

"The SEND system is broken."

In order to enact tangible, meaningful change, we must first appreciate and understand the magnitude of the challenges faced by those working in the SEND and Inclusion space, along with the children, young people and families they work with.

Mounting social and academic pressures, along with the lasting impacts of the pandemic, have contributed to a deterioration of children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. This has led to a higher proportion of young people being referred to educational psychology services, placing greater pressure on local authorities to expand their services at an exceptional pace. In 2023, the [Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition](#) estimated that 1 in 5 children and young people (aged 8-25) had a mental health difficulty.

This data illustrates the increase in need among young people on a national scale, suggesting that local authorities must work with absolute determination to improve the coverage of support provided by educational psychology services and mental health support teams (MHSTs). It is also clear that whole school approaches must be used to create and maintain mentally healthy school environments that help to prevent the emergence of mental health concerns in young people.

It is possible that disruption to children and young people's education is partially responsible for a large portion of the increase in SEND need across the country, as needs have not been identified early and early interventions have not, therefore, been implemented. Similarly, changing social and academic pressures may be placing unprecedented strain on the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. Regardless of what's causing this increase in national SEND need, one thing remains clear: it is imperative that local authorities work swiftly to evolve their provision to fit the current needs of children and young people.

Local focus: the West Sussex SEND landscape

So, how does West Sussex compare to the national picture, in terms of the scale of the challenge we are to address? As part of the research and analysis work that has been undertaken by West Sussex County Council SEND officers to inform our SEND Improvement activity and our Transformation programmes, we have gathered a detailed picture of the current SEND population across our schools. A snapshot summary is provided in the infographic below:

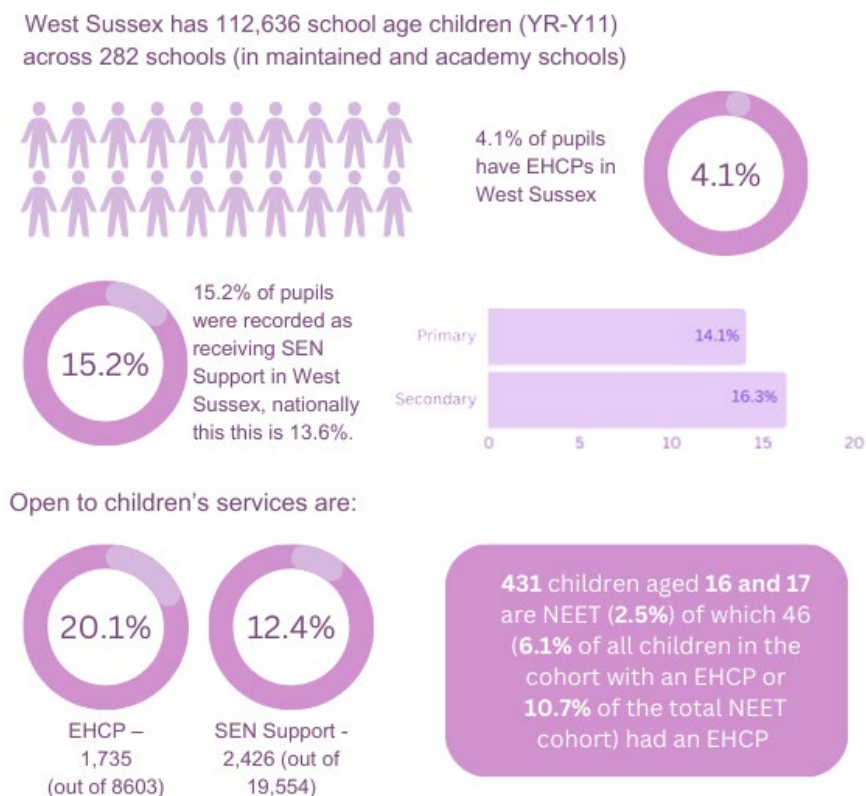


Figure 1: West Sussex SEND profile in 2024



In West Sussex, the proportion of pupils with SEND has continued to grow since the SEND Reforms in 2015. In 2022/23, 19.3% of pupils attending West Sussex schools have either an EHCP or are receiving SEND Support, against a national average of 18.4%. In 2023/24, 4.1% of pupils have EHCPs in West Sussex, and nationally this is 4.8%. Historically, West Sussex has had proportionally less pupils with EHCPs than was seen nationally, however, the numbers of EHCP's in the local area are rising, aligning with the national picture.

