

Report Subject	SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2023/24 – 2025/26
Meeting date	25 November 2025
Status	For Review
Executive summary	This report provides an overview of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Sufficiency Strategy 2024-2026. The SEND Sufficiency Strategy is a key part of the Council's work to deliver a sustainable and stable system, working in partnership to ensure that the needs of children and young people are met, without escalating costs, and supporting delivery of the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Recovery Plan. The strategy is based on updated SEND projections presented in this year's annual school capacity return. Given the scale of our immediate challenge, the SEND Sufficiency Strategy describes the actions we have been taking to respond to pressures in the system over a 2-year period. Details of our progress are contained in this report together with a summary of the key themes and strands of work that will be incorporated in a new refreshed SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan that is being developed for publication in May 2026.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that: Members: 1. Note the growth and pressures across the system and the priorities identified to address these. 2. Review the progress to date and note the next steps which will feature in a new and refreshed SEND and Alternative Provision Sufficiency Strategy ready for approval in May 2026.
Reason for recommendations	The SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2024–2026 outlines the Council's response to rising demand and financial pressures within the SEND system. It supports the Council's statutory duty to ensure sufficient and appropriate education provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The strategy contributes to the delivery of a sustainable and inclusive system by aligning provision with projected needs, improving commissioning practices, and reducing unit costs of provision.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Richard Burton
Corporate Director	Cathi Hadley, Director of Children's Services
Report Authors	Tanya Smith, Head of Inclusion, Places and Capital
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Recommendation/Decision

1. Background

- 1.1 The SEND Sufficiency Strategy provides an important overview as to how the Council intends to respond to increasing demand for services and provision for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities. It sets out our plan for delivering capacity to address supply issues in the short to medium term, ensuring there is access to high quality, locally accessible places and pathways from early years to adulthood for children and young people when they need it in the most efficient way.
- 1.2 The SEND Sufficiency Strategy is a key part of the Council's work to deliver a sustainable and stable system, getting local partners and stakeholders working in the best possible way within the current system to ensure that the needs of children and young people are met, without escalating costs, and supporting delivery of the High Needs Block Recovery Plan. Given the scale of our immediate challenge, the Sufficiency Strategy describes the actions we are taking now to respond to pressures in the system over the course of two years 2023/24 – 2025/26.

2. SEND Sufficiency - Overview

- 2.1 **Strategy Aims:** SEND sufficiency means having enough of the right accommodation and services, in the right places to effectively and appropriately meet the needs of children and families in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. This also includes the quality of services, ensuring they are making a positive difference to the lives of children and young people. Our aim is to promote an inclusive system that:
- Enables children and young people to fulfil their potential
 - Improves outcomes driven by earlier identification of needs and evidence-based targeted support to meet needs promptly, including mental health support
 - Is supported and trusted by our parents/carers
 - Is financially sustainable - spending is directed to support early intervention away from costly specialist provision & high-quality services are delivered within budget.
- 2.2 **Our Model of Provision:** The council believes that children should be educated locally wherever possible within their communities, enabling children to be with other children in their local area and access wider curriculum opportunities locally.
- 2.3 Working with parents/carers and our local partners in education, health and social care, we will continue to provide access to local, quality specialist places and increase the availability of these to offer a full range of provision. This represents a continuum of provision to meet a range of needs, and it starts with ordinarily available provision in our mainstream schools offering a graduated response to meeting the needs of all children i.e. a fully inclusive mainstream school. Further, the continuum offers bespoke and resource base provisions co-located with mainstream schools and designated units and special school places across our specialist school estate. The full range of provision delivered by this strategy is set out in the diagram below.

Full range of provision in BCP



**Special School Places includes expansion on satellite sites co-located with mainstream schools*

- 2.4 **Guiding Principles:** The principles which guide this work are as follows:

- ✓ Provide the right support, right time, right place as part of a system-wide approach to support a graduated response, reduce the volume of needs assessments, manage demand and growth in Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

- ✓ Investment to promote inclusion and accessibility in mainstream schools so that more children with an EHCP remain in mainstream schools and reduce reliance on Independent and non-maintained Special Schools (INMSS).
- ✓ Improving collaboration and data sharing with partners around SEND to improve early identification of need.
- ✓ A sense of belonging with clear pathways throughout education to ensure pupils are placed in the right learning environment so that they can excel.
- ✓ Work together cross phase and in partnership with schools and trusts – emphasis on collaboration between schools and trusts
- ✓ Ensuring that provisions are available to children and young people in each key stage
- ✓ Creating a sustainable and equitable model of local school placements for children and young people with EHCP's
- ✓ Ensuring that children and young people with EHCP's have access to good quality education provision that is mindful of unit costs of provision
- ✓ Availability of a clear and transparent admissions process to aid decision making
- ✓ Developing parent confidence in local provision and mainstream school support with clear information available to families so they can make informed decisions for their child or young person.

