

# SEND Assessment Guidance Handbook



A practical guide to identifying  
SEND needs in the early years

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# An Introduction to the Assessment Guidance

Dingley's Promise has worked in collaboration with the Department for Education to create Assessment Guidance for early years educators. We have 40 years of experience supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), effectively assessing their needs and responding quickly with the interventions needed to accelerate their learning, as well as supporting their successful transitions into the next educational setting.

The assessment guidance has an accompanying toolkit, which has been created to support a child-centred, strengths-based approach to assessing children's needs. It will support the assessment of potentially non-linear development of each unique child, providing a simple approach which helps to identify and meet their needs as soon as possible. It has been assembled through surveys and consultation with a range of early years professionals. The recommended tools have all been user tested for effectiveness and functionality, to ensure they can be applied within your practice.

The toolkit provides a suggested way of working when assessing children with SEND in the early years. Whether you are a school-based provider, group-based provider or childminder, it can be used to identify emerging or existing needs.

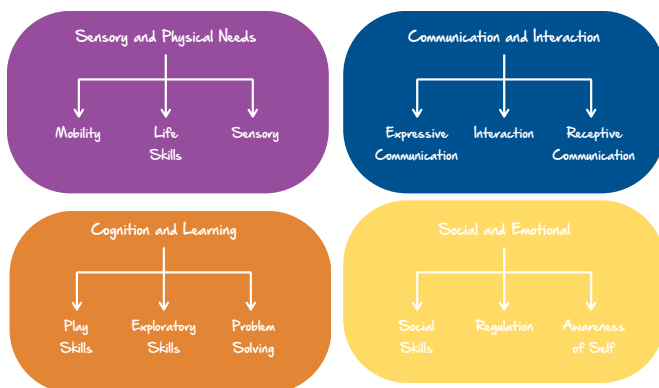
Educators and experts agree that excessive assessment paperwork is not beneficial in the early years, as it takes valuable time away from interacting with children and puts unnecessary strain on educators. For children with SEND, a simple and clear method of assessment is needed to capture where children are, so that you can give them the right support at the right time. This handbook aims to support this.

# When to use the toolkit

The toolkit may be used to identify SEND needs of a child who is joining your setting, or the emerging needs of a child you already support.

The four assessment tools Communication and Interaction, Sensory and Physical, Social and Emotional and Cognition and Learning are based on the 'broad areas of need' and are designed to be used either individually or together, according to the needs of the child.

If a difference in speech development is becoming apparent, you may choose to use the 'Communication and Interaction' tool to assess and decide on next steps as part of your broader assessment process.



You can select and complete the relevant tool to understand in more detail what the child is currently achieving. This way, you create a starting point to work from and this supports you to evidence the successes a child has had as a result of the targeted support and interventions you have provided.

If during a child's progress check at age two, you or their health visitor notice that the child is not meeting some anticipated milestones with their speech and language, you may feel the communication and interaction assessment tool will benefit you and the child.

By using the tool, you can focus on the skills the child is achieving and look at what the child's priorities for support are and how you can deliver this.

# The Four Assessment Tools

The four assessment tools, which reflect the four broad areas of need, focus on the core skills children with SEND may gain in each area.

- Communication and interaction, which may include difficulties speaking, understanding or communicating as well as autism spectrum conditions.
- Cognition and learning, which may include mild, severe or profound learning difficulties where children may require varying support to access their learning, as well as specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia.
- Social, emotional, and mental health, which may include a range of mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders or physical symptoms which are medically unexplained. This could also include challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour, as well as conditions such as attention deficit hyperactive disorder or an attachment disorder.
- Sensory and/or physical needs, which may include a physical disability which impacts their ability to access standard provision. This may also include visual, hearing or multi-sensory impairments or a sensory processing condition.

It is important to remember that whilst these are some of the identified needs within the four broad areas of need, they are not the only needs or areas of support a child may require.

Also keep in mind that children will develop at their own unique rates and not every child will follow a 'typical' pattern of progression in their development. This in no way limits a child's ability to make progress, or takes away from focusing on the child's individual strengths.



# A Celebratory Approach

The four overarching principles of the EYFS are: unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments, learning and development.

These are all met through the use of this toolkit and the celebratory approach to SEND through the use of 'I can' statements. By recognising and valuing the child as an individual, working together with parents and professionals and providing effective support to enable the child to access the environment.

