Heads and Leaders Update

April 16th 2026

UNCLASSIFIED

Reforms
Sufficiency
Inclusive Mainstream Practice

UNCLASSIFIED

SEND Reforms 2026
Headteacher Update

5th March 2026

Why SEND reform is needed in Cheshire East and nationally?

Cheshire East Council

Rising demand for EHCPs and specialist placements

Growing local authority high-needs deficits

Delays in assessment and support processes

Adversarial experiences for families

Postcode variation in access to provision

Government position: the current model is unsustainable.

What are the drivers behind our work in Cheshire East?

Your voice has been key, whether this be young people, parents and carers, early years providers, schools, council officers, health and allied professionals, colleges, Alternative Provision providers. The SEND system simply isn't working well enough for enough people.

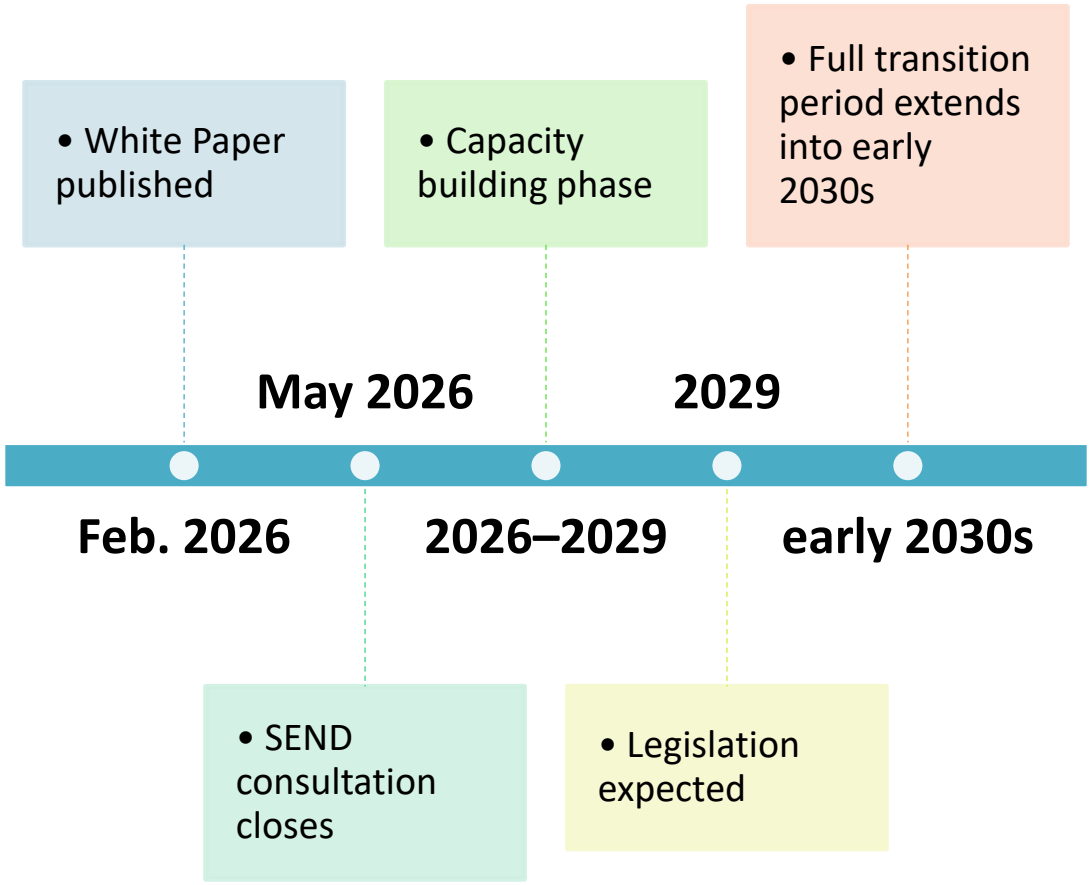
So, by meeting with stakeholders we believe:

- **Inclusion** should be the default expectation
- **Early identification** and early intervention will help
- **Graduated support** should be the norm
- **Reduce an escalation** and adversarial model
- We need **better and stronger partnerships** between education, health, care, the council, families and children

So what's been happening locally?

- Listening to parents and carers via the PCF forum.
- Listening to young people's voices.
- Listening to schools and settings.

Timeline Overview



Timeline Overview

2026
White Paper

Consultation period

2026–2027
Workforce expansion and training

First schools adopt digital ISP systems

2027–2028
National rollout of inclusion standards

Most new additional-needs pupils supported through ISPs instead of EHCP requests

2028–2029
System expected to operate primarily through graduated model

EHCPs increasingly reserved for specialist threshold cases

2029
Legal framework updated

New statutory system formally recognises ISP-first approach

Transition protections for existing EHCP holders begin

2030s
Mixed economy of EHCP + ISP until cohorts naturally transition

The Layered Support Model

1. Universal – High quality inclusive teaching for all

2. Targeted – Additional short-term support

3. Targeted Plus – Ongoing specialist input

4. Specialist – Statutory provision for highest complexity

Children move fluidly between levels based on need.

Individual Support Plans (ISP)

Introduced nationally during 2026–2029 rollout

Digital plan co-produced with families

Multidisciplinary advice added without statutory assessment

Plan follows the child between schools

Individual Support Plans (ISPs)

- Digital, regularly updated support records
- Co-produced with families
- Replace EHCPs as default planning tool
- Focus on day-to-day support rather than statutory entitlement
- Aim to reduce escalation and delay

EHCPs in the Future System

- RETAINED FOR HIGHEST COMPLEXITY NEEDS ONLY
- SPECIALIST PROVISION PACKAGES UNDERPIN STATUTORY PLANS
- TRIBUNAL ROUTE REMAINS FOR SPECIALIST THRESHOLD DISPUTES
- PLACEMENT NAMING REFORMS EXPECTED
- LONG TRANSITION PERIOD TO 2029 LEGISLATION

