The SEND Sufficiency Plan

Introduction

The SEND Sufficiency Plan 2026 sets out how Kent County Council (KCC) will plan and commission sufficient, high-quality education provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), particularly those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

The plan responds to continuing growth in the number of children and young people with EHCPs and increasing complexity of need. It identifies the provision Kent is likely to need in the coming years and informs decisions about the development and commissioning of mainstream and specialist provision across the county. This reflects KCC's statutory responsibility to secure sufficient school places, including provision for children and young people with SEND.

The foundation underpinning the plan is a commitment to **earlier support and greater inclusion**. Over the period of the plan, KCC and its partners aim to strengthen support for children with SEND at the earliest opportunity, enabling more children and young people to have their needs met successfully in mainstream education within their local communities, while ensuring specialist provision is available for those who need it.

The Plan's ultimate purpose is to ensure that the right provision is available in **the right place and at the right time**, improving outcomes for children and young people while making best use of the resources available.

1.0 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Kent

KCC's ambition is that every child and young person should have access to high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve and thrive.

A strategy for education in Kent 2025–2030 sets out three qualities at the heart of KCC's vision for education: **ambition, curiosity and resilience**. These apply to all children and young people.

Kent's SEND Strategy sets out the local area's approach to developing an inclusive education system and meeting its responsibilities to children and young people with SEND. The SEND Sufficiency Plan supports these ambitions by translating them into decisions about the type, number and location of education places Kent will need.

Demand for SEND support has grown significantly. Autism is a particularly important factor in planning future provision: **10,648 children and young people with EHCPs in Kent have autism recorded as their primary need, representing 49% of the total**.

Kent's approach seeks to strengthen the ability of mainstream schools to meet a wider range of needs. This includes consistent implementation of the Mainstream Core Standards and programmes such as Partnerships for the Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS), which supports inclusive practice for neurodivergent children. KCC's Mainstream Core Standards set out what schools must do to support children and young people with SEND.

Kent has made progress in improving SEND services since the previous SEND inspection. The 2026 Ofsted and Care Quality Commission inspection recognised improvements,

including in newer EHCPs, inclusive support in schools, partnership working and earlier help. However, inspectors also identified continuing inconsistencies in children's and families' experiences across the county.

There is also more to be done to create an effective sustainable system. KCC is seeking to do so through its Local Area Strategic Plan and the Government's High Needs Stability Grant arrangements.

This Sufficiency Plan forms part of this wider programme of improvement. Its particular role is to ensure that **the pattern of education provision develops in response to the needs of Kent's children and young people**.

1.1 Strategic Context in Kent

The SEND Sufficiency Plan has been developed during a period of proposed significant national change. In February 2026, the Government published the White Paper *Every Child Achieving and Thriving*, setting out proposed reforms to the school and SEND systems in England. The proposals place increased emphasis on earlier support, inclusive mainstream education and access to specialist expertise.

The proposed model starts with a universal offer of support across all schools, with high-quality adaptive teaching, calm environments and early help when needed. Most children will have their needs met through this offer. Additional support would then be provided through targeted, targeted-plus and specialist levels according to the needs of the child or young person. The Government has also proposed Individual Support Plans and changes to arrangements for children requiring specialist provision and EHCPs. Kent's approach aligns closely with these reforms and seeks to create a more inclusive and sustainable SEND system.

Our Local Area Strategic Plan sets the strategic priorities which the SEND Sufficiency Plan responds to:

Strategic Priority 1: Strengthen Inclusive Mainstream Education

Increase the capacity of mainstream schools to meet SEND needs through high-quality adaptive teaching, earlier intervention, and consistent implementation of Kent's Mainstream Core Standards to enable more children and young people to access support within their local community in mainstream settings.

Strategic Priority 2: Expand Local Specialist Provision

Deliver significant growth in specialist provision through investment in Special Resource Provisions (SRPs), maintained special schools and post-16 capacity. This includes hundreds of additional specialist places across Kent.

Strategic Priority 3: Improve Pathways to Adulthood

Develop a more coherent post-16 system through the Pathways for All programme, expanding access to further education, supported internships, employment pathways and independent living opportunities.

Strategic Priority 4: Create a Sustainable SEND System

Use forecasting, commissioning and service redesign to ensure resources are targeted effectively, improve value for money, reduce dependency on independent provision and support long-term financial sustainability while maintaining positive outcomes for children and families.

Together, these priorities provide the framework for the analysis and commissioning intentions set out in the remainder of this plan.

1.2 Delivery of Additional SEND Provision

During the academic year of 2025-26 we have delivered additional special educational provision as outlined in the previous SEND Sufficiency Plan and in The Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2026-30. The following sections give further detail.

1.2.1 Special School Expansion

We indicated that for September 2026 three special school expansions would take place, adding 162 places in 2026/27. Figure 1 sets out the progress of these schemes:

Figure 1a: Special School Expansion

School	SEN Type	Category	Number of New Places	Number of Filled New Places
Broomhill Bank School	C&I	Expansion	112	42
Aspire Primary	C&I	Satellite	0	0
Meadowfield	PSCN	6th Form Expansion	0	0
Total			**112**	**42**

The expansion of the North Site at Broomhill Bank School has experienced delays arising from highway infrastructure requirements, including the provision of additional drop-off and parking facilities. Resolution of these matters is being prioritised to facilitate delivery of the planned expansion.

The proposals for Aspire and Meadowfield were delayed to enable alignment with the wider sector conversations about accommodation pressures. This was to ensure parity across the County.

Two new special schools are to be built by the Department for Education (Swanley and Whitstable) with a delivery date of September 2028. These are likely to be delayed.

Two in-year capital projects had to be delivered to address pressures. Spaces in the Rainbow MASH (Ashford) have been used temporarily to increase capacity at Wyvern School to enable students to remain in the school for 6th form provision. Foreland Fields School was provided with 3 additional classrooms.

1.2.2 Specialist Resource Provision (SRP) Expansion

The expansion of local Specialist Resource Provision (SRP) will improve access to specialist support within communities, strengthen inclusive education, and contribute to the long-term goal of reducing reliance on high-cost independent and non-maintained special school placements. All new SRPs have been designated for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), reflecting the most prevalent primary needs identified in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

At its meeting of 8 November 2025, the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee endorsed a proposal to significantly increase specialist resource base provision (SRP) in the County. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills subsequently approved £20m to deliver the proposed schemes which together would deliver 889 additional places if all implemented.

As at September 2026 six new SRPs have opened, two existing SRPs have been expanded and one informal provision has been formally designated as an SRP. Together these schemes have added 98 places for September 2026 of which at the start of term 99 have been filled.

Figure 1b: Progress of New SRPs from Table 8c to 8f, (KCP 2026-30)

School	Category	Number of New Places	Number of Filled Places
Ashford Oaks Primary	Expansion	10	10
Dover Christchurch Academy	Expansion	35	35
Homewood School and 6th Form	New	10	9
Lansdowne Primary	New	11	11
Richmond Primary	New	12	14
St Edmund's Catholic	New	7	7
St Edmund's CoE	New	7	9
The Downs Primary	New	6	4
The Turner Free School*	Formalisation	0	0
Total		**98**	**99**

* The Turner Free School: 30 informal places are now formal SRP places; this legally add 30 places to add to the total of new places

The programme to deliver additional SRP places continues. Further new SRPs will open in September 2027 and September 2028. Each year further places will be opened in these SRPs as we phase new admissions over three years. It is important that the new SRPs deliver high-quality provision from day one. It is also important that new provision can grow sustainably, ensuring that the whole school culture adapts to having an SRP, and that parental confidence in the provision is strong. Some proposed projects cannot proceed and alternatives are being sought. The revised list of schemes reduces the total number of potential SRP places from 889 to 821, but numbers continue to be discussed with schools.

