

Cognition and Learning (C&L)

Pupils with Cognition and Learning needs may require support with their academic learning – this may be because they work at a slower pace than their peers and/or struggle to access the learning, even with appropriate scaffolding (as part of an inclusive universal offer). This 'broad area of need' encompasses a wide range of learning difficulties and pupils coded within this area of need should have one of the following census codes assigned:

- **MLD** – Moderate Learning Difficulty
- **SpLD** – Specific Learning Difficulty
- **SLD** – Severe Learning Difficulty
- **PMLD** – Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty

MLD

MLDs are typified by limited progress being made over time across multiple domains (many areas of the curriculum). However, a pupil with 'low prior attainment' does not necessarily have SEN; unless they have barriers to learning that require provision which is 'additional to or different from' their peers¹.

SpLD

Specific learning difficulties (SpLD), affect one or more specific aspects of learning (they can be narrow or highly specific in nature). They encompass a range of conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia.

SLD

Where pupils likely need support in all areas of the curriculum and have associated difficulties with mobility and communication.

PMLD

Where pupils are likely to have severe and complex learning difficulties as well as a physical disability or sensory impairment. Pupils with PMLDs are rarely taught in mainstream schools, as they will often require specialist provision.

Other Considerations (Down's Syndrome)

Another area of need which falls under the heading of Cognition & Learning is Down's Syndrome. From 2025, Down's Syndrome (DS) has been included as a separate category as part of the school census coding and returns². However – DS has not been added as a Primary Need type under the SEND Code of Practice – so pupils will still need another SEND code assigned.

This change was made to allow for better data collection and analysis on the number of pupils with Down's syndrome and their educational settings.

¹ [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK](#)

² [Complete the school census - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

Pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. They should have the following census code assigned:

- **SEMH** - Social, Emotional and Mental Health

The SEND Code of Practice 2015 outlines the following about how SEMH needs may manifest:

‘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.’

Pupils do not have to have a diagnosed condition in order to be recorded on the SEN Register with SEMH. They may have difficulties socialising with their peers, be experiencing low mood for a prolonged period of time, or be unable to self-regulate or express their emotions appropriately and without provision made for them. Pupils (Children) who are Looked After (LAC), previously LAC, or who have had Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) might also have or develop SEMH needs.

The Department for Education published guidance on [‘Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges’](#).

Sensory and/or Physical Difficulties (S/PD)

Some pupils may require SEN provision because they have a disability which prevents or hinders them (day-to-day) from making use of the educational facilities generally provided. These difficulties can be age related and may fluctuate over time. Often, there will be external agencies or medical professionals involved, and specific adaptations or interventions recommended which must be implemented in school. Pupils are also likely to have a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) to be followed in the event of a fire or other emergency. They should have one of the following census codes assigned:

- **VI** – Visual Impairment
- **HI** – Hearing Impairment
- **MSI** – Multi-Sensory Impairment
- **PD** – Physical Disability

VI / HI

Visual Impairment (VI) is a term used to describe visual loss (partial or full). Children with a VI are entitled to support for their learning from a specialist teacher from birth onwards called a Qualified Teacher of Visual Impairment. Pupils may also receive support from a Registered Qualified Habilitation Specialist (in relation to associated mobility and independent living skills). Hearing Impairment (HI) is a term used to usually describe either hearing loss or deafness (usually about how sound travels to the auditory nerve) or difficulties with auditory processing (how sound is processed and interpreted by brain).

A pupil may be added to the register for VI / HI, where a pupil requires specialist support and/or equipment to access their learning, or habilitation support (beyond that which the school provide as a 'reasonable adjustment' under the Equality Act).

MSI

Where a pupil has a combination of vision and hearing difficulties requiring specialist support and/or equipment to communicate, access their learning, or habilitation support to get around (beyond that which the school provide as a 'reasonable adjustment' under the Equality Act). Sometimes also known as 'dual sensory loss', or 'multi-sensory impairment'. Information of how to provide services for deafblind pupils is available through the [Social Care for Deafblind Children and Adults guidance](#) published by the Department of Health.

PD

Pupils with a physical disability have a limitation on their physical functioning ability, dexterity or stamina that has a substantial, or long-term negative effect, on an individual's ability to do normal activities. The pupil will require additional ongoing daily support and/or equipment to access all the opportunities available to their peers (beyond that which the school provide as a 'reasonable adjustment' under the Equality Act).

Communication and Interaction (C&I)

Scholars with Communication and Interaction needs may find it difficult to express their thoughts, needs or emotions. They should have one of the following census codes assigned:

- **SLCN** – Speech Language and Communication Needs
- **ASD** – Autistic Spectrum Disorder

SLCN

Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) include receptive language difficulties (a pupil might not understand what is said to them) and expressive language difficulties (a pupil might not be able to speak fluently or clearly, or they may have a stammer).

The SEND Code of Practice 2015 outlines the following:

‘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.’

SLCN can include the following (not an exhaustive list):

- **Speech and Sound Difficulties**
 - Phonological delay (speech sounds do not develop in line with the rate of development expected)
 - Phonological disorder (when a child produces atypical speech sound processes which do not follow the usual expected development of sounds)
 - Articulation disorder (difficulty in producing speech sounds, including swapping some sounds for others, and difficulty producing specific sounds)
 - Phonological awareness difficulties (difficulties with the ability to identify the different sounds like rhyme, syllables, long/short sounds, and can include difficulty identifying and hearing those concepts of sounds)
- **Developmental Language Disorder**
 - A communication disorder that interferes with learning, understanding and using language (where the language difficulty cannot be explained by other conditions or mitigating circumstances)
 - Can affect speaking, listening, reading or writing
 - Can also be known as: Specific Language Impairment, Language Delay, or Developmental Dysphasia
- **Social Communication Difficulties**
 - Pragmatic difficulties – such as with interacting with others appropriately and according to social norms
 - Pupils require help with appropriate use of / understanding of, both verbal and non-verbal language in social situations
- **Dysfluency** (Stammering / stuttering)
 - Where the quality of speech is not smooth or continuous (e.g. by containing pauses, or repeated words or sounds)
 - Where there is disruption of the forward flow and timing of speech by repetition of sounds, syllables or words

ASD

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), sometimes known as Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC), is considered a C&I need if it means that the pupil requires provision or support that is 'additional to or different from'³ their peers.

When referring to Autistic individuals, it is important to note the outcome of the research completed by the National Autistic Society for an Autism journal in 2015. This research explored the preferences of autistic people, their families, friends and professionals around the language used to describe autism. This found that,

'The most highly endorsed terms were 'autism' and 'on the autism spectrum', and to a lesser extent, 'autism spectrum disorder'⁴.

The National Autistic Society has also published some guidance⁵ on how to talk and write about autism and promotes the use of 'identify first' language such as 'autistic pupil' (not 'person first' language such as 'pupil with autism'). This 'identify first' language approach is generally accepted for autistic pupils, but for other pupils with SEN, a 'person first' approach is widely accepted. If you are unsure of the correct language to use, it is recommended that you ask the pupil and their family of their language preferences.

The SEND Code of Practice 2015 outlines the following:

'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.'

³ [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ [Which terms should be used to describe autism? Perspectives from the UK autism community - Lorcan Kenny, Caroline Hattersley, Bonnie Molins, Carole Buckley, Carol Povey, Elizabeth Pellicano, 2016](#)

⁵ [How to talk and write about autism](#)