Experts at Hand

- Multidisciplinary teams working directly with schools
- SALT, Educational Psychologists, OTs, behaviour specialists
- Shift from referral-based to proactive capacity building
- Reduce need for formal assessment pathways

National Inclusion Standards

- Define what mainstream schools must ordinarily provide

- Cover curriculum adaptation, behaviour, accessibility

- Supported by digital resource library and evidence programme

Shared Journeys Priorities and Project Groups

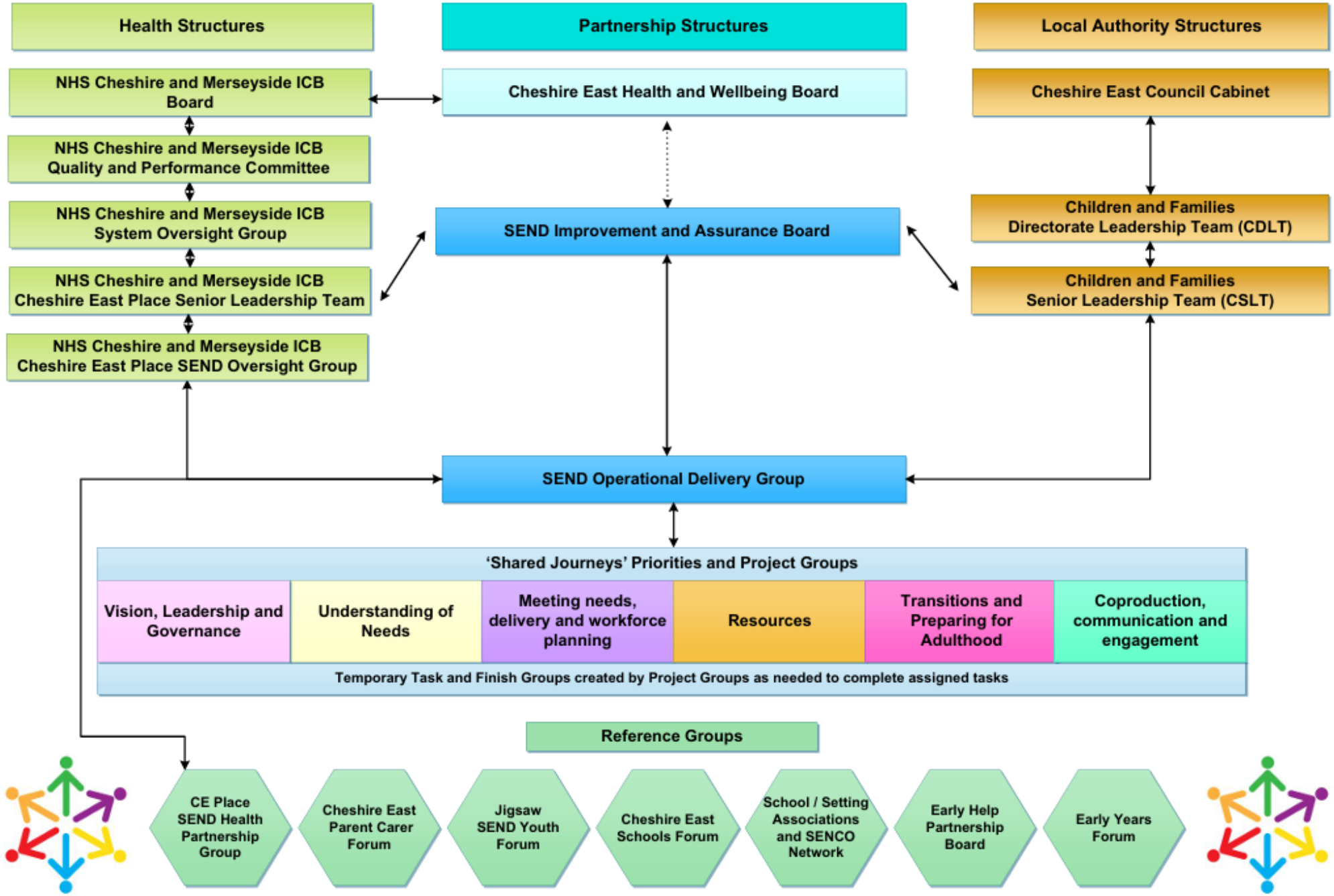
"TOGETHER we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young"

Cheshire East Council

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside

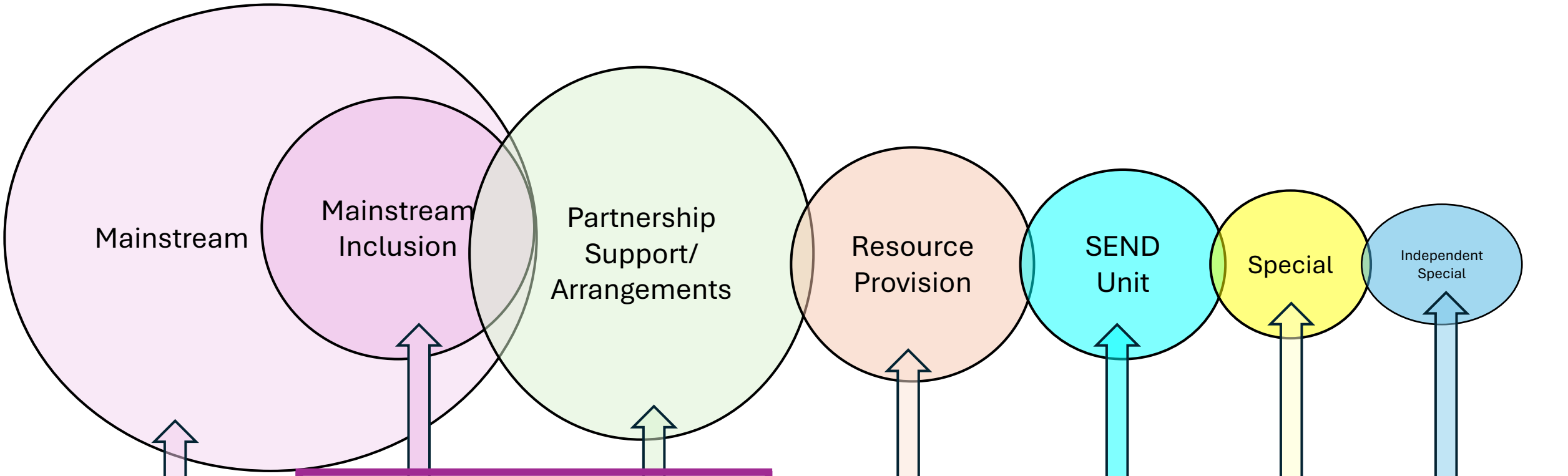
Right Support		Right Place		Right Time	
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
Vision, leadership and governance	Understanding of Needs	Meeting needs, delivery and workforce planning	Resources	Transitions and Preparing for Adulthood	Coproduction, Communication and engagement

Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership Governance



Sufficiency

Approach to Sufficiency



Mainstream School
The majority of children with SEND (EHCP & SEND Support) attend mainstream school with quality first teaching that identifies need and adapts curriculum

Mainstream Inclusion
Some pupils require additional resources and arrangements within schools. Their needs are described in an SEN support plan

Partnership Arrangements
Schools work in partnership to arrange collaborative provision, alternative curriculums and shared resources

Resource Provision
Specialist provision located on mainstream school sites (all EHCPs) (50/50)

SEND Unit
Specialist provision located on mainstream school sites (all EHCPs) (70/30)

Special School
Provision Access to a variety of special school provision catering for the pupils with the most complex needs

NMSS & ISS schools
Access to a highly specialist leaning and care environments for those pupils with highly exceptional or low incidence needs

UNCLASSIFIED

Sufficiency

Provision Proposals

- Type of provision
- New/expanded
- Key focus/area of need?
- Evidence of commitment to Inclusion
- Workforce
- Intended outcomes and impact of provision (linked to needs)
- Physical capacity – school/site
- Potential risks
- Future sustainability



UNCL

Types of Provision

Alternative mainstream provision

An alternative offer within a mainstream school to be locally commissioned and managed (not commissioned by the LA)

This could include Nurture groups, Forest Schools etc. Admission/placements for this type of provision would be managed by the school



UNCLASSIFIED

Types of Provision

RP and SEND units

Specialised units within mainstream schools that offer additional support and resources for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

They are designed to help children with a wide range of needs, from mild to severe, who may struggle with full time mainstream provision.

The expectation is that a child would access 50% mainstream and 50% RP provision.

In a SEND Unit the expectation would change to a 30% mainstream and 70% in SEND provision.

Both types of provision would be commissioned by the LA as all placements will be for children and young people with an EHCP.



UNCLASSIFIED



"I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things."

Mother Teresa.

