

Who is this support and guidance for?

This guidance is intended to provide information to parents on the role of the Specialist Placement Panel and the process that takes place.

What is the aim of the Specialist Placement Panel?

The aim of the specialist placement panel is to ensure children are placed in provision according to need. It provides equity in decision making and is not reliant on when an EHCP is issued.

Panel allows the opportunity to track and monitor the number of places being sought in schools to allow for planning of additional school places.

When is the Specialist Placement Panel held and why those times of year?

Barnet Local Authority holds a specialist placement panel twice a year in December and March. The reason they are held in these months is to ensure children who are going through the phase transfer process have a setting named in Section I of the EHCP within the statutory timeframes.

Which children are in the phase transfer process?

Those children moving from;

Nursery – Primary

Infant – Junior

Primary - Secondary

Secondary - College or other post 16 provision

Is it only children going through the phase transfer process who are discussed at specialist placement panel? My child is not in these groups but it is thought a specialist placement might be suitable

Children who may require a special school or ARP placement in any year group outside of phase transfer are also considered for places at the specialist placement panel.

Who sits on special school panel?

Specialist placement panel is chaired by the Head of SEN. In attendance are representatives from all special school and ARP's (Additionally Resourced Provision) within the Borough of Barnet. The representatives could be Headteachers, Deputy Heads as well as the SENCO or lead teacher of the ARP's. In addition, the primary panel includes a representative of the Early Year SEND Advisory Team and Barnet Early Autism Model (BEAM) Manager. The Head of the Transport and Brokerage Team and Senior EP are also invited to attend panel.

Why is my child being discussed at the Specialist Placement Panel?

If parents wish their child to attend a Barnet special school or ARP, and the child's existing setting supports this view, it is likely your child would be discussed at the Specialist Placement Panel.

If parents wish for their child to be educated in a special school or ARP outside of the Borough or in an independent setting, the LA will also consider suitability of local special schools and/or ARP provision. The Local Authority has a duty to consider the efficient use of resources (the cost to the Local Authority) when placing a child in a school. Out of Borough and/or independent placements may have a higher cost to local specialist provision, which is the reason both are looked at. The Local Authority has to consider all the costs associated with provision which could include therapies and transport.

In some instances, parents may not wish their child to be considered for specialist provision. However, after considering the support that has been provided to the child by their mainstream school, the Local Authority may agree that all reasonable adjustments have been tried and exhausted and think it is appropriate to refer the child for specialist placement provision.

I want my child to go to a special school or ARP, what happens next?

The parent notifies their SEN caseworker they wish their child to be educated in a special school or ARP. The child/young person's current setting may be in agreement and this is evidenced through the annual review or professional reports gathered as part of the EHC needs assessment.

The SEN caseworker will refer the request for a change from mainstream school to special/ARP to the Complex Needs Panel. Panel will read the EHCP, professional reports gathered during the EHC needs assessment or annual review and either agree specialist provision may be suitable and request the caseworker refer to specialist placements panel or disagree and provide their reasons.

Which schools do the LA consult with?

The special school(s) and or ARP for which parents have expressed a preference.

If parental preference is an ARP, all Barnet ARP's, relevant to the child's need will be consulted with. The ARP which is parental preference and most local to the family home (often the same but can differ) will be considered for suitability in the first instance.

How do Specialist Placement Panel members decide on a school's suitability to meet my child's special educational needs?

Panel members are sent the child/young person Education, Health and Care Plan and either the annual review papers and accompanying documentation or reports gathered as part of the request for an EHC needs assessment.

In addition, the special school or ARP may ask to come and observe your child and speak with teaching staff in their current setting.

Places in special schools or ARP's are allocated according to the presenting complexity of each child's special educational needs. Those with the most complex of needs are prioritised for the limited places.

Why might I be offered a different school to one I expressed a preference for?

When deciding if a placement is right for a child, the law asks the LA to name a school based on suitability to meet a child's SEN. If a child is considered suitable for an ARP placement, then this would mean any ARP's for that type of need ie; Autism would be able to meet the child's needs.