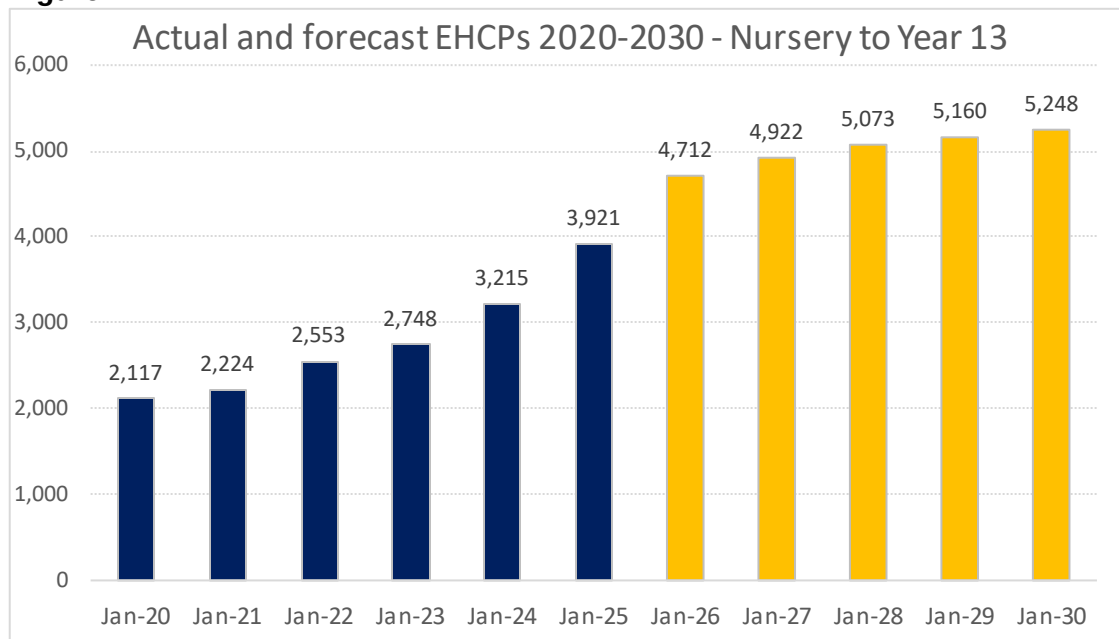
3. Current Pressures and Challenges

- 3.1 This section of the report highlights the rising demand for Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) places across all educational phases—mainstream, specialist, post-16, and alternative provision—driven by complex, system-wide factors. The Council's ability to meet its sufficiency duty is increasingly challenged by rapid growth in EHCP prevalence, particularly in secondary and early years phases, requiring coordinated transformation across the SEND system. Strategic planning must be viewed in the wider context of linked initiatives, with pressures compounded by limited capacity, funding constraints, workforce shortages, and the need for timely multi-agency collaboration.
- 3.2 In common with other local authorities across England, the local SEND system is facing a series of mounting pressures that require urgent and coordinated strategic response. Rising exclusion rates and increasing demand for alternative provision—particularly among children with multiple vulnerabilities such as those in care—underscore the need for more inclusive and responsive services. A shortage of specialist school places is driving greater reliance on Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS), independent non-maintained specialist placements, and alternative provision, further intensifying financial pressures. Challenges extend beyond education into the transition to adulthood, where local employment and training opportunities for young people with SEND remain insufficient, hindering long-term outcomes.
- 3.3 Despite these challenges, the mixed economy of provision continues to play a vital role in maintaining a diverse and resilient local offer. However, the Council must now focus on reducing the unit cost of provision while ensuring that placements deliver both quality and value for money, as part of a broader transformation agenda to secure sufficiency and sustainability across the SEND system.

4. Key Trends

- 4.1 **Forecast Growth in Demand:** In line with the trend nationally, BCP Council has experienced a substantial and sustained increase in the number of EHCPs. The chart below (Figure 1) shows actual and forecasted Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for pupils from Nursery to Year 13 between 2020 and 2030. The data is split with actual figures (2020–2025) in shown by the blue bars and forecast figures (2026–2030) in yellow bars. It shows that EHCP numbers have grown steadily from 2,117 in Jan 2020 to 3,921 in Jan 2025. This represents an 85% increase over five years, indicating strong upward pressure on SEND provision. From Jan 2026 onwards, the forecast predicts a sharper rise, reaching 5,248 by Jan 2030. That's an additional 1,327 plans over five years, or roughly 27% growth from 2025 to 2030. Overall growth shows a total increase from 2,117 to 5,248. This is a 148% growth over the decade which suggests a more than doubling of EHCPs, which will significantly impact resource planning. The drivers behind this growth are outlined in Section 6.

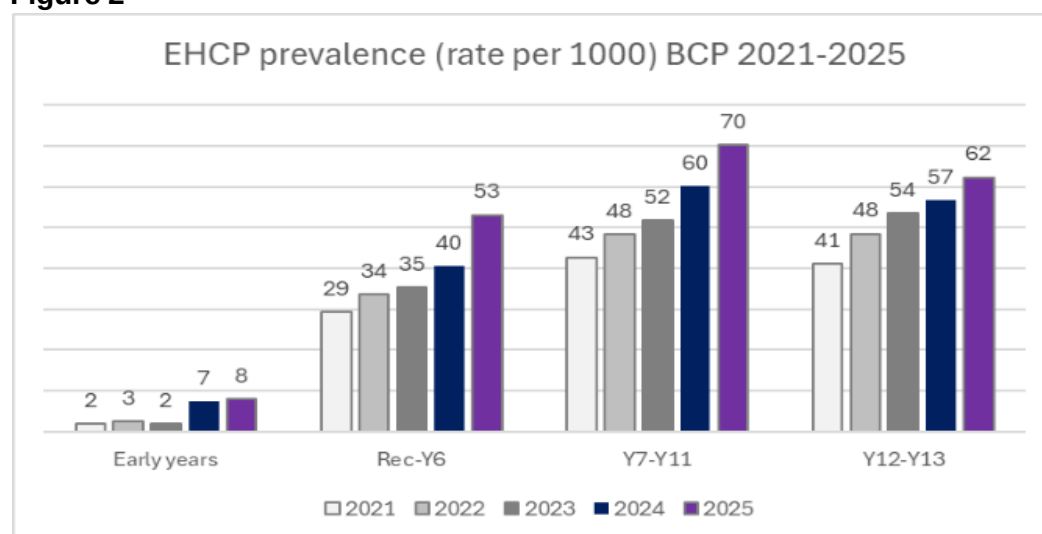
Figure 1



Note: Multiple scenarios have been modelled, with the primary forecast suggesting that the accelerated growth observed will continue for at least one more year. This projection reflects current trends and allows time for new processes and behavioural changes to take effect. From 2026–27 onwards, the forecast assumes a gradual reduction in growth rates, aligning with the strategic objective to slow EHCP cohort expansion and acknowledging that the current pace of growth is not sustainable in the long term.

