

SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026 - 2031



Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

Contents

Foreword	4
Executive Summary	5
SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026 - 2031 at a Glance	5
What is this Strategy?	5
Why is this Strategy needed?	5
Our Aims	5
Our Priorities	6
How will we Deliver this Strategy?	6
Introduction	7
Policy Background	8
SEND Reforms	8
Education Inclusion and SEND Strategies (Review across 2026 - 2028)	9
The Current Picture	10
Needs in Gloucestershire	13
Current SEN for Children and Young People with EHCPs	13
Why has this Strategy been developed?	14
Educational Outcomes	14
Increasing Demand for SEND Support	14
Out of County Placement Pressures	14
Appeals	15
Early Years Provision and Levels of Need	16
Where are we now?	16
Special Schools	18
Mainstream SEND Provisions	19
Early Years SEND Provisions	19
Future Demand	19
What have we done so far?	20
School-Aged Specialist Provision	20
Post-16 Specialist Provision	20
Strengthening Inclusive Early Years Provision	20
Our Priorities and Sufficiency Plans	22
How do we get there?	23
How will we monitor and govern delivery of the strategy?	23
Sufficiency Delivery Plan	24
Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms	27

SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026 - 2031

Foreword

Along with many other local authorities across the country, Gloucestershire has seen a significant rise in the number of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who require additional support to succeed in their education setting.

As a consequence of this rise in demand, Gloucestershire faces sufficiency challenges, and is currently working to provide sufficient specialist places in special schools, early years settings and mainstream SEND provision, to meet the needs of all of our children and young people for whom it has been identified that a specialist setting is needed.

This strategy sets out our approach to ensuring sufficient SEND provision across Gloucestershire and will inform future commissioning intentions. It will provide a framework for ongoing engagement with education providers, including early years, schools and post-16 settings, as well as with children, young people and their families.

While this strategy focuses on the sufficiency of SEND places, a new Gloucestershire Education Strategy will be developed which sets out the county's wider approach to inclusion, including expectations for inclusive practice, service delivery and partnership working. Together, the two strategies will provide a complementary framework, ensuring that both sufficient provision is available and children and young people are supported through a strong and inclusive education system.

Executive Summary

SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026 - 2031 at a Glance

What is this Strategy?

The SEND Sufficiency Strategy sets out how Gloucestershire County Council will ensure there are sufficient specialist places for children and young people aged 0 – 25 with SEND. It focuses on making sure children and young people can access the right provision, in the right place, at the right time, based on current and future needs.

Why is this Strategy needed?

- Demand for SEND support and specialist provision continues to increase across Gloucestershire.
- The number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has risen significantly in recent years.
- Forecasts indicate continued pressure on specialist provision across early years, school-age and post-16 settings.
- National SEND reforms are placing greater emphasis on inclusion, early intervention and strengthening support within mainstream education.
- Additional specialist capacity is required to ensure children and young people with SEND can access appropriate provision as close to home as possible.

Our Aims

- Ensure there are sufficient SEND places for children and young people aged 0 – 25.
- Plan provision using evidence, forecasts and local intelligence about need.
- Improve equitable access to SEND provision across Gloucestershire, including supporting more children and young people to access appropriate support within their local communities.
- Deliver value for money while improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND.



Our Priorities

Over the next five years we will:

Strengthen mainstream SEND provision

- Support schools to strengthen inclusive practice and respond to a wider range of needs;
- Develop additional specialist bases within mainstream schools where there are identified gaps in provision.

Expand specialist provision

- Continue to increase specialist capacity through the development of new places and expansion projects where required;
- Ensure specialist provision is available for children and young people with the most complex needs.

Improve early years SEND provision

- Increase capacity within specialist early years provision where needed;
- Strengthen inclusion and support within mainstream early years settings;
- Improve access to early intervention and assessment.

Develop post-16 opportunities

- Expand local education, training and employment pathways for young people with SEND;
- Improve access to post-16 opportunities across the county.

Promote equitable access

- Use data and sufficiency assessments to identify gaps in provision;
- Improve access to provision in underserved areas, including rural communities.

How will we Deliver this Strategy?

Delivery will be supported through a Sufficiency Delivery Plan, which sets out objectives and actions across mainstream, specialist, early years/childcare, and post-16 SEND provision.

Progress will be monitored through Gloucestershire's SEND and Alternative Provision Local Area Partnership Board and reviewed regularly to ensure the strategy remains responsive to changing needs and national reform developments.

Introduction

Gloucestershire County Council has a statutory duty under Section 14 and Section 15ZA of the Education Act (1996) to ensure that there are sufficient educational places available to meet the needs of all children and young people living in Gloucestershire.

This includes securing provision for children and young people aged 0 - 25 years with SEND. There is an additional local authority duty to have sufficient early years and childcare provision for all children, including those with SEND, under Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Requirements are also placed on local authorities by the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice: 0 - 25 years (2015). The SEND Code of Practice (2015) provides that:



"All children and young people are entitled to an appropriate education, one that is appropriate to their needs, promotes high standards, and the fulfilment of potential."

The demand for specialist places in Gloucestershire has grown significantly over the last 10 years. To respond to this demand growth, we have been expanding our existing special school capacity and building our mainstream SEND provision offer, where possible, as well as creating new provision to meet our ongoing requirements.

Ensuring that there are sufficient places of the right type, in the right place, and at the right time for our children and young people with SEND is fundamental to our SEND and Education Inclusion Strategies for 2022 - 2025. Both strategies will be aligned to the statutory requirements of the reforms of the national SEND arrangements set out in the White Paper of February 2026, and informed by the findings of the public consultation on Gloucestershire's SEND Sufficiency Strategy undertaken between May and June 2026.

The number of children with SEND accessing early years provision has also increased and is likely to increase further, owing to the expansion of early years entitlements to include all children of eligible parents over the age of 9 months to receive 30 hours of childcare per week.

This SEND Sufficiency Strategy details our existing provision for children and young people with EHCPs, forecasts the need for future places, identifies gaps in provision, and sets out the details of our current projects and future plans for securing the additional places required.



