

Derbyshire Early Years SENIF Banding Descriptors Overview and guidance for use.

Area of Need	Band A (Emerging / Low Need)	Band B (Moderate Need)	Band C (Significant Need)	Band D (High / Complex Need)
Cognition & Learning	Some delay in acquiring early learning skills. May need additional adult prompts, support with attention and transitions, and help developing purposeful play.	Noticeable learning difficulties affecting progress across several EYFS areas. Requires adapted activities, repetition, structured teaching approaches, and regular adult support to learn and retain concepts.	Significant barriers to learning despite targeted support. Needs highly differentiated provision, individualised teaching opportunities, and extensive support to engage in learning and play.	Severe and pervasive learning difficulties affecting access to most aspects of the curriculum. Requires a highly personalised programme, specialist approaches, and substantial adult support throughout the day.
Speech, Language & Communication Needs (SLCN)	Difficulties understanding spoken language or following instructions without additional visual or contextual support. Speech may be unclear to unfamiliar listeners.	Delays in understanding and/or using language that impact learning and social interaction. May require specialist involvement and alternative ways to communicate wants and needs.	Marked communication difficulties affecting understanding, expression, and participation. Limited range of communication used consistently across settings.	Profound communication needs requiring specialist communication systems and significant adaptations to enable participation and understanding.
Autism / Social Communication Differences	Differences in social understanding, flexibility, and communication. Benefits from predictable routines, structured interaction, and support during shared play.	Increased difficulty coping with change, understanding social situations, and communicating needs. Requires regular adult mediation and support to engage with peers and activities.	Significant challenges with flexibility, social engagement, and regulation when routines change. Needs substantial support to participate in experiences beyond preferred interests.	Highly individual profile with significant barriers to social learning and communication. Requires a personalised curriculum focused on communication, regulation, relationships, and engagement.

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Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH)	Some difficulty settling, managing transitions, or developing relationships. May need additional emotional support and help regulating responses.	Emotional regulation and sensory needs significantly affect participation. Requires regular co-regulation, adult reassurance, and support to engage with peers and activities.	Significant difficulties managing emotions, relationships, and sensory experiences. Requires intensive adult support for regulation, social interaction, and participation.	Complex emotional and behavioural presentation with high levels of anxiety and dysregulation. Requires highly personalised provision, intensive co-regulation, and significant adaptations to the environment and curriculum.

Guidance for requesting SENIF:

When completing funding requests, practitioners should:

Avoid	Include Instead
Generic statements taken from descriptors	Specific examples observed in the setting
Labels or diagnoses alone	Functional impact on learning, play, communication and relationships
Broad descriptions of need	Frequency, duration and severity of difficulties
Lists of strategies used	Evidence of what has been tried and the impact
Statements about support required	Clear rationale linked to observed barriers to participation

Examples:

Rather than writing:

"The child has significant communication difficulties."

Consider:

The child communicates successfully using visual cues, familiar routines and adult support. They benefit from visuals (we are currently using objects of reference and the child responds to...*include child specific examples*) alongside consistent simple spoken instructions and are increasingly developing their understanding of the language associated with routine activities. During adult-led activities, individual guidance helps them engage, participate and access learning opportunities alongside their peers.

Helpful principle for funding requests:

A useful approach is to describe:

1. What the child can do.
2. What helps them succeed.
3. The level of support needed to maintain access and participation.

For example:

The child is motivated to engage in activities and communicates their interests and preferences in a variety of ways (*include child specific examples*). They access learning most successfully when supported by visual resources, consistent routines and individual adult guidance (*include child specific examples*). This level of support is needed at regular intervals during the session (*include specific frequency*) to enable participation, understanding and sustained engagement in the learning environment.