
One Minute Guide – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Panel

What is the SEN Panel for?

Decisions relating to needs assessment, provision, educational placement and other areas relating to supporting children with SEN are made by the SEN Panel. This is a committee comprised of representatives of a range of bodies, who assist the local authority in making those decisions.

The SEN Panel objectives are to:

- provide a forum for consultation and discussion aiming to support consistent and transparent SEN decision-making
- ensure that children's needs are met quickly, appropriately and in the most inclusive educational setting, wherever possible, locally
- have regard for the effective distribution of children's services resources based on informed decision-making
- contribute to the development of the Education and Partnerships Directorate approach to inclusion and meeting the needs of children with special educational needs.

Who makes up the SEN Panel?

The panel is chaired by the Head of Special Educational Needs, or one of the Service Managers, and is attended by representatives of education, (educational psychologists, SEN Service representatives, Support for Learning Service) a

representative of health, (from therapies or CAMHS), and a representative of social care (social worker).

Moving forward the panel will have representatives from educational settings and the EHCP Coordinator will attend their part of the panel meeting to present their own cases.

How does it work?

The panel meetings are scheduled on a weekly basis. Since the COVID pandemic meetings take place remotely via TEAMS. Cases are discussed in 3 parts:

Part A – New requests for needs assessments

Part B – Draft assessments and decisions to issue a plan; during this part of the meeting members of the panel discuss those plans due to be issued and assure the quality of the plans.

Part C – All other requests; including amendments to plans following annual reviews

During the meeting the members of the panel will discuss each case in turn and make a decision based on the evidence submitted. Occasionally they are unable to reach a decision as they do not have sufficient information – in which case they will ask the EHCP Coordinator to submit

additional information at the next panel meeting.

The panel may refer a case to another forum, such as the Social Inclusion Panel, or the Fair Access Panel, or for the attention of another agency if, for instance, a case needs to be considered for joint funding. All panel meetings are minuted and caseworkers use the minutes to inform their correspondence with parents.

Following the meeting the EHCP Coordinator feeds back the panel decision to the parents or young person within five working days. All discussions taking place during meetings of the SEN Panel are strictly confidential.

Which decisions are taken at SEN Panel?

- Whether to conduct a needs assessment for an EHCP
- Whether to issue an EHCP once a needs assessment has been undertaken
- Review and agreement of the provision in the EHCP
- Review and agreement of the placement requested in an EHCP
- Approval of personal budgets
- Agreement to maintain the plan of a child moving into Tower Hamlets with an EHCP from another authority

What to do if you disagree with a decision

If a parent does not agree with the decisions made during the EHC Needs Assessment process, this can be challenged by them on the:

- decision to not carry out an assessment;
- decision to not issue an EHC plan;
- special educational support in the EHC plan;
- school named in the EHC plan.

First steps:

In the first instance, parents are directed to contact their EHCP Coordinator. Your EHCP Coordinator will have detailed knowledge about the statutory assessment

processes aligned with the young people they are working on behalf of, and also why and how decisions have been made in particular circumstances and those endorsed by the SEN Panel.

Mediation

In the first instance of disagreement, parents will be asked to contact their EHCP Coordinator or the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Advice Service (SENDIAS). An opportunity will be arranged to discuss the case and will support with next steps if a resolution cannot be agreed.

If parents are not happy with the response they may contact Kids London SEN Mediation Services, an independent service. Details are sent to parents at the time of decision making around needs assessments, issuing plans, or amending plans following annual review.

Mediation is a confidential, informal, non-legalistic, accessible and simple disagreement resolution process. The parent's or young person's use of mediation is voluntary. A trained mediator helps the families and professionals involved in the dispute to meet, clarify the issues and work together to reach an acceptable solution. The mediator is an independent facilitator who does not take sides, give advice or make judgements.

Appeal

If parents are still not happy with the decisions made for their child's Needs Assessment or EHC Plan, they have the right to appeal to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST). There is an ongoing national trial where parents may also challenge decisions around Social Care and Health provision in their child's plan, via the SENDIST Tribunal.

Parents or young people who wish to make an appeal may do so only after they have contacted an independent mediation adviser and discussed whether this might be a suitable way of resolving the disagreement. You will need a certificate from the advisor to register for an appeal. You then have one month from receiving this certificate, or two months from the original decision (whichever is the later date), to register an appeal.

Appeals are handled by the Tribunal and details of how to contact the tribunal are sent to parents to inform them of how to do this. Forms should be downloaded and filled out through the SENDIST website.

Making a complaint Education

If you have a complaint to make about a process or professional, please follow the standard procedure which can be found on the Tower Hamlets council website.

Health and social care

If you are not happy with a process or professional, please speak with your EHCP Coordinator first. Most complaints can be dealt directly with this member of staff. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of this, please follow the standard procedure for complaints.