In 2023/24, 15.2% of pupils were recorded as receiving SEN Support in West Sussex, nationally this is 13.6%. The proportion of pupils receiving SEN Support in secondary schools remains above national and regional averages and has increased. West Sussex is tracking above all statistical neighbours for SEN support and the SEN support figure in secondary schools has been consistent for nearly a decade.

Within the Primary school phase, in 2023/24 the highest proportion of need type in West Sussex is speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). This matches the regional picture but at a slightly higher rate in West Sussex (34.9% in West Sussex vs 33% regionally). The second highest proportion of need is Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), which also matches the regional picture, but is at a slightly lower rate in West Sussex (17.9% in West Sussex vs 19% nationally). In addition to this, there are a higher number of children in West Sussex identified as have a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) with 11% locally and 9.1% nationally.

Within the Secondary school phase, in 2023/24, the highest proportion of need type in West Sussex Secondary Schools is Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD). This is at an overwhelmingly higher rate than is seen nationally, with 28.3% of learners in West Sussex as identified with this need, in comparison to just 19.6% nationally. The second highest proportion of need is Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), which also aligns with the national picture, but like Primary age pupils in West Sussex, at a slightly lower rate (20.2% in West Sussex and 23.6% nationally).

For both primary and secondary phases, the most significant variation against the national picture is in the prevalence of pupils recorded with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), with both phases showing a notable difference to the national average. In primary, ASD is noted as the primary need in 9.2% of children compared to 13.6% nationally. This is continued in secondary statistics with just 8.2% with ASD as the primary need against 18.1% nationally. This trend is continued in children educated in our special schools with 29.8% against the national picture of 38%.

Over the past 5 years, West Sussex has not seen the same number of children with an EHCP attending mainstream schools as our statistical neighbours, or indeed nationally. Currently, West Sussex has 13.9% of learners with an EHCP placed in a mainstream academy school, whilst nationally this figure is higher, at 17.9%, and 16.9% in maintained mainstream schools, in comparison to 18.7% nationally. West Sussex has a significantly higher proportion of pupils with EHCPs placed in maintained special schools (MSS) and Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS) than is seen nationally. Some 24.7% of learners with an EHCP are placed in MSS, in comparison to 15% nationally, and 6.7% are placed in INMSS, in comparison to 4.8% nationally.

Implementing meaningful change

Delivering Better Value

This new funding has also allowed us to design and implement pilot projects, many of which are currently underway in schools during this academic year. These pilots will be evaluated in the summer term and we will seek to roll out the initiatives that have the most impact for our children and young people on a wider scale.

West Sussex is part of the southeast region [Change Programme Partnership \(CPP\)](#), along with Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and Portsmouth City Council.

A more detailed look at each of these transformation programmes is explored within the article '*Improving Outcomes through SEND Transformation*' by Nadia McGarry, SEND Improvement Lead within this issue of Education Matters.

The [Autumn 2024 budget](#) has set out increases to school budgets for next year, including a £1bn uplift to the funding that supports the reform of systems which support pupils with



special educational needs. The government states that it is “committed to reforming special educational needs provision.”

We appreciate that it is difficult to anticipate upcoming developments in the SEND space, as needs and priorities are constantly shifting and the detail needed to understand the full implications of the budget statements are yet to be set out. While we await the finer details, it is important to us that colleagues in schools and settings remain assured that their concerns and opinions are central to the development of our local SEND and Inclusion provision. We are committed to working transparently and in partnership with educators, colleagues from Health and Social Care, and children and young people to improve outcomes and enable all to fulfil their potential. You can find out more about our SEND Improvement Plan on the [West Sussex County Council website](#).

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact your locality’s [SEND and Inclusion Adviser](#) for support.