During the course of this year, it became evident that due to the falling roll at Langafel CEP School, the current size of its SRP (40 pupils) was disproportionate and risked destabilising the school. As part of the regular commissioning arrangements an Officer decision (with Cabinet Member support) was made to increase capacity at an alternative setting, Temple Hill PS, to enable provision at Langafel to be scaled back over time, with the aim of reducing to 15 places. Temple Hill is being expanded by 30 places, at a cost of £418,000 (capital and revenue) which is outside of the £20m agreed envelope, but within the schemes of delegation for the relevant officers.

The VI designation at Reculver Primary School has been removed following the statutory process to broaden their designation for ASD/SLCN and increase capacity from 15 to 20 pupil places. The VI designation at Morehall School is in the process of being removed.

2.0 Educational Health Care Plans

2.1 England vs Kent

Nationally the number of Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) has increased annually since their introduction in 2014. The challenges this has placed on the SEND system across England, its sustainability, and the consequential impact on families are well documented.

EHCP growth in Kent remains below the national rate in 2025/26, increasing by 5% compared with 13% in England. Kent now accounts for 3.02% of England's EHCPs, down from 3.23% in 2024/25.

- Whilst Kent's EHCP rate remains higher than the national average, for the 2-18 years population the gap has continued to narrow **(6.36% Kent; 6.14% England)**

.

- Autism spectrum disorder accounts for almost half of all EHCPs in Kent and continues to increase whilst remaining unchanged nationally **(49% Kent; 32% England)**

- Compared with England, Kent has a lower proportion of EHCP requests assessed **(47% Kent; 65% England)** and a lower proportion of assessments resulting in an EHCP **(78% Kent; 94% England).**

2.2 Age Breakdown

The majority of children and young people with an EHCP in Kent and England are those of statutory school age and post-16 young people (Figure 2.a). Kent has a smaller percentage of children aged 5-10 years with an EHCP than national, but a higher proportion in the 11-15 year old group.

Figure 2a: EHCP Numbers by Age in Kent versus England 2026

Age Group	Kent: Number of EHCPs	Kent %	England %
Early Years	634	3%	4%
Age 5-10	6,726	31%	34%
Age 11-15	8,575	39%	36%
Age 16-19	4,592	21%	20%
Age 20+	1,215	6%	5%
Total	**21,742**		

Source: DfE published figures which differ slightly from SEN2 return 2026

Growth in EHCPs was higher nationally than in Kent across almost all age groups in 2024/25. Figure 2b presents the year-on-year change in numbers, showing the difference between the 2024/25 and 2025/26 academic years.

For year on year change, those aged 20 and over were the only age group where Kent's EHCP growth exceeded the national rate, increasing by 443 additional EHCPs **(57% Kent; 6% England).** We will continue to cease EHCPs for this age group where they are no longer required, e.g. the young person is attending university. We are going to see more young people in the older groups as the bulge from a few years ago continues to age up.

Kent also experienced declines in EHCP numbers among children aged 0-4 and young people aged 16-19, while all other groups recorded an increase.

Figure 2b: EHCP Year on Year Growth by Age Group

Age Group	Percentage Change Year on Year 2024/25
0-4	-5%
5-10	+5%
11-15	+5%
16-19	-1%
20+	+57%

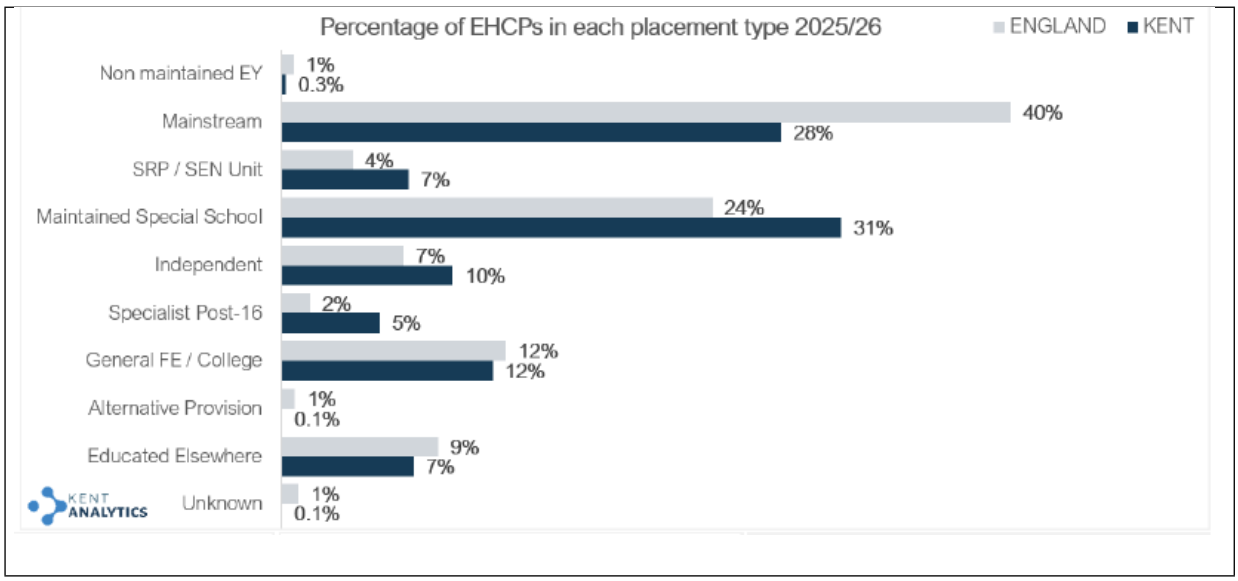
2.3 Placement Type

Kent's continuum of education provision includes mainstream schools and academies, mainstream schools and academies with SRPs, special schools and alternative provisions. We also commission places in independent and non-maintained schools.

In 2025/26 Kent had (Figure 2.c):

- a lower proportion of children and young people with an EHCP attending mainstream schools than England **(28% Kent; 40% England);**
- a higher proportion in SRP/SEN units **(7% Kent; 4% England);**
- a higher proportion attending maintained special schools than England **(31% Kent; 24% England).** Kent has maintained a consistent proportion of children and young people in maintained special schools, whilst England has reported a year-on- year decrease; and
- the proportion of new EHCPs specifying a maintained special school in Kent is more than three times the national rate **(17% Kent; England 5%).** Kent also reports a higher proportion of new EHCPs specifying an independent school **(6.3% Kent; 3.7% England),** although this remains below the level reported between 2019 and 2021.

Figure 2c: Percentage of EHCPs in Each Placement Type 2025/26



2.4 SEN Type

In 2025/26 (Figure 2d) Kent had a higher proportion of children and young people than the England average with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) **(49% Kent; 32% England)** and a lower proportion with moderate learning difficulties **(5% Kent; 10% England).**

Figure 2d: EHCP Distribution by Need Type 2025/26

SEN Type	Total EHCP Number	Kent %	England %
ASD	10,629	49%	32%
SEMH	3,906	18%	21%
SLCN	3,645	17%	22%
MLD	1,012	5%	10%
SLD	778	4%	3%
PD	659	3%	4%
SPLD	367	2%	3%
PMLD	365	2%	1%
HI	202	1%	1%
VI	96	>1%	>1%

What does this mean for pupil place planning – The impact of the differences in EHCP placement types in Kent is significant for families, schools, the local authority and the taxpayer. This position is unsustainable. It means too much of a finite resource is spent on too few, to the detriment of the many.

We will support parents to have confidence in the mainstream offer so that Kent moves closer to national averages for children with an EHCP attending a mainstream school. Children and young people will be educated closer to home for Kent finalised placements. This is particularly important for those with high incident primary needs of ASD, SLCN and SEMH.

The primary to secondary school transfer stage is critical - ensuring there is the right provision, both in terms of the quality SEND support offered by secondary schools and pathways to maintained specialist provision for those who need it.

