

# ISA Specialist Provision Report

April 2026

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This report shows how independent provision helps to meet SEND needs in England. ISA specialist schools are an integral part of the SEND system; a system supporting pillar.**

**The report shows that when provision is matched to need, outcomes follow - stability, safety and specialist teaching are the foundations of progress.**

The Independent Schools Association (ISA) represents the Heads of 802 of the UK's independent schools, of which 205 are specialist provision or SEND schools. These schools educate a diverse and growing population of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This report provides an overarching picture of what specialist provision across ISA schools looks like, drawing on quantitative data and qualitative insights from lived experience.

ISA specialist provision is highly diverse, encompassing large regional anchor schools, mid-sized providers and small relational settings. Many smaller, independently owned schools, often run by an individual, a family, a charitable trust or a small partnership, operate with high staffing ratios, intensive relational practice and limited operating margins, frequently providing crisis stabilisation and early-intervention capacity in areas where alternatives are scarce. This diversity is not incidental: it is critical to the resilience of the wider SEND system. Reform must therefore account for the structural economics of low roll, high-intensity provision. Funding compression or rigid banding models that fail to recognise these realities risk unintended consequences, including diminished local capacity and increased reliance on more intensive placements.

At a time of rising demand and increasing complexity of need, ISA schools provide capacity and continuity at precisely the points where local systems are most constrained. A clear pattern is emerging that ISA schools, alongside others in the independent sector, are increasingly meeting the needs of pupils with complex, overlapping SEND profiles, particularly autism, social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH), and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). These needs are rising nationally, and independent specialist provision is absorbing a significant share of the most complex cases. Across mainstream and specialist ISA settings, schools provide tailored, high-quality support for pupils whose needs are often not met elsewhere.

ISA schools play a critical role in supporting the state to meet escalating SEND and SEMH demand. Independent schools collectively support approximately 132,000 pupils receiving SEND support, reflecting a 35% rise in SEND needs within independent settings since 2019. Of these, 12,926 pupils are educated within ISA specialist provision. Many hold Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs),

and many arrive following periods of disengagement, unmet need or placement breakdown. ISA specialist provision schools typically have the expertise, staffing and therapeutic capacity required to support pupils with complex needs, including trauma, communication needs, SEMH and neurodiversity. This demonstrates their importance within the national SEND landscape and the scale of their contribution to maintaining system capacity.

ISA understands the Government's ambition to develop more clearly defined Specialist Provision Packages to ensure greater national consistency and transparency. ISA is well placed to contribute constructively through co-design, offering practical delivery insight to help shape coherent national frameworks. However, it remains essential that any nationally described provision levels accurately reflect the staffing intensity, therapeutic integration and safeguarding demands associated with high-complexity cohorts. Standardisation, while valuable, must avoid narrowing the breadth of need: provision for pupils with overlapping autism, SEMH, SLCN and executive functioning profiles cannot be captured through headline descriptors alone. ISA is committed to ensuring that reforms remain realistic, sustainable and anchored in the stability and continuity pupils require to thrive.

Independent specialist provision extends far beyond a single model.

- [More House School](#) demonstrates how a large, research led specialist school can deliver academically outstanding outcomes for over 500 pupils with complex SEND while providing system-wide support to more than 275 mainstream schools nationally. Its LAMP based teaching model (enabling all children, including those with neurodivergence or diagnosed SEND, to access a highly aspirational mainstream curriculum, through whole-class teaching), low fees relative to impact, and integrated therapeutic approach illustrate the scale and value of independent specialist provision.
- [Connect at Heathfield Knoll School](#) illustrates a different form of innovation: a small alternative provision embedded within a mainstream school, providing a blended, sensory-aware, trauma-informed environment for pupils who cannot cope in larger settings.
- [Your Ideas Independent Specialist School](#), that caters for eight pupils, shows the unique strengths of micro settings for children experiencing school-based trauma and extreme anxiety. Its relational, developmentally sequenced curriculum and rapid success in re-engaging pupils highlights the role of small specialist schools in preventing long-term disengagement.