Policy Background

SEND Reforms

The Government's 2026 Schools White Paper, **Every Child Achieving and Thriving**¹, sets out a 10-year reform programme aimed at raising standards, strengthening inclusion, and ensuring more children with SEND can have their needs met effectively within mainstream settings. Recent national analysis offers emerging evidence that pupils with EHCPs educated in mainstream settings achieve approximately half a grade higher on average in English and Maths GCSEs than comparable pupils in special schools, reinforcing the importance of strengthening inclusive practice within mainstream settings².

Central to the White Paper's proposals is a new national structure of support organised across four layers – universal, targeted, targeted-plus and specialist – supported by an updated SEND Code of Practice, National Inclusion Standards, and a legal requirement for every school to develop Individual Support Plans for pupils with additional needs.

The White Paper also introduces an Inclusive Mainstream Fund to strengthen early intervention, alongside new multi-agency "Experts at Hand" support, enabling schools to access specialist guidance for children and young people with SEND without the need for an EHCP.

The reforms reinforce a national shift towards widening access to inclusive, high-quality provision and ensuring that specialist placements are accessed by children and young people with the most complex needs. For Gloucestershire, this aligns with our aims to strengthen mainstream capacity, embed consistent inclusive practice, and ensure earlier, needs-led support across the system.

The proposed reforms provide a framework that supports our ongoing work to stabilise demand, ensure the right support is available at the right time, and reduce pressure on specialist settings. As these reforms progress through consultation and implementation, this SEND Sufficiency Strategy will continue to adapt so that Gloucestershire remains

aligned with national expectations, while shaping provision that responds effectively to local need.

Building on this policy direction, the national **Education Estates Strategy 2026**³ outlines a complementary 10-year plan to ensure the education estate provides the physical infrastructure needed to deliver the White Paper reforms. It details a clear expectation that the education estate must be safe, suitable, sustainable and sufficiently sized, with a renewed emphasis on inclusive design and early intervention.

The strategy also sets out an ambition for every secondary school in England to develop inclusion bases, with an equivalent number of places across local primary schools, enabling pupils to access targeted support that bridges the gap between mainstream and specialist provision.

The term "inclusion base" encompasses both school-led "support bases" and local authority-commissioned "specialist bases", formerly known as Resource Bases and SEN Units. Inclusion bases typically support children and young people with SEND, or requiring support for behavioural or pastoral needs, including those at risk of exclusion or low attendance⁴. These proposals form part of a broader national shift towards proactive, long-term estate planning for primary and secondary schools that embeds SEND as a core priority, enabling settings to respond to children with increasingly complex needs.

The Education Estates Strategy and accompanying **Inclusive Education Estates**⁵ guidance also highlights that effective inclusion depends on well designed, flexible spaces that facilitate appropriate intervention, promote engagement and reduce reliance on temporary or unsuitable accommodation. In Gloucestershire, these national commitments directly shape our SEND sufficiency approach, guiding how we plan, develop and invest in provision so that mainstream settings can deliver strong inclusive practice, while specialist capacity is expanded where needed.

We will continue to monitor and review further guidance as it emerges from the Department for Education to ensure our intentions remain current and aligned with national expectations.

¹ [Every child achieving and thriving - GOV.UK](#)

² [GCSE outcomes for pupils with EHCPs: comparison of mainstream and special schools - GOV.UK](#)

³ [Education Estates Strategy: a decade of national renewal - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusion-bases-in-schools>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-education-estates>



Education Inclusion and SEND Strategies (Review across 2026 - 2028)

This SEND Sufficiency Strategy currently works alongside Gloucestershire's [Education Inclusion Strategy 2022-2025](#) and [SEND Strategy 2022-2025](#), to support delivery of the following priorities. These strategies will be reviewed across 2026 to 2028 to align with the national reforms, but it is anticipated the following principles will remain constant:

- Access to support when it is needed, as early as possible;
- Improving access to education for specific vulnerable groups.

We will work to ensure that all children and young people with SEND in Gloucestershire thrive, exceed expectations and live remarkable lives. We will support children and young people to be confident, achieve their ambitions, be aspirational and progress positively into adulthood.

We promote the inclusion of children and young people with SEND within the communities where they live. We understand that meeting needs locally can improve outcomes for children and young people in terms of maintaining connections with communities, deliver benefits in terms of reduced travel times, and promote more flexible and independent travel solutions for families.

A new Gloucestershire Education Strategy will be developed in response to the outcomes of the national Schools White Paper consultation, carrying forward and building upon the principles established through previous strategic work.

The new Education Strategy will complement this SEND Sufficiency Strategy by focusing on how inclusion will be delivered in practice across Gloucestershire's local education system. Whilst this strategy is focused on the sufficiency and distribution of SEND provision and specialist placements, the Education Strategy will establish the county's approach to inclusive practice, service delivery and partnership working, ensuring that children and young people can access the right provision at the right time, and are supported by an education system that creates the conditions for inclusion, participation and positive outcomes.

Furthermore, as part of the future development of Gloucestershire's strategic planning framework, arrangements will be developed to bring together this SEND Sufficiency Strategy and the Gloucestershire School Places Strategy. This will support a joined-up approach to forecasting demand, planning provision and commissioning places across the education system, while maintaining a clear focus on meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND. Any future changes will aim to provide families, education providers and partners with a coherent view of how education provision is planned across Gloucestershire.

The Current Picture

Gloucestershire is situated on the northern edge of the Southwest region.