- 4.2 **EHCP prevalence:** The graph below (Figure 2) shows a clear year-on-year increase in the prevalence of EHCPs across all age groups in BCP from 2021 to 2025. The most significant growth is seen in the secondary age group (Years 7–11), rising from 43 per 1000 in 2021 to 70 per 1000 in 2025, indicating growing demand for SEND support during adolescence. Early Years also show a sharp rise—from 2 to 8 per 1000—suggesting earlier identification and intervention for young children with special educational needs. Despite these figures supporting the upward trend in growth, it is thought that the association between demographic changes and EHC prevalence is weak. Prevalence tends to be more strongly associated with changes in policy, practice, and behaviours across the system of partners and stakeholders.

Figure 2



- 4.3 **Growth by Provision Type:** The implications of growth by provision type on the demand for places is shown in the graph below (Figure 2). Figures are based on the current pattern of provision in BCP and assume a changed pattern of provision to a future [desired] state. The future state assumes more children with an EHCP remain in mainstream, fewer children are placed in INMSS and attend maintained and no maintained specialist places and fewer

children in bespoke 'other' provisions). The graph helps to identify the total number of children requiring places based on the existing proportional split in children attending mainstream and specialist provisions. The difference between the current pattern and the projected pattern in 2029/30 means that over the next 5 years there is a need to commission an additional 1100 places by September 2029/30 and mainstream inclusion of a further 1000 children. Details are contained in the table below (Figure 4).

Figure 3

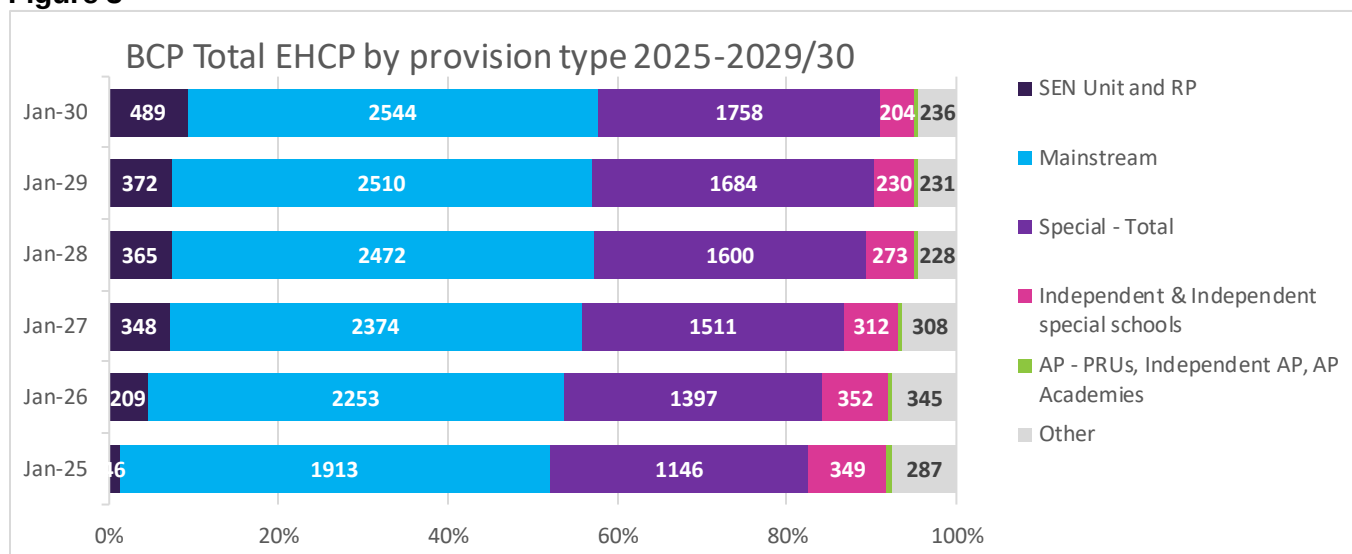


Figure 4: Additional Places Required

Type of Provision	5 Year -Demand for Places
SEN Unit and RP	437
Mainstream	1040
Special - Total	693
Independent & Independent special schools	-71
AP - PRUs, Independent AP, AP Academies	11
Other	-10
TOTAL	2099

Note: Minus figures indicate avoidance of placement necessary to achieve a changed pattern of provision.

- 4.4 **Post 16 Pattern of Provision:** Figure 5 shows the number of post-16 learners with an EHCP currently on roll and the forecast demand through to January 2030. It shows a projected 48% increase in EHCPs between January 2025 and January 2030.

Figure 5

Forecast EHCP's	Jan 2025 (Actual)	Jan 2026	Jan 2027	Jan 28	Jan 29	Jan 30
Year 12-13	578	711	843	918	899	879

Forecasts for Years 12 and 13 are based on cohort survival trends. Projections for post-19 learners require further refinement, as the same methodology cannot be applied. This work is underway.

- 4.5 The pattern of provision for Post 16 young people with an EHCP shows that BCP Council has a higher proportion of post-16 learners with EHCPs in specialist provisions compared to both the national and southwest regional averages, with relatively fewer placed in mainstream settings. Details on the council's Post-16 EHCP pattern of provision (Jan 2025) is as follows:

- 62% of post-16 learners with an EHCP are on roll in specialist provision (special schools, independent specialist colleges)
- 38% of post-16 learners with an EHCP are on roll in mainstream provision (FE colleges, sixth forms).

4.6 According to the Department for Education's 2025 statistics:

- Nationally, around 42% of post-16 learners with EHCPs are placed in mainstream FE colleges or sixth forms, while 58% attend specialist settings, including special schools and independent specialist colleges.
- In the southwest region, the proportion in mainstream settings is slightly higher, at approximately 45%, with 55% in specialist provision.

4.7 This means that:

- BCP Council places a majority of Post-16 EHCP learners in specialist settings, including special schools and independent specialist colleges which impact on the transition into local provision.
- The mainstream proportion is notably lower than both the national and regional averages, reflecting a greater reliance on specialist provision to meet complex needs.
- The lower mainstream placement rate suggests limited capacity or confidence in mainstream FE settings to support learners with EHCPs.
- It also underscores the importance of BCP's SEN capital investment in expanding pathways for children and young people at age post 14.

