



# The national SEND and Inclusion landscape

What challenges are local authorities, schools, and families facing across the country?

"The SEND system is broken."

A simple yet undeniably damning assessment of the current SEND provision and support that is provided to children and young people and their families with SEND. These words are the opening line of the recent <u>report by ISOS Partnership</u>, commissioned by the County Councils Network and the Local Government Association. The national landscape of SEND and Inclusion is rapidly changing, with an exceptional and largely unforeseen spike in EHCPs and identified SEND needs overwhelming the current system. It is evident that significant change is needed nationally to facilitate effective and sustainable provision for current and future cohorts of children and young people. Within this article, we explore the current state of SEND provision across the UK, the local picture within West Sussex, and the two national change programmes: the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Change Programme and the Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme. These programmes seek to provide the insights and impetus to transform SEND provision and deliver improved outcomes for all our children, young people and families needing our support.

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.

#### **Increased SEND on a national scale**

Between January 2023 and January 2024, the number of children and young people with an EHCP <u>increased by 11.6%</u>, posing unexpected challenges to the capacity of local authority SEND and Inclusion services on a national scale. This increase may be symptomatic of a backlog of previously unidentified concerns, perhaps created in part by insufficient provision of EHCNAs, and in part by disruptions to services that would usually allow for early interventions and identification of need.

In 2024, a significant area of increased primary need was Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). This area of need poses a significant challenge, especially in the context of a national shortage of speech and language therapists. The lasting effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has created a unique challenge, wherein children in the early years have had interrupted/delayed starts to education, with numerous periods of lockdown causing disruptions to children's early development.

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 <a href="Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition">Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition</a> 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:

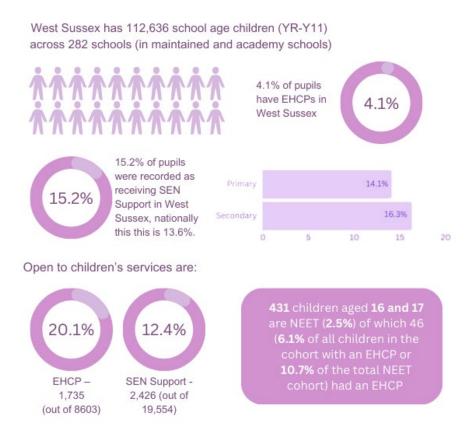


Figure 1: West Sussex SEND profile in 2024





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 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.





The statistical data and comparative trends are collated along with the lived experience and feedback from our young people and families in need of our SEND services. These sources are providing the insight and direction to where we are to focus our efforts and resources to address the challenges we are experiencing to evolve the services to our children and young people.

### Implementing meaningful change

What is 'meaningful change'? Meaningful change is a fundamental reprioritisation and restructure of the way that we plan and deliver SEND and Inclusion provision. Meaningful change is taking place on a national scale, and West Sussex County Council is part of two national initiatives seeking to drive transformational change in our SEND system. Our participation in these initiatives sits alongside our existing work outlined within our <a href="SEND">SEND</a> Improvement plan.

### **Delivering Better Value**

As part of the Government's plan to improve SEND provision across the UK, West Sussex County Council was invited to participate in the Department for Education's Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme. This was due to the significant SEND-related financial and budgetary pressures that we are facing as a local authority. DBV provides us with vital funding so that we can trial new ways to deliver and manage services and support for children and young people with SEND, with a specific focus on increasing inclusion in mainstream schools.

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.

## SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Change Programme Partnerships

West Sussex is part of the southeast region <u>Change Programme Partnership (CPP)</u>, along with Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and Portsmouth City Council.

The Southeast CPP is allowing us to meet weekly with other local authorities in the area, sharing ideas and working collaboratively towards a more positive future for children and young people with SEND needs in the region. Although CPPs are temporary, we are forging invaluable relationships with other local authorities that will continue to be mutually beneficial after the programme has concluded.

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.

#### Looking ahead

The <u>Autumn 2024 budget</u> 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.