UNCLASSIFIED

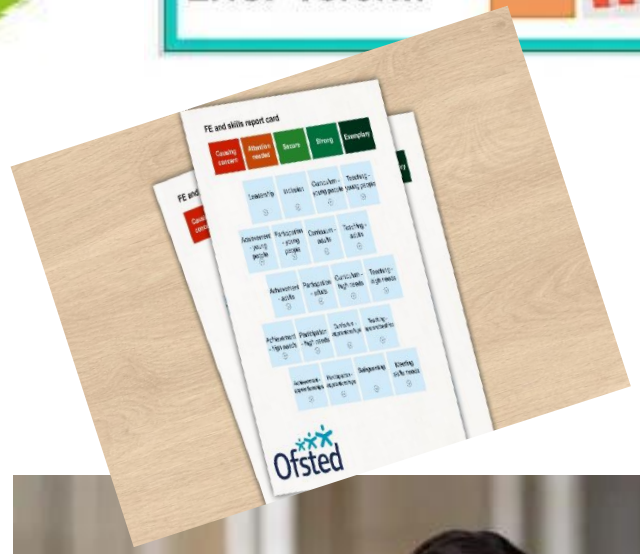
Inclusive Mainstream Practice



UNCLASSIFIED



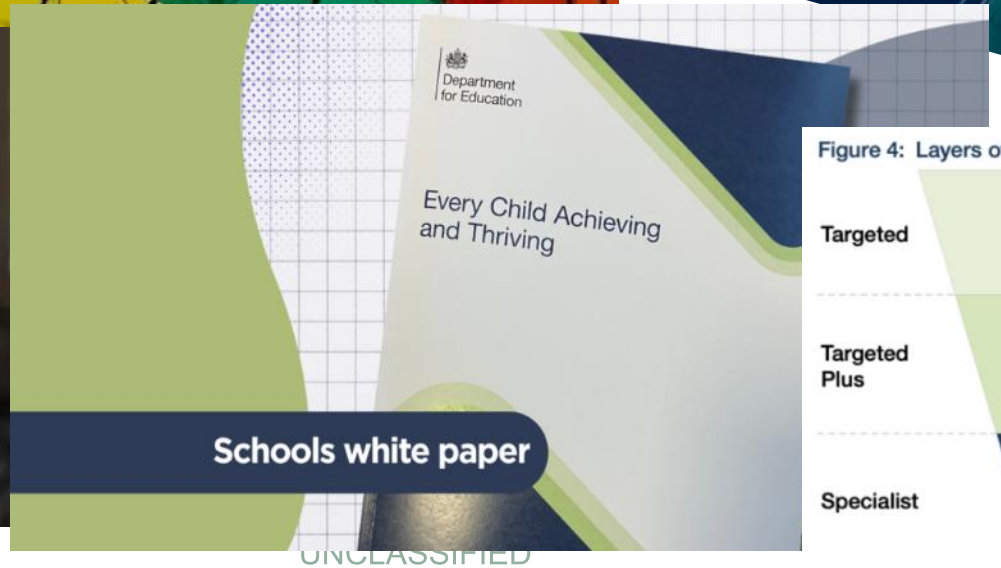














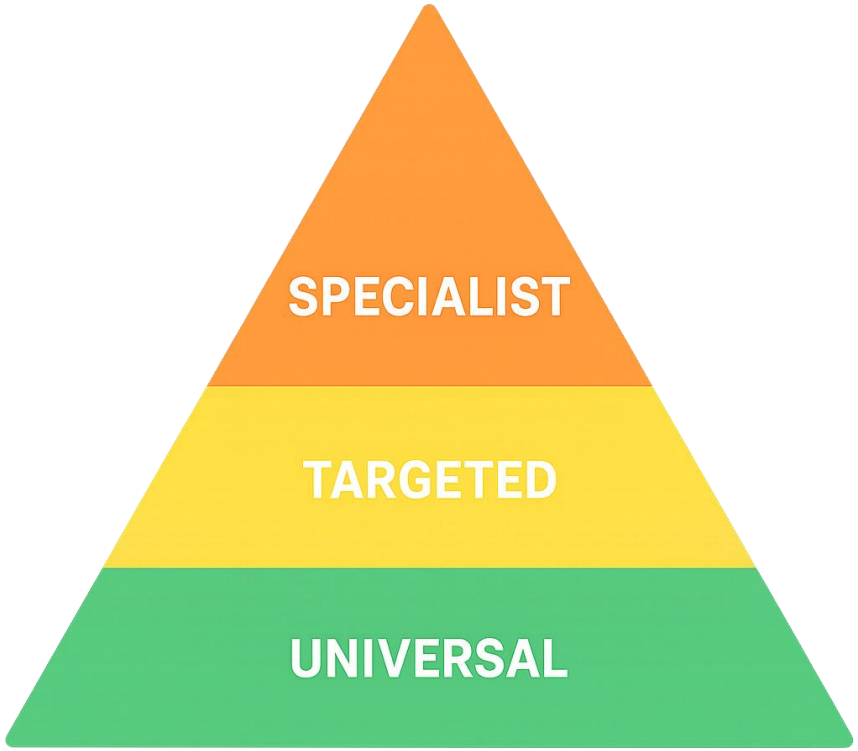
UNCLASSIFIED

Our Inclusion Strategy Priorities

1. Establish a benchmark for inclusion
2. Embed a graduated approach to inclusion
3. Strengthen pathways to education for priority groups
4. Foster effective collaboration across agencies
5. Provide professional development aligned with local priorities
6. Ensure a high-quality continuum of provision

UNCLASSIFIED

Inclusive Mainstream Practice



UNCLASSIFIED

Proposed Inclusive Mainstream Practice Model

Universal

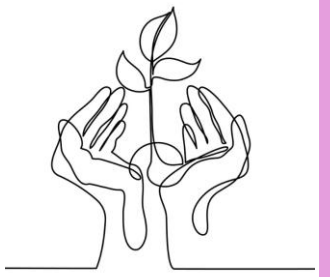
We will work with you on the Inclusion Framework to:

- **Establish a comprehensive understanding of inclusion across all schools** by integrating data analysis with contextual, school-based insights.
- **Support each individual school in gaining a clear picture of inclusion within their setting** through a combination of data interrogation and qualitative information.
- **Develop a collaborative framework** that enables partnership working to identify specific areas for development and actionable steps to enhance inclusion at the school level.
- **Provide robust evidence** to inform the design and delivery of both universal and targeted training and support initiatives.

UNCLASSIFIED

Inclusion Framework

Cheshire East



Develop inclusive mainstream practice in schools which will support in the delivery of the Inclusion Framework

- **Facilitate collaborative engagement with individual schools** to implement the inclusion framework effectively at the school level.
- **Provide strategic guidance and support across whole-school settings** to enhance inclusive practices, informed by the outcomes of the inclusion framework.
- **Deliver tailored targeted support and training** identified through the framework, addressing needs at the whole-school/school level

- actioned through regular visits to primary, secondary and post 16 settings.

- **Deliver tailored support and training** identified through the framework, addressing needs at locality levels

- actioned through the relaunching of **SENCo development networks**
- actioned through the continuation of **Spotlight On Inclusion events**

- **Work in partnership to achieve measurable inclusion outcomes**, both at the school level (e.g. reduction in suspensions, reduction in part time timetables, increase in SEN support etc) and at the local authority level (e.g. reduction in requests for statutory needs assessments, reduction in numbers of children being EHE due to perceived lack of provision in school).

- actioned through continuing partnership working including direct work with heads, CEO's, parents, health and social care

SENCO NETWORK

Inclusive Mainstream Practice

23 April 2026

Development Day

Congleton Town Hall

9:15am – 3:30pm

To include:

- Reforms
- Inclusive Mainstream Practice and the Inclusion Framework
- Sufficiency
- SEND notional budget
- SEN support
- Transition
- ND Profiling Tool
- SEND update
- Etc.

18 June 2026

Development Day

Holmes Chapel Community Centre

9:15am – 3:30pm

To include:

- Reforms update
- Inclusive Mainstream Practice and the Inclusion Framework (update)
- Sufficiency (update)
- SEND information reports
- Annual Review paperwork
- Assessment and intervention support
- Alternative provision
- SEND update
- Etc.

- **Inclusive Mainstream Practice Model (include experts at hand going forwards)**
- **Inclusion Framework** to be used as the delivery mechanism
- Target audience: All mainstream schools and Post 16 settings
- Delivered in all schools/Post 16 settings in Cheshire East by the Inclusive Mainstream Practice Team via locality working.
- Will include: action planning for inclusion, targeted training, signposting to support and resources and capacity development.
- **SENCo development networks**
- Target audience: School/setting SENCos
- **Spotlight on inclusion events**
- Target audience: All partners and settings, including parents, health and social care
- 'A spotlight on …' different aspects of inclusion



- **Inclusion forum (targeted)**
- Case led mechanism for multi-agency support prior to a request for a needs assessment
- Target audience: All mainstream schools/settings.
- **Mechanism for schools to access additional funding**
- Links to send capital spend in mainstream schools (sufficiency).
- The group will also explore funding prior to EHCP funding or change of placement requests.

