**Changes taking place for families with children and young people who have Special Educational Needs and disabilities**

The Children and Families Act is changing the way in which children and young people with Special Educational Needs and disabilities are supported at school and in the community. The Act comes into force during September 2014.

* The Act responds to concerns parents / carers have raised about the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities system over the last few years.
* The Act includes new responsibilities on local authorities and others to make sure parents / carers and young people are much more involved in decisions that affect their lives. It also requires local authorities and health to work with parents / carers and young people to improve services across their local area, for example through parent carer forums.
* The Act requires education, health and social care services to look at how they support children and young people in a way that improves progress and supports the outcomes they want and need.
* The Act requires services that families use, in particular education, health and social care to work more closely together and commission services together.

**What does this mean in real life?**

Education, Health and Care Plans will replace Statements of Special Educational Needs and Learning Disability Assessments (LDAs). Over the next few years, children with an existing statement will be transferred to an Education, Health and Care Plan.

There will be agreed procedures for this and parents / carers and young people will have a say in these. Existing rights, for example rights of appeal, will continue during the transfer.

Education, Health and Care Plans can continue to support young people up to the age of 25 if the local authority considers that the young person needs more time to complete their education or training.

SEN support will replace School Action and School Action Plus. Schools will still be required to identify children who need additional support, involve parent carers and children and young people in planning how to meet these needs and call on specialists from outside the school when they need to.

From September 2014 every local authority will need to have a “local offer” which informs parent carers and young people what is provided in their local area, including what to expect from local early years providers, schools, colleges, health and social care. It will include information on how decisions are made about how services are allocated, how to request a personal budget, how to access more specialist support and how to complain or appeal. Local authorities must involve parent carers, children and young people in developing their local offer.

Local authorities already have to make information and advice available to parent carers about SEN, through Parent Partnership Services.

From September, local authorities must also make information and advice available that covers disability, health and social care, making it available directly to young people as well as parent carers - building on the services (like Parent Partnership Services) they already have in place.

Families with children or young people going through a statutory assessment leading to an education, health and care plan may also be able to get help from an Independent Supporter – someone who doesn’t work for the local authority who can help parents and carers, and young people, through the process.

**What are Independent Supporters?**

These will be people recruited to provide advice and support for parents of children and young people with SEN and disabilities, through the statutory assessment and Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) processes.

Independent Supporters will help families by offering a range of time-limited support such as speaking to different agencies and giving advice on personal budgets. The type of support will be tailored to the needs of each family.

They will be independent from the local authority and be recruited by the private, voluntary and community sectors.

**What can I do if I am worried about how this will affect my child?**

If you are worried about your child, please contact your local authority SEN Team, their contact details can be found on the local authority website or through your child’s school.

Parent Partnership Services can also provide impartial advice and support.

You can find details of your local Parent Partnership Service here: <http://www.parentpartnership.org.uk/>

You can also call the Contact a Family SEND freephone helpline 0808 808 3555 (9.30 – 5pm, Mon-Fri) email: helpline@cafamily.org.uk

There is a range of “mythbusters” that have been produced to help clarify concerns parent carers may have. You can find them here: <http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/childrenandfamiliesbillmyths>

and at <http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/childrenandfamiliesbillmyths-ehcps>

Parent Carer Forums have put a number of questions forward about the changes.

[You can read these questions and the answers from the Department for Education here](https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxubnBjZnRlbXB8Z3g6NzBlM2NhNDUxYTA2ZjA1NA).

**When is this going to happen?**

The law will start to change the arrangements in September 2014. Most local areas are making preparations and plans for this right now. It will take some time for local areas to make all of the changes that are required, so changes will take place over a number of years.