



**Central  
Bedfordshire**

# SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

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## 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.

By age group and type of support the following trends in primary needs were identified for pupils in state funded schools.

For Early Years pupils:

- Proportions on EHC Plans and SEN support were generally similar by primary needs when compared to regional and national averages.
- For EHC Plans, highest primary needs were for Speech, Language and Communication.
- For SEN support, highest primary needs were for Speech, Language and Communication and Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

For Reception pupils:

- Proportions on EHC Plans and SEN support were generally similar by primary needs when compared to regional and national averages.
- For EHC Plans, highest primary needs were for Speech, Language and Communication needs and Autistic Spectrum Conditions.
- For SEN support, highest primary needs were for Speech, Language and Communication and Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

For Key Stage 1 pupils:

- Proportions on EHC Plans and SEN support by primary needs vary when compared to regional and national averages. For those on EHC Plans, Autistic Spectrum Conditions are lower than regional and national averages but for Speech, Language and Communications needs the local proportions were higher. For SEN support, there were higher proportions of local children with Moderate Learning Difficulties and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs when compared to regional and national averages.
- For EHC Plans, the highest primary needs were for Autistic Spectrum Conditions and Speech, Language and Communication needs.
- For SEN support, the highest primary needs were for Speech, Language and Communication needs, Social Emotional and Mental Health and Moderate Learning Difficulties.

For Key Stage 2 pupils:

- Proportions on EHC Plans and SEN support by primary needs vary when compared to regional and national averages. For those on EHC Plans, proportions with Autistic Spectrum Conditions, Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Speech, Language and Communication needs were similar to regional and national averages. For SEN support, local primary needs were generally similar to regional and national averages apart from higher proportions of local children with Moderate Learning Difficulties.
- For EHC Plans the highest primary needs were for Autistic Spectrum Conditions, Speech, Language and Communication needs and Social Emotional and Mental Health.

- For SEN support the highest primary needs were Social Emotional and Mental Health, Moderate Learning Difficulties and Speech, Language and Communication needs.

For Key Stage 3 pupils:

- Proportions on EHC Plans and SEN support by primary needs vary when compared to regional and national averages. For those on EHC Plans, proportions by primary need were sometimes comparable to or below the regional and national averages apart from for Severe Learning Difficulties, where local proportions remain above the regional and national average. For SEN support, proportions by primary need were generally similar to regional and national averages apart from higher proportions of local children with Physical Disabilities and Visual Impairments.
- For EHC Plans, the highest primary needs were for Autistic Spectrum Conditions and Social Emotional and Mental Health.
- For SEN support, the highest primary needs were for Social Emotional and Mental Health and Specific Learning Difficulties.

For Key Stage 4 pupils:

- Proportions on EHC Plans and SEN support were generally similar by primary needs when compared to regional and national averages. For those on EHC Plans, notable exceptions were levels of Autistic Spectrum Disorders above regional and national averages and Speech, Language and Communication Needs around half those of regional and national averages. For those with SEN support, one notable exception was Moderate Learning Difficulties with a lower proportion than regional and national averages.
- For EHC Plans the highest primary needs were for Autistic Spectrum Conditions and Social Emotional and Mental Health.
- For SEN support the highest primary needs were for Social Emotional and Mental Health and Specific Learning Difficulties.

For College Years/Transition:

- Proportions on EHC Plans and SEN support were mostly similar by primary needs when compared to regional and national averages. For those one EHC Plans, two notable exceptions were higher proportions of young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Severe Learning Difficulties when compared to regional and national averages.
- For EHC Plans, the highest primary needs were for Autistic Spectrum Conditions and Social, Emotional and Mental Health.
- For SEN support, the highest primary needs were for Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Specific Learning Difficulties.

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.

# Introduction

## Why SEND is important?

Every child in the UK is entitled to an education with the aim for them to achieve their potential through all stages of development – early years, at school (primary and secondary) and in further education settings, 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 therefore important to identify these needs and to develop services that provide the support necessary to meet them. To achieve this, a combination of education, local authority and health services must form a local partnership to work together and importantly to work together with parents and the young people themselves.

## Purpose of the Central Bedfordshire SEND JSNA

This Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) focuses on children and young adults aged 0-25 years who are residents of, or who are educated within, Central Bedfordshire. The JSNA aims to provide Central Bedfordshire SEND Partnership Board, departments with responsibility for commissioning and service delivery and local leaders with an up to date understanding of the needs of local children and young adults with SEND 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 with as much independence as possible.

## Local offer - explaining SEND

This JSNA provides a very brief overview of some services available to SEND children and young people and their families and carers. Central Bedfordshire's Local Offer website<sup>1</sup> contains information on services and support for parents or carers of children and young people with SEND across education, health and care services, voluntary agencies, leisure activities and support groups. Please see the [Local Offer website](#) for further details.

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<sup>1</sup> [Central Bedfordshire SEND Local Offer](#) (accessed 17/10/2025)

Under Section 20 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and Section 312 of the 1996 Education Act, a child or young person has special educational needs (SEN) if they have a learning difficulty or disability that calls for special educational provision to be made for them. Children have a learning difficulty or disability if they:

- Have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others the same age.
- Have a disability that prevents or hinders them from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions.
- Are under compulsory school age and fall within one of the definitions above or would do so if special educational provision was not made for them.

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is an umbrella term that relates to a wide range of needs that can affect a child's ability to learn in many ways, including their:

- Behaviour or ability to socialise (e.g. they struggle to make friends)
- Reading and writing
- Ability to understand things
- Concentration levels
- Physical ability

## How children with SEND are supported in schools

Many children and young people will experience barriers to learning or progress at some stage in their development. This can be for a range of reasons, and for many it will require only short-term provisions or support. The [Graduated Response to SEND](#) supports children and young people to have their needs identified and met at an early stage and with support appropriate to their needs. For some children and young people, their needs may be more enduring and may require a longer or more targeted intervention to support their ongoing progress. These children are described as having a special educational need and/or disability and they may be supported through SEN support or an EHC plan.

## SEN support and Education, Health, and Care (EHC) Plans

Some children require extra, or different help is given beyond that provided as part of the school's usual curriculum. To aid this, the class teacher, and special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) will implement support in school and may request advice or support from outside specialists. Education, health, and care (EHC) plans are for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through special educational needs support. EHC plans identify educational, health and social needs and set out the additional support to meet those needs.

More details about SEND can be found on the Local Offer page or via the UK government's [Children with special educational needs and disabilities webpages](#)<sup>2</sup>.

## SEND in Mainstream and Special Schools

The majority of children and young people with SEND are educated within mainstream schools in their local area. Mainstream schools ensure that children and young people receive support and help in line with the Graduated Response to SEND or in line with the provision outlined on their EHC Plans.

A small percentage of children require access to specialist settings or more intensive support day to day, and some of these children may be educated through Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) or a SEND Unit in a mainstream school. Resourced provisions are places reserved at a mainstream school for pupils with a specific type of SEND, taught mainly within mainstream classes, but requiring a base and some specialist facilities around the school. Resourced provisions:

- Are designated by the local authority specifically for making this kind of SEN provision.
- Receive specialist funding from the local authority to deliver the appropriate service.
- Cater for a specific area or areas of SEN (for example specific learning difficulties)
- Are usually for pupils with an EHC plan.

SEND units are special provisions within a mainstream school where the pupils with SEN are taught mainly within separate classes. They:

- Are designated by the local authority specifically for SEN provision, and sometimes accommodate pupils registered at other schools on a part-time basis.
- Receive specialist funding from the local authority to deliver the appropriate service.
- Cater for a specific type or types of SEN (for example Autistic Spectrum Conditions).

Places in SEND Units are usually reserved for pupils with an EHC plan but may also provide support for pupils with SEN support.

Of those children or young people on an EHC plan, a small percentage will require access to a special school place to support significant and enduring needs. These are registered as specialist settings, receive specialist funding from the local authority to deliver the appropriate service and ensure that the most vulnerable

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<sup>2</sup> [Children with special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\): Overview - GOV.UK](#) (Accessed 17/10/2025)

children in the area can access an appropriate education designed around their needs. In 2024/25, 898 of Central Bedfordshire’s children and young people were educated in special schools, a population that has increased by 32 in the last year and from 535 pupils in 2015/16 (Source: Department for Education<sup>3</sup>).

**Table 1** Special schools providing SEND provision in Central Bedfordshire by age, year group and specialism

School	Age range	Year Groups	Specialism
The Chiltern School, Houghton Regis	3 to 19	N to 14	Severe Learning Difficulties, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties and Autistic Spectrum Conditions
Ivel Valley School and College, Biggleswade	3 to 19	N to 14	Complex Learning Needs
Oak Bank (Academy) School, Leighton Buzzard	9 to 19	4 to 14	Social, emotional and mental health needs with additional needs including Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders and Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties
Weatherfield Academy, Dunstable	7 to 19	2 to 14	Cognition & Learning Delay, with additional needs including Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders and Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties and/or other general Learning Difficulties

The Central Bedfordshire Specialist School Places Plan 2022 – 2030<sup>4</sup> was developed following extensive public consultation and in response to rising demand following local population growth and the increasing incidence of SEND in this population. It outlines how the council will meet the increasing demand for specialist provision for EHC Plan school aged pupils (Reception to Year 14) in mainstream and special schools. The latest draft adds around 280 ARP places in mainstream schools and around 600 special school places by 2030.

The council has no legal powers to propose or determine changes to the two Academy special schools, therefore collaborative working is essential as part of a common commitment to inclusion and increasing the access to specialist places that meet the needs of all pupils. The plan identified the following pressures and gaps in provision:

<sup>3</sup> [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data for Central Bedfordshire, accessed 15/09/2025

<sup>4</sup> [11.2 Appendix A Specialist School Place Plan.pdf](#) (Revised version October 2023, accessed 17/10/2025)

- Insufficient provision to meet demand, both in ARPs and special schools, despite increases in places in recent years. Pressure for placements for pupils now exists in three primary needs: Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Cognitive & Learning, and Social, Emotional and Mental health (SEMH)
- Progression options for pupils attending an ARP are inconsistent meaning that pupils may not be able to progress with their peers – for example ASD provision in the north of the authority has primary provision in Sandy, middle school in Biggleswade, and upper school in Shefford and Stotfold.
- ARP provision is geographically uneven compared to pupil distribution – for example there is no provision in Cranfield and Ampthill and Flitwick and there is only lower/primary provision in Sandy.
- Special school accommodation has increased but still requires further capital investment. Incremental increases in pupil numbers are now more closely matched following a review of the single value top-up in 2022.

Whilst parents supported the Specialist School Places Plan proposals and principals, feedback from consultation by the council included concerns that the number of places forecasted would not be enough and therefore children would lack suitable and local provision. There were also comments identifying the need to make sure schools are funded correctly to be able to provide mainstream inclusion, as well as needing support from Special schools. In response the council committed to revising its forecasts using the latest data available to develop a longer-term plan that also ensures the right provision for the child.

To meet the forecast need, the Special School Places Plan is seeking to expand existing provision and/or create new provision using an annually reviewed and phased approach to 2030. Key to this is the ongoing transition from a three-tier to a two-tier education system across Central Bedfordshire, a shift driven by both local and national priorities. There is a clear political mandate to move to a structure more closely aligned with the rest of the country, where pupils progress from primary to secondary schools. The current three-tier system has been linked to poorer academic outcomes, with data showing that children in Central Bedfordshire often start well in early years but fall into the bottom quartile nationally by the end of Key Stage 2 and remain there through GCSEs and A-Levels. Aligning with a two-tier system is therefore seen as central to raising standards and improving long-term outcomes.

This transition is not only about educational outcomes but also about the sustainability of the school system. A higher number of small schools in the three-tier structure increases financial instability, with forecasts suggesting that over a third of local authority-maintained schools could be in deficit. At the same time, structural change creates opportunities to use existing buildings for specialist and alternative provision, early years, or community services, contributing to cost avoidance and supporting wider needs such as SEND provision.

The council has committed to an evidence-led approach. Pupil forecasts, site capacity, admissions data, and financial modelling are being combined with ongoing discussions with headteachers, academy trusts, governors, councillors, and the Department for Education. There is consideration of many factors including viability of space, transport implications, future housing growth, redundancy costs and reputational risk. The process is designed to be collaborative, with schools engaged through new School Planning Area meetings to shape the detail of transition at a local level.

SEND considerations are a central part of this transition. Moving to a two-tier model allows for earlier and more consistent identification of need, supports inclusion within mainstream schools, and provides opportunities to repurpose sites for specialist provision where required. At the same time, much of Central Bedfordshire is considered deprived in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation barriers to housing and services domain, at least in part as a result of poor public transport links and a dispersed population. Therefore, the impact on transport, access to local schools, and pathways into post-16 provision are being carefully assessed to ensure children with SEND are not disadvantaged.

The council recognises that this is a complex and sensitive change, and that trust with schools and families must be rebuilt through open communication and transparency. By taking a phased and evidence-based approach, the goal is to deliver a more coherent, financially viable, and inclusive education system that improves outcomes for all children.

## Parent and carer views

Members of the SNAP Parent and Carer Forum represent the views of parent carers of children with SEND aged 0-25 years living in Central Bedfordshire and work in partnership with health, education and social care services and support towards raising standards and sharing knowledge and experience. In August 2024 SNAP published their latest Test the Temperature<sup>5</sup> survey report, informed by 297 local parent carers, to monitor progress in parent carer experience of the EHC Plan process. The survey reports an overall and continuing decline in the satisfaction levels of parent carers with the EHC Plan process and in their communication with the EHC Team over the four years the survey has been conducted. Though there were some positive comments about this process and improvements to local authority services (including increased completion rates for EHC Plans within 20-week statutory timescales), reasons for concern, anger and frustration amongst parent carers included:

- The EHC Plan process is slower than it should be and plans can be poorly written.

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<sup>5</sup> Via [SURVEY UPDATES - SNAP PCF - Central Bedfordshire](#) (Accessed 17/10/2025)

- Communications with the EHC Team can be poor, particularly the need to chase for updates, the slowness and poor quality of responses and lack of continuity (e.g. handovers) when staff change
- Many parent carers don't feel listened to and lack the support needed.
- The Annual Review process was of a poor quality, some felt it was rushed with mistakes made, a lack of coproduction and timelines missed, though school involvement in the process was singled out by some for praise.
- Widespread concerns about the EHC Plan audit process, its development and its ability to improve EHC Plans for children and young people. SNAP are working with Central Bedfordshire Council and others to improve this.
- Long waiting times for Bedfordshire Community Health Services, particularly Community Paediatrics and Speech and Language Therapy.
- Waiting times for autism assessment by Bedfordshire and Luton Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services of around 20 months (up from an average of 12 months in July 2023).

A workshop on improving communications and building positive and sustainable relationships with parent carers was held in 2023 with senior managers from Central Bedfordshire Council, the BMLK NHS Integrated Care Board and local health providers. In response SNAP PCF asked that the following 6Cs in Figure 1 below be adopted as a new way for all to work together to improve SEND services. The latest (Summer 2024) Test the Temperature survey report also recommends the following:

- That recommendations from the 2022 and 2023 surveys are started and/or completed.
- That case studies from complaints are used to inform the development of social care practice in a similar way that SNAP PCF have worked with social care teams in workshops to gain insight into the impact negative experiences on parents and working together to improve practice.
- To review the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the EHC Plan team, particularly how the focus on ensuring EHCPs are completed within the statutory 20 weeks is impacting the quality of the plans and the communication with parent carers.
- That new staff interviews focus on employing people who are child-centred, can be empathetic with parent carers and have the right technical knowledge. If the 6C's were part of the interview process, this could help to support this.

Lastly, SNAP PCF comment that if only one recommendation from their previous report could be prioritised, it would be to create a problem-solving task and finish group to review the survey feedback to find solutions and implement them.

**Figure 1** Improving SEND services through shared values and culture change: SNAP PCF 6Cs approach for local Health providers



Source: Summer 2024 Test the Temperature Survey Report<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> [SURVEY UPDATES - SNAP PCF - Central Bedfordshire](#) (Accessed 17/10/2025)

## The local need

As summarised in Table 2 below, in recent years the total numbers of local SEND pupils have increased:

- The number of pupils with EHC plan has more than doubled over the nine-year period from 2015/16 to 2024/25, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR<sup>7</sup>) of 11.9%.
- The number of pupils receiving SEN support increased by 17% over this nine-year period, with a CAGR of 1.8%.