Inclusion forum (targeted +/specialist)

- Case led mechanism for multi-agency support prior to a request for a change of placement/risk of exclusion
- Target audience: All mainstream schools/settings.



Inclusive Mainstream Practice Model

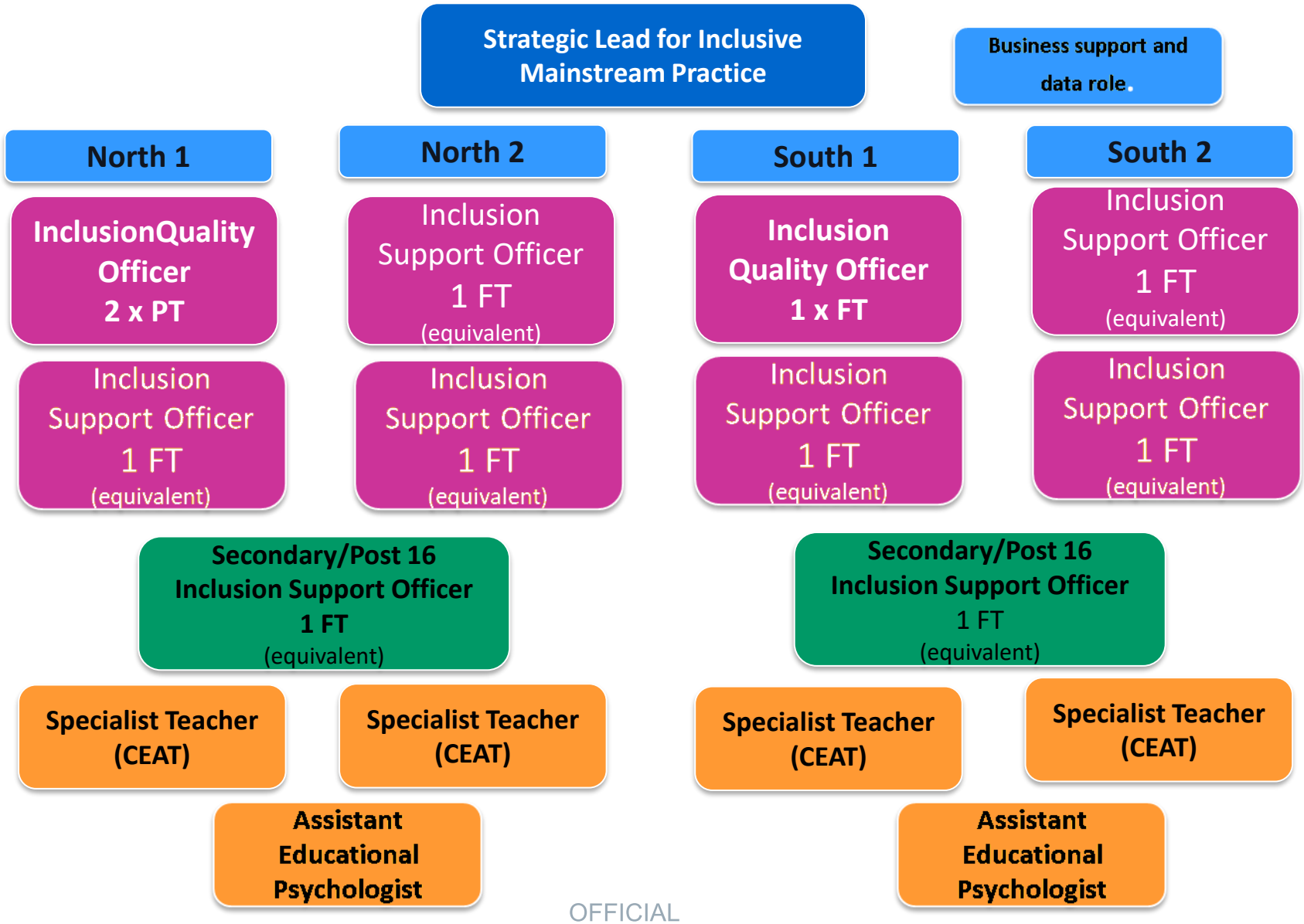
- **Inclusion Framework** to be used as the delivery mechanism
- Target audience: All mainstream schools and Post 16 settings
- Delivered in all schools/Post 16 settings in Cheshire East by the Inclusive Mainstream Practice Team via locality working.
- Will include: action planning for inclusion, targeted training and capacity development.

Universal Offer (at least termly school visits) from Inclusion Support Officers.

Currently also being developed is a potential universal offer from our experts at hand.

UNCLASSIFIED

Inclusive Mainstream Practice Structure



OFFICIAL

Secondment opportunities

Expressions of interest: Friday 24th April

Closing date: Midday Friday 8th May

Interviews: Thursday 14th May





UNCLASSIFIED

Experts at hand

UNCLASSIFIED

Experts at hand

In addition, for the children who need a little extra help, the government will fund a new 'Experts at Hand' service, investing £1.8 billion over 3 years to create a bank of specialists like SEND teachers and speech and language therapist in every local area which schools can draw down from on demand, regardless of whether children have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) – meaning every child will be able to access these resources if they need them.

Specialist SEND support in every school and community - GOV.UK

UNCLASSIFIED

What does inclusion mean in Cheshire East?

