

School Access Initiative – Policy and Procedure

Amended following
consultation November
2024

School Access Initiative – Policy and Procedure

Section 1. What is the Schools Access Initiative (SAI)?

The County Council has a capital funding stream, the Schools Access Initiative (SAI), to enable it to improve the physical accessibility of maintained mainstream schools, for which it has capital responsibility (community, foundation and voluntary controlled schools).

Funding is used to improve accessibility for individuals or groups of children and young people with disabilities to enable them to attend a local maintained mainstream school. The County Council uses the funding to ensure as far as reasonably practicable at least one school in each district is able to meet the diverse needs of children, and to address wider accessibility issues. SAI funding is also used to make adaptations to support individual children where this represents an appropriate use of public funds.

The responsible bodies for schools (governing bodies/academy trusts) must produce an Accessibility Plan. One aspect of this is to explain how they are improving the physical environment of the school to increase the extent to which disabled pupils can make best use of the opportunities available at the school. Therefore, responsible bodies should consider adaptations as part of a strategic approach to planning for pupils with disabilities and, as far as it is possible, proactively anticipate access requirements when any works or improvements to their estates are undertaken. The needs of disabled pupils should be planned for by the responsible bodies.

Section 2. Strategic Priorities

- The County Council's Education Accessibility Strategy sets out how it and its maintained schools are improving access to the physical environment of the schools so that disabled pupils are able to take increased advantage of educational benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the schools.

The steps below will be taken to support this priority, and will inform deployment of SAI resources:

- to address wider accessibility issues in schools, including:
 - to improved physical access to the school e.g. ramps and handrails;
 - to improved physical movement around the buildings e.g. automated doors;
 - to improved facilities within the building for disabled pupils e.g. sensory rooms, medical rooms and acoustic improvements.
- to improve access to a local school* to facilitate inclusion for a named pupil, where this is an appropriate investment and an alternative accessible local school cannot be identified;

** The definition of “local school” will vary with context and circumstances. These include cost of adaptation, incidence rate, rurality. The individual circumstances will be considered to determine whether the adaptation is considered appropriate.*

Section 3. Which schools are supported by KCC’s Schools Access Initiative funding?

All Kent County Council maintained mainstream community, voluntary controlled and foundation schools.

Capital funding for voluntary aided schools, academies and free schools is via either their responsible body’s School Capital Allocation (SCA) or through a Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) application to the DfE.

Section 4. Identification of Need

As outlined in Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 the local authority has a duty to put in place an accessibility strategy (in our case the Education Accessibility Strategy 2024-27)

The School Access Initiative – Policy and Procedure, part of the Education Accessibility Strategy 2024-27, specifically sets out how the local authority will be improving the physical environment of the schools for the purpose of increasing the extent to which disabled pupils are able to take advantage of education and benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the schools. This requires a strategic, proactive approach. However, it is recognised that it will be necessary on occasion to react to changes and individuals’ needs.

The County Council has commissioned accessibility audits on all community, voluntary controlled and foundation schools. The reports give information to school governors and leaders to enable them to address proactively any accessibility issues through their own resources, and to set out further improvements in their Accessibility Plan (published on the school’s website). The County Council is using this information to identify geographical gaps in the accessibility of its schools for it to address proactively. A strategic summary of the findings of the accessibility audits is reported annually to the Education Asset Board, which oversees proposals to address themes identified by the audits and geographical gaps in provision, and allocates available SAI funding accordingly.

The County Council identifies the individual pupils that may need adaptations made to a local school via a number of Specialist Teaching and Learning Services (STLS).

The STLS teams provides advice to both the Council and schools that are planning for prospective pupils who may require physical adaptations.

Referrals to the Physical Disability /Sensory Specialist Teaching and Learning Service (PD&S STLS) can be requested from the nursery or school SENCO or via a

child's physiotherapist or portage worker. Referrals are made via the PD webpage [Physical Disability and Complex Medical Needs - KELSI](#).

Sensory support, including visual and hearing impairments, can be accessed in the first instance via emailing the team at hivimsi@kent.gov.uk. As with the PD service, the Sensory Service will receive referrals from education establishments, parents or health professionals.

