

Specialist Provision Place Planning: Forward View 2026

Access to Education, Employment and Training



March 2026

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Introduction

The challenge of ensuring sufficient local education provision for children and young people with Special Education Needs & Disabilities (SEND) is recognised as a national and local challenge and priority.

The law requires all young people in England to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday. For some young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan, it may be appropriate to remain in education up to 25 years old. Local Authorities have duties under section 14 of the Education Act 1996 to ensure sufficiency of school places available to meet the needs of all children and young people living within the authority area, or for whom they have responsibilities. This duty extends to ensure there are enough suitable educational placements and resources available to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in the area.

Our ambition for all children in Milton Keynes with SEND is that they will have their needs met with a range of inclusive provision available as locally as possible through our mainstream schools, specialist resource provision, SEND units and special school provision.

The demand for SEND places within Milton Keynes has grown significantly over the last 10 years and, there is a clear need to continue to create additional provision to meet our ongoing requirements. Ensuring that there are sufficient places of the right type, in the right place, and at the right time, for CYP with SEND is fundamental to our wider SEND approach.

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

This document predominantly looks at school aged children and young people with an EHCP and is intended for use as a guidance document to support both the local authority and education providers in detailing where places are available and in planning where additional places may need to be secured in the future, supplementing the wider [MK SEND strategy](#).

This document will be reviewed annually to take account of the latest available SEND, housing and population datasets. Comments and feedback about this document are welcomed and can be sent to sufficiencyandaccess@milton-keynes.gov.uk. The information provided in this document may change, not least as a result of policy or funding announcements by the Department for Education.

National context

There are significant complexities for local authorities in navigating the current SEND system which government identify as requiring reform. A 'white paper' has been expected since 2024 but remains delayed, leaving local areas with uncertainty around future strategic aims. There are a number of key challenges currently faced by local authorities in the SEND space:

1. Increasing rates of identified SEND

Local authorities are facing unprecedented growth in the number of children requiring SEND support.

- EHCP numbers reached over 638k in January 2025, up 10.8% in one year/ This is more than double the number of EHCPs in 2014.
- More than 5% of pupils now have an EHCP, up from 3% in 2018.

2. Specialist provision capacity

- There are specialist provision sufficiency challenges, forcing reliance on expensive independent placements.

3. Severe and escalating financial pressures

Authorities are struggling with immense budgetary pressures.

- Councils' SEND spending has risen two-thirds, from £7.8bn (2015–16) to £13.1bn (2024–25).
- Local authorities have accumulated significant SEND deficits nationally which, without reform, could rise to £14bn by 2028/29. The government has said it will pay off 90% of the debts English councils have built up through supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to the end of the 25/26 financial year. This initiative is part of a broader reform, with the government planning to take full responsibility for SEND funding from 2028.
- Rising costs of Home-to-School Transport for children with SEND is one of the fastest-growing LA pressures. It is therefore critical that there is sufficient provision available locally provision is available as locally as possible to support to reduce the financial implications

4. A Fragmented, adversarial and difficult to navigate system

- Families commonly describe the SEND system as adversarial and exhausting.
- This undermines trust and contributes to a high number of lengthy disputes, appeals and tribunal pressures.

5. Recruitment challenges:

- Across education, health and social care, there are staffing challenges to meet rising need
- Local authorities also face difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff to manage SEND services and casework.

Milton Keynes – Planned growth

Milton Keynes has undergone rapid and sustained growth since its designation as a new town in 1967. Originally planned for 250,000 people, it has now evolved into one of the UK's fastest-growing cities, driven by population growth, strong economic performance, and proactive housing delivery.

Milton Keynes currently has an estimated population of around 306k residents, based on the mid-2024 Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimate. However, with continued diverse growth comes challenges. The Indices of Deprivation 2025 (IMD 2025) ranks Milton Keynes as the 102nd most deprived local authority out of 153 upper-tier local authorities in England on the overall Rank of Average Score measure. However, within Milton Keynes, there is considerable variation in deprivation levels across the area, with pockets of marked deprivation concentrated in the Woughton & Fishermead, Stony Stratford, Bletchley East and Wolverton wards. Overall, eight LSOAs fall within the most deprived 10% nationally whilst ten LSOAs are among the least deprived 10% nationally. We therefore need to take this into consideration when we plan for services across the city.

We are currently in the process of delivering our new city plan which outlines our vision up to 2050. The plans seek to provide 60k additional homes over the time period. Through previous local plans, neighbourhood plans and planning permissions (excluding CMK) we already have close to 23,000 new homes due to come forward by 2050. This means the MK City Plan 2050 seeks to allocate land that can deliver around 37,000 additional homes by 2050 which could mean the city's population could approach 500,000.

The Milton Keynes City Plan 2050 has completed its Regulation 19 (Proposed Submission) Consultation phase and aims to submit the proposed submission to the Secretary of State in March 2026 for examination. Subject to approval, it is anticipated that the new plan will be adopted in late 2026 or early 2027.

As a result of significant planned demographic growth, proposed future growth, and despite substantial capital investment in numerous schemes over the years, this document continues to show that there is a need to increase the number of specialist places across the city to meet the projected increase in number of children requiring specialist provision.

SEND Strategy 2025-2028

This year saw the co-production and launch of our new SEND Strategy which will be implemented and delivered between 2025 – 2028 by the MK SEND partnership. This partnership is led by Milton Keynes City Council and the BLMK Integrated Care Board but also includes all of our schools, colleges and early years providers, our Parent Carer Forum (PACA MK) and CNWL NHS Trust.

