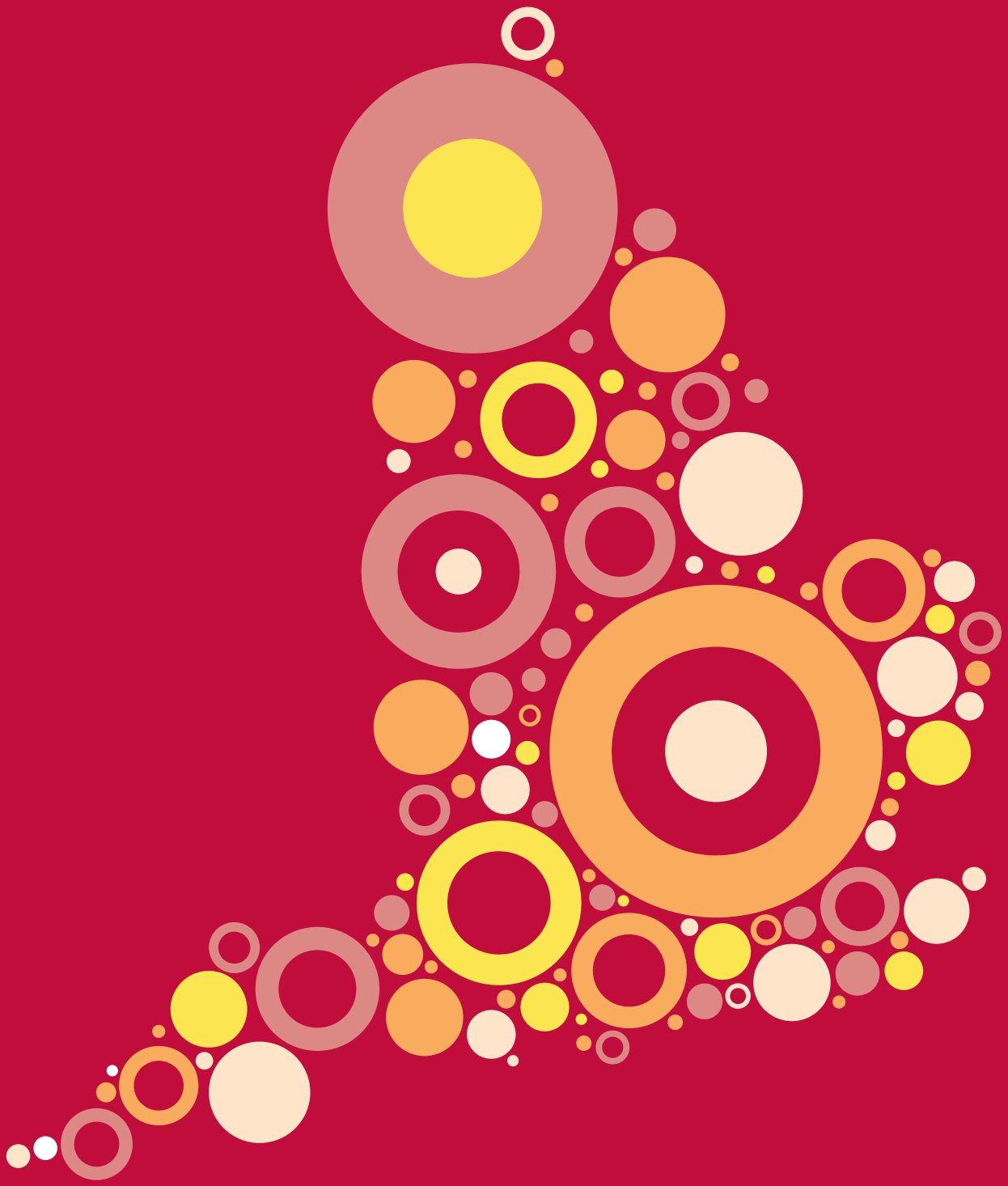

The Children's Plan

The Children's Commissioner's School Census

SEPTEMBER 2025

CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

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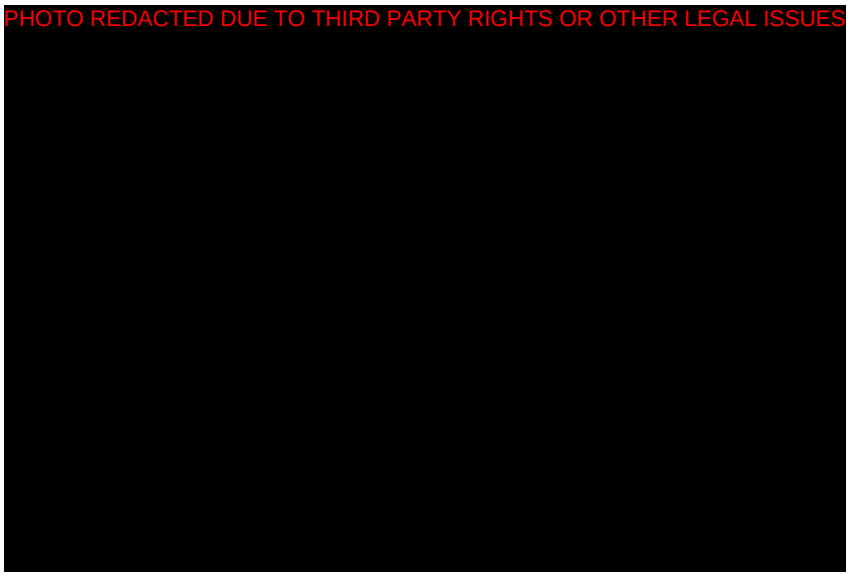
Foreword from Dame Rachel de Souza



For the first time as Children's Commissioner, I have used my statutory powers to ask all schools, and colleges, a set of questions. A census in response to what children told me they wanted and needed to attend, engage, attain, and excel. I want to thank every school and college leader who took the time to respond and helped provide this unique national picture of children's experience of education. Without them it would not have been possible to get, for the first time, such comprehensive proof of how much schools and colleges are doing to support every child, how much they are trying to know and care for their children despite the challenges.

When I became a teacher more than 30 years ago, and later, a headteacher, I saw firsthand the transformative power of great teaching. I was part of the first wave of education reform 20 years ago that brought energy, urgency and a belief that every child could achieve their potential with the right support and ambition. It was exciting.

Those reforms worked. Schools got better, standards rose, and outcomes improved – but not for every child. In that, we failed.

For most children, their educational experience will be radically better than it would have been had successive governments not prioritised reform, investment and ambition in education.

But those reforms did not reach a significant group of children, including some of our most vulnerable. The next great wave of education reform must focus on them: those who face barriers to attending, engaging, attaining, and excelling. Those who find learning hard, or for whom home is not always safe or warm. Those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

It was the pandemic that brought this into sharpest relief.

I was still a school leader, not yet Children's Commissioner. As I looked around my school, it was impossible to ignore the vital wider role we were playing in children's lives – far beyond teaching them to read and the best of what has been thought and known. We were keeping children safe. Providing food and beds. Some things that had been perhaps thought implicitly became explicit: even at the height of the pandemic, we kept schools open for vulnerable children because we acknowledged as a society that children seeing professionals who know and care about them every day is a safeguarding intervention. The challenges brought by Covid were new. This wider role was not.

That broader commitment to children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is something I believe sets us apart as a nation. It is a big reason I wanted to become a teacher. I wasn't just interested in educating, but also in forming, shaping, and developing children. I knew, from my own experience of education, the ability of a great teacher to inspire a child and direct their chosen path in life – and I made it my mission to pay back that great debt in my own career.

From the earliest days of our public education system in England, teachers and schools have recognised this fundamental truth: that their role is not just to teach children and impart knowledge, but to shape them into citizens, full of character, confidence and compassion, to tend to not just their minds but their spirit. Schools carry that mission today. My census confirms this.

That pastoral role has not always been reflected in the public debate about education or the role of schools. But we must double down on it now. Children have asked us to. And leaders have told me, in this census, that they are already are doing so much more, often without the structures and systems to support them. School leaders understand that they have benefitted from the energy, investment and focus of reform, in ways that other services – wider children's services, early help services, youth services, youth justice services, services for disabled children, mental health services and family support – simply did not. And they too agree we must either turn our energy and investment to rebuilding those services or we must support schools to continue fulfilling some of those roles.

That includes providing more and better support for children with disabilities, special educational needs, or additional learning needs, those living in destitution, those for whom the state is their parent, those who are struggling with their mental or physical health and those who do not attend school regularly or are excluded. For most of those children, we should redouble our efforts to make sure they are in the best schools, with the best teachers. They do not require something different when it comes to pedagogy. That is the best way help a child to engage and attain, especially for children with SEND. But for that to be the case, you have to be in school. And you have to have stability and care at home.

For some of these children, brilliant teaching – and a brilliant teacher – is foundational, but it's not enough on its own. They need far more. Good teaching alone can't keep children safe at home, can't mitigate the impact of living in temporary accommodation, can't make living with domestic abuse easier. And without that additional support, the gap between them and their peers will continue to grow. Their challenges lie not only in the classroom but beyond it, from housing and health challenges to having a parent in prison, bereavement, needing a social worker, or being at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation, or having caring responsibilities.

It is those services outside the classroom which – as evidenced by the findings in this report – are often the key to unlocking effective support for children's wider needs. They have not benefited from the same rigour, focus, or investment as schools. And, if we are to smash the glass ceiling on attendance, engagement, attainment and excellence, they must be where we turn our collective energy.

These are not marginal issues. They are barriers that millions of children across the country face every day. Nearly four in ten (37%) children will need additional support with learning at some point in their education[1], and 25% will need a social worker.[2] A million children live in destitution[3] and over a million children miss a day of school a fortnight.[4]

For too many of them, our response is not yet good enough. My *Big Ambition* survey found children deeply value their teachers and their education, yet about a third of them told me they didn't enjoy school.[5] Among teens, this figure rose to over half. But, reassuringly, when it works, children tell me school is a place they trust. A place of safety and of community.

That's why I used my statutory powers to launch the largest-ever survey of schools and colleges in England for the first time, a census to better understand the challenges that children are bringing into

school, how schools support them and what more is needed to make sure every child, everywhere, has what they need to thrive.

Shockingly, much of this data has never been collected before. The findings are powerful.

They show that schools and teachers are stepping up to fill the gaps in wider services and support, doing remarkable work to support children with a wide range of needs, many of which are not formally measured or resourced. The results also reveal that schools are working in a national and regional context that too often fails to acknowledge, let alone support, this work. These efforts by schools are not consistent across the country. Too often, there is insufficient coordination and expertise needed to make it happen.

This report lays out my vision for reform based on what a million children have told me, and now, what school and college leaders have said. It lays out a vision to transform our education system ahead of the Government's School's White Paper, to make sure those children who need more than just brilliant teaching, including those children with disabilities or additional needs, can have their ambitions met. As politicians return to Westminster after the summer recess, this is the single biggest issue facing them – families, parents and children are desperate for change.

Our current system focuses on three main routes for support: pupil premium, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and support for looked-after children. This doesn't capture the full complexity of children's lives. Wider needs are too often either unrecognised, ignored, or shoehorned into a SEND system which isn't designed to provide the right support, where wider needs often manifest as learning needs. No child should be pushed to getting a medical diagnosis for behaviours that are natural responses to the challenges they are facing in their lives. No child should think they are the problem for feeling sad, or different.

I see this squarely as a children's rights issue. We shouldn't tell children there is something wrong with them because we can't support them. Our education system needs a more nuanced understanding of those additional needs and the impact they have both on children's lives and their ability to succeed. A move away from 'special', a term children tell me they find stigmatising, to 'additional', because most children will need something extra from the adults in their lives at some point over their childhood. It must be about more support, more easily, more locally, not exceptionalism. We must guarantee that

hard-won support will remain, but that we will also do more, for more children, without telling them they are the problem. Offering them 'can and will', not 'can't and won't'.

We need an education system that is inclusive by design, where all schools, and all classrooms, are equipped and supported to meet the needs of all children. We need a system that's built on what children tell us they want: to go to a good school and spend time with their friends. To learn and have fun. To get a great job. To feel safe and happy.

It may not sound groundbreaking – but it cannot be optional. If we believe that these things are the rights of every child, then we must act like it. It must be the case for every child that they can go to their local school, learn and make friends, and have their needs met. And so, every school must be as good as the best, with the professional expertise needed to transform that child's life at the time and place that they need it. Where they need support to access that school, it must be delivered in their local community. Where they might need to speak to a specialist, that too should be local. Children have told me how important schools are in their lives – trusted, reassuring, the place they want to receive help.

I have seen examples of bold, purposeful thinking that takes the scale of this issue seriously in other countries. In Canada, for example, in some cases children who are not school ready at age five receive an intensive additional year of support and specialist schools are often integrated into mainstream provision. It's not perfect, but it shows where education policy can think boldly to take children's needs seriously and act early.

In England, we must go further. Now is the time to change how we think about schools, education and their place in wider society. As the government develops its White Paper, it is essential that all additional needs – as well as special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) – are at the heart of the agenda. The data shows that even in outstanding schools, children with additional needs still face worse outcomes. To close that gap, we must build an education system that works with the realities of children's lives, not against them. One that is more ambitious about the role of schools.

That is something we have done before – in extended schools and in teams around the school. And something that the best schools are doing today.

Great teaching remains the single most powerful driver of success. Teaching a child to read is the most radical way of changing their life. But, for some children, it must be part of something broader that

recognises the pastoral, social, emotional, and moral role that teachers have always played. It means ensuring schools are backed up by strong multi-agency partnerships in their local area, brilliant and resourced children's services and properly funded specialist staff. It means having inclusion as the foundation of a strong and fair education system. For every child.

Children – and their parents – deserve to feel confident that their school has the professional expertise and resource required to support them well.

This report is a first step in that direction. It gives us a clear picture of what schools are facing – a detailed state of the nation of our education system.

It calls for some significant changes: a new focus on additional needs; more specialist staff in schools; integrated specialist provision; a statutory framework for multi-agency working and greater delivery capacity across children's services; a unique identifier that makes the state easier to navigate for children, parents and professionals. Ultimately, it calls for a plan to support every child who falls behind developmentally or academically.

Above all, it requires a dedication to the guiding principle behind every successful education reform: that every child has a right to access a brilliant education which unlocks a joyful and successful life, whatever that looks like – with the support to attend, engage, attain, and excel at school. That every child deserves a plan that is ambitious, with the right support and the chance to thrive – no matter their starting point and no matter where they live. If we continue to leave it to chance, to luck, to goodwill, the gap will continue to widen. Postcodes will confirm destinies. Opportunity will stagnate.

The next great education reform starts now. It must have ambition, drive, and the same unshakeable belief that I had as a headteacher: that education can transform lives, so that every child has the chance to attain, excel and achieve their ambitions. We've done it for some. Now is the time to do it for all.

Executive Summary

Every child has the right to access education. That means:

- **Every child attends a brilliant school**, close to home and their friends, that knows them, cares for them and can support their needs, when they need it, for as long as they need it, without delay;
- **Every child feels engaged and enriched by their school experience**, at a school which offers fun, meaningful and rich experiences, and which enables children and young people to thrive;
- **Every child is championed to attain and achieve academically and developmentally**, whatever that means for them, at a school which is inclusive by design, ambitious for all children and young people, and dedicated to pastoral care and formation of the whole child;
- **Every child is supported to excel and succeed into adulthood**, at a school which provides great careers education, with a focus on independence.

This ambition must be shared and supported by the wider services which children and families rely on to succeed and to be happy. All professionals should work to the same level of ambition, focus on the same outcomes and work together towards the same objectives for all children.

Children in England today have access to an internationally-recognised quality of education. England is one of the highest performing European countries in international assessments.[6] Yet far too many children still don't get the quality of education or wider support they should.

Despite large amounts of attention and investment in the education system, the latest figures show that 1.28 million pupils were persistently absent in Autumn 2024/2025[7], 35% of pupils did not achieve a pass in their English and maths GCSEs in 2023/24[8], consistently around 12% of young people aged 16 to 24 are not in education, employment, or training (NEET)[9], the number of children educated in state-funded special schools increased by 37% between 2024/25 and pre-pandemic in 2018/19[10], and perhaps most strikingly, fewer than two thirds of children agreed that they enjoy school or college.[11]

For the vast majority of children, a brilliant teacher is the most important professional in their life. In the wake of the pandemic, teachers and leaders played a vital role in helping children catch up academically,

and central government funded and implemented programmes with a goal to support education recovery.[12]

But, while brilliant teaching is necessary for all children, it isn't sufficient for some. For those children who face challenges outside the classroom, who need more than just education recovery, there was a limit to what great teaching could achieve without wider support. As the figures above show, too many have been left behind.

Some of those challenges are well understood, or at least categorised, by the education system. In January 2025, almost 2.2 million pupils were eligible for free school meals[13], almost 1.3 million children were in receipt of Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support[14], 639,000 had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)[15], and in 2024, almost 400,000 children were classified as a child in need (CIN).[16]

Alone, those children make up a huge proportion of those who leave school without good GCSEs. Almost three in four children who don't get a passing grade 4 in English and Maths GCSE were either categorised as SEN, were a child in need, were persistently absent, were eligible for free school meals, or had ever been permanently excluded. Many more will face one of those challenges over the course of their school lives – for instance, one in four children will have a social worker at some point[17], and nearly four in ten (37%) children are identified as having SEN between ages five and sixteen.[18]

Children who face multiple challenges face an escalating risk of not attaining at school. While 82% of pupils without SEN achieve a pass in English and maths, this drops to 43% for those identified with SEN. Pupils with one or more additional need beyond SEN face other reductions in attainment, with each added need compounding the challenge. Just 24% of children with SEN and one other of those additional needs achieve a pass in English and maths.

Wider, less well measured, needs have a similar effect. For example, children who frequently move home are less likely to achieve highly in their GCSEs than children who have a stable home throughout their education. Those with one address were most likely to get five GCSEs passes (65%), compared to just half (50%) of those with three home moves over their school career and just over one-in-ten (11%) of those with ten moves.[19]

Lots of children face barriers that aren't regularly captured by schools or the wider education system:

- In 2022 in England, almost one million children had an active referral to mental health services;[20]

- In 2024 in England, more than 164,000 children were growing up in in temporary accommodation;[21]
- A million children in the UK were in destitution at some point over the year 2022;[22]
- Over 150,000 had experienced the bereavement of someone important to them;[i]
- More than 100,000 live in formal or informal kinship care[23]; and
- 95,000 children in England had a parent in prison in 2024.[24]

School quality plays a role in mitigating these effects. Pupils with additional needs perform better in Ofsted-rated outstanding schools, with the most pronounced attainment gap observed between outstanding and good schools. Rigour and accountability are important in improving outcomes for children. But for those children facing abuse, neglect or instability at home, it will be the combination of excellent schools and support from the wider system that will be necessary.

Currently, the only statutory support guaranteed to children who face additional needs in their education is through the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system. In addition, there has been a reduction in some areas non-statutory spending – for instance, local authority spending on early intervention services, for instance, fell by 42% between 2010 and 2024.[25]

The lack of wider support means that more children are pushed towards statutory support.[26] That can mean children seek a diagnosis or are given a label that many have told us they don't want.[27] This pressure is causing a regression to a medicalised model of disability, a deficit model, where children have to prove what they can't do in order to access support. It means that too many children are spending their precious and short childhoods on waiting lists.[28]

[i] Through the Children's Commissioner's census, the office was told by schools that 149,529 had experienced the bereavement of someone important to them. This was based on the 86% of settings which responded to the survey. As such, the office has extrapolated up to 'over 150,000' to reflect the whole population of children.

When children do get statutory support, their experience is often challenging. Many wait too long to get an EHCP[29] and some find the system is adversarial, slow[30], and difficult to navigate.[31] For too many children, it can feel like the system is working against them.

For children with EHCPs, too often they are not effective. In some cases, they are low quality, poorly written, and include interventions that are not underpinned by evidence. The current definition of SEN is not clear or consistent and children's access to the system is too dependent on where they live, where they go to school, and even on individual professionals.[32] The join up and coordination envisaged in the Children and Families Act 2014, has not proved so in reality.[33]

Despite the system not working well for large groups of children, it is very – and increasingly – expensive. Local authority 'high needs' funding, which is largely for special educational needs provision has increased from £6.8 billion in 2013-14 to £10.9 billion in 2025-26, in real terms. That excludes spending on SEND from other school and local authority budgets.[34]

"It's really hard to get help." – SEND Panel member

Many schools are doing what they can to fill service gaps and support children with a wide range of additional needs, but that doesn't happen in a systemic or consistent way. Across the system there appears to be a lack of understanding of what those needs are, lack of clarity on what role schools should play, what effective and high-quality support looks like, inconsistency across services and a lack of support to enable schools to provide the services that children need. There is no shared accountability, funding or outcomes framework that meaningfully supports agencies to work together.

This report presents national evidence about the range of children's needs in schools, and the ways schools are responding to meet these needs. The research presents findings from the Children' Commissioner's landmark school census. In 2024, the Commissioner used her powers to request information from all state-funded schools and colleges in England. Nearly nine in ten (86%) of schools and colleges across the country responded, providing – for the first time – a unique national stocktake of the pastoral offering and support they provide for children across England.

Data presented here is focused on state-funded mainstream primary and secondary schools. Over the coming months, findings focussed on special schools and alternative provision, and colleges will be published.

Findings

The Commissioner's census found:

- **Children have a wide range of additional needs outside of the classroom, but schools don't always know what they are.** 60% of state-funded mainstream schools could not report on exactly how many children had experienced the bereavement of someone important to them, 62% could not report exactly on how many lived in unsuitable accommodation, and 43% could not report exactly if their children had a parent/carer in prison. For every pupil characteristic the Children's Commissioner asked schools to provide a number for, primary schools were more likely to be able to provide an actual number than secondary schools.

- **Schools are worried about problems beyond the school gate.** Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was a top four concern for 70% of primary schools and 78% of secondary schools. More than half of primary and half of secondary schools view child safety online as a top four concern.

    - **More secondary schools are worried about the funding of wider services than they are about their own funding.** Over half of primary and secondary schools viewed funding of wider services for children as a top four concern.

    - **Schools worry most about issues where they need help from other services.** The top concern for secondary schools was attendance – 63% of secondary schools view attendance as a top four concern, as do 44% of primary schools. Similarly, the experiences and progress of children with EHCPs/on SEN Support is a top concern for 53% primary schools and 40% secondary schools. Availability of local services was perceived as a barrier to providing additional support by 69% of primary and 81% of secondary schools. Secondary schools were almost twice as worried about misogyny and sexism as curriculum.

    - **School leaders view the availability of funding and overall staff capacity as barriers to providing additional support.** Availability of funding was cited by 95% of primary schools and 94% of secondary schools, and overall staff capacity was cited by 78% of primary and 74% of secondary schools. For implementing EHCPs, the main barrier in both primary (69%) and secondary schools (72%) was funding not matching need, with a lack of specialist

staffing cited as the second biggest barrier. Secondary schools were better able to make adjustments for pupils with SEND. However, reasonable adjustments for pupils with SEND that may necessitate additional cost, staff capacity or changes to the physical space are the most common reasonable adjustments that schools say they are unable to make. More than a quarter of secondary schools and almost one third of primary schools said they were unable to provide access to extra teaching assistant support.

