



Annex – Background on projections

Introduction

This annex sets out projections underpinning the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) consultation document, *SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First*.

As set out in the consultation document, substantial investment will back reforms to embed much earlier intervention providing better access to support from education, health, and care services in mainstream early years, schools and colleges. Projections set out in this annex reflect these plans for more children and young people to be able to access the support they need to thrive and achieve in mainstream education. We will continue to build our estimates of this trajectory throughout the consultation period, and throughout subsequent implementation of any reforms. As such, these projections are illustrative of our proposed policy approach and updated projections will be published following the consultation.

Approach to projections

Estimates are produced by simulating the progress of hypothetical cohorts of children and young people through the education system. Simulations of these year-on-year movements are based on observed trends at the national level:

1. Historic trends in movements between different levels of SEN support and provision types (for example mainstream, state-funded specialist, and independent specialist).
2. New entrants¹ are added using population projections and historic patterns of SEN level and provision type amongst these cohorts.
3. State-funded specialist placements are assigned a total capacity that increases in line with investment².
4. The process is repeated to simulate progression over the years. Cohorts remain in the education system until they leave the system.

The model is validated by ensuring that it can replicate historic data before being used for future projections, including the assumptions for policy scenarios. Data used to inform projections cover all state-funded education, including early years, mainstream and special schools, alternative provision, further education, and specialist post-16 institutions. All education, health and care plans (EHCPs) are included. Projections in this annex use

¹ Children entering state-funded education, including early years, mainstream and special schools, alternative provision, further education, and specialist post-16 institutions.

² This reflects the fact that the government is investing in building capacity in state-funded specialist provision.

percentages as this offers the clearest illustration of the trajectories. These percentages illustrate the overall shape of reform for the whole system and reflect the inherent uncertainty in numbers, although they are technically only for schools due to differences in data sets and in the variety of take-up in provision other than schools.

The modelling is based on National Pupil Database³, Individualised Learner Record⁴ and SEN2⁵ data on EHCPs linked together across years. These are combined with assumptions including about population growth, and the anticipated combined effects of policies set out in *SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First*.

Assumptions

Projections illustrate the implementation of the combined policies to deliver an improved, more inclusive system, set out in *SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First*.

Historic trends in EHCP growth

Before 2014, the rate of Statements of SEN (the predecessor to EHCPs for schools) was stable at between 2.8% to 2.9%⁶ of the school population, and the rate of state-funded special school placements⁷ between 1% to 1.5%⁸. Since the 2014 reforms and new funding system in 2018, EHCP rates and state-funded special school placement rates among the total school population have increased significantly to 5.3%⁹ and 1.9%¹⁰ respectively (by 2024/25). These increasing EHCP rates have been driven primarily by increasing trends in the number of children and young people, at every age, newly accessing SEN Support, and an increasing proportion of those on SEN Support subsequently acquiring EHCPs.

Modelling assumptions (2026/27 to 2028/29)

We expect that the number of new EHCPs will increase but at a slower rate through to 2029/30 as we begin to invest in the new system and equip mainstream early years settings, schools and colleges to meet needs earlier.

More pupils who require specialist support will be able to be educated in new specialist bases and new state-funded special school places making full use of the £3.7bn capital investment expanding state specialist capacity.

³ [National Pupil Database](#)

⁴ [Individualised Learner Record \(ILR\) technical documents, guidance and requirements](#)

⁵ [Special educational needs person level survey: guide - GOV.UK](#)

⁶ [Special educational needs in England: January 2015 - GOV.UK](#) [xlsx] (see Table 1a)

⁷ State-funded special and non-maintained special schools

⁸ 1980-1999: [Statistics of Education: Schools in England 2000](#) [pdf]; 2000-2002: [Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics Statistical First Release \(provisional\), January 2010](#) [pdf]; 2003-2019: [Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics 2019 Accompanying Tables](#) [xlsx] (See Table 1a).

⁹ [Special educational needs in England: January 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁰ 'Pupils in all schools, by type of SEN provision - 2020 to 2025' from 'Special educational needs in England', [Permanent data table - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

Modelling assumptions (2029/30 onwards)

In line with 'phase three', as set out in *SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First*, the new system will be in place from this point, and we have assumed:

- schools will look and feel different to today, with support for children with SEND readily available and early intervention embedded at every stage of a child's education. All teachers and teaching assistants across early years, schools and post-16 will have received high quality training. All secondary schools will have an inclusion base, two thirds of which will be a specialist inclusion base, with an equivalent number of places in primary schools. And all schools will have access to Experts at Hand, wrapping health and specialist support around mainstream settings. All this will increase the number of children who have their needs identified and met early, will receive support they need without needing an EHCP, and will be able to thrive in their local mainstream setting; and
- all children and young people who have a special school place in September 2029 will be able to stay in special school until the end of their education, unless they chose to move.

