To support students with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) schools must follow the SEND code of practice that requires them to publish information on their approach to identifying and supporting children and young people with SEN from the age of 0 to 25. Statements for children and young people with more complex needs have been replaced by Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and SEN Support replaces School Action and School Action Plus. Amongst other support outlined in the code:

- Schools have a legal duty to secure access to independent careers guidance for all year 8-13 pupils with a EHCP in place. The duty states that;
  - Guidance must be delivered in an impartial manner and include information on the full range of education and training options, including apprenticeships.
  - Schools must have high aspirations and make use of the local offer to help prepare them for adulthood.
  - Advice should include all opportunities and signpost onto study programmes that will support their transition to paid employment.
  - Schools should understand their interests, strengths and motivations and use this as a basis for planning support from an early age.
  - All schools should consider how to link employers with young people from year 9 onwards

For an example of employers working to help put students with learning disabilities on the path to employment and a productive life, see the National Grid EmployAbility and Let’s Work Together schemes:

www.nationalgridconnecting.com/hidden-talent/

National Grid – EmployAbility programme

Through their EmployAbility programme, National Grid offers internships to students, giving them an opportunity to develop skills and confidence in a business environment.

The programme started in September 2013 with a partnership between National Grid at Warwick and Round Oak School, a special state school for pupils aged from 11 to 19. Since then the programme has expanded and now also runs in Hinckley, Solihull and Wokingham. Working closely with a local school, National Grid identifies roles that interns can fill, offering them three months in the role, supported by a job coach (funded through Access To Work). During their final academic year, students do three internships and are quick to assimilate into the business environment. The programme is designed to be extremely supportive, encouraging students to defy preconceived prejudices and to realise their potential. The aim is to grow their self-belief and in so doing, increase their aspirations. According to Department for Education figures, students with learning disabilities have only a seven per cent likelihood of finding paid employment. The success rate for students on the EmployAbility programme is ten times higher.

Why should employers get involved?

For National Grid, EmployAbility has allowed them to recruit from the widest possible pool, bringing a breadth of skills and talent to the workplace. In their experience, people with special educational needs are committed individuals with fantastic tenacity and determination to overcome problems. With an impeccable work ethic, the EmployAbility interns are role models to everyone at National Grid and are emblematic of the organisation’s diversity strategy. Not only that, but witnessing the growth of interns’ self-belief, confidence, communication skills and ambition brings tremendous personal and job satisfaction.

Brookfields School - Pathway to Employment

Even though 65% of students with a learning disability aspire to have paid employment, only 6% (MENCAP, 2016) of them achieve that ambition. To counter this imbalance, Brookfields School near Reading has worked in partnership with a local independent career development company to devise a unique education programme. As a direct result, local businesses have become more open to the idea of recruiting and training people with disabilities.

Case Study

Brookfields School is an OfSTED Outstanding Special School near Reading. It supports 234 pupils with learning disabilities, ranging in age from 3 to 19.

Only 1 in 6 people with a learning disability is currently in paid work, even though 65% express the desire to get a job. People with a learning difficulty are excluded from the workforce more than any other group of disabled people and even though they have the same right to work as
everyone else, they find it much harder to get a job. As a result, Brookfields vision is to increase the probability and possibility of paid employment for pupils by enabling them to gain work related skills for independent living.

The school has worked in partnership with a local independent career development company called Talentino!® and together they have developed a unique careers education programme (Careers at Every Level©) for special schools and young people with learning difficulties.

The school’s Pathway to Employment Team, in partnership with Talentino!®, students and previous students who are now in full-time paid employment, support the programme by offering training to other special schools, local authorities, virtual schools, national organisations and businesses.

The ‘Pathway to Employment’ initiative includes the following elements:
- Careers at Every Level©
- ‘Life After School’ for pupils with more severe learning difficulties
- Work-based placements
- Work-related learning
- Business enterprise
- Supported Internships

From Year 9, students are prepared for work through time-tabled, classroom-based career coaching and are supported by the school’s extensive business network of over 50 employers. Other important partners include Ways into Work - a supported employment provider - and the local FE College.

Through the schools Employment Engagement Strategy, with a business led approach being at its heart, the school has a proven track record of working with businesses to get young people with learning difficulties into employment. Businesses that have supported the students by offering placements or by employing them, agree that they make a valuable contribution and possess the skills and attitude they are looking for.

The school’s own research shows that the aspirations for paid employment as a life outcome of their pupils, their families and staff have increased since the programme was implemented.

Why should employers get involved?
Through training and support given by the school, businesses have overcome the usual misconceptions about people with learning difficulties. Employees respond positively to a more diverse team, particularly if they are given a chance to ‘buddy’ or line manage a person with a learning difficulty. The work done by the school with two of the largest employers in Reading has resulted in a change to the businesses recruitment process. They now actively hire people with learning difficulties and additional needs.

There is much evidence that shows employees with a learning difficulty stay with one employer for a longer period of time than average and take less time off sick. By working in partnership with the school, businesses can access a reliable, committed workforce they would have been unlikely to consider before.

When students are on work-based placements or Supported Internships, the school provides the business with a dedicated Job Coach who can help to make the experience both beneficial and rewarding for all concerned.

Typically the Job Coach will:
- Provide support and a direct contact for the business
- Carry out a risk assessment
- Match the skills and talents of the young person to the most relevant job
- Introduce the young person to the business before the work placement starts
- Prepare the business and employees for the placement by offering bespoke training and support
- Work in partnership with the business to learn about the job that the student will do so that the Job Coach can train the student in that task
- Discuss and agree objectives and expectations with the business
- Plan and deliver a bespoke induction programme that includes health & safety and conditions of work
- Identify a supervisor and mentor
- Review progress during the work placement
- Involve the business in review and feedback

As a direct result of engaging with the schools programme, businesses have become more open to the idea of recruiting and training people with disabilities.