Support for children and young people with Neurodivergent and/or Speech Language and Communication Needs can be accessed via a number of sources. This includes general advice via referral to the Local Inclusion Forum Team (LIFT), SLTS and resources that are available on the KCC website:

<https://www.kelsi.org.uk/special-education-needs/special-educational-needs/autism-education-trust-aet>

[Parent Portal | Home \(speechandlanguage.info\)](#)

A realistic balance must be taken between the importance of school access and the cost of projects. In some cases, it will not be possible or appropriate to deliver adaptations due to the nature of the school site or prohibitive cost of any proposed works. Where this is the case, professionals may recommend that the child is placed at an alternative local school which is able to meet the child's needs. Most schools' over-subscription criteria will place a high priority on children who have access needs, including physical impairments and medical issues, but who do not have an EHC Plan. The admission of children with an EHC Plan is dealt with via the statutory assessment process.

In order to support parents/carers in making informed choices when applying for a school place, we are working to improve the accessibility information available, as this will better support access to the curriculum and physical access to premises.

While we wish to support parental choice, it will not always be appropriate or necessarily possible, to ensure that whichever school a parent chooses for their child will be accessible for that child's specific needs.

Section 5. County Council criteria for SAI funding for adaptations relating to an individual pupil

Stage 1.

Following a pupil referral to the appropriate STLS service, the Service will contact and visit the parents' preferred school to make an initial assessment of needs of the pupil. This will report on:

- the possible adaptations that may be required.

A 'Record of Visit' is completed. If adaptations are required, this will be shared with Property and Infrastructure and the relevant Assistant Director Education (ADE).

Property and Infrastructure will undertake a high level feasibility of the ability to implement the adaptations and the estimated cost. This will be reported to the relevant ADE.

Many pupil specific projects cost much less than £10,000 (e.g. classroom blinds for a pupil with visual impairment, a classroom soundfield system for a pupil with hearing impairment, or a wall mounted adjustable changing bed for a pupil with medical needs). If the potential adaptations required are expected to be under £10,000, it will be the school's decision and responsibility to fund through their revenue or devolved capital budgets. The ADE will contact the preferred school to confirm that this is the case.

Where potential adaptations would need support from the SAI budget (cost £10,000 or more), an initial triage will be undertaken by the relevant Area Schools Organisation Officer (ASOO) and reported to the ADE (Appendix A). In liaison with the appropriate specialist service, this will consider:

1. The adaptations required and their costs.
2. Whether the preferred school is the nearest age-appropriate school?
3. If not, whether it is the nearest age-appropriate school that has already had accessibility adaptations relevant to the pupil's needs?
4. Whether there is an age-appropriate school in the district that can already meet the child's needs, and if so, how far away this school is?
5. Other material factors, such as transport costs if relevant.

The ADE will consider whether it may be appropriate to make adaptations at the preferred school, and thus to move to stage 2, or whether (for example) an alternative school is already able to meet the Child's needs, and the likely costs/needs of others would prohibit expenditure in this case.

The decision at Stage 1 (appendix A) will be communicated in writing to the school/specialist teacher/parent/carer as appropriate by the ADE. The appropriate specialist teaching service/the school should liaise with the parents or carers of the child or young person following the outcome at Stage 1. The process for challenging the decision is outlined in Appendix D.

Stage 2.

The ADE will contact Property and Infrastructure who will arrange a site visit and report from a property specialist to provide advice to the school, and the relevant ADE on the level of cost and feasibility of any works.

If, following the feasibility adaptation costs are expected to be under £10,000, it will be the school's decision and responsibility to fund through their revenue or devolved capital budgets. The ADE will contact the preferred school to confirm that this is the case.

If adaptations are expected to cost £10,000 or more, the school can apply for SAI support by completing the SAI referral form (see Appendix B).

All SAI funding requests will be considered on an individual basis by the SAI Panel.

Acceptance of a request does not constitute a commitment to delivery or funding. The SAI Panel will then decide on the viability of the proposed works identified by the site visit.

When considering the appropriateness of applications for the SAI, the SAI Panel will look at:

- whether the school is the child or young person's nearest age appropriate school;
- the proximity of alternative accessible schools;
- evidence of individual need;
- the extent to which the adaptation would be effective in overcoming the disabled pupil's potential disadvantage;
- the overall feasibility of any proposed works, including site practicalities and health and safety considerations;
- whether the cost / impact of any adaptation would be viewed as effective investment of public resources;
- the interests of other pupils on the school roll and prospective pupils;
- the need to 'compensate' for lost space at a school as a result of the accessibility improvements;
- the extent to which facilities may be utilised by the wider community; and
- the school's accessibility plan.

The SAI panel's decision at Stage 2 (appendix B2) will be communicated in writing to the school/specialist teacher/parent/carer as appropriate by the ADE. The appropriate specialist teaching service/the school should liaise with the parents or carers of the child or young person following the outcome at Stage 2. The process for challenging the decision is outlined in Appendix D.