Across ISA SEND schools, three quarters support autistic learners, and almost the same proportion work with pupils whose needs centre on SEMH. Most schools describe more than one primary need

within their pupil cohort, reflecting the reality that children rarely fit neatly into a single category. Many pupils arrive after extended periods out of education, following unsuccessful placements in mainstream settings that could not meet their sensory, emotional or cognitive needs. Schools including Grow Independent School, The Lady Byron School, The Tower School and The Southover Partnership demonstrate how specialist environments can stabilise attendance, rebuild confidence and support sustained academic and personal progress.

ISA specialist provision is predominantly secondary, with 73% of pupils aged 12 or over. This aligns with national trends showing rising EHCP demand in secondary settings and reflects the amplification of unmet need during adolescence. Despite the complexity of profiles supported, outcomes across ISA specialist schools demonstrate what becomes possible when provision is matched to need. Schools such as Moon Hall School Reigate and Longdon Park School illustrate how specialist teaching, therapeutic integration and preparation for adulthood lead to consistently positive destinations.

Financially, provision across ISA specialist schools spans a broad range, reflecting diversity of need, staffing ratios and therapeutic intensity. There is no clear relationship between published fees and EHCP volume; cost is primarily linked to need. Case studies show that independent specialist schools combine specialist teaching, therapy and relational practice in integrated models that avoid unnecessary expenditure. ISA schools are therefore not stepping in only when mainstream options fail; they are offering proactive, high quality, personalised pathways that deliver stability, progress and longterm outcomes.

Taken together, the evidence shows that ISA specialist provision is an integral part of the SEND system. Outcomes are not incidental; they are the product of sustained, needs led investment in environments purpose-built for complexity. ISA schools are committed to working with Government and partners to ensure that reform strengthens, rather than destabilises, the specialist capacity on which thousands of children and families rely.

## INTRODUCTION

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is a broad umbrella, encompassing a wide range of developmental, learning, communication, and emotional needs. For families, the journey towards finding the right provision can be long, complex and emotionally charged. For schools, meeting pupils' needs requires skill, commitment and flexibility. ISA member schools, both specialist and mainstream, have become increasingly important partners within the national SEND system, supporting children who require tailored environments, targeted intervention, and a more relational, holistic approach than many mainstream schools can offer.

An Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is a statutory document for children whose special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) require provision beyond what a school can normally deliver, yet some pupils with SEND do not have one because schools, including those in the Independent Schools Association (ISA), are able to meet a wide range of needs through their own high-quality SEN Support. ISA member schools include both mainstream and specialist settings and are recognised for providing individualised, well-resourced support for pupils with autism, SEMH and speech, language and communication needs, often accommodating children whose needs were not adequately met in previous placements. Their ability to adapt teaching, provide therapeutic programmes and implement targeted interventions means that pupils can often have their needs identified and supported promptly. While an EHCP remains essential, and is often the only route for securing an appropriate placement through the local authority, this flexible approach can help ensure pupils receive effective support while the statutory process is underway or in addition to it. A particular advantage of the independent sector is that schools often have lower overall headcount, smaller classes, fewer behavioral challenges, and often more outside space than mainstream state schools. For some students with complex, overlapping profiles of need, who nevertheless lack an EHCP, the environment and approach of independent schools is, in itself, sufficient to meet the needs within the school's standard fees. Of course, replicating these environmental and staffing factors in a mainstream setting would carry significant cost, where parents are privately funding independent education without the benefit of an EHCP, taxpayers are currently not being asked to bear.

Across the ISA network, SEND provision reflects the complexity of the pupils themselves. The majority of schools support children with autism, SEMH needs, and communication differences, often in combination. Many pupils also present with ADHD, moderate learning difficulties, or specific learning

differences such as dyslexia or dyspraxia. These overlapping profiles mean that a high degree of personalisation is not optional, it is essential.