In 2024, Gloucestershire's 0 - 19 population is estimated to have stood at

146,293

which equates to 21.9% of the total population⁶

Between 2022 - 2030, the population of 0 - 19-year-olds is projected to decline by 2.6% or 3754 people, to a total of

138,724

This is in opposition with the picture for the whole population, which is expected to increase by 6.4% during this period⁷

As of January 2026, Gloucestershire held

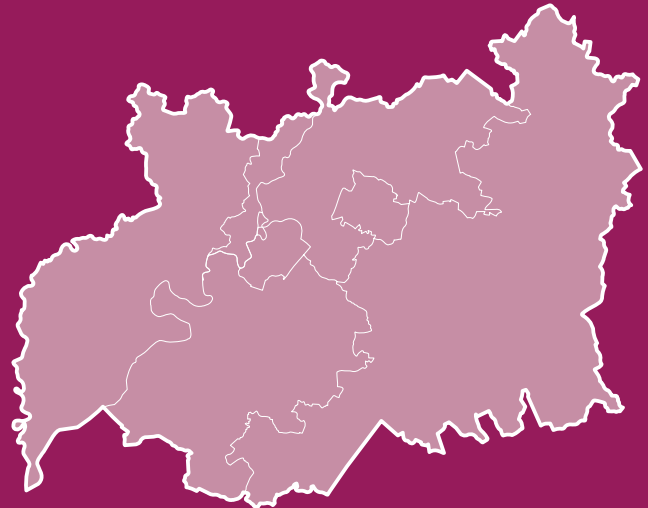
7,521

EHCPs for children and young people aged 0 - 25. This is an increase of 17.3% or the equivalent to 1,107 EHCPs from January 2025

In addition to those with an EHCP, there were

465

children and young people undergoing assessment or at draft EHCP stage at the start of January 2026



In 2025, there was a

37.2%

increase in issued EHCPs compared to the previous year

Children and young people aged 11 - 15 years account for the highest percentage of children and young people with an EHCP

(37.5%)

followed by children aged 5 - 10 years

(37.4%)

The most commonly identified primary need in newly issued EHCPs include Social, Emotional and Mental Health at

34.4%

Speech, Language and Communication Needs at

28.6%

Moderate Learning Difficulties at

21.6%

Autistic Spectrum Disorder at

10.5%

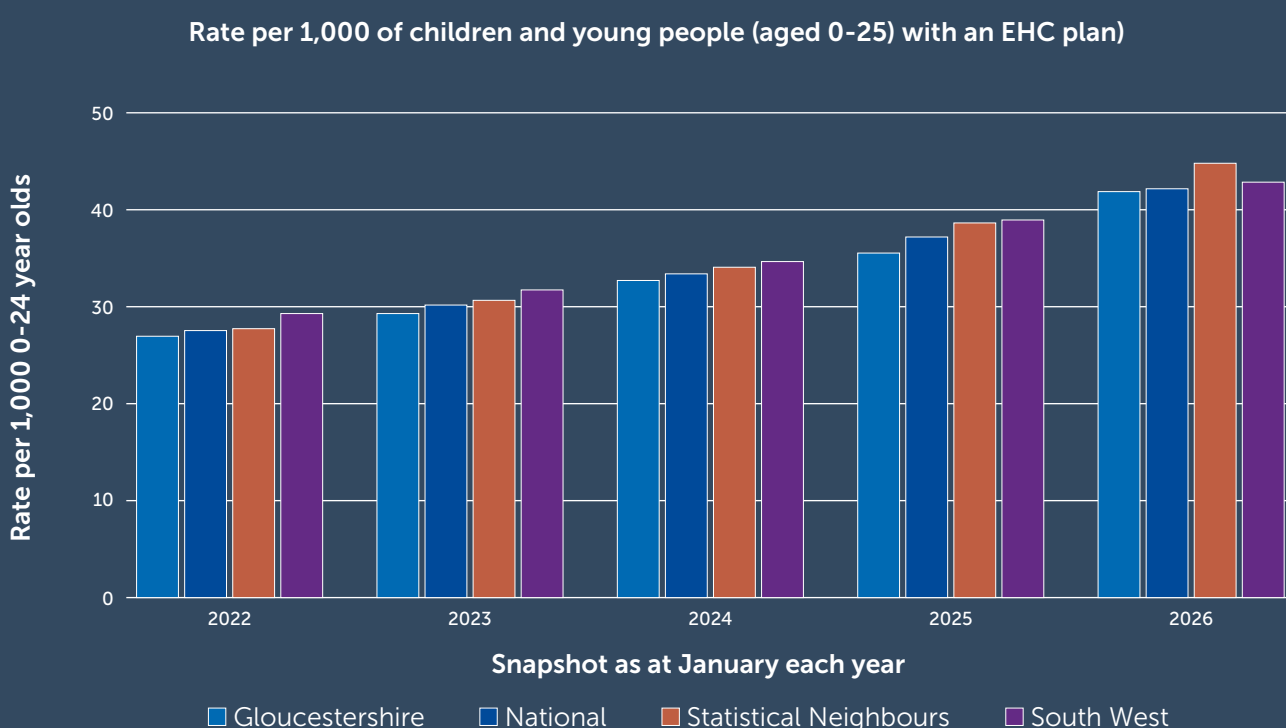
⁶ Mid 2024 Population Estimates, Office for National Statistics

⁷ Sub-national projections (migrant category), Office for National Statistics

SEN2 census (January)	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
0 – 25 EHCPs	4,854	5,289	5,876	6,527	7,521

Table 1: Growth of EHCPs in Gloucestershire 2022 - 2026

The proportion of children and young people with an EHCP has continued to rise, increasing from 36 per 1,000 in January 2024 to 42 per 1,000 in January 2026. In January 2026, Gloucestershire's EHCP prevalence rate was in line with the national rate, and remained lower than the rate of its statistical neighbours and the Southwest.



Between 2020 and 2025, the number of new EHCPs issued increased by approximately 769, equivalent to 137.8%.