**Table 2** Number of local children and young people by SEND provision type in all schools

Type of support	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2018/ 19	2019/ 20	2020/ 21	2021/ 22	2022/ 23	2023/ 24	2024/ 25
EHC plans (number of pupils)	1,142	1,243	1,306	1,431	1,538	1,722	2,034	2,339	2,775	3,128
SEN support (number of pupils)	4,854	4,966	4,981	5,128	5,201	5,251	5,447	5,777	5,708	5,679
Total special education needs	5,996	6,209	6,287	6,559	6,739	6,973	7,481	8,116	8,483	8,807
Total pupils	43,505	44,403	44,983	45,652	46,192	46,377	47,380	48,483	49,159	49,740

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) accessed 20/08/2025

In Table 3, when compared to the East of England and England averages, the trend and overall percentage of school pupils in Central Bedfordshire with an EHC plan in place is similar and continues to increase. The proportion of pupils receiving SEN support has also increased overall but at a lower rate when compared to the regional and national data. The overall percentages locally also remain lower than the regional and England averages and the latest data suggests a small but steady decline in the last two years. For Central Bedfordshire, the latest data (2024/25) reports that SEN remain more prevalent in male than female pupils and reflect the national proportions too with:

- EHC Plans – 70.7% male pupils (71.4% Eng) & 29.3% female pupils (28.6% Eng)
- SEN support – 61.8% male pupils (61.2% Eng) & 38.2% female pupils (38.8% Eng)

<sup>7</sup> The Compound Annual Growth Rate is the average increase per year over a number of years and gives a more useful measure of change that reflects how each year's change impacts on those that follow.

**Table 3** Local, regional and England percentage of children and young people by SEND provision type\_in all schools

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
<b>% of pupils with EHC plan</b>										
Central Bedfordshire	2.6	2.8	2.9	3.1	3.3	3.7	4.3	4.8	5.6	6.3
East of England	2.8	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.2	3.5	3.8	4.1	4.6	5.1
England	2.8	2.8	2.9	3.1	3.3	3.7	4	4.3	4.8	5.3
<b>% of pupils with SEN support</b>										
Central Bedfordshire	11.2	11.2	11.1	11.2	11.3	11.3	11.5	11.9	11.6	11.4
East of England	10.8	11.0	11.0	11.2	11.5	11.5	11.9	12.3	12.9	13.5
England	11.6	11.6	11.7	11.9	12.1	12.2	12.6	13.0	13.6	14.2

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data accessed 20/08/2025

In Table 4 the numbers of SEND children in state-funded nurseries and independent schools were too small for wider comparison, though there are 57 more pupils in local independent schools on EHC Plans this year compared to last year. The latest data reports that the proportions on EHC Plans in local state-funded primary and secondary schools continue to be slightly higher than the regional and national averages. However, the proportions of pupils requiring SEN support continue to be lower than the regional and national averages for state-funded primary and secondary school pupils. For state-funded alternative provision (AP), the numbers continue to be small but the proportions for those on EHC Plans are similar than the regional average and higher than the national average. For those on SEN support the proportion is far higher than the regional and national averages and alternative provision is explored in more detail below.

**Table 4** SEN provision by schooling for England, East of England and Central Bedfordshire for 2024/25

	% on EHC Plan (number of CBC pupils)			% on SEN support - without an EHC Plan (number of CBC pupils)		
	Eng	EoE	CBC	Eng	EoE	CBC
State-funded nurseries	2.1	1.7	1	16.7	13	13.3
			2 pupils			27 pupils
State-funded primary	3.5	3.5	4.3	14.8	14.2	11.4
			1059 pupils			2778 pupils
State-funded secondary	3.1	3.3	4.6	13.4	12.6	11.8
			1095 pupils			2826 pupils
State-funded AP school	26.3	31.3	28	57.1	43	68
			14 pupils			34 pupils
Independent school	6.5	5	18.5	17.6	17.4	4.3
			60 pupils			14 pupils

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs](#) data for Central Bedfordshire, accessed 20/08/2025

## Primary need

The primary need refers to the main reason that a child requires additional help to learn and develop to meet their potential. There are currently 13 primary needs identified and recorded by education settings. Some children's needs will be covered by one area, for example a blind child with no other conditions, whereas others might cover multiple areas such as an autistic child with sensory issues and learning disabilities. It's also important to understand that while some children will always have SEN, others have shorter term needs that once met will mean that standard education provision will be sufficient for the child to learn and thrive. The 13 primary needs fall under the following broad areas.

## Communication and Interaction

Children and young people with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN) have difficulty in communicating with others. This may be because they have difficulty saying what they want to, understanding what is being said to them or they do not understand or use social rules of communication. The profile for every child with SLCN is different and their needs may change over time. They may have difficulty with one, some or all areas of the different aspects of speech, language or social communication at different times of their lives.

*Speech, Language and Communications Needs* - Pupils with SLCN cover the whole ability range. They may have difficulty in understanding information conveyed through spoken language and they find it hard to understand and/or use words in context in their native language. This is distinct from children whose first language is not English and children with language difficulties related to English as a second language should not be included in this category.

*Autistic Spectrum Condition* - Autistic Spectrum Condition can affect children very differently depending on the extent of their autism. The condition is identified as an SEN when it leads to significant difficulties in the areas of social communication, social interaction, and restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour/interests.

## Cognition and Learning

Learning difficulties is an umbrella term that can be specific, affecting one aspect of learning, or affect multiple aspects and it varies in severity. It includes where children and young people learn at a slower pace than others their age, have difficulty in understanding parts of the curriculum, have difficulties with organisation and memory skills, or have a specific difficulty affecting one particular part of their learning performance such as in literacy or numeracy.

*Specific Learning Difficulties* - include conditions such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Children can be identified as having SEN within this category without a formal diagnosis.

*Moderate Learning Difficulties* – This includes pupils with generalised learning difficulties across all curriculum areas and includes difficulties in adaptive functioning such as communication, social skills, independence, and self-care (IQ between 50 and 70).

*Severe Learning Difficulties* – Children with these needs have significant learning difficulties that mean they achieve less than 50% of age group targets across all areas of education, including adaptive behaviour (IQ less than 50).

*Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties* - In addition to severe learning difficulties, pupils will have other significant difficulties, including physical difficulties, sensory impairment(s) and/or severe medical difficulties. Pupils with PMLD are likely to need sensory stimulation and a curriculum broken down into very small steps.

## Social, emotional, and mental health

Children can have social, emotional, and mental health difficulties at any stage in their development and these can be linked to a specific event in their lives, such as bereavement, trauma, illness, family stresses and being bullied. The presenting problems, therefore, can vary in intensity, frequency, and duration. Children and young people with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties often have difficulty in managing their relationships with other people, are withdrawn, or if they behave in ways that may hinder their and other children's learning, or that have an impact on their health and wellbeing. Social, emotional, and mental health becomes an SEN when the impact of emotional responses has a significant and enduring impact on learning.

They may range from changes in emotional resilience (such as withdrawal or anxiety about attending school/setting) to expressions of underlying stress (such as tearfulness, refusal to engage with learning, self-harming) or more overtly challenging behaviour (such as aggression, defiance, antisocial acts). Some emotional and mental health needs can be linked to longer term issues such as learning problems, difficulties with social skills, prolonged family disruption or medical conditions such as Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Condition (ADHC), which may become identified as the primary need.

## Sensory and/or physical disabilities

Some children and young people require special educational provision because they have a disability which prevents or hinders them from accessing and making full use of the educational facilities generally provided. This category includes:

- Visual impairments, from partial sight through to blindness. Pupils may require adaptations to their environment and/or different learning materials
- Hearing impairments, from mild hearing loss to profound deafness
- Multi-sensory impairment (MSI) – visual and hearing impairments combined

- Physical disabilities that require on-going support

## Primary need prevalence

Table 5 summarises the recent trends in primary needs identified in children and young people across Central Bedfordshire. Notable trends in the last nine years include more than 2500 more children and young people receiving SEN and whilst some primary needs have remained relatively stable, others have greatly increased in number. Notably the local populations identified with Autistic Spectrum Conditions, Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Speech, Language and Communication needs have each more than doubled in size over the last nine years and continue to increase. Populations with Specific and Moderate Learning Difficulties also remain high.

**Table 5** Trend in numbers of children and young people in all state-funded schools<sup>8</sup> receiving SEN provision in Central Bedfordshire by primary need

Primary need	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2018/ 19	2019/ 20	2020/ 21	2021/ 22	2022/ 23	2023/ 24	2024/ 25
Autistic Spectrum Condition	659	719	794	874	1003	1039	1168	1356	1574	1686
Hearing Impairment	93	94	93	106	115	122	118	116	117	117
Moderate Learning Difficulty	1254	1237	1033	996	1190	1176	1214	1220	1161	1079
Multi- Sensory Impairment	17	17	25	30	30	32	37	38	34	33
Other Difficulty/Disability	248	255	259	257	24	28	49	71	93	59
Physical Disability	144	152	178	162	227	205	220	220	213	205
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	46	45	46	40	37	35	33	33	29	27
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	581	619	652	671	129	31	35	73	47	69
Severe Learning Difficulty	208	230	226	219	197	190	182	161	136	67
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	1040	1095	1145	1258	1499	1614	1821	2054	2174	2386
Specific Learning Difficulty	931	866	852	891	1051	1139	1068	1139	1184	1189
Speech, Language and Communications needs	664	765	861	930	1117	1262	1404	1526	1631	1728
Visual Impairment	44	41	49	50	56	57	59	65	70	70
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>5929</b>	<b>6135</b>	<b>6213</b>	<b>6484</b>	<b>6675</b>	<b>6930</b>	<b>7408</b>	<b>8072</b>	<b>8463</b>	<b>8715</b>

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 20/08/2025

<sup>8</sup> All state funded schools = state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools and state-funded alternative provision schools. It does not include independent schools

Table 6 splits the most recent primary need data by the type of SEN provided across the local state-funded school population. For those pupils with an EHC plan, the greatest primary needs were Autistic Spectrum Conditions (35%) followed by Social, Emotional and Mental Health (21%) and Speech, Language and Communication (20%) needs. These local proportions are similar to or slightly higher than the regional and national averages for pupils with an EHC Plan, as summarised in Table 6.

**Table 6** Primary need for all state-funded schools by SEN provision in Central Bedfordshire, East of England and England in 2024/25

Primary need	CBC EHC plan (no)	CBC EHC (%)	EoE EHC (%)	Eng EHC (%)	CBC SEN support (without EHC plan) (no)	CBC SEN (%)	EoE SEN (%)	Eng SEN (%)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	1073	35.0	31.2	33.6	613	10.8	10.4	9.7
Downs Syndrome	16	0.5	0.4	0.3	2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hearing Impairment	40	1.3	1.9	1.4	77	1.4	1.4	1.5
Moderate Learning Difficulty	239	7.8	9.6	7.8	840	14.8	12.1	14.4
Multi-sensory impairment	17	0.6	0.4	0.3	16	0.3	0.2	0.3
Other difficulty or disability	24	0.8	1.9	2.0	35	0.6	3.6	3.5
Physical Disability	87	2.8	3.4	3.3	118	2.1	1.9	1.8
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	21	0.7	1.7	2.2	6	0.1	0.1	0.1
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	69	1.2	6.1	4.9
Severe Learning Difficulty	67	2.2	9.0	7.0	no data	no data	0.1	0.2
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	657	21.4	17.0	16.0	1729	30.5	26.1	23.6
Specific Learning Difficulty	182	5.9	5.3	4.3	1007	17.8	16.2	13.6
Speech, Language and Communications needs	625	20.4	17.3	20.7	1103	19.5	21.0	25.7
Visual Impairment	20	0.7	0.9	0.9	50	0.9	0.7	0.8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3068</b>				<b>5665</b>			

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data for Central Bedfordshire, accessed 21/08/2025)

In Table 6, for those pupils receiving SEN support the greatest primary needs were Social, Emotional and Mental Health (31%), Speech, Language and Communication (19%) and Specific (18%) and Moderate (15%) Learning Difficulties. These local

proportions sometimes differed from regional and national averages. Whilst the percentage of local pupils receiving SEN support for Autistic Spectrum Condition is similar, the percentages with Specific Learning Difficulties and Social, Emotional and Mental Health support needs are higher than regional and national averages. Further, the local percentage of pupils with Speech, Language and Communications needs (19%) is lower than the regional (21%) and national (26%) averages.

## Uncertain impacts of COVID-19 pandemic

Across the age ranges reported below it's not possible to measure the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions on the prevalence of primary needs of the local SEND population. The data reported below have not been adjusted for the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for the peak periods of 2019/20 and 2020/21, and therefore reflect the restrictions and changes to services during these periods and should be treated with caution. For example, sometimes the numbers of pupils are too small to establish whether there is a significant difference associated with the pandemic. Reductions in prevalence during the pandemic periods might reflect reduced access to services, including those to diagnose primary needs. Changes for primary needs relating to Social, Emotional and Mental Health, Speech Language and Communications, Autistic Spectrum Condition and Learning Difficulties are sometimes noticeable but must also be interpreted with caution because it can be hard to separate COVID-19 from other factors influencing primary needs. Lastly, from 2021/22 any increases in prevalence might reflect services catching up with backlogs and re-aligning with pre-pandemic trends. However, caution is also needed here because other factors could have an influence, particularly where changes to services and support have taken place. The following sections now break down primary need by age.

## Early Years

In 2024/25, 192 local children aged 4 years and under were identified with SEN, of which 20 had EHC plans and 172 received SEN Support and their primary needs are summarised in Table 7. Here the numbers on EHC Plans are very small but the proportions by primary need are generally similar to those reported across the East of England region and England. For SEN support, the numbers of children are greater but still small and generally similar across many primary needs when compared to regional and national averages. Notable differences to regional/national averages include no reported local children with Severe or Profound Learning Difficulties and a higher local proportion with Speech, Language and Communications needs.

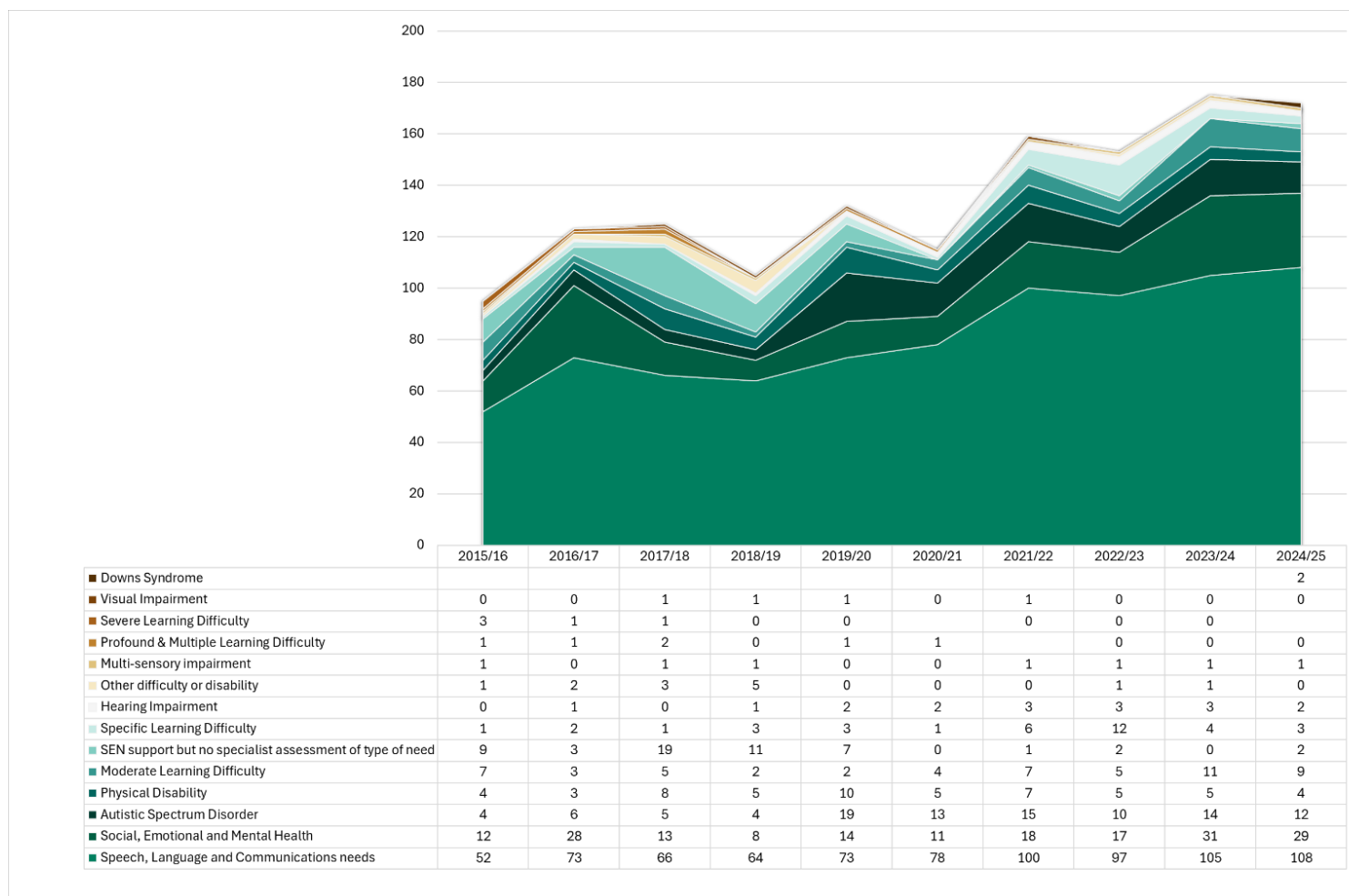
**Table 7** Primary need for state-funded Early Years by SEN provision in Central Bedfordshire, East of England and England in 2024/25