The three tenets of this strategy and our priorities for each are:

-Children and young people with SEND Thrive

	What is our priority?	What will be on our action plan?	How will we evidence change?
Priority 1a:	Children's needs will be identified early and met at the earliest point.	We will strengthen pathways across education, health and care so that children can access services they need to meet their needs.	We'll monitor information and feedback about service access, and we'll develop an audit tool to measure how well we work together.
Priority 1b:	EHCs will be timely, high quality and holistic.	We will develop the way our EHCs are written and used to ensure that they are driving high quality holistic support for children with the most complex needs.	Through our quality improvement framework which includes audits and feedback.
Priority 1c:	All schools will consistently demonstrate inclusive practice and readiness to support SEND children.	We will promote inclusive practices in our schools, enabling most children with SEND to attend and achieve in mainstream schools.	Through our attendance, attainment and exclusions data, and through the development of an 'inclusion kitemark'.

-Children and young people with SEND Belong

	What is our priority?	What will be on our action plan?	How will we evidence change?
Priority 2a:	There will be the right mix of local school places to enable all children to attend a local school that meets their needs.	We will ensure a range of local education and alternative provision options so local children can attend a school or setting within their local community wherever possible.	Data sets relating to placements and school place planning; and outcomes from our Inclusion Partnership.
Priority 2b:	Children with SEND will be able to access fun activities near where they live.	We will create opportunities for children with SEND to have fun and be included in the community.	We'll ask children and young people their views on opportunities that are available to them on an annual basis.
Priority 2c:	Our diverse local community will know what's on offer for SEND families.	We will ensure information and services are accessible for our diverse and growing local community.	We will seek representative voices from a range of diverse cultures to gather views and monitor usage of our services.
Priority 2d:	Children's plans will have personalized outcomes that reflect their individual ambitions.	We will focus on individual ambitions and personalised outcomes in children's plans.	We'll ask children and young people their views on their involvement in their plans on an annual basis.

- Children and young people with SEND are at the heart of our plans

	What is our priority?	What will be on our action plan?	How will we evidence change?
Priority 3a:	The voice of children and families will drive our work in SEND.	We will improve how we gather and use the voices of children and families in strategic work.	We will capture case studies showing the involvement of children and families.
Priority 3b:	Our services will reflect our local community's needs and aspirations.	We will use data effectively to inform service delivery.	Use of joint strategic needs assessment, self evaluation and operational data in decision making.
Priority 3c:	Our SEND workforce will be well trained and supported to meet children's needs effectively.	We will educate the workforce about SEND.	We will capture training attendance and impact as well as ask families for feedback.

Current landscape

There are currently five maintained and one academy special school in Milton Keynes, providing over 1,000 places across the city. As well as the special schools, there are fourteen units or resourced provisions in mainstream schools providing a further 227 places for children with SEND.

Needs of children with SEND Support or an EHCP are unique to each individual, however for the purposes of monitoring the demand and future projections it is useful to categorise the needs of children. We will therefore use the SEND code of practice: 0-25 years which sets out four main areas of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND):

- Cognition and Learning
- Communication and Interaction
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health
- Sensory and Physical

We would expect the majority of children to be educated in a mainstream setting and be supported by the schools 'Ordinarily Available Provision'. In some cases, children will require access to more specialist settings that provide more bespoke support. In this case a child may be educated in a Resourced Provision, a SEND unit within a mainstream school or a Special School. These places are commissioned by Milton Keynes City Council with child allocation agreed through our Specialist Provision Panel (SPAP).

Resourced Provision:

- children spend most of their time within mainstream classes
- are designated by the local authority specifically for making this kind of SEND provision
- receive specialist funding from the local authority to deliver the appropriate service
- cater for a specific area or areas of SEND (for example specific learning difficulties)
- are usually for pupils with an EHCP

School	Age Range	Year Groups	Commissioned No. Places	Specialism
Charles Warren Academy	4-7	R to 2	6	Speech, language and communication
Orchard Academy	7-11	3 to 6	12	Social communication needs
Shepherdswell Academy	4-7	R to 2	8	Speech, language and communication
St Paul's Catholic School	11-19	7 to 14	28	Social communication needs
			11	Visually impaired
			10	Hearing impaired
The Radcliffe School	11-19	7 to 14	15	Social communication needs

SEND Unit:

- children spend most of their time in separate, typically specialist classes within a mainstream school
- children require an EHCP to access a place in a SEND unit
- are designated by the local authority specifically for making SEND 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 SEND (for example Autistic Spectrum Conditions)

School	Age Range	Year Groups	Commissioned No. Places	Specialism
Priory Common	4-7	R to 2	8	Social communication needs
Germander Park	2-7	N to 2	16	Social communication needs
Bradwell Village	7-11	3 to 6	16 (rising to 24 from September 2026)	Social communication needs
New Bradwell Primary School	3-11	R to 6	32	Social communication needs
Southwood School	7-11	3 to 6	16 (rising to 24 from September 2026)	Social communication needs
St Paul's Catholic School	11-16	7-11	24	Social communication needs
The Woodlands School	11-16	7-11	24	High complex needs

Special school:

- support children with significant and enduring needs, children require an EHCP to access a place in a special school
- are registered as specialist settings
- receive specialist funding from the local authority to deliver the appropriate service
- ensure that the most vulnerable children in the area can access an appropriate education that is designed around their needs.

School	Age Range	Year Groups	Commissioned No. Places	Specialism
Romans Field	5 to 11	1 to 6	66	Social, emotional and mental health needs
	11-16 (secondary pathway)	7-11	24	Social communication needs- additional secondary pathway
Slated Row	4 to 19	R to 14	228	Specific learning difficulties
Stephenson Academy	9 to 16	5 to 11	117	Social, emotional and mental health needs
The Redway	2 to 19	N to 14	181	Profound and multiple difficulties
The Woodlands School	4 to 19	R to 14	212	Social communication needs
White Spire	5 to 19	1 to 14	170	Specific learning difficulties

Alternative education

Local authorities and schools have statutory duties in relation to the provision of alternative education as follows:

- a) Education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of permanent exclusion, illness, or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education.
- b) Education arranged by schools for pupils who have been excluded on a fixed term basis.
- c) Pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour.

