**Areas of need – defining individual special educational needs**

The SEND Code of practice details that all SEND needs are categorised into 4 areas:

* Communication and interaction
* Cognition and learning
* Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties
* Sensory and/or Physical needs

This guidance is intended to support schools and services in identifying primary and secondary needs to ensure that they are accurately recorded on school census data returns and within individual plans.

Schools are required to record a child’s primary need within the school census. They should also identify any secondary needs, of which a child may have more than one. It is important that all needs are clearly identified and recorded by schools as part of the My Plan or EHC Plan process.

The Sheffield Support grid (SSG) has been developed using these 4 areas of needs. This means that schools should be able to use the SSG to consistently identify primary needs and any secondary needs. The area of need where a child’s need is greatest on the SSG should be recorded as their primary need. Where a child is recorded at the same level on the SSG (for example 1a3 and 3a3) schools should identify which is the most prevalent presenting need and ensure recording of secondary needs.

The following table details how the school census should be recorded based on the primary need as identified on the SSG

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| **Broad area of need** | **Primary SSG descriptor** | **School census descriptor** |
| Communication & Interaction | 1a | Speech, language & communication needs (SLCN) |
| 1b | Speech, language & communication needs (SLCN) or  Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) (where there is a diagnosis) |
| Cognition & learning | 2a3/4 | Moderate learning difficulty (MLD) |
| 2a4/5 | Severe learning difficulty (SLD) |
| 2a5 | Profound & multiple learning difficulty (PMLD) |
| 2b | Specific learning difficulties (SpLD) |
| Social, emotional & mental health difficulties | 3a | Social, emotional & mental health (SEMH) |
| 3b | Social, emotional & mental health (SEMH) |
| Sensory and/or physical needs | 4a | Visual impairment (VI) |
| 4b | Hearing impairment (HI) |
| 4a + 4b | Multisensory impairment (MSI) |
| 4c | Physical disability (PD) |

The SSG also includes a category 4d – medical, however this is not included as a category within the census returns.

The census returns also include a category of *‘SEN support’ but no specialist assessment of type of need (NSA)’* which is rarely used as needs should be recorded within one of the 4 areas of need.

It is important that schools use these definitions when completing and populating plans such as My Plans, in the same way that advice givers will use them in providing details of how needs present and are met. SENDSARS will also use these definitions when writing EHC Plans. Schools should ensure that the primary need in the EHC Plan is reflected on their school census. Schools should also consider as part of the annual review if there is a change of primary need and ensure this is evidenced and communicated as part of the Annual Review report.

**Frequent questions:**

*A child presents with needs that may be autism but doesn’t have a diagnosis. What should I record as primary need?*

If the area of need is communication and interaction but a child does not have a diagnosis of autism you should record the need as SLCN

*Is primary need SLCN / ASD or SEMH?*

There is often confusion as to whether a school should put primary need as SLCN / ASD or SEMH as they are often interlinked. The prevalent presenting need should be recorded as the primary need. It may be that the impact of a child’s sensory (ie how they interact with their environment) and communication needs are most prevalent. In which case primary need would be SLCN / ASD. If their most pressing need is around their social interaction and emotional responses then SEMH would be the primary need. It is often hard to differentiate between the two and you will often need to record a secondary need. Where a child has a diagnosis of Autism then this would most often be the primary need, unless their mental health or emotional responses and behaviours are more prevalent. If in doubt, schools should ask advice from services such as the Educational Psychologist or citywide SENCOs.

*How do we define ‘sensory’ needs?*

In the SEND Code of practice, the term ‘sensory’ is used to define visual, hearing or multi-sensory impairments. It is not used to define sensory needs related to responding to a child’s environment. Likewise physical disability is not used to define a physical response to the environment but a child’s own physical disabilities. Where a child has sensory needs relating to how they interact with their environment this should be recorded as SLCN / ASD and detailed under those areas of the SSG.

**Aligning SIMs data base with the Sheffield Support Grid** (nb. some schools may not use SIMS and so should use their alternate systems in the same way)

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| Open SIMs - front page view |
| Click on the Special Educational Needs logo at the top, 5th from right. |
| Type the child's name and click ‘Search’. |

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| This will take you to the child's SIMs page. |
| Scroll down to basic SEN details |
| Status – new to add or edit to amend      Choice of 3 from drop down menu (E, K, N) |

|  |
| --- |
| Current needs box |
| Click on new to add a need, choose from drop down menu. Select and click on ok to save. |
| You can change the ordering of needs (to align with SSGe info) by clicking on need type and then move up/down to change order on the list.      **Click Save** |

**SEND Code of Practice reference**

References to areas of need are contained in the SEND Code of Practice, 2015 at section 6.28 – 6.35. For ease of reference these sections are detailed below.

**Communication and interaction**

6.28 Children and young people 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.

6.29 Children and young people with ASD, including Asperger’s Syndrome and Autism, are likely to have particular difficulties with social interaction. They may also experience difficulties with language, communication and imagination, which can impact on how they relate to others.

**Cognition and learning**

6.30 Support for learning difficulties may be required when children and young people learn at a slower pace than their peers, even with appropriate differentiation. Learning difficulties cover a wide range of needs, including moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD), where children are likely to need support in all areas of the curriculum and associated difficulties with mobility and communication, through to profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), where

children are likely to have severe and complex learning difficulties as well as a physical disability or sensory impairment.

6.31 Specific learning difficulties (SpLD), affect one or more specific aspects of learning. This encompasses a range of conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia.

**Social, emotional and mental health difficulties**

6.32 Children and young people 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 challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. 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 children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder.

6.33 Schools and colleges should have clear processes to support children and young people, including how they will manage the effect of any disruptive behaviour so it does not adversely affect other pupils. The Department for Education publishes guidance on managing pupils’ mental health and behaviour difficulties in schools – see the References section under Chapter 6 for a link.

**Sensory and/or physical needs**

6.34 Some children and young people 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 children and young people 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. Children and young people with an MSI have a combination of vision and hearing difficulties. Information on how to provide services for deafblind children and young people is available through the Social Care for Deafblind Children and Adults guidance published by the Department of Health (see the References section under Chapter 6 for a link).

6.35 Some children and young people with a physical disability (PD) require additional ongoing support and equipment to access all the opportunities available to their peers.