Primary need	CBC EHC plan (no)	CBC EHC (%)	EoE EHC (%)	Eng EHC (%)	CBC SEN support (without EHC plan) (no)	CBC SEN (%)	EoE SEN (%)	Eng SEN (%)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	4	0.4	0.3	0.3	12	2	1.5	1.9
Downs Syndrome	1	6.3	1	4	2	100	45.8	48.4
Hearing Impairment	2	5	1.4	1	2	2.6	1.7	2.2
Moderate Learning Difficulty	0	0	0	0.2	9	1.1	0.5	0.3
Multi-sensory impairment	0	0	1.1	1.4	1	6.3	1	2
Other difficulty or disability	0	0	0.8	0.7	0	0	1.1	1.3
Physical Disability	0	0	0.9	1.1	4	3.4	2.6	3.2
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	1	4.8	1.8	1.8	0	0	6.2	23.2
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	2.9	1.8	1.7
Severe Learning Difficulty	0	0	0.2	0.4	no data	no data	16.2	12.2
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	2	0.3	0.1	0.1	29	1.7	0.6	0.7
Specific Learning Difficulty	1	0.5	0.9	0.5	3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Speech, Language and Communications needs	9	1.4	0.8	1	108	9.8	5	6.4
Visual Impairment	0	0	0.9	1	0	0	1.5	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>				<b>172</b>			

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#), data for Central Bedfordshire, accessed 28/08/2025

Further data analysis for Early years children on EHC support is not possible because the numbers remained at or below 25 in recent years but Figure 2 below summarises the recent trend in primary need for those on SEN support. Here small numbers also make it hard to identify trends with any confidence, but the number of Early Years children with Speech, Language and Communication primary support needs has more than doubled in the last nine years and continues to increase.

**Figure 2** Number of Early Years children receiving SEN provision by primary need in Early Years



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data for Central Bedfordshire, accessed 28/08/2025  
(Note: blank cell = no data available)

## Reception

In 2024/25, the total number of children with SEND in reception in Central Bedfordshire was 425, with 136 children on an EHC plan and 289 children receiving SEN Support. As summarised in Table 8 below, for those on EHC Plans the numbers of children for some primary needs are small. For those with greater numbers, the proportions for Autistic Spectrum Conditions and Speech, Language and Communication needs are similar to those across the East of England and England. For SEN support, the numbers of children are also small and similar across many primary needs when compared to regional and national averages. One notable difference is a slightly higher proportion of local children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs compared to regional and national averages.

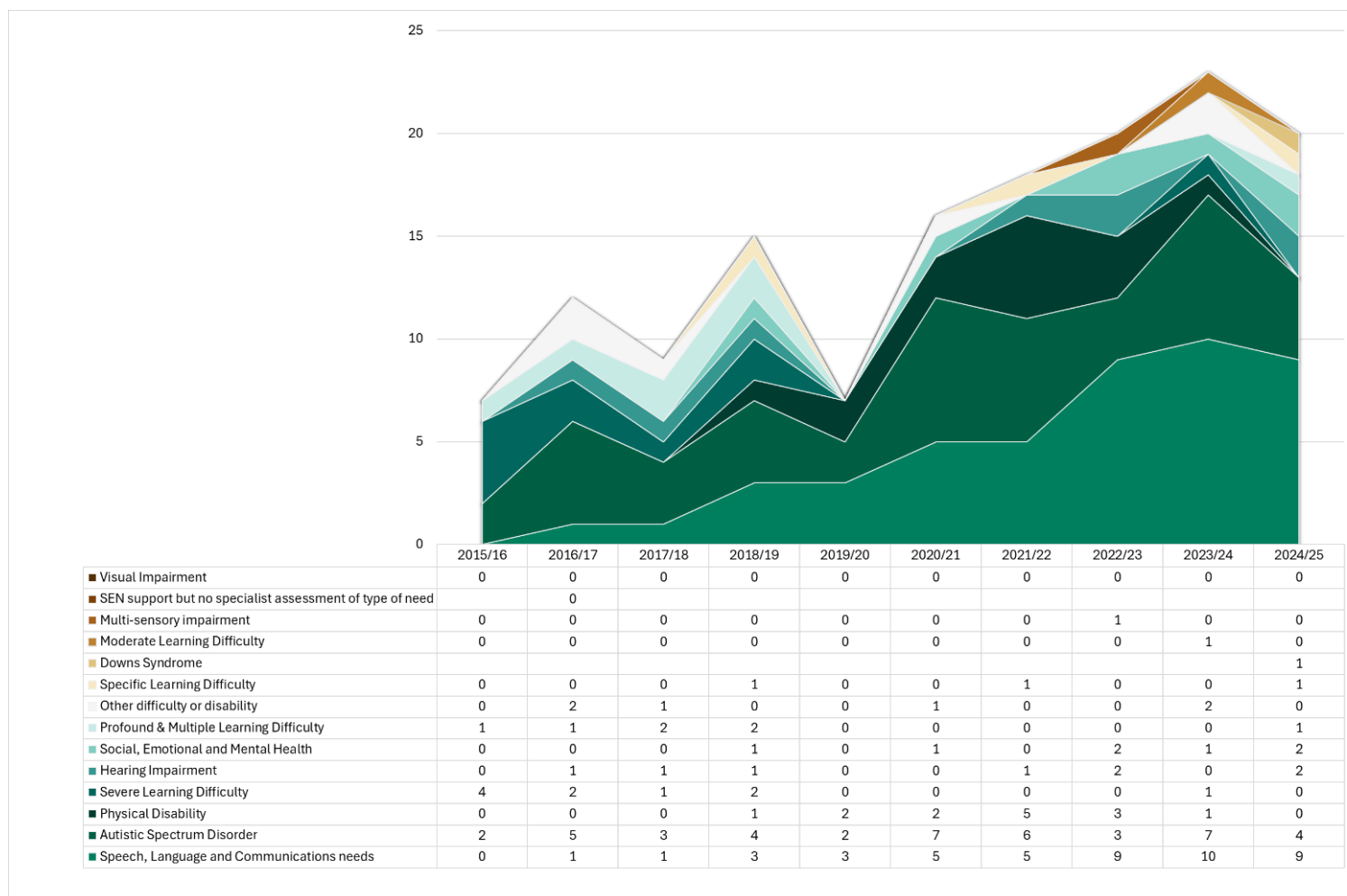
**Table 8** Primary need for state-funded Reception by SEN provision in Central Bedfordshire, East of England and England in 2024/25

Primary need	CBC EHC plan (no)	CBC EHC (%)	EoE EHC (%)	Eng EHC (%)	CBC SEN support (without EHC plan) (no)	CBC SEN (%)	EoE SEN (%)	Eng SEN (%)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	51	4.8	6.2	5.8	25	4.1	6.5	5.0
Downs Syndrome	3	18.8	18.0	19.1	0	0.0	33.3	29.3
Hearing Impairment	0	0.0	3.6	4.6	4	5.2	4.4	4.8
Moderate Learning Difficulty	5	2.1	1.5	1.4	12	1.4	1.4	1.2
Multi-sensory impairment	1	5.9	2.2	3.7	2	12.5	3.1	4.6
Other difficulty or disability	0	0.0	3.6	3.8	1	2.9	3.2	2.9
Physical Disability	4	4.6	4.7	4.3	6	5.1	4.7	5.2
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	1	4.8	4.6	5.5	0	0.0	20.0	12.1
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0.0	5.7	4.8
Severe Learning Difficulty	2	3.0	3.1	3.7	no data	no data	13.4	9.1
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	9	1.4	0.9	1.0	85	4.9	3.2	2.9
Specific Learning Difficulty	2	1.1	3.4	3.4	6	0.6	0.7	0.7
Speech, Language and Communications needs	56	9.0	8.5	9.0	144	13.1	12.7	12.5
Visual Impairment	2	10.0	4.0	3.7	4	8.0	4.3	3.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>				<b>289</b>			

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

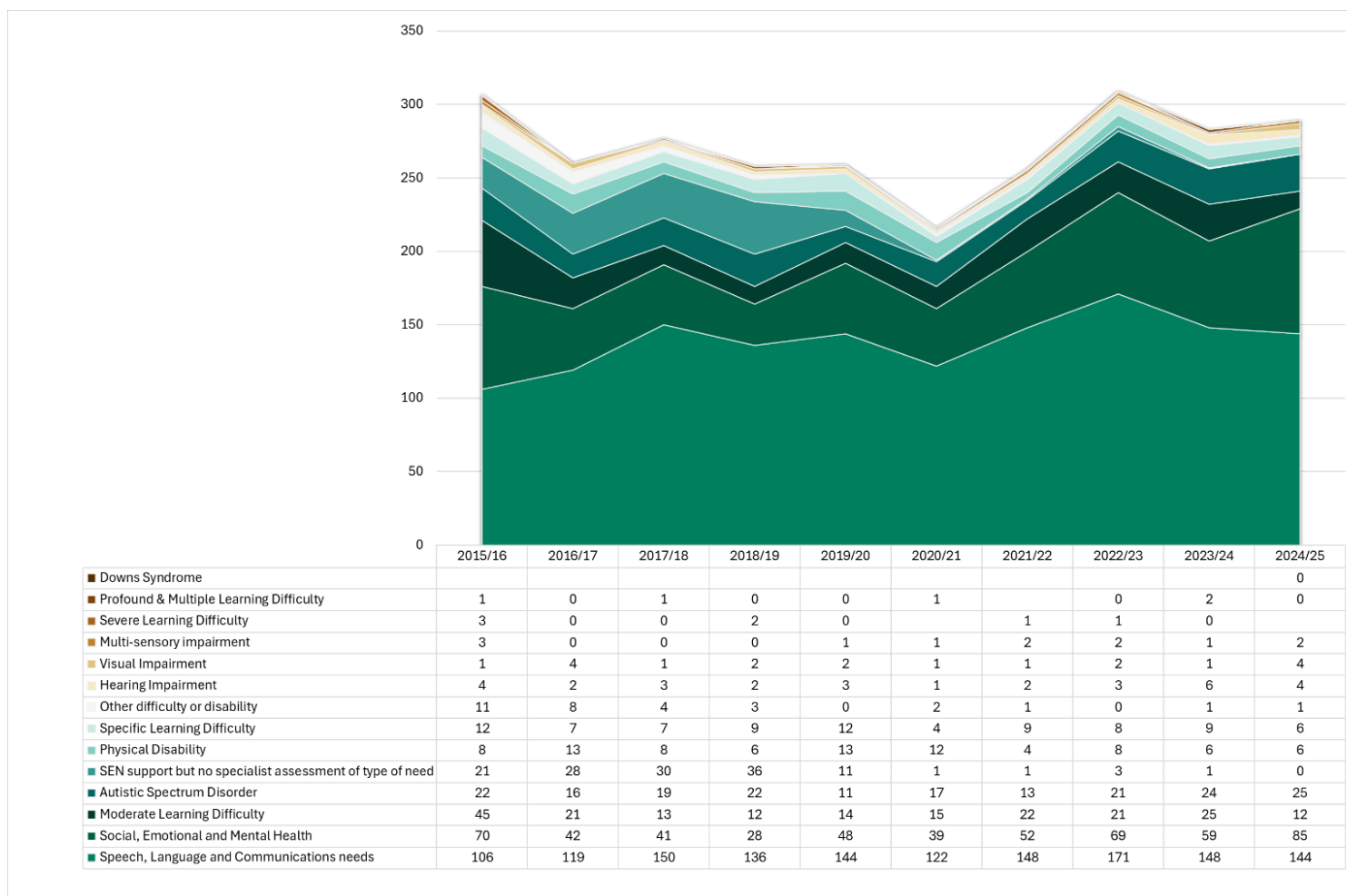
Further data analysis for Reception children on EHC Plan is summarised in Figure 3 below. Whilst the numbers are small, the increasing numbers of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders are clear. It is also notable that the numbers of children with Speech, Language and Communication needs remains high but has fallen in the last year. With similar analysis for SEN support children in Figure 4 below, most notable are increases in the numbers of children with Social, Emotional and Support Needs and the continued predominance of children with Speech, Language and Communication needs.

**Figure 3** The number of children on EHC Plan by primary need in Reception, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025) (Note: blank cell = no data available)

**Figure 4** The number of children with SEN support by primary need in Reception, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025) (Note: blank cell = no data available)

## Key Stage 1 (Years 1-2)

In 2024/25 the number of local SEND children in Key Stage 1 was 1,318 with 442 with an EHC plan and 876 children receiving SEN Support. As summarised in Table 9 below, for those on EHC Plans the numbers of children by some primary needs are small. For those with greater numbers, the proportions for Autistic Spectrum Conditions are lower than regional and national averages but for Speech, Language and Communications needs the local proportion is higher with the same comparison. For SEN support, the numbers of children are also small and similar across many primary needs when compared to regional and national averages. However, notable differences to regional and national averages are higher proportions of local children with Moderate Learning Difficulties and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs.

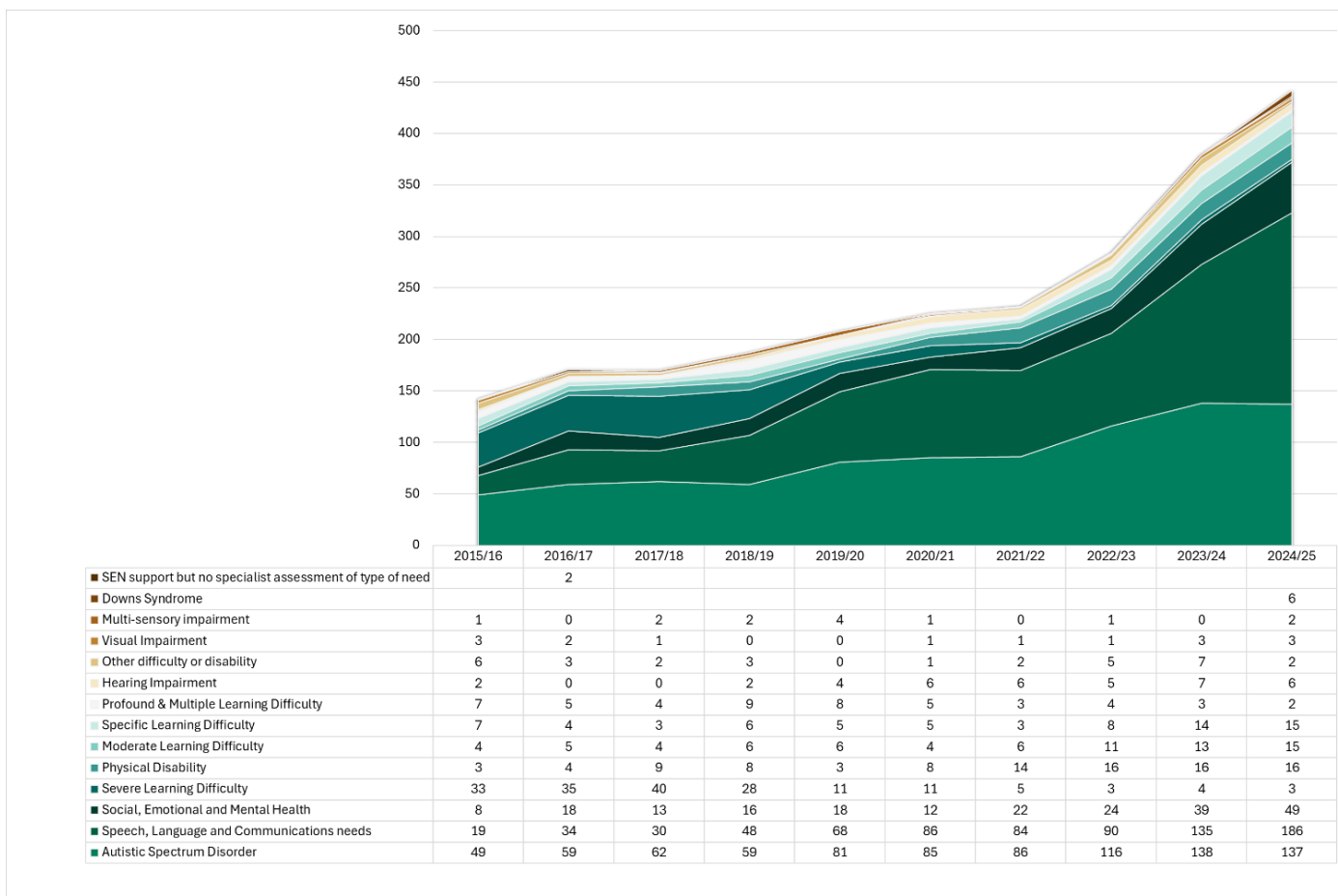
**Table 9** Primary need for state-funded Key Stage 1 by SEN provision in Central Bedfordshire, East of England and England in 2024/25

