

Primary SEND Unit (Communication & Interaction) Specification

1. Vision and Strategic Rationale

Background

Vision for SEND and Inclusion

Our vision in Cheshire West and Chester is to support children, young people with SEND and their families to have inclusive opportunities, to have their needs met at the right place at the right time and ensure they are happy, healthy and safe.

It is our commitment that children, young people, and their families' voices are heard and listened to.

SEND priorities for 2025 onwards

The SEND Strategy is based on evidence from past performance, needs assessments, and shaped through consultations with children, young people, parents, carers and professionals who work with them.

When setting the priorities for 2025 onwards the findings from the SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2025) have been included, the areas for improvement highlighted in the local area SEND Inspection (February 2022), priority areas from the SEND High Needs Sustainability Programme, priorities within the Inclusion Matters Strategy 2023-2027, recommendations with regard to SEND from People and Overview Scrutiny, engagement findings as well as the Perceived Gaps report from the Parent Carer Forum (PCF) and PCF survey 2024.

Based on the above findings, our agreed priorities are as follows.

1. Enable children and young people to access an appropriate and effective full-time curriculum and environment suitable to their needs
2. Increased focus on early intervention and Identification of needs
3. Further develop effective transition to preparing for Adulthood
4. Co-production (12 month)
5. Sufficiency and Commissioning
6. Quality and Timeliness of Education, Health and Care plans

The Current Picture in Cheshire West and Chester:

The number of Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) increased significantly from 480 in 2022 to 652 in 2024. With the monthly average increasing from approx. 40 to 54 respectively.

The proportion of children and young people aged 0-25 with an EHCP has increased from approximately 1.8% (1857 of 101,258 0-25 pop) in January 2019 to 3.7% (3808 of 102,944 0-25 pop) in January 2025. This compares with England from 2.0% (353,995 of 17,312,013 0-25 pop) to 3.6% (638,745 of 17,849,967 0-25 pop) over the same period. Communication and Interaction accounts for approximately 44% of all EHCP's compared with 51% for England in the 0-25 age group. Social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) accounts for 25% of EHCP compared to 15% for England.

SEN2 Snapshot in January of each year	Cheshire West and Chester	England	England Average LA 1	Regional Average 2
C 2019	1,857	353,995	47,353	2,284
2020	2,065	390,109	52,875	2,517
2021	2,289	430,697	58,455	2,779
2022	2,588	473,255	64,506	3,053
2023	2,882	517,048	71,971	3,336
2024	3,339	576,474	82,819	3,719
2025	3,808	638,745	92,839	4,121
% Increase in caseload 2019-2025	105%	80%	96%	80%

¹ England averages are based on 155 local authorities

² Regional averages are based on 25 North West LAs

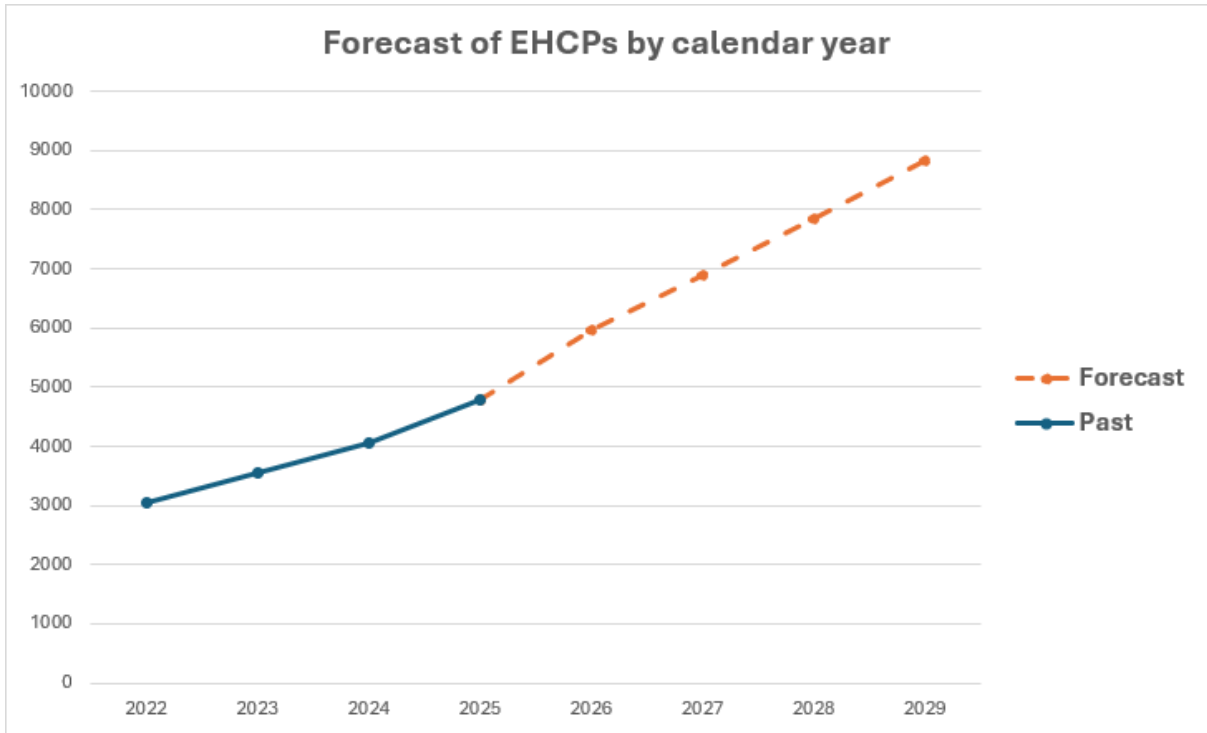
Rates have been based on a population of 17,849,967 aged 0-25 in England and 102,944 aged 0-25 in CWAC (mid-2024 estimates, ONS)

