

Special Education Needs Teacher

Special educational needs (SEN) teachers work with children and young people who have learning difficulties and disabilities. These may be because students are physically disabled, have visual or hearing impairments, are emotionally vulnerable or suffer from other learning difficulties.

SEN teachers in England and Wales teach the National Curriculum as far as possible. In Scotland, they teach the 5-14 Curriculum, S grades and H grades. They spend much of their time teaching small groups or individuals, and have to adapt what they teach to meet the needs of individual students. For example, teachers working with students with hearing impairments help to develop their speech, communication skills and sign language.

SEN teachers may be involved in helping students who have difficulties with:

- reading, writing, number work or understanding information
- expressing themselves or understanding what others are saying
- behaving properly in school
- organising themselves and their work
- sensory or physical needs which may affect them in school.

In general terms, their work involves:

- preparing materials and lessons
- setting, assessing and reporting on students' work
- giving advice and guidance to students, and holding reviews of their progress
- talking to parents and carers, and other professionals
- liaising with other teachers and learning support assistants
- organising activities, field trips or work experience.

Teachers work 39 weeks a year in school. Teachers can work part time, or on a supply basis (filling in when other teachers are away).

Salaries range from at least £23,352 a year (£23,538 in Scotland) for a teacher entering special educational needs work, to at least £37,374 a year for an experienced special needs teacher (£36,219 in Scotland). Teachers working in the London area and parts of south-east England are paid additional allowances.

SEN teachers should be able to communicate in the most appropriate way for their students, be patient and be able to motivate students.

Most SEN teachers work in mainstream schools. Some work in special schools, and others work in pupil referral units, community homes, hospital schools and youth custody centres. There is a shortage of SEN teachers.

To work in a state school, people must first qualify as a teacher and have at least two years' teaching experience. Independent schools also prefer this. For more general information about becoming a teacher, see **School Teacher**.

Teachers wishing to go on to specialise in teaching students with visual, hearing or multi-sensory impairment can take further qualifications. Universities and colleges offer full-time courses (one year) or part-time and distance learning training courses (these last two years).

There are also courses for qualified teachers to teach students with other special educational needs. Some are general, while others concentrate on a particular area, eg dyslexia or autism. Most are part time and last several months.

It is possible to become deputy headteacher or headteacher in a special school. Promotion in a mainstream school can be to special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) or head of the special needs department.