- **School's responses to children's challenges vary.** Schools are already doing a great deal for their children, but support varies by phase, region, level of deprivation and needs of their cohort. There is a lack of clarity on what effective practice is, where this support is regulated, and what good value, and therefore what schools should be paying for this wider support, looks like.
    - **On average, primary schools provide fewer support roles in school than secondary schools.** Secondary schools have more of the surveyed staff roles in school than primary schools (2.9 roles in secondary schools compared to 1.4 in primary schools). Additionally, **more than one third of primary schools do not have any of the surveyed staff roles in school, compared to just under one in ten secondary schools.**
    - 42% of primary schools and 82% of secondary schools provided a mental health counsellor.
    - Fewer than half of primary schools (44%) and 68% of secondary schools have any kind of provision of school nurses.
    - Only one in ten primary schools and one in 20 secondary schools had a Family Hub on-site.
    - **London based secondary schools were most likely to have a staff role provided.** An exception was family liaison/support officers, where London had the lowest provision (51% of secondary schools provided this role compared to 61% of secondary schools in the South East). **There were large regional differences in primary schools with a school nursery.** 83% of primary schools in the North East had a nursery compared with 43% of schools in the South East.
    - **There are differences by deprivation. In general, the most deprived schools are more likely to have provision of a role/resource.** Primary schools with higher levels of pupil deprivation are more likely to offer family and community support services. Nearly three-

quarters (73%) have a Family Liaison Support Officer, compared to just over a third (36%) of schools with the least deprived pupils. Additionally, primary schools with high levels of pupil deprivation are more than four times as likely to host a Family Hub or children's centre (18% vs. 4%).

- **Schools have different views of the support they should provide. Some want to be doing more.** For primary schools, there is still demand for roles supporting children's mental health, development and family needs. Of those without an existing role in school, more than 75% wanted to provide a mental health counsellor, speech and language therapist, family liaison/support officer, Educational Psychologist, and Education Mental Health Practitioner. Responses showed a similar story for secondary schools. More than 75% of secondary schools without the role want a mental health counsellor, a family liaison/support officer, an Educational Psychologist, and an Education Mental Health Practitioner.

- **Schools' provision is often delivered through external partners.** Many schools told the office that the support pupils were receiving was delivered via external provision. This raises potential questions about the cost, quality and consistency of provision, the commissioning structures and processes of schools, and the level of regulation, control and oversight of provision. 30% of secondary schools had external provision for their school mental health counsellors. Schools are often doing what they can to fill gaps left by the withdrawal of other services – particularly from local authorities, and with long waiting lists for some health services – but often that appears to have little direction or strategic oversight.

What should we do?

The education system is at a critical juncture. Growing challenges with SEND provision, stubborn absence rates, and broad attainment gaps call for ambitious reform.

This report builds on the reality of what is happening in our schools. It sets out a series of recommendations which would enable schools to better meet the needs of all their pupils and support them to attend, engage, attain and excel. Crucially, we recommend that the education system does more to support children with additional needs. Seven key changes would help:

1. **A national statement of ambition for all children**

A vision of education that puts attending, engaging, attaining, and excelling at the core. A system that focuses on helping children do what they can and surpass it, rather than telling them what they can't do and accepting it.

The upcoming Education White Paper and subsequent reforms should provide a clear statement of ambition for all children. That should include concrete goals of reducing absence and every child being able to go to a school that can meet their needs, every day. The goal should be to create a system that ensures more children can attend their local school and are supported not only to attend, engage, attain and excel in education but are given rich experiences that stretch them beyond the curriculum – ultimately, giving them the best opportunity to become successful, happy adults.

The new vision should be backed by clear accountability with school and local level data for attendance, engagement, attainment, and progress being published.

A new vision should bring the top concerns of the education system closer to the top concerns of children. Children are clear that they worry about doing well at school, about what they learn, and crucially about being set up to get a good job, owning their own home and having a family.[35] That is as important, if not more so, for children with the most complex lives, those with additional needs who need and want the most from their schools.

2. **A new focus on a broader range of additional needs for those who need support inside and outside the classroom**

A shift away from a deficit model, that instead empowers children. A new system that acknowledges the whole child, taking into account the range of factors that can impact a child's education that the system currently fails to support.

The education system should have a broader conception of need based on a new definition of 'additional needs'. This should include a broader range of needs, including safety, pastoral, health and learning needs. That definition should be set out in a new additional needs framework which should detail different levels and types of need and what is expected of schools, and wider

services, in terms of support, both inside the classroom, and where it will require wider professionals.

It should be built on a clinically-led review of the prevalence of neurodevelopmental disorders and the consistency of diagnostic approaches.

To ensure these wider circumstances are understood, the Single Unique Identifier due to be introduced in the upcoming Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (referred to in this report as 'Unique ID') must be implemented ambitiously and without delay so that schools understand children's lives without excessive new bureaucratic workload. The Unique ID should underpin a new digital platform called the Children's Plan, where families and professionals can share information about children's needs and the support they will get.

3. **Extra help for schools to deliver targeted and specialist support where needed, and deepen their role, impact and orientation in communities**

A school system that accepts that schools have already stepped up into the gap left by other services and gives them the resources they need to get on the front foot and work with their communities proactively, rather than reacting to needs as they arise.

Schools are already doing a huge amount to respond to additional needs – often becoming genuine community service hubs – but have limited capacity to do more systematically. A number of specific changes would help.

First, a new funding premium for additional needs and inclusion. Schools whose children have high levels of additional needs should receive additional funding to help meet those needs. That could be via a reformed pupil premium, or a new funding mechanism – an 'inclusion premium' – or both.

Second, a core offer from all schools. The first part of that core offer should ensure that schools are enabled to provide high quality pastoral support. The second part should be access to key professionals and services. Both should be funded by the new funding premium.

This system would both help children and reduce pressures on teachers, who too often are being asked to step in as social workers, carers, and whilst teachers can and should support children

with low level need, so as not to medicalise normal challenges, more acute support should be provided by professionals in schools.

There must be the same level or rigour underpinning forms of pastoral support as there is for pedagogy, with evidence reviews undertaken by What Works centres, and specialised qualifications on inclusion.

4. A new approach to statutory education support: Education, Health, and Care Plans

A plan that works for every single child. A system that ensures the right support, at the right time, with tailored plans for children based on their needs, backed by a better understanding of children's lives, and evidence of what works.

The current system of statutory support for special educational needs is too narrow in its definition of 'need' and at the same time not specific enough about the levels of need that should attract support. A new approach should acknowledge the breadth of need that can act as a barrier to a child's ability to learn, while also detailing the levels of need and types of support that are effective. Reforms should include a number of key elements:

Statutory support should be more specifically designed around children's needs. All support should be provided through a Children's Plan – some children will require an Education Plan, with support provided in mainstream education as part of an enhanced offer, including from the wider professionals in schools. Some may require an Education and Care plan, for example those with a social worker or who are at risk of extra-familial harm. Children who have ever received support from children's social care should attract Pupil Premium Plus, priority admissions, and support from the Virtual School. Some will require an Education and Health plan, such as those with acute or chronic health conditions, or mental health challenges.

Alongside the Unique ID, support should be offered through a new digital platform that sets out children's needs and the support to which they are entitled and the progress they make. This should be accessible to parents, young people themselves, and include a shared management information system for all professionals working with them, with different levels of access depending on your role.

Crucially, EHCPs – which should also be offered through the Children's Plan platform – should be only for children whose needs sit across all three sectors: education, health, and care, and should reflect this fact. Children with life-long, life-limiting or life-determining conditions should be given statutory support plans until they are 25 automatically, and without a long assessment process. Children in care or living away from home in institutions should also have EHCPs to reflect the challenges they face accessing health services.

Support should also be more responsive to early indicators of additional need. Children who are behind at key milestone checks at 9 to 12 months, at two and a half years, in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile at age 5, or at the end of Key Stage 2 should have their support needs set out through an Education (and Health/Care) Plan.

Children who aren't 'school ready' by the end of reception should be offered support through a Children's Plan. That could include being offered an additional year in Reception to they can be supported to begin Key Stage 1 meeting their key development milestones.

This reform should recognise, however, just how long and how hard those with existing plans have fought to obtain them. In such a low-trust environment, any reform will be met with significant and understandable resistance, and it will be difficult to deliver with consent. As such, the vision for this system set out in our recommendations is a longer-term one. No child with an existing plan should lose their plan. No child should have to move school. We need more support, not less, more easily, more locally. The Government should set out a timeframe for moving towards this plan, communicate the new provision clearly to children and those who care for them, and seek to bring in delivery for a new cohort of children. Children's rights and voices must be central to this transition.

Our current system is oppositional for almost everyone, including children with lifelong or life-limiting conditions and learning difficulties. The system should work markedly better for these children, in particular.

5. Delivering opportunity locally – Local Opportunity Mission Delivery Boards

A system that ensures children can attend and thrive at their local school. A system that puts resources where they are needed and incorporates necessary strategic oversight at a local level for specialist services and places.

Schools cannot help children with additional needs to succeed in education on their own. It must be a place-based priority, and we must focus on developing the broader children's workforce. We must incentivise and encourage our best and brightest talent to work across all of the services children require, and give local areas the powers they need to set out local strategies and allocate the necessary resources based on a proactive plan for their area, and not through reactive commissioning. Every local authority should have a Director of Education or Chief Education Officer, to work alongside every school. They should support leaders with attendance, commissioning of wider services, coordinating schools as safeguarding partners, improving the outcomes of children with an Education Plan and oversee the Virtual School. Where appropriate, regional mayors should have greater powers to work regionally on addressing local need.

The key building block of this work should be a new specialist support fund, jointly funded by health, education and children's social care, and designed to reflect and meet the needs of children in the local area. Local children's services and health services should be held accountable for the outcomes of children with additional needs – for instance, for their attendance. The Children's Commissioner will publish a unique data set to support that work, and will chair a group on ensuring the Unique ID is implemented in a way that works for children and families.

6. The critical role of special schools and alternative provision

An assumption that every child should be in mainstream education, able to socialise and learn with all children, whatever their needs. A system that focuses on ensuring that education isn't lost, and making sure that when children are excluded, they have a safe and enriching educational environment.

Schools outside of mainstream provision can be transformative for children. When the Children's Commissioner asked if children enjoyed school, children in state-funded special schools were the most likely to agree.

While special schools enabling children to thrive should be praised, the default should be a mainstream school for children – inclusive by design for the benefit of children with SEND, and for those without. We must reject any sense that children with SEND are a burden in mainstream. All children have the right to enjoy a mainstream education and the integration that confers. As such, there should be an assumption that pupils educated in settings besides mainstream – i.e. special and alternative provision schools – will return to mainstream wherever possible or remain registered in a mainstream school so they are able to engage in school life, for instance taking part in PE, music, art or enjoying lunch together.

There should an overarching framework for alternative provision which outlines how every child will receive support during their time in alternative provision. No child should be excluded to home. There should be a day one right to alternative provision.

Wherever possible, all families of schools should have both special and alternative provision capacity. Whilst the imperative is for classrooms, schools and the school system to be inclusive, where specialist units work well they should be encouraged as a mechanism for keeping children in mainstream education.

Internal alternative provision should wherever possible be delivered by schools themselves and not delivered by an external provider. No child should be placed in unregulated or unregistered alternative provision.

7. Services beyond the school gate

A fully resourced and flourishing system for family support, children's social care and children's mental health provision, working hand in hand with schools to support children with additional needs.

The challenges many children face in attending, engaging and attaining in education cannot be solved by schools alone. The proposals in this report will allow schools to better know and understand challenges their children face, and to better support them within school. But for those children who are facing significant challenges at home, whether that is experiencing domestic abuse, being criminally exploited, or struggling with a mental health disorder, it is highly likely that they will need more than just brilliant teaching, they will need targeted support from

flourishing children's services beyond the school gate, not least because they may not be attending school in the first place.

This will require significant reforms to children's social care, youth work, youth justice services and Children and Young People's Mental Health services. The Children's Commissioner has set out in detail in other reports the reform needed, but they must include:

- Statutory early help duty, including a Family Hub in every neighbourhood
- National threshold for support under section 17 of the Children Act, including school absence, kinship and parental imprisonment
- Shared outcomes framework for all children, including educational attainment of those receiving support
- Joint accountability and inspection regimes across all services for children
- Increased mental health support in the community, with ring-fenced funding for children
- Annual health reviews for all children
- A Violence Reduction Unit in every area
- All children in contact with the criminal justice system receive a safeguarding response, with specialist interventions to support them.

Introduction

All children have a right to education – to attend, to engage, and to attain, and to benefit from the broad enriching experiences that a great education offers. For most children in England, that is true today. By international standards, literacy and numeracy in England are well above the average. Even compared to the other UK nations, attainment in England has been on a strong upward trajectory over the last decade.[36] This trajectory has followed significant attention and reform from teachers and policymakers.[37] School spending has not seen the same decline as other children's services, which have experienced significant spending cuts over the last 15 years.[38,39]

Education isn't working for too many children

Far too many children still don't access the education they deserve. More than a third of children don't achieve grade 4 or above in English and maths[40] and there is a persistent and long-term attainment gap. The GCSE attainment gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their more advantaged peers has remained at between 26 and 29 percentage points since 2005/2006.[41]

"My son will leave this [school] with barely any education behind him and has been set up to fail because the [school] cannot meet his needs." – Parent of boy with SEND, 13, The Big Ambition

Many of those challenges have been compounded by the impact of Covid. In 2018/19, 65% of primary school pupils left school meeting literacy and numeracy benchmarks. By 2022/23, it had fallen to 60%.[42] There has been a rise in absenteeism – in the autumn term of 2024/25 there were 39,000 children not in school, who aren't accessing education at all[43] and almost one in five pupils were persistently absent, a rate which remains higher than before the disruption of Covid.[44]

Perhaps most importantly of all, too few children say they enjoy school. Children's experience of school is as important as their exam results, if not more, but *The Big Ambition* found that just 60% of children agreed with the statement "you enjoy school or college" and 75% with the statement "you have great teachers who support you". Children with SEND were less likely to say they enjoy school than those without SEND.[45]

Ahead of the Education White Paper, it's crucial that the focus of the past decades on brilliant teaching isn't lost. For the vast majority of children, a brilliant teacher is the most important intervention they will have in their lives. For a significant minority, though, brilliant teaching is necessary, but not sufficient alone for them to excel through their education.

Supporting children with additional needs

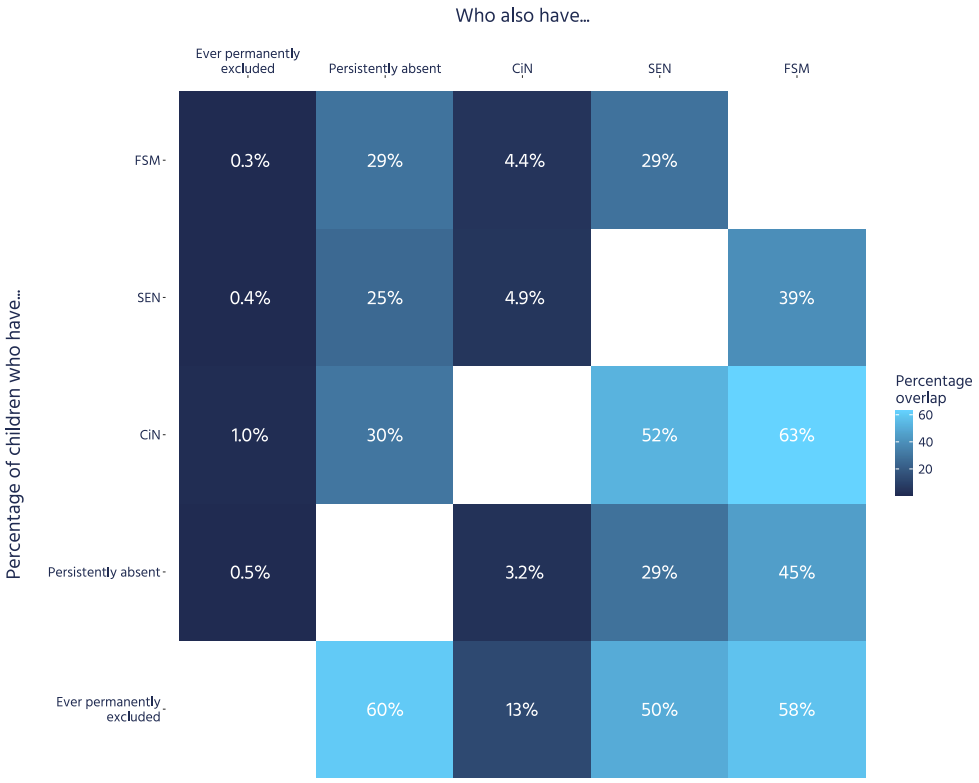
The challenges children face in succeeding at school are well known and many of the influences on those outcomes are well understood.[46] Children facing a range of additional needs are less likely to do well at school. That includes a number of the barriers to learning that are well understood by the education system – for instance, the latest figures show that:

- more than two million children are eligible for free school meals[47]
- 1.28 million children receive SEN Support[48]
- 638,745 children have an Education, Health and Care Plan[49]
- 399,500 children are children in need, including 49,900 who have a Child Protection Plan and 83,630 who are looked after[50]
- around a third of children in reception have not reached a good level of development[51]

Crucially, existing data sets don't give a clear picture of how these needs overlap. Where the data can be linked it shows children often face multiple challenges. For instance, the office's analysis (Figure 1) shows that among pupils who had SEN[ii], 39% were eligible for free school meals (FSM). Among children who were persistently absent, 45% were eligible for FSM, and 29% had SEN. Over 50% of children who were ever permanently excluded, 58% were eligible for FSM. And of the cohort of children who were a child in need (CIN), 52% had SEN and 63% were eligible for FSM.

[ii] Pupils who either received SEN Support or had an EHCP.

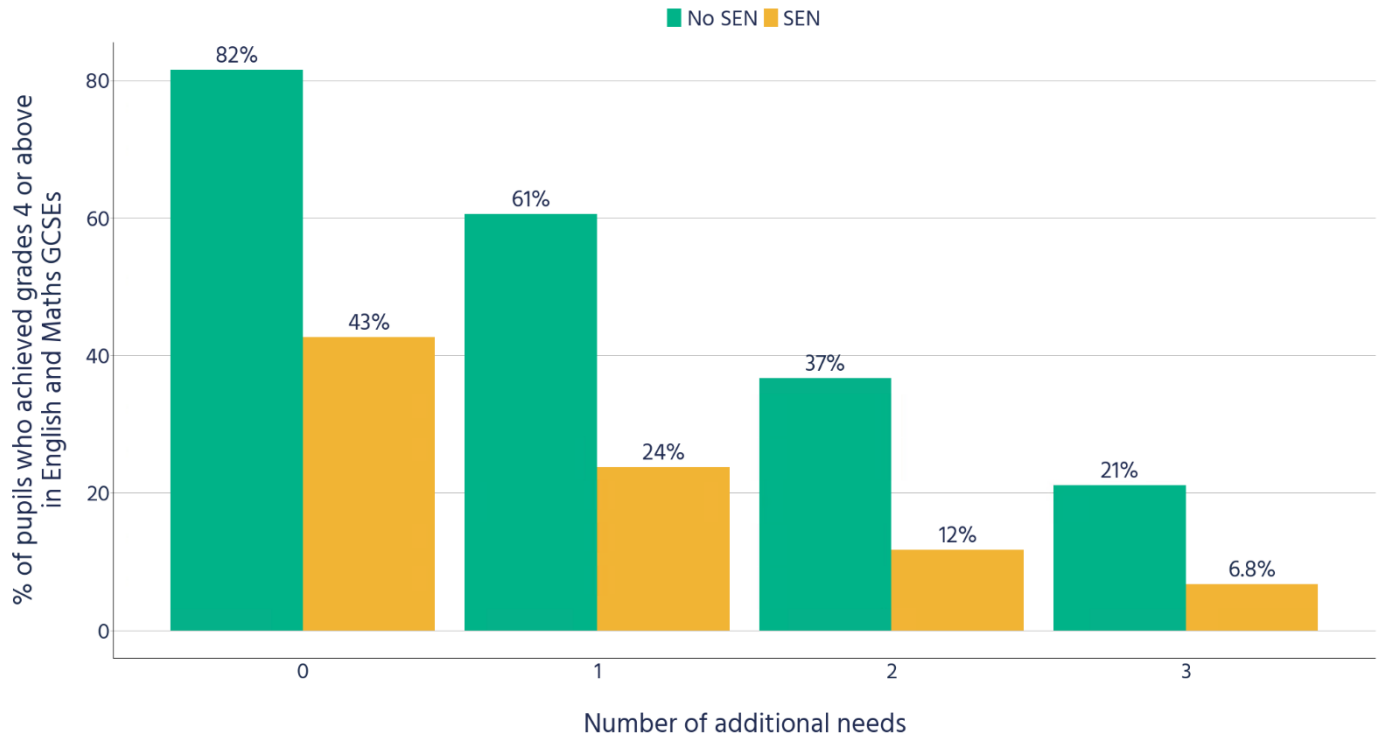
Figure 1 – Heatmap showing how many pupils have overlapping needs, 2023/24



Pupils with overlapping needs face escalating challenges with their education. Almost three in four children who don't get a passing grade 4 in English and maths GCSEs either had SEN, were CIN, were persistently absent, were eligible for free schools meals, or had ever been permanently excluded by the time they sat their GCSEs.

Figure 2 highlights the differences in attainment by SEN status and presence of another additional need. For instance, 82% of pupils with no identified SEN and who do not have an additional need will achieve a pass in English and maths GCSE. For pupils with identified SEN, but no further additional needs, this falls to 43%. Pupils who have one or more additional needs as well as their SEN face an additional challenge to their chances of obtaining a pass at GCSE English and maths. With every additional need, educational attainment falls further. This pattern holds for both children with and without SEN.

Figure 2 – Proportion of pupils who achieved a pass (grade 4 or above) in GCSE English and maths by SEN and number of further additional needs[iii]



As shocking as these results are, they only account for five of the multitude of additional needs a child may encounter during their school career. These five additional needs are ones which are well recorded and identified by the school system, but far more remain undetectable in the data.

Those wider, less well measured, needs have a similar effect. For example, children who frequently move home are less likely to achieve highly in their GCSEs than children who have a stable home throughout their education. Those with one home address across their whole school career were most likely to get five or more GCSEs passes (65%), compared to just half (50%) of those who moved home three times, and just over one-in-ten (11%) of those with ten moves.[52]

[iii] Where an additional need is any of: child in need, persistently absent, ever permanently excluded, and free school meal eligible.

