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Pupils in England with SEN support or an education, health and care (EHC) plan . Including type of need, age, sex, free school meals (FSM) and ethnicity.

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Published

11 June 2026

Last updated

30 June 2026

[1 update](#)



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Headline facts and figures

Pupils with an EHC plan 538,547 pupils in schools in England. Up by 11.6% from 2025 ► What is this EHC plan number? ?
EHC plan (percent) 6.0% percent of pupils with an EHC plan. Up from 5.3% in 2025 ► What is this EHC plan percent? ?
Pupils with SEN support/SEN without an EHC plan 1,319,780 pupils in schools in England. Up by 2.8% from 2025 ► What is this SEN support number? ?
SEN support/SEN without an EHC plan (percent) 14.8% percent of pupils with SEN support. Up from 14.2% ► What is this SEN support percent? ?

Over 1.8 million pupils in England have special educational needs (SEN)

This is an increase of 91,400 (5.2%) pupils since 2025 and includes pupils with an [education, health and care plan](#)  (EHC) plan and pupils with [SEN support](#) . The increasing trend has continued since 2016.

- The percentage of pupils with an EHC plan has increased to 6.0%, from 5.3% in 2025.
- The percentage of pupils with SEN support (no EHC plan) has increased to 14.8%, from 14.2% in 2025.

The most common type of need for those with an EHC plan is autistic spectrum disorder, and for those with SEN support is speech, language and communication needs.

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Pupils with special educational needs in schools

The number and percentage of pupils with SEN has continued to rise

The number of pupils with an EHC plan increased by 11.6% between 2025 and 2026 to 538,500, and has more than doubled since 2016. The number of pupils with SEN support has increased by 2.8% from 2025 to 2026, and by 33.0% since 2016. Since 2016, the [total pupil population increased by 4.2%](#), meaning that there are now proportionally more pupils with an EHC plan or SEN support.

There are now 6.0% of pupils with an EHC plan, and 14.8% pupils with SEN support, continuing the increasing trend since 2016. Prior to 2016, the [rate had remained steady at 2.8% \(opens in new tab\)](#). This increase is consistent with [local authority data on the number of EHC plans for all children and young people](#).

Pupils with an EHC plan account for an increasing proportion of pupils with SEN; 29.0% of pupils in 2026, up from 19.3% in 2016.

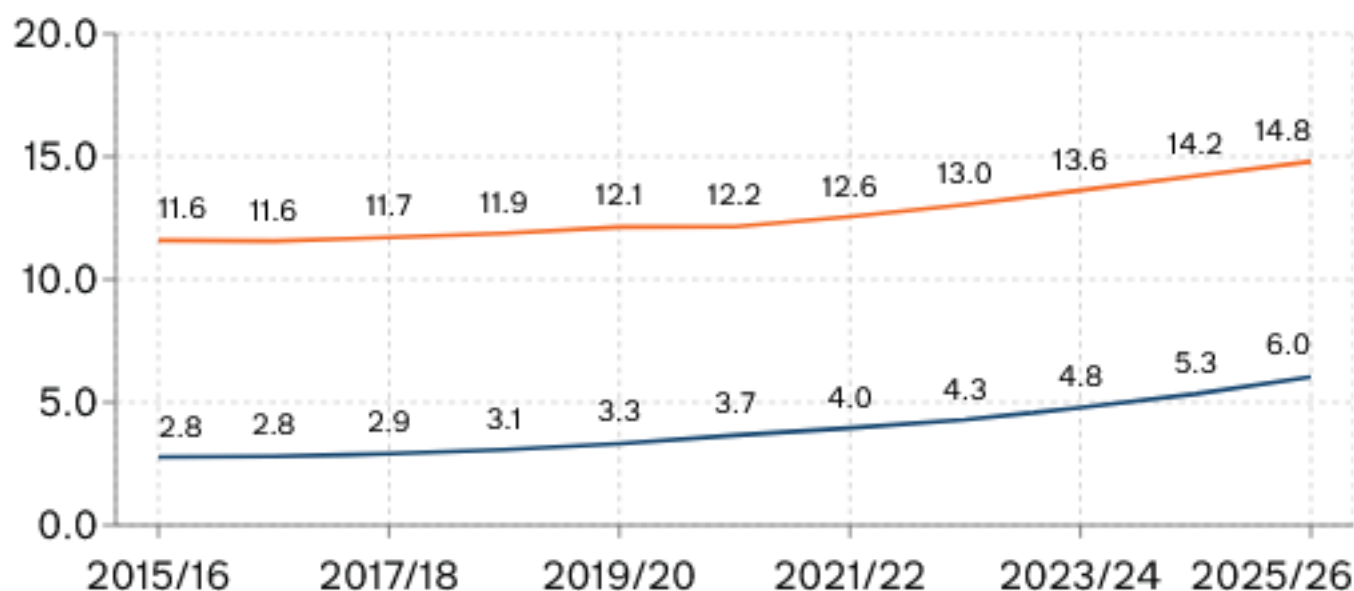
Local authority data on EHC plans is published in the [Education, health and care plans publication](#), which includes all children and young people to age 25 with EHC plans, and those not captured in this publication in non-maintained early years provision, further education, home education or not in education, employment or training.