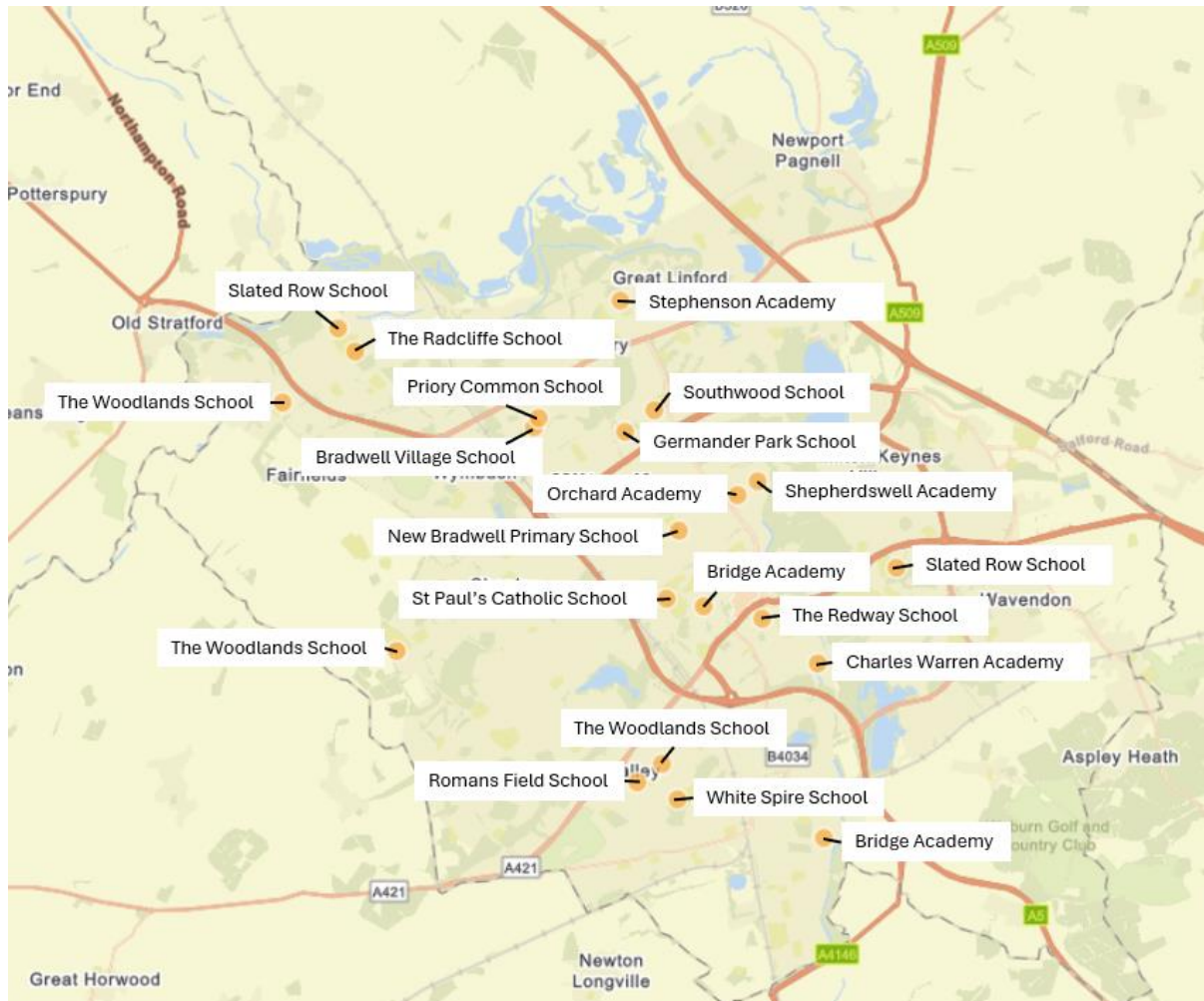
In Milton Keynes we have agreed a collaborative approach to the commissioning and oversight of alternative education provision via the Milton Keynes Inclusion Partnership. The number of places required are agreed and secured in advance through funding from the Dedicated School's Grant (DSG) to ensure the local authority's duties in relation to permanent exclusion or illness can be met; however, the Inclusion Partnership enables these places to be used proactively by schools as an intervention strategy, to improve a pupil's behaviour, and therefore avoid the need for schools to permanently exclude.

Following the amalgamation of MK Primary PRU and Bridge Academy, Milton Keynes now has one all-through provider for alternative provision across multiple sites: Manor Road in Bletchley which delivers Primary, West, and Post 16, and the Central site in Coffee Hall which delivers provision for Key Stage 3 and 4

School	Age Range	Year Groups	Commissioned No. Places
Bridge Academy (all-through)	4-19	R to 14	280

Admission to alternative provision in Milton Keynes is overseen by a monthly Alternative Education Panel for each primary and secondary phases. The panel comprises senior representatives from all mainstream schools in Milton Keynes and senior officers from Milton Keynes Local Authority. The meeting is chaired by the Milton Keynes Inclusion Partnership Officer.

The below map shows the location of all special schools, SEND units, resourced provision and alternative provision across the city.