Calendar Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
New EHCPs Issued	558	582	864	793	967	1327

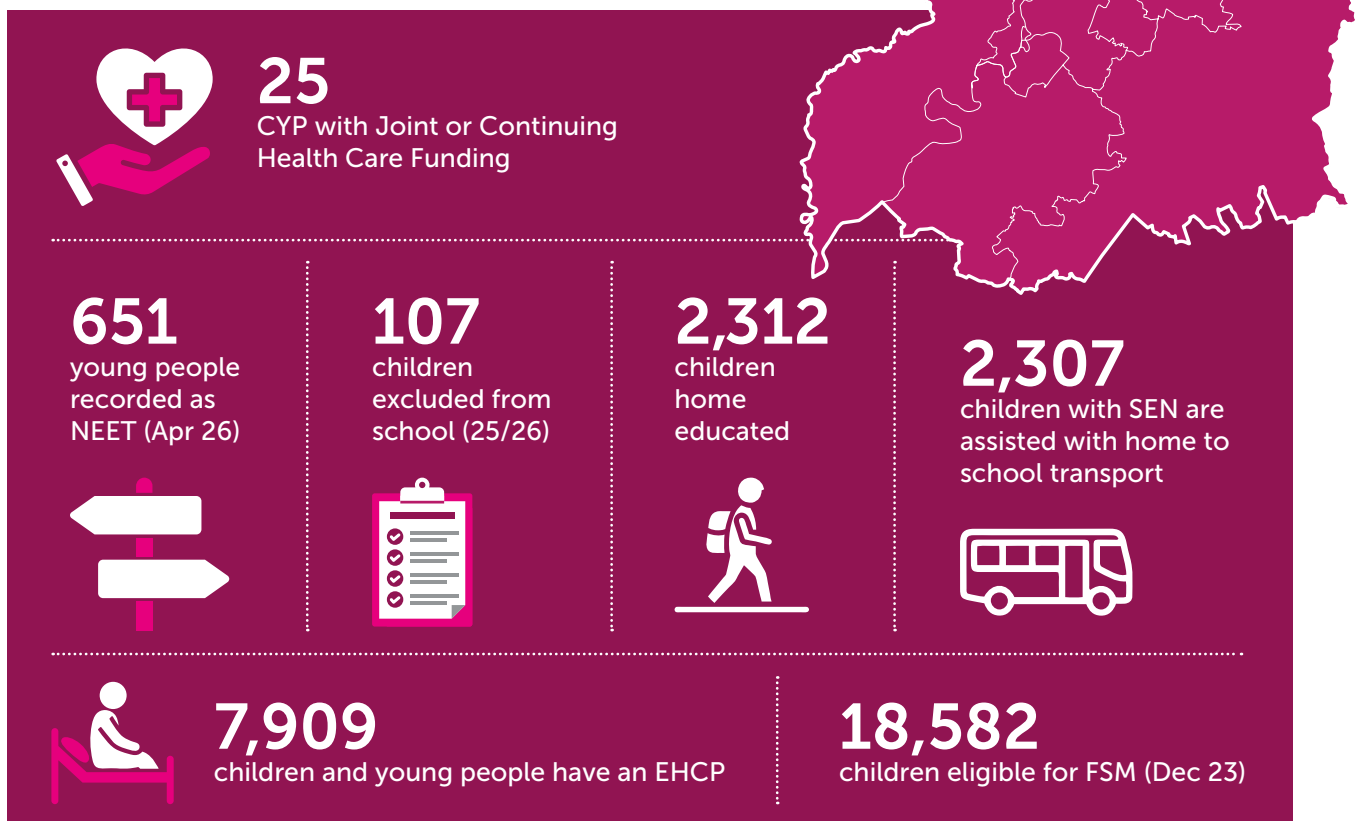
Table 2: New EHCPs issued in Gloucestershire 2020 - 2025

The number of new EHCPs issued in Gloucestershire increased by 21.9% between 2023 and 2024, reversing the decrease observed the previous year. This rise was broadly in line with statistical neighbours (22.2%) and greater than the national increase of 15.8%. Gloucestershire data for the 2025 calendar year indicates a continued and sharper rise with 1,327 EHCPs issued, equivalent to a 37.2% increase between 2024 and 2025. This increase in the number of new EHCPs issued was higher than statistical neighbours (29.1%) and significantly greater than the national increase of 13.3%. The number of new EHCPs issued in the Southwest decreased by 2.1% between 2024 and 2025.

Type of Placement	Number of Children and Young People with an EHCP	Percentage (%)
Alternative Provision	39	0.52
Early Years Settings (including private, voluntary and independent sector)	79	1.05
Elective Home Education	104	1.38
Mainstream Post-16 Provision	781	10.38
Non-Maintained Schools or Independent Schools (Local Authority-funded placements)	441	5.86
Other arrangements by the Local Authority – Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS)	380	5.05
Other, including Hospital Schools (where applicable)	296	3.94
Specialist Bases in Mainstream Settings	67	0.89
Specialist Post-16 Institutions	134	1.78
State-funded Mainstream Schools or Academies	3664	48.72
State-funded Special Schools or Special Academies	1536	20.42
Total	7521	100

Table 3: Distribution of EHCPs across placement types (SEN2 census, January 2026)

Needs in Gloucestershire



Current SEN for Children and Young People with EHCPs

The term 'primary need' in the context of the SEND Code of Practice (2015) refers to the main area of need that a child or young person has, which is the most significant and requires the most support.

- The following primary needs have stabilised since 2018/19:
 - Hearing Impairment
 - Multi-Sensory Impairment
 - Physical Disability
 - Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties
 - Severe Learning Difficulties
 - Specific Learning Difficulties
 - Visual Impairment
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs rose during the COVID-19 pandemic and have continued to increase over the past five years, remaining one of the most prevalent primary needs.
- Moderate Learning Difficulties have seen a continuous uplift.
- Speech, Language and Communication Needs have seen an increase in the youngest pupils. This trend is likely linked to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which opportunities for early social interaction that support speech and language development were significantly reduced.
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder has shown a more complex trend. There has undoubtedly been an increase in the proportion of pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder as awareness of the condition has improved in recent years.

Why has this Strategy been developed?

Educational Outcomes

Outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children and young people who have additional needs have not improved at appropriate rates, and the attainment gap between this cohort and their peers continues to be too wide.

In 2025, within Key Stage 2, 8% of young people in Gloucestershire with an EHCP achieved age-expected standards in reading, writing and maths – slightly lower than the national figure of 9%. Among those receiving SEN support, 22% of young people achieved the expected standard, which is significantly lower than the national average of 29%.

The most recent national data sets from 2024/25 show that Gloucestershire continues to experience higher rates of permanent exclusion compared to its statistical neighbours and nationally. While overall exclusion numbers have reduced in 2024/25 and 2025/26, driven by a reduction in secondary-age exclusions, primary-age exclusions remain 5 times higher than in 2020/21.