4.8 **Needs Assessment – Alternative Provision:** BCP Council has experienced high levels of permanent exclusions, particularly at secondary level, which has placed increasing pressure on existing Alternative Provision (AP) services. This prompted a strategic needs assessment to inform the development of additional provision and evaluate gaps in provision, learner profiles, and future demand. Findings from this assessment are guiding the creation of additional registered AP settings, with a focus on:

- **Primary Phase Support:** Providing options to support our primary leaders to help respond to a range of complex needs
- **Quality Assured Provision:** Ensuring provision is Ofsted-registered and quality-assured
- **Registered Providers:** Reducing reliance on unregistered or short-term placements to rebalance provision working with our registered providers
- **Tailored Support and Re-integration:** Delivering creative ways to meet the needs of learners requiring tailored support due to Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and re-engage children back into mainstream education and improve outcomes. Currently there are limited reintegration routes which impacts the progression of young people
- **Diversify Pathways for Learners:** Diversifying AP pathways, including vocational options and therapeutic support, to better meet the needs of excluded and at-risk pupils and increasing capacity for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 learners.
- **Transition and reducing Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET):** Focusing on transition and engagement with post 16 provision and addressing low attendance for pupils with EHCPs which drop off as pupils progress through secondary school (by year 11 this is 72%)
- **Sustainable Unit Costs of Provision:** Reducing unit costs of provision to create sustainable services and support

5. Our Approach – Delivering our Two-Year Strategy

5.1 This strategy draws on different sources of data, insights and perspectives necessary to understand the strategic needs of our local community. Working with parents, carers and our partners to best understand the mix and range of services we need for children across Education, Health and Care, we are making progress with our sufficiency duty. Thus far, we have:

- **Data and Evidence:** Reviewed our data and evidence base necessary to achieve a strategic overview of the needs of our children and young people.
- **Communication and Engagement:** Improved communication and strengthened partnerships necessary to help to re-establish BCP as a strong and trusted system leader.

- **Co-production:** Held SEND Sufficiency and Inclusion workshops, events and conferences with our partners in education and parents/carers where our challenges and aspirations have been shared widely and all partners have added their expertise and insights.
- **Governance:** Developed a SEND Programme Board to ensure strong governance and oversight.
- **Lived Experience:** Understood the impact of our sufficiency actions on the lived experiences of our children and families via locality meetings where families gave their feedback about the availability of local provision and what this means to them.
- **Capital Investment:** Maximised capital funding to support the development and delivery of new and additional places.
- **Local Offer:** Enhanced information on the Local Offer so it is clear what provision is available.

5.2 **Two Priorities** Reflecting the scale of the challenge, the strategy sets out two priorities. They are as follows:

- (i) **Early Identification, intervention and inclusion:** Providing the right support, right time, right place as part of a system wide approach to support a graduated response, reduce the volume of needs assessments, manage demand and growth in EHCPs. This includes investment to promote inclusion and accessibility in mainstream schools. It also includes a requirement to improve collaboration and data sharing with partners around SEND to improve early identification of need.
- (ii) **Access to Sufficient, local, high-quality places:** Investment to increase the sufficiency of specialist places for children and young people with SEND and those who require alternative provision with cost avoidance in high needs expenditure. Priorities include:
 - Increasing places for children and young people with a focus on autism and social, emotional and mental health
 - Ensuring more EHCP children remain in mainstream at secondary school
 - Enabling our special schools to support our mainstream schools in the development of new provisions
 - Ensure that more young people post 16 are accessing education in mainstream settings and increase pathways for learners post 14
 - Investing in alternative provision that meets a range of needs aligned to the work of the Belonging Strategy and thereby reducing numbers of children in longer term Alternative Provision.
 - Developing Service Level Agreements (SLAs) that are outcomes focussed, are monitored and demonstrate delivery against our High Needs Recovery Plan i.e. cost avoidance and lower unit costs focussed on the cost of placements rather than plans.
 - Ensuring that data, systems and processes support the delivery of places

6. What have we delivered so far?

6.1 A range of actions designed to secure improvements in early identification, intervention and inclusion were delivered in our SEND Improvement Plan and further activities are also embedded in the newly refreshed SEND and Alternative Improvement Plan approved by the SEND Improvement Board in September 2025. Actions in the updated plan are more detailed and draw in strands of work across the service.

6.2 **Specialist Places Delivered:** In responding to our sufficiency challenges, the Council has delivered 24 additional early years assessment places and an additional 295 places by working with local school leaders to agree to co-locate specialist provisions in mainstream schools. This approach helps to make the best use of the school estate by utilising surplus accommodation in schools thereby sustaining schools experiencing falling rolls. Proposals delivered include resourced provisions, satellite locations and mainstream plus link provision for Year 7 children. The majority of places created are for children with autism though they also include places for children with speech, language and communication needs and social emotional and mental health needs. The new Resourced Provisions are helping to provide

alternative pathways for children with an Education and Health Care Plan to access the support they need in a mainstream setting. This will help ensure that more children remain in mainstream provision which is an important part of creating a sustainable and balanced pattern of provision. The table below (Figure 6) sets out the total number of places delivered by phase. The table also shows the number of places in pipeline. Pipeline places are those which are in the commissioning process and are made up of projects that are part of the current commissioning round.