If the access improvements are considered necessary, appropriate and deliverable, the school will be contacted to discuss funding options prior to any works being commissioned.

For the avoidance of doubt, apart from in exceptional cases the County Council will not fund any adaptations where the accessibility issues have arisen through a lack of maintenance on the part of the school.

No accessibility improvements (e.g. installations or adaptations supported through the SAI programme) should be further adapted or removed by the school without the prior agreement with the County Council. This is because the improvements are a capital asset for immediate and future benefit.

Schools supported by SAI programme funding will need to have an up-to-date accessibility plan in place and published on their website.

In partnership with the school, the County Council will commission and oversee any approved building works or installation of specialised equipment. The school will be responsible for any future maintenance, repair or training related to the accessibility improvements that are delivered. Schools may request to undertake “self-delivery.” To do so, the school would need to complete the ‘Application for a Self-managed Project’ available from the relevant ADE which will be considered by Education Asset Board alongside or subsequent to the SAI funding request. Approval is subject to the County Council being satisfied the project will be professionally managed and completed to the appropriate standard.

Section 6. SAI Governance

The SAI Panel is a sub-group of the Education Asset Board. Its membership comprises:

- One Assistant Director for Education (Chair)
- Assistant Director SEN or Operations Manager
- Head of PD&S STLS
- Head of Capital Projects (or representative)
- Accountant- Capital and Budget Monitoring
- Advisors, as appropriate, who may be:
 - Specialist Teacher – Physical Disability
 - Specialist Teacher – Sensory
 - Advisory Teacher – Vision Support Team
 - Advisory Teacher – Hearing Support Team
 - Team Leader – Autism & Communication Service
 - Assistant Project Manager – School Access

The Panel will meet approximately every six weeks to consider referrals for adaptations. Its decisions will be recorded (Appendix B2). The panel will monitor progress of commissioned works.

Decisions relating to referrals will be communicated back to the school/specialist teacher in writing, with a clear rationale for the decision.

Depending on the proposed cost of a project, the Director Education and SEN may be asked to approve the Panel’s recommendations.

The appropriate support service and the school should liaise with the parents or carers of the child or young person for whom the improvements are intended, explaining how they will aid the placement at the school. It is particularly important to ease any concerns a parent or carer may have when a child is due to start school for the first time or transfer to a new phase of education.

Process Chart

Appendix C provides a visual summary process chart for ease of reference.

Section 7. Appendices

The following documents are attached as appendices:

- Appendix A – Assistant Director Education Initial Assessment Form
- Appendix B1 - SAI Referral Form – To be completed by the school
- Appendix B2 – SAI Panel Decision Form
- Appendix C - School Access Initiative (SAI) Referral Process
- Appendix D - Challenging the decision of the Assistant Director of Education at Stage 1 or the SAI Panel at Stage 2

Appendix A

Assistant Director Education Stage 1 Initial Assessment Form (to be complete by ASOO)

Specialist Teacher's name:

Date of completion:

Preferred school name:

Preferred school status:

Area:

Headteacher:

Community / Foundation / VC

Does the school have an up-to-date accessibility plan? Yes / No

Pupil's name:

Pupil's address:

Does the pupil have an EHCP?

DOB:

Yes / No / In process

1a. What adaptations are required to support the pupil's needs? *Information provided by appropriate specialist service.*

1b. What are the approximate costs? *Information provided by Property and Infrastructure. Are the cost expected to be less than £10,000?*

If this is less than £10,000, it will be the school's decision and responsibility to fund through their revenue or devolved capital budgets. No further assessment is required.

2. Is this the nearest age-appropriate school? Yes/No

3. Is the preferred school the nearest school that has the accessibility adaptation required to meet the pupil's needs?

4. Are there any schools in the district/borough with adaptations which can met the pupil's needs? If yes, list the schools and the distance from the pupil's home.

5. Other material considerations (e.g. transport costs if relevant).

Stage 1 Decision to be completed by the Assistant Director Education

Given the information above, does the Assistant Director Education consider:

- a. it may be appropriate to make adaptations at the school of parental preference, and thus to move to stage 2;
- b. an alternative age-appropriate school is already able to meet the Child's needs, and thus adaptations at the preferred school is an inappropriate use of public funds;
- c. an alternative school may be able to be adapted to meet the child's needs at a cost that is significantly more appropriate than the works required at the preferred school.

Decision:

Reasons for the decision:

Copy of completed form sent to the Headteacher and the appropriate specialist service.