If a child is considered suitable for a special school placement the LA will name a school based on their ability to meet your child's SEN. It may be the school identified by the parent is not considered suitable or is considered greater provision than the child requires by the panel and an alternative special school may be offered.

Although the LA is required to take account of parental preference, it is also necessary to consider the distance from the family home, the suitability of peer group and the number of children in one class. All of these are discussed before any specialist placement is offered.

Specialist Placement Panel decided a specialist placement would be suitable provision although the LA is unable to offer a place due to the incompatibility of efficient education of others. What does this mean?

The Local Authority will seek to place a child in the most suitable school to meet a child/young person's SEN as required by law.

The LA will not place a child in a setting if it is incompatible with the efficient education of others. Meaning, if there are too many children placed in the school it could become too difficult for the school to provide specialist teaching to meet the needs of all children, thus risking all the children's learning being affected.

In some instances, it may be a child's needs are considered unsuitable for the peer group with which they would be taught, and this would have a detrimental effect on the other children's learning.

Where the specialist placements panel is unable to place a child in the preferred school due to the incompatibility of others, panel may offer alternative specialist placement.

When would I expect to hear the decision made by Special School Panel for my child and by whom?

The SEN caseworker will contact a parent regarding the outcome of special school panel. Following the panel, decisions are circulated internally to review the decisions recorded and ensure accuracy. Panel members have one week to inform the SEN Manager of any amendments.

Once this deadline has passed, the decisions are sent to SEN Caseworkers to begin informing parents of the panel outcome. There are many children discussed at special school panel and it can take time to notify each parent. Ideally caseworkers will have informed parents of the decision three weeks from the panel meeting.

My child was offered a place for the following academic year for phase transfer, what happens next?

The caseworker will amend Section I of your child's EHCP naming their current placement to be followed by school xxxxx in September 20xx in line with statutory timeframes. ([phase transfer link](#))

My child was not offered a place for the following academic year for with phase transfer, what happens next?

The SEN caseworker will contact parents to explain why a school has not been named following panel and what actions will be taken next.

My child is in a through school so they will naturally go into Year 7. Why is the SEN Team asking me for school preference?

Your child may be attending a through school and you may wish them to stay for secondary education. Even if this is the case, the Local Authority has a duty to follow the phase transfer process for your child. This means consulting with the school of your preference (in this scenario the school your child is currently attending) to ensure your child's special educational needs can continue to be met at that school.

If the current setting is in another Borough and/or an independent provision the Local Authority is required to consider the efficient use of resources (the cost to the Local Authority) when placing a child in a school. Out of Borough and/or independent placements may have a higher cost to local provision, which is the reason the LA will consider all setting during phase transfer.

My child was not offered a special school place and is in the phase transfer process. What happens now?

If a special school or ARP is not offered at the specialist placement panel, the expectation will be for a child to attend the named mainstream setting. If there are concerns with the school being able to meet the child's special educational needs, this should be addressed via the annual review process. The child would not automatically be discussed at the next special school panel.

My child was not offered a special school place and is not in the phase transfer process. What happens now?

If a special school or ARP is not offered at the specialist placement panel, the expectation will be for a child to remain in their current setting and the child will be discussed at the next panel unless advised this is no longer necessary.

If my child is yet to receive an EHCP and I want a special school, do I complete the mainstream admissions process online via e-admissions?

Yes. You are advised to complete the mainstream e- school admissions process even if your child is having an EHC needs assessment. Until a child has been issued with a draft EHCP the only way of securing school placement is through Admissions.

Children without EHCP plans attend mainstream schools until an EHCP identifies a child's needs and provision indicating specialist school placement is required.

What can I do if I am unhappy with the school named in Section I of the EHCP?

The Local Authority seek to name schools in line with parental preference wherever possible. If parents are not in agreement with the school named in Section I of a child's EHCP, there is a right of appeal to the First Tier Tribunal once in receipt of the final EHCP and accompanying letter.