The majority of placements for children with an EHCP in Cheshire West and Chester are in mainstream schools and academies (44%) (this includes additionally Resourced Provision), similar to North West (45%) and England (44%). This is followed by placements in maintained special schools and special academies: 28.6% compared to 25.0% nationally. Only 4.6% of placements are in independent or non-maintained special schools, compared to 5.3% nationally.

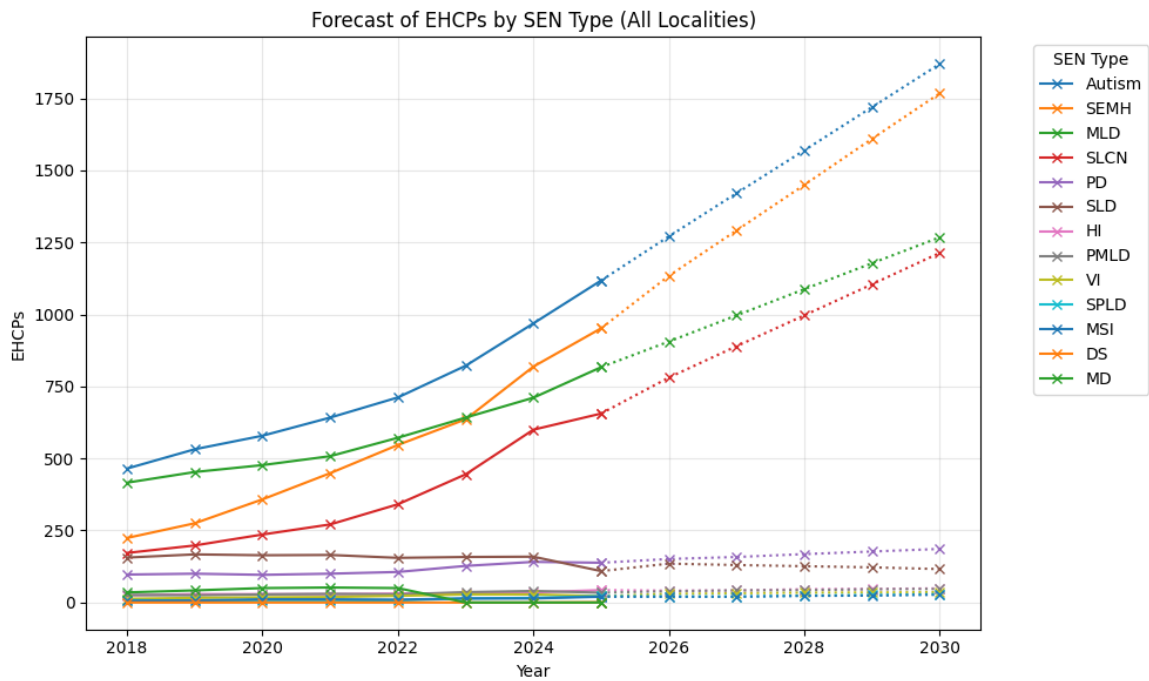
What's the Future Need?