The case studies provide vivid illustrations of this. At [\*Arnold Lodge School\*](#), a young person with autism and severe mental health needs arrived after prolonged periods of non-attendance and significant anxiety. Through enhanced transition, careful planning, and strong relationships, they re-engaged with learning, completed A Levels with outstanding results, and progressed to a Russell Group university. A pathway made possible by the school's flexible, emotionally attuned approach.

In other settings, the needs are different but equally complex. At [\*The Hive\*](#) (Salterford House School), very young children with sensory and communication needs, including non-verbal pupils and children masking distress in mainstream classrooms, have made rapid progress in language, social interaction and emotional regulation after moving into a calm, specialist primary environment. Their progress highlights a recurring theme: when the environment fits the child, learning can begin.

The landscape data further underscores the significance of this work. ISA schools SEND provision is predominantly secondary-focused, 73% of pupils are aged 12+, with only 2% in early years. This reflects both trends in need and gaps in mainstream provision: exclusions, school-based anxiety, sensory overwhelm and unmet needs often escalate during adolescence, and specialist independent schools are increasingly supporting pupils who arrive with fractured educational histories.

Yet despite these challenges, ISA schools demonstrate strong academic and personal outcomes. Whether it is dyslexic learners outperforming national averages ([\*Moon Hall School\*](#)) or young people recovering from educational trauma and re-engaging learning ([\*Grow Independent School\*](#)).

This report aims to bring together the quantitative patterns and the human stories. It provides a detailed picture of who ISA specialist provision schools serve, what needs are most common, how provision is structured, what outcomes are achieved, and how independent schools work with local authorities and families to meet demand. The analysis is paired with real-world examples to ensure the data is grounded in the lived experiences of children, families and staff.

Before presenting the data, it is important to recognise the strategic role independent specialist provision plays within the national SEND system. The following section outlines why independent schools are an essential part of the solution to current capacity and complexity challenges.

## SECTION 1.5: THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS WITHIN THE SEND SYSTEM

Independent schools play a central and often decisive role in sustaining the national SEND system at a time of unprecedented demand, rising complexity of need and significant pressure on maintained provision. Their contribution is not peripheral; it is structural. Independent

specialist and mainstream schools provide capacity, expertise and responsiveness that directly support local authorities in meeting statutory duties, particularly for pupils whose needs cannot be met within available state-sector options. ISA supports the ambition to

strengthen inclusive practice within mainstream settings, recognising the importance of specialist expertise in enriching classroom capability across the system. At the same time, greater inclusion does not negate the continued need for dedicated specialist environments for children and young people whose profiles require intensive therapeutic, relational and multi-disciplinary support. Reform must therefore advance both priorities in parallel: building the capability of mainstream provision while safeguarding high-quality specialist capacity for those whose needs extend beyond what universal approaches can sustainably deliver.

[More House School](#) in Surrey demonstrates the scale, depth and system value that independent specialist provision can offer within the SEND landscape. As the largest SEND-specialist school in the United Kingdom, with over 500 pupils and 411 EHCPs, More House delivers academic outcomes above national averages at both GCSE and A Level while maintaining fees broadly equivalent to state-maintained special schools. Its model combines a mainstream academic curriculum with highly trained teachers who understand the barriers experienced by neurodivergent learners and who embed evidence-based strategies throughout everyday classroom practice.

Crucially, More House contributes far beyond its own pupil cohort. The school currently supports more than 275 mainstream schools across the UK, including primaries, secondaries, MATs and post-16 providers, helping them embed inclusive, LAMP-informed teaching and improve outcomes for children with complex communication, attention, memory and processing needs. This outreach work directly aligns with national ambitions for more inclusive mainstream provision and offers a proven, cost-effective alternative to the creation of isolated “hubs” or withdrawal-based units.