Chart

Table

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The percentage of pupils with SEN support and EHC plans continues to increase



— EHC plans (%)

— SEN support (%)

Footnotes

1. Includes state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools, state-funded alternative provision schools and independent schools.
2. Includes pupils with SEN support in state-funded schools and pupils with SEN without an EHC plan in independent schools.

[Show 1 more footnote](#)

Source: School Census

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The proportion of pupils with SEN has increased in all school phases

- In nursery, 19.1% of pupils have an EHC plan or SEN support, an increase from 18.8% in 2025.
- In primary, 19.4% have an EHC plan or SEN support, an increase from 18.2%.
- In secondary, 17.6% have an EHC plan or SEN support, an increase from 16.5%.
- In state-funded Alternative Provision (AP), 84.9% have an EHC plan or SEN support, an increase from 83.4%.
- In independent schools, including independent special schools, 26.3% have an EHC plan or SEN support, an increase from 24.1%.

The number of pupils with SEN in AP schools has increased, this is largely driven by the increase in pupils with an EHC plan (up from 26.3% to 30.7%), whereas the proportion of pupils with SEN support has decreased from 57.1% to 54.2%.

The percentage of all pupils with an EHC plan who are in mainstream schools (state-funded primary and secondary) has increased from 56.2% to 57.8% in 2026, which continues the trend since 2018.

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Number and percentage of pupils in England, by SEN provision and school type, 2024/25 and 2025/26

		2025/26	2024/25
Independent school	Education, health and care plan	Headcount of pupils	44,53337,825
		Percentage of pupils	7.96.5

	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	Headcount of pupils	102,889	102,484
		Percentage of pupils	18.4	17.6
Non-maintained special school	Education, health and care plan	Headcount of pupils	4,486	4,334
		Percentage of pupils	98.6	98.5
	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	Headcount of pupils	59	53
		Percentage of pupils	1.3	1.2
	Education, health and care plan	Headcount of pupils	5,087	4,380
		Percentage of pupils	30.7	26.3
State-funded alternative provision	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	Headcount of pupils	8,972	9,496
		Percentage of pupils	54.2	57.1
	Education, health and care plan	Headcount of pupils	871	794
		Percentage of pupils	2.4	2.1
State-funded nursery	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	Headcount of pupils	5,946	6,213
		Percentage of pupils	16.7	16.7

State-funded primary	Education, health and care plan	Headcount of pupils	182,182	157,716
		Percentage of pupils	4.1	3.5
	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	Headcount of pupils	686,881	671,977
		Percentage of pupils	15.4	14.8
State-funded secondary	Education, health and care plan	Headcount of pupils	129,011	113,452
		Percentage of pupils	3.5	3.1
	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	Headcount of pupils	514,285	493,210
		Percentage of pupils	14.1	13.4
State-funded special school	Education, health and care plan	Headcount of pupils	172,377	164,139
		Percentage of pupils	99.5	99.3
	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	Headcount of pupils	748	851
		Percentage of pupils	0.4	0.5

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Footnotes

1. Includes state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools, state-funded alternative provision schools and independent schools.
2. Includes pupils with SEN support in state-funded schools and pupils with SEN without an EHC plan in independent schools.

[Show 1 more footnote](#)

Source: School Census

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Primary type of need

Primary and secondary type of need are recorded in the school census and are available for state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools and state-funded AP schools. Data on type of need is not available for independent schools or general hospital schools and are therefore not included in totals in this section.

Primary type of need is collected for **all** pupils where an EHC plan has been

issued or a pupils that are receiving SEN support. Figures here will therefore be different to those presented in [Education, health and care plans publication](#) which includes all children and young people (aged 0 to 25) that have an Education,

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example, it is possible that an individual may have autistic spectrum disorder or Down Syndrome but their special educational needs are recorded as Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Moderate Learning Difficulty.

The most common type of need among pupils with an EHC plan is autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)

One in three pupils with an EHC plan are identified with a primary need of ASD (33.5%) and over one in five have a primary need of speech, language and communications needs (22.1%).