Our Pathways for All programme was developed to bring together colleges, schools and specialist providers to develop more inclusive post-16 opportunities. Pressure for places will build in the post-16 space and it will be necessary to increase provision capacity to resolve this.

3.0 EHCP Forecast and Current Provision

To support our future SEND commissioning intentions, Kent produces an EHCP Forecast. Based on historical data about how children of certain ages and SEN types move between placement types over time, it estimates the number of children and young people with an EHCP and what type of setting they might be placed in for the future. It factors in newly

issued EHCPs, which are driven by population, and also EHCPs being ceased. Policy assumptions aligned to the Local Area Strategic Plan have been applied to the EHCP Forecast in order to inform future commissioning in line with policy direction.

3.1 EHCP Forecast for Age Groups

Our Forecast produced last year (2025) assumed that EHCPs in Kent would increase by 3% (from 20,635 to 21,270) during the course of the year. Actual data shows the increase was 5% in Kent (21,750). Although this is higher than forecast, it compares favourably with the higher national increase of 13%. This indicates that efforts to bring control to the system are working, but our assumptions were ambitious and optimistic. The assumption moving forward is that the number of EHCPs in Kent will continue to increase at a steady rate and that our forecasts are robust.

There is a risk that ongoing uncertainty regarding future SEND reforms may influence system behaviour including increased requests for statutory assessment and EHCP as families and educational settings seek to secure existing entitlements ahead of potential legislative change. Such behavioural responses could place additional pressure on already constrained statutory services.

Figure 3a: EHCP Forecast by Age Range

Age Group	2026 EHCP Actuals	EHCP Forecast				
		2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Early Years	54	49	49	49	49	48
Years R-6	7,308	7,557	7,493	7,327	6,991	6,495
Years 7-11	8,575	8,819	8,852	8,815	8,914	9,151
Years 12-13	2,981	3,355	3,622	3,805	3,794	3,752
Years 14+	3,015	3,015	3,249	3,456	3,669	3,834
Total	**21,750**	**22,795**	**23,265**	**23,451**	**23,416**	**23,280**

Figure 3a is the forecast by age range. It indicates that the number of children and young people with an EHCP will increase from 21,750 in 2026 to 23,280 by 2031, reaching a peak of 23,451 in 2029. While overall demand continues to grow, the pattern varies significantly by age phase. The number of pupils with EHCPs in primary-age provision (Years R-6) is forecast to decline after a short-term increase, reducing from 7,308 in 2026 to 6,495 by 2031, reflecting falling primary pupil populations. In contrast, demand in secondary-age provision (Years 7-11) is expected to rise steadily from 8,575 to 9,151, making this the largest cohort throughout the period.

The most significant growth is forecast in post-16 provision. EHCPs for young people in Years 12-13 are projected to increase by 26% between 2026 and 2031 (from 2,981 to 3,752), while the number aged 14+ is expected to grow by 27% (from 3,015 to 3,834). Combined, post-16 cohorts will increase from 5,996 to 7,586, accounting for almost all net growth across the forecast period. This reflects the continuing trend of young people remaining in education and training for longer and highlights the increasing need for additional post-16 SEND capacity, specialist provision, and preparation for adulthood pathways.

3.2 EHCP Forecasts for Need Type

Figure 3b: EHCP Forecast by Need Type

Need Type	2026 EHCP Actuals	EHCP Forecast				
		2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
ASD	10,649	11,240	11,553	11,709	11,751	11,742
SEMH	3,926	4,059	4,062	4,002	3,914	3,787
SLCN	3,649	3,927	4,117	4,261	4,341	4,406
MLD/SPLD	1,380	1,420	1,410	1,400	1,369	1,341
SLD/PMLD	1,144	1,115	1,072	1,029	990	953
Other	1,002	1,034	1,050	1,051	1,052	1,051
Total	**21,750**	**22,795**	**23,265**	**23,451**	**23,416**	**23,280**

The forecast (Figure 3b) shows that future demand will continue to be driven by pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). ASD is projected to increase from 10,649 pupils in 2026 to 11,742 by 2031, remaining the largest area of need. SEMH remains a high incident need but is forecast to remain stable in numerical terms.

For place planning, this highlights the need to continue developing the skills of practitioners in mainstream settings and the physical environments of these schools to meet the needs of pupils with ASD, SLCN and SEMH, with high-quality support services wrapped around them to cater for those with higher levels of need. Specialist Resource Provisions (SRPs) and maintained special schools will continue to play a vital role for those with the most complex needs.

3.3 Early Years (EY)

Policy assumptions influencing our forecasting and commissioning intentions relating to EHCPs and Early Years provision

The Government's Best Start in Life Strategy[1] (2025) sets a national expectation that by 2028, at least 75% of children will achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) at age five. Helping children feel ready for school is a team effort including everything parents do at home, alongside the care and learning received in childcare and early years education.

Locally, Kent's approach to early childhood and readiness to start Reception aligns with the DfE's Universal RISE (Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence) framework, which identifies Reception-year quality as one of the national priorities for driving improved outcomes.

KCC's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment[2] identifies where further Early Years provision may be needed. Currently provision in Kent is predominantly delivered by the Private Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector/settings.

The expectation is that such provisions will be inclusive and accessible to all young children, regardless of their SEND and promote equality of opportunity as set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) so that these children can make progress.

It is important that any necessary special educational provision is put in quickly, as any delay may lead to lost learning, frustration in learning, behaviour difficulties and loss of self-

[1] Best Start in Life - Best Start in Life
[2] Childcare Sufficiency Assessment - 2025-2026 Academic Year

esteem. Our revised model of support for early years has a clearly defined offer at universal, targeted and specialist levels. It will upskill and build confidence with Early Years educators in relation to SEND, improving outcomes for young children and enabling earlier identification to the benefit of all vulnerable children, not only those with SEND. Support for a more consistent implementation of universal strategies is being provided to mainstream settings through a coaching and mentoring model.

Children with complex needs will often have many agencies involved with their care and their education journey. In Kent the Early Years Professional Resource Group (EY PRG) ensures that Early Years providers, children and their families, have access to a bespoke offer to meet their needs during the Early Years phase of their education from a range of professionals and services.

The expectation, for the vast majority of cases, is that before making an EY PRG request there will be robust evidence of how Starting Strong[3] guidance, designed to support all early year's providers in developing their Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP), has been implemented within the setting to evidence impact for all children.

The Special Education Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) is provided by local authorities to early years providers, childminders, and some out of school settings to support pre-school children with special educational needs.

The Disability Access Fund (DAF) aids access to early years places by, for example, supporting providers in making reasonable adjustments to their provision and has been extended to include all eligible nine month, two, three and four year olds.

Figure 3c: EHCP Forecast for Early Years Settings

Age Group	2026 EHCP Actuals	EHCP Forecast				
		2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
EY	45	39	38	39	39	38
Year R	15	12	10	10	10	10
Total	**60**	**51**	**49**	**49**	**49**	**49**

The number of pupils with EHCPs in early years settings and Year R is forecast to reduce in 2027 then remain stable for the remainder of the forecast period (Figure 3c). This reduction reflects the assumptions set out above.

What this means for pupil place planning – It is expected that more children with additional needs will transition successfully into mainstream Reception classes, reducing demand for some specialist placements.

Building parental confidence in the mainstream offer will be key to supporting these transitions and ensuring families feel assured that appropriate support can be provided within local schools. However, mainstream schools may see increasingly complex needs within Reception cohorts and will require strong inclusive practice, effective support, and robust transition arrangements to achieve positive outcomes for all children.

[3] Early Years Ordinarily Available Provision

3.4 Mainstream Provision

Policy assumptions influencing our forecasting and commissioning intentions relating to EHCPs and mainstream provision

As of January 2026, Kent has 129,331 pupils in 459 primary schools. There are 114,706 pupils in 104 secondary schools. A total of 244,037 pupils attend 563 state funded schools.

