Checklist](#).
- An emotionally friendly setting takes account of following:

## Ethos

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A warm, accepting and inclusive culture is reflected in the setting's vision statement, staff meetings, development plans and day-to-day interactions. The culture and ethos will promote:

- [Growth Mindsets](#) in staff and children with a focus on learning, encouragement for reflection and self-evaluation and that it is safe to make mistakes and that they promote learning.
- [Emotion Coaching](#) for all children:
  - Recognising the feeling the child is displaying;
  - Naming this feeling for the child;
  - Providing comfort;
  - Offering a solution;
  - E.g. "You are obviously very upset about this. I'm going to help you. Let's look at what we can do about it together."
- A [solution-focused](#) culture in which staff and children are encouraged to look for solutions rather than an over-focus on problems.
- Promotion of a culture of collective responsibility for everyone's emotional wellbeing; an expectation that all will act if they see it being compromised for one.
- Opportunities for inclusion of all in curriculum and extra-curriculum activities including clubs and trips outside the setting.

### Systems and policies

Agreed and consistently applied policies and systems which address:

- Identification of whole-setting strengths and areas for development with regards to being an emotionally friendly setting.
- Additional monitoring of at-risk children such as those with disrupted family life, those who have experienced abuse, those with wider SEND, LAC or those from other minority groups.
- Feedback to and from parents with opportunities to share good news as well as difficulties that may need addressing.
- A proactive approach to giving and eliciting feedback from other settings/child minders involved with the child.
- Clear lines of communication around the needs of all individuals.
- Staff have access to information and resources such as this graduated approach.
- An identified member of senior management who will champion emotional wellbeing and be responsible for maintaining the setting's relationship/behaviour policies which are grounded in relationship approaches to supporting children's emotional wellbeing e.g. [Solihull Approach](#), [Emotion Coaching](#) principles.
- Positive expectations for behaviour expressed in concrete terms, including visuals.
- Systems in place to support staff retention and continuity of care to reduce multiple changes in Key Worker.
- Transition policy in place to outline the support given to children on induction or when transitioning between settings.
- There is a clear and child-friendly method of gaining feedback from children on their experiences of school/nursery e.g. children's council, 'you said, we did' sessions, use of smiley faces or use of the [Mosaic approach](#). Following this feedback there is an analysis

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of trends/patterns and changes are made accordingly within the setting and children are then informed of these changes.

### Staff emotional wellbeing and resilience

- Specific and timely appreciation of the work of staff.
- Senior leaders are accessible and staff concerns about wellbeing are listened to, their concerns explored constructively and any necessary follow-up actioned.
- Informal and formal face-to-face feedback opportunities.
- Surveys with a focus on staff wellbeing e.g. [Surrey Healthy Schools](#), [Health Education Partnership](#).
- Access to mentoring and peer supervision e.g. [Solution Circles](#).
- A comfortable staffroom with easily accessible refreshment facilities.
- Training and coaching opportunities including activities to promote staff emotional resilience.
- Promotion of wider activities in the community that support emotional and physical wellbeing.

### Setting environment

- Displays promote and reinforce the emotionally healthy ethos, systems and policies for staff and children.
- Access to supervised safe-areas during unstructured times of the day and minimising 'blind spots'.
- Access to helpline numbers and useful websites on notice boards e.g. Childline, Samaritans, NSPCC, The Children's Society, Banardos.
- A calm and ordered learning environment with clear and consistent routines and preparation for changes to activities or routines e.g. objects of reference, visual timetables and verbal prompts from staff.
- Outdoor and indoor provision is spacious, exciting, well maintained and pleasant.
- Plentiful toys and resources so that children do not have to wait for prolonged periods for other children to finish playing with them.
- Creative use of outdoor space and opportunities for outdoor learning e.g. [Forest School](#) / mud kitchen / bicycles / water trays etc.
- Use of animals or pets within the setting for children to help look after and encourage empathy.
- Use of a shared toy which the children get to take home to 'look after' and then return e.g. a travelling teddy bear.