Appendix B1:

Stage 2: SAI Referral Form- To be completed by the school		
School name:	School status: Community / Foundation/ VC	Area:
Headteacher:		Does the school have an up-to-date accessibility plan? Yes / No
Pupil's name: DOB:	Pupil's address:	Does the pupil have an EHCP? Yes / No / In process
What are the pupil's needs?		
What adaptations are proposed? (information from appropriate Specialist Service Record of Visit and Property and Infrastructure feasibility report)		
What are the costs of the proposed adaptations?		

How will the adaptations support the pupil?

When is the work required for?

What consultation has taken place to date (parents / school / occupational therapist etc.)?

What has been discussed with the child (if appropriate) and do they have any thoughts or feedback?

Key issues in relation to proposed adaptations:

e.g.

Will there be a need to 'compensate' for lost space at a school as a result of the accessibility improvements;

To what extent will the facilities be utilised by the wider community

Will there be any detrimental impact existing/future pupils?

Would works to complete the adaptations be limited to school holidays times only?

Attachments required:		
School Accessibility Plan: Attached? Yes/No		
Property feasibility report: Attached? Yes / No		
PD STLS Record of Visit Attached? Yes/No		
Headteacher signature:	Chair of Governors signature:	Trustee signature (if appropriate):
Name	Name	Name
Date	Date	Date

Email the completed form and additional information required to the Assistant Director Education for the area:

Dartford, Gravesham, Sevenoaks - Ian Watts ian.watts@kent.gov.uk

Ashford, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe - David Adams david.adams@kent.gov.uk

Canterbury, Swale, Thanet – Robert Veale robert.veale@kent.gov.uk

Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells – Nicholas Abrahams nicholas.abrahams@kent.gov.uk