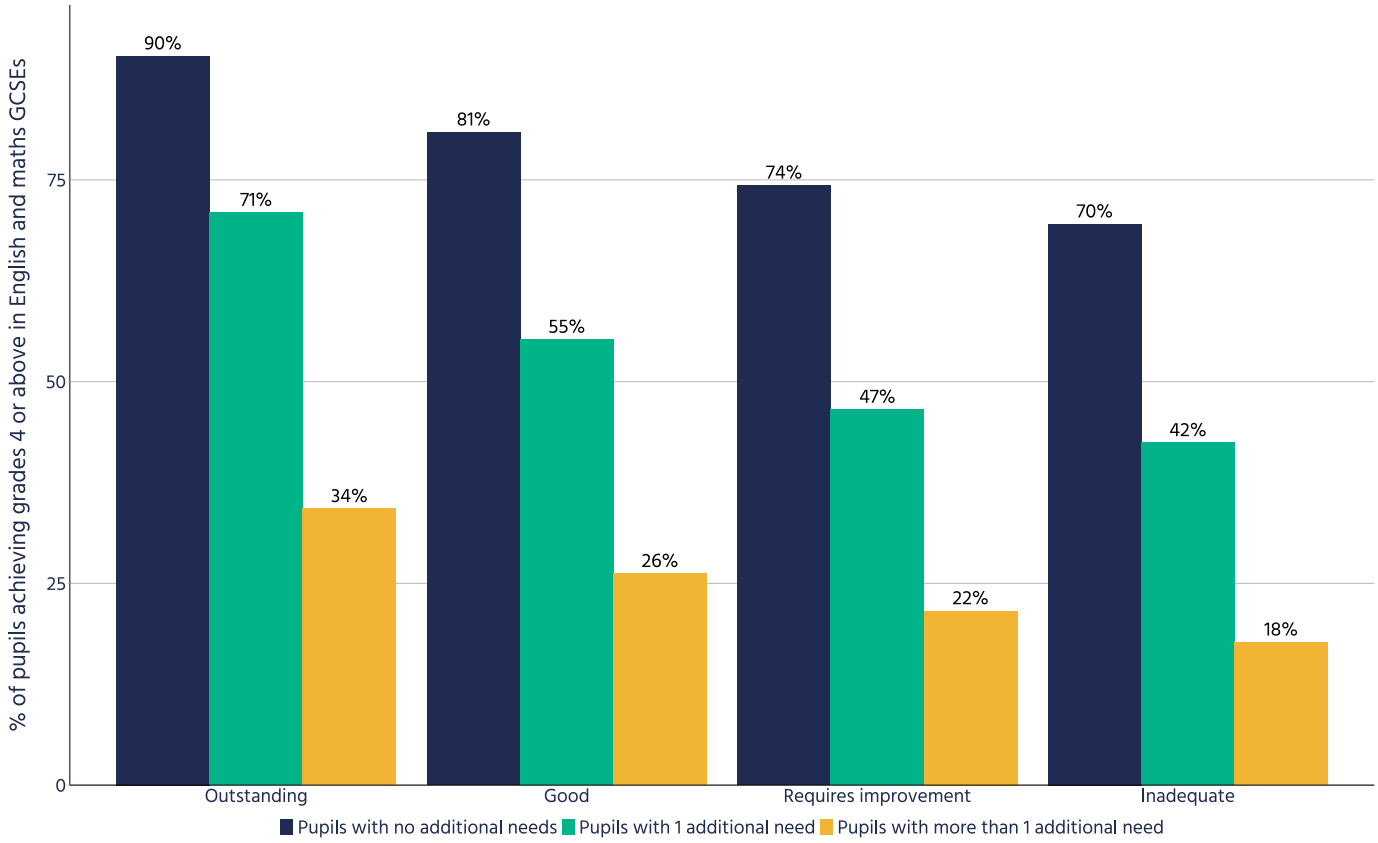
Lots of children face barriers that aren't regularly captured by schools or the wider education system:

- In 2022 in England, almost one million children had an active referral to mental health services[53];
- In 2024 in England, more than 164,000 children were growing up in in temporary accommodation[54];
- A million children in the UK were in destitution at some point over the year 2022[55];
- almost 150,000 had experienced the bereavement of someone important to them[56];
- more than 100,000 live in formal or informal kinship care[57]; and
- 95,000 children in England had a parent in prison in 2024.[58]

The office's analysis demonstrates the benefits of going to a good school for pupils with additional needs. Figure 3 shows that pupils with one or more 'additional need' do better in outstanding schools than pupils in schools with a lower Ofsted rating. This trend also holds for pupils without an additional need.

Pupils with one or more additional needs are most likely to pass their maths and English GCSE when in a school rated outstanding by Ofsted. Attainment declines with each lower Ofsted rating, with the most significant gap observed between outstanding and good schools.

Figure 3 – Percentage of pupils who achieved a pass (grade 4 or above) in GCSE English and maths by Ofsted rating of their school and number of additional needs[iv]



[iv] Where an additional need is any of: special educational needs, child in need, persistently absent, ever permanently excluded, and free school meal eligible.

Special educational needs and disabilities

Children facing barriers to learning can get help in a number of ways. However, the only individualised statutory support to engage in education to which children are entitled is through the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system (See section below on 'The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system in England'). The SEND system is currently under public scrutiny with government, the Education Select Committee, National Audit Office, Public Accounts Committee, local authorities and of course children and parents themselves all highlighting the need for urgent reform.[59]

There are two main reasons for that scrutiny. Firstly, there is a lack of robust evidence about the support and interventions which are effective for children and young people with SEND.[60] For this reason, questions about the quality of support delivered through EHCPs are rightly an important concern.

"I do not feel safe, I feel targeted and they do nothing to protect me and are supposed to have completed an EHCP as instructed by an Educational Psychologist and have not bothered and are hoping I will be so depressed and miserable I will leave." – Boy with SEND, 14, The Big Ambition

Secondly, local authorities are under huge financial pressure with many reporting their spending on SEND is unsustainable.[61] The number of children with an EHCP has increased dramatically in recent years, including a 10.8% rise in January 2025 from the previous year[62], and the government forecasts that this will continue to increase.[63]

The number of children and young people requiring specialist provision and support to engage in education, combined with the lengthy delays children and young people are facing to access specialist support[64], is an indication that reform is indeed needed.

Furthermore, right now this system often delivers suboptimal outcomes across the board. Children wait out lengthy delays and then, in some cases, receive support with an extremely limited evidence base, or an EHCP that is copied and pasted and does not actually improve their standard of education.[65] Parents, in these circumstances, are forced through an adversarial system: from assessment to receipt and then to an unclear EHCP that sets them up for conflict with schools.[66]

"When I got my EHCP for special needs it was meant to take 6 weeks to be completed, however it took over 30 weeks. If I had not got the EHCP, I would most likely be out of education as I would have found a mainstream school too stressful as they would be unable to provide to my needs." – Boy, 11, The Big Ambition

However, while the focus on improving outcomes for children with SEND is positive, a focus only on support under the EHCP system is the wrong place to start.

Schools, and the full education system, need to be enabled to support children with a broader range of needs. This is not a novel perspective – previous approaches including extended schools, full service schools, and Every Child Matters have looked to enable schools to respond to a wider set of challenges and play a bigger role in children's lives.

Many schools are already doing a huge amount to support children with a range of challenges well beyond those set out within an EHCP. However, across the education system, there is a lack of information about the additional needs children bring to school. There is also a lack of clarity on how schools can best support those children to attend and engage at school.

"They should think about what children actually want not what they want children to have." – Boy, 11, The Big Ambition

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system in England

The SEND system is all of the support intended to ensure that 'children and young people with SEN or disabilities are to achieve their ambitions and the best possible educational and other outcomes, including getting a job and living as independently as possible.'[67]

What are special educational needs

A child or young person can be categorised as having special educational needs for two reasons:[68]

- They have a learning difficulty – meaning they have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age
- They are disabled – meaning they have a disability which calls for special educational provision.

Support elements

Children and young people with Special Education Needs (SEN) have a right to support as outlined in t**he SEND code of practice.**[69]

- **SEN Support** for children and young people with a learning difficulty or disability calls for special educational provision to be made in pre-school, school or college. SEN Support is additional to, or different from, the support generally made for other children of the same age in a school.
- **Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)** are the formal basis of support for children and young people who need more support than is available through SEN Support. EHCPs aim to provide a unified approach across education, health care, and social care needs. Parents can ask their local authority to carry out an assessment if they think their child needs an EHCP. Section F of an EHCP sets out what specific provision is required for a child, and there is a legal obligation on the part of local authorities to deliver this.

Having SEN Support or an EHCP does not remove the legal duty for schools, early years providers, post-16 institutions and local authorities to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children and young people under the Equality Act 2010.[70]

Role of local authorities

Local authorities are statutorily responsible for overseeing the local offer of services and provision to meet the special educational needs of children and young people in their area through co-production with key education, health and social care partners.[71] These **local area partnerships** are responsible for the strategic planning, commissioning, management, delivery and review of arrangements for children and young people with SEND who live in a local area.

In addition, local authorities are required to publish a **local offer**, which sets out information about provision available across education, health and social care for children and young people in their area who have SEN or a disability. This includes for children and young people who do not have EHCPs.[72]

Inspections and accountability

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission conduct **area SEND inspections** of local services for children and young people. Only a quarter of areas inspected since the introduction of the framework in January 2023 have shown local SEND arrangements leading to consistently positive outcomes.[73]

From November 2025, Ofsted will be conducting inspections under the new **education inspection framework**.[74] As part of this, an inclusion inspection will evaluate the support provided to vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, including those with SEND.[75]

School funding for SEND support

SEND funding is part of the overall dedicated schools grant (DSG) allocated to each local authority to fund their schools budget. Local authorities, in consultation with their schools forums, determine the allocation to individual schools.[76]

Children and young people with SEND are educated across a range of settings depending on their preferences and the nature of their needs. Many children and young people with SEND attend mainstream primary and secondary schools, where they receive support through SEN Support or their EHCP.[77] Special schools typically provide education to children with more complex or severe needs. Alternative provision settings support children who cannot attend mainstream or special schools.[78]

The Children's Commissioner's school census

Ahead of an expected Schools White Paper, this report seeks to set out a vision for an education system that is better equipped to support and consider children's full range of additional needs. The research presented in this report is based on an information request sent to all schools and colleges across England – a census of state-funded schools and colleges asking about their pastoral offering and support for pupils across the country. The office received responses from 86% of schools and colleges (almost 19,000 schools and colleges), making this a near-comprehensive national picture of how schools are responding to pupil needs and providing support beyond education.

Chapter 1 highlights the range of needs that children bring to school as well as the challenges that schools have in learning about and understanding those needs.

Chapter 2 looks at schools' key concerns both for their school and in their community, and the barriers schools currently face to providing additional support and supporting children with SEND in particular.

Chapter 3 focusses on what schools are doing to provide support. It provides the first national picture of the specialist roles and resources that schools have outside the classroom.

Chapter 4 shows that schools have different perspectives on the roles they can and should be playing in children's lives.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides recommendations for change to enable more children to succeed and thrive in education.

1. Schools are supporting children with a wide range of needs

Children's educational outcomes are impacted by a wide range of factors.[79] Over the course of their lives, the majority of children – if not all – will face a circumstance or event that acts as a barrier to their success in education. Those might be needs that are currently categorised as special education needs, as well as broader challenges – at home, in their family, or in their community. Some of those needs are well understood by schools – in particular where they are linked to statutory responsibilities such as children eligible for free school meals, looked after children, and children with SEN.

Many of the challenges that children face, such as bereavement, homelessness, kinship care, parental imprisonment or parental separation, are not routinely or systematically understood by schools. While some progress has been made, for example the recent introduction of a field in the Department for Education School Census denoting whether a pupil is a young carer, there are still gaps in official data collections.[80] When children experience homelessness, suffer a bereavement, or grow up in kinship care – life events that have a huge impact on their daily lives – schools have no formal mechanism to understand or acknowledge those needs.

The challenges of the care system and achieving success – Tamar's story

Only 14% of young people who are care-experienced go on to attend university.

I am proud to say that I am among them, but who I am today has been shaped by my life experiences, which began in foster care. From the age of 1, I was placed in foster care due to familial circumstances. To begin with, I was moved around from household to household until I was settled with a lovely family in the North of England. There, I was provided with love but often felt the odd one out. I was the only person I knew who didn't live with their biological parents, I was the only one to be called out of class for regular checkups with social workers, I was the only one who had such a complicated situation, I was the only girl who was black and hence it was difficult to feel like I belonged anywhere.

One day, the life that I had begun to feel stable in was drastically changed when a visit from social workers dictated that I would move back with my biological family. In a matter of days, everything had changed. The area I lived in was different, my school was now different, and even the people who were in my life now were completely different. Unfortunately, no adults around me understood how frustrating it was to never have stability. It always felt like a tick-box was trying to be achieved with no regard for how it would affect me.

One way in which I was profoundly affected was by my education. Changing schools meant I had to learn a different curriculum, as even schools a few miles apart often have different subjects available and choose different topics for exams. Having to constantly adapt made it easy to give up, because what would be the point if I had to move again and start all over? But in addition to my shaky start in life, I was raised for most of my childhood in a low-income household, where most people around me were unemployed.

The statistics weren't in my favour, but that was all the more reason why I had to work, because there was no other way for me to succeed. So I did, I worked as hard as I could, I went to every revision session, spent every spare moment revising, and joined every extracurricular I could, such as being a part of the eco-club, being an I-Will Ambassador, a Diana Award Ambassador and eventually a Children's Commissioner Ambassador. As an Ambassador for the Children's Commissioner, I spoke to MPs, spoke at a number of conferences, and most importantly, was a voice for care-experienced people like myself, who were known of but somehow forgotten. Being in these important roles, thanks to the Children's Commissioner, I felt like a voice calling for change and representing the people who were in care like myself, one of the main goals of my activism.

With the encouragement of all those who worked with the Children's Commissioner, I applied to Oxford in 2024 and can gladly say that I have received an offer to study at University College (the oldest one, hence the name). Who I am today has been shaped by my life experiences, but they don't define me. Rather, it's my beginning, which I can look back on to allow me to remember why I do what I do. It's my hard work today which has determined who I am and who I go on to be so that I can be the change I would like to see in the world.

Tamar was a Children's Commissioner Youth Ambassador from 2024 to 2025

The Commissioner's school census has directly asked schools what they know about the characteristics of their pupils. Table 1 presents the numbers and percentage of pupils with certain characteristics.

Table 1 – Pupil characteristics reported by schools

To the best of your knowledge, how many of your pupils in Summer Term 2024…	Number of pupils (unweighted)	% of pupils
…were receiving free school meals?	1,501,899	24%
…were living in unsuitable accommodation?	146,663	3%
…had experienced the bereavement of someone important to them?	149,529	3%
…were on waiting lists for mental health support (including CAMHS)?	130,850	2%
…were young carers?	74,683	1%
…had a parent or carer in prison?	30,903	0.5%
…were living in formal or informal kinship care?	28,614	0.5%
…were unable to attend school, or attend full-time, due to treatment for serious or complex illnesses?	17,057	0.3%
…were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children?	2,971	0.05%

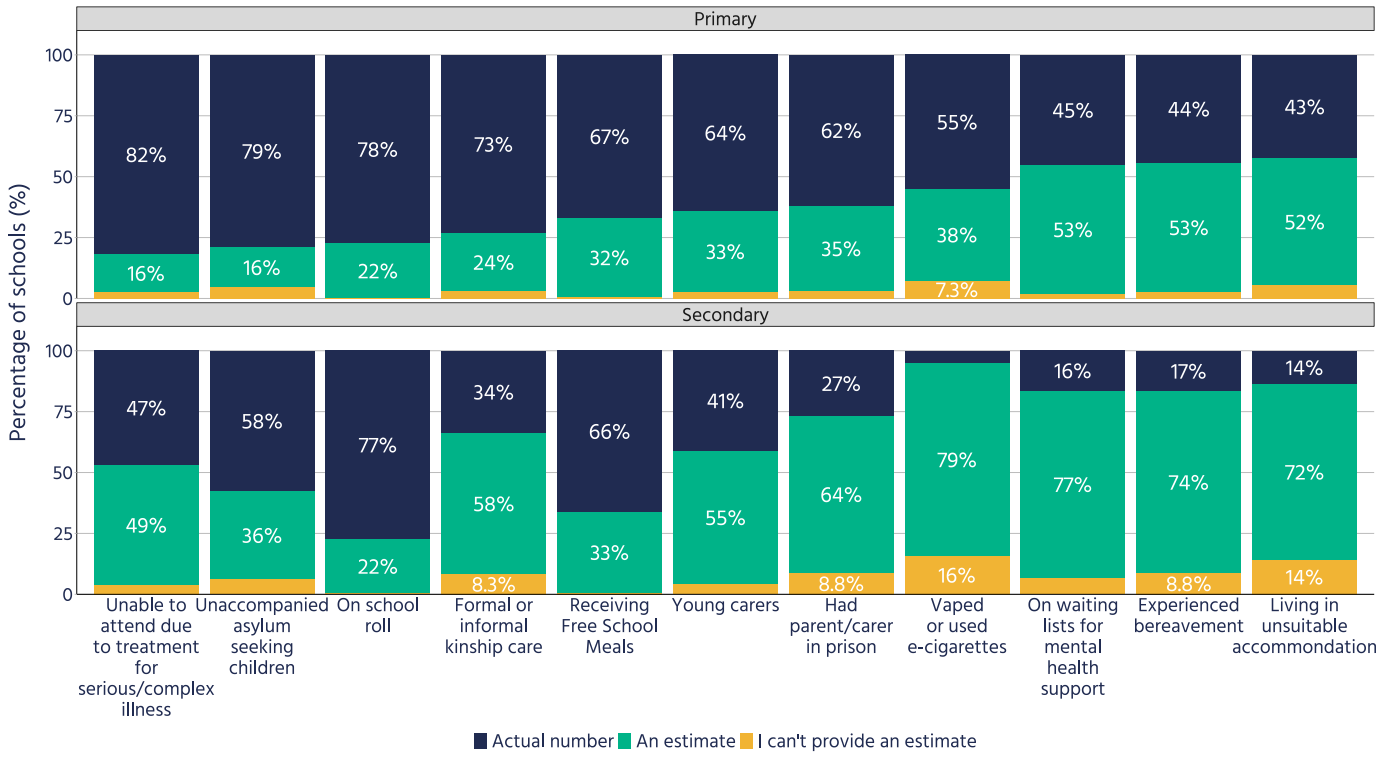
But whether the numbers provided reflect the reality children face is unclear. This is why the census also asked schools if the number they provided was an actual number, an estimate or whether they couldn't provide an estimate. Across all state-funded mainstream schools, 60% of schools could not report on exactly how many children had experienced the bereavement of a loved one, 62% could not report exactly on how many lived in unsuitable accommodation, and 43% could not report exactly if their children had a parents/carers in prison.

Primary schools were much better acquainted with their pupils than secondary schools. Figure 4 shows that for every pupil characteristic the Children's Commissioner asked schools to provide a number for, primary schools were more likely to be able to provide an actual number. Most notably, only 16% of secondary schools could give the number of children on waiting lists for mental health support, 77% could estimate this, and 7% of schools were unable to provide an estimate. Given the current policy drive to provide more mental health support for children and young people within schools, many

secondary schools don't appear to have a way of recording the number of pupils waiting for other provision.

Almost three quarters (73%) of primary schools could provide the actual number of pupils living in formal or informal kinship care, compared to just 34% of secondary schools. Almost one in ten secondary schools could not provide an estimate of formal/informal kinship care, bereavement, or pupils with a parent/carer in prison. Most secondary schools provided an estimate rather than an actual number. Although secondary schools are supporting much larger cohorts, this suggests missed opportunities both on information sharing at transition and with other services, and in getting to know the needs of their children.

Figure 4 – Differences by school phase in the percentage of schools who were able to provide exact numbers of pupils with certain characteristics



The Commissioner's census did not cover the entire population of schools[v], and the numbers in Table 1 relate to the 86% of state-funded primary and secondary schools who did respond. However, in some cases, it is clear that, at a national level, schools' estimates of the number of pupils with a particular need may not match with the reality of children's lives. For instance, office calculations based on official statistics in development from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) show that in England there were nearly 95,000 children with a parent in prison between October 2021 and 2022, compared to the almost 40,000 estimated by schools.[81] Similarly, ONS data estimates that around 114,000 children live in formal or informal kinship care.[82] Schools put this at just 29,000. Schools aren't being given clear information about when children are on mental health waiting lists. Schools estimated that 131,000 children were on waiting lists for mental health support. In reality, 320,000 were waiting for support from CAMHS at the end of the year in March 2024.[83]

The extent to which schools are aware of the range of additional needs in their pupil cohort is important. Schools need to have a good understanding of their children to be able to plan for provision and staff training to meet pupil needs. Better joined up working and data sharing arrangements with other agencies will be an essential part of helping schools to know their children. Equally important is building trusting relationships and providing opportunities for children to open up about challenges they face.

That does not mean that the solution to those problems lie in schools or that schools should necessarily provide the support that children need – but every school should know as much as possible about their pupils so they can give them the best change of attending, engaging, and attaining in education.

At almost every level, the amount – and use – of information held about children is not good enough. There are two key problems. First, some crucial data simply isn't collected. For instance, we don't even have an accurate understanding of the number of children there are in England, nor do we have a single way of understanding the number of disabled children.[84] Second, even when information is gathered, it is often poorly used and not shared. The NHS knows if a child has a long-term health condition and local authorities know when a child is registered as homeless. However, the key services in their lives – including schools – often aren't given that information.

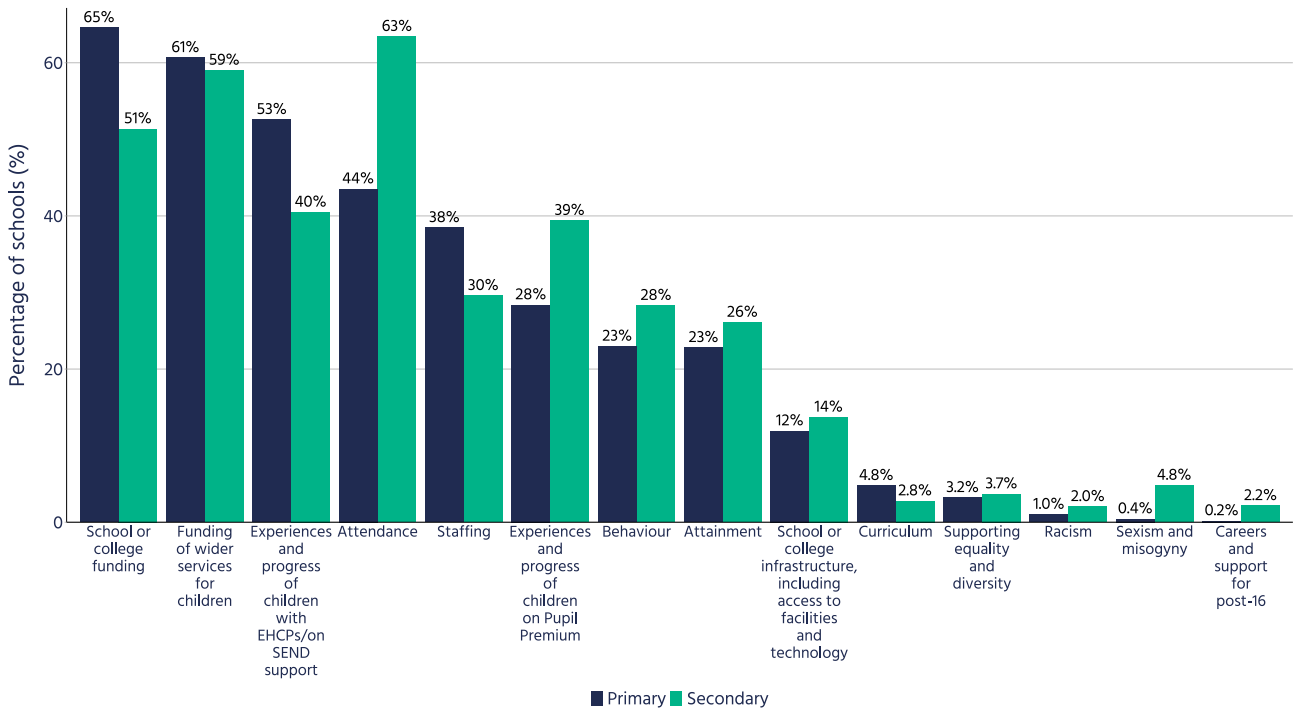
[v] Independent (private) schools, for example, were not included in the scope of the census.