Problem solving	
I can search for hidden objects	I can adjust my approach to achieve my desired outcome
E S I	E S I

## Types of Assessment

Assessment of children in the early years can help to promptly raise awareness of a development delay and allow you to implement appropriate support at the earliest point, ensuring the needs of both the child and their family are met. The assessment tools can be used to supplement the following assessment activities.

- **Starting point** – An initial assessment, completed with parent and/or carer views when a child begins attending your setting. This is not included in the EYFS and is not a statutory requirement.
- **Formative assessments** – This is your ongoing assessment and is vital in the learning and development process. It involves you understanding your children's interests, what they know and can do, and then shaping teaching and learning experiences for each child reflecting that knowledge. This includes observations, which is the continuous process of noticing what a child knows, understands and can do, in order to build knowledge of each individual child. There is no requirement in the EYFS to keep written records in relation to the formative assessment.
- **Summative assessments** – These are often written at predetermined points of the year, and provide you and the parents and/or carers with a summary of what the child knows, understands and can do at a particular point in time.

There are two statutory summative assessments that take place in the EYFS:

**Progress check at age two** – when a child is aged between two and three, you must review their progress and provide parents and/or carers with a short, written summary of their child’s development in the three prime areas.

**Early Years Foundation Stage Profile** – at the end of reception year, each child’s level of development must be assessed against the 17 early learning goals (ELGs) set out in the EYFS.

There is another statutory assessment point within the EYFS, the Reception Baseline Assessment, which is a short assessment completed within the first 6 weeks of a child starting reception year. A score will be given for each child, which will be used as the basis for an accountability measure of the relative progress of a cohort of children through primary school.

Exemptions from the EYFS Profile assessment requirements cannot be granted on the basis of a child having SEND. The assessment requirements are important as they help parents, carers and educators to recognise the progress of children with SEND, understand their needs, and plan effective activities and support.

Support for a child with potential or known SEND often starts with assessment, in line with the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle (the graduated approach). It may be through your observations and assessments that you recognise a child is not meeting the expected developmental milestones. It is through this early recognition that we can implement effective support for children.

You can learn more about assessments in early years child development training (EYCDT) in Module 7: Effective curriculum and assessment:

<https://child-development-training.education.gov.uk/about/module-7>

You can find out more about the graduated approach and how you can support children with differences and needs in Module 8: Supporting individual differences and needs:

<https://child-development-training.education.gov.uk/about/module-8>

# Completing the Assessment Tool

Each statement is broken down into three levels:

E

S

I

for Emerging

for Supported

for Independent

*The child is showing some interest or awareness of this skill.*

*The child can achieve this skill with support from another (adult or child).*

*The child can consistently achieve this skill on their own without additional support from an adult or child.*

The statements are organised like building blocks, with the likelihood that the lower blocks are achieved before the higher blocks.

However, some children will not progress in a typical way, and you should not be concerned if you are observing that the higher blocks have been achieved before the lower blocks.

By reading the statements you can make a judgement as to whether you feel the child is not yet showing awareness of this skill, and so leave it unmarked, or determine whether they are emerging, able to do this with support or able to do this independently.

## Cognition and learning

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_ My key person is: \_\_\_\_\_  
 My date of birth is: \_\_\_\_\_ My communication method: \_\_\_\_\_

Play skills		Exploratory skills		Problem solving	
I can co-operate with a familiar person when playing, for example rolling a ball back and forth	I can focus on an activity of my own choosing for up to 2 minutes	I show awareness of routines through reaction to visual and audio stimuli	I can use a visual routine to support my understanding of the day	I can search for hidden objects	I can adjust my approach to achieve my desired outcome
E S I	E S I	E S I	E S I	E S I	E S I
I can copy the actions of others	I link ideas during play such as putting a teddy in a car and pushing it along	I can remember where preferred objects are and seek these out	I can transition to a new task using a visual or audio prompt	I can balance objects on top of each other	I show awareness of counting objects during play
E S I	E S I	E S I	E S I	E S I	E S I

You can then mark the coordinating letter however you wish (circle, highlight, tick, etc.).

You can also note the types of play you observe from the child, to support your decision making in appropriate strategies of support, or the environmental adjustments you can make to enhance their learning.

Every time you complete an additional review you should use a different colour to evidence where you feel the child is at that point. Using a different colour will clearly show progress over each time. We recognise that some children may regress with their development on occasion, this should also be marked, and appropriate next steps and intervention should be carried out.