### Adult-child interactions

- Opportunities for children to verbalise their achievements together e.g. kind acts, effort/perseverance, extra-curricular interests/strengths which are shared with the class or placed on a board.
- Promoting and regularly using feelings vocabulary.

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- Modelling and normalising references to one's own and others' feelings.
- Stories, games, role play and art work which explore feelings.
- Catching children being good.
- Managed ignoring of low level behaviours where appropriate to give space for the child to recover and self-regulate.
- Distraction rather than confrontation wherever possible.
- Visual as well as limited and consistent verbal prompts.
- Redirection using the child's name and expressed in terms of what *is* required rather than what is not required e.g. 'walk please' instead of 'don't run'.
- Frequent public praise; problems addressed privately.
- Monitoring of peer relationships and adjustments where needed to promote friendships.
- Play with other children is supported by modelling simple play scenarios and language that can be used by the child.
- Ensuring learning activities take account of children's developmental stage e.g. attention span during carpet sessions.
- Finding out from the child *what has happened* in a situation, what they are thinking or feeling. "What happened?" is more concrete and therefore more helpful than "Why?"
- Consideration of what could be done differently another time; if the child struggles to think what he/she would do differently consider what someone else might do instead. Practise solutions through role play.
- Bringing of an agreed transitional object into the setting and opportunities to make links with home during the day e.g. making something to show a parent later.
- Use of [circle time](#) with a strengths based approach (i.e. talking about what has gone well) to promote sharing of feelings and joint problem solving.

Sources of further information/support:

- [Supporting Children's Behaviour in the Early Years](#)
- [Inclusion Development Programme](#)
- DfE [Social and Emotional Aspects of Development](#)
- [Being, Becoming, Belonging](#) materials (Surrey County Council)
- [First Steps](#) (Essex County Council)

## Review

- Continue to monitor and record the child's progress using the Unique Child sections in Development Matters in the EYFS and Early Years Outcomes.
- Meet with parent/carers to discuss plans and progress and address any learning and development needs, with interpreters where necessary.
- Parent/carers should be encouraged to provide information about anything happening at home which may help or hinder their child's development and share ideas with practitioners on how to support their child. For example, this could be achieved through a communication book that both the parent/carers and setting use daily.
- For children whose home language is not English, discussion should take place with parent/carers in their home language so strengths and areas for development can be explored.

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- Consider whether there is a need to move up to the next stage of the process, building on what has worked but introducing more intensive approaches based on a greater understanding of needs (SEN Support).

## SEN Support

### Description of need

- The child has mild to moderate, persistent difficulties and is not making expected progress in identified areas for development despite a range of interventions, quality first teaching and differentiated provision over time.
- Difficulties are becoming increasingly apparent and there is evidence the child continues to work at levels below age related expectations in some or all aspects of the prime areas of learning.
- Repeated Assess, Plan, Do, Review (APDR) cycles have not resulted in a marked increase in progress and assessments over time indicate a more individualised or differentiated cycle is required.
- Professional judgement – practitioners and parent/carers agree the child has achieved limited progress and requires an enhanced level of intervention with an individually targeted approach.
- Significant concerns regarding poor growth, weight gain/loss, and/or social, emotional and mental health that require advice from outside agencies and are impacting on the child's development.
- Dependent on adult support to start or sustain attention to learning activities.
- Regularly refuses to engage with an adult's agenda despite high levels of encouragement and reassurance.
- Communicates negative feelings largely non-verbally i.e. through physical actions and/or unwanted behaviours.
- Restless to the extent that this is quite disruptive to their own learning and the learning of others i.e. disrupting carpet sessions.
- Actively resists transitions and these can be a trigger for unwanted behaviours.
- Great difficulty in finding anything positive to say about themselves and/or vocalises negative comments about themselves frequently.
- Uncooperative with peers and sometimes physically aggressive to them during unstructured times/free play.
- Rejected by peers/becoming increasingly isolated within setting.
- Significant difficulties recognising and regulating own emotions which may be evidenced by persistent difficulties in turn taking, sharing and social interaction.
- Appearing unhappy and joyless on frequent occasions or prolonged periods.
- Frequently shuts down and appears overwhelmed i.e. not responding to adult's initiations of interaction, hiding, putting physical barriers between themselves and others.
- Frequently withdraws and does not participate in activities.
- Very quiet with limited verbal communication/vocalisations in setting.
- Signs of deliberate self-harm/self-injury on occasions e.g. hand banging, skin picking, pulling hair out.
- Low attendance because of high levels of anxiety/upset when in the setting.