Figure 6: Specialist Place Provision – Number of Places Delivered and, in the pipeline,

	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	Total	Total EY/Primary Split	Total Secondary Split
Early Years Assessment Places		12	12			24	24	
Specialist School Places Delivered	46	49	140	60		295	182	113
Places in pipeline				96	128	224	224	
Total Delivered/ In Pipeline	46	61	152	156	128	543	430	113

- 6.3 **DfE's Special Free School Programme:** The council is still waiting for an update from the Department for Education (DfE) on funding for the development of its new special free school previously announced. The LA successfully bid for one of two new special schools. The school will provide 180 specialist places for children and young people with autism aged 3-18. The school plays an important part in increasing the sufficiency of local specialist places and details are eagerly awaited.
- 6.4 **Special School Outreach Provision:** As part of the commissioning process, an outreach offer from special schools is supporting maintained schools to strengthen and expand their resourced provisions by sharing expertise, strategies, and tailored advice and support to school leaders, SENCOs and teaching and support staff. The offer is helping schools embed inclusive practice in the development of their resourced provisions and benefit from professional learning exchanges focused on SEND pedagogy, therapeutic approaches, and behaviour support. This collaborative model strengthens local provision and ensures pupils with complex needs can thrive in their community schools.
- 6.5 **Post 14 Pathways:** Efforts to increase places for Post 16 learners are summarised below. This sets out the number of places commissioned for the current academic year and summarises the work that is underway to increase pathways for learners:
- Linwood Post 16 Satellite at the former Ted Webster Community Centre providing a total of 60 places for 2025/26. This provision complements the existing Post 16 offer at Linwood which includes its CHI provision - '*Classroom in the Heart of Industry*' (CHI).
 - Supported internships continue to grow and improve with 70+ places from an initial 18 commissioned in 2022. There is also one internship specifically for those young people who want to set up their own businesses which will be an important new route.
- 6.6 **Post 19:** Currently, we are supporting 547 young people aged 19 and over with EHCPs, and this figure is expected to rise in line with the overall growth trend. The extension of EHCP eligibility to age 25 under the 2014 SEND reforms has created a significant and ongoing sufficiency and funding challenge. A child who received an EHCP at age five in 2014 is now 16 and may require support for up to nine more years. Crucially, no additional high needs funding was allocated to local authorities to meet this extended responsibility, meaning the financial burden has grown without a corresponding increase in resources. This has direct implications for sufficiency planning, and our work to commission appropriate pathways and creates a three-fold pressure as follows:
- **First**, the high volume of learners continuing education beyond age 16, often in specialist provision. This poses a sufficiency challenge since specialist placements for post-19 learners are limited, and the market is under strain, requiring proactive commissioning and partnership development.
 - **Second**, the extended duration of support up to age 25, which significantly increases costs over time while managing escalating costs within a static funding envelope. This reflects that the funding model has not evolved to reflect the extended statutory duty,

leaving local authorities to absorb costs for up to nine additional years per learner without any uplift in high needs block allocations

- **Third:** Extended participation also drives up associated costs such as SEND transport, which often escalates for post-19 learners due to longer travel distances and bespoke arrangements.

6.7 Our focus is on developing sustainable pathways and details of the actions necessary balance sufficiency, quality, and financial sustainability while meeting statutory duties and supporting positive outcomes for young people are contained in the Next Steps section of the report.

6.8 **Commissioning:** The council has been actively improving commissioning processes by embedding a more strategic, outcomes-led approach to the development of SLAs and contracts. This includes aligning SLAs with the fiscal benefits that will feed into the updated High Needs Recovery Plan, focusing on cost-effective delivery, and ensuring that funding reflects the actual cost of placements rather than the number of EHCPs. Commissioning teams have introduced clearer performance metrics, strengthened monitoring frameworks, and engaged providers in co-producing SLAs that drive accountability, quality, and value for money across specialist provision.

6.9 **Ensuring Data and Systems Support the Delivery of Places:** The council continues to improve how we capture, record and use live data to understand the connection between our assessment, placement and educational practice and demand within the system and the impact and experience for children and families. Important in this is to stay curious, unpack some of the key things we know about children and young people with additional needs and disabilities and how things might change over time with deep dives. This includes capturing implications for sufficiency and decisions about what places are needed and where, arising from front door activity including:

- Outcomes following annual review affecting placements
- Planning and anticipating demand arising from Education Health and Care Needs Assessment and front door experience
- Planning for transition points involving the process of reviewing the cohort
- The impact of placement decisions on the costs of home to school travel
- Data obtained from occupancy of existing provisions to ensure existing specialist provision is being fully utilised.
- Conduct regular needs assessments to identify the number and type of SEND places required for future planning continues and this includes a focus on improving forecast data for rising Reception children from Early Years.

6.10 **Admissions Re-design:** As part of the work necessary to improve systems and processes, work has been underway to gain support for a project to redesign the admissions system. The project has since gained the approval of the Corporate Management Board and the SEND Programme Board. This is a major piece of work that will significantly improve our placement decision making which is a necessary foundation for commissioning sufficiency of specialist places. The purpose of the redesign is to create a fair, transparent and complaint admissions system for children and young people with an EHCP, ensuring appropriate placement decisions are made through improved processes and robust governance arrangements. Key objectives of this work are as follows:

- **Policy Framework:** To develop and implement a clear and consistent special admissions policy for SEND placements in special provision and resourced provision.
- **Operational Framework:** To build a robust operational framework supporting sufficiency planning, placement decision-making, and school accountability.
- **Process:** To make the placement process more equitable and sustainable, ensuring that decisions are based on clear evidence of need and applied consistently across all settings.
- **Systems:** To develop effective systems for recording, managing, and acting on data relating to admissions, placements, and sufficiency pressures.
- To ensure the timely and appropriate placement of children and young people, including those currently unplaced.

- **Right Placement, Right Time:** To reduce the number of children and young people in incorrect placements therefore preventing placement break downs and additional school moves.
- **Urgency and Priority of Placements:** To prioritise those that are urgent placement needs and those that can be incorporated into a longer-term plan, using the Unique Identifier data.
- **Quality Assurance:** To support a Quality Assurance Framework that can scrutinise provisions creating joint accountability for high quality provision.
- **Transparency and Communications:** To drive transparency and quality of communication to all stakeholders including parents, ensuring consistency and quality across all stages of special admissions.

6.11 The Admissions Re-design project was initiated in November 2025 and is being implemented in 2 phases with implementation from April 2026 followed by a period of a full year to test, review, refine and embed up until August 2027. An overview of the implementation plan is provided at **Appendix 1**.