The forecast predicts the increase in the number of EHCPs over the next 5 years, from 2026 to 2030. This forecast is based on data from the SEN2 census, which includes the number of children with active EHCPs at the time of the January snapshot, as well as those who had an EHCP at any point during the previous year i.e. EHCPs that had ceased in the year before the census date.

There were 3808 EHCPs active in January 2025 from the SEN2 2025 census. Overall, there had been 4047 EHCPs within the year up to the date of the census, with 239 ceasing prior to January. In total, this is an EHCP rate of 3.9% of the population aged 0-25 (3.7% at January snapshot). The forecast produced predicts an increase to 6725 EHCPs within the year up to January 2030 (6.4% population aged 0-25). This is a projected increase of 66.2% from 2025 to 2030.



Further work will build on this forecasting method to predict the increase in EHCPs broken down by need and locality. Certain needs categories—Autism, Speech, Language, and Communication Needs (SLCN), Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD), and Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMh)—currently account for the majority of EHCPs, and show a stronger increase in need compared to other needs. 90% of the 4047 EHCPs in 2025 had a primary need of Autism, SLCN, MLD, or SEMH. By 2030, the number of EHCPs for these needs is expected to increase by 73%, while the comparatively small number of EHCPs that have a different primary need is expected to increase by only 25%. As a result, these four primary needs will end up accounting for 96% of the overall increase in need in EHCPs. This disproportionate increase should be considered when planning resources and support mechanisms for future EHCP needs.



Forecasting by locality shows a similarly uneven pattern of growth. The largest rise in EHCPs is expected in Chester & Ellesmere Port, followed by Northwich & Winsford, with more moderate growth in the Rural locality. These geographical variations emphasise the need for locality-based planning, ensuring that specialist provision and early intervention capacity grow in the areas where need will be highest.

2. Delivery

What is a SEND Unit

A SEND Unit is a form of specialist provision located within a mainstream school, designed for a clearly defined cohort of pupils who have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and require a substantially higher level of specialist support than can ordinarily be delivered in a mainstream classroom. Pupils placed in the Unit are on the roll of the school but not included in the PAN.

A SEND Unit provides dedicated, additional accommodation and specialist staffing that operates as a distinct setting within the school, delivering most of each pupil's curriculum, interventions and care within the Unit, with planned and needs led access to mainstream lessons and wider school life. Unlike a Resourced Provision (RP), where pupils spend most of their timetable in mainstream classes, pupils in a Unit spend the majority of their time in the specialist Unit environment.

The purpose of the Unit is to ensure pupils with complex SEND can access education safely and successfully, receiving specialist teaching, therapy, regulation support and structured routines, while still benefiting from the opportunities, social inclusion and community belonging that a mainstream school provides.

The SEND Unit will meet the needs of:

- Children with EHCPs identifying C&I as the primary area of need (including Autism and complex speech, language & communication needs).
- Pupils with communication and interaction profiles comparable to special school cohorts but who can thrive within a supported mainstream environment.
- A small number of pupils with additional cognition & learning or SEMH needs where these stem from or are closely associated with communication difficulties.

This SEND Unit will deliver high-quality specialist Communication & Interaction (C&I) support within a mainstream primary setting. It will:

- Provide targeted, specialist teaching for pupils with significant communication, language, social interaction and Autism-related needs.
- Enable children to access mainstream learning with appropriate scaffolding.
- Increase local sufficiency and reduce reliance on independent special school placements.
- Support whole-school inclusion through shared expertise, modelling and training.
- The SEND provision will align with Inclusion Matters and the wider SEND strategy for Cheshire West & Chester.

Admissions to the SEND Unit will be managed through the statutory EHCP consultation process. When considering placements, priority will be given to parental preference, the suitability of the pupil's profile in relation to the Communication and Interaction specialism, and the overall complexity of need.

Council's Preferred Inclusion Model (% time expectations)

The Council's preferred inclusion model for a SEND Unit is:

- 60–80% of the pupil's timetable spent in the Unit (majority of curriculum, interventions, therapies, regulation, specialist teaching)
- 20–40% of the timetable spent in mainstream lessons (mainstream access carefully planned, scaffolded, and reviewed; based on individual need and EHCP outcomes)

Capacity, Phased Development and Accommodation Requirements

Commissioned places: 10

Opening profile:

Year 1: 5 pupils, across Reception–Year 2

Year 2: Expand to 10 places, across Reception–Year 6

All pupils will be on roll at the host school but not contributed in the school's PAN

The SEND Unit Accommodation Requirements - the Base will provide essential areas:

- 1 × dedicated Communication & Interaction specialist classroom (Base)
- 1 × small group learning/intervention (Therapy) room
- 1 × sensory regulation area (low arousal)
- Dedicated storage for communication systems and sensory tools
- Adjacent toilets; accessible WC
- Dedicated outdoor area for movement, sensory circuits and structured play

Staffing Model

Core team will consist of:

- SEND Provision Lead Teacher – specialist in C&I/Autism, responsible for quality of provision and EHCP implementation
- Specialist Teaching Assistants – trained in communication strategies, social communication groups, and AAC
- SENCO – strategic oversight and statutory duties (separate role from the SEND Provision Lead Teacher)
-

Activities and Interventions

The Unit must be able to deliver a core menu including small-group and 1:1 specialist teaching; pre-/post-teaching linked to mainstream; SaLT-designed communication groups; sensory regulation and movement breaks; emotion coaching/ELSA/CBT-informed programmes; parent workshops and multi-agency meetings.

3. Funding

SEND Unit are funded through a combination of place funding and pupil specific top-up funding, in line with DfE High Needs Operational Guidance. Each agreed place generates £6,000, which is paid whether the place is filled or not, ensuring the school can maintain the specialist staffing and stability required for the provision. For each pupil on roll, this £6,000 is supplemented by top-up funding based on their assessed level of need; in Cheshire West and Chester for 2024–25 this is set at £7,125 for Band B and £11,062 for Band C. Top-up funding follows the pupil and is designed to reflect the level of support required to meet the outcomes in their EHCP.

4. Safeguarding, Governance & Quality Assurance

The Unit is within the school's safeguarding, safer recruitment, behaviour and SEND policies; all staff receive appropriate supervision and CPD.

Commissioner QA: include termly monitoring, learning walks, fidelity/evidence sampling, and parent/carer voice.

Data returns each term: attendance, mainstream access %, progress against EHCP targets, intervention uptake, incidents/exclusions, and destination/transition data.

5. Monitoring & Accountability

To ensure the SEND Unit delivers high-quality, inclusive support that meets pupils' needs, strengthens mainstream inclusion, and provides transparent, accountable oversight for the school and the Council. To ensure this:

- The Unit is fully integrated into the School Development Plan with clear priorities, actions and outcomes.
- A Named SEND Governor provides oversight through termly link visits, data scrutiny and reporting to the Governing Board.
- An Annual Strategic Review is held with the Headteacher, SENCO, SEND Provision Lead Teacher, the Council's SEND Provision Lead Practitioner and SEND Commissioner to evaluate outcomes, quality, resource use and compliance.
- Termly monitoring covers: attendance, exclusions, EHCP outcomes, parent confidence, placement sustainability, staff training and budget/resource use.

Key Performance Indicators could include:

- Functional Communication: demonstrable improvement against EHCP/IEP targets.
- Structured Social Interaction: increased participation using a consistent social/communication rubric.
- Mainstream Engagement: individual progress in time spent in mainstream and quality of participation.
- EHCP Outcomes: high proportion of outcomes on track or achieved.
- Parent Confidence: strong positive feedback and minimal unresolved concerns.
- Attendance: high attendance levels with reduced persistent absence.
- Exclusions: very low or zero exclusions, with effective risk management.
- Placement Sustainability: placements remain stable with successful Y6 to Y7 transitions.

Please Note: This document reflects current legislative requirements, national policy, and local commissioning priorities at the time of publication. The Government's ongoing SEND Reforms and the commitments set out in Every Child Achieving and Thriving White Paper (2026) are expected to bring further changes to the structure, expectations and operation of specialist and inclusive provision across England. As these reforms progress, it may be necessary to update elements of this specification to ensure continued compliance with statutory duties and alignment with emerging national frameworks.

The Local Authority will work collaboratively with the school to support any required amendments, including updates to operating models, staffing expectations, data requirements, curriculum access, and approaches to inclusion. Any future changes will be implemented in a planned and supportive manner to ensure continuity for pupils, staff and families.

It is also important for schools to recognise that the national direction of travel strongly prioritises mainstream inclusion, early intervention, and graduated support. The Government has indicated an expectation that all schools will, in future, play a more active role in meeting a broader range of SEND within mainstream environments. Developing strong inclusive practice now—including through early consideration of Inclusion Bases—positions schools to stay ahead of future statutory requirements, ensures readiness for reform, and strengthens their capacity to meet the needs of their local community.

By engaging proactively with this agenda, schools place themselves in the best possible position to adapt confidently to evolving national expectations and to contribute to a coherent, locality-based system of support for children and young people with SEND.