The most common type of need among pupils with SEN support are speech, language and communication needs

The primary need identified for one in four pupils is speech, language and communication needs (25.7%). This is followed by social, emotional and mental health needs (24.8%) and moderate learning difficulty (13.8%) .

These trends are similar to previous years.

Chart	Table
► Export options Number of pupils with an Education, health and care plan or SEN support in England, by primary need, 2024/25 and 2025/26	
Education, health and care plan	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan

	Specialist care plan		Moderate learning difficulty	
	2025/26	2024/25	2025/26	2024/25
Total	493,764	444,419	1,216,756	1,181,665
Autistic spectrum disorder	165,399	149,217	124,247	114,772
Down syndrome	2,242	1,422	266	225
Hearing impairment	6,440	6,368	17,474	17,396
Moderate learning difficulty	35,475	34,755	161,933	170,228
Multi-sensory impairment	1,392	1,352	3,092	3,278
Other difficulty or disability	9,587	8,954	40,373	40,923
Physical disability	14,918	14,865	20,154	21,085
Profound and multiple learning difficulty	9,339	9,911	503	695
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	no data	no data	65,219	57,779
Severe learning difficulty	31,246	31,271	1,592	1,859
Social, emotional and mental health	83,339	71,304	301,482	279,230
Specific learning difficulty	21,384	19,064	158,833	160,490
Speech, language and communications needs	108,936	92,004	312,118	304,021
Unknown	no data	11	2	140
Vision impairment	4,067	3,921	9,468	9,544

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Footnotes

1. Includes state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools and state-funded alternative provision schools. Does not include independent schools.
2. EHC plans also includes statements of SEN. Statements were phased out from 2014 to 2018.

[Show 2 more footnotes](#)

Source: School Census

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Pupil characteristics

Information on the characteristics of pupils with SEN are recorded in the school census and are available for state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools and state-funded AP schools. Data is not available for independent schools or general hospital schools and are therefore not included in totals in this section.

SEN is most prevalent at age 10

The percentage of pupils who have SEN support increases during primary school age, reaching a peak of 17.7% of pupils at age 10. This then steadily declines through secondary ages, to 14.0% at age 15. This continues to decrease after compulsory school age.

The percentage of pupils with an EHC plan also increases during primary school age, from 3.6% at age 4, to a slightly later peak of 6.9% at age 11 before slightly declining to 6.4% at age 15. The proportion continues to decrease after compulsory school age.

SEN continues to be more prevalent in males than females

The majority of SEN pupils are male (70.7% of pupils with an EHC plan, 60.4% of pupils with SEN support) but the proportion of pupils with SEN who are female has been growing in recent years.

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Number and percentage of pupils with SEN in England, by SEN provision and sex, 2015/16 to 2025/26

		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Count of pupils of all ages	Education, health and care plan	60,445	162,594	61,664	166,290	64,297	173,610
	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	322,927	604,110	324,204	610,144	330,645	619,610
Percent of pupils of all ages	Education, health and care plan	27.1	72.9	27.1	72.9	27.1	72.9
	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	34.8	65.2	34.7	65.3	34.8	65.3

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Footnotes

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2. EHC plans also includes statements of SEN. Statements were phased out from 2014 to 2018.

Source: School Census

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Pupils with SEN are more likely to be eligible for free school meals

The percentage of all pupils eligible for free school meals has increased since the introduction of transitional protections which will continue to be in place during the roll out of Universal Credit. This has meant that pupils eligible for free school meals on or after 1 April 2018 retain their free school meals eligibility even if their circumstances change. In January 2026, [26.5% of pupils were eligible for free school meals, compared to 13.6% in 2018](#).

45.3% of pupils with an EHC plan and 39.8% of pupils with SEN support are eligible for free school meals. This compares to 22.7% of pupils with no identified SEN.

► Export options

Percentage of pupils with SEN in England, by SEN provision and FSM eligibility, 2015/16 to 2025/26

		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Eligible for free school meals	Total	14.3	14.0	13.6	15.4	17.3	20.1
	Education, health and care plan	31.6	31.4	31.0	32.8	34.6	36.1
	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	26.3	25.5	24.7	27.3	29.9	33.4
	No identified SEN	12.1	11.8	11.5	13.2	14.9	16.6

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Footnotes

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2. EHC plans also includes statements of SEN. Statements were phased out from 2014 to 2018.