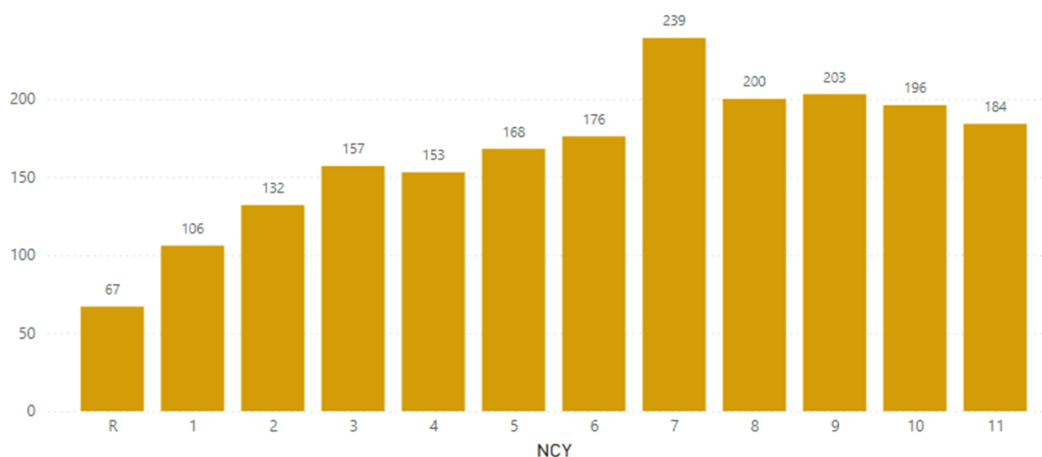


Current position: EHCPs*

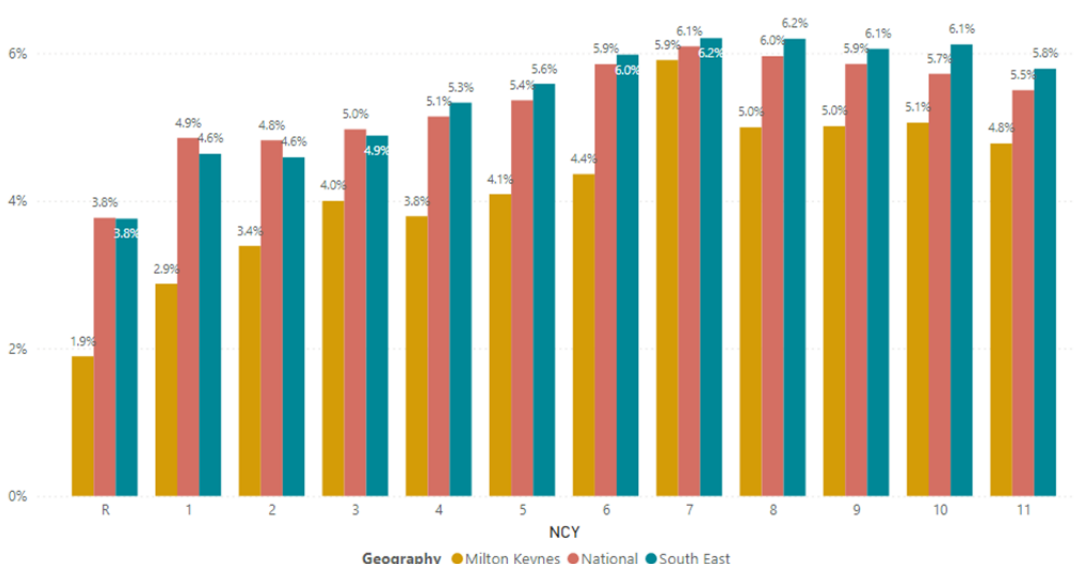
Source: [Special educational needs in England, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

The breakdown of children with an EHCP is shown below, by National Curriculum Year (NCY) and type of school, from year R to year 11. Mainstream units are counted within the mainstream category.

Total number of children with Education, Health and Care plans in Milton Keynes

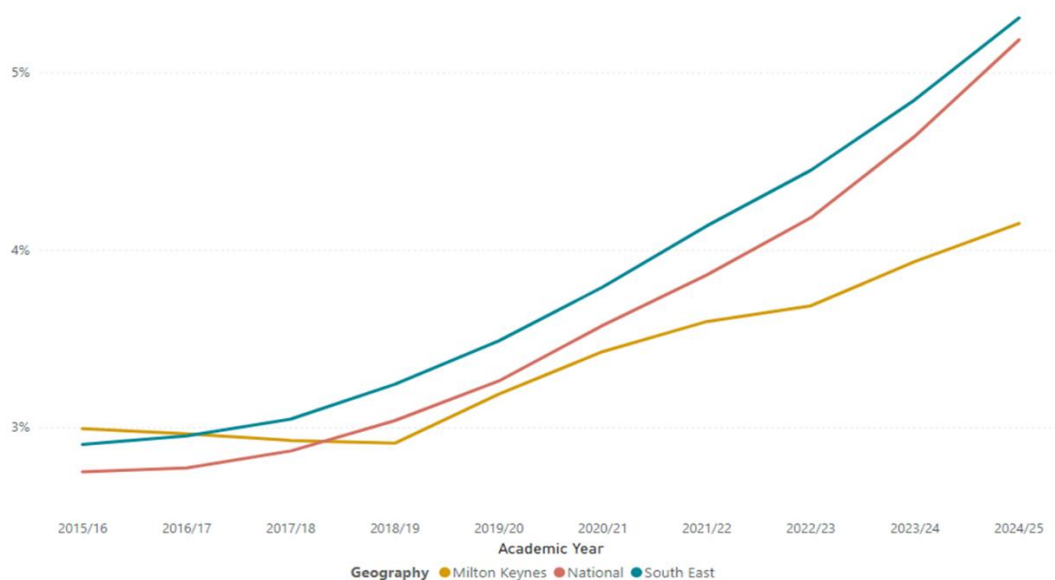


The chart below displays the relative breakdown of EHCPs across year groups for Milton Keynes, nationally and the South East region. This shows that the most children with an EHCP in Milton Keynes are in year 7, as the previous years pupil bulge moves into the secondary system. Milton Keynes is broadly in line with the national and regional data.