6.12 **Communications Plan:** BCP Council, in collaboration with our Parent Carers Together (PCT) forum, has developed a new communications plan to strengthen transparency and engagement in relation to our sufficiency activity. This plan sets out a clear framework for sharing regular updates on the development of specialist places, capital investment, and strategic planning—ensuring families are informed, involved, and empowered throughout the process. It reflects our shared commitment to co-production and building trust with the SEND community.

7. Next Steps – Refreshed Approach SEND and Alternative Provision Sufficiency Strategy

7.1 The current strategy was established with a two-year horizon, focusing on immediate priorities for expanding provision, improving outcomes, and addressing rising demand for EHCPs. As we approach the end of this cycle, a refreshed strategic plan will be required to sustain progress and respond to evolving needs, particularly across the secondary phase, post-16 pathways and developing our alternative provision.

7.2 While growth and demand remain high, the council is in a stronger position to understand the gaps in the service and develop its longer term thinking necessary for the development of an updated SEND and Alternative Provision Sufficiency Strategy.

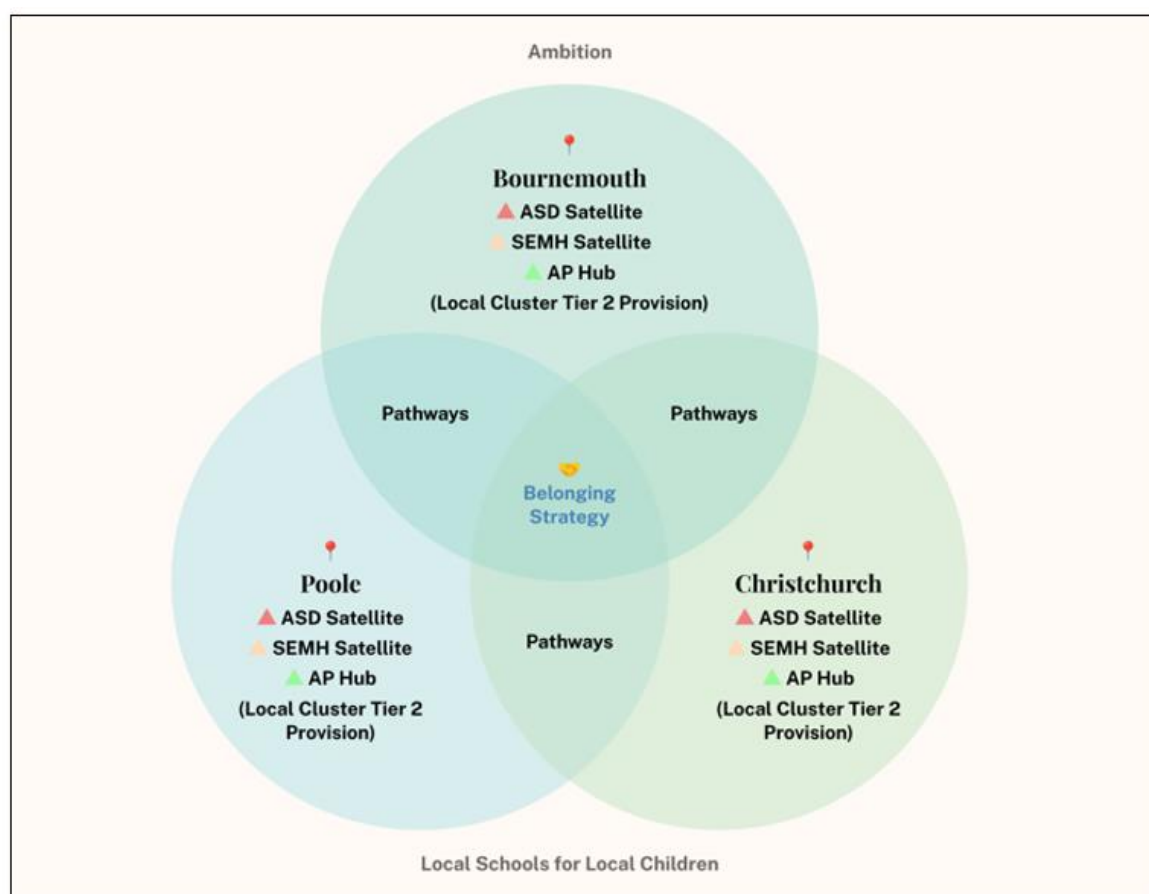
7.3 The focus of the updated strategy will further help to create the right conditions for the creation of specialist and alternative provision places by pursuing system wide changes that bring together the activity across the service to:

- **Alternative Provision:** Encourage inclusive practice in mainstream schools as part of our work across the service with The Difference who are delivering Inclusion training to school leaders and co-leading a multi-disciplinary working group of partners and stakeholders to develop a three-tiered model of alternative provision as part of the Council's Belonging Strategy and SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan (details are contained in **Appendix 3**). This work should include a focus on developing options for primary schools to support a range of needs and help keep children in mainstream schools.
- **Secondary Phase Approach:** To address sufficiency challenges in alternative provision across secondary schools, the Council is adopting a joined-up approach that spans SEND, Inclusion, and wider Children's and partnership services. The strategy involves co-designing solutions that draw on shared expertise and actively apply the three-tier model of alternative provision to resolve sufficiency issues. The goal is to create mainstream pathways that are responsive, inclusive, and sustainable.
- This renewed strategic focus has prompted the development of a refreshed secondary strategy. Work is already underway to engage secondary school headteachers, with a strong emphasis on developing internal alternative provision models. These models aim to offer short-term placements for children and young people with additional needs, providing tailored and inclusive interventions like the flexible, personalised support often found in

small group Resourced Provisions. The provision will help learners re-engage with education and reduce the risk of exclusion.

- Current thinking is at the development stage and is best illustrated in the concept shown in Figure 7: Local Schools for Local Children. This model outlines a geographically distributed cluster approach, featuring alternative provision hubs, specialist satellite provision across Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole, and Tier 2 cluster-based provision aligned with the Belonging Strategy. The intersecting pathways across the conurbation are designed to deliver impact and quality, supported by access to a broad curriculum and qualification routes, robust systems, and a sustainable finance model. This approach also complements efforts to deliver a sustainable travel and transport service.