Kent has a lower proportion of children and young people with an EHCP attending mainstream schools, not including SRPs, than England (**28% Kent; 40% England**). This position is unsustainable. Kent has to move towards the national average. If Kent was at national average 2,610 more children with EHCPs would be in mainstream schools. Numerically this equates to the number of children Kent places in independent and non-maintained special schools at a cost of c£130m per annum plus transport costs.

The policy assumption is that with inclusive support a significantly greater proportion of children with an EHCP can and should be educated in a mainstream provision near to their home, local community and friends.

Ordinarily Available Provision: All primary and secondary mainstream schools and academies are expected to deliver a graduated response to pupils with SEND, either as SEN Support or with an EHCP. This is supported by our Mainstream Core Standards. This also includes access to universal health services, and targeted individual support from therapeutic services including Speech and Language, Occupational Health and Mental Health Services, e.g. PINS and the Balanced System.

In general, accessibility is about making sure a person is not excluded from something because of their disability. It is about removing barriers so that someone with a disability can do what they need to, in a similar amount of time and effort as someone who does not have a disability. The Accessibility Strategy[4] sets out how Kent County Council and its maintained schools currently ensure education is accessible for pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND), and what steps will be taken to further improve accessibility in the three areas; curriculum, premises and information.

Many aspects of the Accessibility Strategy apply equally to academies and free schools, for example, access to certain local authority services and the expectations on schools. Whilst legally the local authority is not responsible for these schools, we work closely with them and their trusts to ensure that the needs of all pupils are supported.

The proposed national changes for SEND reforms aim to create a more inclusive education system by enabling more children and young people with additional needs to attend their local mainstream school while accessing targeted support. A key element of this approach is the development of inclusion bases within mainstream settings, including both support and specialist bases, to provide flexible provision for pupils with SEND and those requiring behavioural, pastoral or attendance-related support. These bases will strengthen the continuum of provision available, allowing a wider range of needs to be met within mainstream schools. By increasing capacity and expertise, promoting earlier intervention, and enabling children to remain connected to their local communities and peers, inclusion bases are expected to improve participation, outcomes and inclusion, while reducing reliance on specialist placements where needs can be effectively met in a mainstream environment.

[4] Accessibility Strategy 2025 to 2028

The Experts at Hand (EAH) offer supports mainstream early years, primary, secondary and post-16 settings to better identify and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. Delivered through local partnerships, it provides access to specialist professionals who help identify needs earlier through observation, assessment and tailored, evidence-based support. The offer complements, but does not replace, statutory provision set out in an EHCP. By embedding expertise from speech and language therapists, educational psychologists, occupational therapists and specialist teachers within mainstream settings, EAH will strengthen workforce confidence and capability, support earlier intervention, and help ensure that children and young people receive timely support within their everyday learning environment.

Figure 3d: EHCP Forecast for Mainstream Places

Age Group	2026 EHCP Actuals	EHCP Forecast				
		2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Early Years	6	7	7	7	7	7
Years R-6	3,267	3,320	3,176	3,081	2,936	2,763
Years 7-11	2,475	2,441	2,334	2,249	2,286	2,348
Years 12-13	202	242	256	269	260	254
Years 14+	19	16	21	23	24	26
Total	**5,969**	**6,027**	**5,794**	**5,628**	**5,513**	**5,396**

Figure 3d shows that the number of pupils with EHCPs in mainstream provision is forecast to increase slightly from 5,969 in 2026 to 6,027 in 2027, before gradually declining to 5,396 by 2031. This reduction is primarily driven by falling numbers in Years R-6 and to a lesser degree in Years 7-11, although post-16 numbers are expected to increase slightly.

While this may appear to conflict with Kent's ambition to increase mainstream attendance for pupils with SEND, the trend is largely explained by demographic factors and the movement of historically larger EHCP cohorts through the education system. The forecast also reflects the expected impact of SEND reforms, which aim to support more children and young people within mainstream schools at SEN Support level rather than through an EHCP. As a result, a reduction in the number of pupils with EHCPs in mainstream schools does not necessarily indicate a reduction in inclusion. Instead, it may reflect greater success in meeting needs earlier and without the need for statutory plans.

For place planning, this reinforces the need to continue investing in inclusive mainstream practice and support services, while recognising that future inclusion may increasingly be demonstrated through higher levels of effective SEN Support rather than growth in EHCP numbers within mainstream schools.

What does this mean for pupil place planning - responding to national policy developments and building parental confidence in mainstream education will be key considerations for future planning.

Continued investment in mainstream inclusion and early intervention, supported through the DfE High Needs Provision Capital Allocation, will improve the accessibility of schools and learning environments. This funding will enable adaptations to buildings and facilities, increasing schools' capacity to meet a wider range of physical, sensory and communication needs.

By strengthening schools' ability to provide appropriate support locally, more children and young people with SEND will be able to access and succeed in mainstream education within their community. This will help reduce reliance on special school provision where children's needs can be effectively met in a mainstream setting.

3.5 Special Resource Provisions (SRPs)

Policy assumptions influencing our forecasting and commissioning intentions relating to EHCPs and SRPs

A Specialist Resource Provision (SRP) provides support for those pupils who, without specialist input, are unlikely to make progress in their learning and will struggle to take part in mainstream school life, but for whom a Special School is not the most appropriate provision. SRPs support children to attend mainstream provision and take part in the mainstream curriculum and wider offer with others where appropriate. In 2026, Kent has 80 SRPs in 72 maintained and academy trust schools.

In November 2025, KCC agreed an SRP expansion programme focused on addressing areas of identified need (type) and geographical gaps in capacity, particularly to support the transition of pupils with ASD and SLCN from primary education into Year 7. The programme planned to:

- create 32 new SRPs
- expand 4 existing SRPs
- deliver an additional 889 pre-16 specialist places over the five-year period to 2030.

Recognising the pressure of the autism cohort our new provision designations support pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). This will help more children and young people access appropriate specialist support in their local area. This aligns with the national inclusion proposals for mainstream schools.

We do not have SRPs designated for SEMH places and it is not our intention to commission these in the future. VI places are not commissioned in our SRPs; however, Kent has a countywide specialist service which supports children with SEN for VI, HI and PD in their local mainstream school.

For 2026-27 a total of 1,706 SRP places have been commissioned for children and young people with an EHCP (Figure 3e). This is an increase of 155 places from 2025-26. Kent have 20 post-16 places commissioned for ASD/SLCN. It is our intention that this remains an exceptional circumstances offer agreed in line with our placement decision making process. SRPs are considered an SEN intervention and students attending these will ordinarily be expected to progress to a post-16 provision that is appropriate to their needs and aspirations for the next phase of their education.

Figure 3.e: Commissioned Places by Phase and District for 2026-27

District	Primary Phase	Secondary Phase	Total Places
Ashford	66	40	106
Canterbury	79	134	213
Dartford	132	88	220
Dover	198	101	299
Folkestone & Hythe	67	62	129
Gravesham	40	29	69
Maidstone	40	14	54
Sevenoaks	27	12	39
Swale	97	122	219
Thanet	91	2	93
Tonbridge & Malling	97	152	249
Tunbridge Wells	7	9	16
Total	**941**	**765**	**1,706**

The districts with the lowest number of commissioned SRP places are in Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks and Maidstone. We currently commission more primary SRP places overall. This covers 7-year groups in primary schools compared to 5-year groups in secondary schools. Dover currently has two primary SRPs. One is a new provision that is building capacity through a phased implementation model, while the other has a substantially higher number of places than is typical for primary SRPs, influencing the overall distribution of specialist capacity within the district.

Tonbridge & Malling has four secondary SRPs. While three provisions are comparable in scale to the county average, one operates at a substantially larger capacity, contributing a significant proportion of the district's specialist secondary provision.