2. Schools are concerned about issues beyond the school gates

2.1. School leader concerns for their school

Schools were given a list of concerns and asked to select up to four they had for children in their school. Figure 5 shows school or college funding was a top concern for schools, more so for primary schools (65%) than secondary schools (51%). Notably, more secondary schools (59%) were worried about the funding of wider services than they were about their own funding (51%). This concern indicates school leaders understand that the things their children are struggling with will not be solved by schools alone. Schools face knock-on effects from a lack of service provision in the local area and are often the only provider left who can fill that gap of support for pupils in the community.

Figure 5 – School leader concerns for pupils in school by phase of school



Beyond funding, the next highest concerns were focussed on issues that have origins beyond the school gates. Secondary schools were most concerned about attendance (63%). They are right to be, given the growing numbers of pupils not in school. There are 39,000 children missing education, who aren't attending school at all[85], and nearly 20% of pupils are persistently absent [86], substantially higher than the rate before Covid[87].

Children also recognise the importance of tackling school attendance.

"Solving root causes of school attendance issues (mental health, discrimination, lack of facilities/ adjustments made at school for children who don't 'fit')." – Girl, 16, The Big Ambition

However, as the Commissioner's work on attendance has shown, this is not an issue that will be resolved by schools alone.[88] Just as schools need to be aware of which children are facing mental health challenges, partners in health, public health and social care need to be aware of which children are persistently absent and prioritise them in their plans. The progress of children on EHCPs or on SEND support was also one of the top concerns of school leaders (53% of primary schools, 40% of secondary schools), and this too – by its very nature – is something that requires multi-agency collaboration to address.

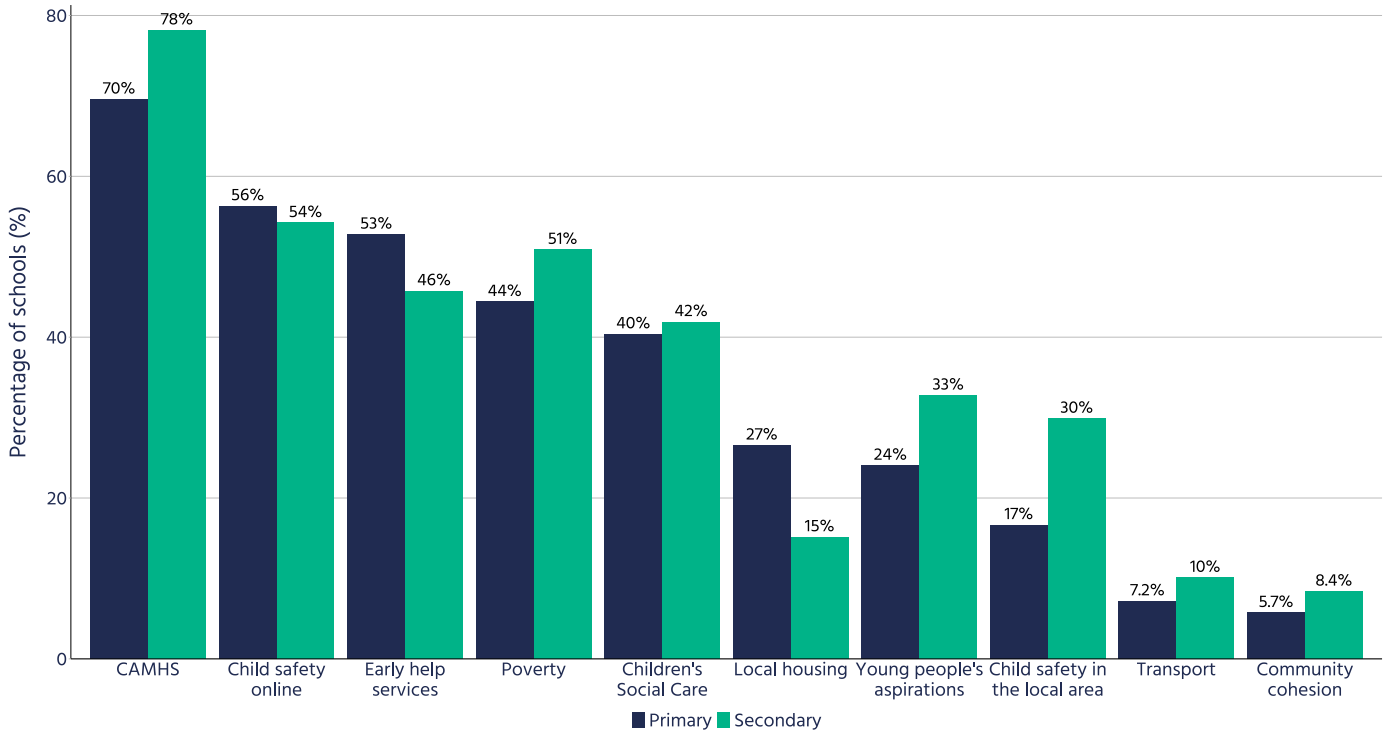
Attainment and behaviour were still, perhaps unsurprisingly, a concern for many schools – 23% of primary and 26% of secondary schools were concerned by attainment and 23% of primary and 28% of secondary schools by behaviour. It is notable that issues such as curriculum, career and post-16 support, racism and sexism, were much lower down the list of concerns for school leaders. Secondary schools were almost twice as worried about misogyny and sexism as curriculum.

The low level of concern school leaders had around career and post-16 support is starkly at odds with what children have told the office. Children's number one concern for the future is getting a good job.[89] That low level of concern might be the result of schools feeling like those areas of delivery are under control, or that their performance is strong – but the level of concern that children display in this area should be reflected by schools.

2.2. School leader concerns for children in the wider community

As well as concerns for their school, schools were asked about their top four concerns for pupils in the local area (see Figure 6). The most cited concern was Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), which was selected by 70% of primary schools and 78% of secondary schools. Schools are increasingly dealing with more pupils with mental health difficulties and being asked to fill the gaps where children face long waiting lists for community services. In 2023-24, 320,000 children were on waiting lists for mental health support. There were 45,000 children waiting more than two years for their second contact with Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) and waiting times varied dramatically by region.[90] Only 36% of referred children received support, while 31% had their referrals closed without receiving support.

Figure 6 – School leader concerns about the local area by school phase



Child safety online is an important concern for schools, with over half of primary and secondary schools selecting this as a top four concern. While the vast majority of schools are implementing mobile phone policies which limit pupils' use of their mobile phones during the school day, there is little or nothing

they can do about children's phone use outside of the school gates.[91] There is limited guidance on how to manage behaviour issues that are brought into school from the online world or how to manage harmful rather than illegal content.[92]

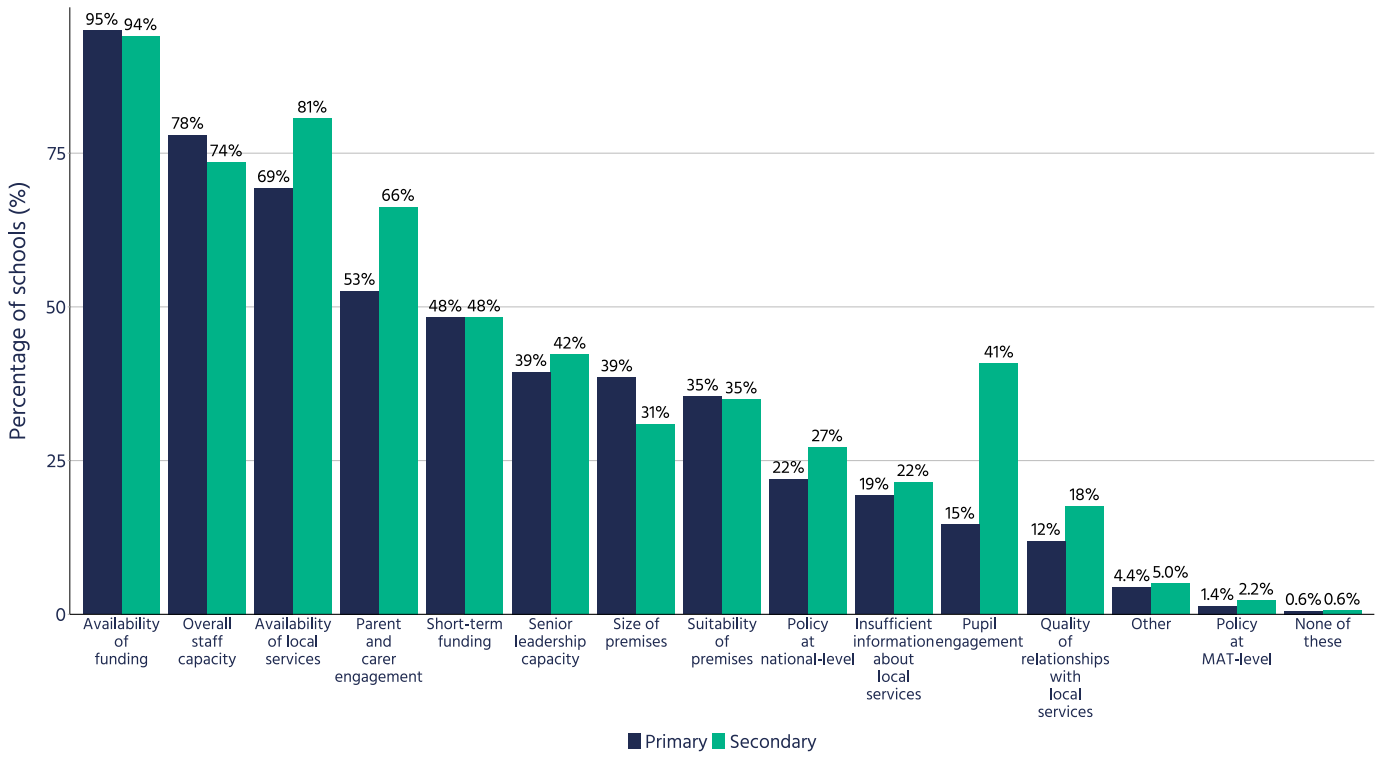
Local housing was a bigger issue for primary schools (27%) than secondary schools (15%), although this could be related to the fact that more primary schools were able to provide an actual number of children in unsuitable accommodation, rather than an estimate (see Figure 4) – perhaps knowing more about children's housing makes schools more likely to worry about it. Less frequently selected school leader concerns were about community cohesion and transport.

2.3. Barriers to providing additional support

"Invest more in schools." – Girl, 11, The Big Ambition

Schools provide support for children with a wide range of needs. Schools were asked about their top barriers to providing additional support to pupils (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 – Barriers to providing additional support to pupils by school phase



The top barrier was the availability of funding, cited by 95% of primary schools and 94% of secondary schools. Overall staff capacity was the second highest barrier reported by 78% of primary schools and by 74% of secondary schools.

Consistent with school's concerns outlined above, the availability of local services was a barrier reported by a high percentage of schools (69% of primary and 81% of secondary schools). Other concerns centred around engagement. Pupil engagement was a top concern for 41% of secondary schools compared to 15% of primary schools. Parent and carer engagement was also more of a concern for secondary schools than primary schools cited by 66% of secondary schools and 53% of primary schools.

Only around one in five schools said policy at the national level was a barrier to providing additional support, one of the least selected of the list given to schools. On the surface, schools are more concerned about what is facing them on the ground than what is happening within national policy. However, it is

worth recognising the impact of national policy on the issues schools are most concerned about: funding, and availability of local services.

2.4. Barriers to supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities

More specifically than the challenges of providing additional support, schools were also asked about the barriers they faced to providing support to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The *Children and Families Act 2014* sets out the way in which local authorities and schools must identify, assess, and support children with SEND.[93] The SEND Code of Practice provides the framework for delivering this support, emphasising early identification, inclusive education, and coordinated planning.[94]

Data from the Department for Education shows that the proportion of pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and with SEN Support (SEN without an EHCP) continue to grow. Overall, in the 2024/25 academic year, 14% of pupils had SEN Support and 5% of pupils had EHCPs.[95] For pupils with EHCPs, autistic spectrum disorder was the most common primary need, and speech, language and communication needs were most prevalent within SEN Support.[96]

In the Commissioner's school census, schools were asked about the barriers they face to fulfilling an Education, Health and Care Plan (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 – Barriers to being able to fulfil the requirements of an EHCP by school phase

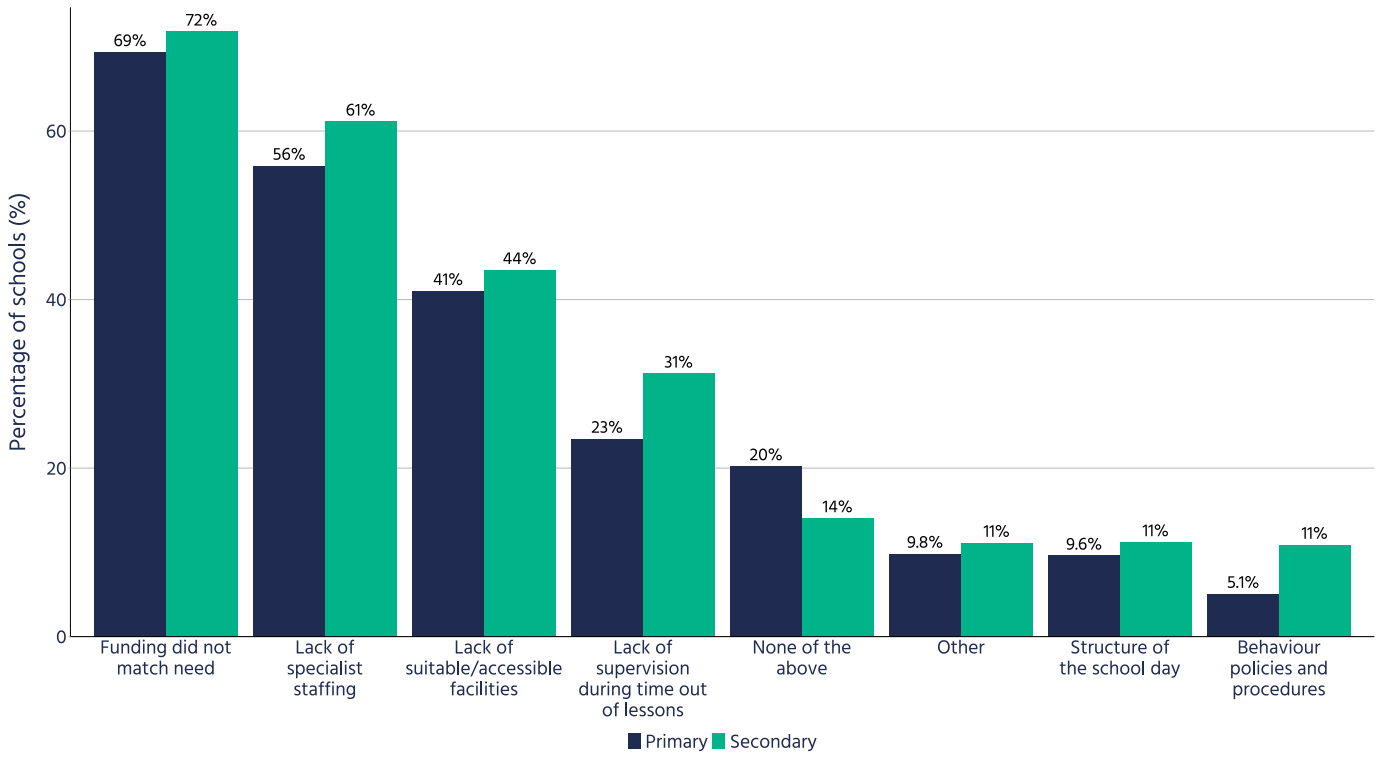


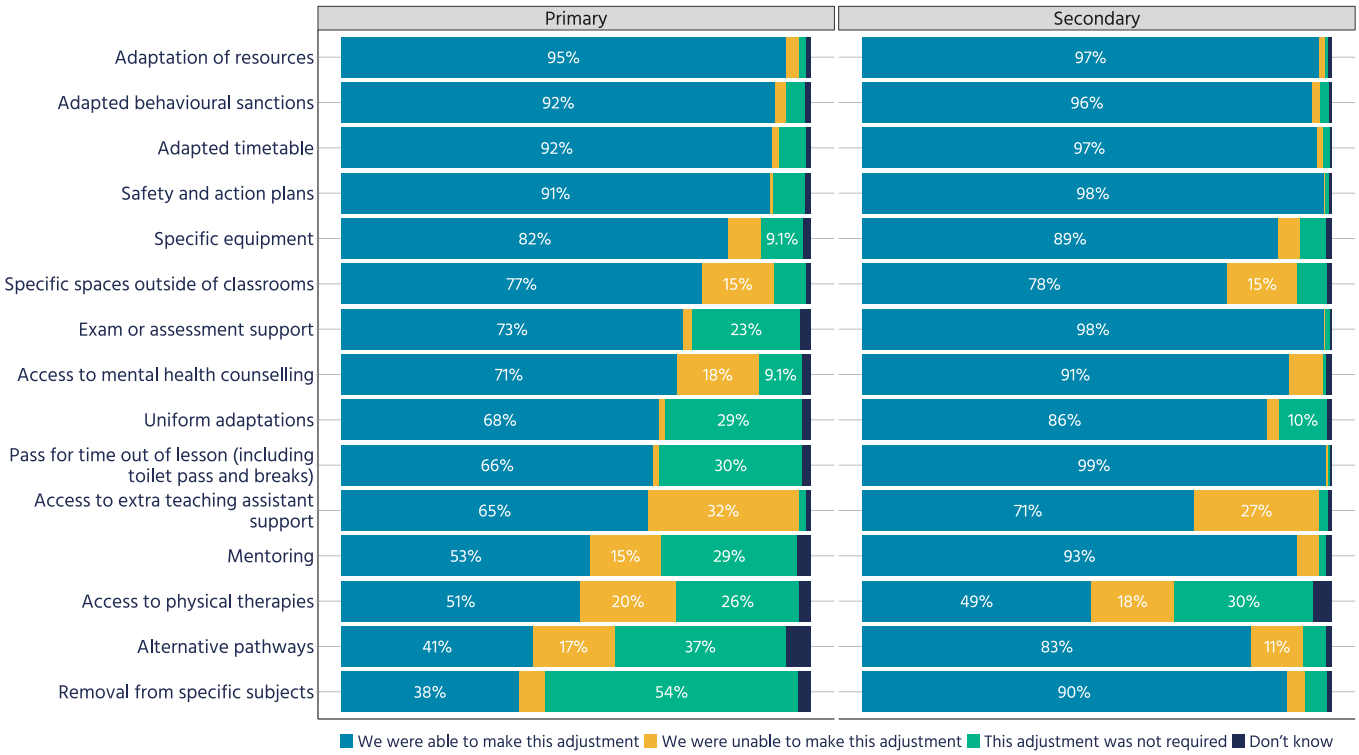
Figure 8 shows the main barrier for both primary (69%) and secondary schools (72%) was funding not matching need. A lack of specialist staffing was the second biggest reason. This may demonstrate the sentiment the office heard during roundtable discussions, that schools want broader support services integrated with schools to help support their pupils.

Schools were also asked how they were able to deal with reasonable adjustments for pupils with SEND (Figure 9). In general, secondary schools were better able to deal with making adjustments for pupils with SEND. Over 90% of secondary schools made adaptions in terms of the resources, behavioural sanctions, timetables, mentoring, exam or assessment support, time out of lessons or removal from specific subjects, as well as safety and action plans. However, more than a quarter of secondary schools said they were unable to provide extra teaching assistant support and almost one in five secondary schools were unable to provide access to physical therapies (while 30% said the adjustment was not required). There was 15% of secondary schools who could not provide specific spaces outside of classrooms and one in ten said they were not able to make adjustments for alternative pathways.

Primary schools were able to adapt resources, behavioural sanctions, and timetables and provide safety and action plans (over 90% of schools). Many of the adjustments were not seen as required such as alternative pathways (37% of schools), exam or assessment support (23% of schools), pass for time out of lesson (30% of schools), removal from specific subjects (54%), and uniform adaptions (29%). Similarly to secondary schools, access to physical therapies (20% of schools) and extra teaching assistant support (32%) were the two adjustments that seem harder for schools to make.

Adjustments that may necessitate additional cost, staff capacity or changes to the physical space are the most common adjustments that schools say they are unable to make.

Figure 9 – Reasonable adjustments a school can make for pupils with SEND by Phase



By law, all mainstream schools are required to have a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)[97] and a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo).[98] Although not a legal requirement, schools are strongly encouraged to have a Senior Mental Health Lead (SMHL).[99] All three roles are demanding and have specific duties and responsibilities. But some schools may not have the capacity, or see the need, to have three members of staff each performing one role.

Figure 1010 – Special Educational Needs Coordinator, Designated Safeguarding Lead and Mental Health Lead roles by phase

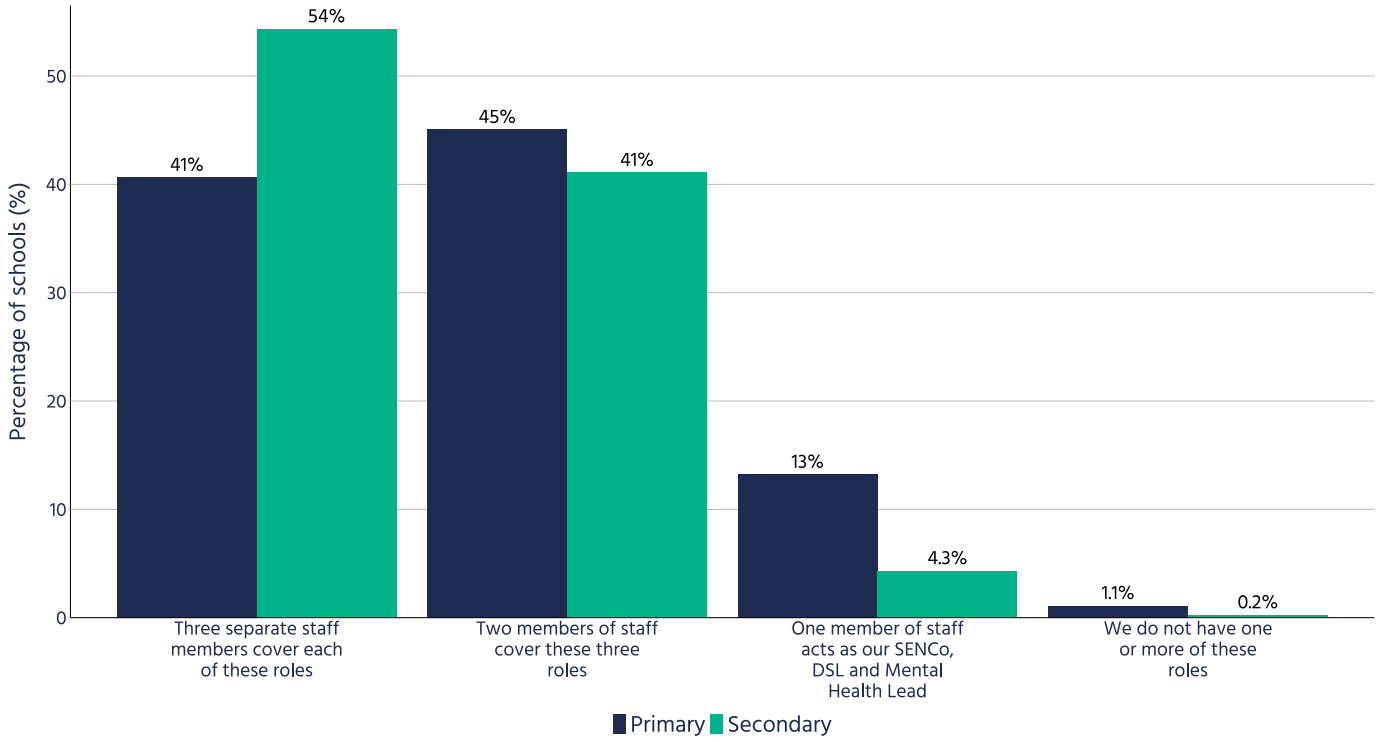


Figure 10 shows that just under half of primary schools (41%) and 54% of secondary schools have a member of staff for each of these roles. Around one in ten primary schools have one member of staff who acts as all three roles. In contrast a much smaller percent of secondary schools (4.3%) have one member of staff for all three roles. Despite this, there is still 41% of secondary schools (and 45% of primary schools) who have two members of staff covering the three roles. This staffing profile is a choice for individual school leaders.

