

Q. What is a special need?

A. The term 'special needs' refers to a diverse range of needs often caused by a medical, physical, mental or developmental condition or disability. Special needs can include cognitive difficulties, physical or sensory difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and difficulties with speech and language. Professionals (who have the responsibility for helping children with special needs, like paediatricians, psychologists and educators) often use a functional development approach (i.e., looking for delays in functional areas of child development) and a clinical diagnostic approach (i.e., using a set criteria to diagnose conditions or illnesses) to define special needs.

Q. What are some characteristics of students with special needs?

A. The type and extent of difficulties experienced by students with special needs varies greatly, but may include difficulties with:

- Reading, writing, number work or understanding information
- Mastering academic content
- Communication, such as expressing themselves or understanding what others are saying
- Social interaction, such as making friends or relating to adults
- Mobility or movement due to a physical impairment
- Hearing or vision due to a sensory impairment
- Appropriate behaviour

Q. What can be done to help someone with special needs?

A. If a student is suspected of having special needs, a comprehensive assessment should take place as early as possible. If a student is determined to have special needs (by meeting the criteria or requirements for special educational services), they may be eligible to receive certain specific free services to help with their unique need. These services should be appropriate to the student's needs and abilities and promote the inclusion of all with special education needs, regardless of disability. While educational provision is available in special schools that cater specifically for students with special needs, many students can benefit from attendance at mainstream schools provided that adequate arrangements can be put in place to

meet their needs. Remedial, resource and visiting teachers provide services for students with a range of special needs attending mainstream schools.

Related Links

[National Association for the Mentally Handicapped of Ireland \(NAMHI\)](#)

[Mencap](#) (UK)

[The ARC](#) (US)

[Down's Syndrome Association](#) (UK)

[Down Syndrome Information Network](#) (US)