Source: School Census

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Pupils with SEN have higher rates of first language being English than the general school population

84.2% of pupils with an EHC plan and 83.9% of pupils with SEN support have a first language known to be or believed to be English. This is similar to the previous year, and compares to 76.4% of all pupils in schools with no identified SEN.

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Percentage of pupils with SEN in England, by SEN provision and first language, 2015/16 to 2025/26

		Percentage				
		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Education, health and care plan	English	84.4	84.6	84.3	84.2	84.0
	Other than English	14.6	15.3	15.5	15.5	15.6
	First language unclassified	1.0	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4
SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	English	81.9	82.8	83.1	83.3	83.5
	Other than English	16.6	17.0	16.8	16.5	16.2
	First language unclassified	1.5	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
No identified SEN	English	79.3	80.3	80.1	79.8	79.6
	Other than English	18.5	19.5	19.7	19.9	20.1
	First language unclassified	2.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3

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Footnotes

1. Includes state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools and state-funded alternative provision schools. Does

not include independent schools.

2. EHC plans also includes statements of SEN. Statements were phased out from 2014 to 2018.

Source: School Census

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SEN is most prevalent in the Traveller of Irish heritage ethnic group

26.6% of pupils recorded as Traveller of Irish heritage ethnic group had SEN support in 2026, and a further 10.4% had an EHC plan. The lowest rate for SEN is in the Chinese ethnic group; 5.8% of pupils in this ethnic group had SEN support and 2.6% had an EHC plan.

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Ethnicity by type of SEN provision and type of need in England for 2025/26

		Total	Education, health and care plan	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan
Total		8,359,455	493,764	1,216,756
Any other ethnic group		220,633	9,880	24,204
Asian / Asian	Any other Asian	210,182	9,846	17,816

British	background			
	Bangladeshi	150,877	9,610	16,960
	Chinese	64,930	1,701	3,762
	Indian	353,670	10,562	24,869
	Pakistani	390,881	19,520	46,359
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	Any other Black background	74,998	5,777	10,320
	Black African	442,053	23,794	47,883
	Black Caribbean	72,951	5,795	13,680
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background	248,391	14,539	33,137
	White and Asian	147,651	6,889	17,195
	White and Black African	80,139	5,024	11,356
	White and Black Caribbean	134,069	10,487	26,608
White	Any other White background	589,357	24,159	64,137
	English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	4,992,446	324,203	829,004
	Gypsy / Roma	28,669	1,953	6,750
	Irish	19,625	1,093	3,151
	Traveller of Irish heritage	6,501	678	1,727

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Footnotes

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2. EHC plans also includes statements of SEN. Statements were phased out from 2014 to 2018.

Source: School Census

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Further information on Special Educational Needs, combining pupil characteristics such as ethnicity, FSM, national curriculum year, sex and primary need can be found in the [data catalogue](#), or you can create your own tables using the [table tool](#).

This is the second year that the figures have been published in this format, the time series contains four academic years from 2022/23 to 2025/26.

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SEN units and resourced provisions

SEN units are special provisions within a mainstream school where the pupils with SEN are taught within separate classes for at least half of their time. SEN units:

- are designated by the local authority specifically for making SEN provision, and sometimes accommodate pupils registered at other schools on a part-time basis
- receive funding of £6,000 or £10,000 per place, and usually top-up funding for any additional costs of support required by individual pupils
- cater for a specific type or types of SEN (for example autistic spectrum disorder)
- are usually for pupils with an EHC plan (but may also provide support for pupils with SEN support).

Schools should only use this indicator where the SEN unit has been formally recognised as such by the local authority where the school is located.

Resourced provisions are places that are reserved at a mainstream school for pupils with a specific type of SEN, taught for at least half of their time within mainstream classes, but requiring a base and some specialist facilities around the school. Resourced provisions:

- are designated by the local authority specifically for making this kind of SEN provision
- receive funding of £6,000 or £10,000 per place, and usually top-up funding for any additional costs of support required by individual pupils
- cater for a specific area or areas of SEN (for example specific learning difficulties)
- are usually for pupils with an EHC plan, but could include pupils with SEN support.

Schools should only use this indicator where the resourced provision has been formally recognised as such by the local authority where the school is located.

Most pupils placed in units will have an EHC plan. It is unlikely that a child would

be placed in a unit and also receive support from resourced provision, but a school could have resourced provision for one type of need and a unit for another.

Number of SEN units and resourced provisions has increased

In January 2026, there were 514 schools in England with SEN units, an increase from 449 in 2025. There were 1,309 schools with a resourced provision, a slight increase from 1,217 in 2025.

Full information on SEN units and resourced provisions is available in the school level underlying data file that accompanies this release.

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Contact us

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