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## SEN Support

- Easily upset and teary in comparison to peers and age appropriate expectations.
- Significant anxiety when separating from parent/carers that persists beyond a transition/induction period.

## Assess and Plan

- Ongoing assessment is central for all Early Years children. More intense and regular assessment is needed for children with significant emerging concerns and reasonable adjustments must be made to the assessment process.
- Children who may need SEN Support in Early Years often have difficulties in using and understanding language making it difficult to assess precisely the level of delay in their overall development. Practitioners can contact [Trafford Area SENCO](#) for advice on supporting and monitoring children with SEND.
- The key person should liaise with the school/setting SENCO and parent/carers to share concerns and begin an Individual Support Plan which incorporates the views of parent/carers. Ensure any specialist advice is included in the Individual Support Plan.
- Continue to monitor and review the Individual Support Plan, recording the child's progress and the impact of strategies and interventions used. This should be completed at least every 6 weeks as part of the APDR cycle. The following free online tool can help with assessment and planning -

[Early Years Developmental Journal](#) helps identify areas where extra help may be needed as age ranges are narrower than those within the Early Years Outcomes, for example the 0 to 11 months age band is broken down into 4 steps. It therefore provides a more precise picture of a child's strengths and areas for development and of where support should be targeted.

- Continue to liaise with your [Link Health Visitor](#) as appropriate.
- Consider requesting support and advice from outside agencies i.e. [Special Educational Needs Advisory Service](#) (SENAS), [Trafford Early Development Service](#) (TEDS).
- Consider [early years training opportunities](#) for staff members.
- Consider use of other SEMH specific assessment tools such as the [Early Years SEMH Checklist](#) and the [Leuven Scales of Well-being and Involvement](#).
- Use structured observation tools to reflect on what the child is communicating through their behaviour (functions of the behaviour) i.e. [ABC charts](#), [STAR approach](#), [behaviour observation record](#), [sample incident tally](#), [Preschool Behavioural Analysis Framework](#).
- Continue to consider whether other areas of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) may be affecting the child's emotional wellbeing e.g. difficulties successfully communicating and interacting with others. Refer to other sections of the Early Years Graduated Approach should this be the case.
- Agree a small number of targets with all involved which are based on an increasing understanding of the child's needs following completed cycles of assess, plan, do, review. Phrase these as positive SMART outcomes for the child. SMART outcomes should be based on severity, frequency and how realistic it is for the child to be successful. All adults supporting the child within the setting and at home should be aware of planned outcomes and be involved in setting these ('co-production').
- Refer to [NASEN Early Years SEND resources](#) for more information on the co-production of

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SMART outcomes.

### Do

- Continue with strategies/approaches listed within 'do' section of Universal Provision- Quality First Teaching. In addition consider the following:
- Involving the child in tailored small group/1:1 interventions aimed developing social and emotional skills, such as:
  - [Legotherapy](#).
  - Activities from Section 2 of the [Every Child A Talker](#) (ECAT) resource.
  - Activities aimed at supporting the development of the child's emotional vocabulary e.g. Essex County Council [expressing feelings materials](#).
  - Activities aimed at teaching the child problem solving skills e.g. [problem solving scripts](#), [problem solving model](#).
  - [Nurture groups](#).
  - Activities using the [Social and Emotional Aspects of Development \(SEAD\)](#) materials such as the 'box of feelings'.
  - Reading books together which focus on identifying and managing feelings, such as the [colour monster book](#).
- Ensure calming and grounding strategies are regularly interspersed throughout the child's day e.g. [heavy work activities](#), access to sensory room/toys, listening to music, [mindfulness activities](#).
- Use a tailored [Social Story](#) targeting a specific skill identified on the child's Individual Support Plan.
- Use individualised visual supports to support the child's understanding of feelings and appropriate social behaviours e.g. [feeling fans](#), [ELSA materials](#), [traffic light cards](#).
- Sources of further information/support:
  - Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Early Years ([NICE Guidance](#)).
  - [Early Support Information on Behaviour](#) (Council for Disabled Children).