Primary need	CBC EHC plan (no)	CBC EHC (%)	EoE EHC (%)	Eng EHC (%)	CBC SEN support (without EHC plan) (no)	CBC SEN (%)	EoE SEN (%)	Eng SEN (%)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	137	12.8	17.0	15.5	75	12.2	11.3	10.8
Downs Syndrome	6	37.5	24.0	21.1	0	0.0	8.3	12.9
Hearing Impairment	6	15.0	12.0	11.4	12	15.6	15.6	15.0
Moderate Learning Difficulty	15	6.3	4.9	4.7	133	15.8	10.7	9.4
Multi-sensory impairment	2	11.8	14.4	13.4	2	12.5	12.1	14.5
Other difficulty or disability	2	8.3	12.1	10.5	4	11.4	11.1	9.5
Physical Disability	16	18.4	13.4	12.5	16	13.6	14.3	13.4
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	2	9.5	15.2	13.9	3	50.0	26.2	14.2
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	4.3	18.5	17.1
Severe Learning Difficulty	3	4.5	11.6	11.4	no data	no data	14.5	12.1
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	49	7.5	6.2	6.5	253	14.6	12.5	12.0
Specific Learning Difficulty	15	8.2	7.8	7.7	56	5.6	4.3	4.2
Speech, Language and Communications needs	186	29.8	21.1	21.6	315	28.6	28.3	26.6
Visual Impairment	3	15.0	9.7	9.0	4	8.0	11.6	11.4
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>442</b>				<b>876</b>			

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

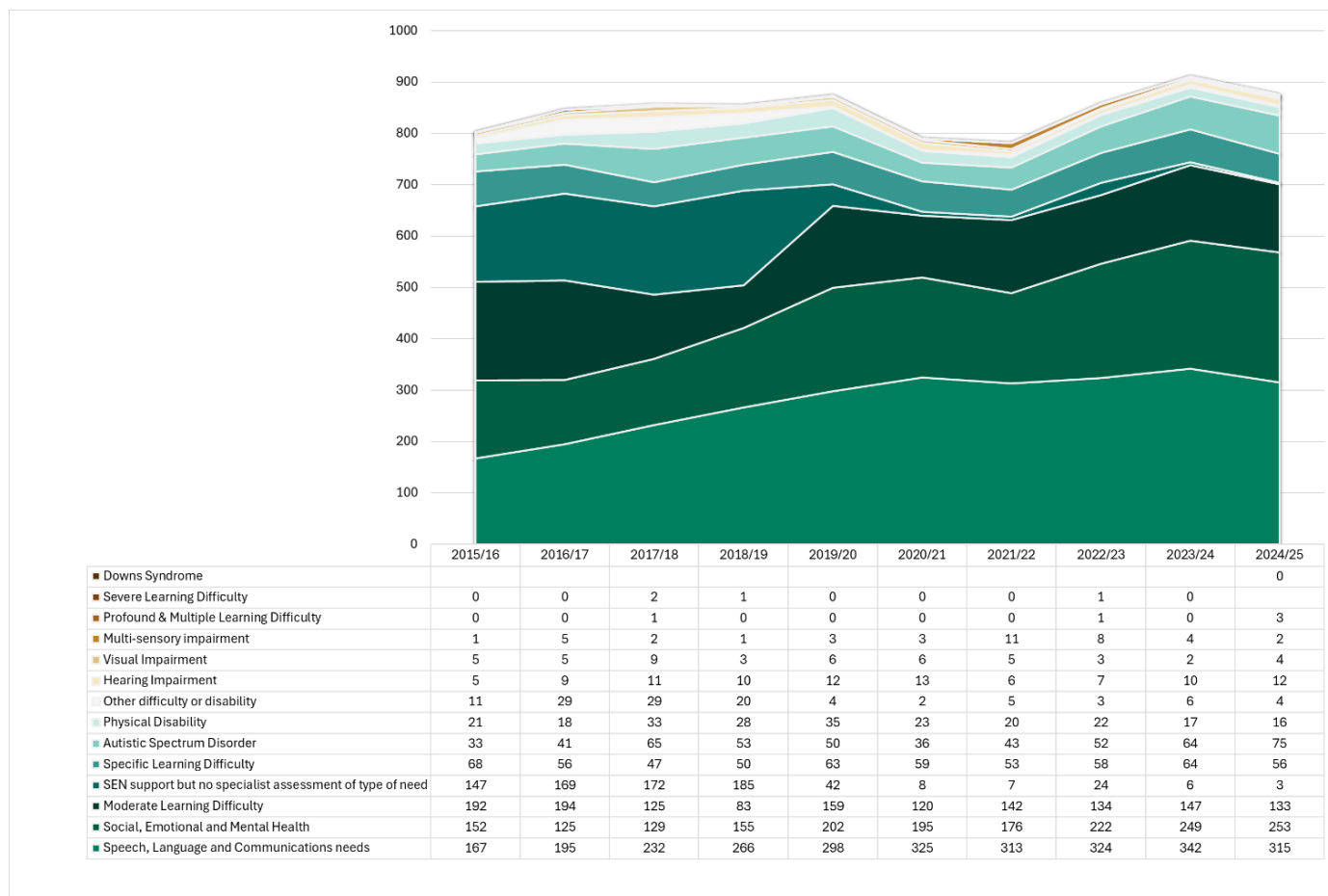
Further analysis for KS1 children on EHC Plans is summarised in Figure 5 below. Whilst the numbers are small for many needs, the increasing numbers of children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health and Speech, Language and Communication needs are clear, whilst needs relating to Autistic Spectrum Disorders remain high. Similar analysis for SEN Support children is summarised in Figure 6 below. The numbers are small for some needs and remain steady for others. Whilst the number of local children with Speech, Language and Communication has nearly doubled in the last nine years and remains high it decreased in the last year. Notably, the numbers of children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs continue to increase but at a lower rate than in previous years.

**Figure 5** The number of children on EHC Plan by primary need in Key Stage 1, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025) (Note: blank cell = no data available)

**Figure 6** Trend in the number of local children on SEN support by primary need in KS1, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025) (Note: blank cell = no data available)

## Key stage 2 (Years 3-6)

In 2024/25, the number of local KS2 children identified with SEND was 3,036, with 986 on an EHC plan in place and 2,050 receiving SEN Support. In Table 10 below, for those on EHC Plans the numbers of children by some primary needs is small. For more prevalent needs including Autistic Spectrum Conditions, Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Speech, Language and Communication needs, the proportions are similar to those across the East of England and England. For SEN support, the proportions of children for most needs were generally similar to regional and national averages. One notable difference were higher proportions of local children with Moderate Learning Difficulties (51%) when compared to the national average (45%), though regional levels were similar (48%).

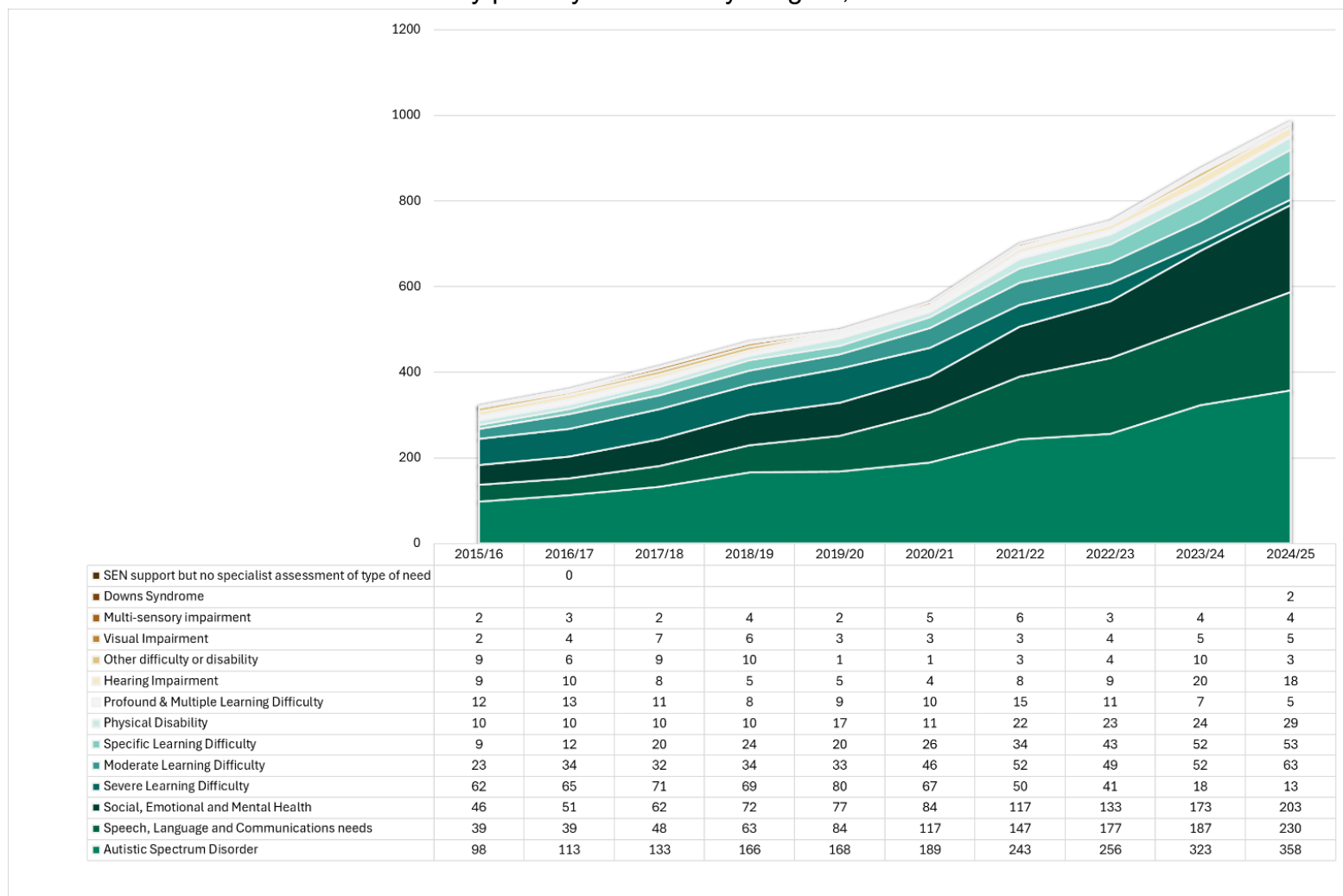
**Table 10** Primary need for state-funded Key Stage 2 by SEN provision in Central Bedfordshire, East of England and England in 2024/25

Primary need	CBC EHC plan (no)	CBC EHC (%)	EoE EHC (%)	Eng EHC (%)	CBC SEN support (without EHC plan) (no)	CBC SEN (%)	EoE SEN (%)	Eng SEN (%)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	358	33.4	32.0	31.5	184	30.0	29.3	28.8
Downs Syndrome	2	12.5	32.0	31.6	0	0.0	8.3	8.4
Hearing Impairment	18	45.0	31.6	30.3	26	33.8	30.5	30.7
Moderate Learning Difficulty	63	26.4	26.6	26.9	432	51.4	48.3	45.3
Multi-sensory impairment	4	23.5	34.8	33.6	8	50.0	42.9	36.6
Other difficulty or disability	3	12.5	31.0	29.2	9	25.7	31.6	31.4
Physical Disability	29	33.3	30.3	31.1	32	27.1	31.6	31.7
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	5	23.8	28.5	29.6	1	16.7	26.2	22.2
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	31	44.9	49.1	46.7
Severe Learning Difficulty	13	19.4	32.5	28.5	no data	no data	31.8	33.3
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	203	30.9	31.8	31.4	573	33.1	35.9	35.7
Specific Learning Difficulty	53	29.1	27.4	27.5	341	33.9	34.2	33.3
Speech, Language and Communications needs	230	36.8	36.1	36.5	402	36.4	36.4	36.4
Visual Impairment	5	25.0	34.6	29.7	11	22.0	30.7	30.8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>986</b>				<b>2050</b>			

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

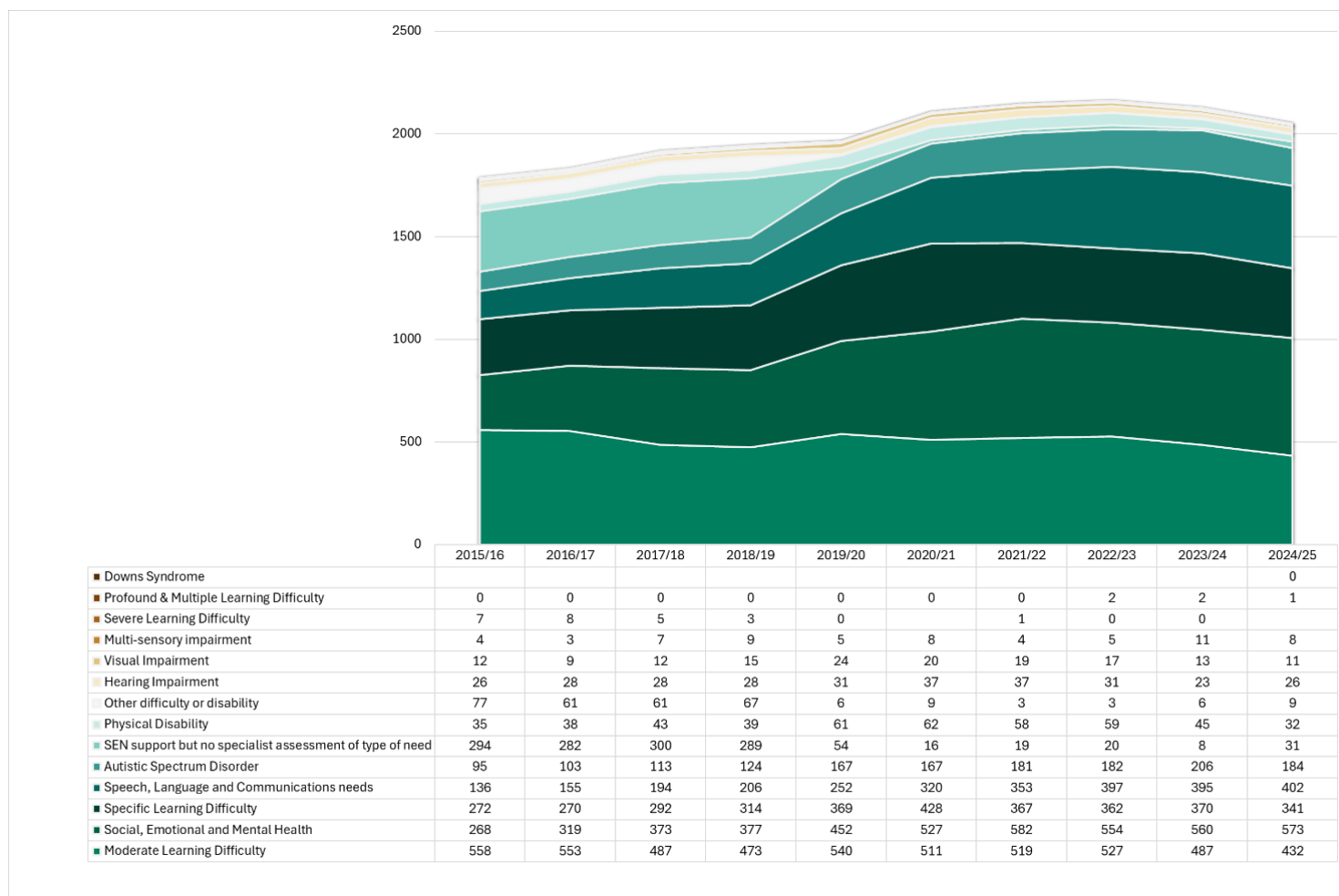
Further analysis for KS2 children on EHC Plans is summarised in Figure 7 below. Whilst the numbers are small for many primary needs, as at Key Stage 1, the increasing numbers of children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs, Speech, Language and Communication needs and Autistic Spectrum Conditions are clear. Further, whilst the overall numbers of children on EHC Plans with Moderate Learning Difficulties continues to increase, the recent decrease in the numbers of children with Severe Learning Difficulties continues. Similar analysis for KS2 children on SEN Support is summarised in Figure 8 below. The numbers are small for some needs but others are much higher, though falling in the most recent year (e.g. Autistic Spectrum Conditions). Numbers of children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health and Speech, Language and Communication needs remain high.