Figure 3f: EHCP Forecast SRPs by Age Range

Age Group	2026 EHCP Actuals	EHCP Forecast				
		2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Early Years	0	0	0	0	0	0
Years R-6	822	937	1,087	1,188	1,227	1,237
Years 7-11	655	723	873	1,019	1,128	1,139
Years 12-13	49	54	57	58	63	72
Years 14+*	5	4	4	5	5	5
Total	**1,531**	**1,718**	**2,021**	**2,269**	**2,423**	**2,453**

* Year 14+ young people are included in EHCP forecasts but excluded from school placement totals, as they are no longer on roll in educational settings.

Figure 3g: EHCP Forecast SRP by Need Type

Age Group	2026 EHCP Actuals	EHCP Forecast				
		2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
ASD	922	1,099	1,367	1,585	1,711	1,743
SEMH	51	51	46	44	42	40
SLCN	345	368	419	465	502	509
MLD/SPLD	50	45	44	41	38	39
SLD/PMLD	39	37	31	28	24	19
Other	124	117	114	108	106	103
Total	**1,531**	**1,718**	**2,021**	**2,269**	**2,423**	**2,453**

The forecasts (Figures 3f) indicate a significant increase in the number of children and young people, both primary and secondary school aged, requiring an SRP place.

ASD and SLCN pupil numbers in SRPs over time are forecast to increase (Figure 3g). The group categorised as Other, which includes HI and PD, is forecast to decrease along with the numbers of SLD/PMLD and MLD/SPLD. We do not intend to open SRPs for SEMH but there are pupils with this SEN successfully attending our SRPs.

What does this mean for pupil place planning – The plans to add 899 SRP places will address a significant proportion of the forecasted increase in demand. This will reduce reliance on high-cost independent specialist placements.

Future planning will prioritise districts where capacity gaps have been identified, particularly to support the transition of pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) from Year 6 into Year 7. These cohorts represent a significant proportion of demand and are not forecast to decrease in size.

The greatest pressure for secondary phase provisions are currently evident in Thanet and Tunbridge Wells. To address this, two new secondary SRPs are planned in Thanet and one in Tunbridge Wells. Additional pressure is also evident in Maidstone, where plans include the expansion of an existing SRP and the development of a new provision. In Sevenoaks, a new secondary SRP is planned. Additional SRP capacity in Gravesham is being developed as part of a Department for Education school rebuilding programme. Given the potential for delays associated with major capital projects, planned expansions in the neighbouring district of Dartford will also contribute to meeting anticipated demand across the wider area.

Although primary SRP provision is generally more available, further expansion is required in some areas to meet projected demand. Three new primary SRPs are planned in Tunbridge Wells and two in Sevenoaks.

These developments will play a key role in ensuring sufficient specialist capacity is available to meet future demand and improve local access to provision. Further details are provided in Tables 5b to 5e.

3.6 Maintained Special School Provision

Policy assumptions influencing our forecasting and commissioning intentions relating to EHCPs and maintained special school provision

There are currently 25 maintained special schools in Kent. The majority of these (21 schools) offer places for pupils in both primary and secondary school phases.

In December 2025, the Department of Education (DfE) confirmed a £3bn investment to improve special educational needs (SEN) provision across England. This included previously agreed plans for two new special schools in Kent, the Leigh Academy Birchwood in Swanley and the Whitstable Special School. Both of these new special schools were anticipated to open in September 2025 but have been delayed until at least September 2028 because of DfE decision making. This has led to a continued dependence on high-cost placements in the independent special school sector.

KCC continues to work with its maintained special schools to provide the support to enable them to provide for the needs of children with the most complex needs.

Our policy assumptions are informed by the following information:

1. **6,717 (31%)** of children and young people are in Kent maintained special schools.
2. The percentage of children and young people in England in maintained special schools is 24%.
3. Kent should move towards the national averages for maintained special schools.
4. This indicates that with the expansions contained in the previous iteration of this plan and the two new special schools, Kent's maintained special school sector is the right size to provide for all the county's needs.

KCC continues to work with its maintained special schools to provide the support and funding to enable these to provide for the needs of the most complex children and young people with SEN.

Figure 3h: EHCP Forecast for Maintained Special Schools by Age Group

Age Group	2026 EHCP Actuals	EHCP Forecast				
		2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Early Years	0	0	0	0	0	0
Years R-6	2,542	2,581	2,542	2,447	2,324	2,095
Years 7-11	3,341	3,477	3,543	3,606	3,744	3,974
Years 12-13	631	707	734	766	801	818
Years 14+	203	172	206	212	216	233
Total	**6,717**	**6,936**	**7,025**	**7,031**	**7,085**	**7,119**

The forecast indicates an increase in the number of maintained special school places in line with the delivery of the two new special schools (Figure 3h). The pupil numbers will increase for secondary phase and post-16. Overtime we forecast a decrease in the primary phase of pupils attending maintained special schools.

What does this mean for pupil place planning – Maintained special schools will see an increase proportionally for the secondary and post-16 cohort as we move towards national averages for maintained special school attendance.

Over time the profile of pupils in individual maintained special schools will change to reflect the changing demographic needs as set out above. We expect system realignment to ensure that these schools are supporting those pupils with an EHCP and the most complex needs.

The proposed two new special schools will provide the capacity required to meet the forecast increased need. With this capacity included, we are looking to hold maintained special school numbers broadly static.

3.7 Independent and Non-Maintained Schools (INMSS)

Policy assumptions influencing our forecasting and commissioning intentions relating to EHCPs and independent and non-maintained special school provision

Where we are unable to provide specialist provision in a Kent maintained special school or SRP, specialist placements are commissioned in the independent and non-maintained sector. As of January 2026, there were 2,068 Kent resident pupils funded for an INMSS place. This represents 10% of all Kent EHCP and an increase of 296 places (16%) from

January 2025/26. Our policy assumption is that we will move towards national averages of children and young people attending INMSS.

Each school charges a different rate depending on need type and several other school-based factors. For 2026/27 the average cost for a maintained special school place is £28,621 and an INMSS place is £60,035. This average is not just the basic placement cost for special but includes the other grant funding received such as legacy funding and exceptional pupil need funding. On average, an INMSS place is twice as expensive as a maintained special school place.

Our new independent and non-maintained special school procurement process aims to improve outcomes, strengthen quality assurance, enhance pricing transparency, and secure better value for money while ensuring placements remain focused on children with the most complex needs. Provision under this Framework includes Independent Special Schools (both Section 41 and non-Section 41) and Non-Maintained Special Schools. Providers must be appropriately registered with Ofsted or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and must meet statutory and contractual quality, safeguarding, and compliance requirements.

It is our intention to reduce the numbers of new admissions in the independent sector as we build capacity in other sectors of our SEND provision, thus our expectation is that we will have less requirement for provision from this sector.

Figure 3i: ECHP Forecast for Independent Schools

Age	2026 EHCP Actuals	EHCP Forecast				
		2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Early Years	0	0	0	0	0	0
Years R-6	400	430	410	348	258	174
Years 7-11	1,400	1,461	1,427	1,303	1,138	1,095
Years 12-13	208	265	318	347	337	319
Years 14+	60	62	69	80	95	105
Total	**2,068**	**2,219**	**2,223**	**2,078**	**1,827**	**1,692**

The forecast (Figure 3i) indicates a slight increase in pupil numbers for 2027 to 2028 and then a decrease for all groups, except post-16 (Years 12-13 and 14+). While this may appear to conflict with Kent's ambition to decrease INMSS attendance for pupils with SEND, it recognises the delays in opening the two new maintained special schools.

What does this mean for pupil place planning – It is recognised that the independent sector is a valuable part of the educational provision in Kent and will continue to be so. However, the current level of reliance on this sector is unsustainable and it is our intention to reduce these places by 3% to move closer to national average figures.

The largest cohort, over 50%, are of secondary age and this cohort are moving through the system.

Most INMSS commissioned places will be for schools on our INMSS Open Framework, supporting due diligence and assessment for quality, governance, policies and cost for this education. This new framework replaces the previous Dynamic Purchase System (DPS) which ended in August 2026.