### Review

- Parent/carer and Multiagency (PAM) review meetings should be held every 6 weeks as part of the APDR approach. Ideally this will be chaired by the SENCO with a written record of the meeting circulated afterwards.
- PAM review meetings should take a [person-centred approach](#) in order to ensure that practitioners are:
  - Making sure that they're truly taking into account the experiences of the child, their family and those supporting them when reviewing how well things are going.
  - Creating an environment where people are made to feel comfortable in expressing themselves honestly.
  - Developing actions that are based on experiences and learning, leading to an environment where they are constantly improving their support.
- The views of any involved external agencies who are unable to attend should be sought

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prior to the meeting if possible – this can be done by the SENCO.

- Assessments are presented and updated at review meetings. Where specialist advice exists (e.g. Speech and Language Therapy, SENAS) recommendations should be highlighted to staff and implemented within the new Individual Support Plan.
- There should be increased involvement of parent/carers in the assessment, monitoring and review process. During reviews, the views of parents/carers, and children wherever possible, should be sought, recorded and respected.
- Consider whether there is a need to move up to the next stage of the process, building on what has worked but introducing approaches aimed at supporting children with more complex and persistent difficulties (High Level SEN Support).

## High Level SEN Support

### Description of need

- The child will have complex and persistent difficulties and is not making expected progress despite significant levels of focused intervention, implementation of specialist advice and extensive differentiation of the EYFS curriculum. Difficulties are clearly apparent in relation to the 3 prime areas of learning.
- The child will be experiencing social, emotional and mental health needs which significantly and regularly interfere with his/her learning or that of the group, despite the implementation of an individualised behaviour management programme and appropriate modifications to the learning environment being made.
- Highly dependent on adult support to start or sustain attention to learning activities.
- Highly anxious about many aspects of setting life i.e. they appear in a heightened state of anxiety for the majority of time.
- Actively resistant to transitions and these regularly trigger difficult to manage behaviours which are difficult to redirect or distract from.
- Agitated much of the time i.e. seeming unable to relax and be calmed.
- Rarely engages in adult directed learning activities, structured play opportunities or carpet sessions.
- Regularly disruptive to the learning of others i.e. unable to join group/carpet activities.
- Physically aggressive to both peers and adults on a regular basis.
- A persistent poor attender due to emotional needs.
- Selectively mute in setting i.e. communication differs significantly between home and setting.
- Engaging in regular self-harming/injurious behaviours e.g. hand banging, skin picking, pulling hair out.
- Unable to sustain attention to learning activities without significant adult intervention and support.
- Severe and persistent demonstrations of challenging behaviours which jeopardise the child's own and others' safety.
- Persistently damages equipment or materials.
- Complete withdrawal from activities on offer most of the time e.g. hiding, running away.
- Child may have experienced significant trauma, neglect or abuse which is impacting on their development. A high level of multiagency involvement over a sustained period of time has likely been needed to keep them safe.

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## High Level SEN Support

### Assess and Plan

- Assessment and planning should be as within the SEN Support section, plus the following:

#### Early Years Provision Maps

At this stage, where children need high levels of support, schools/settings should complete an [Early Years Provision Map](#) instead of other forms or individual support plans. Provision mapping is a way of evaluating the impact on children's progress of provision that is additional to and different from the school/setting's curriculum. Evaluated provision maps can help settings manage this provision to ensure that it is and continues to be effective in helping children to make progress. The provision mapping and evaluation cycle should run in parallel with the school/setting's system for tracking and evaluating children's progress and it should feed into the Parent and Multiagency (PAM) review meetings. The provision map should be constructed in partnership with the parents/carers during the Assess, Plan, Do, Review (APDR) process and parents should be involved in agreeing the outcomes.