Inclusion in Cheshire East settings means:

All staff supporting the learning, wellbeing and safety needs of all our children so that they **belong**, **achieve** and **thrive**

It is guided by four core principles:

- Inclusion is built from universal support up

  → Starting with what is ordinarily available to all children, and layering support as needed
- Inclusion is a culture led from the top

  → Leadership drives inclusive values and practices across settings
- Inclusion is community collaboration

  → Schools, families, and agencies work together to support every child
- Inclusion is measurable

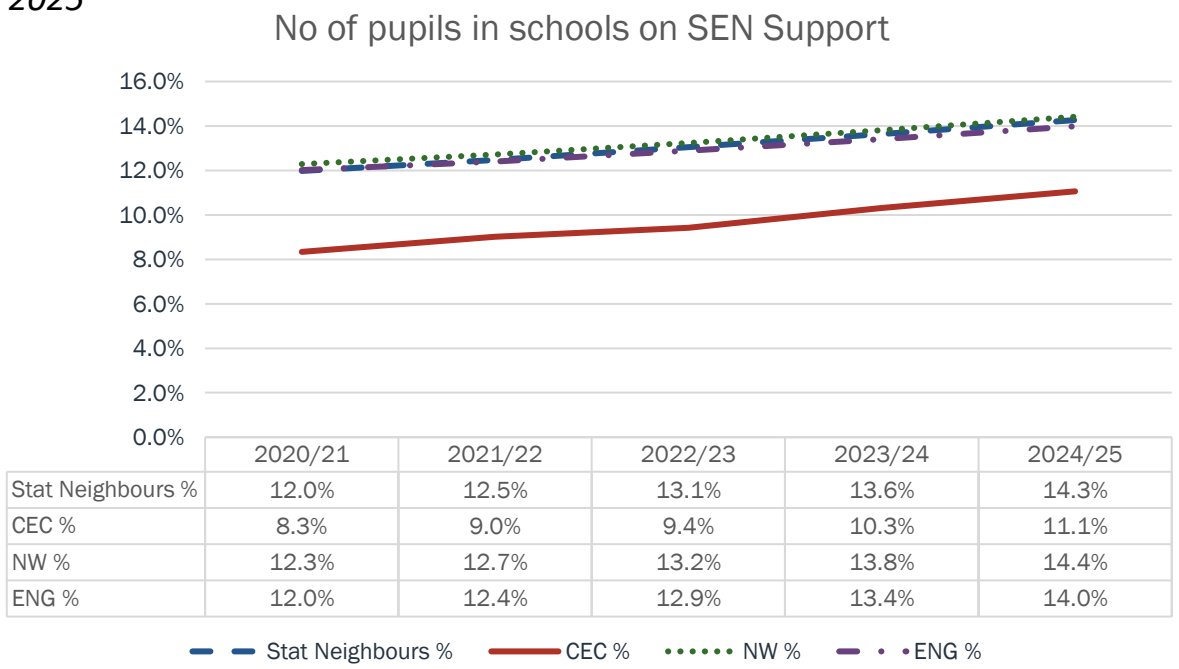
  → Progress is tracked using clear indicators, targets, and outcomes

UNCLASSIFIED

Cheshire East Pupil Statistics – SEN Support

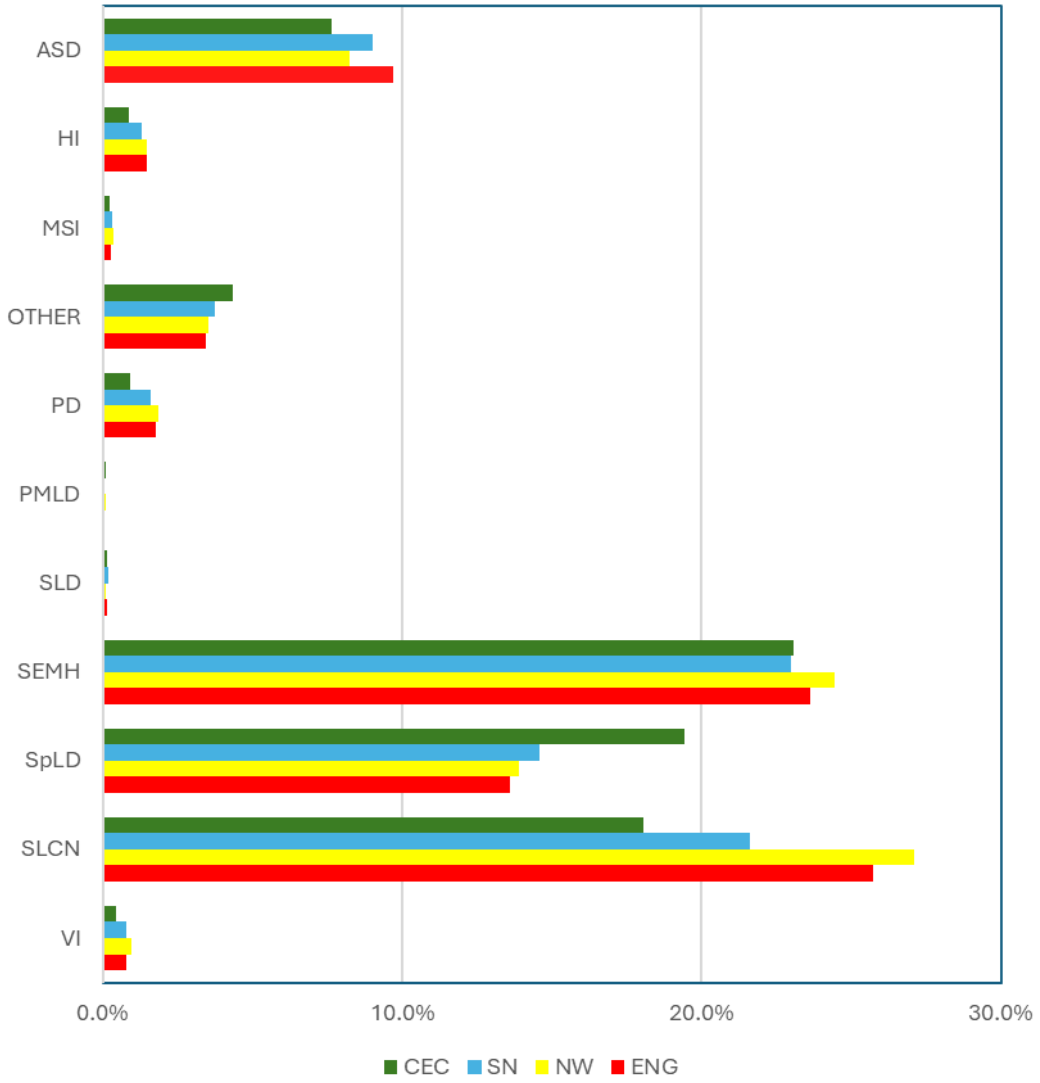
*Data as at January 2025

% of pupils in CE schools on SEN Support



	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Stat Neighbours %	12.0%	12.5%	13.1%	13.6%	14.3%
CEC %	8.3%	9.0%	9.4%	10.3%	11.1%
NW %	12.3%	12.7%	13.2%	13.8%	14.4%
ENG %	12.0%	12.4%	12.9%	13.4%	14.0%