Gloucestershire's approach to reducing the use and necessity of permanent exclusion focuses on maintaining capacity within alternative provision, while expanding capacity in primary-age provision and earlier-intervention partnership placements for pupils in Key Stage 3.

Increasing Demand for SEND Support

In January 2026, across all Gloucestershire schools⁸, there were 14,785 (15.8% of pupils) children and young people receiving SEN support packages without an EHCP, and 7,521 (4.2% of residents aged 0 - 24 years) children and young people with an EHCP.

The number of pupils in state-funded primary and secondary schools and academies identified as having additional needs without an EHCP (SEN support) has been increasing year on year, rising from 11,646 in January 2020 to 14,674 in

January 2026. The exact reason for this is unclear; however, it suggests earlier identification of children and young people with lower-level additional needs to prevent these from escalating.

The number of children with complex needs has continued to rise year on year. For a small proportion of these children and young people, the complexity of their care, education and health needs requires specialist support, either outside of the county or within independent provision. The cost of these placements has risen, informing our work to develop more cost-effective, in-county provision, alongside person-centred, outcome-focused approaches, including the creation of residential solutions within the county.

Out of County Placement Pressures

As a county bordered by seven other local authorities, Gloucestershire faces ongoing pressure on special school placements from neighbouring areas, particularly for schools located near the borders, which can result in a significant number of out-of-county pupils on special school rolls. Work continues with Gloucestershire special schools to ensure that provision planning gives full consideration to the needs of children and young people who live within the county. In line with the SEND Code of Practice (2015), Gloucestershire County Council requires that all consultations from other local authorities are routed through the Council.

The county is also experiencing increased pressure as a result of a growing number of children in care from other local authorities being placed in Gloucestershire and requiring specialist provision.

While year-on-year figures have fluctuated, there has been an overall upward trend in the number of children transferring into Gloucestershire where the EHCP is maintained by Gloucestershire County Council, as well as those recorded as non-Gloucestershire pupils whose EHCPs are maintained by the originating local authority. Combined totals increased from 121 in the 2021/22 academic year to 145 in 2024/25. Notably, the number of children in care to other local authorities within these cohorts has risen, almost doubling since 2021/22 (from 15 to 28).

⁸ This includes all pupils in state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools, pupil referral units and independent schools.

Gloucestershire is implementing a variety of strategies to meet children and young people's needs and mitigate the impact of these trends, including:

- Providing interim packages of specialist provision through tutors and mentors whilst places are sought – a total of 147 packages of support were delivered during the 2024/25 academic year;
- Providing additional funding to mainstream schools to meet children and young people's needs;
- Working in partnership with all schools to make reasonable adjustments and directing schools, if necessary, to admit and support pupils whose needs they may initially feel unable to meet.

Appeals

During the 2024/25 academic year, high numbers of appeals were lodged. The most frequently cited reason for appeal was a disagreement with Section I (Education Placement), accounting for 37.3% of cases. Appeals citing disagreement with Sections B (SEN), F (Specialist Educational Provision), and I (Education Placement) comprised 31.0% of the total. The number of appeals is expected to rise further while work to expand sufficiency continues.



Early Years Provision and Levels of Need

Most children access their early years education and childcare entitlement within mainstream settings across the county. The Child Development and SEND Offer provides specialist, child-focused interventions, including outreach support within Early Years settings and portage home visiting for children with significant developmental needs.

To ensure children with additional needs can fully participate in high quality early years provision, providers can also access targeted funding, such as the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund and the Disability Access Fund. However, the early years sector continues to experience significant pressures.

An increasing number of children with SEND are deferring school entry and remaining in early years settings. This trend adds strain at a time when the expanded childcare offer has driven a substantial rise in demand for early years places, meaning many early years providers are holding waiting lists. While this presents an opportunity to identify needs sooner, it also creates challenges for providers in supporting a growing number of children with SEND.

A further concern is the limited availability of specialist provision for early years children with EHCPs. Whilst many early years providers can meet increasingly complex needs, some children remain without a named placement during both their pre-school and Reception years due to insufficient specialist capacity.

Compounding these issues, the early years sector in Gloucestershire operates within private, voluntary and independent settings. As a result, the local authority cannot name an early years provider in Section I of an EHCP without the express permission of the provider's manager or owner. Where appropriate placements cannot be secured, exceptional provision may be considered.

These challenges can result in some early years children being less likely to access an early years setting or, if they do, they are less likely to access their full entitlement and are at greater risk of making slower progress compared to their peers.

Where are we now?

In Gloucestershire, a higher proportion of children and young people with SEND, including those with EHCPs, are successfully supported in mainstream early years settings and schools than in specialist provision, and have access to a range of support to enable this.

Special schools and mainstream SEND provisions provide for a range of needs and ages and, in some cases, for more than one phase of education. A list of specialist settings in Gloucestershire can be found below:



Setting	Primary Need	Age Range (Years)	Commissioned Places 2019	Commissioned Places 2025
Special School				
Alderman Knight School	• Communication and Interaction • Cognition and Learning	7 - 19	125	220
Battledown Centre for Children & Families	• Sensory and Physical • Communication and Interaction • Cognition and Learning	2 - 11	40	65
Belmont School	• Cognition and Learning • Communication and Interaction	4 - 16	110	156
Bettridge School	• Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties • Severe Learning Difficulties • Communication and Interaction	2 - 19	134	148
Brook Academy	• Social, Emotional and Mental Health • Communication and Interaction	11 - 16	Not applicable	80
Heart of the Forest Community Special School	• Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties • Cognition and Learning • Communication and Interaction • Sensory and Physical	2 - 19	100	160
Lift Crescent View (previously The Ridge Academy)	• Social, Emotional and Mental Health	5 - 11	40	65
Paternoster School	• Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties • Cognition and Learning • Communication and Interaction • Sensory and Physical	2 - 17	50	60
Peak Academy	• Social, Emotional and Mental Health	11 - 16	60	73
Sladewood Academy	• Communication and Interaction • Cognition and Learning	4 - 11	Not applicable	60
The Milestone School	• Communication and Interaction • Cognition and Learning	2 - 16	306	326
The Shrubberies School	• Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties • Cognition and Learning • Communication and Interaction • Sensory and Physical	2 - 19	110	138