The rate of EHCPs in Milton Keynes have risen consistently since 2018/19 although slightly behind England and the South East, as shown below. The growing pupil population and limited capacity of resource within key professions required to progress the EHCP

assessments (such as Educational Psychologists) will have restricted the rate of growth previously. However, we expect our rate to continue to rise in the coming years and likely increase at a faster rate due to recent structural changes implemented across the service.



The current landscape of children with an EHCP by school type is shown below, more than half of children with an EHCP are enrolled mainstream setting. It must be noted that children based in units are included within the mainstream data.

In the primary phase 68% of children with an EHCP attend a mainstream school, 3% less than the national average. In the secondary phase 47% of children with an EHCP attend a mainstream school, 9% less than the national average. Our ambition is that as many children as possible with an EHCP are able to have their needs met in a local mainstream setting when it is appropriate to do so and we will continue to consider locally how we can continue to drive forward inclusion across our system- particularly considering any unexpected differences when compared nationally.

Primary	2022-23		2023-24		2024-25	
	Milton Keynes	National	Milton Keynes	National	Milton Keynes	National
Mainstream	60%	68%	65%	70%	68%	71%
Special School	38%	32%	36%	30%	33%	29%

Secondary	2022-23		2023-24		2024-25	
	Milton Keynes	National	Milton Keynes	National	Milton Keynes	National
Mainstream	47%	53%	47%	54%	47%	56%
Special School	53%	47%	53%	46%	53%	44%

Specialist Provision Place planning Group

It is expected that we will require additional places in specialist provision in forthcoming years. There are two factors contributing to this; an increase in children requiring specialist provision as a result of increased complexity of need and a rise in the number of children and young people moving into Milton Keynes that require specialist provision.

Assessing the capacity of the specialist provision place system is complex. There is currently no 'net capacity' assessment widely available as there is for the rest of the maintained mainstream system and no Published Admission Number (PAN) is required by law. Instead, the local authority and schools work in partnership to determine the maximum number of children that each specialist provision can admit without prejudicing the quality of education combined with the physical building restraints.

Due to the complex nature of specialist provision place planning, in summer 2023 a Specialist Provision Place Planning Group was established to ensure that specialist provision place planning is collaboratively and holistically considered. The membership of the group includes representation from senior MKCC officers, a mixture of specialist education providers, mainstream schools and representation from PACA MK (our parents and carer forum).

The planning group has developed a clear set of place planning principles which will guide the way the system operates. These are set out below:

- To always ensure that Milton Keynes City Council can fulfil its statutory duty of ensuring there are sufficient places for children with EHCPs who require them in Milton Keynes.
- The short and longer term availability of specialist provision places within Milton Keynes will be monitored and reviewed on a termly basis.
- To support community cohesion locally and across Milton Keynes, and to ensure children with an EHCP can access an appropriate school place.
- When it has been identified that a new specialist provision or additional specialist places are required, the timing and release of school places will be considered.
- The group will work in partnership with the sector to maximise the specialist provision available within local mainstream, or special schools, to reduce the need for children to access such places outside of Milton Keynes, aiding in reducing the impact on the School Travel Support (STS) budget, supporting to minimise the cost to the High Needs Block and ensuring holistic value for money.
- All schools within Milton Keynes should work cohesively in partnership with each other, for the benefit of all children and schools within the local area, regardless of differing

educational type (SEND/mainstream), models (infant/junior/primary/all-through) or status (academy/maintained) promoting an inclusive practise approach at all times.

Recently completed projects

As a result of the place planning group, and close sector partnership working, over the past 18 months there have been several workstreams that have delivered additional specialist provision to the local system:

- The development of additional Communication and Interaction places across the primary and secondary phase resulting in 104 additional places within 6 units across the city.
- The development of a secondary pathway at Romans Field School delivering an additional 24 places.
- The development of a High Complex Needs provision operated by The Woodlands School delivering an additional 24 places.
- Agreement to commission a further 20 alternative education places (total of 280 places) from September 2026 to support system pressures and to support proactive use of provision for those children at risk of exclusion.