Figure 7: Local Schools for Local Children



- **Developing Our Post-14 and Post-16 Offer:** While the Council has been coordinating efforts across teams involved in commissioning post-16 provision, the development of a cohesive offer with flexible pathways remains at an early stage. Continued collaboration is essential to align services, identify gaps, and shape a more integrated and responsive offer that meets the diverse needs of young people. The emerging strategy will aim to:
 - **Expand access to supported training routes**, including internships and employment opportunities, for children and young people with special educational needs who do not have an EHCP or associated funding. Work is underway to explore the post 16 offer with our special schools incorporating creative options to develop our 'learning pathways' potentially across multiple sites and commissioning routes to employment through supported internships and pre-internships. An options analysis will help shape this work further.
 - **Strengthen early identification** of pupils at high risk of becoming NEET, with tailored transition support for those with SEND.
 - **Improve course planning** by gathering and sharing clear data on post-16 needs with mainstream providers, enabling the Council to broker a broader and demand-led curriculum offer. Current gaps include areas such as Sport and Animal Care, and there is a need to build parental and learner confidence in accessing Foundation Offers

within Further Education Colleges. Work is underway with Bournemouth and Poole College to develop a post 14 Curriculum offer as part of a pilot programme.

- **Enhance transition planning** through robust annual review processes from Year 9 onwards, incorporating Careers, Advice and Guidance to support Preparation for Adulthood.
- **Home to School Transport:** As part of a review of home to school transport, there is an opportunity to provide support for children and young people to develop their independence skills and prepare for adulthood through a proposed independent travel training offer.
- **Post-19 Next Steps:** Further work is required to forecast and plan for the evolving needs of young people in the post-19 sector. This will include:
 - **Identifying learners who will require continued educational provision beyond age 19**, and developing progression pathways tailored to individual needs with a strong focus on Preparation for Adulthood.
 - **Planning for EHCP cessation** (or, more positively named 'graduation') in a structured and supportive way to ensure young people are prepared for adulthood and receive appropriate support.
 - **Building confidence among parents and young people** to access employment and navigate available support systems.
 - **Mapping and communicating employment pathways** clearly to young people and their families.
 - **Strengthening joint working with health and social care** to ensure timely and appropriate transitions out of education into adult services.
 - **Anticipating national reform**, including the forthcoming White Paper on SEND, Alternative Provision, and Inclusion expected in Autumn 2025, and preparing for the systematic challenges and opportunities it may bring.
 - **Embedding Preparation for Adulthood outcomes** across all pathways to ensure young people are supported to achieve independence, employment, good health, and community participation.
 - **Commissioning** supported internships and employment-focused programmes to reduce reliance on costly out-of-area provision.

- 7.4 **Turnkey opportunities – Place Creation:** The council will continue to progress its efforts to deliver several turnkey opportunities. These refer to the total number of places offered by sites that deliver a significant number of places. The council is also working with the DfE to progress one of the two bids received for the development of specialist places at the former Parkfield School site. Turnkey opportunities are broken down in Figure 8 as follows:

Figure 8: Additional Turn-Key Place Opportunities

	Places
Parkfield	180
Site locations under review	120-300
AP	100
Total Places (Range)	400-580

- 7.5 The council will continue to develop a meaningful strategy through a collaborative and consultative process, drawing on data and evidence to achieve rapid change needed to deliver improvements in the short to medium term. Details of our approach will be presented to the SEND Programme Board in the first instance and will feature as a key part in the updated SEND Sufficiency Strategy in May 2026.

8. Risks and Mitigations

- 8.1 Delivering a sustainable and responsive SEND and Alternative Provision Sufficiency Strategy requires careful navigation of a range of operational, strategic, and systemic risks. Key risks and proposed mitigations are contained in Appendix 2.

9. Legal Implications

9.1 The delivery of a robust SEND Sufficiency Strategy is underpinned by a complex legal framework that governs the rights of children and young people, the duties of local authorities, and the expectations of multi-agency collaboration. As the strategy evolves, it is essential to remain mindful of the legal implications associated with planning, commissioning, and delivering provision. These include statutory responsibilities under education and equality legislation, procedural requirements for consultation and decision-making, and the potential for legal challenge where duties are not met or processes are not followed. The following outlines the key legal considerations that must inform the development and implementation of the strategy.

- **Statutory Duties Under the Children and Families Act 2014:** Local authorities have a legal duty to identify and meet the special educational needs of children and young people in their area. This includes ensuring sufficient and appropriate provision is available, both in mainstream and specialist settings. Failure to meet these duties could result in legal challenge via judicial review or tribunal proceedings.
- **Duty to Secure Education Health and Care (EHC) Plans:** The council must ensure timely and lawful assessment and issuance of EHC plans under the SEND Code of Practice. Delays or inadequacies in provision linked to sufficiency gaps may breach statutory timelines and obligations.
- **Equality Act 2010:** The strategy must ensure non-discrimination and reasonable adjustments for children and young people with disabilities. Any changes to provision must be assessed for potential disproportionate impact on protected groups, supported by a robust Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).
- **Human Rights Act 1998:** Children have a right to education under Article 2 of Protocol 1. Inadequate or inaccessible provision could be challenged as a breach of this right, particularly if it affects access to suitable education.
- **Public Law Principles:** The council must act reasonably, transparently, and fairly in its decision-making. This includes meaningful consultation with stakeholders, especially parents and carers, and clear communication around changes to provision.
- **Procurement and Capital Investment:** Any new provision or expansion must comply with public procurement regulations and statutory processes for school alterations, including planning and consultation requirements. Delays or missteps in these processes could result in legal or financial risk.
- **Cross-Border and Market Management Considerations:** The council must navigate legal complexities around placements made by other local authorities and its limited control over independent providers. Strategic commissioning must align with legal frameworks governing school admissions, funding, and inter-authority collaboration.