Exploratory skills		Problem solving	
I show awareness of routines through reaction to visual and audio stimuli	I can use a visual routine to support my understanding of the day	I can search for hidden objects	I can adjust my approach to achieve my desired outcome
<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>

Monitoring how children progress with their learning helps you see where to focus your support. The development growth section enables you to note how a child is progressing over a period of time, recognising areas where the child may need further support and areas in which they are making continuous developmental progress and so highlighting their strengths.

It is also useful to add notes to document the child’s interests and engagements in the activity. For example, if they engage better in their learning when standing rather than sitting, or when they are holding a preferred object whilst participating in the activity.

**Cognition and learning**

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_ My key person is: \_\_\_\_\_  
 My date of birth is: \_\_\_\_\_ My communication method: \_\_\_\_\_

	Date completed	Completed by	Development growth	How I play (e.g. play type, characteristics of effective teaching and learning, Leuven levels)
Start point			/ 72	
Review 1			/ 72	

## One Page Profile

A one page profile creates a clear outline of who the child is as an individual. It will enable you, and others, to consider the child’s strengths, interests and types of play, regularly ensuring that the support provided is impactful.

It is important to reflect on what a child enjoys and doesn’t enjoy, as well as any key support that makes the environment and experiences accessible to them throughout the day.

In the box titled “how I play”, you can refer to or describe how a child participates in play.

One page profile

My name is... Leigh 	I feel happy when... I am playing independently I have my monkey Someone sings "The wheels on the bus"
I communicate by... Pointing and gestures Introducing objects of reference and Makaton signs	How I play... Spinning and rolling objects Solitary play
I might feel sad or upset if... I am not given time before a transition The fire alarm goes off or noise levels are loud Someone is playing too close to me I am tired	You can support me by... Using now and next with me with visuals Showing me a sand timer before a change Getting my ear defenders during a fire drill Following my sleep routine Limiting unnecessary noises in my environment

## Support and Achievement Play Plans

To support a child with SEND it can be beneficial to complete a SAPP. This outlines the long-term goals as agreed between the family, key person, SENCo and where relevant, other professionals supporting the child.

The SAPP is broken down into small steps for the coming term. These should be updated regularly, particularly if you feel a child is achieving the goals they were working on and no longer benefits from the support detailed in the plan.

### Support and achievement play plan

Child's name:	Date of birth:	Funding:	I have a one-page profile: Y / N
Setting:	SENCo:	Key person:	
Areas of need (please identify primary and secondary needs)			
Communication and interaction:	Cognition and learning:	Social and emotional:	Sensory and physical:
I attend another setting: Y / N	Setting name:	SENCo:	Key person:
The professionals supporting me are:			
Service	Professional	Job Role	Contact details

Further to the DfE Assessment Guidance, Dingley’s Promise recommends the following steps to support your practice:

### Data analysis

Qualitative data is often needed to inform external professionals or the child’s next setting about progress and current stages of development. This is particularly helpful when looking to access funding, begin the EHCP process or as part of transitions. If this is needed, the toolkit can be used to make a simple calculation which reflects progress over time in the 4 areas of need.

This can be simply monitored by recording the number of emerging, supported or independent statements a child is achieving. For example, where a child is emerging in a statement this would be recorded as 1, supported would be 2 and independent would be 3. You can add these together to see how much of the assessment tool they are covering with each review, monitoring their progress against themselves.

Emerging - 1 point

Supported - 2 points

Independent - 3 points

Based on the progress on this child’s chart:

Emerging x 4 = 4 points

Supported x 7 = 14 points

Independent x 6 = 18 points

Total: 4 + 14 + 18 = 36

### Cognition and learning

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_ My key person is: \_\_\_\_\_