Setting	Primary Need	Age Range (Years)	Commissioned Places 2019	Commissioned Places 2025
Mainstream SEND Provision (Specialist Bases)				
Chesterton Communication and Interaction Centre	• Communication and Interaction	4 - 11	10	10
Christchurch Communication and Interaction Centre	• Communication and Interaction	4 - 11	10	10
Gastrells Communication and Interaction Centre	• Communication and Interaction	4 - 11	10	10
Ruardean Communication and Interaction Centre	• Communication and Interaction	4 - 11	10	10
The Piper Centre	• Communication and Interaction • Cognition and Learning	4 - 11	20	30
The EPIC Centre	• Communication and Interaction	11 - 16	10	10
Early Years Provision				
Dingley's Promise, Gloucester	• Early years SEND assessment centre	0 - 5	Not applicable	12
Dingley's Promise, Cheltenham	• Early years SEND assessment centre	0 - 5	Not applicable	12
Total			1145	1655

Table 4: Commissioned places in special schools, SEND provision in mainstream schools and early years

Special Schools

Cohorts of pupils within our 12 special schools are growing. Work has been ongoing to increase special school places in line with demand, including the following:



- Additional build at Heart of the Forest Special School to increase capacity by 20 places;
- Additional build at Alderman Knight School;
- Repurposing of Sladewood Academy from a mainstream primary school to a special primary school to provide an additional 60 places;
- Opening of Brook Academy to provide an additional 80 secondary places.

Mainstream SEND Provisions

Gloucestershire maintains 6 specialist bases in mainstream schools, totalling 80 places. These are split across:

- 4 primary-phase Communication and Interaction specialist bases (total of 40 places);
- 1 primary-phase specialist base for pupils with a range of SEND needs, including Communication and Interaction and Cognition and Learning (30 places);
- 1 secondary-phase Communication and Interaction specialist base (10 places).

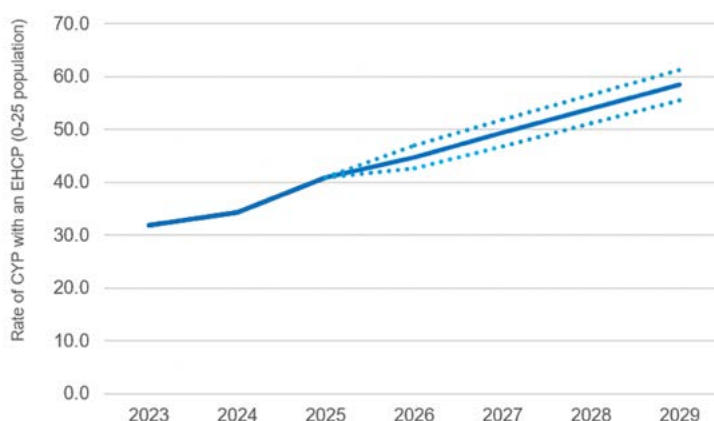
Early Years SEND Provisions

- 2 early years SEND assessment centres.

Future Demand

The number of children and young people with SEND is projected to continue increasing through to 2029/30, placing further pressure on education and support services. Forecasts underpinning the local SEND Reform Plan are based on a 3-year linear trend, reflecting recent growth in EHCPs and anticipated medium-term demand.

This is consistent with the Department for Education's assumption that EHCP numbers will continue to rise, albeit at a slower rate, as reforms strengthen early identification and support within mainstream settings. Based on current trends, the local SEND Reform Plan projects that the number of EHCPs could reach approximately 10,700 by the end of 2029.



Growth is expected to be most significant among children aged 5 – 15, with the greatest increases in need associated with communication and interaction and social, emotional and mental health.

The SEND School Capacity Survey (SCAP) projects future demand and available capacity within specialist education provision, including state-funded special schools and academies, non-maintained special schools, independent schools (mainstream and special), specialist bases in mainstream schools, and alternative provision schools.

Current projections indicate that an additional 800 specialist places may be required in state-funded special schools, academies, and non-maintained special schools by 2032/33, bringing total capacity requirements to just over 2,800 places. These forecasts take account of planned expansions to specialist provision, including a new all-through special school scheduled to open in January 2027 and a second special school planned to open in 2028.

The return also reflects the long-term ambition to reduce reliance on independent specialist placements by increasing capacity within state-funded provision, including the expansion of specialist bases in mainstream schools. Based on current assumptions and planned developments, capacity in these settings is projected to increase from around 80 places currently to more than 500 by 2032/33. These figures represent projections and are intended to illustrate the potential level of capacity required if current trends and commissioning intentions continue.

What have we done so far?

School-Aged Specialist Provision

In 2019, Gloucestershire commissioned 1145 places across 9 special schools and 6 specialist bases in mainstream schools. In 2025, there were 1655 commissioned places across 12 special schools, 6 specialist bases in mainstream schools, and 2 early years SEND assessment centres, thus creating an additional 510 places.

Gloucestershire has opened two new special schools in the last 3 years, increasing our capacity by 140 places. In addition, we have maximised commissioned numbers across all existing special schools via extensions of school buildings, as well as remodelling of existing accommodation to enhance our local offer and improve our capacity to meet current and future demand.

Post-16 Specialist Provision

Since 2020/21, Gloucestershire has significantly expanded its post-16 SEND offer, creating approximately 146 commissioned specialist base places across further education colleges and training providers, in partnership with non-school alternative providers.

Alongside these specialist bases, the county has expanded alternative and vocational pathways through non-school alternative providers. The specialist provision developed since 2020 has been designed to meet a broad range of SEND, including: Autistic Spectrum Disorder; social, emotional and mental health needs; severe and moderate learning difficulties; communication and interaction needs; anxiety-based school avoidance; complex trauma; and young people requiring specialist support with preparation for adulthood, independence and employability skills.

