

Schools for children and young people with learning difficulties (LD)

Children and young people will be attaining at a low academic level, either because of a global learning difficulty or because of the impact of autism and/or a speech and language disorder on their functioning. The impact on functioning could be in terms of academic and/or social communication and interaction.

Children and young people placed in this type of school will therefore have a primary need in the areas of moderate learning difficulties (LD), autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) or speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). There will usually be associated secondary needs, such as behavioural and emotional or physical and sensory difficulties.

The following sections give a guide to the typical level of functioning in the three main areas of need which would make a child or young person suitable for placement in this type of school. A child or young person may have the level of functioning described in one or more of these three areas, as defined by PLASC categories: LD, ASD and SLCN. (Not every bullet point under the three headings will necessarily be met.)

For placement in a secondary learning difficulties school at Yr7, National Curriculum levels refer to teacher assessments in Yr5 because these will feature in the annual review report used to inform the decision about secondary transfer placement. It is expected that some children and young people will be attaining higher levels by the time of secondary transfer.

Young people attending secondary-age schools will have access to a range of accreditation appropriate to their ability and the progress they have made in the school.

Typical levels of functioning:

i) MLD

- For primary-age schools, children operating at National Curriculum attainment levels predominantly in the range P4 to P8 (principally in the core subjects)
- children in the early years will be assessed as achieving predominantly at around half chronological age as indicated by appropriate measures of **progress**
- Overall cognitive profile at or below 2nd percentile (where available)
- For secondary-age schools, young people operating at National Curriculum attainment levels **predominantly** in the range P6 to 1c as recorded in the Yr5 annual review documentation (and up to L2b at the beginning of Yr9 for pupils transferring from another school)

and/or

ii) ASD

- Diagnosis of autism or multidisciplinary assessment of characteristics universally accepted as falling within the autism spectrum
- Evidence of high and prolonged levels of anxiety and/or sensory sensitivity that are almost entirely preventing access to the mainstream classroom environment and which might manifest themselves in challenging behaviour (including withdrawn behaviour)
- Evidence of significant and prolonged difficulties in social communication and interaction
- Poor receptive language skills, with performance often measured at or below 2nd percentile
- Variable or inconsistent ('spiky') cognitive ability profile with attainment limited by impact of the autism, so that the child or young person is usually operating at the levels defined in previous LD section. However, there may be an area of particular strength, e.g. maths or ICT, where a child or young person is achieving at a higher level

and/or

iii) SLCN

- Expressive and/or receptive language at or below 2nd percentile (a speech and language disorder)
- Variable or inconsistent ('spiky') cognitive ability profile with attainment limited by impact of the speech and language disorder, so that the child or young person is operating at the levels defined in the LD section above. However, there may be areas of particular strength, e.g. maths and science, where a child or young person is achieving at a higher level
- Speech and/or language skills considerably below the level of non-verbal skills, as indicated by standardised assessment or by a discrepancy of four or more National Curriculum sub-levels between speaking and listening and other core subjects

Many children and young people will demonstrate a combination of the three primary areas of need above. Some will also have additional needs, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia or Dyspraxia. Medical issues may require daily supervision and potential intervention.

Children and young people will require a differentiated and often personalised curriculum to meet their profile of need. Further examples of a child or young person's functioning, engagement and learning style will be available in the case studies.