% SEN Support pupils by Primary Area of Need 24/25



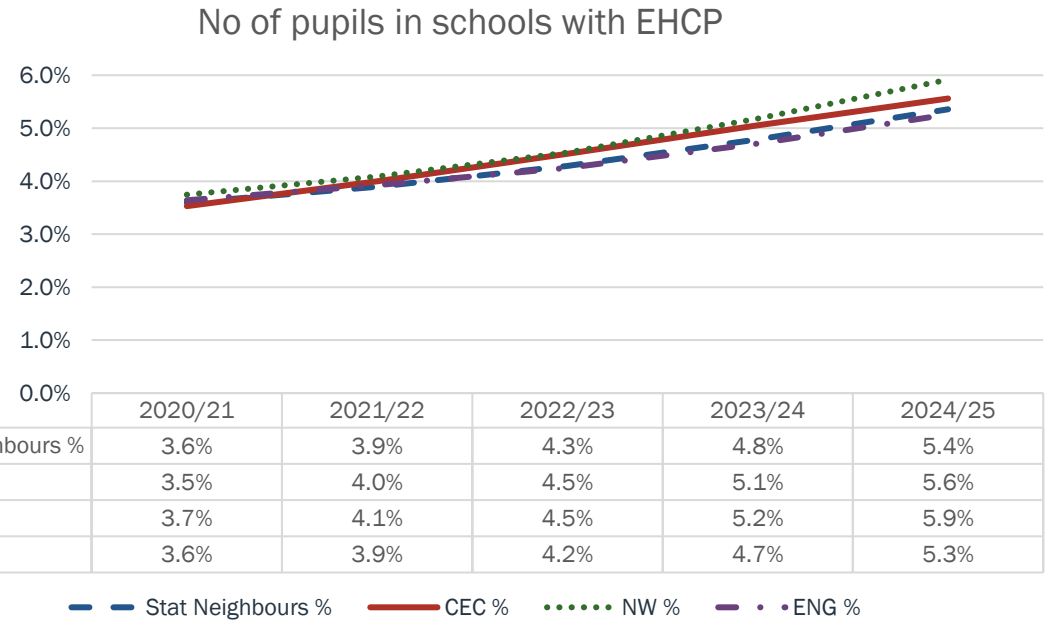
- Between January 2024 – January 2025, children and young people within Cheshire East schools who are **subject to SEN support increased from 10.3% to 11.1%**.
- Increasing inclusion at SEN support for children and young people continues to remain a priority for us. Whilst we have seen this increase, we remain below the national and regional averages and below our statistical neighbours