The expansion has created a more diverse and flexible local offer, reducing reliance on out-of-county placements and providing pathways that better support progression into further education, employment, supported internships, independent living and community participation.

Strengthening Inclusive Early Years Provision

The vast majority of children with SEND in Gloucestershire access their entitlement within mainstream early years and childcare settings. The local authority recognises the critical role that early intervention, inclusive practice and timely support play in improving outcomes for children and reducing the need for more specialist intervention later in their educational journey.

Our approach is to strengthen the capacity, confidence and sustainability of mainstream early years provision so that more children with SEND can access high-quality support within their local community from the earliest possible stage.

To support providers in meeting a wide range of needs, a range of funding streams and targeted support are available to early years providers. These include:

- **Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF)** to provide additional resources for children with emerging or identified SEND who require support beyond that ordinarily available within the setting. In Gloucestershire, this is available for individual or small groups of children, and for settings with higher numbers/percentages of children with identified SEND. Funding is provided through upfront termly payments to support early years environments and practice relevant to the needs of the community they support.
- **Disability Access Fund (DAF)** to support providers in making reasonable adjustments and improving access for children in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

- **Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)** to support improved outcomes for eligible disadvantaged children, including those with SEND.
- **Inclusion in Early Years Funding** – new Government funding in 2026, which provides additional support to strengthen inclusive practice and increase provider capacity to meet children’s needs at an earlier stage. This is paid to settings where data suggests they are more likely to support higher numbers of children with additional needs.

The local authority will continue to review and develop its approach to early years inclusion funding to ensure that support is targeted effectively, promotes inclusion, and helps providers respond in a timely and sustainable way to children’s changing needs.

In addition to funding, Gloucestershire has a well-established Early Years Inclusion Service which provides advice, guidance and practical support to providers across the county. This includes:

- A structured referral pathway through which settings can request support to enhance inclusive provision and develop staff confidence and capacity to support children with SEND;
- Advice, coaching and modelling of inclusive practice within settings;
- Access to a wide range of inclusion resources, guidance materials and practical tools;
- A comprehensive training offer for practitioners, including SEND-focused professional development and the Early Years Level 3 Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) qualification.

This graduated approach enables children, families and providers to access support at the earliest opportunity, helping children to participate fully in their early education and childcare experience, and prepare them for successful transition into school.

Gloucestershire will also continue to build on the opportunities presented through the Best Start in Life Programme. Through the development of Best Start Inclusion Practitioners, inclusion-focused workforce development and emerging local inclusion hubs, we will strengthen earlier identification, targeted intervention and specialist support for children with additional needs. These approaches will help create a more connected system of support for families and practitioners, and increase local capacity to meet children’s needs before difficulties escalate.

Alongside the ongoing development of specialist early years SEND assessment provision, the local authority will continue to work with providers, families, health partners and schools to improve transitions, increase access to inclusive early education and childcare, and ensure that children with SEND can access the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

Our Priorities and Sufficiency Plans

Our current SEND and Education Inclusion Strategies emphasise the need to continue to support mainstream settings to help them meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.

In addition, to ensure sufficiency, we aim to continue our ongoing expansion programme of SEND placements with the following priorities:

- Commissioning a range of provision that is robust, resilient, flexible, and creative, and which matches the range of needs of our children and young people;
- Securing provision when and where it is needed;
- Procuring provision that offers value for money;
- Ensuring that our children and young people placed in independent non-maintained special schools receive good quality education, giving them the best chances of securing positive outcomes.

We will:

- Identify gaps in provision from 0 – 25 years and co-design solutions with key stakeholders, including children and young people with SEND, their families, educational settings, and practitioners across education, health and social care, seeking to maximise use of the whole school estate;
- Promote fair and equitable access to SEND provision by using data and intelligence to inform commissioning decisions, ensuring provision is developed in response to need and is accessible to all children and young people who require it, regardless of their background, circumstances or where they live within the county;
- Encourage and support mainstream schools to develop SEND provision through specialist bases where gaps are identified, and work collaboratively to strengthen whole-school inclusive practice;
- Consider how we build sufficiency of early years SEND provision in parts of the county where this is not already commissioned;
- Make creative use of existing space and buildings by leading innovative approaches, exploring new funding models for expansion projects, and driving appropriate construction through effective programme and project management tools;
- Maximise the use of available funding sources to create and expand SEND provision, prioritising areas where additional capacity is most needed;
- Review the wider local area partnership resource needed to support the provisions, ensuring education settings are equipped to deliver effective provision and respond to the needs of our children and young people.

How do we get there?

The local authority recognises this as an iterative programme of work, responsive to national developments and workstreams aimed at increasing inclusion across all sectors, while remaining aligned with the vision and priorities set out in the current Education Inclusion and SEND Strategies, as well as any future strategic priorities.

How will we monitor and govern delivery of the strategy?

The quality and impact of SEND and inclusion services in Gloucestershire are overseen by the SEND and Alternative Provision Local Area Partnership Board. The board is formed of key leaders from across education, health and social care systems and parent carer representatives. The strategy will be governed by the Strategic Oversight Board who will receive an annual report on progress against the delivery plan. By exception or on request, the Local Area Partnership Executive Board will also receive reports on progress.

The operational delivery of the plan will be overseen by the local area Specialist Sufficiency Group. This group meets monthly and is chaired by the Director of Education. It brings together key officers from across Gloucestershire local authority to ensure that actions are progressed, risks are mitigated, and the delivery plan is adapted in response to national reforms and changes in local context.



Sufficiency Delivery Plan

The Sufficiency Delivery Plan is a dynamic document that will be reviewed and updated over time in line with government reforms, the outcomes of national consultations, and developments within the local context. Delivery of this strategy will be supported by a detailed local SEND Reform Implementation Plan, which has been submitted by the local authority to the Department for Education. The plan is currently undergoing the national review and assurance process. Once this process has concluded, details of implementation activity, milestones, governance arrangements, and progress monitoring that will underpin delivery of the strategy's objectives, will be published through Gloucestershire's Local Offer.