3. Schools responses to children's challenges vary

Different cohorts of children bring different, and varying levels, of challenge to school from beyond the school gates. Schools' ability to respond to those needs and support children also varies. The office asked schools a series of questions about their wider support offer for children beyond the classroom. This is the first time this data has been collated at a national level from such a large number of schools.

"Simple things like understanding their fears and anxieties, knowing that they need more emotional support and patience than others can make a difference." – Adult on behalf of girl with SEND, 9, The Big Ambition

3.1. Schools are doing a great deal for their children, but provision is not consistent

Schools are delivering non-educational support in a variety of ways to meet pupil need. The office asked schools about staff roles, such as Education Mental Health Practitioners, mental health counsellors, speech language therapists, and school nurses. The office also asked about the resources provided in schools, such as a Family Hubs, nurseries, and breakfast provision. The full responses to these questions are provided in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2 – Staff roles by type of provision for primary and secondary schools

	Primary Schools			Secondary Schools		
	Any provision	Role in school	External provision	Any provision	Role in school	External provision
A mental health counsellor	42% (5996)	17% (2422)	25% (3619)	82% (2283)	54% (1488)	30% (826)
A staff member for supporting UASC	10% (1402)	1.1% (148)	9.0% (1258)	21% (571)	8.5% (233)	13% (343)
A family liaison/support officer	51% (7379)	39% (5631)	12% (1759)	58% (1602)	43% (1203)	15% (411)
A staff member for supporting young carers	34% (4888)	23% (3243)	12% (1662)	60% (1675)	51% (1411)	10% (282)
A school nurse	44% (6249)	2.0% (277)	42% (5978)	68% (1891)	22% (620)	46% (1280)
A speech and language therapist	63% (9041)	13% (1806)	51% (7298)	57% (1556)	10% (280)	47% (1286)
A Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) or Safer Schools Police Officer (SSO)	32% (4603)	1.0% (146)	31% (4459)	56% (1572)	9.3% (260)	47% (1312)
A social worker	35% (4929)	0.8% (107)	34% (4826)	37% (1036)	3.0% (84)	34% (952)
A youth worker	11% (1553)	0.7% (92)	10% (1462)	36% (999)	7.9% (217)	29% (789)
An Educational Psychologist	65% (9369)	8.0% (1146)	58% (8245)	69% (1931)	11% (300)	59% (1636)
An Education Mental Health Practitioner	46% (6503)	17% (2404)	29% (4131)	64% (1777)	27% (751)	37% (1036)
An English as an Additional Language Coordinator	32% (4559)	21% (2904)	12% (1669)	57% (1562)	47% (1297)	9.9% (274)

Schools often deliver services and support for pupils on-site, including staff roles and resources embedded within the school. Schools can employ members of staff for their support services. This may be full-time or part-time but is a visible presence in school to be called upon when children need help. Alternatively, schools may draw on external provision of services to deliver support in schools.

This can be a more cost-effective way of securing provision, however, system wide there is a lack of understanding of what good external provision looks like and often a lack of support for schools on how to commission and quality assure external provision. In some cases, it's clear where services a school provides should not be done so externally – such as internal alternative provision. There should be no need for this kind of support to be outsourced. In other cases, schools will signpost their pupils to external services rather than arrange provision in school. It's even less clear in these instances how schools, and the wider education system, are ensuring quality and effectiveness.

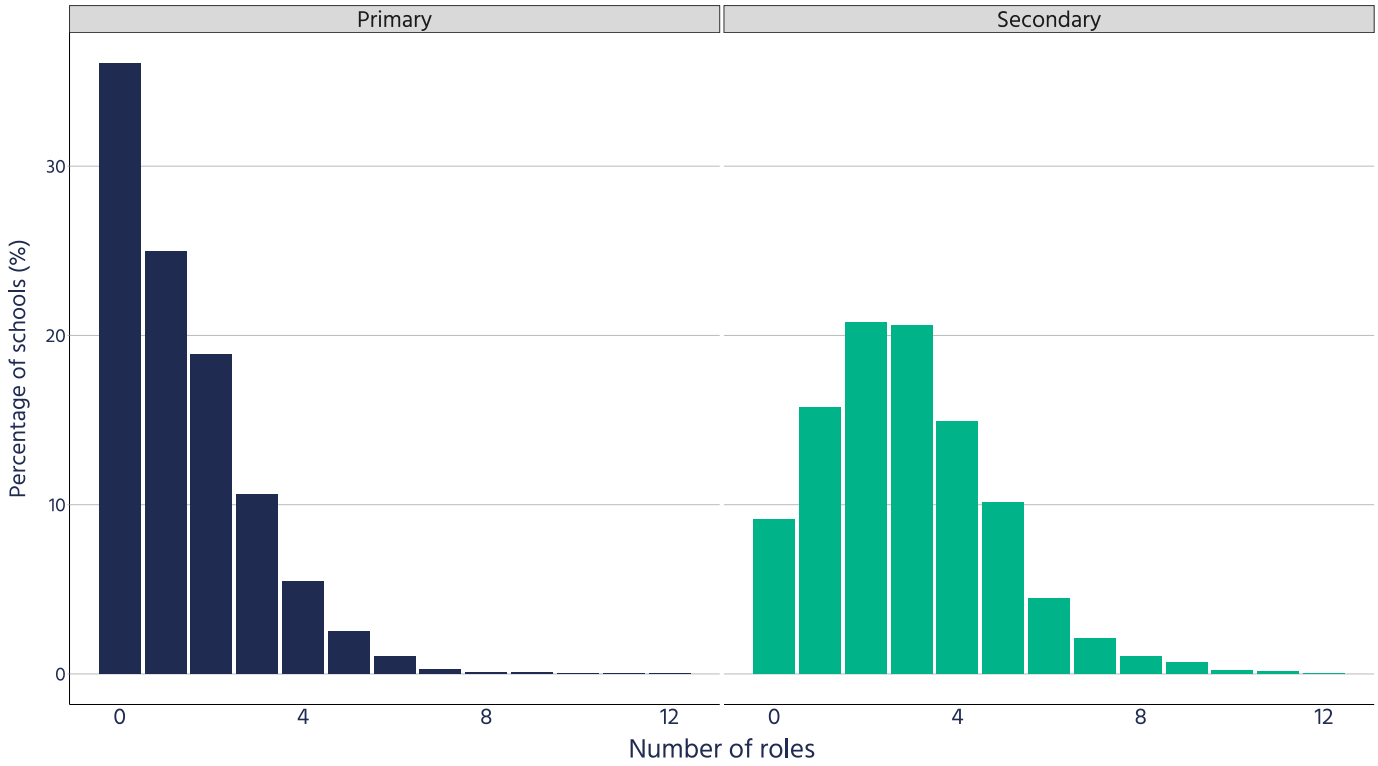
Schools also have resources on site, some of which may be run by the school and some which may be delivered by an external provider. This can include things such as a school nursery, wrap around childcare, and breakfast provision. See a full list of resources in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Resources by type of provision for primary and secondary schools

	Primary Schools			Secondary Schools		
	Any provision	Run by school	External provider on-site	Any provision	Run by school	External provider on-site
A Family Hub or children's centre	11% (1551)	2.4% (347)	8.6% (1216)	5.4% (149)	1.0% (27)	4.5% (123)
A nursery	60% (8636)	53% (7575)	7.6% (1093)	7.5% (206)	3.6% (100)	3.8% (106)
A room for children's wellbeing	71% (10199)	70% (10093)	1.2% (177)	81% (2258)	80% (2231)	1.9% (53)
A sexual health clinic	0.9% (124)	0.0% (7)	0.8% (117)	13% (356)	0.7% (20)	12% (338)
A vaccination clinic	13% (1823)	0.5% (71)	12% (1754)	37% (1036)	2.2% (60)	35% (977)
An internal alternative provision (AP)	11% (1519)	8.0% (1122)	2.9% (407)	35% (972)	30% (835)	5.6% (154)
An outdoor space for children to play or learn	98% (14146)	98% (14120)	0.4% (63)	92% (2562)	92% (2557)	0.5% (14)
Breakfast provision	88% (12606)	74% (10582)	15% (2126)	79% (2206)	77% (2143)	2.5% (70)
Enrichment activities: art, drama, music	95% (13639)	89% (12871)	12% (1679)	99% (2784)	99% (2773)	2.3% (64)
Enrichment activities: sport	99% (14201)	91% (13047)	17% (2405)	100% (2786)	100% (2779)	2.4% (66)
Free food provision for families	43% (6116)	23% (3217)	21% (3045)	37% (1034)	24% (665)	14% (396)
Holiday activities provided free of charge	34% (4877)	9.3% (1315)	26% (3633)	41% (1145)	23% (640)	19% (540)
Social and emotional wellbeing interventions	95% (13703)	92% (13221)	10% (1443)	97% (2712)	93% (2603)	13% (365)
Student participation (e.g. student council)	97% (14034)	97% (14007)	0.3% (49)	99% (2764)	99% (2763)	0.5% (14)
Wrap-around childcare	79% (11366)	58% (8319)	23% (3357)	12% (331)	9.5% (263)	2.7% (74)
Youth work	12% (1674)	3.4% (482)	8.6% (1208)	49% (1361)	18% (490)	33% (914)

The average number of staff roles for primary schools was 1.4 and for secondary schools was 2.9. But Figure 11 below shows significant variation. More than one third of primary schools have none of the staff roles in school, compared to just under one in ten secondary schools. Fewer than 0.5% of primary schools had ten or more support staff while 36% had no support staff. Again, fewer than 0.5% of secondary schools had ten or more roles while just 9% had no role in school. In short, some schools do a lot and some schools do little, but it is difficult to disentangle how much of this is due to choices the school makes, levels of pupil need, and the quality and availability of local services.

Figure 11 – Distribution of the number of staff roles by phase



On average, schools have more resources than they have staff roles. The average number of resources is 7.7 for primary schools and 7.5 for secondary schools. This is unsurprising given schools can provide resources using existing staff capacity instead of having to employ a new specific staff role. Around one in ten primary and secondary schools have between zero and five resources and very few had over ten resources.

These figures reflect an array of decisions made at school, Trust, local, and national levels. Schools support pupils in a multitude of ways, but this has grown out of many separate choices and policies, rather than one clear strategy. The sections below describe the policy context for the key roles and resources we asked schools about.

3.1.1. Health and mental health support

Recent NHS data highlights a rise in mental health concerns among children and young people. Although children's mental health services were under pressure before Covid, there has been a 93% increase in contacts with mental health services between November 2019 and November 2023.[100] Services are struggling to keep pace with demand.

This has knock-on effects for schools who have more pupils with mental health needs, which have become a real concern for schools. CAMHS in the local area was reported as being a top concern by 70% of primary schools and 78% of secondary schools. Schools are left to try and fill gaps in mental health support so that children can engage in the school day. Existing evidence draws attention to an association between mental ill health and absence in pupils,[101] which demonstrates clearly why supporting pupil mental health is a priority for schools.

Schools have a statutory duty under *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)*[102] to promote both the physical and mental wellbeing of their pupils. A 'whole-school approach' to mental health is supported through government initiatives such as Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) and previous funding for Senior Mental Health Leads in schools.[vi] MHSTs work closely with local NHS children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) to ensure faster access to specialist care when needed. The roll out of MHSTs is ongoing.[103] As of April 2025, MHSTs covered 52% of pupils in England, with plans to expand to 60% by April 2026, reaching an additional 900,000 pupils, and a commitment in the NHS 10-year plan[104] for their continued expansion in schools and colleges.[105]

[vi] Schools received government funding to train a designated senior mental health lead. These leads are responsible for implementing a whole-school approach to mental health, coordinating support, and liaising with external services, as set out in DfE guidance such as *Senior Mental Health Lead Training,* Department for Education (2025).

The Commissioner's school census found that 46% of primary schools had access to an Education Mental Health Practitioner and 42% had provision of a mental health counsellor (see Table 2). The nature of the provision was important. More primary schools use external provision for these services than have a role in school. There were 17% of primary schools who had a mental health counsellor role in school. In secondary schools, 82% provided a mental health counsellor, and 64% had an Education Mental Health Practitioner.

Although not all schools had a mental health counsellor or an Education Mental Health Practitioner, schools were almost universally providing social and emotional wellbeing interventions (95% of primary schools and 97% of secondaries, see Table 3). And this was almost entirely run by the school rather than an external provider. The implication is that some schools are using existing staff capacity rather than hiring new roles or turning to external support.

The census also explored the provision of school nurses in schools. Commissioned by local authorities, school nurses offer year-round support for children and young people both in and out of school settings. School nurses play a key role in identifying children's health needs early and helping families navigate the health and care system. They also are a key partner in supporting safeguarding arrangements.[106]

"A school nurse could come and ask if you want to talk about home life school life or if you just want to talk." – Girl, 11, The Big Ambition

The number of school nurses has fallen by 33% since 2009[107], and the Commissioner's school census findings show that less than half of primary schools (44%) and 68% of secondary schools have any kind of provision of school nurses.

School nurse

A primary school in Birmingham told us:

"We pay for a school nurse one day a week. We can ask parents if a child has had MMR but [have] no right to demand to see their red book, and the parent might bring it out of courtesy, but the nurse rings the GP and finds out. She also sorts out GP appointments somehow. She used to do EpiPen/allergy/asthma training. No training on diabetes at the moment. She has been here years, knows families, remembers issues. Other schools in the consortium have cut her."

3.1.2. Educational Psychologists and speech and language therapy

Educational Psychologists play a key role in assessing the needs of children and identifying appropriate support.[108] The Commissioner's census shows that 65% of primary schools have some kind of provision of an Educational Psychologist, but this was mainly due to schools using external provision (58% of schools). Only 8% of primary schools had a specific role in school. In secondary schools, a similar story emerges, with 69% of schools having any provision, 11% a role in school and 59% external provision.

Schools play a key role in the early identification of developmental delays. A large percentage of schools are commonly sourcing speech and language therapist support. The census found that speech and language therapists are used in 63% of primary schools and 57% of secondary schools, but mostly through external providers. Department for Education data that shows in 2024/25 the most common type of need for those with SEN Support was speech, language and communication needs.[109]

There are Government efforts to increase speech and language therapist provision in schools. The speech language therapy Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) Programme was launched as part of the government's Plan for Change. It aims to provide earlier, targeted speech and language support in schools and early years settings. Under ELSEC, SaLT assistants are embedded in schools, working across multiple settings to support children aged 2–11.[110] They help identify and address speech, language, and communication needs before they escalate, promoting better academic and social outcomes.

3.1.3. Community support

Schools are increasingly recognised not only as places of learning, but also as central hubs within their communities. A key element of the community support schools can offer is supporting families with early childhood and childcare. The school census findings show that over half of primary schools run wrap-around childcare (58%) and over half run a nursery (53%). Wrap-around childcare is childcare provided before and after the school day during school term time. Many parents rely on this wrap-around support to enable them to work. All parents in England have the right to request their child's school consider setting up wraparound or holiday childcare.[111] A school-based nursery is nursery provision located on a school site. These can be operated under different delivery models and play a crucial role in providing high-quality early education.[112] Both services can assist with smoother transitions into school and building relationships between families and schools.

"Ensure early years childcare and wrap around care is affordable and accessible." – Parent of boy, 5, The Big Ambition

There is evidence that school breakfast clubs are positively correlated with better academic progress and reduce educational attainment gaps for some children.[113] Breakfast clubs can also act as childcare, allowing more parents to return to work or simplify their hours. There is a distinction between paid versus free breakfast provision and whether that provision is through a breakfast club. The government has committed to rolling out free breakfast clubs across the country.[114] The Children's Commissioner's school census found that 88% of primary schools, and 79% of secondary schools, offered breakfast provision. Around two in five schools offer free food provision for families: 43% of primary schools and 37% of secondary schools offered some kind of free food provision.

Many council-run children's centres have closed or cut back services since 2010.[115] This has meant a reduction in early intervention services for families, particularly new parents. The Family Hub initiative is designed to rebuild some of this provision. The government has recently announced its intention to fund the roll out of up to 1,000 Family Hubs, building on the previous government's reforms.[116]

Within that programme, Hubs are encouraged to work with schools to ensure children get consistent support, and facilitate access to wider support for families, including parenting programmes, youth work, mentoring, food support, and community mental health services.[117]

The Commissioner's school census showed that, currently, schools with a Family Hub were few and far between. Only one in 10 primary schools and one in 20 secondary schools had a Family Hub run by the school. Where they did have a Family Hub, this was more commonly run by an external provider.

3.1.4. Social care support

Schools play a vital role in safeguarding and supporting the wider wellbeing of children, often acting as a key point of contact with social care services. Under the *Children and Families Act 2014* and *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)*, schools have a statutory duty to identify and respond to concerns about a child's welfare, working in partnership with local authority children's social care.[118] Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) are central to this role, acting as the link between education and statutory safeguarding services. In 2024, schools were the second largest source of referrals to children's social services, accounting for two in ten referrals.[119]

DSL multi-agency working

A school in Birmingham told us:

The DSL's team supports access to services for families. This can range from financial support through to mental health. They do not just focus on the child, also focus on the parent. Having a whole family approach has a real impact on attendance. They're now up six percentage points on attendance relative to last year. Have better attendance than comparable schools.

There is increasing national focus on the importance of integrated support for children and families, particularly through early help and multi-agency working.[120] Schools are seen as critical partners in this, particularly in identifying needs early and supporting access to services such as family support workers, school-based social workers, and early help teams.

The Commissioner's school census showed just over one third of both primary (35%) and secondary schools (37%) had a social worker, though this was almost entirely external provision (likely through the local authority). Family liaison/support officers were more common and more likely for schools to have this as a role in school (39% of primary schools and 43% of secondary schools). Over half of primary and

secondary schools had any provision of a family liaison/support officer (either a role in school or through external providers).

3.2. Support provided by schools varies across the country

It is clear from the findings that schools are not universal in the support they are offering children.

To explore this further, the office analysed whether there were any patterns in the characteristics of schools that provided and did not provide roles and resources. This involved linking data from the Department for Education's pupil-level School Census to obtain the following school and pupil characteristics: Ofsted rating, the average income deprivation experienced by a pupil at each school, academy status and region the school was located in. In earlier chapters staff roles and school resources were analysed by the type of provision – whether internal or external. In this chapter that distinction is not made and the following findings reflect schools that offer any form of provision for the staff role or resource.

The largest differences the office observed were by the average income deprivation of a school's pupils, and by region. These findings are reported below.

3.2.1. Deprivation

The average[vii] pupil IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index, a commonly used measure of child income deprivation) was used as a measure of pupil deprivation in schools.[viii] This school-level measure of deprivation was calculated by taking the average IDACI of pupils in each school. Across almost all of the staff roles the office asked schools about, there were clear differences by the level of deprivation. In the section below for both primary and secondary schools, differences are reported

[vii] Average pupil IDACI was always calculated using the median.

[viii] The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived families within a lower-layer super output area (LSOA), more colloquially referred to as neighbourhoods. It is a subset of the Income Deprivation Domain which measures the proportion of the population in an area experiencing deprivation relating to low income. The definition of low income used includes both workers with low incomes and those who are out of work.

between the lowest decile (the 10% most deprived) versus the highest decile (the 10% least deprived). Although the office opted to compare the extremes of the distribution i.e. the most deprived versus the least deprived, the figures in Annex B show that there is a linear relationship between deprivation and provision.

Primary schools

Primary schools serving the most deprived communities are more likely to have more provision compared to schools with the least deprived pupils. The correlation between provision and deprivation is especially pronounced in mental health and emotional wellbeing support, where over half (56%) of the most deprived schools have a dedicated mental health counsellor, compared to just a third (33%) of the least deprived. More deprived schools are also more likely to offer dedicated wellbeing spaces (80% versus 64%), youth workers (16% versus 10%), and staff supporting young carers (43% versus 27%). School nurses are slightly more prevalent in deprived schools (48% versus 40%).

In terms of specialist educational support, schools with the highest levels of pupil deprivation are significantly more likely to have access to professionals such as speech and language therapists (73% compared to 52%), Educational Psychologists (76% compared to 56%), and EAL coordinators (42% compared to 24%).

Internal alternative provision is also more common. Primary schools with the highest pupil deprivation level are more than twice as likely to have an internal alternative provision (16%) as primary schools with the lowest levels of deprivation (7%).

Breakfast provision is nearly universal across all schools, though is slightly higher in more deprived schools (95% versus 85%). Free food provision is significantly more common in schools with higher pupil deprivation. Primary schools with the highest levels of pupil deprivation are more than twice as likely to have free food provision for families (58%) as primary schools with the lowest levels of pupil deprivation (26%). Primary schools in the lowest decile (most deprived) of pupil deprivation are more likely to provide holiday activities free of charge (47%) than primary schools in the highest deprivation decile (23%).

Primary schools with high pupil deprivation are more likely to offer family and community support services. Nearly three-quarters (73%) employ a Family Liaison Support Officer, compared to just over a

third (36%) of schools with the least deprived pupils. Additionally, primary schools with high levels of pupil deprivation are more than four times as likely to host a Family Hub or children's centre (18% vs. 4%). Presence of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) or School Support Officers (SSOs) is also more common in these settings, with 39% of high-deprivation schools reporting such staff, compared to 27% of schools in the lowest deprivation decile.

However, childcare shows some interesting differences. Nursery provision is much more prevalent in more deprived schools than in the most affluent schools, in fact almost twice as likely (85% compared to 43%). However, the only role in which this pattern is reversed is for wrap-around childcare. Wrap-around childcare is more frequently provided in schools with lower deprivation levels (89% compared to 53%), indicating a potential gap in extended care availability in schools with more deprived pupils.

Some of the roles and resources showed fewer differences by pupil deprivation in schools. These included having a social worker in school, a staff member for supporting UASC, an outdoor space, social emotional wellbeing interventions, and student participation.

Secondary schools

Although differences in provision broken down by pupil deprivation in secondary schools are generally less pronounced than in primary settings, some notable patterns do emerge.

Secondary schools with more deprived pupils are more likely to have a school nurse, with 81% reporting provision compared to 60% of the least deprived schools. Additionally, schools in the most deprived decile are more likely to have an Education Mental Health Practitioner (67% compared to 59%) and an EAL coordinator (67% compared to 45%).

Family and community support is also more prevalent in more deprived secondary schools. Nearly two-thirds (64%) have a Family Liaison or Support Officer, compared to 53% in the least deprived schools. These schools are also significantly more likely to offer free holiday activities (59% compared to 20%) and free food provision for families (53% compared 21%). Breakfast provision is nearly universal in high-deprivation schools (95%), compared to 74% in the lowest deprivation decile. Additionally, internal alternative provision is more common in deprived schools (54% compared to 33%).