3.8 Post-16 Provision

Policy assumptions influencing our forecasting and commissioning intentions relating to EHCPs and Post-16 provision

Most young people with SEND complete their education alongside their peers by age 18. However, national legislation allows young people with an EHCP to continue receiving support in education or training up to age 25. The number of young people with an EHCP has increased significantly in recent years and is expected to continue growing as larger age groups move through the education system.

Growth, as measured by the percentage change year on year for 2024/25, in EHCPs was higher nationally than in Kent across almost all age groups. The only exception was those aged 20 and over where Kent recorded a 57% increase compared with the previous year, an increase of 443 EHCPs. As part of our strategic planning, we will through better working practices and engagement with families cease EHCPs in the post-16 sector where appropriate.

Kent launched the Pathways for All programme to bring together colleges, schools and specialist providers to develop more inclusive post-16 opportunities. A key challenge within post-16 education is that many providers, particularly school sixth forms, predominantly offer Level 3 qualifications such as A Levels. However, many young people with an EHCP do not yet have the qualifications required to access these courses and therefore need greater opportunities to Level 2 and below provision. Kent is working closely with education providers to expand the availability of these courses.

Kent currently has 17 special schools with sixth forms, which together provided 834 post-16 places in 2025-26. These schools work in collaboration with further education colleges to broaden the range of academic, vocational and specialist courses available to students. Alongside this provision, three further education college groups operate across 11 campuses throughout Kent, although there are currently no college sites located in Tunbridge Wells or Sevenoaks. In addition, Specialist Post-16 Institutions make an important contribution to the county's post-16 offer, expanding opportunities through vocational pathways in areas such as sport, music, animal care and horticulture.

As part of the Local Area Strategic Plan, work is underway to strengthen post-16 pathways and improve outcomes for young people with SEND. This includes a review of the Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) standards[5], supported by the establishment of a baseline for post-16 SEND participation and transition outcomes, enabling progress to be measured and areas for improvement identified. In partnership with education, health and care providers, post-16 pathway guidance will be refreshed to provide clearer information, more consistent expectations, and well-defined progression routes. These actions will support improved transition planning, helping young people move successfully into further education, training, employment or adulthood while reducing the risk of becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

[5] Preparation for Adulthood Core Standards and Protocols - Kent County Council

Figure 3j: Post-16 EHCPs by District

Home District	Number of Post-16 EHCPs
Swale	776
Thanet	671
Canterbury	586
Ashford	503
Maidstone	489
Dover	439
Tonbridge & Malling	431
Dartford	420
Folkestone & Hythe	394
Gravesham	392
Sevenoaks	373
Tunbridge Wells	311
Not Kent Address	19
Not recorded	9
Total	**5,813**

Source: SEN2 Return 2026

Figure 3j illustrates the distribution of post-16 EHCPs across Kent districts and highlights the continuing demand for specialist support, particularly for courses at Level 2 and below. While it is anticipated that many young people with EHCPs will have their educational needs met within mainstream colleges and other local post-16 provision, the data reflects ongoing pressure on specialist services.

Looking ahead, the greatest level of growth is expected to be in the post-19 cohort (Figure 3.k), with a 56% increase between 2026 and 2031. It is expected that a greater proportion of post-16 learners with EHCPs will be supported in colleges, schools and Specialist Post-16 Institutions (SPIs), rather than Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS). The highest numbers of post-16 young people with EHCPs are found in Swale, Thanet and Canterbury, indicating where demand for both mainstream and specialist support is likely to be greatest.

Figure 3k: EHCP Forecast of Post-16 in Full Time Education

Age	2026 EHCP Actuals	EHCP Forecast				
		2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Years 12-13	1,459	1,641	1,811	1,932	1,939	1,911
Years 14+	2,060	2,328	2,557	2,813	3,064	3,223
Total	**3,530**	**3,985**	**4,384**	**4,760**	**5,019**	**5,150**

East Kent College have junior college provision at several of their sites which provides education for a small number of young people in Year 10 and 11. The row for these students has been removed from the table but not the total.

What does this mean for pupil place planning - The post-16 forecasts present the most significant challenge to the County Council in respect of meeting the education needs of any group with an EHCP.

The EHCP Forecast indicates that better community support for young people with autism is required to enable more young people to become independent learners as they move into post-16 education and on to an independent adulthood.

The provision for course places at Further Education (FE) Colleges and Specialist Post 16 Institutions (SPIs) will need to increase significantly. To avoid long travel distances, there is a greater need for provision in East Kent.

Local Collaborative Partnership Area groups (LCPAs), led by post-16 sector leaders across the county, are developing a more coherent pathway offer within the local action plans. This includes delivering an increase for places at level 2 and below for students across districts.

4.0 Other Settings

Most children attend school for their education, but there are a range of other settings that children and young people with an EHCP attend. These include tuition, online providers arranged by parents or the local authority and Education Other Than At School (EOTAS).

We anticipate that improvements in statutory assessment timelines, expanded maintained provision, better inclusive practice, earlier support and intervention, and more effective commissioning will reduce the number of children and young people with EHCPs waiting for provision, while also shortening the time required to identify and secure appropriate placements.

4.1 Awaiting Provision

In January 2026 a total of 659 children and young people with an EHCP were awaiting provision (Figure 4a). The greatest pressures are evident in Swale, Tonbridge & Malling, Thanet, and Dartford, where the highest numbers of children and young people are waiting for a suitable placement.

The post-16 cohort, including young people aged 20 to 24, represents the largest group (66%) of those awaiting provision. This highlights significant demand for suitable college, sixth form, training, and specialist post-16 placements. Work to address these pressures is being supported through Kent's Pathways for All programme.

Within the secondary-age cohort of those awaiting provision, demand is distributed relatively evenly across districts but reflects greater placement pressures than those seen within the primary-age cohort. In contrast, pressures within the primary-age cohort are most evident in Dartford and Ashford.

The statutory school-age cohort totals 221 children and young people in 2026, representing a reduction of 149 from the 370 recorded in 2024/25. This reduction can be viewed as an indicator of improving system performance. Falling numbers of children and young people awaiting provision, alongside shorter waiting times, suggest that recent improvements across the system are beginning to have a positive impact. We would expect this trend to continue.

Figure 4a: Children with an EHCP Awaiting Provision

Home District	Aged 0-3 Years	Aged 4-10 Years	Aged 11-15 Years	Aged 16-19 Years	Aged 20 – 24 Years	District EHCP Total
Ashford	0	10	15	25	9	59
Canterbury	0	2	15	30	9	56
Dartford	0	13	10	28	12	63
Dover	0	9	11	22	9	51
Folkestone & Hythe	0	0	9	17	13	39
Gravesham	0	7	13	28	11	59
Maidstone	1	2	14	16	10	43
Sevenoaks	0	3	12	21	11	47
Swale	1	7	14	31	13	66
Thanet	1	5	11	33	13	63
Tonbridge & Malling	0	8	16	27	14	65
Tunbridge Wells	0	4	4	16	8	32
Not Kent Address	0	2	0	8	1	11
Not recorded	0	3	2	0	0	5
Total	**3**	**75**	**146**	**302**	**133**	**659**

Source: SEN2 Return 2026

4.2 Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) and Tuition (Alternative Provision)

We commission external tuition companies to provide education for pupils who may be awaiting placement (Alternative Provision) or as part of an Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) package. EOTAS allows local authorities to arrange specialist education outside mainstream school or further education settings for children and young people with an EHCP when school-based provision is unsuitable. EOTAS provision typically combines alternative education with therapeutic and health support.