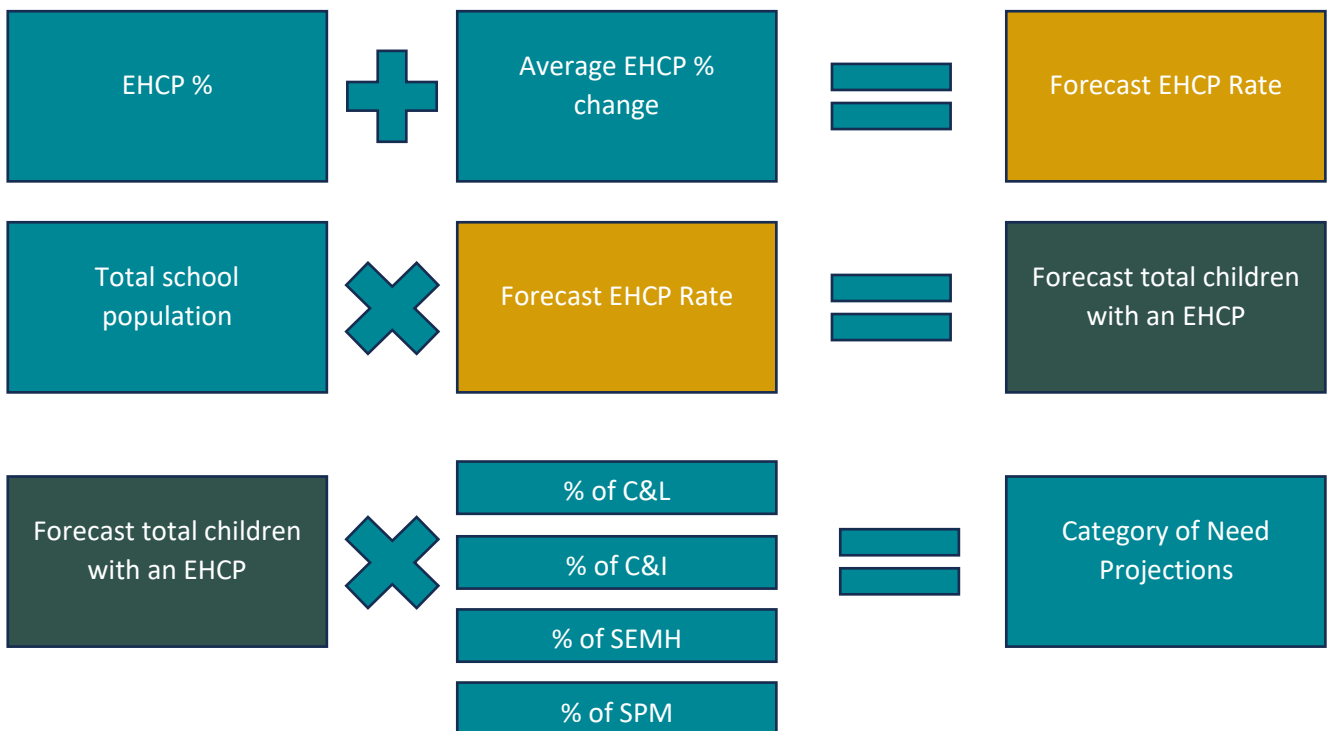
Future projections (YrR-11)

Projecting scale and timing of future demand for education provision is extremely complex due to the number of variables, the vast majority of which are uncontrollable. This complexity is further enhanced in relation to specialist provision due to timing of EHCP assessments, differing levels in complexity of need and changing needs throughout educational life. Given this complexity, it is important to establish a robust and consistent methodology for projecting future demand for school places for those with an EHCP to ensure that, wherever possible, children are accommodated locally.

Methodology

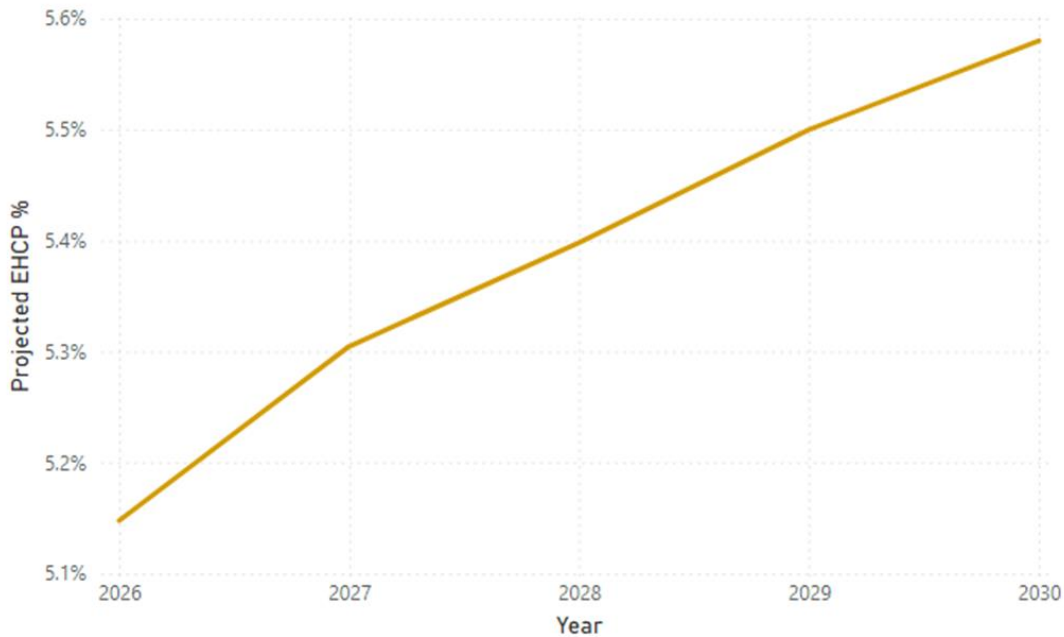
The methodology for projecting specialist place demand begins with the overall pupil population as a base. Then, an EHCP rate is determined by reviewing trend data from the previous three years and applied to future years. By multiplying the total pupil population and EHCP rate we are able to produce projections for the total number of children with an EHCP.

The next step is to determine how many of these children will require a specialist place, and how many can have needs met within a mainstream setting. This is done by reviewing trend information from the previous three years around placement type and taking into account any ongoing/upcoming projects that may impact placements and any children awaiting placement in a specialist provision. These percentages can then be applied to the total number of EHCPs. Finally, data regarding children’s specific needs from the previous three years is used to determine future need trends.

