TOGETHER for Children and Young People

Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be **young**

SEND Sufficiency Position Statement



Cheshire East Council

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1 Purpose

This position statement sets out the refreshed approach to responding to sufficiency of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision in Cheshire East. It provides an updated understanding of need, demand, pressures, strengths, and gaps across the local system. It also identifies the priority areas that will shape the development of the next Cheshire East SEND Sufficiency Strategy.

The aim of the new strategy will be to enable the strengthening of inclusive practice through ensuring the allocation of a significant proportion of the SEND capital investment to develop the physical environments of our mainstream education settings as well as investing in the expansion of Resource Provisions and SEND Units as well as Special School places. It will aim to ensure that children and young people with SEND (SEND Support and EHCPs) in Cheshire East receive the right support, at the right time, in the right place – in their local community as often as possible.

2 Local Context

Cheshire East continues to experience rising demand for specialist provision. Key drivers include:

- An increasing number of children and young people with increasingly complex needs.
- Mainstream education settings struggling to meet the needs of the increasing demands due to physical environment, staff skills (and recruitment/retention), access to specialist advice.

All of this has led to a sustained rise in requests for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs). These pressures mirror national trends but present

specific challenges for Cheshire East given its geography, rurality and existing provision.

Following the 2009 local government reorganisation which left Cheshire East with four special schools, compared to ten in Cheshire West and Chester, resulting in a longstanding imbalance in specialist provision. This significantly smaller share of specialist provision created an inherited and ongoing imbalance that Cheshire East has had to address over time.

3 Summary of the Sufficiency Position

3.1 Strengths

- Developing partnership working across education, health and care, including a refreshed SEND governance structure.
- Highly regarded specialist provision in key areas, with pockets of strong collaboration between special schools and mainstream settings.
- Good early years practice in many settings, supported by committed multi-agency professionals and implementation of early years portage. Clear mechanism for graduated approach with strong early years forum.
- Ongoing capital investment in SEND, including the creation of additional specialist places.

3.2 Current Pressures and Gaps

- **High demand for specialist school places with particularly high numbers of Independent Special School places**, especially for autism and SEMH which continues to exceed existing capacity.
- **Incomplete pathways of Resource Provision and SEND Units** leading to children and young people not always being placed in provision that matches their needs.
- **Variation in inclusive practice** across mainstream education settings affects children's experiences and parental confidence.
- **Rising complexity of need** is creating pressure on education staff skills and access to specialist support.

- **Limited availability of alternative provision**, particularly for short-term or preventative support.
- **Home-to-school transport pressures** linked to increased out-of-borough placements and distance to suitable provision.
- **Post-16 provision gaps** for young people with complex needs, including limited supported internships and employment pathways in some areas.
- **Early years pressures**, including increasing numbers of young children presenting with social communication needs and developmental delays.

4 Needs Analysis (Initial Findings)

Early analysis of Cheshire East's data shows:

- Year-on-year growth in the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)
- Significant increases in autism and SEMH as primary needs for children with EHCPs.
- Growing demand for specialist and resourced provision, particularly in the north of the borough.

A fuller sufficiency analysis, including projections, benchmarking, and demand modelling, will accompany the development of the final SEND Sufficiency Strategy.

5 Vision and Principles

The development of the Cheshire East SEND Sufficiency Strategy will be shaped by the following principles:

We want all our children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities to be **HAPI**:

Happy and healthy

Achieving their potential

Part of their communities

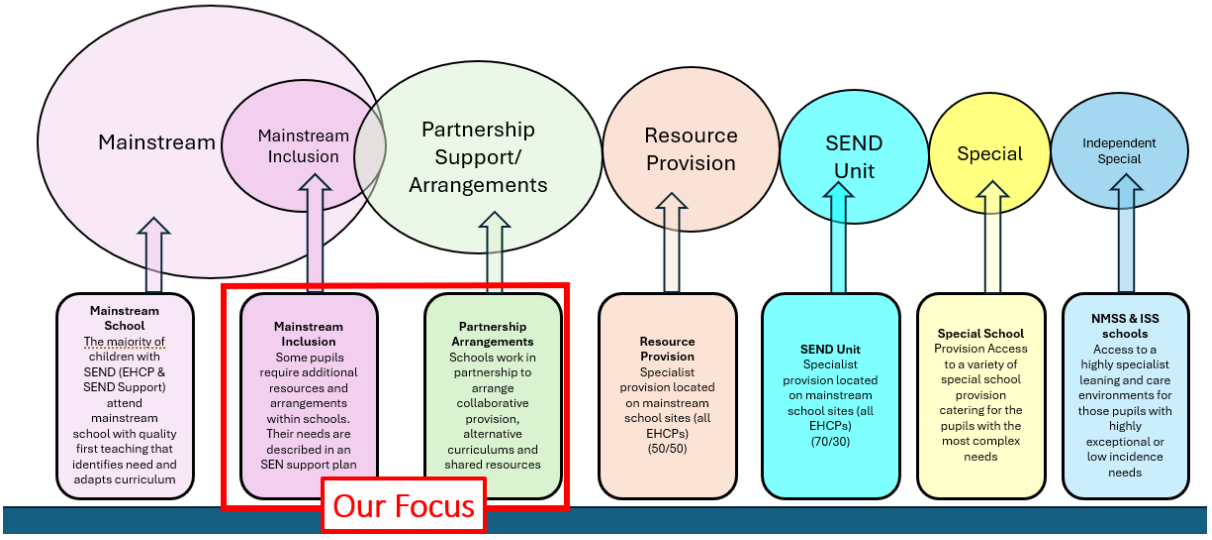
Independent as possible, making choices about their future.