UNCLASSIFIED

Cheshire East Pupil Statistics - EHCP

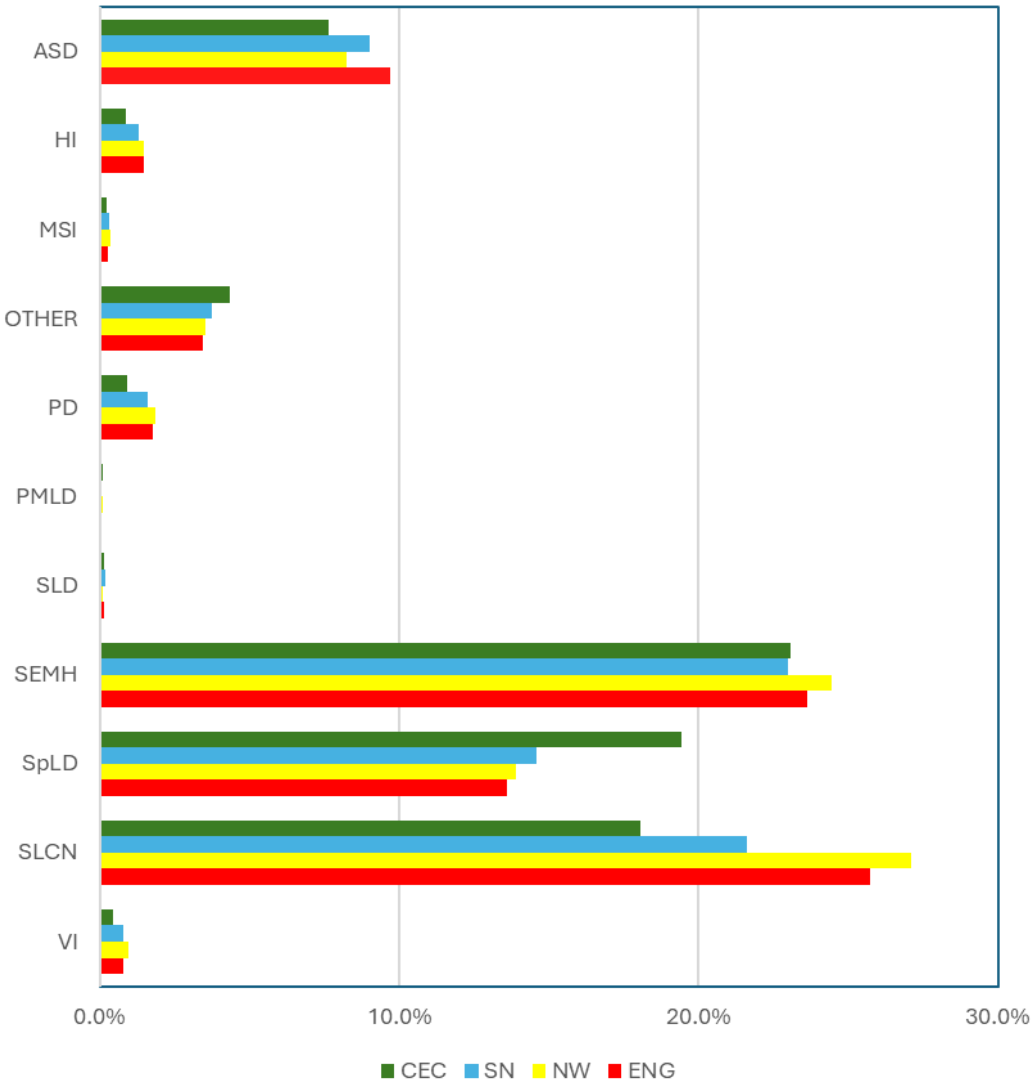
**Data as at January 2025*

% of pupils in CE schools with EHCP



	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Stat Neighbours %	3.6%	3.9%	4.3%	4.8%	5.4%
CEC %	3.5%	4.0%	4.5%	5.1%	5.6%
NW %	3.7%	4.1%	4.5%	5.2%	5.9%
ENG %	3.6%	3.9%	4.2%	4.7%	5.3%

% EHCP pupils by Primary Area of Need 24/25



- The main needs of our children with EHCPs is **Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH)**.
- Our data around speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is lower than our comparator areas but SpLD is higher.
- We have a **lower rate of autistic children to our statistical neighbours** and to **national and regional**.

UNCLASSIFIED

Inclusion Support Offer

Including Inclusive Mainstream Practice and Experts at Hand Structure

Business support and data role

Strategic Lead for Inclusive Mainstream Practice

Business support and data role

North 1	North 2	South 1	South 2
Inclusion Support Advisory Teacher (1 FT)	Inclusion Support Advisory Teacher (1 FT)	Inclusion Support Advisory Teacher (1 FT)	Inclusion Support Advisory Teacher (1 FT)
Inclusion Support Advisory Teacher (1 FT)	Inclusion Support Advisory Teacher (1 FT)	Inclusion Support Advisory Teacher (1 FT)	Inclusion Support Advisory Teacher (1 FT)
Specialist Teacher (CEAT)	Specialist Teacher (CEAT)	Specialist Teacher (CEAT)	Specialist Teacher (CEAT)
Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist
Educational Psychologist Trainee	Educational Psychologist Trainee	Educational Psychologist Trainee	Educational Psychologist Trainee
Sensory Inclusion Service: North 1 and North 2		Sensory Inclusion Service: South 1 and South 2	
Special School Outreach	Special School Outreach	Special School Outreach	Special School Outreach
Parent Carer	Parent Carer	Parent Carer	Parent Carer

Just Drop In
Mental Health Support Team

Visyon
Mental Health Support Team

Inclusive Mainstream Practice

Experts at Hand structure

Strategic Lead for Inclusive Mainstream Practice

North 1	North 2	South 1	South 2
Speech and language therapy services	Speech and language therapy services	Speech and language therapy services	Speech and language therapy services
SPOTTS and OT service	SPOTTS and OT service	SPOTTS and OT service	Functional OT service
0–19 health service: North 1 and North 2		0–19 health service: South 1 and South 2	

Inclusion Strategy for Cheshire East 2025 – 2028

1.Establish a benchmark for inclusion

TOGETHER we will:

- Define shared principles for collective action
- Outline good practice and set clear expectations for children, young people, and families
- Promote data sharing to drive improvement and accountability
- Clarify roles and responsibilities in delivering an inclusive education system

2. Embed a graduated approach to inclusion

TOGETHER we will:

- Align inclusion priorities with strong multi-agency governance of Cheshire East's graduated approach
- Champion early identification and response through the graduated approach
- Embed education inclusion as a core principle across schools, partners, and parent forums
- Provide consistent, equitable support to help schools use the graduated approach to improve outcomes
- Develop digital platforms to enhance collaboration and prioritise early intervention and inclusion

3. Strengthen pathways to education for priority groups

TOGETHER we will:

- Create clear plans for a graduated approach to improve outcomes for priority groups in Cheshire East
- Map available mental health services and resources for children, young people, and settings
- Embed non-attendance resources and training to support emotional barriers to school attendance
- Define good practice, clarify roles and responsibilities, and identify required support and training for these groups

Inclusion in Cheshire East settings means:

All staff supporting the learning, wellbeing and safety needs of all our children so that they **belong**, **achieve** and **thrive**

Principals of inclusion

- **Inclusion is built from universal support up**
  → Starting with what is ordinarily available to all children, and layering support as needed.
- **Inclusion is a culture led from the top**
  → Leadership drives inclusive values and practices across settings.
- **Inclusion is community collaboration**
  → Schools, families, and agencies work together to support every child.
- **Inclusion is measurable**
  → Progress is tracked using clear indicators, targets, and outcomes.

4. Foster effective collaboration across agencies

TOGETHER we will:

- Support stakeholders in developing a shared understanding of local inclusion issues, agreeing priorities, and communicating a joint action plan
- Ensure schools and settings are well-supported by key agencies to deliver inclusive education
- Enable access to timely, appropriate support through Cheshire East's graduated approach for those struggling in mainstream education
- Provide timely access to additional professional support, including in-school services
- Promote collaboration across settings to ensure smooth transitions for all learners

5. Provide professional development aligned with local priorities

TOGETHER we will:

- Ensure all educators have access to inclusion-focused training and professional development
- Provide guidance and support for schools adopting whole-school inclusion approaches
- Celebrate and promote successful initiatives (e.g. RADY, Autism for Schools, PINS, MHST) with equitable or targeted access
- Recognise and celebrate inclusive settings and grow communities of practice

6. Ensure a high-quality continuum of provision

TOGETHER we will:

- Establish a consistent early intervention offer, including outreach, for children struggling to access mainstream education
- Extend early intervention support to school leaders developing inclusive whole-school approaches
- Expand specialist and alternative provision to increase support and capacity for children