



## Special education needs for expats

What every expat needs to know about UK special education if your child has special educational needs – or you think there might be something not quite right.

### **My child seems to be struggling with reading/spelling/maths/writing. Who do I speak with?**

In the first instance, always go to your class teacher. They will 'log' the discussion and this is a way to get the ball rolling in a constructive and documented way.

### **The teacher says that everything is fine but I suspect otherwise. What should I do?**

Your child's teacher knows where your child stands in relation to classmates and if your teacher is experienced, they might have a broader understanding of how your child compares with children in this age

group. However, identifying the signs of learning difficulties is not a taught component of initial teacher training in the UK and new teachers may over or under identify difficulties. Ask the teacher if you can speak with the SENCO.

### **Who is the SENCO and what do they do?**

The SENCO is the Special Educational Needs Coordinator and they are responsible for implementing the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice; this is the legislation which governs the identification, assessment and reporting on children with additional needs. At the very least, the SENCO oversees the list of children who may need or are receiving support; they may also be a skilled specialist teacher of learning difficulties.

### **What kind of support can I expect from the school?**

All schools are responsible for ensuring that children with any learning disabilities – and this includes the hidden cognitive learning disabilities like dyslexia and ADHD - receive the support they are entitled to in line with the Equality Act (2010). However, they only need to provide 'reasonable' adjustments; definitions of reasonable will vary.

### **Does a fee-paying (independent) school have better support than a state school?**

Only sometimes. As many independent schools are selective, with an assumption that a child will be more able and less in need of support. That said, most have a learning support teacher who sees the children once a week. What training that

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teacher has, whether the service is included in the fees and whether your child is deemed appropriate for that support is the schools' choice. An independent school will generally not offer speech and language support, occupational therapy or social skills groups. These may be available in a state school.

**I want my child to have additional support beyond what the school finds reasonable to provide. What do I do?**

If you are in a position to pay for this, you can look at either PATOSS.org or the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) website: both have lists of specially trained teachers but beware, demand far outstrips supply in London.

**I can't pay for the support my child needs. How can I get support from a children's service?**

Some children may be entitled to apply for a EHC Plan (Education & Health Care Plan) through the school. These go to a tribunal of the borough the school is in and your child's case will be evaluated. Unless a child has a medical issue as well, these are rarely granted, even in the case of autistic spectrum disorder. They are seldom given to pupils in the independent sector. State schools can apply for special support from the borough and your child may receive a teaching plan from a specialist at no cost. Again this varies.

**Where can I learn more?**

Both the BDA and PATOSS have informative websites, as does the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust website. Don't be put off by the word 'dyslexia' in the titles, these apply to all learning differences and are great general sites.



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