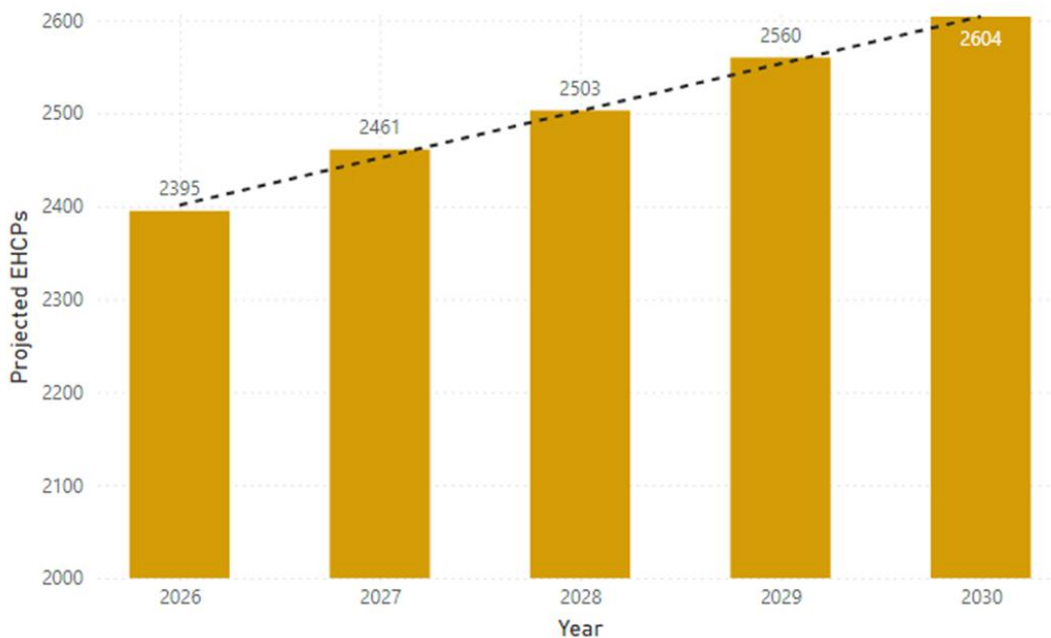


The SEND JSNA developed by Public Health also provides some forecasting data in relation to levels of need and this is also considered alongside the formula noted above.

The forecasted percentage of EHCPs shown below, is expected to continue to rise in the coming years, as we continue to work through child assessments.

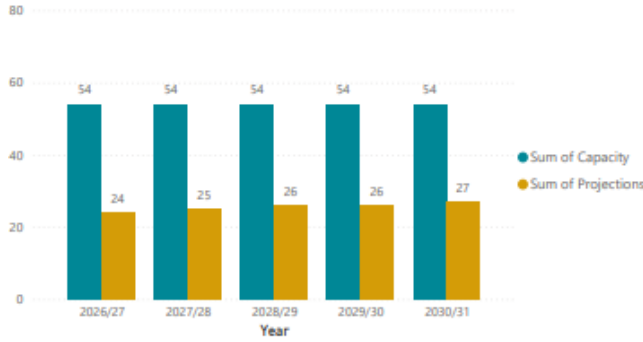


The projected number of school-aged children with an EHCP is shown below for the next five years, this represents the peak number typically present at the end of an academic year. This is a combination of an increase rate of children with an EHCP as well as a growing school age population.

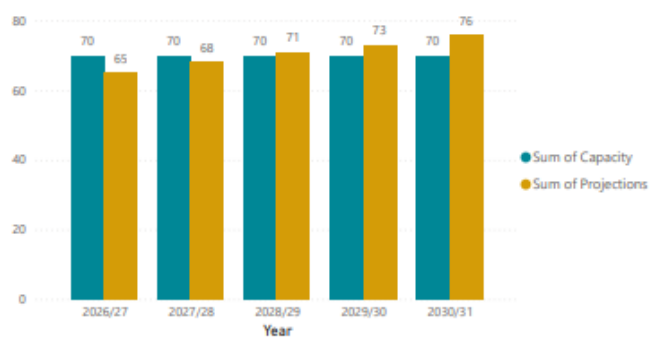


The total number of EHCPs are then categorised into primary and secondary phases before split by category of need. As not all children with an EHCP will require a specialist provision place, the final step is to determine the rate of children that will require a specialist place.

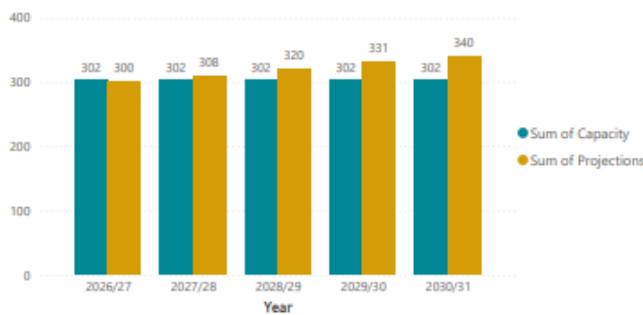
Primary Phase - Cognition and Learning



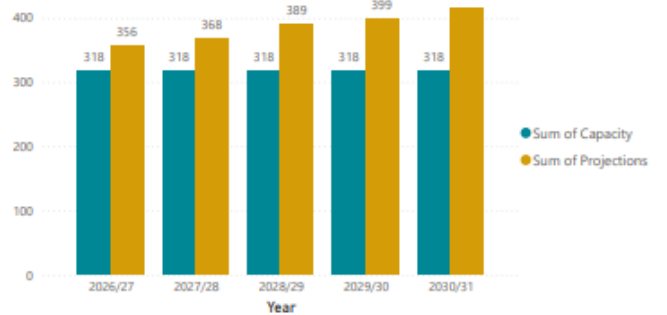
Secondary Phase - Cognition and Learning