- [Portage SEND Best Practice Assessment Checklist](#) links into the EYFS curriculum and aids assessment and planning. The skills are broken down into small steps so that parents and practitioners can assess and celebrate every skill that the child has achieved. It can then act as a guide to the design of teaching activities to further promote development. A checklist may be allocated to children who access the highest levels of Early Years SEND Funding by the EY SEND Panel.
- Ensure that all staff have had relevant SEND training to support the child within the school/setting.
- Ensure a risk management assessment has been completed if needed and an individualised plan written and shared with all adults supporting the child in the setting and at home e.g. [Risk Assessment Record](#), [Positive Handling Plan/Policy](#). This should be a working document which is updated and reviewed at regular intervals as practitioners gain a greater understanding of the child's needs and how best to minimise risk in the setting.

### Do

- Continue with strategies/approaches listed within 'do' sections of Universal Provision-Quality First Teaching and SEN Support.
- Strategies used for children presenting with high levels needs should be highly individualised and based on advice given by specialists involved with the child and their family.
- On-going small group or 1:1 support to teach and practise target skills in a structured way.
- Targeted support from Key Worker is likely to be needed on a daily basis to support the child's engagement in the setting's routine, support/scaffold their play and social interactions and ensure the safety of themselves and others.
- The child is likely to require an individualised daily routine which may include:
  - frequent opportunities for engaging in activities aimed at reducing anxiety.
  - 1:1 nurture time with Key Worker.
  - flexible expectations regarding child's engagement in carpet/group activities.

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- dedicated safe spaces to use when struggling to regulate their emotions (e.g. tents, quiet corner, beanbag etc).
- Frequent access throughout the day to child's Key Worker to provide emotional support, promote resilience and meet the individual's attachment needs.
- It may be appropriate for staff to be trained in de-escalation and positive handling strategies.

## Review

- [Person-centred](#) Parent/carer and Multiagency (PAM) review meetings should continue to be held every 6 weeks as part of the APDR approach. The child's provision map should be reviewed as part of this process.
- Where Early Years practitioners and parent//carers are happy with the progress being made, consideration should be given to returning to the earlier stages of the graduated approach or to universal provision.
- Where there continues to be ongoing concern about a child's rate of progress and needs are being seen as potentially significant and long term then schools/settings can consider applying for an [Early Years SEND Grant](#). This resource is for the very small number of children with highly complex needs to support them to access their early education place. Applications are considered monthly by the Early Years SEND Panel and must be supported by a provision map which outlines the projected outcomes for the child and strategies required to meet them. This should be linked to the resources/funding needed to achieve this.
- As Early Years children are very young and still at the early stages of development, funding is allocated on a short term basis initially for either one or two terms. After this period, the school/setting must submit an evaluated provision map and decide whether to return to an earlier stage of the graduated approach or to apply for another Early Years SEND Grant.
- Following ongoing APDR cycles, referral to the Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) service may be appropriate if Selective Mutism persists.

## Requesting an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment

The following actions should be evident before considering a referral for [EHC Needs Assessment](#), usually following implementation of support through an Early Years SEND Grant.

- Targets for Individual Support Plans have been informed by external advice from specialists and reviewed every 6 weeks over a significant period of time.
- Advice has been regularly sought from agencies appropriate to child's needs and there is clear evidence of its implementation. This could include from SEN Advisory Service (SENAS), Sensory Impairment Support Service (SISS) and Trafford Early Development Service (TEDS).
- An [Early Help Assessment](#) will have been carried out if a child with significant needs has several agencies involved, and the family needs help to coordinate support.
- SEN support has been adapted or modified depending on how effective it has been in achieving the agreed outcomes. If the school/setting have taken relevant and purposeful action to identify, assess and meet the SEN of the child but they have not made expected progress, the school/setting or parents should consider requesting an EHC Needs Assessment.