However, there is less prominent variation by deprivation in the presence of mental health counsellors, speech and language therapists, PCSOs/SSOs, social workers, youth workers, and support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

It is worth noting that these are correlations. More research would be needed to investigate whether the relationship holds when controlling for other factors, such as location, pupil need, local service provision.

3.2.2. Regional differences

There is regional disparity in the roles and the resources that a school provides. Differing needs of the pupil population, as well as school size, and the quality and availability of local provision, could be responsible for regional disparities.

Figure 12 shows that 58% of primary schools in the North East (followed closely by London with 52%), had a mental health counsellor, compared to 35% of schools in Yorkshire and The Humber and the South East. Larger proportions of secondary schools in London had provision of staff roles than other regions, for instance, London had the highest provision of English as Additional Language Coordinators, Educational Psychologists, speech language therapists, school nurses and mental health counsellors. The only exceptions were a youth worker, a staff member for supporting young carers, and family liaison/support officers -where London had the lowest provision (51% of secondary schools had a family liaison/support officer compared to 61% of secondary schools in the South East).

Figure 12 – Regional differences in staff roles provided by the school (either internal or external)

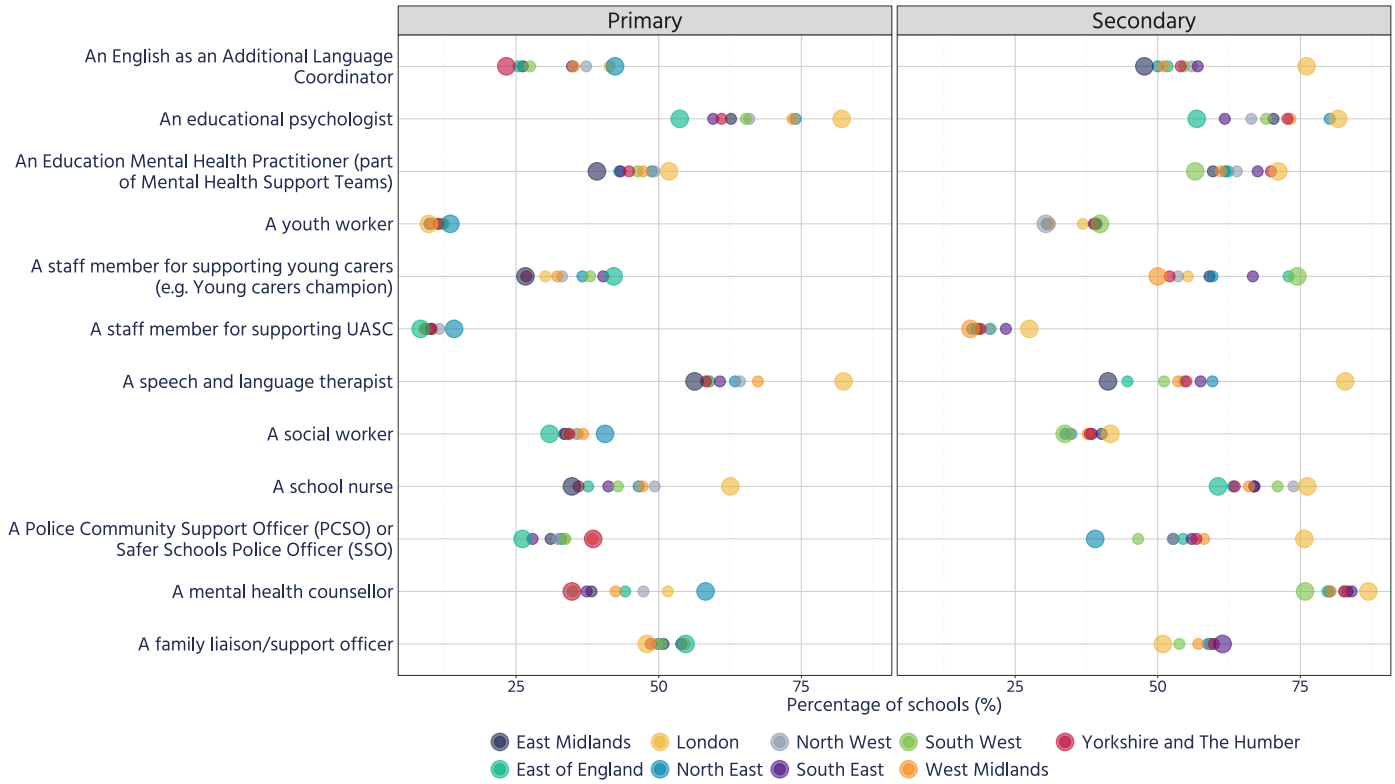
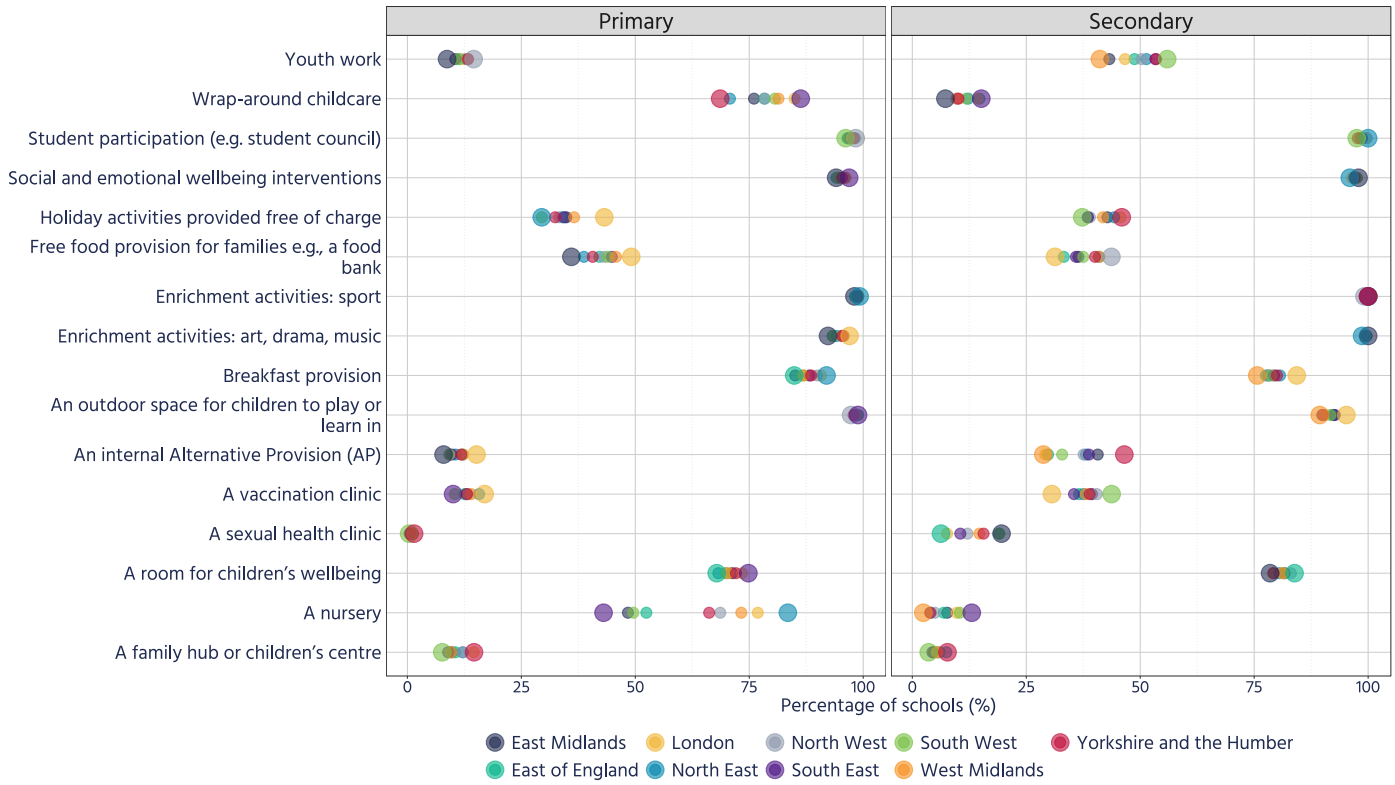


Figure 13 presents regional differences in resources provided on-site in schools. There are large regional differences in primary schools with a school nursery. In the North East there were 83% of schools with a nursery compared with 43% of schools in the South East. There was lower provision of breakfast in primary schools in the East of England (85%) compared to the North East (92%).

London was most likely to have primary schools with free food provision e.g. a food bank (49%) compared with 36% in the East Midlands. 47% of secondary schools in Yorkshire and the Humber have internal alternative provision compared to 29% of schools in the West Midlands. Holiday activities provided free of charge are found in a larger proportion of secondary schools in London and Yorkshire and the Humber (46%) compared with 37% of schools in the South West.

Figure 1213 – Regional differences in resources offered in school (either run by the school or external provider)



There are many reasons why schools and local areas differ in their provision of additional support for children. This, however, means that children will be getting a fundamentally different school experience depending on where they go to school, and there is no guiding rationale for the way schools and local areas should make those decisions.

4. Schools have different views of the support they should provide

For the schools who don't have a particular role in school, some told the office their preferences for whether they want that role in school (data presented in Tables B3 and B4).[ix] By looking at these preferences we can begin to understand, on average, where there are gaps in support, according to school leaders.

For primary schools, there is still demand for roles supporting children's mental health, development and family needs. Of primary schools without an existing role in school, over 75% wanted to provide a mental health counsellor, speech and language therapist, family liaison/support officer, Educational Psychologist, or Education Mental Health Practitioner. There was mixed demand for some roles, including Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) or Safer Schools Police Officers (SSO), social workers, staff member for supporting young carers and English as an Additional Language Coordinator. This is most likely related to variation in pupil needs. For some roles and resources there was a clear preference against provision. For instance, most primary schools without internal alternative provision did not want to provide it (75%).

In secondary schools, a similar story emerges. Over 75% of secondary schools without the role, want a mental health counsellor, a family liaison/support officer, an Educational Psychologist, or an Education Mental Health Practitioner. There were mixed views among secondary schools who don't provide internal alternative provision, about wanting to provide it. Around half of secondary schools without internal alternative provision wanted it, and around one half did not. This hesitancy may be related to limited guidance, research or evidence on best practice and what works.[121]

[ix] The questionnaire design meant that schools could select multiple boxes about their provision and their preferences for having a role in school. As such, not all schools without a role in school responded to the part of the question about whether they want or don't want the role in school. The results in this chapter correspond to the sample of schools who responded (this can be found in Table B3 and B4). See published transcript for more information.

Another example of this mixed demand for resources is Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). Of the responses received from some secondary schools who don't have a PCSO or Safer Schools Officer (SSO), 62% (435 schools) say they want one in school. However, the evidence base for them is limited. The Youth Endowment Fund evaluation reported that there was little research on their impact and noted that critics of the intervention 'suggest that it might cause young people to be criminalised for behaviour that would have otherwise been dealt with using non-criminal school sanctions. Or it may reinforce negative stereotypes about schools and pupils'.[122]

When asked about whether they had anything else they would like to tell the Children's Commissioner, some schools told the office that they are increasingly filling a gap in support. They want to provide this support but highlight that sufficient funding is needed so schools can continue to deliver for all children. One primary school said:

"Schools are increasingly having to cover the roles that other services would have previously provided. Whilst schools are capable of providing this support, they do need sufficient funding and financial support from a government level in order to be the profession to offer this wider services to students. Without the additional support and funding, other aspects of school life such as academic standards, behaviour & attendance suffer as a result of stretching our capacity to support children more widely."

This data is uniquely valuable because it captures the real-time realities of schools and their preferences for the provision they want to offer to pupils. National administrative datasets, and to some extent one-off surveys, collected by the Department for Education, often focus on outcomes and performance metrics. The Commissioner's school census fills a critical gap in listening to the views of schools and understanding where there is demand for additional provision. This is meaningful in the context of national discussions about schooling reform.

5. What needs to change

In almost all the ways that they are measured, schools in England are performing well.[123] In many ways, they are unrecognisable from where they were at the turn of the millennium, providing better experiences, better teaching, and better outcomes. School improvement should rightly be regarded as a rare recent public service reform success story.

But against this backdrop of long-term improvement, there are real causes for concern. There is a stubborn attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children, more pupils are both persistently and severely absent compared to pre-pandemic rates, and almost a third of children told the Children's Commissioner's office that they don't enjoy school.[124]

The knock-on impact of the challenges schools face is that large numbers of children leave formal education without a clear next step, with young people not in education, employment, or training at consistently over 12%.[125] Those facts show we are failing children. Overwhelmingly, children say they are ambitious for their future: they want to go to school, achieve, and above all go on to get a good job.[126] That is not the reality for too many children and young people in England.

Schools are worried about their capacity to do more, but they are already doing it

This research shows that schools are already doing a huge amount to meet the needs of their pupils. However, despite school budgets being relatively protected compared to wider early intervention services and children's social care, school leaders have told us that funding is a key barrier to providing additional support.[127] Education spending for 2023–24 was £116 billion, down 11% (£15 billion) from 2010–11. As a share of national income, spending has dropped from 5.6% in 2010–11 to 4.1% in 2023–24, matching historic lows.[128]

That is due to shift over the next four years, with day-to-day spending through the core schools budget set to increase by £4.2 billion between 2025-26 and 2028-9. Due to falling pupil numbers, this is expected to correspond to a three per cent rise in spending per pupil over the spending review period. However, half of the increase in additional spending since 2019 has been absorbed by rising SEND costs.[129] Given this challenging funding landscape, it is unsurprising that our analysis shows 65% of primary schools and 51% of secondary schools cited funding as one of their top concerns.

Schools are as, if not more, worried about wider services

Next to their own concerns about funding and capacity, school leaders told us that they are concerned about challenges outside the school gates. Secondary schools are most likely to say they are worried about attendance (63%) – something they can't solve alone – and were more likely to say they were worried about funding for wider services (59%) than their own funding (51%).

In particular, schools worry about issues where they rely on wider services to deliver good outcomes for their pupils, with 69% of primary schools and 81% of secondary schools saying availability of local services was a barrier to providing additional support.

The next wave of education reform

Brilliant teaching – and therefore a brilliant teacher – is the most important thing we can do for children. But challenges outside the classroom are putting a glass ceiling on what pupils can achieve. This is precisely where the education system must now focus all its care and effort. It must recognise the pastoral, social, emotional, and moral role that teachers have always played. It means ensuring schools are backed up by strong multi-agency partnerships in their local area, brilliant and well-resourced children's services and properly funded specialist staff. It means having inclusion as the foundation of a strong and fair education system. For every child.

Children have told us that they have great teachers who support them[130] and want to see more support in school. That can't mean expecting more from teachers. To provide all children with a brilliant education, teachers need support – either in school or via wider community services – from effective, evidence-based interventions. This will allow teachers to get on with their primary role – to teach – and reduce the pressure on teaching staff to deliver across an array of roles.

At a time when teacher recruitment and retention is a significant concern across English education, reform that ensures teachers can focus on their classrooms rather than wider system failures is likely to be welcome.[131] Knowing more about children does not mean every teacher knowing everything happening in a child's life. It means a strong pastoral offer from schools, with an evidence base approached with the same level of rigour as classroom pedagogy. It means a strong multi-agency approach to meet the needs of children. Knowing more should be simpler, based on a widely used single

access portal containing multi-agency information from across a child's interactions with the state, and not the job of an overworked pastoral lead to fill in.

A key driver of the reform movement in education was a huge amount of energy, time, and resources devoted to understanding 'what works' and driving up the quality of classroom practice. A newly qualified teacher today will likely have access to high-quality resources on curriculum, on pedagogy, and in many cases on the cognitive science of learning. That is simply not true for pastoral care, and as schools have increasingly stepped up into dealing with social issues, the time has come for a renewed focus on this area that recognises the pastoral, social, emotional, and moral role that teachers have always played. The education system must be as passionate about what works in engaging children and helping them access education as about ensuring strong early literacy, because even the best possible classroom practice will not help children who neither attend nor engage. Bluntly, the most well-executed and evidence-based pedagogy the teaching profession has to offer is of no use for a child outside of the classroom the lesson is happening in.

It is important not to get lost in a false dichotomy between schools doing wider pastoral work or not – as our census shows, the majority of schools already *are* doing work in this area. The question, then, is whether we want schools to be doing this work proactively, with a clear evidence base and support around them, or reactively, responding to the needs of their community as best they can.

This is also what children want. We know from *The Big Ambition* that children trust their schools, and where there is a need for additional services, they want these delivered in their schools. To children, schools are more than just a classroom: they are places of safety and community.

In many areas, schools are the most visible and tangible part of the state, still present and providing services when other parts of the state or civic infrastructure has shrunk, in particular the non-statutory elements of the state.[132] It makes sense, then, to have schools as the *places* where services are provided, rather than schools, particularly teaching staff, providing services themselves.

That isn't a new idea. Schools have always had a role in providing support to children outside of teaching the curriculum and helping children to attain. More recent approaches such as Extended Schools or system approaches such as Every Child Matters have attempted to codify what that offer should be.[133] Currently, there isn't a coherent approach to how that support is provided.

The SEND crisis means it is time for a new approach

Partly as a result of that lack of coherence, children with additional needs often go without the support they need. Many are also pushed into the formal SEND system which, in turn, is failing to provide the support needed to improve children's outcomes. A lack of support and inclusion in the school system means children, parents, and schools are pushed towards statutory support, or out of school completely.[134]

"Support (especially mental health and SEND support) should be far more easy to access for children. Children shouldn't have to be on the verge of breakdowns before they get noticed for exam access arrangements, breaks etc." – Child, 16, The Big Ambition

Between 2015 and 2024, there was an 140% increase in the number of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).[135] Since 2020, there has been a 30.2% increase in placements in alternative provision[136], and since 2018 a 176% increase in the number who are severely absent.[137]

This is leading to negative outcomes across the board. It leads to poor outcomes for children who get EHCPs, as they are often not suitable,[138] with schools telling the office they are unable to meet their requirements. It leads to children with additional needs that are poorly understood not receiving the help they need. And it leads to poor outcomes for the whole system, which incentivises increasing numbers of individual statutory plans over wider inclusion.

Moreover, the system as it is has made it incredibly, and increasingly, difficult to reform. To get it right, there must be a clarity of purpose and a clear offer to win back the trust of families and ensure a system that functions for the children who need it. It must support those with unrecognised need, be less adversarial, and function for those who need it.

The system is adversarial, escalating need: Elle's Story

This story is based on a case study from the Children's Commissioner's Help at Hand team, with all identifying details changed.

Elle's parents knew that she would need additional help from the age of three. She was getting some support from the NHS from this time. Elle found being in large groups, noise and changes of routine very difficult. She would often 'shut down' or become tearful at primary school. Her primary school at first refused to apply for an EHCP and so her parents had to make an independent application which was turned down.

Meanwhile, Elle was having more and more 'incidents' at school. The parents requested mediation and by this time the school was in support of the EHCP and the application and it was granted. By this time Elle was coming to the end of Key Stage 2 and she needed to apply for secondary school. The parents were then told that none of the secondary schools they applied for could meet Elle's needs, even ones with specialist resource units.

Elle had gone from having insufficient need to warrant an EHCP, to so much need that no mainstream school could meet them.

The existing system fails those who have EHCPs: Bobbie's Story

This story is based on a case study from the Children's Commissioner's Help at Hand team, with all identifying details changed.

Bobbie is a looked after child who has a learning disability linked to early childhood neglect. She has an EHCP and attends a mainstream school. However, the school has not been providing all of the support outlined in the EHCP, partly due to its large size and the demands on teachers and resources. Bobbie has not been achieving in school and is well behind her peers. She has also been bullied and wants to leave to have a fresh start and go to a smaller setting.

Bobbie's foster carers have been asking for more support for her since Year 7 and she is now due to start GCSE courses, even though it is recognised that she will not be able to sit the exams. Her professionals have all agreed that she would do better in a small special school. However, all of the schools consulted by the SEND team have responded that they are full or cannot meet her needs, and the team has not used its powers to name a special school in the EHCP and direct it to offer a place. Instead, the plan has been changed to offer a more personalised curriculum at her current school, with some off-site provision, but neither the school nor SEND team have progressed this so far, despite requests from the foster carers and social work team (Bobbie is a child placed out of her home area, so the SEND team and Virtual School/social work team are from different LAs).

Bobbie will therefore start the next school term with no clear plan for ensuring she can benefit from her education and fulfil her potential, despite having the framework of being a looked after child, with an EHCP. Her foster carers are understandably frustrated about this and feel the system is not working for her.

The existing system fails to support those with unrecognised need: Josie's Story

This story is based on a case study from the Children's Commissioner's Help at Hand team, with all identifying details changed.

Josie has no EHCP and was in mainstream secondary school. Her family life has been very difficult and there was violence at home.

She found the start of secondary school very hard and there were concerns about her behaviour. When she was 14 the Local Authority thought she was at so much risk at home that they removed her from her family and put her in foster care. Her foster carers were a long way from her school.

The stress of travel on top of being removed from home and a background of troubles at home made regular school attendance hard. Her school said that she should no longer go into the school. Josie felt this was very unfair because this was a place that her friends and teachers, whom she trusted, were, and this was being taken away from her.

A key observation from the work of the Children's Commissioner's office is that too many children have needs the system fails to recognise and are going through their education without support. The focus of reforms – and the upcoming White Paper – should not be about reducing the number of children eligible for support but building an education system that does more to support all children to attend, engage, and attain in education. These recommendations set out what that system could look like, and as such should be taken as a whole.

Recommendation 1: A national statement of ambition for all children

Children are ambitious for themselves. They have told the Children's Commissioner's office that they want to be at school, to do well, and ultimately get good jobs.[139] This ambition isn't always reflected in their interactions with the education system – for instance, the decline in attendance as children transition from primary to secondary school.[140]

Between the end of Year 6 and the end of Year 7, children become much more likely to say they don't enjoy school and to have high levels of absence.[141] That is particularly true for children with known additional needs – those who have SEND, are CIN, or are eligible for FSM.[142]

Achieving and thriving do not sit in opposition. The happiest children are often the ones who do best in school. If the primary goal of schools is to ensure that every child leaves with a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy, then this is well-served by ensuring that children are attending and engaging. The school system should reflect this, with high expectations and strong pastoral support for every child.

1a: A vision for the education system which is ambitious for every child

The upcoming Education White Paper and subsequent reforms should provide a clear statement of ambition for all children. That should include concrete goals of reducing absence and every child being able to go to a school that can meet their needs, every day. The goal should be to create a system that ensures more children can attend their local school and are supported not only to attend, engage, attain and excel in education but are given rich experiences that stretch them beyond the curriculum – ultimately, giving them the best opportunity to become successful adults living full lives.

This recommendation underpins and is reinforced by all of the recommendations in this report. To make that ambition tangible, the White Paper should prioritise:

- Increasing attendance and engagement and falling levels of persistent and severe absence.
- A higher proportion of children attending a mainstream school
- More children saying they are happy at school

Making that happen cannot happen by writing it down. It depends on full system reform.

1b: Stronger accountability measures focussed on attendance, engagement, attainment, and progress

The goal of any education system should be to increase effectiveness over time and ensure that any child, no matter their background, can succeed. That requires strong accountability frameworks to ensure that at both a school and system level we understand what is working.

