

Assessment & Planning Officer (APO) Role and Responsibilities

The APO role

The broad role of the APO is to draft and update Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for educational settings and/or other professionals to implement.

The APO does not provide direct educational support. They write and update the EHCP by collating the expertise of:

- the educational setting
- health services
- social care services
- any other relevant SEND services
- any other relevant professionals

The APO acts as intermediary between the Local Authority and the child/young person. They submit relevant requests from the educational setting or family to the Local Authority and then communicate the Local Authority's decision following consideration.

APO allocation

There are two teams of APOs within Assessment & Planning:

- the 0-13 team has responsibility for EHCPs up to around age 13 (i.e. the end of year 8), and
- the 14-25 team has responsibility for EHCPs from around age 14 (i.e. the beginning of year 9) to age 25

Each APO has a caseload of 100 to 250 children / young people.

Each educational setting within the county has at least one allocated APO. Where educational settings outside the county have East Sussex children/young people attending, there are also allocated APOs for those settings.

Depending on the size of the setting and the year groups of the cohort, there may be more. For example, secondary schools have at least two allocated APOs to cover years 7 and 8, and then years 9, 10, and 11.

Children/young people that are not attending a setting are allocated an APO.

The allocated APO for a child/young person therefore changes over time depending on which educational setting they attend and their age.

The APO remit

Within the APO's remit

There are two key statutory processes that make up the majority of the APO role.

The APO can support during these processes or during other related matters.

Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA):

The APO does the following during this process:

- collates EHCNA advice into a draft version of the EHCP
- ensures the special educational needs identified in the EHCNA advice can be linked with appropriate provision and outcomes in the EHCP
- works with the family around any requested changes to the draft document and their preferred educational setting
- submits any requests to the Local Authority for consideration (for example, for additional funding)
- consults with relevant educational settings to find an appropriate placement
- finalises the EHCP with a placement named
- shares the finalised EHCP with the family, educational settings, and relevant professionals (such as our colleagues in Health)

You can find more [information about the EHCNA process on the Local Offer](#).

Please note that the SEND Assessment & Planning admin team processes the initial EHCNA request; an APO is allocated once the Local Authority has determined whether it is necessary to complete the EHC needs assessment (generally within 6 weeks of the request).

This APO is allocated specifically to manage the EHC needs assessment process. The APO that supported the family through the EHC needs assessment does not usually continue managing the EHCP after the process finishes. Please see 'APO allocation' section above.

Annual Reviews:

Existing EHCPs are reviewed every year. The APO does the following during this process:

- attends the review meeting where possible
- processes the review recommendations
- updates the EHCP with new information shared during the review (if appropriate)
- submits any requests to the Local Authority for consideration (for example, for a change of placement type)
- consults with relevant educational settings (if appropriate)

- finalises and shares the amended EHCP with the family, educational settings, and relevant professionals (such as our colleagues in Health)

You can find more [information about the EHCNA process on the Local Offer](#).

Outside the APO's remit

While the APO acts as a general point-of-contact regarding EHCPs and wants to help where they can, please note that their remit does not cover everything.

APOs are not direct educational or therapeutic providers, health professionals, Educational Psychologists, or Social Workers. They are not the point-of-contact for all SEN or educational matters.

General SEN support:

The Assessment & Planning team is specifically relevant for children/young people that already have EHCPs or are going through the EHCNA process.

Local Authority decisions:

The APO communicates decisions from the Local Authority but are not responsible for making these decisions.

Local Authority decisions include:

- whether to complete an assessment or issue a plan following the EHCNA,
- placements,
- funding allocations and personal budget requests,
- appropriate provision,
- levels of need,
- suitability of provision and placements,
- transport support eligibility

All statutory decisions are made by a panel of professionals using all the available information and evidence. This ensures that the decisions we make are robust and equitable to all children and young people with SEND.

Educational setting decisions:

Decisions made by the educational setting can be outside the direct control of the APO and Local Authority. For example, exclusions and some service referrals are based on the setting's judgement.

The APO liaises with the educational setting and endeavours to work collaboratively with them. They can discuss decisions and make recommendations but **cannot** necessarily affect the setting's decision.

Tribunals:

Where an appeal is in progress, any work relevant to the appeal is the responsibility of the allocated Tribunal Lead.

The APO may maintain some involvement with aspects of the EHCP that are not covered by the appeal, depending on the appeal scope.

SEND services:

Assessment & Planning is not responsible for all Local Authority input for children/young people with EHCPs. Other SEND services can provide support.

The APO can signpost families and educational settings to other services if needed. They do not have control over the other service's input.

FAQs

Can my APO advise me about the best educational setting for my child?

Your APO can discuss your thoughts and preferences with you but **cannot** advise on which educational setting you should choose.

You are encouraged to arrange visits to any schools/settings you are considering. Visits would be arranged directly with the setting rather than through the Local Authority.

The Local Authority consults with local schools/settings in addition to your parental preference.

There is more information about finding a school on the Local Offer:

- [EHCP: Finding a School | East Sussex Local Offer](#)

How do I ask for changes to my child's EHCP?

Requests for changes to the EHCP must be raised through an annual review. For example, if you do not consider that the EHCP is a true reflection of your child. The setting can hold an early annual review if needed; it isn't necessary to wait a year from the last review.

For changes to be agreed by the Local Authority, there must be clear evidence to support them.