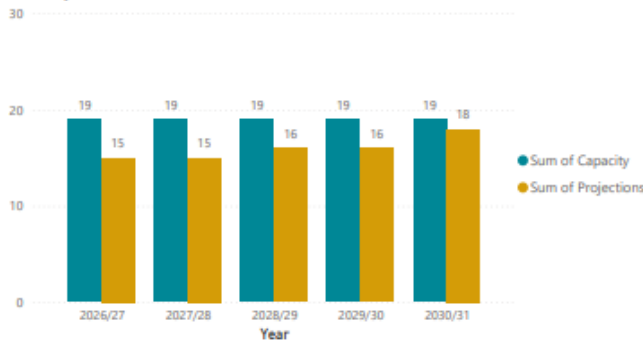
Primary Phase - Communication and Interaction



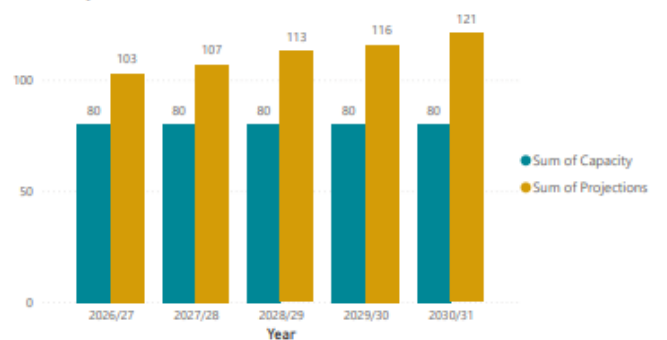
Secondary Phase - Communication and Interaction



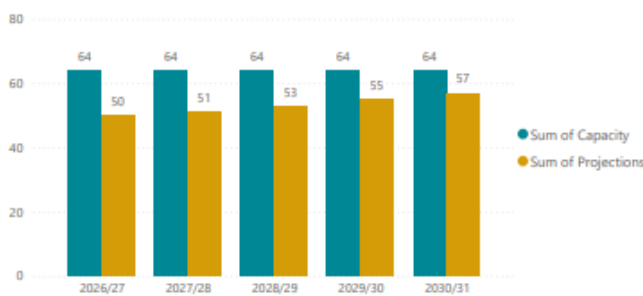
Primary Phase - Emotion, Behavioural, Social



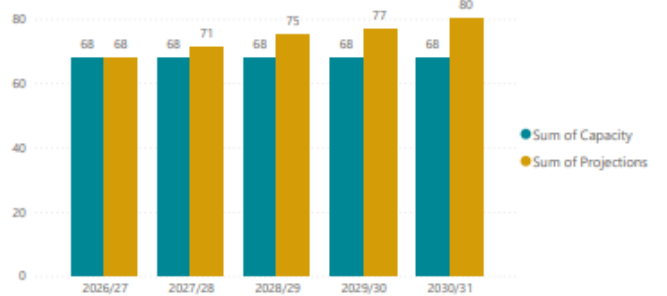
Secondary Phase - Emotion, Behavioural, Social



Primary Phase - Sensory / Medical / Physical



Secondary Phase - Sensory / Medical / Physical



Alternative provision projections

The projected demand for alternative provision is calculated slightly differently by using mainstream projections and applying an assumed percentage of children that will access alternative provision (Pupil Referral units).

In the primary phase, numbers accessing alternative provision have maintained a relatively steady position over the past four years at an average of 0.14%. This value has been used to project the level of primary demand in the coming years:

Academic year	Primary projection	AP %	Primary demand
2026/27	26577	0.14%	38
2027/28	26386	0.14%	37
2028/29	26425	0.14%	37
2029/30	26584	0.14%	38
2030/31	26502	0.14%	38

As mentioned above the previous four year trend for the proportion of children accessing a place at Bridge Academy (including Bridge West) has increased from 0.65% of secondary children in May 2021 to over 1% in May 2025. If we assume this trend continues we could see up to 1.3% of children in secondary school accessing an alternative provision, the projections are shown below:

Academic year	Secondary projection	AP %	Secondary demand
2026/27	20007	1.31%	263
2027/28	20116	1.41%	285
2028/29	20127	1.51%	305
2029/30	20082	1.61%	324
2030/31	19815	1.71%	340

The below table shows the five year projections for post-16 demand on alternative provision, the general trend over the last three years has been a decrease in overall number of children as well as a percentage of the post-16 cohort although there has been a rise in September 2024.

Academic year	Post 16 projection	AP %	Post 16 demand
2026/27	3906	0.84%	33
2027/28	4055	0.84%	35
2028/29	4164	0.84%	35
2029/30	4205	0.84%	36
2030/31	4260	0.84%	36

Looking ahead

Modelling clearly indicates that additional specialist places are required to be developed over the coming years in response to continued growth in the number of EHCPs and wider demographic changes in the school population. In order to address some of the above key pressure points, the place planning group and the local authority are seeking to progress with the following schemes of work:

- **Expanding Milton Keynes Specialist Provision Programme:** Following the success of phase 1 we are continuing to progress phase 2 with our ambition being that additional places will begin to become available from September 2026. We will also consider what the priorities should be for phase 3.
- **New city plan:** Over the next 12 months, continue to work with stakeholders to ensure there is appropriate land/infrastructure secured in the new iteration of the city plan when established.
- **Continue review of additional alternative education places:** Continue review of alternative provision to ensure the right number of places are available to support our schools
- **SEND Strategy 2025-2026:** Continue to work with partners within our local area partnership to support delivery of our SEND strategy and ensure that all SEND children **Thrive, Belong and Are At The Heart Of Our Plans**
- **New mainstream school:** Continue to progress delivery of a SEND unit in our new primary school in the Western Expansion Area of Milton Keynes.
- **Review of Post 16 provision:** carry out review of availability of local post 16 provision following previous 2024 review to ensure we can continue to meet projected future demand.
- **Exploration of central government schemes:** Continue to review and explore opportunities to bid on central government led schemes over the course of this parliament