Currently, 3.7% of the total EHCP cohort are educated through EOTAS or tuition arrangements rather than in traditional school-based provision. More than half of these children and young people **(416, or 54%) are aged post-16,** indicating that the greatest demand for these arrangements lies beyond the compulsory school-age years. There is also notable pressure within the secondary phase, where 293 children and young people (35.5% of the cohort) are supported through EOTAS or tuition arrangements. This suggests that demand is concentrated largely in secondary and post-16 age groups, rather than within primary education.

During 2025/26 in Kent, 614 children received EOTAS. Its increasing use highlights concerns about late identification of needs, insufficient early intervention, and gaps in suitable provision. The Government intends to align future arrangements with SEND reforms and proposed Specialist Provision Packages from 2029/30 and is considering replacing current local authority-led arrangements due to inconsistencies in practice and outcomes.

The Education Programme is an interim (alternative) provision for pupils with SEN and no current educational placement offer from the local authority. It has a total capacity of 108 places. In January 2026, 66 children and young people were receiving tuition from this provision; 17 children were primary aged with an EHCP (and 2 were awaiting an EHCP) and 47 were secondary aged with an EHCP.

Figure 4b: EHCP Other Cohort (including tuition arranged by parents/LA and EOTAS)

Home District	Aged 4-10 years	Aged 11-15 years	Aged 16-19 years	Aged 20 – 24 years	District Total
Ashford	8	21	38	11	78
Canterbury	8	27	49	9	93
Dartford	14	26	34	3	77
Dover	3	19	27	6	55
Folkestone & Hythe	5	14	21	4	44
Gravesham	2	13	37	4	56
Maidstone	10	31	34	2	77
Sevenoaks	5	28	21	6	60
Swale	9	39	40	13	101
Thanet	12	35	24	6	77
Tonbridge & Malling	6	27	30	6	69
Tunbridge Wells	5	13	17	1	36
Not Kent Address	0	0	1	2	3
Not recorded	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**87**	**293**	**373**	**73**	**826**

Source: SEN2 Return 2026

Figure 4b indicates the highest numbers overall are recorded in Swale (101) and Canterbury (93), with the pressure particularly evident within secondary provision. Four other districts also have significant numbers, with more than 76 pupils each: Ashford, Dartford, Maidstone and Thanet. To support effective pupil place planning, there is a need to review and strengthen both the SEN and mainstream offer within these districts, promoting more inclusive practice and increasing parental confidence in choosing and remaining within local provision. In response to this demand, we are developing secondary mainstream provision in Swale alongside a comprehensive SRP offer.

4.3 Elective Home Education (EHE)

Elective home education (EHE) describes the choice that parents can make to provide education for their child either at home, or in some other way, instead of sending them to school full-time. It is the responsibility of parents to ensure their child is educated and it is recognised that parents may choose home education for a variety of reasons.

While parents may choose elective home education for a variety of reasons, for some families this decision may be influenced by a perception that their child's special educational needs are not being adequately met within the state education system. Home education can be a positive and successful option when it is an informed choice and is delivered with appropriate consideration of the child's individual needs. We encourage parents choosing this option to have awareness of their responsibilities as outlined in our policy and procedures Kent County Council Elective Home Education Policy and Procedure.

Figure 4c: Children attending EHE with an EHCP

Age Group	Number of EHCPs
Early Years (0-4 years)	0
Primary Age (5-10 years old)	97
Secondary Age (11-16 years old)	246
Post-16 (16-18 years old)	34
Total	**377**

Source: SEN2 Return 2026

In Kent, there are 377 primary and secondary-aged children and young people with an EHCP who are educated at home (January 2026) (Figure 4c). Most of this cohort are of secondary school age (246 children or 65%), which may indicate perceived challenges relating to curriculum accessibility, school environments, and the ability of settings to meet SEN as children progress through the stages of their education. Parents report concerns about their children relating to anxiety, mental health and wellbeing, sensory overload, and difficulties accessing appropriate support within mainstream settings.

With the Government's focus on developing a more inclusive mainstream education system, Kent's ambition is to ensure that more children and young people with SEND can have their needs met successfully within local schools. This supports the wider objective of fulfilling the legal duty to ensure that every child of compulsory school age receives a safe, efficient and suitable full-time education. Through continued investment in inclusive practice and targeted support, we would expect the number of children with EHCPs accessing elective home education to reduce over time as confidence in, and positive experiences of, school-based provision increases.

4.4 Alternative Provision (AP)

Under Section 19 of the Education Act 1996, local authorities have a duty to arrange suitable education for children of compulsory school age who may not otherwise receive suitable education because of exclusion, illness (physical or mental health conditions) or other reasons.

Education arranged under this duty is referred to by the Department as alternative provision, (AP). Schools may also arrange off-site provision to support pupils to improve their behaviour, and this is also known as alternative provision. Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are a frequently used form of AP.

In Kent, Alternative Provision (AP) is delivered through a combination of Local Authority maintained Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and AP settings, alongside academy-operated PRUs and AP providers. Budgets are fully delegated to the respective Management Committees, enabling local headteachers to oversee the delivery of alternative provision while retaining responsibility for the pupils on their school roll.

To support inclusion, all non-selective secondary schools in Kent receive inclusion funding. Although primary and grammar schools do not receive this funding, in line with agreements made through the Schools Funding Forum, the local authority expects districts to use their allocations flexibly to meet the needs of all children and young people across their area, including those attending primary schools.

The primary purpose of an AP placement is to provide short-term support that enables pupils to successfully reintegrate into mainstream education. However, some pupils attending PRUs may be undergoing statutory assessment or may have been issued an EHCP whilst at the PRU.

A new alternative provision school, Jude’s Academy in Northfleet, has already been approved by the DfE, and we hope that the DfE will continue to deliver this new free school as planned and as swiftly as possible.

Figure 4d: Kent Pupil Referral Unit Locations

Kent Area/District	Pupil Referral Unit
Dartford and Gravesham	Estuary Academy North
Swale	Estuary Academy Island
Folkestone and Hythe	Birchwood School
Maidstone and Malling	Maidstone and Malling Alternative Provision
Thanet and Dover	Enterprise Learning Alliance
West Kent, Tunbridge Wells	Two Bridges School

The Rosewood School is the authority's provision for children and young people who because of ill health (physical or mental health conditions) cannot attend school for a period of time. Its core aim is to reintegrate a pupil back to their mainstream provision. The school has three sites across the county based in Canterbury, West Malling and a residential adolescent unit in Staplehurst.

4.5 Children Missing Education (CME)

A Child Missing from Education (CME) is a child of compulsory school age who is neither registered at a school, or placed in alternative provision by a local authority, or receiving a suitable elective home education. In January 2026 in Kent there were a total of 321 children.

Children may become missing from education for a variety of reasons, including failure to start school at the appropriate age, being removed from school by their parents due to problems at school, disinterest or poor attendance or stopping their education due to exclusion, illness or bullying. Other reasons can include challenges in securing a school place after relocating to a new area, as well as wider personal circumstances such as the family is homeless and living in temporary accommodation or a refuge, and long-term medical or emotional difficulties.

We will work closely with families to better understand the factors that contribute to children becoming missing from education. This insight will help inform our future planning and ensure that services are responsive to the needs of children and young people.

Our approach is to strengthen commissioning, inclusive practice, and support within schools to reduce the number of children and young people who become CME. Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure their child receives a suitable full-time education, including provision that meets any special educational needs they may have.

Where concerns arise and a child is not receiving an appropriate education, the local authority will take action to safeguard the child's right to education, including the use of School Attendance Orders where necessary. Between February 2025 and January 2026, 94.7% of Children Missing from Education (CME) cases in Kent were closed within 30 school days.

4.6 Forecasts for Other Settings

The forecast (Figure 4e) indicates a gradual reduction in the number of children and young people with EHCPs accessing education in other settings, with overall numbers expected to fall from 1,875 in 2026 to 1,421 in 2031, representing a reduction of 454 pupils (24%). Throughout the forecast period, secondary-aged pupils (Years 7-11) continue to comprise the largest cohort, although numbers are projected to decrease from 693 to 580.