The More House educational model is also underpinned by research from the [University of Cambridge's Centre for Attention, Learning and Memory \(CALM\)](#), which demonstrates that teaching approaches addressing Language, Attention, Memory and Processing (LEAP) benefit all learners, regardless of diagnosis. While this approach is particularly relevant to academic need and does not address wider needs, it helpfully shows that selected aspects of specialist expertise can be scaled, shared, and embedded across the wider system, improving inclusion without increasing cost, in line with the aims of the SEND reform.

Across England, maintained SEND provision has been stretched by rising levels of neuro-developmental conditions, social, emotional and mental health needs, and increasing numbers of children whose profiles include multiple overlapping challenges. Independent schools have responded to this shift by expanding specialist pathways, developing therapeutic environments and offering provision tailored to emerging and increasingly complex needs. This growth reflects a system-wide pressure rather than market expansion for its own sake: as demand rises, independent schools have been able to innovate, reconfigure and increase capacity more rapidly than the state sector, whose flexibility is often

limited by infrastructure, staffing pipelines and capital constraints. The continued increase in independent specialist placements therefore mirrors the broader escalation in complexity and the capacity gaps emerging across the system. Rising adolescent anxiety, greater identification of neurodevelopmental needs, workforce shortages and delays in early intervention have all intensified the pressures experienced by families and local services. Independent specialist providers have expanded largely in response to these systemic factors, not in isolation from them. Reform that focuses solely on placement cost, without addressing the structural drivers of demand, risks shifting pressure rather than resolving it. Sustainable reform will require funding frameworks that are aligned with the realities of complexity, prevention and early stabilisation, ensuring that provision remains both responsive and resilient.

Connect at Heathfield Knoll School is a highly effective example of how independent schools can create innovative, flexible pathways for pupils falling between mainstream and specialist criteria. Designed for up to 24 learners with autism, anxiety, sensory processing differences and EBSA, Connect offers low-arousal classrooms, sensory-integration spaces and integrated social development opportunities. As part of a wider mainstream school, it provides both a safe alternative environment and flexible inclusion opportunities. This hybrid model demonstrates how independent schools can expand capacity, prevent exclusion and ensure pupils with complex needs remain engaged in their learning.

Crucially, independent schools act both as specialist providers and as safety nets. They support pupils who have experienced extended periods out of education, those whose needs have escalated due to unmet early support, and those requiring environments with higher staffing ratios, therapeutic integration or specialist expertise. In doing so, independent schools prevent crisis escalation, reducing the likelihood of repeated placement breakdowns, costly emergency interventions, and the long-term social and economic impacts associated with children falling out of the education system entirely.

Independent schools also play a pivotal role in maintaining locality and choice within SEND provision. In several regions, independent specialist settings ensure that children can access appropriate provision closer to home, reducing travel time, improving attendance, and enabling stronger partnerships with families. In areas with high levels of complex need, independent schools absorb significant volumes of EHCP funded pupils, relieving pressure on oversubscribed maintained special schools and enabling local authorities to meet statutory timelines and placement obligations.

In addition, independent schools contribute meaningfully to continuity across phases, particularly for adolescents and young people preparing for adulthood. Their ability to offer coherent 7–16 or 7–19 pathways, often with integrated therapeutic teams, bespoke curricula and specialist transition support, helps sustain progress at the stages where national capacity is most constrained. This continuity

particularly benefits pupils with autism, SEMH, language and communication needs, and those requiring flexible post 16 routes that combine academic, vocational and independence-focused learning.

Independent schools benefit from significant flexibility in how they design and deliver their curriculum, enabling them to respond directly to the diverse, and often complex, needs of their learners. This flexibility allows schools to integrate essential life-skills development, such as communication, independence, social interaction, emotional regulation and practical problem-solving into the fabric of everyday learning.

[Centre Academy London](#) supports pupils with a 6 point careers plan. Careers are woven into schemes of work that include money education, life-skills, regular guest speakers, external advice, and the school guarantees every pupil will leave having completed work experience. 100% of 2025

leavers progressed to higher education or into a job.