The new vision should be backed by clear accountability for school and other services, and local level data for attendance, engagement, attainment, and progress being published and scrutinised by regulators and policy makers.

Recommendation 2: A new focus on a broader range of additional needs for those who need support inside and outside the classroom

Children want to learn, and they want to attend school. Via *The Big Ask* and the *Attendance Audit*, the Children's Commissioner has heard about the desire of young people, regardless of their needs, to participate in their education.

Many children will face a barrier to learning over the course of their lives. This might be moving house, illness, the loss of a family member, or any number of common occurrences that can nonetheless make learning difficult.[143] Only a small fraction of these are well understood by the education system.

This is not to say that schools and school staff are not working phenomenally hard to meet need – many are. But the system is simply not set up to help them understand the full picture of a child's life, or to interact in a frictionless manner with other parts of the state for a large number of children.

That is by design. Schools are directed to support children with a small number of specific needs. Ofsted's inspection handbook describes 'disadvantaged pupils' as "pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the definition of pupils in need of help and protection; pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria for deciding the school's pupil premium funding."[144]

That is no longer the right approach. The education system should have a broader understanding of additional needs, which include the needs of disabled children, children with learning needs, and children facing a broad range of barriers to learning.

The Children's Plan proposes that every child should have details of their education and their wider needs on a Unique ID platform. For many children, this will simply be a modified version of their school report – for others, a vital hub to ensure that when they interact with state services, those services have a proper understanding of their lives.

2a: Successful implementation of a Unique ID

Schools, like wider children's services, often struggle to provide the support children need because they don't have a clear understanding of their situation or needs. This report has shown that even relatively easily identifiable, clear, and ongoing needs – such as having a parent in prison – are often not shared with schools. Our hope is that the Single Unique Identifier proposed by the Government (referred to as 'Unique ID' henceforth) opens the door for a new era of data sharing where the data impacts children.

It should not be the job of schools to collect this information.

A Unique ID would require input from across services, and mean less, not more, data collection for schools. The system would allow, for instance, the imprisonment of a parent to be noted on a child's ID by the justice system, with a portal for schools to access this information. The outcome would be reduced time for school pastoral leads trying to find out what is happening at home, and instead simply accessing the portal.

The successful roll out of the new Unique ID is fundamental to building an education system better equipped to support children with a range of additional needs.

2b: A new definition of 'additional needs'

There should be a new system wide definition of additional needs. The office has set out some of those needs that are poorly understood by the education system currently, though these are intended to be indicative rather than exhaustive. A new definition of additional needs should seek to set out key barriers to achieving – including the ongoing importance of poverty and economic disadvantage – but broaden our current understanding and definition.

Many of these needs could be better understood and addressed in the context of a new Unique ID, set out above. This, via input from other parts of the state, could present a fuller, and more useful picture of a child's life, allowing for their school to better understand, and thus respond to, their needs at that time.

2c: A framework of needs and entitlements

A framework of needs and entitlements should include this new definition of additional needs, setting out the needs that should be incorporated into an improved and broader inclusion premium.

That framework should detail what is expected of schools in supporting children with additional needs, what schools are entitled to in terms of specialist support, and what children are entitled to when they have different levels of additional need.

2d: A clinically led review of the prevalence of neurodevelopmental disorders and the consistency of diagnostic approaches

In conversations with professionals throughout this work, some shared that they felt they weren't always using consistent definitions for learning needs. This leads to unfair and patchy outcomes based on the views on individual clinicians within and across areas. There should be a clinically led review of prevalence and diagnostic validity to inform the new additional needs framework.

Recommendation 3: Extra help for schools to deliver targeted and specialist support where needed, and deepen their role, impact and orientation in communities

Children have told us that they often receive great support from their school. Three quarters of children said that they have great teachers who supported them. Children have also told us that they want to receive additional support via, or in, their school.

Schools are already responding to the additional needs of children – often becoming genuine community service hubs. However, schools have said they are struggling to meet additional needs,

sometimes unable to meet the requirements of EHCPs, and are concerned about both their own resources as well as those in the wider support system.

Within a system that defines a broader set of additional needs, schools – and particularly teachers – cannot simply be expected to do more. They need support to provide effective interventions. This is crucial if a more inclusive education system isn't going to deepen the challenge of retaining teachers.

Broadly, there are two ways to do that. One would be area-based – transferring power and funding to local authorities and allowing them to commission and deliver services. Another is school-based, which would allow schools the funding and ability to commission and deliver these services. Regardless of structure, any new system should be based on a number of key elements:

3a: A funding premium for additional needs and inclusion

A new inclusion premium should take into account children with a broader set of additional needs: children in need, children with an additional learning need, children who are not attending well, and children who do not meet the Early Year Foundation Stage milestones, for instance.

Schools whose children have high levels of additional needs should receive additional funding to help meet those needs. That could be via a new funding mechanism, an inclusion premium, or through a reformed pupil premium, or both.

Schools and local authorities should have to publish data on these pupils, showing their attendance, attainment, and progression for all cohorts.

3b: A core universal offer from all schools

A new framework for additional needs should set out what support all schools should provide. That should be based on the common barriers to attaining, engaging, and attaining in education.

The first part of the universal offer should be ensuring that schools have staff who have the time and expertise to provide evidenced pastoral care. This should be funded through the inclusion premium.

For children who need additional support, they should be able to access specialists through an Education Plan or via schools working together to ensure access to these professionals. That should mean that all schools should be a hub for support services, that are either based in the school or that a school can

access via a network of connected schools or local partners. Schools are where most children are, where they should be, and where they say they most want to access professional support.

As a minimum all schools should have access to an Educational Psychologist, a school nurse, a Mental Health Support Team, and a family support officer, so that escalation to secondary services can occur where it is deemed appropriate.

Schools are where most children are, where they should be, and where they say they most want to access professional support.

What could a core offer look like?

A core offer for schools should be made up of high quality pastoral care and an expanded offer for specialist support

High quality pastoral care

The foundation for any support for children with additional needs is all children feeling safe at school. Schools should be enabled to focus on the vital pastoral role they play in children's lives. That should mean that all children benefit from:

- A trusted relationship with school staff, based on additional pastoral training for specific teachers and an NPQ for pastoral practice and leadership.
- A safe environment, where pupils can rely on schools knowing what is happening elsewhere, via the utilisation of a unique ID.

An expanded offer of specialist support

This research gives an indication of the services that are either common or in demand by schools. The services with the highest combination of schools either with a role or service, or which don't have it but want it, shows what a core offer could look like. That looks slightly different for primary and secondary schools. Based on those roles that are most widely provided or in demand, an expanded specialist support offer could include the following professionals:

- Educational Psychologist
- School nurse
- Mental health support team
- Family liaison/support officer

The goal should be that the core offer is sufficient to support the majority of children experiencing difficulty accessing education.

3c: A stronger evidence base

An important part of ensuring that support is better tailored for all children is to understand if current, and any new, approaches are having positive outcomes for children. While this report has painted a national picture of what schools are doing to support the needs of children, we need to understand if these approaches are working. To support schools in this, there should be continued investment in the existing 'What Works' evidence base via the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)[145] and the Foundations What Works centre[146]. An evidence base for pastoral intervention should also be created, with funding given to the EEF to assess what works for pastoral intervention and establish a clear corpus of knowledge regarding effective interventions in this area.

We must apply the same energy and intellectual rigour to key pastoral challenges as we have to pedagogy and curriculum, and develop a robust evidence base and pride in good practice when it comes to how to engage parents, how to boost attendance, and how to support children going through challenges outside school.

3d: More specialist training

A new set of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) for Pastoral Work at both a practical and strategic level, and SEND under the 'Specialist NPQs' section, to enable school staff to upskill in these areas. The SEND NPQ would differ from the existing SENCO NPQ owing to a different, less strategic focus – instead being centred on teaching and classroom behaviour management.

Recommendation 4: A new approach to statutory education support: Education, Health and Care Plans

Despite the efforts of schools, there are some children who don't receive the support they need. When the Children's Commissioner asked children if they enjoyed school, children with SEND were less likely to say yes.[147]

Even in an inclusive education system, where schools are much better equipped to support children with additional needs, some children will need more support than their school or area can provide.

The current system of statutory support for Special Educational Needs' key weakness is that it is too narrow about what type of need might require additional support but not specific enough about the level of that need. A new approach to statutory support should reverse those weakness – setting out a broad range of types of need with specific understanding of the levels of need that require intervention. Years of adversarial relationships have made reform both difficult and necessary, and thus the new system should be one focused on what can be added to support children, not how best to restrict support.

4a: Introduce a Children's Plan

A new Children's Plan platform should be delivered alongside the Unique ID. This should create a new platform for establishing children's needs and setting out the support they are entitled to. Any plan for ongoing support offered to a child should be set out through the Children's Plan.

Crucially the plan should be digitised and, as appropriate, made visible to parents to help them engage with the state and improve people's experience of receiving support. Parents and carers should be able to understand their child's school experience, and state services should be able to use a child's plan to understand the wider context of their lives.

Alongside the introduction of a Children's Plan platform and Unique ID, a taskforce should be established to oversee the implementation of both of these, working across the relevant bodies to ensure successful multi-agency working.

4b: A broader approach to statutory support

A new system of statutory education support should be built on a more specific understanding of children's needs. All plans should be offered through the Children's Plan information management platform, digitised, standardised where possible, and built on the strongest possible evidence base. That should have a number of key elements:

- **A new Education Plan for all children who need specialist support to engage in education, over and above a core school offer.** This would set out the support they should get from their school, or from their local area. For instance, that would include all children who don't meet the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 2, who are suspended or excluded, or who are severely

or persistently absent. In some cases, children with just an education need – and not health or care needs – may need to access a special school place. An education plan would enable that.

- **Where a child has multiple needs that should be reflected in their plan.** Children with health and education needs should receive and Education and Health plan (EHPs) and those with care needs an Education and Care Plan (ECPs). This should be supported by a single national threshold for Section 17 Assessment under the Children Act, rather than allowing local authorities to set their own criteria for an S17 assessment. Children's social care should always play an active role in the provision of ECPs and health in the provision of EHPs. EHCPs should be only for children whose needs span across education, health and care. They should be offered through the Children's Plan platform and should reflect the three areas of need:
    - Importantly, a small number of children should now receive EHCPs automatically, for instance those with life-long and life-limiting conditions. These should go up to the age of 25. There should be a clear focus on ensuring that these plans are well-written and delivered quickly.
    - EHCPs should be genuinely multi-disciplinary and should be funded from the pooled budget used to fund local area specialist support. This is described in more detail under Recommendation 5.
- All plans should be standardised, digitised, and set out the support children and young people need to engage in education.
- As well as being evidenced based, interventions set out in Children's Plans should not be at profit-making providers. No one should be making a profit from providing services for the most vulnerable children.

Below are some case studies that outline how this new system would work for children – especially those for whom the existing system does not work.

Case studies

Hypothetical journeys through an improved SEND system

Rebecca:

Rebecca has Down's Syndrome. She is doing well in Reception and is looking forward to starting Key Stage 1 next year. Her parents have had multiple meetings to both get her EHCP and ensure it is correct – but there are still errors in it. Rebecca should be able to attend a local mainstream school, if she can have access to the right support. Her parents are worried about this.

Rebecca currently receives support. Under the new framework, Rebecca would receive the same support, but this would have been given automatically once she received her Down's Syndrome diagnosis a week or so after she was born.

Alex:

Alex's father was recently sentenced to four years in prison, after being arrested in front of Alex at the family home. For Alex, this was a hugely traumatising and difficult event, and since this time he's disengaged from school. His school has no idea this has happened – Alex hasn't told them because he doesn't want to talk about it.

Alex currently receives no support. Under the new framework, Alex could have an education and care plan.

Alice:

Alice has difficulty regulating her emotions and is very anxious. Her parents have been told that she has Social, Emotional, and Mental Health Needs (SEMH) and needs extra support to help her take part in school. She did not receive extra support and so her parents have – with great difficulty – ensured she has an EHCP. Her behaviour in school and engagement has not meaningfully changed.

Alice currently receives support, but it doesn't appear to be working. Under the new framework, Alice would have an education plan, with a firm evidence base.

David:

David has stopped attending school. He is experiencing persistent low mood, struggling to deal with schoolwork, and when he is in school his behaviour has declined. He no longer follows along in class and has stopped answering any questions. His attendance has steadily dropped from 93% three years ago to 52% now.

David currently receives no support.

Under the new framework, David would be supported by an education plan.

Morgan:

Morgan's mum is very unwell. Morgan is finding it hard to do homework, pay attention in class, and get to school on time, because they look after their mum.

Money is very tight, and Morgan is often really tired. They don't go to school very much anymore, and their school has no idea what is happening at home.

Morgan currently receives no statutory support.

Under the new framework, Morgan would be supported by an Education and Care plan.

4c: Greater intervention in the early years

Children and professionals consistently talk about the need for earlier support.[148] The new approach to statutory support should create new mechanisms to ensure that happens. For instance children who are behind on key development milestones, at six months, two to two-and-a-half, and at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, should have their support needs set out through a Children's Plan with a formal support trigger at each of these key points.

Where children are still behind on key milestones at the end of Reception – and so not 'school ready' – they should be offered additional support to catch up, that could include being offered an additional year in Reception to they can be supported to begin Key Stage One meeting their key development milestones.

Recommendation 5: Delivering opportunity locally – Local Opportunity Mission Delivery Boards

Children have a real interest in their local area. In recent work for the government's Child Poverty Unit, children and young people also spoke about their desire for more opportunities to have fun in their local area, including more clubs, parks and activities. Children also spoke about the loss of community services that existed.[149] They want their area to improve, and to have better local services.

The support children with additional needs require to succeed in education cannot be provided solely by individual schools. It needs a whole system, and crucially, area-based approach to providing support.

The Children's Commissioner's experience of chairing the Greater Manchester Local Attendance Action Alliance highlighted, as one key outcome, the importance of an area-based approach to children's needs – bringing together key partners and agencies to provide insights, expertise, and interventions. An education system designed to support children with additional needs should strengthen place-based approaches – both in schools and in the wider community. The upcoming White Paper should clarify whether that should be done through local authorities, families of schools, or other regional bodies. A key goal of local children's services should be to support children and schools so teachers are free to teach and that children who face barriers to education can attend, engage, and attain at school.

5a: A local specialist support fund

In addition to a broader pupil premium, all areas – either locally or regionally – should provide specialist provision that children and schools can access where their needs are over and above what a school can provide. That should be joint-funded, through a pooled budget between education, social care, and health on a population level basis. The fund should be run by local opportunity boards to support the government's opportunity mission.

The local support fund should strategically commission residential special school placements. This could be done at a strategic level through Regional Care Cooperatives and alongside other high-needs provision such as youth justice provision, children's homes, and tier 4 CAMHS placements.

Parent choice for high-needs places should be maintained but that should be local as a default.

5b: Local area characteristics taken into consideration by the accountability system, and local children's services and health services held accountable for children's outcomes

The new accountability system should hold schools accountable on how representative their pupil cohort is of the area they serve , as well as looking at outcomes for pupils with additional needs.

To build on schools being held accountable for how inclusive their cohort is, the children's services inspection framework and Integrated Care Board inspection framework should align and include judgements on how they work with education partners on inclusiveness in schools. They should be held accountable for the educational outcomes of children who have social care or health needs.

Local authority, health, and education inspections should use a common outcomes framework. That should include children's school attendance, engagement, attainment, and a measure of progress.

• Attendance: ensuring children are in school.

• Engagement: school enjoyment, wider SMSC, personal development.

• Attainment: Foundational skills (especially literacy).

• Excellence: Post-education outcomes based on the individual child — jobs, independence, further study.

5c: Where appropriate, greater involvement in education and care from regional mayors

The process of devolution in England has not always been a linear one. Some areas that have a regional mayor have had one for over 20 years, some for eight, and others for far less time, or will shortly have their first.[150] Government should consider granting further devolved powers on education to regional mayors on a case-by-case basis and publish a long-term strategy to set out a roadmap to greater regional grip of education.

5d: Directors of Education in all local authorities

There should be a Director of Education for every local authority, who would lead on commissioning wider services to ensure that every child in an area can access education in that area, keeping young people within the areas they live, and reducing reliance on out-of-area placements. This function would work with local health services, and Directors of Children's Services – to ensure provision of special and residential school places.

These Directors should be empowered as statutory officers alongside DCSs, with the capacity and authority between these two roles to:

- Manage admissions to special schools
- Ensure sufficient provision in their area.
- Lead on attendance and school engagement in their area.
- Support and intervene where needed in system planning, such as in early years education, school places, SEND, and Early Help.
- Manage the Virtual School

5f: Education as a fourth statutory safeguarding partner

Given the important roles that schools already play in the lives of children, and the additional roles they have found themselves stepping up into over the past decade, we should acknowledge the current state of the sector, and add education to local authorities, police, and health as statutory safeguarding partners. That should build on learnings from the Families First for Children (FFC) pathfinder programme.[151]

Recommendation 6: The critical role of special schools and alternative provision

Schools outside of mainstream provision can be transformative for children. When the Children's Commissioner asked if children enjoyed school, children in state-funded special schools were the most likely to agree.

Every child should attend a good, local school where they can attend, engage, and attain in education, but for some children who have complex health or educational needs their school may need to be a Special school, or they may be excluded, and so need alternative provision. This provision must still be good, and must still be local.

6a: An assumed path to mainstream

While special schools enabling children to thrive should be praised, the default should be a mainstream school for children – inclusion by design for the benefit of children with SEND, and for those without. We must reject any sense that children with SEND are a burden in mainstream. All children have the right to enjoy a mainstream education and the integration that confers. As such, there should be an assumption that pupils educated in non-mainstream settings (i.e. special schools or alternative provision) will return to mainstream wherever possible or remain registered in a mainstream school so they are able to do PE, music, art, enjoy lunch, and travel together. There should be a set plan to re-integrate with an established and agreed upon timeline. Where this is not the case, the rationale should be clearly set out as part of their Children's Plan, in a way that is accessible to and understood by their parents or carers.

The Government should implement an overarching framework for alternative provision which outlines how every child will receive support during their time in alternative provision, and provides guidance on re-integrating the child back into mainstream.

This is socially beneficial for everyone. An assumed path to mainstream is both important for children with additional needs to integrate into and experience mainstream education, and for children in mainstream education to learn how to include their whole community.

6b: A day one right to alternative provision

Exclusions are a difficult but necessary part of the education system. However, given the current issues within this part of the school system, and the potential loss of learning for those excluded to home, the Government should introduce a new requirement for continued education, on the grounds that home education is insufficient for excluded pupils. No child should be excluded to home. There should be a day one right to alternative provision.

It should be the responsibility of the education system, when excluding a pupil, to place them in state-funded alternative provision or other regulated educational facilities from day one of an exclusion, regardless of whether the exclusion is fixed-term or permanent. No child should receive their education in unregistered, unregulated, or illegal provision.

6c: More support for internal alternative provision

Wherever possible, all schools – either themselves or working in conjunction with other local schools – should have both special and alternative provision capacity. Whilst the imperative is for classrooms, schools and the school system to be inclusive, where specialist units work well they should be encouraged as a mechanism for keeping children in mainstream education.

Internal alternative provision can be a hugely useful intervention and is best when it is integrated into wider school life. The Department for Education should offer more support for schools looking to develop in-house alternative provision offers via both guidance and funding, with the aim to reduce the (small) level of outsourcing present within internal alternative provision.

Recommendation 7: Services beyond the school gate

This report has made clear that the challenges many children face in attending, engaging and attaining in education cannot be solved by schools alone. The recommendations above detail proposals that will allow schools to better know and understand challenges their children face, and would bring other agencies into schools as part of a reformed core offer to help support brilliant teaching, as well as renewed approach to delivering genuine multi-agency educational support.

But for those children who are facing significant challenges at home, whether that is experiencing domestic abuse, being criminally exploited, or struggling with a mental health disorder it is highly likely that they will need more than just brilliant teaching, they will need targeted support from flourishing

children's services. Not least because they may not be attending school in the first place. This will require significant reforms to children's social care, youth work, youth justice services and Children and Young People's Mental Health services. The Children's Commissioner has set out in detail in other reports the reform needed, but they must include:

- Statutory early help duty, including a Family Hub in every neighbourhood
- National threshold for support under s17 of the Children Act, including school absence, kinship and parental imprisonment
- Shared outcomes framework for all children, including educational attainment of those receiving support
- Increased mental health support in the community, with ring-fenced funding for children
- Annual health reviews for all children
- A Violence Reduction Unit in every area
- All children in contact with the criminal justice system receive a safeguarding response, with specialist interventions to support them.

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the thousands of school and college leaders who took the time to respond to the Children's Commissioner's survey. Her thanks goes to all of them for their time, and for allowing this report to be such a comprehensive picture of education today, information that we now have for the first time.

Many people contributed to the evidence included in the report, and developing the policy recommendations. The Children's Commissioner would like to thank in particular:

The teachers, headteachers and public servants who took time to attend roundtables, provide feedback on the findings, and help to shape the recommendations.

The Children's Commissioner's Advisory Board who provided early challenge and feedback on the project, the survey, and the findings.

The Children's Commissioner's Youth Ambassadors and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Panel who provided vital evidence from their own experience, as well as insightful responses to the early findings.

The Rt Hon Bridget Philipson MP, Rt Hon Andy Burnham, The Baroness Cass, Ed Vainker, Annabel Kiki, and Tamar - who helped to present the findings at the launch event, and appeared on a panel to discuss the findings.

And finally, the brilliant and dedicated team at the Children's Commissioner's office who delivered this landmark report on behalf of England's children.

Annex A – Methodology

The Children's Commissioner for England has statutory powers under Section 2F of the Children Act 2004 to collect data relating to children. All public sector organisations in England are legally required to provide data the Commissioner requests. In 2024, the Commissioner launched her census of all state-funded schools and colleges in England. The Commissioner's school and college census asked about the support schools and colleges offer to pupils and their families, staff roles and responsibilities, and the characteristics and vulnerabilities of pupils. The window of data collection was between September 2024 to January 2025 and 18,869 schools and colleges responded. This response rate equated to 86% of schools and colleges in England. The focus of this report is state-funded mainstream primary and secondary schools. The office collected data from 14,612 primary schools and 2,860 secondary schools. This corresponds to 87% of all state-funded mainstream primary schools and 84% of all state-funded mainstream secondary schools in England.

The schools who responded were broadly representative of the national population of schools. Of the schools who responded, 84% were primary schools and 16% were secondary schools, while nationally 83% of state-funded mainstream schools were primaries and 17% were secondaries. For Ofsted ratings, 75% of schools in the Children's Commissioner's census had a rating of 'Good' and 74% of the whole population of state-funded mainstream primary and secondary schools were rated 'Good'. There was also little difference in the proportion of academies in the Children's Commissioner's census (50%) than the 52% of state-funded mainstream schools which are academies nationally.

Although, schools in the Children's Commissioner's census look representative of the whole school population, it is important to test for non-random missingness, where schools who did not respond might look different to schools who did. Table A1 presents a comparison of respondent schools with non-respondent schools. Respondent and non-respondent schools were broadly similar, however, there were several differences. Non-respondent schools were significantly more likely to have not been yet inspected by Ofsted, this could be due to them recently opening or converting to an academy. A higher proportion of the non-respondent schools were academies (59%) versus the respondent schools (50%).