Can I get assistance with travel to and from my child's school?

Children/young people with EHCPs may be eligible for transport assistance to and from school. This is handled by the [SEN Transport team](#), which is separate to Assessment & Planning.

Can my APO make a referral to another service?

APOs can make some internal referrals, but most referrals should be made by the educational setting.

Schools/settings have access to multiple SEND services which can support them to meet needs and put appropriate provision in place.

What happens if my child is struggling to attend school?

Schools have access to multiple SEND services which they can utilise if there are any attendance concerns.

If attendance is still a point of concern following SEND service involvement, the APO can arrange an early annual review. The review can be used to discuss whether there is evidence that the provision or setting is no longer suitable.

What happens if my child has been permanently excluded?

The Inclusion and Alternative Provision (INCAP) team handles the immediate next steps after a pupil has been permanently excluded. This includes arranging the 'sixth day provision' that children/young people are entitled to, which is usually a temporary arrangement.

While INCAP arranges initial provision, the APO/educational setting arranges an early annual review. The review allows for the EHCP to be updated (if needed) and a new educational setting to be identified.

How do I complain?

If your concerns relate to the educational setting, you should discuss these directly with them. Each setting has its own complaints process if you feel it is necessary to go down that route.

There is information about making a complaint to the Local Authority on the East Sussex website:

- [Submit a corporate complaint or compliment | East Sussex County Council](#)

Who do I contact if my APO is on annual leave?

It is **not possible** during times of annual leave to allocate another APO. Your APO will endeavour to respond upon their return. APOs set automated responses detailing their annual leave. The automatic responses usually direct any queries to the SEND Assessment & Planning admin team that can be reached at SEN.CaseworkAssistants@eastsussex.gov.uk.

If your query is urgent, please indicate this in the subject bar when contacting the admin team.

Can I be supported to make a request for an EHC needs assessment?

The recommended first step is to talk to your child's educational setting if you can. It can be an opportunity to discuss your concerns and whether additional support or services could be explored in general, as well as whether the educational setting agrees that an EHC needs assessment would be appropriate at this time. If the educational setting agrees that it would be appropriate, they can take it forward.

If you would like to request an EHC needs assessment yourself, or you would like to check that the request has been received, you can do so by contacting the SEND Assessment & Planning admin team on 01273 336740 or SEN.CaseworkAssistants@eastsussex.gov.uk.

There is information about the EHCNA process available on the East Sussex Local Offer:

- [EHCP: Introduction, Assessment and Process | East Sussex Local Offer](#)

Why hasn't my child's EHCP been issued yet?

Following the EHCNA process:

The EHCP cannot be issued until all statutory advice has been received from professionals carrying out the assessments. Your APO will chase up any outstanding reports and will keep you notified.

Your APO understands the statutory deadlines and will always work towards these.

Following an annual review:

Where requests for changes within the need and provision sections of the EHCP are received, depending on the request, your APO will need to liaise with the appropriate professional (such as the Educational Psychologist). Your APO will chase up any outstanding information and will keep you notified.

Your APO understands the statutory deadlines and will always work towards these.

Following the Phase transfer process:

As part of the annual review process for specific year groups, your APO will secure a placement for your child's next phase of education.

School placements will be confirmed by 15 February in the calendar year of the move for children transitioning from:

- early years to Reception
- infant school to junior school
- primary to secondary school

Placements will be confirmed by 31 March in the calendar year of the move for young people transitioning from:

- secondary school to a post-16 institution or apprenticeship
- a post-16 institution to a post-19 institution

There is information about the phase transfer process available on the East Sussex Local Offer:

- [EHCP: Phase Transfer | East Sussex Local Offer](#)

Can the Local Authority cease my child's EHCP?

A Local Authority may cease to maintain an EHC plan if it determines that it is no longer necessary for the plan to be maintained or if it is no longer responsible for the child/young person. This applies to all age groups.

This could be because the young person (aged 16 or over) leaves education to take up paid employment, enters higher education (university), or no longer wishes to engage in further learning.

The Local Authority may cease an EHCP in circumstances where a family moves abroad on a permanent basis.

Can I electively home education my child if they have an EHCP?

Yes, a family is able to electively home educate a child with an EHCP where the Local Authority has deemed it appropriate. Home education must be suitable for the age, ability, aptitude, and SEN of the child. We will work in partnership with you and support you to ensure that the SEN is met.

What do I do if I am moving into East Sussex and my child has an EHCP?

The old Local Authority will transfer the EHCP to the new authority (East Sussex) on the day of the move or within 15 working days of the date they became aware of the move. We will ask you for proof of your address as part of this process.

We are **unable to process** any transfer prior to any move.

There is information about the process of moving into East Sussex available on the East Sussex Local Offer:

- [EHCP: Moving Into and Out of East Sussex | East Sussex Local Offer](#)

What do I do if I am moving out of East Sussex and my child has an EHCP?

If you will be moving out of East Sussex, please inform your APO.

We will transfer the EHCP to your new authority on the day of the move or within 15 working days of the date you notified us of the move.

There is information about the process of moving out of East Sussex available on the East Sussex Local Offer:

- [EHCP: Moving Into and Out of East Sussex | East Sussex Local Offer](#)

Assessment & Planning strives for excellence and will always put the child/young person's SEN, voice, and wellbeing at the heart of its statutory work.