10. Financial Implications

10.1 Delivering a sustainable SEND Sufficiency Strategy carries significant financial considerations, both in terms of immediate investment and long-term cost management. Key implications are set out as follows:

- **Capital Investment Requirements:** Expanding and adapting the local school estate to meet rising demand requires capital funding. Projects involve adaptations, refurbishment and a mix of major and minor capital works in schools. The council recently submitted details of capital investment to the DfE as part of its annual high needs capital assurance return.
- **Revenue Pressures:** Increased demand for specialist placements and support services places pressure on the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Without sufficient local provision, reliance on costly independent and out-of-area placements may continue, exacerbating budgetary strain.
- **Cost Avoidance Opportunities:** Investing in early intervention, inclusive mainstream provision, and local specialist capacity can reduce long-term reliance on expensive external placements. Improved sufficiency may also reduce transport costs and associated logistical pressures.

- **Joint Funding Dependencies:** Effective delivery depends on securing appropriate contributions from Health and Social Care partners, particularly for children with complex needs. Lack of alignment or delays in joint commissioning may result in unfunded pressures on education budgets.
- **Market Development and Incentives:** Encouraging schools and academies to expand provision may require financial incentives or support packages. The council may need to underwrite certain risks or offer transitional funding to stimulate development.
- **Banding and Funding Model Reform:** A revised banding model, co-produced with stakeholders, will have financial implications for how funding is distributed across settings. Ensuring the model is equitable, transparent, and sustainable is critical to managing expectations and avoiding unintended cost shifts.

Background Papers

- Children and Young People's Partnership Plan 2024/25
- SEND Improvement Plan 2024/25
- SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan 2025/27 [1.3 02 - SEND and AP Improvement Plan.docx](#)
- Belonging Strategy 2024 [1.3 04 - Belonging Strategy Final.pdf](#)
- SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2024 – 2026 [1.3 05 - SEND Sufficiency Strategy.pdf](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1: SEND Admissions Re-Design Implementation Overview

Appendix 2: SEND Sufficiency Risks and Mitigations

Admissions Re-design - Implementation Overview

Phase 1

Preparation and Alignment (Oct–Dec 2025)

- Confirm governance and Terms of Reference.
- Cleanse and analyse UDF data to identify gaps.
- Launch internal communications and training to shift culture and language around “unplaced” pupils.
- Establish interim processes for placement decisions.
- Create and run Extraordinary Panels to review cases.

System Design (Nov 2025–Feb 2026)

- Build/adapt data systems for tracking placements.
- Design panel frameworks and supporting tools.
- Draft QA and KPI frameworks.
- Develop Special Admissions Policy.

Refinement and Readiness (March 2026)

- Consult with schools, parents, and CYP.
- Finalise documentation and tools.
- Deliver training and establish operational plans.

Summer Term Implementation (Apr–Jul 2026)

- Operate live panels using the new system.
- Monitor QA and gather feedback.
- Refine tools

Phase 2

Review and Continuous Improvement (Sep 2026–August 2027)

- Monitor KPIs and present findings.
- Update policies and publish an annual review

Sufficiency Risks and Mitigations

Pace and Scale of Local Provision Development

- **Risk:** Difficulty in expanding provision quickly enough to meet growing and diverse needs.
- **Mitigation:** Prioritise strategic partnerships with schools and academies to co-develop phased expansion plans; explore interim solutions such as satellite provision and resource bases.

Complexity of Needs

- **Risk:** Increasing complexity of children and young people's needs may outpace available expertise and infrastructure.
- **Mitigation:** Invest in workforce development and specialist training; strengthen multi-agency collaboration to support holistic planning and delivery.

Rising Demand and Timeliness of EHCPs

- **Risk:** Improved timeliness and volume of EHCPs may accelerate demand beyond current capacity.
- **Mitigation:** Use dynamic forecasting models and real-time data to inform commissioning cycles; embed flexibility in provision planning.

Parental Confidence in Local Provision

- **Risk:** Low confidence in local maintained settings may drive demand for out-of-area placements.
- **Mitigation:** Enhance transparency and engagement with families; invest in quality improvement and inclusive practice across mainstream and specialist settings.

Key Phase Transitions

- **Risk:** Planning for transitions (e.g., primary to secondary) may be constrained by scale and complexity.
- **Mitigation:** Develop transition protocols and early planning frameworks; ensure cross-phase coordination and tailored support.

In-Year Identification of Needs

- **Risk:** Late identification makes it difficult to forecast and allocate places accurately.
- **Mitigation:** Strengthen early identification pathways and flexible commissioning options; maintain contingency capacity.

Demographic Shifts

- **Risk:** Population changes, including inward migration, may disrupt demand forecasts.
- **Mitigation:** Regularly update demographic modelling; maintain adaptable provision planning and reserve capacity.

Cross-Border Placements

- **Risk:** Other local authorities placing children in BCP schools may impact sufficiency planning.
- **Mitigation:** Monitor cross-border activity and engage in regional planning forums to coordinate demand and capacity.

Joint Funding Challenges

- **Risk:** Difficulty securing timely and appropriate contributions from Health and Social Care.
- **Mitigation:** Strengthen governance and joint commissioning arrangements; embed shared outcomes and accountability.

Market Management Limitations

- **Risk:** Limited control over independent and academy-led provision development.

- **Mitigation:** Use influence and incentives to encourage local expansion; align capital investment with strategic priorities.

Capital Investment Approval Delays

- **Risk:** Lengthy local processes may delay critical infrastructure projects.
- **Mitigation:** Streamline internal approvals and maintain clear project pipelines; engage early with planning and procurement teams.

Statutory Process Delays

- **Risk:** Prescribed alterations, free school presumptions, and planning timelines may delay delivery.
- **Mitigation:** Build realistic timelines into project planning; maintain oversight of statutory milestones and dependencies.

Banding Model Review

Risk: Delay or lack of consensus in co-producing a revised banding model may affect equity and funding clarity.

- **Mitigation:** Maintain inclusive stakeholder engagement; ensure the model is transparent, needs-led, and adaptable to future pressures.