**Figure 7** The number of children on EHC Plan by primary need in Key Stage 2, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025) (Note: blank cell = no data available)

**Figure 8** Trend in the number of local children on SEN support by primary need in Key Stage 2, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025) (Note: blank cell = no data available)

## Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9)

In 2024/25, 2,239 local children were identified with SEND at KS3, 801 with an EHC plan in place and 1,438 receiving SEN Support. As summarised in Table 11 below, for EHC Plans the numbers by some primary needs are small but the proportions are comparable to/below regional and national averages. Notable exceptions are Severe Learning Difficulties, with local proportions above regional/national averages and Speech, Language and Communication needs with proportions below regional and national levels. For SEN support, the numbers of children at KS3 with some primary needs are small but similar to regional/national averages. Notable differences are higher local proportions with Physical Disabilities and Visual Impairments compared to the regional/national average.

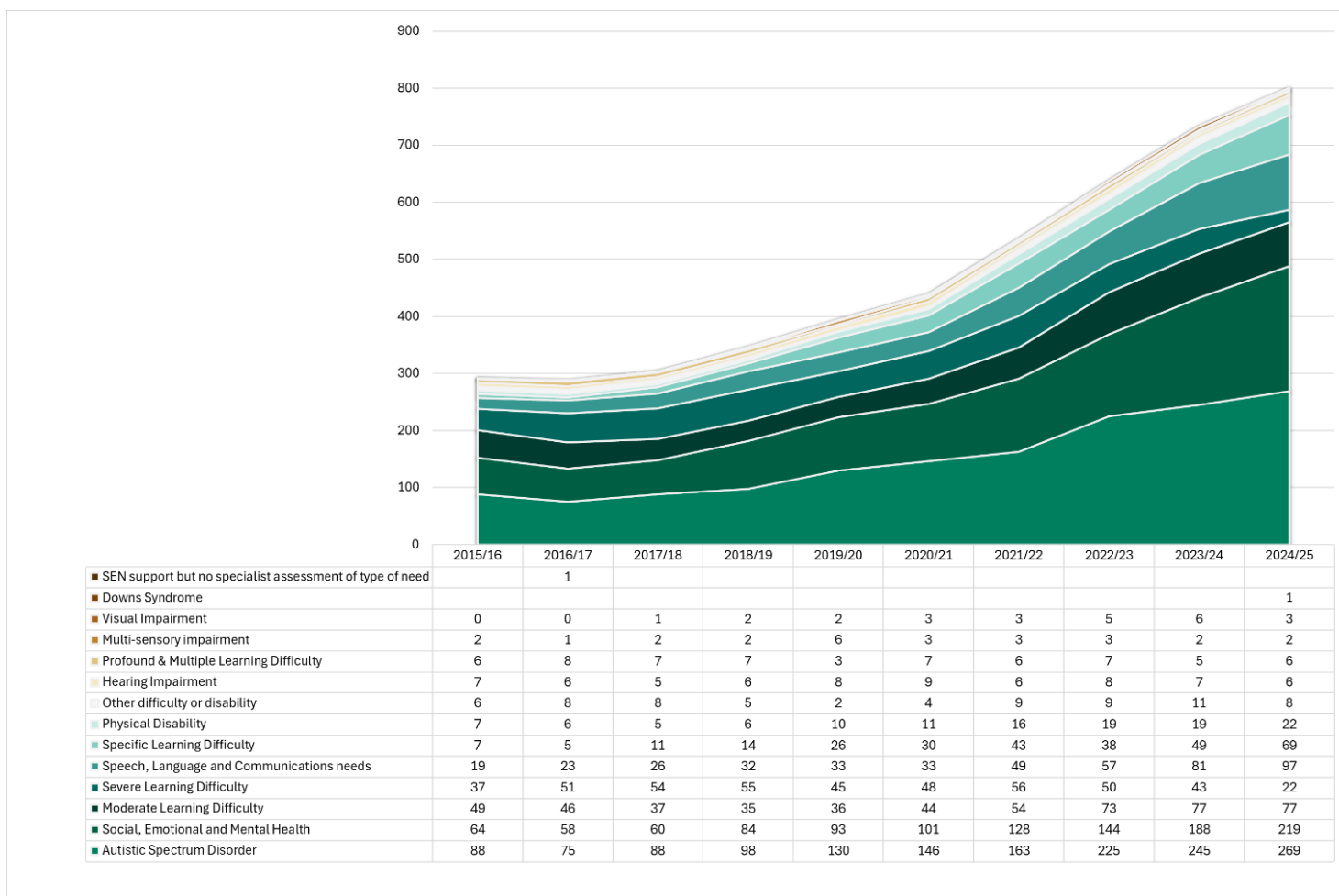
**Table 11** Primary need for state-funded Key Stage 3 by SEN provision in Central Bedfordshire, East of England and England in 2024/25

Primary need	CBC EHC plan (no)	CBC EHC (%)	EoE EHC (%)	Eng EHC (%)	CBC SEN support (without EHC plan) (no)	CBC SEN (%)	EoE SEN (%)	Eng SEN (%)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	269	25.1	25.3	25.8	188	30.7	29.5	30.5
Downs Syndrome	1	6.3	13.0	14.9	0	0.0	4.2	0.4
Hearing Impairment	6	15.0	26.4	28.1	16	20.8	26.1	25.0
Moderate Learning Difficulty	77	32.2	37.5	36.3	191	22.7	24.5	27.2
Multi-sensory impairment	2	11.8	25.4	27.4	2	12.5	26.3	23.9
Other difficulty or disability	8	33.3	26.9	30.3	10	28.6	28.4	30.6
Physical Disability	22.0	25.3	25.9	26.0	44	37.3	24.7	25.0
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	6	28.6	21.5	20.2	1	16.7	7.7	19.0
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	27	39.1	17.8	19.3
Severe Learning Difficulty	22	32.8	24.7	23.9	no data	no data	12.3	21.0
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	219	33.3	36.6	34.4	477	27.6	27.5	27.8
Specific Learning Difficulty	69	37.9	36.4	36.7	367	36.4	33.0	34.5
Speech, Language and Communications needs	97	15.5	20.8	19.4	97	8.8	11.5	11.7
Visual Impairment	3	15.0	26.7	28.7	18	36.0	27.5	28.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>801</b>				<b>1438</b>			

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

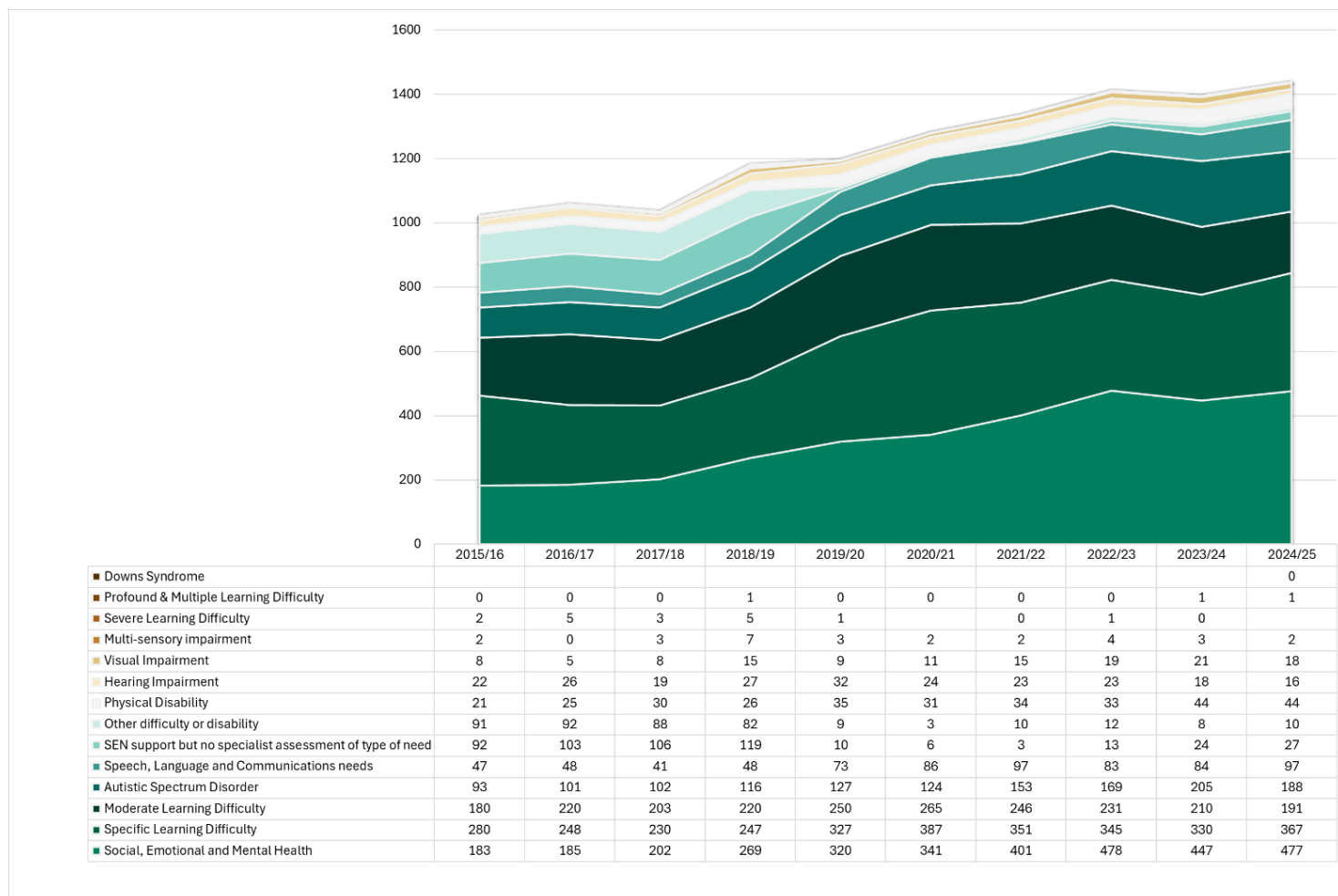
Further analysis for KS 3 children on EHC Plans is summarised in Figure 9 below. Whilst the numbers are small for many needs, as at KS1 and KS2 there are more children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Autistic Spectrum Conditions. More children with Speech, Language and Communication needs and Specific Learning Difficulties are also reported, though, as at KS2, the last year has seen a decrease in Severe Learning Difficulties. Similar analysis for KS3 children on SEN Support is summarised in Figure 10 below. The numbers are small for some primary needs and remain steady. For Moderate Learning Difficulties and Autistic Spectrum Conditions the numbers are high but decreasing. Recent data also reports increases in Speech, Language and Communication needs, Specific Learning Difficulties and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs.

**Figure 9** The number of children on EHC Plan by primary need in Key Stage 3, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025) (Note: blank cell = no data available)

**Figure 10** Trend in the number of local children on SEN support by primary need in Key Stage 3, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025) (Note: blank cell = no data available)

## Key stage 4 (Years 10-11)

In 2024/25, the number of local children identified with SEND at KS4 was 1,239, with 500 with an EHC plan and 739 children receiving SEN Support. As in Table 12 below, for those on EHC Plans the numbers of children by some primary needs are relatively small but the proportions are comparable to or below regional/national averages. Notable exceptions are Autistic Spectrum Disorders at levels above the regional/national average, whilst Speech, Language and Communication Needs proportions are below regional/national averages. For SEN support, the numbers at KS4 with some primary needs are relatively small but at levels similar to regional/national averages. One notable exception was Moderate Learning Difficulties, a need with a lower proportion than regional/national averages.

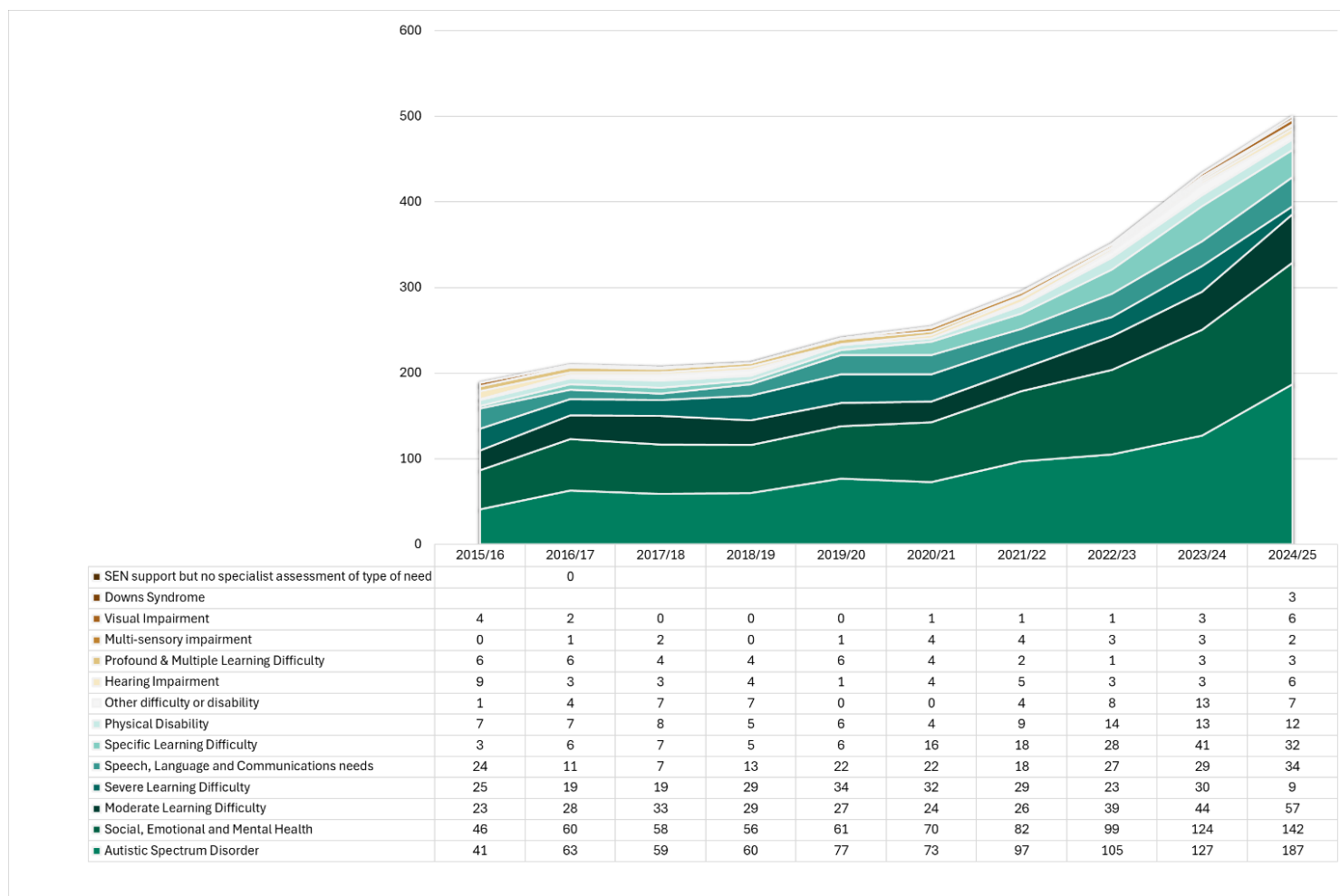
**Table 12** Primary need for state-funded Key Stage 4 by SEN provision in Central Bedfordshire, East of England and England in 2024/25