Table A1 – Differences in characteristics of missing and non-missing schools

Demographic variable Categorical variables	Sample of non-respondent schools (%)	Sample of respondent schools (%)	Chi-squared Standardised residuals
Ofsted Rating			**p-value=0.00**
Outstanding	9% (258)	11% (1843)	2.55
Good	67% (1938)	75% (13084)	8.37
Requires improvement	7% (203)	6.9% (1208)	-0.30
Inadequate	0.6% (16)	0.5% (81)	-0.67
Not yet inspected	16% (457)	7.2% (1256)	-15.60
Governance			**p-value=0.00**
Academy	59% (1702)	50% (8699)	-9.41
LA maintained	41% (1170)	50% (8773)	9.41
Region			**p-value=0.00**
East Midlands	10% (299)	9.5% (1656)	-1.57
East of England	9.2% (264)	12% (2126)	4.59
London	13% (380)	11% (1911)	-3.60
North East	4.4% (125)	5.2% (914)	1.98
North West	16% (461)	14% (2478)	-2.64
South East	12% (351)	16% (2781)	5.09
South West	12% (331)	11% (1941)	-0.66
West Midlands	12% (358)	11% (1863)	-2.87
Yorkshire & The Humber	11% (303)	10% (1802)	-0.39
Continuous variables			**p-value**
% rural schools	22%	26%	0.00
Average proportion FSM eligibility	20%	19%	0.00
Average proportion persistent absence	18%	16%	0.00
Average proportion severe absence	1.6%	1.3%	0.00
Average proportion English as Additional Language (EAL)	20%	18%	0.00
Average proportion young carers	0.37%	0.52%	0.00

Average proportion EHCP	3.0%	3.0%	0.82
Average proportion SEN Support	15%	14%	0.05
N	**2,872**	**17,472**	

The Children's Commissioner's census was linked, via school URN, to the 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics'[152], 'Pupil absence in schools in England'[153], 'Special educational needs in England'[154] data published by the Department for Education. It was also joined, via school postcode, to the English indices of multiple deprivation[155]. An indicator for the level of income deprivation in a school was measured by calculating the median pupil's Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).

Data was also collected for state-funded special schools, state-funded alternative provision and further education colleges, the findings of which are not reported here but will be reported separately to reflect the different contexts in which they operate.

The questionnaire was grouped into several topics:

- Understanding your pupils
- Most concerning issues in school and the local area
- Staff roles and responsibilities – what schools already have and what they want to have (see Table A2 for list of roles)
- School resources – what schools already have and what they want to have (see Table A3 for list of resources)
- Barriers to providing support

Additionally, there was an open text question, where schools were asked if there was anything else they would like to tell the Children's Commissioner. Although it is not the primary focus of this report, free-text responses have been read by the office, and the most significant themes are reflected in the content of the report.

The census was designed for schools to be able to report on the type of provision they offered pupils. For each role, the census asked schools how they provided this role: whether it was a specific role employed in school, or external provision provided privately or via the local authority, or signposting to

services. Schools could select multiple options. There are several important reasons for distinguishing between having a role in school and external provision. Firstly, the type of provision may matter for children's outcomes. Pupils may benefit from having a staff member in school where it is known they can go to for support as and when they need it. However, schools are constrained by budgets and funding, and it may not be an efficient use of resources to have a role in school, particularly where it is difficult to forecast pupil need or demand.

Table A2 – Staff roles the census asked schools about whether they provide to pupils

List of staff roles in school 2023/24	
Educational Psychologist	Speech language therapist (SLT)
School nurse	Education Mental Health Practitioner (part of MHST)
Mental health counsellor	Family liaison/support officer
Social worker	Police Community Support Officer or Safer Schools Police Officer
Staff member for supporting young carers	Youth worker
English as an Additional Language Coordinator	Staff member for supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Table A3 – Resources the census asked schools whether they provide to pupils

List of on-site resources in school 2023/24	
A room for children's wellbeing	A Family Hub or children's centre
An outdoor space for children to play or learn in	A nursery
Enrichment activities: art, drama, music	A sexual health clinic
Enrichment activities: sport	A vaccination clinic
Holiday activities provided free of charge	An internal alternative provision (AP)
Social and emotional wellbeing interventions	Breakfast provision
Student participation (e.g., student council)	Free food provision for families (e.g., a food bank)
Youth work	Wrap-around childcare

Annex B – Data tables and graphs

Table B1 – Schools who don't have a staff role in school and whether they want one

	Primary schools			Secondary schools		
	Schools without a role	No, don't want role	No, we want role	Schools without a role	No, don't want role	No, we want role
A mental health counsellor	81% (11566)	17% (814)	83% (3870)	46% (1269)	12% (40)	88% (287)
A staff member for supporting UASC	89% (12418)	74% (5693)	26% (1950)	83% (2283)	62% (828)	38% (514)
A school nurse	97% (13758)	41% (1648)	59% (2390)	77% (2126)	30% (168)	70% (390)
A speech and language therapist	87% (12406)	17% (532)	83% (2661)	88% (2422)	28% (190)	72% (483)
A staff member for supporting young carers	74% (10542)	47% (2592)	53% (2865)	47% (1312)	28% (197)	72% (504)
A family liaison/support officer	60% (8549)	23% (1066)	77% (3566)	56% (1558)	23% (183)	77% (601)
A Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) or Safer Schools Police Officer (SSO)	97% (13820)	53% (2704)	47% (2412)	90% (2502)	38% (266)	62% (435)
A youth worker	95% (13467)	67% (5626)	33% (2769)	91% (2493)	35% (397)	65% (725)
An Educational Psychologist	91% (13068)	23% (690)	77% (2360)	88% (2457)	18% (96)	82% (434)
A social worker	98% (13928)	45% (2147)	55% (2620)	96% (2663)	33% (320)	67% (642)
An English as an Additional Language Coordinator	77% (10844)	50% (3570)	50% (3623)	51% (1411)	40% (372)	60% (566)
An Education Mental Health Practitioner	81% (11483)	19% (800)	81% (3516)	71% (1958)	12% (67)	88% (512)

Table B2 – Schools who don't have a resource in school and whether they want it

	Primary Schools			Secondary Schools		
	Schools without resource	No, but we don't want this	No, but we want this	Schools without resource	No, but we don't want this	No, but we want this
A Family Hub or children's centre	88% (12428)	58% (7170)	42% (5258)	93% (2550)	64% (1622)	36% (928)
A nursery	40% (5666)	51% (2902)	49% (2764)	92% (2528)	89% (2244)	11% (284)
A room for children's wellbeing	29% (4090)	8.9% (363)	91% (3727)	18% (515)	19% (100)	81% (415)
A sexual health clinic	98% (13844)	98% (13580)	1.9% (264)	85% (2360)	84% (1984)	16% (376)
A vaccination clinic	86% (12142)	94% (11395)	6.2% (747)	62% (1700)	89% (1516)	11% (184)
An internal alternative provision (AP)	87% (12301)	75% (9276)	25% (3025)	64% (1761)	52% (914)	48% (847)
An outdoor space for children to play or learn in	1.7% (249)	8.4% (21)	92% (228)	8.1% (226)	27% (62)	73% (164)
Breakfast provision	12% (1760)	33% (583)	67% (1177)	21% (578)	27% (155)	73% (423)
Enrichment activities: art, drama, music	5.2% (755)	5.4% (41)	95% (714)	0.5% (13)	c	c
Enrichment activities: sport	1.4% (205)	14% (29)	86% (176)	0.4% (10)	c	c
Free food provision for families	56% (7934)	44% (3487)	56% (4447)	61% (1697)	38% (648)	62% (1049)
Holiday activities provided free of charge	64% (9153)	38% (3480)	62% (5673)	57% (1592)	42% (665)	58% (927)
Social and emotional wellbeing interventions	4.6% (657)	8.1% (53)	92% (604)	2.5% (70)	8.6% (6)	91% (64)

Student participation	2.6% (381)	27% (104)	73% (277)	1.2% (34)	c	c
Wrap-around childcare	20% (2922)	36% (1038)	64% (1884)	86% (2371)	80% (1904)	20% (467)
Youth work	81% (11306)	67% (7588)	33% (3718)	46% (1282)	34% (430)	66% (852)
"c" indicates where values have been suppressed due to disclosure risk						

Figure B1 – Heatmap of provision of staff roles (internal or external) in primary schools by deprivation decile

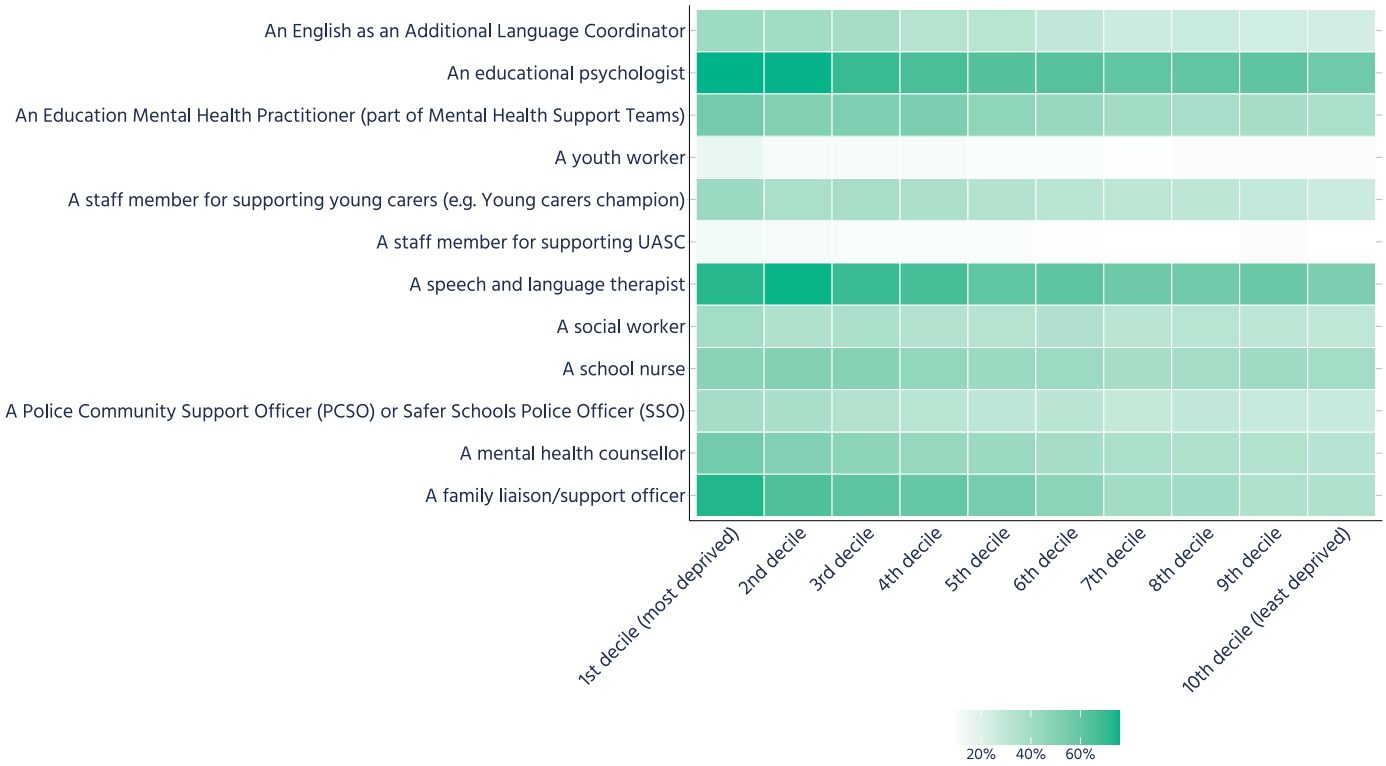


Figure B2 – Heatmap of provision of staff roles (internal or external) in secondary schools by deprivation decile

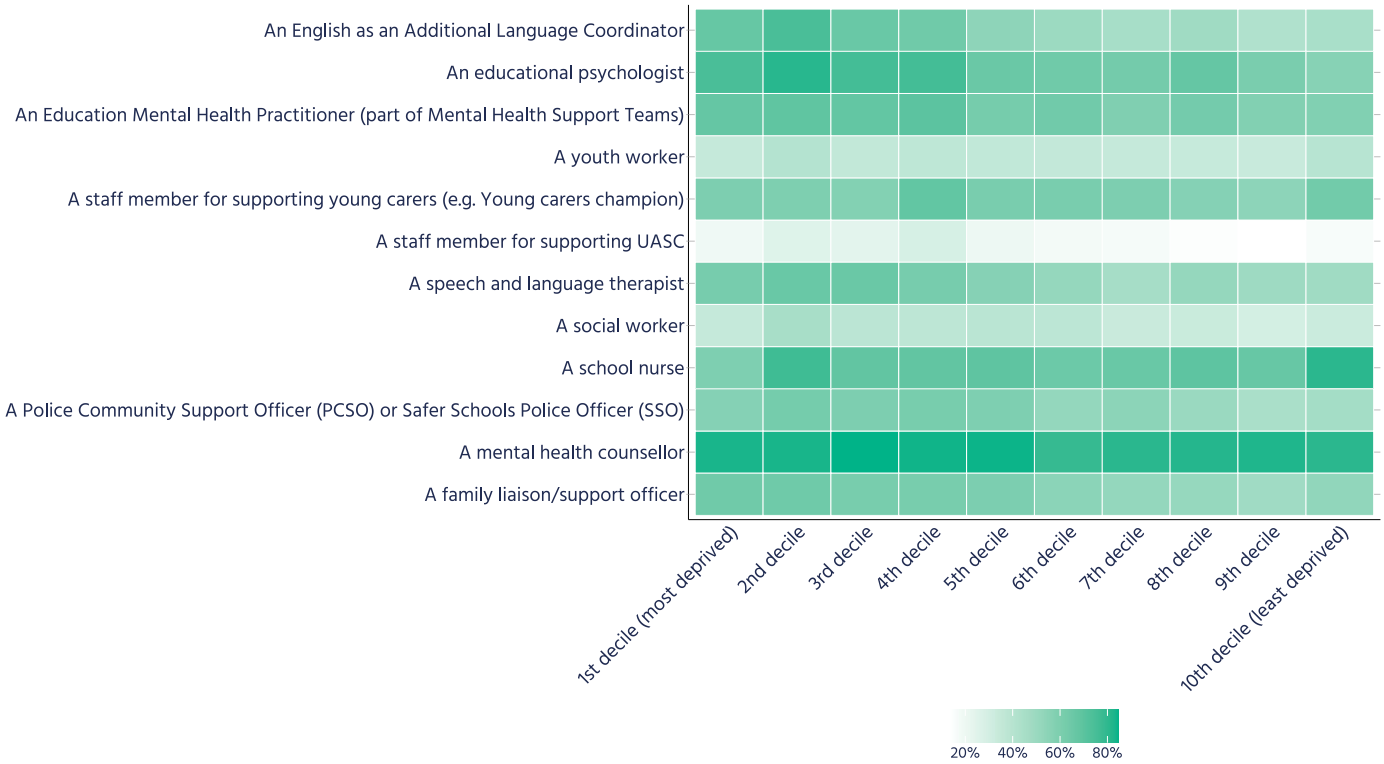


Figure B3- Heatmap of resources provided (run by the school or external provider) in primary schools by deprivation decile

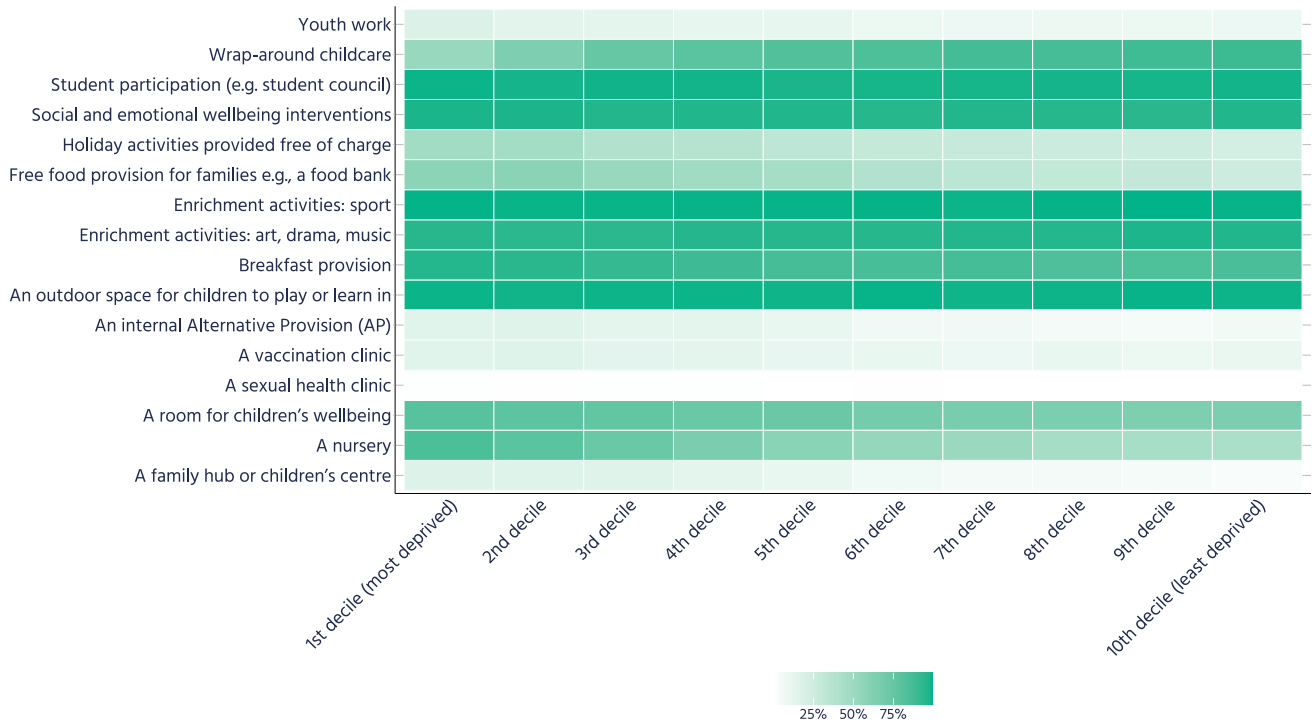
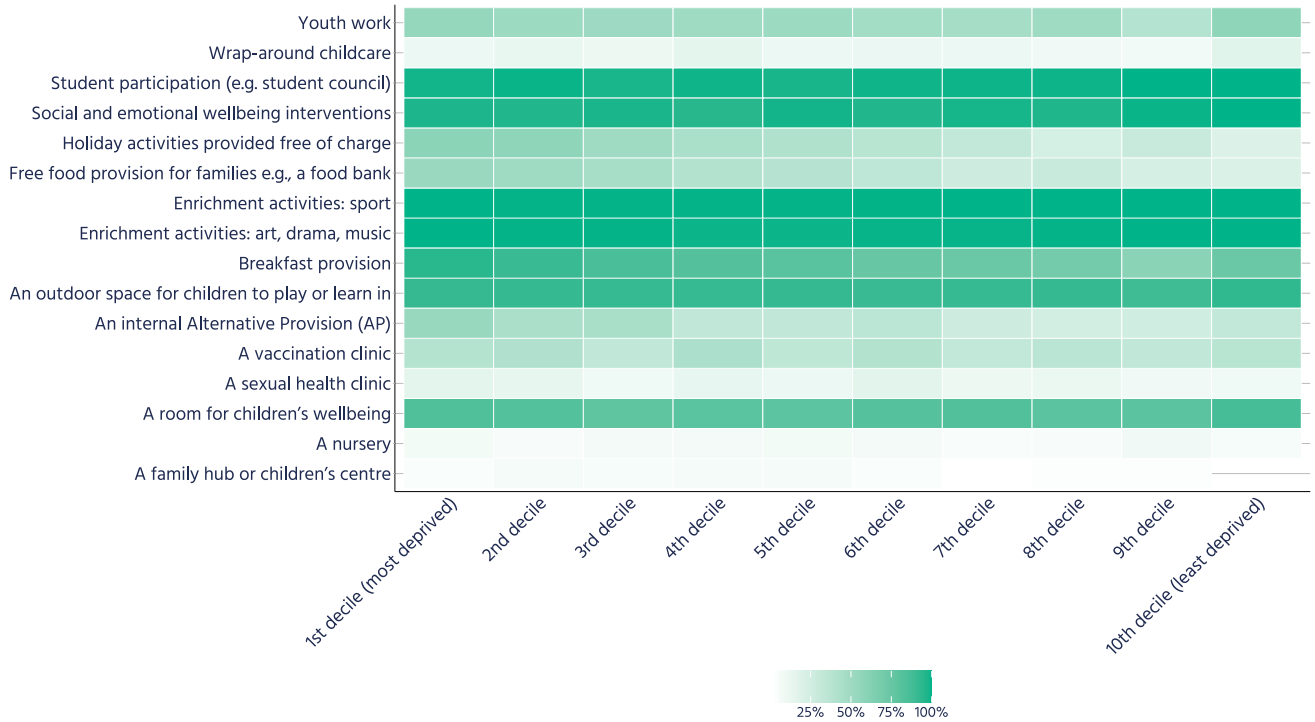


Figure B4 – Heatmap of resources provided (run by the school or external provider) in secondary schools by deprivation decile



Annex C – How the recommendations map against the UNCRC articles

Recommendation (see full recommendations for detail)	Article of UNCRC
Recommendation 1: A national statement of ambition for all children	
1a: A vision for the education system which is ambitious for every child	28, 29, 31
1b: Stronger accountability measures focussed on attendance, engagement, attainment, and progress	3, 28, 29
Recommendation 2: A new focus on a broader range of additional needs for those who need support inside and outside the classroom	
2a: Successful implementation of a Unique ID	3, 18, 19
2b: A new definition of 'additional needs'	2, 20, 22, 23, 28, 29
2c: A framework of needs and entitlements	2, 3, 28, 29
2d: A clinically led review of the prevalence of neurodevelopmental disorders and the consistency of diagnostic approaches	2, 3, 23, 24
Recommendation 3: Extra help for schools to deliver targeted and specialist support where needed, and deepen their role, impact and orientation in communities	
3a: A funding premium for additional needs and inclusion	20, 23, 26, 28, 29
3b: A core universal offer from all schools	18, 19, 24, 28, 29
3c: A stronger evidence base	3, 18, 28
3d: More specialist training	23, 28, 29
Recommendation 4: A new approach to statutory education support: Education, Health and Care Plans	
4a: Introduce a Children's Plan	2, 3, 5, 6, 18, 23, 28
4b: A broader approach to statutory support	18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 29, 29
4c: Greater intervention in the early years	3, 18, 28, 29
Recommendation 5: Delivering opportunity locally – Local Opportunity Mission Delivery Boards	

5a: A local specialist support fund	18, 20, 23, 24, 28, 29
5b: Local area characteristics taken into consideration by the accountability system, and local children's services and health services held accountable for children's outcomes	2, 23, 24, 28, 29
5c: Where appropriate, greater involvement in education and care from regional mayors	3, 28
5d: Directors of Education in all local authorities	20, 23, 28, 29
5e: Education as a fourth statutory safeguarding partner	3, 18, 19, 20
Recommendation 6: The critical role of special schools and Alternative Provision	
6a: An assumed path to mainstream	2, 3, 23, 28, 29
6b: A day one right to alternative provision	2, 3, 28, 29
6c: More support for internal alternative provision	2, 3, 23, 28, 29
Recommendation 7: Services beyond the school gate	
Targeted support from children's social care, youth work, youth justice services and Children and Young People's Mental Health services	3, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 31, 34, 36, 39, 40

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