My date of birth is: \_\_\_\_\_ My communication method: \_\_\_\_\_

Play skills		Exploratory skills		Problem solving	
I can co-operate with a familiar person when playing, for example rolling a ball back and forth	I can focus on an activity of my own choosing for up to 2 minutes	I show awareness of routines through reaction to visual and audio stimuli	I can use a visual routine to support my understanding of the day	I can search for hidden objects	I can adjust my approach to achieve my desired outcome
<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>
I can copy the actions of others	I link ideas during play such as putting a teddy in a car and pushing it along	I can remember where preferred objects are and seek these out	I can transition to a new task using a visual or audio prompt	I can balance objects on top of each other	I show awareness of counting objects during play
<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>
I explore new objects with interest	I can play with items in different ways	I can look for objects placed near or around me	I can re-enact or imitate everyday routines during play	I try to complete tasks independently, using trial and error	I can group or organise objects in a way which is meaningful to me
<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>
I recognise familiar objects and the joy they bring	I repeat actions demonstrating cause and effect	I use my different senses to explore new objects and environments	I correctly understand the use of objects such as putting a phone to my ear	I can notice change as I interact with my environment	I demonstrate pride in my accomplishments
<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>	<b>E S I</b>

**E** Emerging (1 mark) **S** Supported (2 marks) **I** Independent (3 marks)

You can monitor a child’s progress through the change in the number of statements a child is covering within the assessment tool each term.

You may wish to drill down these figures in more detail by calculating percentages for each child. To calculate a percentage, divide the points given by potential points (72) and multiply by 100. If you have recorded a child as 36 points across the grid this would equate to  $36/72 \times 100 = 50\%$ .

Working out the percentage

- Total achieved in assessment = 36
- Divided by a possible total of 72 = 0.5
- Multiply by 100 to find the percentage = 50%

Child percentage: 50% for this assessment

What you observe, and your knowledge of the child, will be crucial when completing this assessment framework, formative and summative assessments.

It is important to remember that observation and assessment should not involve spending a long time away from interacting with children. It can often be noted mentally or jotted down during an interaction and recorded formally later.

**Cognition and learning**

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_ My key person is: \_\_\_\_\_  
 My date of birth is: \_\_\_\_\_ My communication method: \_\_\_\_\_

	Date completed	Completed by	Development growth	How I play <small>(e.g. play types, characteristics of effective teaching and learning, Leuven levels)</small>
Start point			/ 72	
Review 1	19/08/2024	LB	18 / 72	Child F engages in activity better when sitting
Review 2	15/09/2024	LB	29 / 72	Child F wanted to hold his elephant toy to complete the task
Review 3	22/10/2024	LB	36 / 72	
Review 4			/ 72	
Review 5			/ 72	

# Recap: how to use the tools - a step by step approach

- 1** An area of need is recognised through observation and discussed with the family.
- 2** The appropriate broad area(s) of need is selected from the assessment tools.
- 3** Use the tool to ascertain what the child can do in their area of need by highlighting the 'I can' statements according to whether the child is showing the skill as emerging, supported or independent.
- 4** Discuss the child's strengths and strategies to support them with the child's family, noting this on a one-page profile.
- 5** Use the assessment tool to outline the initial targets for their child. Using specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) targets, you can help a child to make progress towards the assessment statements within the tool.
- 6** You may want to produce a Support and Achievement Play Plan (SAPP), which will identify long-term goals and record key strategies you may use to support the child. Then implement the strategies discussed in practice, noting their impact on the child and how the child engages with your planned support.
- 7** By the end of the term, or appropriate period, you review the impact of the strategies with the family, complete a development monitoring review to determine developmental progress and set out new targets.
- 8** Repeat steps 5-7 until you feel support is no longer required or you support the child to transition to their next setting or school.

# External Input

There may come a time where you feel external specialist support is required. You may refer to your setting or local authority area Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCo) for support and guidance, or you can directly refer to these services and work with them on any additional support to be implemented. You should only request specialist support when you are satisfied that you have used a graduated approach to understand the child and their needs. Even when they are waiting to be seen you should continue to trial different approaches to support the child.

## Summary

Used consistently and as part your broader ongoing assessment process, this toolkit will enable the effective identification of existing and emerging SEND needs. We hope that it gives you increased confidence and provides a useful way of celebrating smaller developmental milestones of children with additional needs in your setting.

A whole setting approach to the toolkit is needed to ensure that all staff members are using the toolkit in the same way and children are observed in a consistent way. This supports the accurate recording of current developmental progress, whilst effectively aiding the planning of next steps.

## Other useful links

The DfE Guidance and all resource documents can be found here :  
<https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/support-for-practitioners/send-assessment>

For other training and resources to support inclusive practice, please visit our website:  
<https://dingley.org.uk/dingleys-promise-training>

Here you will find a range of flexible online training courses on practical topics and some useful resources to support your practice and personal development.



[dingley.org.uk](https://dingley.org.uk)



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