- **Inclusion First**: Most children and young people should be able to thrive in their local mainstream school or setting, supported by a strong graduated response.

- **Early Identification and Prevention**: Needs should be recognised early, with proactive responses that prevent escalation.
- **Local Support, Local Provision**: Children and young people should be able to access high-quality education close to home.
- **Co-production at Every Level**: Children, young people, families and practitioners will influence service design and strategy development.
- **Preparing for Adulthood from the start**: Plans and pathways will focus on independence, community inclusion, good health and employment outcomes.
- **Sufficient Specialist Placements and Pathways**: Specialist provision across the education phases to support children and young people when needs are not able to be met in local schools. Ensuring there are the right number and type of places to meet children and young people's needs.

6 Emerging Priorities for Cheshire East

Our Inclusion Strategy will aim to increase the inclusive capacity of our mainstream education settings and grow our own specialist provision locally is a key mitigation within our DSG management plan



6.1 Strengthening Inclusive Practice

- Consistent, high-quality inclusive practice across all education settings through shared standards, training and system leadership.
- Enhanced workforce development in key need areas through developing the Experts at Hand model to upskill the wider workforce.
- Improved access to therapy and specialist support aligned with need.
- Strengthening the graduated response across early years, schools and post-16 settings.

6.2 Increasing Local Inclusive Capacity

- Further expansion of specialist school places.
- Review of resourced provision and SEND units and opportunities to expand, to also ensure provision pathway planning.
- Opportunity for mainstream education settings to develop alternative provision to meet the needs of their cohorts.
- Development of flexible alternative provision, including short-term, preventative and reintegration-focused options.
- Ensuring provision is geographically balanced and pathways are aligned between phases of education to reduce the need for extended travel.

6.3 Building Trust and Parental Confidence

- Clearer communication about the local offer and available support.
- Greater transparency in decision-making, processes and provision development.
- Continued development of co-production with parent carer forums and young people.

7 Next Steps

- Complete the detailed sufficiency assessment linked to need, including mapping, forecasting and financial modelling. We are modelling this on creating 426 places in specialist bases (resource provision, units and specialist settings) which is in addition to the 140 places at the new Westfields special school. In addition, we are modelling our demand as being based on 99 support bases in early years settings, mainstream schools and FE colleges.
- Ensure the completion of pathways of the different types of provision across the ages and phases in the system.
- From 8 June 2026, roll out the option for mainstream education settings to submit 'Provision Proposals' to receive SEND capital allocation to develop inclusive practice to meet needs locally. These expressions of interest should be returned by 3 July 2026.
- Engage widely with children, young people, families, education settings and partners on the emerging findings.
- Develop a Cheshire East SEND Sufficiency Strategy with clear priorities, outcomes and delivery plans through the SEND Reform process.
- Implement a monitoring and evaluation framework to track impact and ensure accountability.
- Development of clear commissioning arrangements to include quality assurance and oversight.

8 Sufficiency of current level of childcare provision for 0–5s

Cheshire East has a clear and mature approach to early years sufficiency, ensuring that there are sufficient high-quality early education and childcare places available across all localities to meet current and projected demand, including for SEND.

This includes ongoing analysis of population growth, housing development, take-up of funded childcare entitlements and local patterns of need, including children with SEND and those in areas of disadvantage.

The council works closely with providers, schools, and partners to identify gaps in provision and to support the development and expansion of places where needed. This includes ensuring that early years settings are supported to deliver inclusive provision and meet a wide range of needs.

Delivery is closely linked with the Best Start in Life and Family Hubs model, making sure that sufficiency planning supports early identification, early intervention and equitable access to high-quality provision across the borough. In addition, we use our portage workers to link with early years settings to make sure that they have the right skills and capacity to meet children's needs.

Sufficiency is monitored regularly through the council's Directorate Leadership team and more details can be found at: Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

9 Cheshire East SEND capital bid process

The Cheshire East Inclusion and SEND reform programme develops a strategic and locality-driven approach to strengthening inclusive provision across mainstream education settings. The programme is designed to address increasing demand, rising complexity of need, and clear gaps in specialist capacity by investing capital funding into education setting environments. It aims to allow more children and young people with SEND to be supported within great providers in our local area and which means that fewer children and young people will be reliant on independent and out-of-area provision.

The need for reform is shown through detailed locality based analysis which is contained in the pack emailed to providers on 10 June 2026. This data shows the numbers of young people with EHCPs and SEND support needs, suspension levels, children attending AP etc.

The programme aims to expand and enhance capacity within mainstream education by supporting the development of specialist provision, including resourced provisions and SEND units, together with capital improvements such as accessibility adaptations, and other learning spaces. These are intended to remove barriers to learning, strengthen early support, and lead to better outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Delivery is through a two-stage application process. Stage 1 needs the provider(s) to submit a provision proposal by 10 July 2026 explaining the need, objectives, expected outcomes, costs, risks and sustainability plans. Education providers will be notified with a decision in principle by mid-September 2026. For those providers which progress to Stage 2, them there needs a detailed business case including full project design, procurement, confirmed costs, and confirmation of statutory approvals.

Applications are evaluated on their alignment with the local area SEND strategy, the scale and impact for children and young people, feasibility of the proposal, workforce capacity, value for money, and sustainability.