Primary need	CBC EHC plan (no)	CBC EHC (%)	EoE EHC (%)	Eng EHC (%)	CBC SEN support (without EHC plan) (no)	CBC SEN (%)	EoE SEN (%)	Eng SEN (%)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	187	17.4	14.7	15.1	104	17.0	16.7	18.2
Downs Syndrome	3	18.8	7.0	4.7	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hearing Impairment	6	15.0	19.4	17.9	14	18.2	16.2	17.1
Moderate Learning Difficulty	57	23.8	22.5	23.3	61	7.3	13.1	15.2
Multi-sensory impairment	2	11.8	14.4	14.9	1	6.3	11.4	14.9
Other difficulty or disability	7	29.2	21.7	20.3	9	25.7	17.3	19.3
Physical Disability	12	13.8	16.7	17.0	13	11.0	17.0	16.7
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	3	14.3	12.4	13.4	1	16.7	13.8	8.6
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	7.2	6.4	8.6
Severe Learning Difficulty	9	13.4	14.9	16.3	no data	no data	10.1	10.7
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	142	21.6	22.5	24.2	283	16.4	17.7	18.5
Specific Learning Difficulty	32	17.6	20.4	20.1	208	20.7	22.3	22.1
Speech, Language and Communications needs	34	5.4	10.9	10.1	30	2.7	5.4	5.7
Visual Impairment	6	30.0	18.2	19.6	10	20.0	17.5	18.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>				<b>739</b>			

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

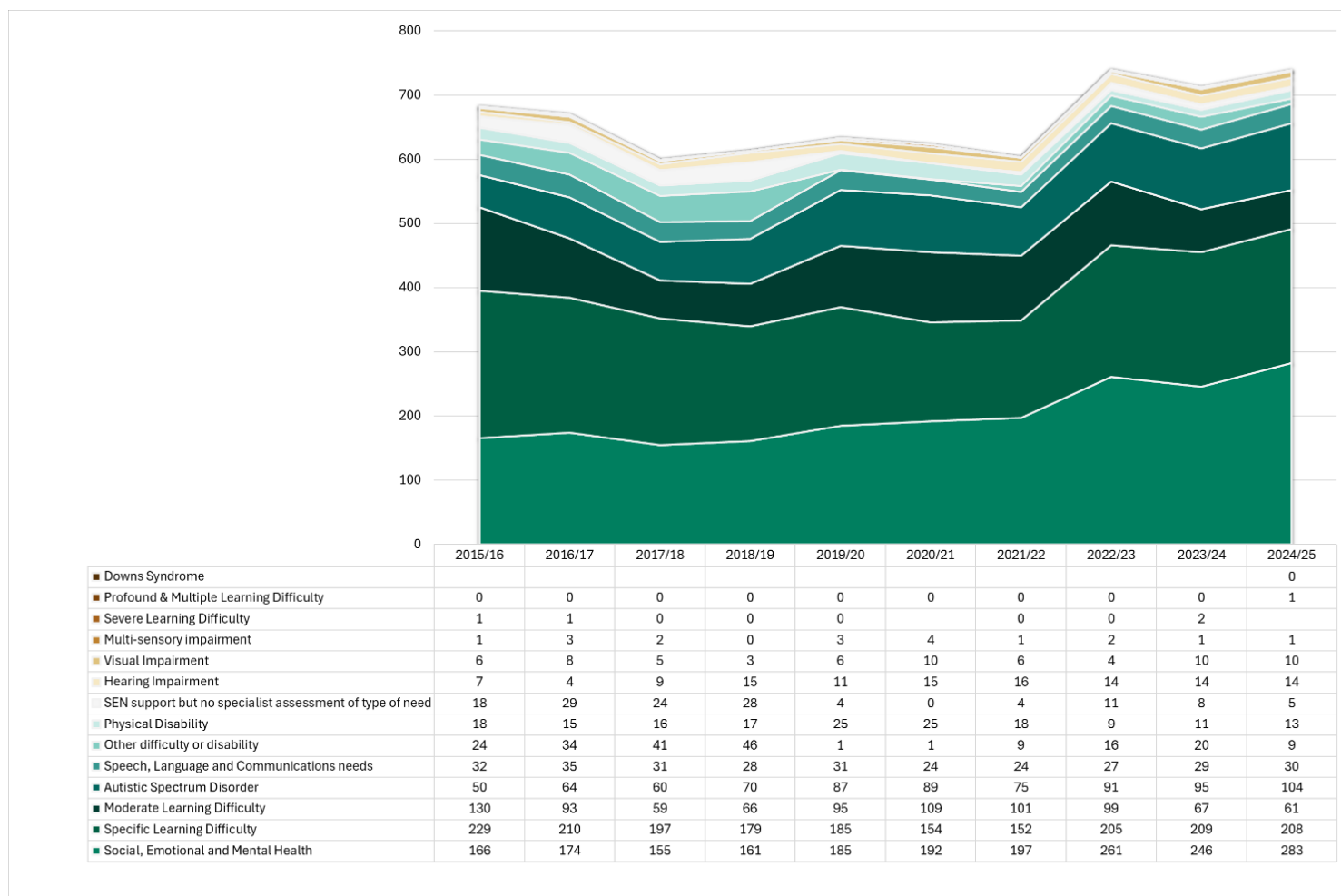
Further analysis for KS4 children and young people on EHC Plans is summarised in Figure 11 below. Whilst the numbers are small for many needs, increasing numbers of children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Autistic Spectrum Conditions are clear. Further data analysis for KS4 children on SEN Support is summarised in Figure 12 below. The numbers are small for some primary needs and remain steady. The numbers of children with Moderate Learning Difficulties are higher but have continued to decrease in the last few years. However, the numbers with Autistic Spectrum Conditions and Social, Emotional and Mental Health continue to increase, whilst numbers with Specific Learning Difficulties remain high but steady.

**Figure 11** The number of children on EHC Plan by primary need in Key Stage 4, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data for Central Bedfordshire, accessed 28/08/2025.  
 (Note: blank cell = no data available)

**Figure 12** Trend in the number of local children on SEN support by primary need in Key Stage 4, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025) (Note: blank cell = no data available)

## College Years (Years 12-14) and transition

In 2024/25, there were 284 young people receiving SEND provision in years 12 to 14 in Central Bedfordshire, of whom 183 had an EHC plan in place and 101 were receiving SEN Support. As summarised in Table 13 below, for those on EHC Plans the numbers of young people by some primary needs are relatively small but the proportions are often similar to regional and national averages. Two exceptions are the proportions of young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Severe Learning Difficulties, which both remain above the regional/national average. For SEN support, the numbers of young people in College years/transition with primary needs remains small but at levels similar to or below regional/national averages.

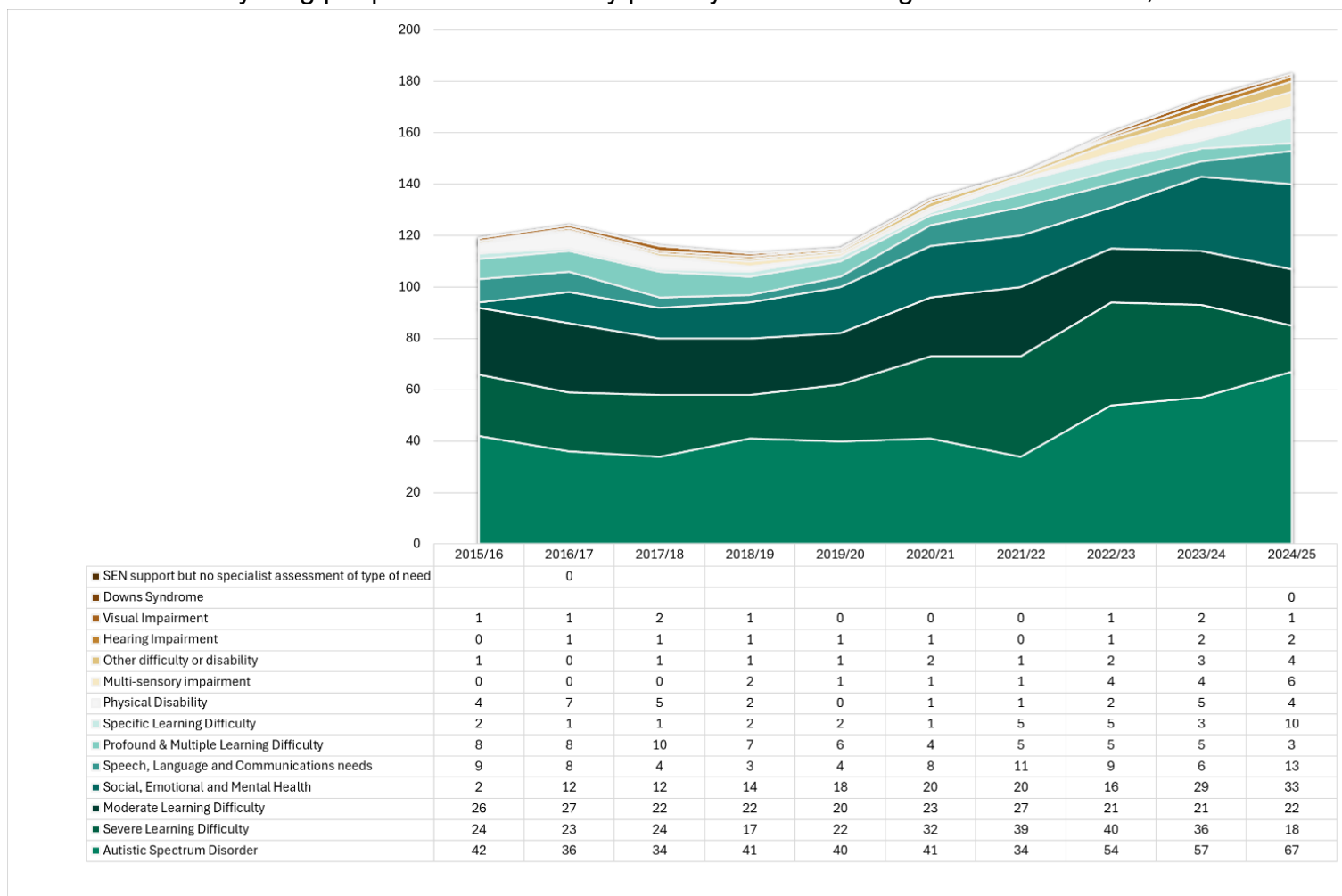
**Table 13** Primary need for College Years and transition young people by SEN provision in Central Bedfordshire, East of England and England in 2024/25

Primary need	CBC EHC plan (no)	CBC EHC (%)	EoE EHC (%)	Eng EHC (%)	CBC SEN support (without EHC plan) (no)	CBC SEN (%)	EoE SEN (%)	Eng SEN (%)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	67	6.2	4.5	5.9	25	4.1	5.2	4.8
Downs Syndrome	0	0.0	5.0	4.4	0	0.0	0.0	0.4
Hearing Impairment	2	5.0	5.7	6.7	3	3.9	5.5	5.2
Moderate Learning Difficulty	22	9.2	6.8	7.1	2	0.2	1.5	1.5
Multi-sensory impairment	6	35.3	7.7	5.6	0	0.0	3.1	3.4
Other difficulty or disability	4	16.7	3.9	5.2	2	5.7	7.5	5.0
Physical Disability	4	4.6	7.9	7.9	3	2.5	5.1	4.9
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	3	14.3	15.9	15.4	0	0.0	0.0	0.7
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	1.4	0.8	1.7
Severe Learning Difficulty	18	26.9	13.0	15.7	no data	no data	1.7	1.7
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	33	5.0	1.9	2.4	29	1.7	2.6	2.4
Specific Learning Difficulty	10	5.5	3.8	4.0	26	2.6	5.3	4.9
Speech, Language and Communications needs	13	2.1	1.7	2.2	7	0.6	0.7	0.7
Visual Impairment	1.0	5.0	5.8	8.3	3.0	6.0	6.8	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>				<b>101</b>			

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

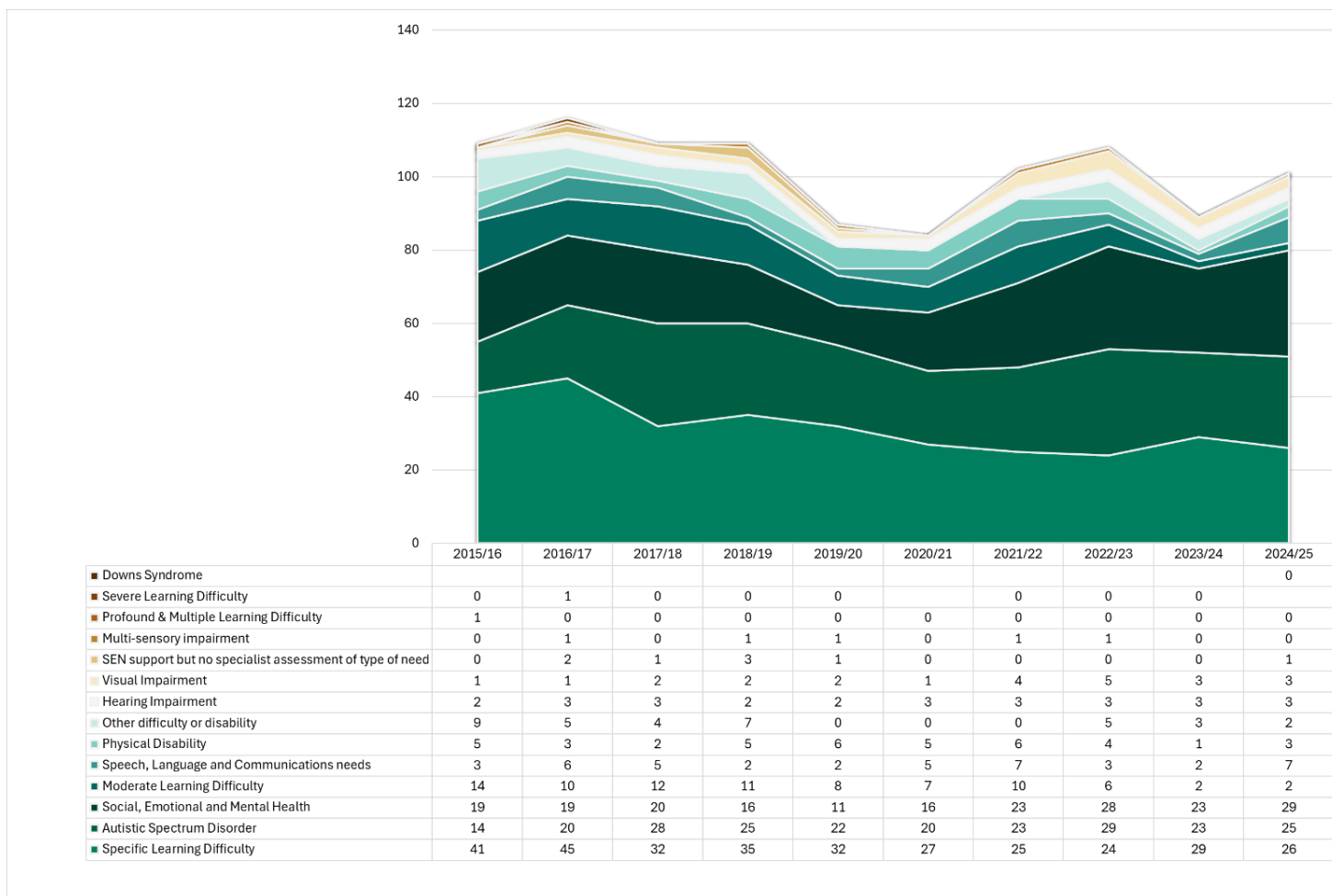
Further analysis for young people in their College Years/transition on EHC Plans is summarised in Figure 13 below. Whilst the numbers are small across most primary needs, as at earlier Key Stages, the increasing numbers of young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Autistic Spectrum Conditions are clear. The last two years have also seen the numbers with Moderate Learning Difficulties stabilise, whilst numbers of young people with Severe Learning Difficulties continue to reduce. Further analysis for those on SEN Support is summarised in Figure 14 below. The numbers are small for most primary needs and remain steady, with recent small increases in the numbers of young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs.

**Figure 13** Trend in number of young people on EHC Plan by primary need in College Years/Transition, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025) (Note: blank cell = no data available)

**Figure 14** Trend in the number of young people on SEN support by primary need in College Years/transition, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025 (Note: blank cell = no data available)

## SEND Education Transport

Central Bedfordshire Council considers transport an extension of the school day to ensure the children and young people arrive at school or college ready to learn. Wherever possible, and where procurement rules allow, children and young people remain on the same transport with the same driver and passenger assistant, where applicable. Transport is provided in line with Central Bedfordshire Council's Home to School Transport policies [Apply for school transport | Central Bedfordshire Council](#) (accessed 17/10/2025).

In 2024/25 Central Bedfordshire Council provided home-to-school transport for 1,105 young people (including 79 students aged 16 years and over) on 321 routes, all of whom have an EHC plan. 287 were transported by the Council's own Fleet and Non-Emergency Patient Transport services, an increase from 192 in 2023/24 that has required additional vehicles and staff. Other pupils are transported by private operators whose staff are trained and vetted to the same level as Central Bedfordshire Council employees.