The most significant decline is anticipated among the 14+ age group, where numbers are forecast to reduce by around 50%, from 485 in 2026 to 243 in 2031. The Years 12-13 cohort is expected to remain relatively stable until 2028 before experiencing a gradual decline.

Similarly, the number of primary-aged pupils (Years R-6) in other settings is forecast to decrease steadily from 262 to 216 over the period.

Overall, the trend suggests a reduced reliance on alternative education arrangements over time, particularly among older age groups.

Figure 4e: EHCP Forecast for Other Settings

Age	2026 EHCP Actuals	EHCP Forecast				
		2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Early Years	3	3	3	3	3	3
Years R-6	262	277	268	253	236	216
Years 7-11	693	700	659	623	602	580
Years 12-13	432	446	447	433	394	378
Years 14+	485	433	392	323	264	243
Total	**1,875**	**1,859**	**1,769**	**1,635**	**1,500**	**1,421**

What does this mean for pupil place planning: Our aim is to reduce the number of pupils requiring tuition or EOTAS by increasing access to suitable school-based provision. Enhanced outreach support for inclusion in mainstream schools will promote earlier intervention and more effective SEND support, while ongoing development of our provider framework will help ensure high-quality, cost-effective tuition, therapy and specialist services.

Many of the children and young people in this cohort have not been able to access or sustain a successful mainstream placement. As capacity increases within SRPs and maintained special schools, we expect to secure appropriate placements more quickly.

The Education Programme and external tuition will continue to support pupils who are between placements, although no significant expansion of capacity is planned.

5.0 Future SEN Commissioning of Provision

5.1 Special School Planned Commissioning

Pressures remain, both locally and nationally, on state maintained special school capacity. The sufficiency pressures in our special schools has led to a number of challenges and the increased use of the independent and non-maintained sectors. A paper proposing a capital programme to alleviate the sufficiency and suitability challenges and support Kent's maintained special schools to continue to deliver high-quality education to their pupils will be present ed to KCC CYPEE Cabinet in November 2026.

Figure 5a: Agreed and Planned Special School Additional Provision in Kent

Provision: Special School	Proposed Year	SEN Type	District	Potential Additional Number of Places	Total Additional Places by Year				
					2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32
Expansion of special school (Broomhill Bank)	2027/28	C&I	Sevenoaks	130	40	40	50	0	0
New special school (all through) Swanley	2028/29	PSCN	Sevenoaks	250	0	114	66	70	0
New special school (all through) Whitstable	2028/29	SEMH/ASD	Canterbury	120	0	48	28	44	0
Expansion of special school (Parkwood Hall)	2031	C&L	Sevenoaks	40	8	8	8	16	0
Total planned special school places				540	48	210	152	130	0

5.2 SRP Planned Commissioning

Figure 5b: Planned New/Expanded SRPs in East Kent

East Provision: SRP	Date of Opening	SEN Type	District	Total Additional Places by Year					Total New Places
				2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	
Newlands Primary*	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Thanet	10	7	3	0	0	20
Herne Bay Primary Planning Group	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Canterbury	10	10	0	0	0	20
Faversham Primary PG Bysing Wood	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Swale	15	5	0	0	0	20
Bromstone**	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Thanet	6	6	0	0	0	12
Total planned primary SRP places				41	28	3	0	0	**72**
Thanet Non-Selective PG	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Thanet	15	15	20	0	0	50
Canterbury Coastal PG***	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Canterbury	15	15	10	0	0	40
Canterbury Coastal PG (2)	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Canterbury	15	15	20	0	0	50
Faversham non-selective PG	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Swale	10	10	0	0	0	20
Thanet Non-Selective (2) PG	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Thanet	10	10	10	0	0	30
Total planned secondary SRP places				65	65	60	0	0	**190**
Total planned SRP places				106	93	63	0	0	**262**

*Newlands: potential additional number of places reduced from 40 in consultation with the school
**Bromstone: does not have a designated SRP and needs to be formalised through the statutory process. Work is necessary to meet the required standards (BB104)
***Canterbury Coastal Planning Group: potential additional number of places reduced from 50 in consultation with the school

Figure 5c: Planned/New Expanded SRPs in North Kent

North Provision: SRP	Date of Opening	SEN Type	District	Total Additional Places by Year					Total New Places
				2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	
Alkerden CoE Academy (Primary)	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Dartford	4	3	3	5	0	15
Rosherville CoE Primary Academy	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Gravesham	4	5	6	0	0	15
Edenbridge PG: Edenbridge Primary School	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Sevenoaks	7	7	6	0	0	20
Swanley PG: St Marys	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Sevenoaks	6	5	4	0	0	15
Total planned primary SRP places				21	20	19	5	0	**65**
Alkerden CoE Academy (Secondary)	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Dartford	5	6	7	7	0	25
Sevenoaks and Borough Green PG: Knole Academy	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Sevenoaks	6	12	12	0	0	30
Dartford and Swanley non-selective PG	2028/29	ASD/SLCN	Dartford	0	10	10	10	0	30
Total planned secondary SRP places				11	28	29	17	0	**85**
Total planned SRP places				32	48	48	22	0	**150**

Figure 5d: Planned New/Expanded SRPs in South Kent

South Provision: SRP	Date of Opening	SEN Need Type	District	Total Additional Places by Year					Total New Places
				2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	
Ashford North Planning Group	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Ashford	7	7	6	0	0	20
Ashford East Planning Group	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Ashford	7	7	6	0	0	20
Tenterden South Planning Group	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Ashford	6	5	3	0	0	14
Ashford South Planning Group	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Ashford	6	5	3	0	0	14
Total planned primary places				26	24	18	0	0	**68**
Total planned secondary SRP places				0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Total planned SRP places				26	24	18	0	0	**68**

Figure 5e: Planned New/Expanded SRPs in West Kent

West Provision: SRP	Date of Opening	SEN Need Type	District	Total Additional Places by Year					Total New Places
				2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	
South East Maidstone Town	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Maidstone	6	5	3	0	0	14
North West Maidstone Town	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Maidstone	6	5	3	0	0	14
Maidstone Rural	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Maidstone	6	5	3	0	0	14
Tunbridge Wells Town 1 East Planning Group	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Tunbridge Wells	6	5	3	0	0	14
Tunbridge Wells Town 2 West Planning Group	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Tunbridge Wells	6	5	3	0	0	14
Tunbridge Wells Rural	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Tunbridge Wells	6	5	3	0	0	14
Total planned primary SRP places				36	30	18	0	0	**84**
St Augustine (expansion)	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Maidstone	8	12	10	0	0	30
Maidstone Secondary Town	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Maidstone	8	12	10	0	0	30
Skinners' Kent Academy	2027/28	ASD/SLCN	Tunbridge Wells	8	12	10	0	0	30
Total planned secondary SRP places				24	36	30	0	0	**90**
Total planned SRP places				60	66	48	0	0	**174**

Figure 5f: Planned Changes for Established SRPs

SRP Provision	Date	District	Category of Change	Total New Places
The Archbishop School	2027/28	Canterbury	Broaden Designation to ASD/SLCN	10
Westlands School	2028/29	Swale	Broaden Designation to ASD/SLCN alongside School's Rebuild Programme	25
Wincheap Foundation Primary School	2026/27	Canterbury	Broaden Designation to ASD/SLCN	20
Total Planned Places				**55**

Figure 5g: Agreed and Planned Alternative Provision in Kent

Alternative Provision:	Proposed Opening Date	SEN Type	District	Total Additional Number of Places	Total Additional Places Added By Year				
					2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32
Expansion of KS3 provision, The Rosewood School	2027	Health Needs Education Centre	Canterbury	30	30	0	0	0	0
Jude's Academy	2031	AP	Gravesham	80	0	0	0	0	20
Total Planned Alternative Provision Places				**150**	30	0	0	0	20