



**Central
Bedfordshire**

SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Executive Summary

Executive summary

Every child in the UK is entitled to an education to achieve their potential at all stages of development and to lead happy and fulfilled lives into adulthood. However, some children have needs that mean that this may not be possible without specific help that goes beyond standard education provision. It is important to identify these needs and develop services that provide the support necessary to meet them. This Joint Strategic Needs Assessment focuses on those aged 0-25 years with SEND who are residents of, or are educated within, Central Bedfordshire and seeks to improve our understanding of their needs to:

- Inform the strategic, system wide priorities to improve independence and outcomes for children and young adults with SEND, and their families.
- Inform commissioning at both strategic and operational levels, so that services and support are tailored to need and based upon the best available evidence.
- Inform the wider system so that all relevant future plans in the local area are considered through the lens of independence and inclusion, reducing the social and environmental barriers to living and providing as much independence as possible.

In line with national SEND trends and local population growth in the area, the overall number of children and young people with SEND in Central Bedfordshire continues to increase. When broken down by the type of support, these increases for pupils on an EHC plan and SEN support are both similar to those seen across the East of England and national levels. However, for local pupils receiving SEN support this increase is smaller compared to those on EHC Plans and the overall proportion remains slightly lower than regional and national averages.

Broad trends in primary needs identified in local children and young people in state funded schools in the last nine years include:

- An increase of more than 2500 pupils receiving SEN in state funded schools.
- Some primary needs including physical, sensory and profound disabilities remaining relatively stable during this period.
- Other primary needs increasing substantially, with Autistic Spectrum Conditions, Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Speech, Language and Communication needs each more than doubling in size during this period and continuing to increase.
- The number of pupils with Specific and Moderate Learning Difficulties remains high.

Table 1 summarises trends in primary needs identified for pupils in state funded schools by age group and type of support.

Table 1 Trends in primary needs for pupils in Central Bedfordshire state funded schools by age group and type of support.

Stage	Local primary needs compared to national and regional averages		Highest local primary needs	
	EHC Plans	SEN Support	EHC Plans	SEN Support
Early Years	Similar	Similar	Speech, Language & Communication	Speech, Language & Communication and Social, Emotional & Mental Health
Reception	Similar	Similar	Speech, Language & Communication and Autistic Spectrum Conditions	
Key stage 1	Autistic Spectrum Conditions lower; Speech, Language & Communication higher; Others similar	Moderate Learning Difficulties, higher; Social, Emotional and Mental Health higher; Others similar		Autistic Spectrum Conditions and Speech, Language & Communication
Key stage 2	Hearing impairment higher; Severe Learning Difficulty lower; Others similar	Moderate Learning Difficulties, higher; Others similar		
Key stage 3	Severe Learning Difficulties, higher; Others similar or lower	Physical Disabilities and Visual Impairments, higher: Others similar	Autistic Spectrum Conditions and Social, Emotional & Mental Health	Social Emotional & Mental Health and Specific Learning Difficulties.
Key stage 4	Autistic Spectrum Disorders, higher: Speech, Language & Communication Needs, lower; Others similar	Moderate Learning Difficulties, lower; Others similar		
College Years/ transition	Social, Emotional & Mental Health needs, higher: Severe Learning Difficulties, higher; Others similar	Similar		

Wider inequalities are also impacting on the local SEND population. In Central Bedfordshire and England overall, children eligible for free school meals are more likely to be identified with SEND and, in 2023/24, nearly 32% of pupils with an EHC plan had free school meals, though this is lower than the England average (42%). Further, 25% of local pupils with SEN Support were eligible for free school meals, a

level similar to the England average (25%). Eligibility locally was also highest among those with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs, Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Moderate Learning Difficulties.

Central Bedfordshire has also experienced an increase in numbers of pupils on EHC Plans across the ethnic backgrounds in recent years. Whilst pupils of White ethnicity continue to make up the majority, as a proportion they have decreased to 81% in the most recent data, whilst the proportion of Black ethnicity has remained relatively constant (3-4%) and those from Asian (4%) and Mixed (9%) ethnicities continues to rise steadily. For SEN support, the proportion of pupils of White ethnicity has decreased to 85% in the most recent data whilst the proportion of pupils from Black and Asian ethnicities has remained relatively constant (~2%) and those from Mixed ethnicities has increased steadily to 8% in 2024/25. By primary need, the data suggest some local differences by ethnicity.

The number of local suspensions for those on EHC Plans and receiving SEN support is similar to regional and national levels. For those on SEN support the numbers of permanent exclusions are small but similar to regional and national levels. For those on EHC Plans the proportions are higher by comparison but the total number (n=16) of pupils remains small. The number of local Alternate Provision (AP) pupils on EHC Plans has recently decreased but remains below the regional average and slightly above the national average. The number of local AP pupils on SEN support has also recently decreased but remains higher than the regional and national averages.

Focusing on secondary needs, for local pupils on EHC Plans the latest 2024/25 data reports that the following secondary needs were most common and as a proportion were similar to regional and national levels, except where noted as follows:

- Speech, Language and Communication needs
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (slightly higher than regional & national %s)
- Autistic Spectrum Conditions
- Moderate Learning Difficulty
- Specific Learning Difficulty

For local pupils receiving SEN support the latest data suggests the following secondary needs were most common and as a proportion were similar to regional and national levels:

- Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs
- Speech, Language and Communication needs
- Autistic Spectrum Conditions
- Specific Learning Difficulty
- Moderate Learning Difficulty

For those on EHC Plans and SEN support, the proportions of top three secondary needs by primary need were both broadly similar to regional and national averages.

Lastly, the local SEND population is forecast to grow from around 8,800 to between 9,100 to 11,900 children and young people by 2029/30. Further, the data behind these projections suggests that the rate of increase in the proportion of local school children with EHC Plans is growing much faster than for England overall and when compared to those receiving SEN support.