153 young people were provided with single transport, mostly because the young person was the only one attending a particular establishment or sometimes due to the student's needs. Further, 136 young people are funded through a Personal Transport Budget or the payment of parental mileage.

## Inequalities

Inequalities can affect the education, health and well-being of children and young people of all ages. These are covered in the Children and Young People section<sup>9</sup> of the Central Bedfordshire JSNA but they can impact on children with SEND even more, as explored in the following sections on Free School Meals, Ethnicity and Suspensions and Exclusions.

## Free School Meals

Across England, pupils with an EHC plan or requiring SEN support are more likely to be eligible for free school meals (FSM) compared to all pupils and to those without special educational needs. In Central Bedfordshire in 2024/25:

- 31.8% (n=977) of pupils with an EHC plan were eligible for free school meals, a lower value compared to the East of England region (38.7%) and England (43.8%) averages
- 25.4% (n=1,440) of local pupils with SEN Support were eligible for free school meals, a lower value compared to the East of England (33.9%) and England (39.3%) averages

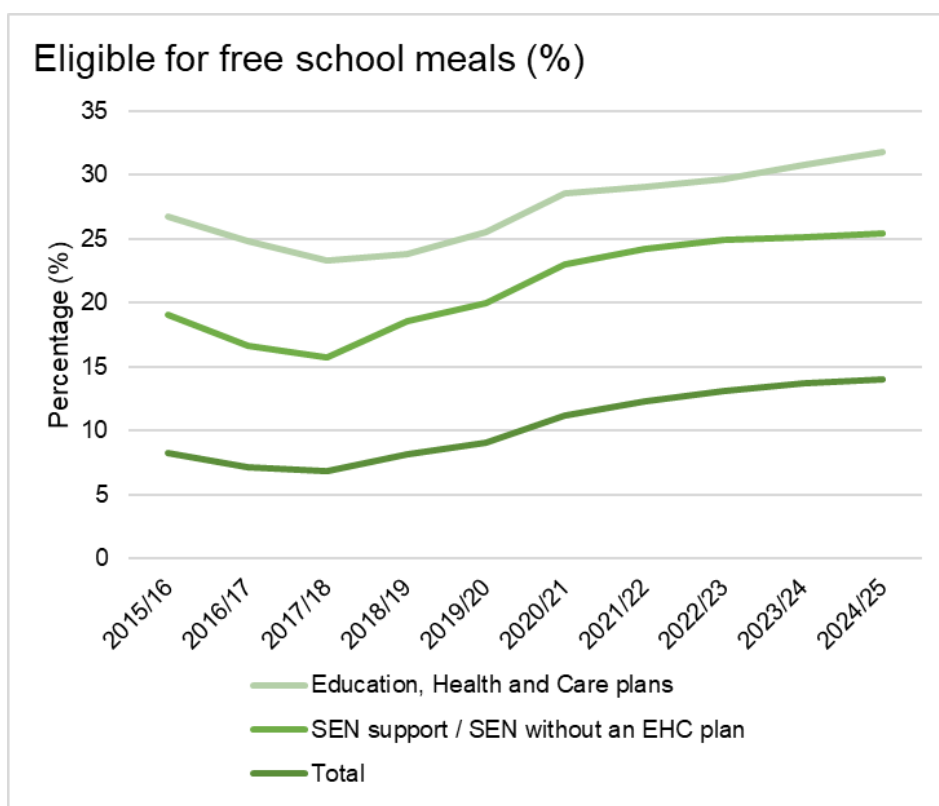
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<sup>9</sup> [Children & Young People | Central Bedfordshire JSNA](#)

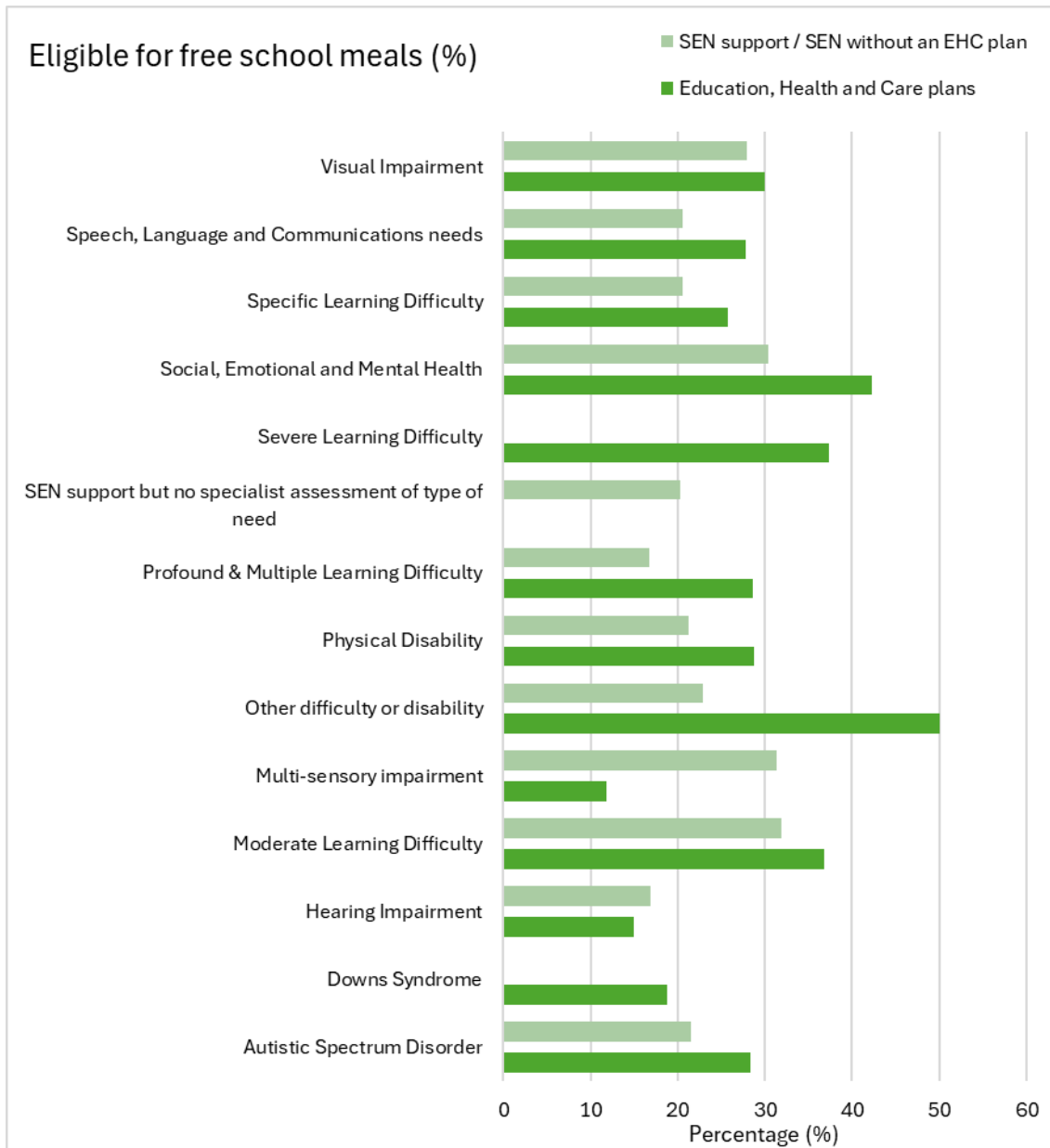
Recent local trends in Figure 15 also illustrate how the overall increase in the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals ('Total' line) continues to mirror the overall increase in the percentages of eligible SEND children. The gap between those local pupils eligible for free school meals with an EHC plan or receiving SEN support also remains large but lower than the gaps at regional and national levels.

Further, Figure 16 below illustrates the variation in the relationship between eligibility for free school meals and primary need, although there is no data available for those with Severe Learning Difficulties receiving SEN support.

**Figure 15** Trend in pupils (as a %) by type of SEN Support in Central Bedfordshire eligible for free school meals (Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 11/09/2025)



**Figure 16** Free school meal take up by primary need for SEND pupils in Central Bedfordshire state funded schools in 2024/25 (Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 11/09/2025)



In Central Bedfordshire for 2024/25 free school meals eligibility was highest for pupils with the following primary needs, with a similar distribution seen at regional and national levels<sup>10</sup>:

- Social, Emotional and Mental Health (n= 804)

<sup>10</sup> See [Special Educational Needs in England](#) Free School Meals data (Accessed 17/10/2025)

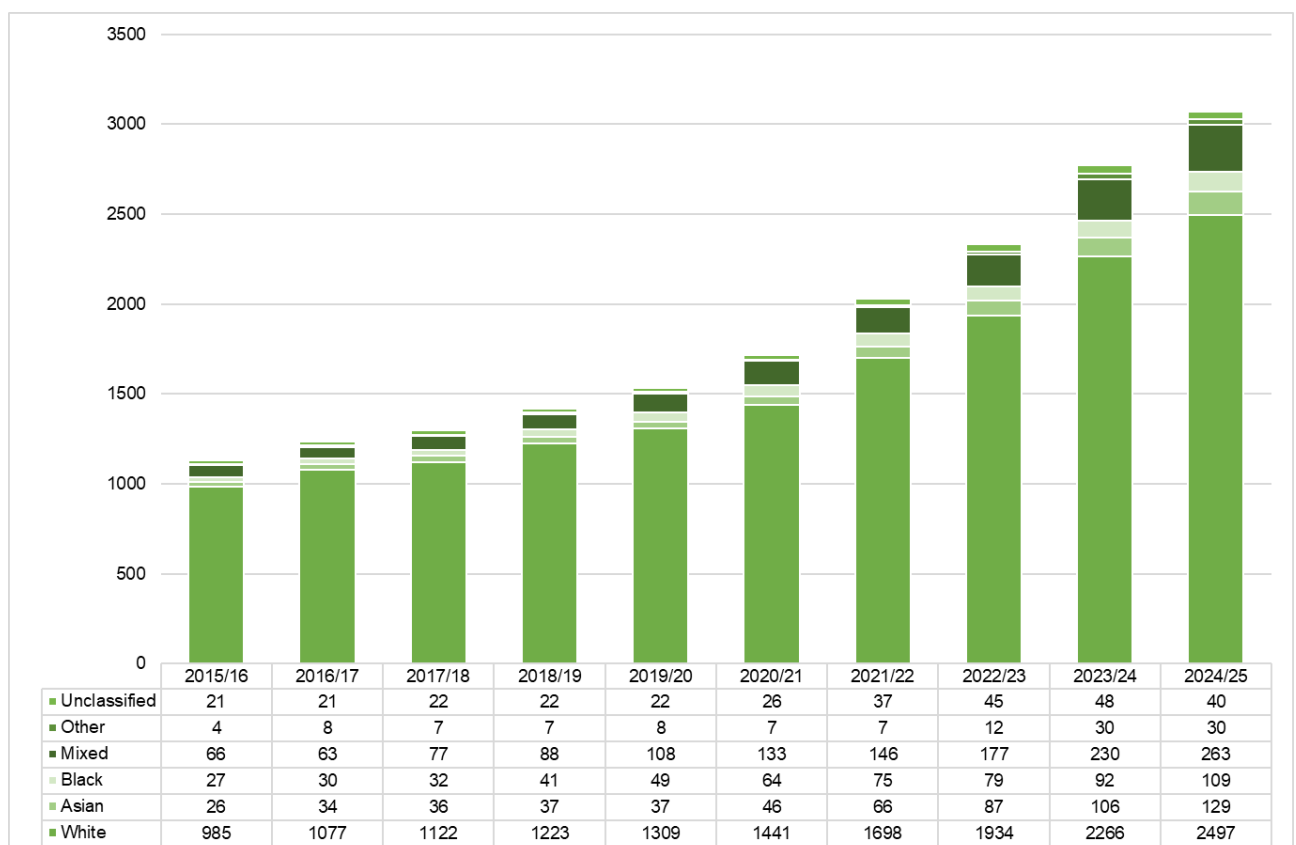
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder (n = 437)
- Moderate Learning Difficulties (n= 356)
- Speech, Language and Communications Needs (n=301)
- Specific Learning Difficulty (n= 255)

## Ethnicity

Central Bedfordshire has experienced an increase in numbers of pupils on EHC Plans across all ethnic backgrounds in recent years, as summarised in Figure 17 below. Whilst children and young people from White backgrounds continue to make up the majority, as a proportion they have decreased from 87% in 2015-17 to 81% in 2024/25. During this period the proportion of pupils from Black backgrounds has remained relatively constant (3-4%) but the proportions of pupils from Asian and Mixed backgrounds continue to rise steadily:

- Asian backgrounds – from 2% in 2015/16 to 4% of pupils in 2024/25
- Mixed backgrounds – from 6% in 2015/16 to 9% of pupil in 2024/25

**Figure 17** Trend in ethnicity for pupils on EHC Plan in Central Bedfordshire state-funded schools, 2015/16-2024/25

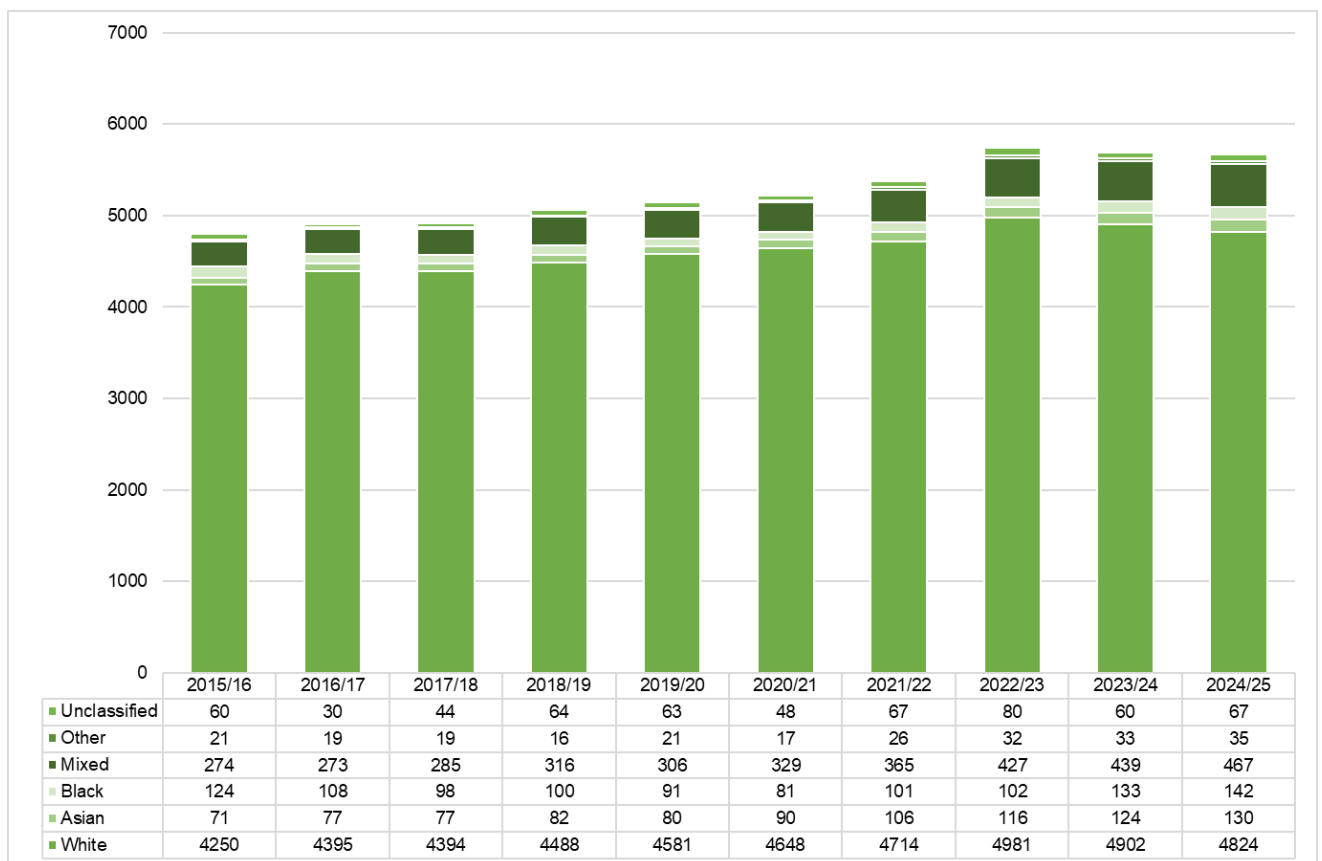


Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

Central Bedfordshire has also experienced an increase in the numbers of pupils requiring SEN support across all ethnic backgrounds in recent years, though this is more gradual than for EHC Plan pupils and this is summarised in Figure 18 below. Whilst children and young people from White backgrounds continue to make up the majority, as a proportion they have decreased from 89% in 2015/17 to 85% in the 2024/25 data. The proportion of pupils from Mixed backgrounds has also increased steadily during this period, from 5.7% in 2015/16 to 8.3% in 2024/25. However, the proportion of pupils from Black and Asian backgrounds requiring SEN support has remained relatively constant:

