

How can I tell if my child has a special need?

There are many special needs that a child may suffer: some are immediately apparent, and if you have a child who has a particular need you may well already be gaining support from local medical and social services. In such a case it will be helpful if you can ask whoever is in charge of your child's case to write to the school with details of the condition and information as to how the school may support the work of the medical team working with your child.

But if you feel that there might be a special need that is not yet diagnosed the school will certainly try to help you.

Before you contact us, however, it would be very helpful if you could read the following points - it will certainly help us act more rapidly as we seek out the best help available for your child.

The first point to make is that children are very varied in their abilities. A child may naturally be poor at reading or maths - that doesn't mean that he/she has dyslexia or dyscalculic.

On the other hand a child might seem particularly talented as a footballer, musician, IT programmer, actor... but that doesn't automatically mean the young person is talented enough to warrant special support. Often only an expert in the field can tell if there is really exceptional talent in the child.

The fact is that being very good or very poor at something does not of itself mean a child has a special need. Nor does the fact that a child objects to going to school mean that the child has a special need called "school phobia".

Generally speaking, a special need which is not a physical disability (which can of course be seen much more readily) is shown by patterns of behaviour that are a long way outside the norm, which can't be explained by intelligence, and which are permanent or which occur regularly.

Obtaining a diagnosis

You should also be aware that taking a child through the route of diagnosing a special need can be difficult if not distressing for a child. Not every child wants to be singled out as different, and sometimes being singled out in this way can cause more problems than it solves.

Thus careful consideration has to be given in each case as to whether the school feels it is likely that a child has a special need and whether the necessary testing and then subsequent special treatment is in the best interests of the child.

If after reading this you do feel that your child has a special need, please do contact us, and let us know the details. We will investigate and let you know our findings as soon as possible - but please do be aware that such a preliminary investigation can take a little time, and the fact that we are looking into the issue does not mean that we will necessarily agree that your child has a special need.

Finally, may I add that sometimes it is felt that if a child has a special need such as dyslexia or dyscalculia the child may automatically be granted additional time in exams or excused the need to pass an exam.

Although this can apply this is not an automatic provision of finding that a child has a special need.

What is not a special need?

Being particularly good or particularly bad is not in itself a clear sign of there being a special need. And the law specifically excludes having English as a second language as a special need.

But above all, if you want to report that your child has a special need we will want to know the answer to these questions - and when answering these questions the more specific and detailed you can be, the better.

- a) Why do you think your child has a special educational need?
- b) Is your child learning at the same rate as other children of their age?
- c) What specific issues have you noted at home that relate to this possible special need?
- d) Are you giving help to your child to try and overcome these problems?

Finally, it is important to note that for many special needs there are no cures – for many children the answer is that they may be able to improve matters themselves through a lot of hard work, and they may well have to manage their special need for the rest of their lives.