Figure 1: Projections for percentage of school pupils with an EHCP (actuals for 2024/25)¹¹

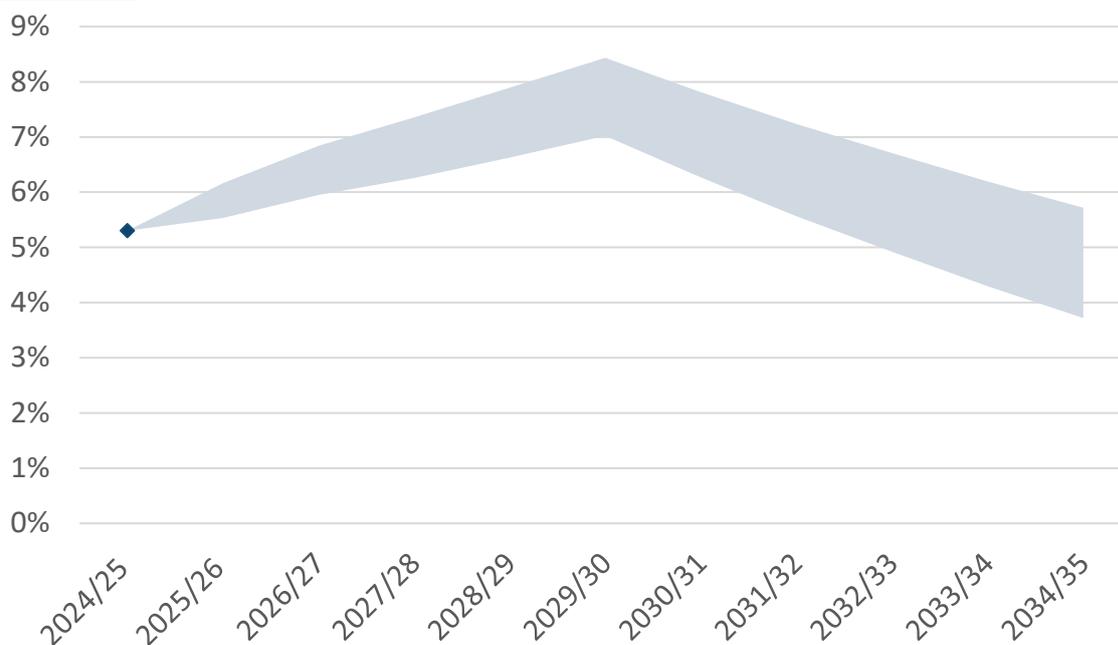


Table 1: Central estimate - percentage of school pupils with an EHCP projection¹²

Academic year	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35
% with EHCP of all pupils ¹³	5.3	5.8	6.4	6.8	7.3	7.7	7.0	6.4	5.8	5.2	4.7

Until 2029/30, due to investment in training and support in mainstream early years, schools and colleges the rate of increase in new EHCPs is expected to slow between now and 2029/30 but the number of EHCPs will continue to grow.

From 2030/31, we expect to see year-on-year reductions in the percentage of pupils needing EHCPs to access support as a result of the combined impact of policies in *SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First*. Our central estimate suggests that the proportion of pupils expected to have an EHCP by 2034/35 will be similar to the proportion today.

Additionally, we estimate that by 2035, 15-20% of pupils will have an Individual Support Plan written by their setting and detailing the support they will get from the enriched

¹¹ [Special educational needs in England, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#) and [Education, health and care plans, Reporting year 2025 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

¹² These are estimates around which there is substantial uncertainty as shown in the graph, however, a central estimate figure is provided for ease of reading.

¹³ Includes state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools, state-funded alternative provision schools and independent schools. Includes all ages in schools. Due to the variety in take up in provision other than schools, it is not possible to calculate a meaningful percentage for the full 0 to 25 age group.

mainstream inclusion offer in the Targeted and Targeted Plus layers, in addition to those with a specialist provision package (EHCP).

Across all EHCPs¹⁴ we estimate that around 1 in 8 children and young people that currently hold an EHCP will transition to an Individual Support Plan between 2030 and 2035 after their end of phase review.

These projections are subject to uncertainty, including the interaction between pre-reform impacts and post-reform trajectories. They will therefore be kept under review throughout the consultation period, and throughout subsequent design and implementation of any reforms, including the development of the National Inclusion Standards and Specialist Provision Packages by the independent expert panel. Updated projections will be published following the consultation.

Table 2: Specialist placement actuals (for 2024/25) and projections – including additional detail on special subcategories

Percentage of school pupils by academic year	Pupils in all special placements¹⁵	Pupils in specialist bases	Pupils in all special schools	Pupils in independent special schools	Pupils in state-funded special schools (including non-maintained special schools)
2024/25	2.6	0.3	2.3	0.4	1.9
2025/26	2.6	0.3	2.3	0.4	1.9
2026/27	2.7	0.4	2.4	0.4	2.0
2027/28	2.9	0.4	2.5	0.5	2.0
2028/29	3.1	0.6	2.4	0.4	2.0
2029/30	3.2	0.7	2.5	0.4	2.1
2030/31	3.3	0.8	2.5	0.4	2.1
2031/32	3.3	0.8	2.5	0.4	2.1
2032/33	3.3	0.8	2.5	0.4	2.1
2033/34	3.2	0.8	2.4	0.3	2.0
2034/35	3.1	0.8	2.2	0.3	1.9

We expect there to be steady, continued growth in the proportion of pupils in specialist placements until around 2030/31. During this time, as a result of investment, a greater proportion of these placements will be based in Specialist Bases in mainstream, with around a quarter of specialist provision within mainstream schools by 2035.

We have not made any assumptions about changing capital investment enabling more capacity in maintained special schools and support bases beyond the Spending Review (SR) period (that is, from 2030/31 onwards), as these will be subject to the next SR.

¹⁴ Across all ages and settings (including FE).

¹⁵ Includes all special schools and specialist bases (SEN Units and Resourced Provision). '[Pupils in all schools, by type of SEN provision - 2016 to 2025](#)' from 'Special educational needs in England', [Permanent data table - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#) for special schools. Internal DfE analysis using School Census for SEN Units and Resourced Provision.

© Crown copyright 2026

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

About this publication:

enquiries www.gov.uk/contact-dfe

download www.gov.uk/government/publications

Follow us on X: [@educationgovuk](https://twitter.com/educationgovuk)

Connect with us on Facebook: facebook.com/educationgovuk