Identifying the Area of Primary Need Guidance

Special Educational Needs

Introduction

This guidance is to support the consistent identification of a CYP's primary special educational need.

This is important to ensure that the right provision, support services and placements are identified for CYP and that the data we hold and report on about Birmingham's CYP and their special educational needs is accurate to inform both local and national service development and sufficiency planning.

The challenge is that a CYP can be experiencing difficulties in more than one area of need and/or that one area can impact on another, sometimes short-term, especially if there is an unmet need. For example, if a CYP has an on-going unmet need in cognition and learning, that may result in frustration, low self-esteem and/or anger, which could in turn result in challenging behaviour, as an outcome of unmet learning needs.

Every CYP will have a unique set of strengths and needs, and these can change over time and between contexts. Therefore, it is important that we routinely review the CYP recorded area of need and update when required.

The areas and characteristics described below are to clarify and assist in identifying primary needs at a point in time but should not define or limit our understanding of a CYP or our aspirations for them.

Communication & Interaction

The Code of Practice states:

'CYP with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) have difficulty in communicating with others. This may be because they have difficulty saying what they want to, understanding what is being said to them or they do not understand or use social rules of communication. The profile for every child with SLCN is different and their needs may change over time. They may have difficulty with one, some or all of the different aspects of speech, language or social communication at different times of their lives.

CYP with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), including Asperger's Syndrome and Autism, are likely to have difficulties with social interaction. They may also experience difficulties with language, communication, and imagination, which can have an impact on how they relate to others.'

SLCN is an umbrella term derived from the Bercow review in 2008. It applies to all CYP who have difficulty with speech, language and/or communication.

These difficulties could be:

- As a primary need (developmental language disorder) in the absence of any other difficulties
- As part of another condition such as autism, learning difficulties, deafness, or cerebral palsy
- Resulting from social and/or environmental disadvantage.

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CYP with SLCN may need help to understand abstract vocabulary, words with more than one meaning depending on context and the literal meaning of language. They may benefit from support in drawing inference, making predictions, cause and effect reasoning and problem-solving. CYP with disordered, delayed expressive language may need help to access vocabulary (word retrieval), organise and express thoughts and ideas sequentially and express those ideas through both spoken and written output.

CYP with SLCN do not necessarily experience delay in their academic learning.

CYP with SLCN may have difficulty expressing emotion, which can result in frustration, high anxiety, ritualistic and/or challenging behaviour.

- *For CYP with a primary need in this category of special educational needs, you will need to further identify whether SLCN or ASD is the most appropriate descriptor.*
- *Decision and review points include, during and on completion of an EHC Needs Assessment and following an annual review when an amended EHC plan is issued.*
- *You must check the SEN identified on Nexus and ensure this is updated.*

Cognition & Learning

The Code of Practice states:

'Support for learning difficulties may be required when CYP learn at a slower pace than their peers, even with appropriate differentiation. Learning difficulties cover a wide range of needs:

- Moderate learning difficulties (MLD)
- Severe learning difficulties (SLD), when CYP are likely to need support in all areas of the curriculum and any associated difficulties with mobility and communication
- Profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), when CYP are likely to have severe and complex learning difficulties as well as a physical disability or sensory impairment
- Specific learning difficulties (SpLD), which affect one or more specific aspects of learning. This encompasses a range of conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dyspraxia.'

SpLD can also co-occur with difficulties on the autistic spectrum, such as autism without intellectual disability or delay.

At the SEN Support level, CYP with cognition and learning needs will typically have fallen behind their peers and age-related expectations by a considerable margin. Progress will invariably be slow and generally this will be across a range of areas/subjects.

It is important to ascertain whether slow progress and/ or low attainment is attributable to a learning need or a learning gap. Both can be improved with appropriate provision but there may be differences in that provision.

- *For CYP with a primary need in this category of special educational needs, you will need to further identify whether MLD, SLD, PMLD or SpLD is the most appropriate descriptor.*
- *Decision and review points include, during and on completion of an EHC Needs Assessment and following an annual review when an amended EHC plan is issued.*
- *You must check the SEN identified on Nexus and ensure this is updated.*

Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties

The Code of Practice states:

'CYP may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying behaviours that challenge, are disruptive or disturbing.

These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other CYP may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder.'

Behaviours which may manifest as a result of unmet SEMH need may include distractibility, poor relationships with peers, non-co-operation, disengagement, anger, stress, verbal or physical violence.

Behaviours may also be associated with the CYP's life experiences and environmental factors such as family breakdowns and bereavements, abuse, domestic violence and neglect.

It is important to consider the factors influencing and contributing to a CYP's SEMH needs. Schools must reflect on what can be done to address the factors which are within their influence. For example, a CYP may respond negatively to environments or to particular adults. Schools must consider how the environment can be changed or how the adults' behaviours and relationship with the CYP might be changed in order not to trigger certain unwanted behaviours. Involving parents/carers is also important, to ensure the partnership of home/school addresses these issues together. Teaching new skills and building intervention around that which motivates the CYP is particularly important in this context, as is consideration of how the CYP can achieve a sense of belonging and worth within the school community.

When planning how to meet a CYP's needs, full consideration should also be given to any co-existing challenges with communication, interaction, or learning. However, it is important to remember that a CYP with SEMH will not necessarily be experiencing any delay in their academic learning although, in time, this may be a consequence, if SEMH needs are not met. Similarly, non-attendance and school refusal may be a sign of SEMH needs and these will have a negative impact on academic attainment if not addressed.

- *For CYP with a primary need in this category of special educational needs, the descriptor is SEMH.*
- *Decision and review points include, during and on completion of an EHC Needs Assessment and following an annual review when an amended EHC plan is issued.*
- *You must check the SEN identified on Nexus and ensure this is updated.*

Sensory and/or physical needs

The Code of Practice states:

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'Some CYP require special educational provision because they have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of the educational facilities generally provided. These difficulties can be age-related and may fluctuate over time. Many CYP with vision impairment (VI), hearing impairment (HI) or a multi-sensory impairment (MSI) will require specialist support and/or equipment to access their learning or habilitation support. CYP with an MSI have a combination of vision and hearing difficulties.

Some CYP with a physical disability (PD) require additional on-going support and equipment to access all the opportunities available to their peers.' There is a duty on schools and education settings to comply with the Equality Act 2010. Reasonable adjustments can and should be made for CYP whether they have an EHCP or not.

CYP with sensory and/or physical impairment may need additions and adaptations to the environment and to resources, to access learning at the appropriate level. They may need specialist equipment and the school may need specialist advice. Adaptations to the curriculum and the teaching may also be needed, to allow full access to learning; for example, more time to complete tasks, support with processing information and managing information over- load for the 'well-functioning' senses, or alterations to the physical education curriculum.

CYP may need support with developing and maintaining a positive self-image and self-esteem, coupled with a sense of acceptance, and belonging within the school community. There should be acknowledgement that not all CYP are confident in explaining or discussing their conditions and benefit from support in managing the perceptions of others. Additionally, some CYP may require adaptations to school rules to help them manage their conditions and this needs to be understood within the school community.

- *For CYP with a primary need in this category of special educational needs, you will need to further identify whether HI, VI, MSI or PD is the most appropriate descriptor.*
- *Decision and review points include, during and on completion of an EHC Needs Assessment and following an annual review when an amended EHC plan is issued.*
- *You must check the SEN identified on Nexus and ensure this is updated.*