An overview of the Sufficiency Delivery Plan is set out below:

Short-Term Objectives: To be achieved in the next 2 years		
What do we need to achieve?	How are we going to do it?	When are we going to do it?
Mainstream SEND Provision		
Review and optimise existing mainstream specialist bases.	Review current commissioning briefs to ensure they are fit for purpose, analyse support requirements, and develop an offer to enable schools with specialist bases to leverage their current capacity and respond effectively to children and young people's evolving needs.	2027
Specialist SEND Provision		
Review current provision and commissioning in maintained special schools and academies.	Review and amend commissioning briefs. Review net capacity assessments of special schools from the Department for Education to check commissioned numbers and any possible expansion opportunities. Review special schools on the Department for Education's school rebuilding programme to determine whether there are any development opportunities.	2026
Completion and opening of the Gloucestershire Academy for Inspirational Learning (GAIL) in January 2027.	Establishment and construction of a new 200-place special school for children and young people (aged 4 – 16) with moderate and additional learning difficulties in The Wheatridge, Gloucester. A phased approach to pupil intake will be taken.	2027
Maximise our ability to commission available places in independent schools and independent non-maintained special schools.	Develop a pipeline system to support the commissioning of available placements. An updated overview of available places by year group, location and provision will support quicker and more efficient commissioning decisions.	Ongoing
Block purchase with unregistered alternative provision providers.	Block purchase 15-hour-per-week provision to enable us to efficiently and quickly place children and young people who are not currently on a school roll and are awaiting a special school placement. Providers are quality assured and monitored to ensure delivery of commissioned outcomes, including effective transition planning to school or college placements.	Ongoing

Early Years / Childcare SEND Provision		
Ensure equity of lease arrangements for all early years providers delivering from Gloucestershire County Council buildings.	Identify all Gloucestershire County Council buildings currently used by early years and childcare providers, and document their lease arrangements and associated charges.	2027
Assess and monitor sufficiency of early years/childcare provision for children with SEND and address gaps where identified.	Continue monitoring Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment requests and exclusion data in Reception and Year 1 to identify children with SEND who did not access their early years entitlement, and engage with parents/carers to understand potential barriers to accessing provision. Engage with early years providers to understand and address barriers to inclusion. Baseline inclusion audits, inclusion action plans, training and support. Offer potential inclusion funding to providers to increase confidence, skills and capacity to support children with SEND.	Ongoing
Create additional early years places for children with higher levels of SEND, with and without EHCPs.	Monitor the delivery and impact of the two existing early years SEND assessment centres in Cheltenham and Gloucester. Assess need and scope options to increase early years SEND assessment placements in other areas of the county. Consider need and options for early years SEND provision for children with EHCPs.	2026-27
Strengthen inclusion and capacity within mainstream early years provision.	Review and develop Early Years SEND funding arrangements, including SENIF and Inclusion Funding, to ensure support is timely, equitable and responsive to need. Review and expand, where needed, the Early Years Service Inclusion offer, Inclusion Champions platform, training programme and Best Start Inclusion support. Monitor impact through inclusion audits, provider engagement and children's outcomes.	2026
Post-16 SEND Provision		
Develop a dedicated post-16 offer using unregistered alternative provision providers.	Commission, monitor and quality assure post-16 provision with work placements and workplace skills. Providers will be measured on the outcomes and destinations of young people they support.	2026
Use current data to identify and address gaps in post-16 provision.	Continue to develop bespoke specialist provision in partnership with training providers, alternative provision providers and further education colleges.	2026

Medium-Term Objectives: To be achieved in the next 5 years

What do we need to achieve?	How are we going to do it?	When are we going to do it?
Mainstream SEND Provision		
Expand mainstream SEND provision by developing additional specialist bases.	Develop and implement local authority-commissioned specialist bases within mainstream primary and secondary schools, with the ambition of creating up to 480 additional specialist base places, helping to bridge the gap between mainstream and specialist provision and meet current and future needs. Specialist bases will be developed and delivered in line with the latest guidance from the Department for Education to ensure inclusive, accessible environments and high-quality provision ^{9,10}. The location, designation and number of specialist bases will be informed by ongoing sufficiency assessments, including data on current and projected need, demand trends and geographical distribution of provision. Particular consideration will be given to improving access to specialist support in underserved areas of the county, including rural communities such as the Forest of Dean and the Cotswolds.	2031
Specialist SEND Provision		
Progress plans for delivery of new special school in Cheltenham.	Establishment and construction of a new 200-place special school for children and young people (aged 4 - 16) with complex learning difficulties on Arle Road, Cheltenham, to open September 2028. A phased approach to pupil intake will be taken.	2028

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusion-bases-in-schools>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-education-estates>

Early Years / Childcare SEND Provision

Ensure the provision of sufficient, high-quality early years and childcare provision across the county.	Develop and promote supply and demand data systems with providers to improve sufficiency data. Use supply and demand data to expand early years and childcare provision where needed. Progress work to create additional early years SEND assessment placements across the county. Implement and monitor the impact of Department for Education grant funding (capital and revenue) to expand provision where it is most needed. Agree clear processes with Gloucestershire County Council's Asset Management and Property Services and Commissioning colleagues to utilise appropriate buildings for new/expanded early years provision, including lease arrangements, building work and building/management costs.	2028-29
Sustain sufficient early years and childcare provision for all children, including those with SEND.	Review the impact of existing and future commissioned early years SEND assessment centres. Implement and review the impact of inclusion and enhanced inclusion programmes in early years provision.	2030
Post-16 SEND Provision		
Expand the supported internship offer.	Develop additional supported internship places for young people with social, emotional and mental health needs.	2028
Expand SEND post-16 options.	Continue to explore partnership opportunities between registered and unregistered alternative providers. Create additional capacity in lower-level post-16 courses. Improve access to local post-16 opportunities across the county, with a focus on underserved rural areas such as the Forest of Dean and the Cotswolds.	2031
Develop re-engagement provision for learners not in education, employment or training.	Development of re-engagement provision for young people not yet ready for full-time education, alongside creating in-year opportunities for post-16 education to support mid-year entrants.	2028

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SEND
Sufficiency
Strategy
2026 - 2031



Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL