A School and Early Years Guide to Supporting DLA Applications

Page of contents

Page 1 Why this guide matters

Page 2 Understanding the DLA process and what schools and early years settings can do

Page 3, 4 & 5 Tips for writing a strong supporting statement

Page 6 & 7 Quick check list for your supporting statement

Page 8 Communicating with parents

Page 9 Signposting

Page 10 Final checklist

Why this guide matters

Schoolsandearly years settings are often the first place families turn when they begin navigating disability benefits such as Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for children or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for adults.

Your observations, reassurance, and supporting evidence can make a significant difference.

For many families, this process can feel overwhelming, your clarity and kindness can transform their experience.

Understanding the DLA Process and what schools and early years settings can do

A diagnosis is not required

Familiescan apply for DLA even before a formal diagnosis. What matters is that the child **needs significantly more care, supervision, and documented support** than other children of a similar age.

✔️ Help families understand what "extra support" means

Encourage parents, where appropriate, to compare their child's needs to:

- Age expectations, or
- A sibling or peer close in age

This often helps families recognise needs they've become used to managing.

✔️ Why your input matters

DLA assessors place real value on:

- Day-to-day school/setting observations
- Details about safety, supervision, and support
- How the child's needs differ from typical peers

Schools/settings often provide evidence that families simply can't, and the evidence and documentation they provide is hugely helpful.

How can you help?

- Provideaclear, factual supporting statement/complete section 38 on the DLA form
- Communicate openly with parents about what details are helpful
- Explain why certain information (e.g., toileting, risk, supervision) is relevant
- Signpost families to local and national organisations for benefits advice

Tips for writing a strong supporting statement

Basic Information

Include:

- Year group
- SEND status
- Primary area(s) of need
- Any diagnosis (with dates if known)
- If on a pathway or awaiting assessment

Support Currently in Place

List support such as:

- TA or one-to-one support
- Small-group work
- Sensory circuits
- Catch-up interventions
- Emotional regulation strategies
- Calm spaces or sensory rooms

List of agencies involved

Such as:

- SALT
- OT
- Physio
- CAMHS
- Pediatrician
- Audiology
- Specialist teachers

Describe Needs Compared with Peers

Include:

- What children of the same age can usually do
- What this child needs extra help with
- Clear, concrete examples

Example:

"Most three-year-olds can follow a simple two-step instruction, but X needs each step broken down and repeated 3–4 times."

Observations from Everyday Routines

Describe the child's needs during:

- Transitions
- Mealtimes
- Play
- Toileting
- Emotional regulation
- Learning activities
- Social interactions

Avoid jargon, use plain, descriptive language.

Example:

"X becomes overwhelmed by noise and will often hide under tables or cling to staff."

What to include about SelfCare

Toileting

Be specific about:

- Whether the child is toilet trained for their age
- How often accidents occur
- Whether staff need to clean, change, or remind the child
- Supervision required
- Any sensory issues, fears, or resistance
- Help needed with wiping or handwashing

Examples:

"Most children in Reception use the toilet independently. X needs an adult to take them to the toilet every 1–2 hours and supervise handwashing."

"X becomes distressed by the noise of hand dryers and refuses to enter the toilets without an adult."

Dressing and Undressing

This includes:

- Putting on/off coats
- Fastening zips, buttons, shoes
- Changing for PE
- Managing clothing during toileting
- Sensory challenges with clothing

Examples:

"X cannot put on their coat independently and requires hand-over-hand support for zips and sleeves."

"X needs adult help throughout PE changing and is usually the last to finish, even with 1:1 support."

Hygiene and General Self-Care

Think about

Handwashing support

Cleaning face after eating

Brushing hair

Managing runny noses

Understanding personal hygiene

Eating and Feeding

Include:

- If the child needs help opening food, cutting food, or being prompted to eat
- Risk of choking
- Sensory difficulties with textures
- Whether they require supervision throughout meals
- Any special diets or feeding strategies

Examples:

"X needs an adult to sit with them during lunch to prompt every few minutes due to very slow eating."

"Staff cut up all food due to choking risk; X does not recognise when food is too l arge."

Extra Support Required (Frequency, Duration, Level)
Spell out:

- How often support is needed
- How long it takes
- What type of support is required
- What happens without it

Example:
"One-to-one support is needed for 20–30 minutes each morning to help X settle. Without this, he becomes distressed and may hit out."

Safety or Supervision Needs
Include any concerns about:

- Running off
- Choking
- Lack of danger awareness
- Aggression linked to distress
- Self-injury
- Sensory-seeking behaviours

Example:
"X will suddenly run towards the road if the gate is open, without understanding the danger."

Fluctuating Needs
Some days will be easier than others, describe this.
Include:

- Good days vs bad days
- Triggers
- Patterns (e.g., fatigue, sensory overload)

Example:
"X often manages group time on Mondays, but is usually too tired or dysregulated to take part later in the week."

Strategies and Adjustments Used by Staff
List tools and approaches such as:

- Visual timetables
- Makaton or sign support
- Sensory equipment
- Movement breaks
- Task breakdown
- Social stories
- One-to-one supervision

Example:
"X requires visual cues and hand-over-hand assistance for all self-care tasks."

Keep the Tone Factual
Schools often focus on strengths, but DLA assessors need to understand difficulties.

Emotional, Social, and Behavioural Impact
Explain how needs affect:

- Friendships (how does the child behave with others in comparison to their peers? Do they prefer to be alone?
- Anxiety
- Regul ation
- Participation
- Reliance on adults

Example:
"X needs an adult with him the entire time outdoors because he becomes anxious if unable to see a familiar adult."

Quick check list for your supporting statement

1. **Child's Needs Compared to Peers**

Include:

- What typical children of the same age can do
- What this child needs extra help with
- Clear examples showing differences

2. **Extra Support Needed**

Describe:

- Frequency (how often)
- Duration (how long)
- Type of support
- What happens without support

3. **Safety & Supervision**

Include examples of:

- Running off / danger awareness
- Choking risk
- Self-injury or head banging
- Aggression linked to distress
- Sensory-seeking behaviours

4. **Fluctuating Needs**

Expl ain:

- Good days vs bad days
- Triggers
- Patterns (e.g., afternoons harder)

5. **Strategies Used in School/EY**

For example;

- Visual timetables
- Makaton/signs
- Social stories
- Movement/sensory breaks
- 1:1 supervision
- Task breakdown, visual prompts

6. Social, Emotional & Behavioural Needs
Include:

- Anxiety
- Meltdowns / shutdowns
- Reliance on adults
- Difficulty forming friendships
- Emotional regulation challenges

7. Professionals Involved
State:

- Who is involved (SALT, OT, CAMHS, Paediatrician, etc.)
- Key recommendations
- Strategies school follows

8. Self-Care (Short Summary)
Include only the essentials:

- Toileting: Are they toilet trained for age? Accidents? Prompts? Supervision?
- Dressing: Help with coat, zips, PE changing, clothes management.
- Feeding: Opening food, cutting food, prompting, choking risk, supervision.
- Hygiene: Handwashing, wiping face, runny nose, brushing hair.

Reminder:
If a child needs more help with self-care than peers, this should be included.

9. Tone
Be factual and clear about difficulties.
Positive statements are fine, but don't "gloss."

Communication with parents

Communicating with parents about Disability Living Allowance (DLA) can feel sensitive, but it's also an important opportunity to reassure families and offer clear, practical support. Creating space for open conversation helps parents share what they feel comfortable with and understand why certain details , such as toileting, routines, or levels of supervision, are relevant to their application. By offering to look over their application with them, write a supporting statement avoiding any judgement, and signposting to trusted sources of guidance, you can help families feel confident and informed.

When speaking to parents

- Ask what they would like included (being mindful that it must be consistent with your and your colleagues observations)
- Explain why certain details (e.g., toileting) matter
- Offer to review your statement alongside them
- Avoid judgement , every family's experience is personal

You can also remind families:

- DLA is not based on income
- Claiming support is not "making a fuss"
- Applications can be made before diagnosis

Making the Process Clear for Families

Step 1: Gather evidence
School/EY reports, professional input, parent observations.

Step 2: Complete the DLA form
Parents can ask for help from school or external agencies.

Step 3: Submit form and wait for decision letter
Parents can continue to submit medical evidence up until the point of the decision.
Don't delay sending the form, as it makes wait times longer and they may not get monies backdated if awarded.
Can take between 5-6 months for a decision.

Step 4: Mandatory Reconsideration (MR) and appeal
If families don't agree with the decision, they can ask for a MR.
If they don't agree with the outcome of the MR, they can appeal.
MR's and appeals have a time frame - *1 month from decision guarenteed opportunity to dispute, or up to 13 months with a good reason.*

Signposting

Signposting

There are manylocal and national organisations that can support families through the process of claiming disability benefits. If the families aren't able to fill out the form yourself, they may also be able to help with form-filling. You may find it helpful to signpost parents or carers to these services so they can access further guidance and reassurance.

Local (Wirral / Merseyside)

- **Citizens Advice Wirral** - Family Hub sessions offer targeted support for pregnant parents and families, including help with completing child DLA forms https://citizensadvicewirral.org.uk/
- **Involve Northwest** - https://involvenorthwest.org.uk/what-we-do/welfare-advice/ Multiple drop in sessions including help with completing child DLA forms
- **Wirral SEND Local Offer**
- **Family Toolbox** - https://familytoolbox.co.uk/
- **SENDLO Wirral** - https://www.sendlowirral.co.uk/
- **Wirral Society of the Blind and Partially Sighted (for blind or partially sighted children)** - https://wirralsociety.org.uk/
- **Merseyside Society for Deaf People (for deaf or hard of hearing children)** - https://msdp.org.uk/
- **Family Hubs** - https://www.wirralinfobank.co.uk/Services/14405
- **If living in a Housing Association, possibility of access to a welfare advisor** e.g. Magenta - https://www.magentaliving.org.uk/welfare-and-benefits/ One vision - https://ovh.org.uk/news-events/are-you-getting-the-benefits-youre- entitled-to/

National Organisations

- Contact - the charity for families with disabled children
- Scope
- Disability Rights UK
- National Autistic Society
- Mencap

Other Financial Support can be available to families.

Use a benefit calculator https://citizensadvicewirral.org.uk/benefit-calculator/ or contact one of the organisations about to find out more about benefits families are entitled to

One final checklist!

A few last checks for you to consider:

- Have I described how the child differs from typical peers?
- Have I explained the extra help they need?
- Have I given specific examples?
- Have I included safety or supervision needs?
- Have I described strategies and adjustments used?
- Have I included frequency, duration, and level of support?
- Have I kept the tone factual?
- Have I signposted parents to support?

We're part of your FAMILY TOOLBOX Because life doesn't come with a manual
citizens advice Wirral
Foundation Years Trust
involve northwest involving communities & inspiring change