

Appendix 2: Local Government Association – SEND System Recap (2021)

Demand has gone up

As of January 2021, the number of children and young people with an EHC plan has increased by 11 per cent (60,000) over the previous 12 months alone.

This unprecedented demand for additional SEND support has been caused by a perfect storm of factors:

- **More pupils:** school census data shows that between 2014 and 2018 the number of pupils in all schools in England grew by just over 600,000 – an increase of 7.5 per cent, with some local areas having experienced much higher population growth than others.
- **A change in expectations:** the Children’s and Families Act 2014 rightly raised the expectations of parents and the aspirations of pupils through a existing code of SEND practice expecting all children to receive the best possible education and support.
- **Extended eligibility:** many more young people aged 16 to 25 are now on EHC plans.
- **More children with complex needs:** advances in life expectancy, more awareness and better diagnoses means there are now more children and young people with needs that are difficult to meet within mainstream schools.
- **Current secondary school attainment measures:** do not currently reward schools with a high degree of inclusion.

Funding has stagnated

Councils have overspent their allocated budgets for children with SEND, known as the High Needs Block, for the last four years.

This has seen them ‘top up’ budgets with funding from elsewhere such as general schools budgets. However this flexibility to transfer funding has now been significantly curtailed by government restrictions, further exacerbating pressures on councils.

This makes it more difficult to invest in the early support services that can help children and young people integrate into a mainstream education rather than need more expensive specialist support, such as family-based early help services, speech and language therapies, physiotherapy and occupational services and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

This significant growth in demand has left councils struggling to provide the vital support children with SEND need.

Schools are under increasing pressure

At the same time, funding pressures on mainstream schools as a result of inflation, increasing teachers’ pay and higher pension contributions for support staff, mean that many can’t provide extra support for complex needs.

By pursuing an EHC plan schools receive further funding from councils. But schools must meet the first £6,000 of any additional support required, leaving increasing numbers of pupils without the help they need.

There are many more children and young people who have special educational needs, but who fall below the threshold required for an EHC plan. The funding for the additional support they need to fulfil their potential is met from mainstream school budgets.

Following the 2021 Spending Review, the Government announced £2.6 billion for new school places for children with SEND. Whilst this announcement was welcomed, further support for children with SEND is urgently needed to help address lost learning during the pandemic.

The Department for Education (DfE) has allocated an additional £780 million for high needs budgets in 2022/23, but it is vital that councils are provided with long-term sufficiency of, and certainty over, funding to support children with SEND. To ensure this, the Government must urgently conclude its ongoing review of the SEND system.

High needs specialist provision has increased

Specialist schools are largely full and councils have found it difficult to create new provision.

Over the last five years 164,500 pupils with EHCPs, around 50 per cent, are being educated in specialist schools.

Many have to travel long distances, at great expense to councils, often to more costly independent provision, as a result of earlier cuts to specialist services. We are now in the second year in which there are more children and young people with EHC plans in such schools than there are in mainstream education.

Councils are now reaching a tipping point

Whilst it is encouraging that the Government has allocated additional funding of £780 million for high needs budgets in 2022/23, it isn't enough to provide councils with long-term certainty and funding, particularly considering councils' existing High Needs Block deficits which we estimate to be around £600 million.

There is simply not enough money to keep up with demand, leaving many councils concerned that they will be unable to meet their statutory duties and meaning children with high needs or disabilities could miss out on a mainstream education.

Many children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities could miss out on the high quality education they need if councils aren't given adequate funding to manage the unprecedented rise in demand. **This is why we are calling on Government to provide councils with long-term certainty for funding.**