- Black backgrounds from 2.6% in 2015/16 to 2.5% in 2024/25
- Asian backgrounds from 1.5% in 2015/16 to 2.3% in 2024/25

**Figure 18** Trend in ethnicity for pupils receiving SEN support in Central Bedfordshire state-funded schools, 2015/16-2024/25



Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

Table 14 explores how ethnicity is reflected across the different primary needs in the most recent data. For those local children and young people on EHC Plans, whilst the numbers for many primary needs are relatively small, notable observations when compared to the proportions in Figure 17 include:

- A higher proportion of White pupils (88%) with Specific Learning Difficulty
- A slightly higher proportion of Asian pupils (5%) with Autistic Spectrum Condition
- A slightly higher proportion of Black pupils (6%) with Speech, Language and Communication needs
- A slightly higher proportion of Mixed race pupils (11%) with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs

**Table 14** Primary need by ethnicity for children and young people by SEN provision in Central Bedfordshire in 2024/25

Primary need	EHC plans						SEN Support					
	White	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	Unclassified	White	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	Unclassified
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	848 (79%)	59 (5%)	35 (3%)	100 (9%)	18 (2%)	13 (1%)	533 (87%)	8 (1%)	6 (1%)	60 (10%)	4 (1%)	2 (1%)
Downs Syndrome	13 (81%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (3%)
Hearing Impairment	33 (83%)	1 (3%)	3 (8%)	3 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	69 (90%)	3 (4%)	1 (1%)	2 (3%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Moderate Learning Difficulty	205 (86%)	4 (2%)	7 (3%)	18 (8%)	1 (0%)	4 (2%)	717 (85%)	30 (4%)	14 (2%)	61 (7%)	5 (1%)	13 (5%)
Multi-sensory impairment	13 (76%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	2 (12%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	14 (88%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Other difficulty or disability	17 (71%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	4 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	28 (80%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	5 (14%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Physical Disability	71 (82%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	10 (11%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	107 (91%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	7 (6%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	18 (86%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (83%)	1 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	no data	55 (80%)	0 (0%)	4 (6%)	7 (10%)	0 (0%)	3 (0%)
Severe Learning Difficulty	55 (82%)	2 (3%)	3 (4%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	5 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	no data	no data
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	550 (84%)	9 (1%)	17 (3%)	71 (11%)	2 (0%)	8 (1%)	1457 (84%)	20 (1%)	44 (3%)	175 (10%)	10 (1%)	23 (1%)
Specific Learning Difficulty	160 (88%)	4 (2%)	2 (1%)	14 (8%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	899 (89%)	10 (1%)	18 (2%)	63 (6%)	5 (0%)	12 (1%)
Speech, Language and Communications needs	494 (79%)	42 (7%)	37 (6%)	37 (6%)	9 (1%)	6 (1%)	893 (81%)	55 (5%)	52 (5%)	85 (8%)	7 (1%)	11 (0%)
Visual Impairment	20 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	46 (92%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	1 (1%)

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

For those local children and young people requiring SEN support, whilst the numbers for many are also relatively small the proportions that differ from the overall patterns in Figure 18 above include:

- A higher proportion of White pupils (88%) with Specific Learning Difficulty
- A higher proportion of Asian pupils (7%) with Speech, Language and Communication needs
- A higher proportion of Black pupils (6%) with Speech, Language and Communication needs

## Suspensions, permanent exclusions and alternative provision settings

Table 15 summarises the latest data (2023/24) on suspensions and permanent exclusions from state-funded schools for children and young people in Central Bedfordshire and how this relates to data on eligibility for free school meals, gender, ethnicity and year group. The number of local suspensions for those on EHC Plans and receiving SEN support is comparable to regional and national levels. The numbers of permanent exclusions are small but similar to regional and national levels for SEN support. Though the proportions for those on EHC Plans are higher, the total number (n=16) of pupils is too small for meaningful tests of significance.

**Table 15** A summary of suspensions and permanent exclusions data for SEND pupils in state-funded schools in Central Bedfordshire, 2023/24

Suspensions & permanent exclusions (2023/24)		Suspensions CBC (no)	Suspensions CBC (%)	Suspensions EofE (%)	Suspensions Eng (%)	Permanent exclusions CBC (no)	Permanent exclusions CBC (%)	Permanent exclusions EofE (%)	Permanent exclusions Eng (%)
SEN provision	SEN support	1,567	27.84	29.41	29.43	27	0.48	0.39	0.41
	EHC plan	776	28.22	28.38	25.62	16	0.58	0.38	0.26
Sex	Female	1,384	5.83	7.32	8.58	17	0.07	0.07	0.08
	Male	3,054	12.27	13.52	13.93	60	0.24	0.16	0.18
FSM	Eligible	2,130	32.00	28.39	27.55	46	0.69	0.33	0.33
	Not eligible	2,308	5.50	5.97	5.99	31	0.07	0.06	0.06
Ethnicity	Asian / Asian British	37	1.81	3.84	3.75	1	0.05	0.04	0.05
	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	156	9.69	7.02	7.84	4	0.25	0.10	0.10
	Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	479	12.31	10.90	11.66	13	0.33	0.15	0.16
	White	3588	9.00	11.39	13.07	57	0.14	0.12	0.14
	Any other ethnic group	77	17.82	6.41	7.20	1	0.23	0.08	0.09
	Ethnicity Unclassified	101	13.27	16.16	16.10	1	0.13	0.15	0.17
Year group	Reception and Key Stage 1 (Year 2 and below)	342	2.45	2.73	1.69	4	0.03	0.03	0.02
	Key Stage 2 (Years 3-6)	661	4.40	3.75	2.86	11	0.07	0.04	0.04
	Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9)	2207	20.72	23.15	27.00	38	0.36	0.24	0.29
	Key Stage 4 (Years 10-11)	1174	18.57	20.53	23.72	24	0.38	0.25	0.27
	College Years (Years 12 and above)	31	1.15	0.95	1.00	0	0.00	0.01	0.01

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

Some children and young people subject to permanent exclusion or other reasons for absence (e.g. long-term illness) can be moved into alternative provision settings (e.g. Pupil Referral Unit, AP Academy or Free School) to continue their education in Central Bedfordshire. Table 16 summarises the recent trend in local alternative provision (AP), where the number of AP pupils on EHC Plans has recently decreased and remains below the regional average but 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.

**Table 16** Funded alternative provision in Central Bedfordshire by type of SEND support

Funded alternative provision, by one year period		Headcount	EHC plans	EHC plans (%)	SEN support/SEN without an EHC plan	SEN support/SEN without an EHC plan (%)
2022/23	Central Bedfordshire	62	16	25.8	43	69.4
	East of England	1,101	336	30.50	564	51
	England	13,191	3368	25.50	7518	57
2023/24	Central Bedfordshire	74	22	29.70	52	70
	East of England	1,345	421	31.30	568	42
	England	15,866	3837	24.20	9212	58
2024/25	Central Bedfordshire	50	14	28.0	34	68.0
	East of England	1363	426	31.3	586	43.0
	England	16,643	4380	26.3	9496	57.1

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 12/09/2025

## Secondary need

The final analysis here summarises the most recent data on secondary needs identified for SEND children and young people in state funded schools in Central Bedfordshire. As summarised in Table 17 below, for local pupils on EHC Plans the following secondary needs were most common. As a proportion, these were similar to regional and national percentages, except for:

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

**Table 17** Proportion of secondary needs by EHC Plan/SEN support for Central Bedfordshire children and young people in 2024/25

Secondary need	CBC EHC plan (no)	CBC EHC (%)	EofE EHC (%)	Eng EHC (%)	CBC SEN support (without EHC plan) (no)	CBC SEN (%)	EofE SEN (%)	Eng SEN (%)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	227	7.4	10.0	7.1	144	2.5	2.1	1.9
Hearing impairment	22	0.7	0.6	0.6	12	0.2	0.2	0.2
Moderate Learning Difficulty	148	4.8	4.2	4.7	116	2.0	2.0	2.5
Multi-sensory Impairment	17	0.6	0.4	0.5	10	0.2	0.1	0.2
Other Difficulty or Disability	45	1.5	2.1	2.2	68	1.2	1.1	1.1
Physical Disability	37	1.2	1.6	1.7	22	0.4	0.5	0.5
Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty	8	0.3	0.3	0.3	1	0.0	0.0	0.0
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	0	0	0	0.0	46	0.8	0.7	0.5
Severe Learning Difficulty	58	1.9	1.4	2.0	0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	312	10.2	7.4	7.4	349	6.2	5.0	4.9
Specific Learning Difficulty	100	3.3	3.3	2.7	121	2.1	2.3	2.1
Speech, Language and Communications needs	316	10.3	10.3	12.3	164	2.9	3.2	3.7
Visual impairment	20	0.7	0.7	0.7	10	0.2	0.2	0.2
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1310</b>				<b>1063</b>			

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

For local pupils with SEN support the following secondary needs were most common and, as a proportion, were similar to regional and national percentages:

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

Lastly, Table 18 below summarises the most recent data on the top three secondary needs for the five most common primary needs for local pupils in state-funded schools. For those on EHC Plans, the proportions of the top three secondary needs by primary need are generally similar to regional and national averages. Notable differences included:

- Higher proportions of pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (primary) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (secondary)
- Lower proportions of pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulty (primary) and Speech, Language and Communication needs (secondary) but the numbers of pupils for the latter are small (n=28).

Similarly, for those local pupils receiving SEN support the proportions of top three secondary needs by primary need are similar to regional and national averages. Notable differences were:

- Higher proportions of pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (primary) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (secondary)

**Table 18** Top three secondary needs by primary need for EHC Plan/SEN support for Central Bedfordshire children and young people in 2024/25

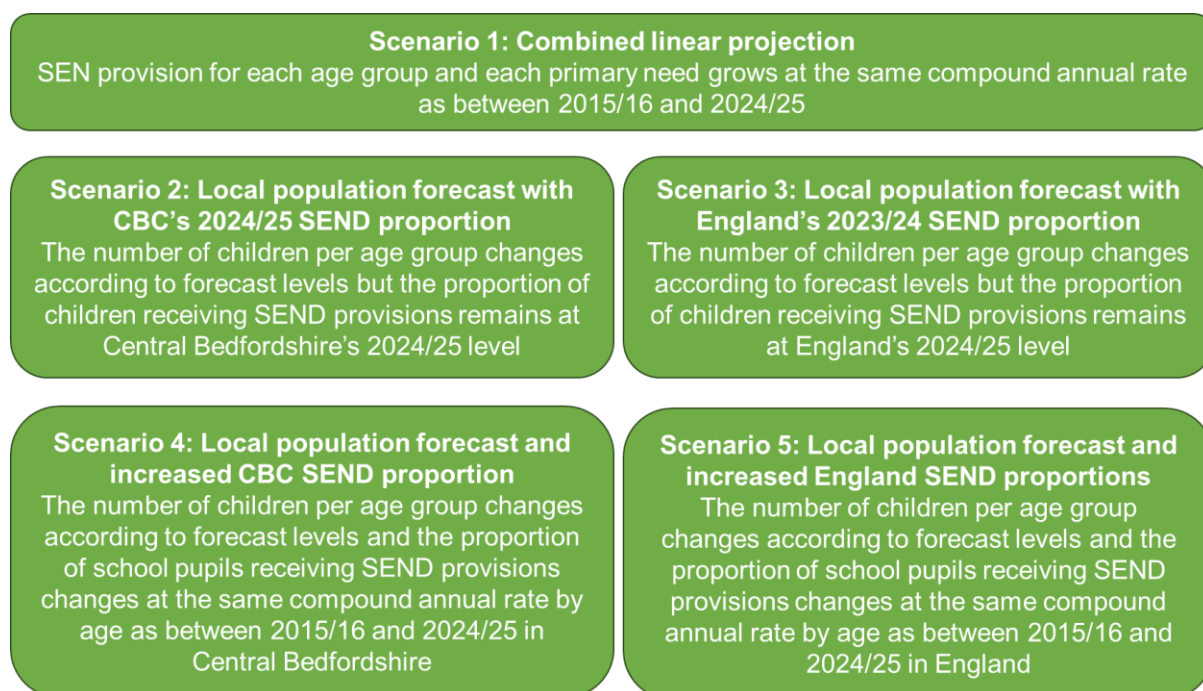
Primary need type	Top 3 secondary need	CBC EHC plan (no)	CBC EHC (%)	EofE EHC (%)	Eng EHC (%)	CBC SEN support (without EHC plan) (no)	CBC SEN (%)	EofE SEN (%)	Eng SEN (%)
Autistic Spectrum Condition	Speech, Language and Communications needs	192	17.9	16.2	17.8	41	6.7	7.6	9.2
	Social, Emotional and Mental Health	179	16.7	11.6	10.3	116	18.9	14.4	13.7
	Specific Learning Difficulty	46	4.3	3.2	2.5	21	3.4	2.9	3.1
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	96	14.6	12.8	11.0	84	4.9	4.1	3.3
	Speech, Language and Communications needs	39	5.9	7.5	10.5	62	3.6	3.7	4.6
	Moderate Learning Difficulty	23	3.5	4.5	4.2	61	3.5	3.5	3.1
Speech, Language and Communications needs	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	96	14.6	12.8	11.0	84	4.9	4.1	3.3
	Speech, Language and Communications needs	39	5.9	7.5	10.5	62	3.6	3.7	4.6
	Moderate Learning Difficulty	23	3.5	4.5	4.2	61	3.5	3.5	3.1
Moderate Learning Difficulty	Speech, Language and Communications needs	28	11.7	17.4	21.6	37	4.4	4.9	5.5
	Social, Emotional and Mental Health	24	10.0	9.6	10.2	41	4.9	5.6	5.7
	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	19	7.9	13.7	7.8	14	1.7	1.1	0.8
Specific Learning Difficulty	Social, Emotional and Mental Health	19	10.4	11.9	11.4	71	7.1	5.7	5.6
	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	19	10.4	7.3	7.4	16	1.6	1.1	1.2
	Speech, Language and Communications needs	16	8.8	10.9	13.4	16	1.6	2.7	3.1

Source: Department for Education [Special Educational Needs in England](#) data, accessed 28/08/2025

## Projections of future demand for SEN provision

The proportion of school pupils receiving SEN provisions in Central Bedfordshire has increased but has been consistently below that of comparator local authorities and England as a whole. Therefore, in addition to the number of children receiving SEN changing in line with the population growth, it is also likely that it will increase further because of a higher proportion of children being identified with SEN. To understand the future demand for SEN provision, five different projection scenarios have been created for the next five years. As summarised below, Scenario 1 is based on a linear projection assuming that recent changes continue to 2029/30. Four alternative scenarios alongside four alternative projections sees proportions of school pupils with SEN provision applied to locally-developed population forecasts. For more background to these longer-term forecasting methods and the assumptions underpinning them please visit the [Population Forecast Dashboard](#)<sup>11</sup>.

**Figure 19** Five projections for future demand for SEN provision in Central Bedfordshire



The five scenarios suggest that increases will be driven primarily by an increase in the proportion of children and young people receiving SEN provision rather than by an increase in the overall local population size. 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. As summarised in Table 19 below, from a baseline of 8,807 pupils in 2024/25 there is potential for the number receiving SEN provision to increase from 324 to 3,133

<sup>11</sup> See: [Population Forecasts 2023–2043 | Central Bedfordshire JSNA](#)

pupils by 2029/30. Notably, Scenario 4 forecasts an increase in the numbers of CYP on EHC Plans that is not far off the numbers needing SEN support in the next five years. Time and monitoring will inform which scenario best summarises what is actually happening to the local SEN population but it is hoped these projections will help to inform discussions about this.

**Table 19** Projections for future demand in 2029/30 by scenario and type of SEN provision (Source: Department of Public Health estimates utilising different forecasts)

Scenario	Number of pupils in 2029/30		
	EHC Plan	SEN Support	All SEND
From 2024/25 baseline	3,128	5,679	8,807
Scenario 1:	3,893	6,312	10,205
Scenario 2:	3,216	5,914	9,131
Scenario 3:	2,561	6,853	9,414
Scenario 4:	5,742	6,047	11,789
Scenario 5:	3,921	8,019	11,940