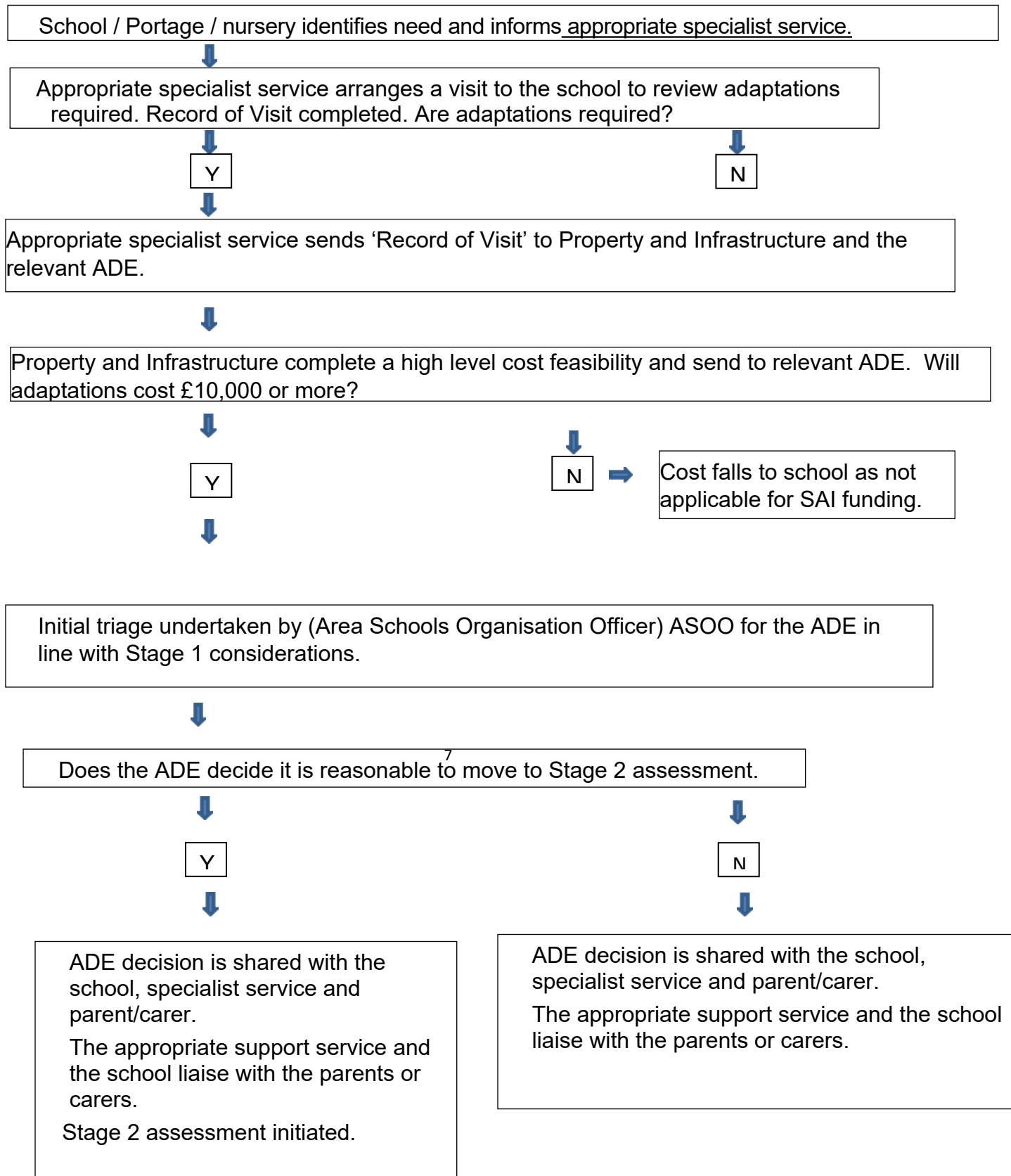
Appendix B2

Stage 2: SAI Referral Form- Panel Decision		
School name:	School status: Community / Foundation/ VC	Area:
Headteacher:		Responsible Assistant Director Education:
Pupil's name:	Pupil's address:	Does the pupil have an EHCP?
DOB:		Yes / No / In process
School Accessibility Plan: Attached? Yes/No	Property feasibility report: Attached? Yes / No	Specialist Service Record of Visit Attached? Yes/No
Does the panel consider the project necessary, appropriate and deliverable? Yes/No		
Please briefly outline the reasons for the decision.		
Signature of SAI Panel Chair:	Date of decision:	
Name:		

Copy of completed Panel Decision form sent to the Headteacher by the ADE.

Appendix C: School access Initiative (SAI) Referral Process

Stage 1



Stage 2

Site visit from a property specialist arranged. Report sent to the school and ADE.
Will the potential adaptations cost £10,000 or more?

Y

School can apply for SAI support by completing the SAI referral form (Appendix

SAI Panel consider the referral (Appendix B1) in line with Stage 2 criteria. Does the SAI Panel consider the project necessary, reasonable and deliverable?

Y

ADE shares the SAI Panel decision (Appendix B2) with the school, specialist service and parent/carer.
ADE discusses the option of the school 'self-managing' the project.

The appropriate support service and the school liaise with the parents or carers.

N

Cost falls to school as not applicable for SAI funding.

N

ADE shares the SAI Panel decision (Appendix B2) with the school, specialist service and parent/carer.

The appropriate support service and the school liaise with the parents or carers.

Appendix D outlines how the decision at either stage can be challenged.

Appendix D: Challenging the decision of the Assistant Director of Education at Stage 1 or the SAI Panel at Stage 2.

Decisions relating to referrals, will be communicated back to the school/specialist teacher/parent/carer in writing, with a clear rationale for the decision in line with this policy.

The appropriate support service or school will liaise with the parents or carers of the child or young person for whom the accessibility improvements are intended, explaining the next steps.

It is intended that parents/carers have a clear understanding about the decisions made regarding the accessibility improvement request for their child. They will be supported to secure a local place at a school which is able to support their child with full access to a good education. If a parent/carer wishes to raise a concern that the panel decision is flawed or wants to formally challenge the decision made, they should follow the County Council's complaints procedure, details of which can be found via the following options:

- fill in our online form [Complaint details \(icasework.com\)](https://www.kent.gov.uk/education/complaints)
- call [03000 41 41 41](tel:03000414141) or text relay 18001 03000 41 41 41
- email county.hall@kent.gov.uk

If you are not satisfied with the response of the County Council, you have the right to take your complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Details can be found at [Home - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](https://www.local.gov.uk). You can complete the form on [The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman website](https://www.local.gov.uk/the-local-government-and-social-care-ombudsman) or call their advice line on [0300 061 0614](tel:03000610614).

If you believe that the decision made has discriminated against your child because of their disability, you can appeal to the First-tier Tribunal (Special Education Needs and Disability). Further information can be found here: [First-tier Tribunal \(Special Educational Needs and Disability\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/first-tier-tribunal/special-educational-needs-and-disability)

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Support and advice for parents/carers is available from Information, Advice and Support Kent (IASK). To access their support:

- visit: the IASK website at <https://www.iask.org.uk/>
- call: 03000 41 3000
- email: iask@kent.gov.uk