Rather than treating these skills as supplementary, many independent specialist provision schools embed them as core curriculum components, tailoring content, pace and pedagogy to each learner. This adaptability balances academic progress with the development of the competencies required for successful adulthood and life beyond education.

Taken together, these factors demonstrate that independent schools are a vital component of the national SEND ecosystem. Their provision is not a parallel system but an essential extension of the state's capacity, ensuring that children and young people even with the highest and most complex needs can access appropriate, legally compliant education. The data and case studies in the remainder of this report evidence this contribution in detail, illustrating how independent providers support stability, improve outcomes, and help prevent the spiralling costs that arise when needs go unmet.

## SECTION 2: DEMOGRAPHICS & PROVISION ANALYSIS

### 2.1 OVERVIEW: WHO ISA SCHOOLS SERVE

ISA specialist provision schools in England and Wales, support a broad and diverse range of learners, but the demographic picture is remarkably consistent: most provision is aimed at children and young people in Key Stage 3 and above, often because earlier needs were not identified or met in time. The data confirms this trend, but the case studies show the human reality behind it.

#### ACROSS ALL ISA SPECIALIST PROVISION SETTINGS:

73% OF PUPILS ARE AGED 12+, MAKING SECONDARY THE DOMINANT PHASE.

PRIMARY-AGED CHILDREN (5-11) MAKE UP ABOUT A QUARTER OF PUPILS, AND

EARLY YEARS PROVISION (0-4) IS RARE, WITH ONLY A HANDFUL OF SCHOOLS OFFERING IT.

This distribution mirrors the journeys of many children: they often cope in early primary, begin to struggle as demands increase, and disengage as they reach adolescence when sensory, communication or emotional challenges intensify.

This is clearly reflected in the stories across member schools. For example, at *Grow Independent School*, pupils often arrive after long periods of non-attendance, sometimes spanning more than a year, because their needs could not be met in secondary environments where pupils are expected to fit into tightly structured behavioural and academic norms. Similarly, *Lady Byron School* describes students who had “disengaged completely from mainstream” before joining yet went on to achieve a 100% positive destination rate with all pupils progressing into

college or work placements.

*Your Ideas Independent Specialist School* supports pupils whose needs arise from developmental trauma, anxiety and school-based avoidance. Many arrive after long periods of non-attendance or repeated placement breakdowns. As a very small setting with only eight pupils, it provides a relational, therapeutic environment where children can re-establish trust, rebuild confidence and access a developmental rather than chronological curriculum. Its work illustrates how some ISA specialist schools support pupils who are significantly below age-related expectations due to disrupted learning and emotional trauma.

### 2.2 SCHOOL SIZE AND STRUCTURE

ISA specialist provision settings tend to be small and relational, with a median roll of just 44 pupils. While some larger schools can accommodate up to 500 learners, the typical ISA specialist provision school operates with:

- small classes
- close adult-pupil relationships
- a stable, predictable environment

These features are not simply incidental; they are the reason many children succeed after struggling elsewhere.

*Your Ideas Independent Specialist School* demonstrates the distinctive strengths of very small-scale specialist provision. The school provides an intensely relational, trauma-informed environment for children with autism, ADHD, school-based anxiety and developmental trauma. Pupils typically arrive following failed placements, persistent nonattendance or significant emotional distress, and many are not working at age-related expectations. The school's developmental, rather than chronological, curriculum allows each child's programme to be built around their emotional

stage, interests and EHCP priorities.

Because of its size, staff can prioritise psychological safety, trust, and individualised mentoring, helping pupils stabilise, rebuild confidence and re-engage with learning at a pace appropriate to their needs. Despite opening only in April 2024, Your Ideas was judged 'Good' in all areas at its first Ofsted inspection in March 2025, reflecting the effectiveness of a small, relational setting for learners whose needs cannot be met in larger or less personalised environments.

*Arnold Lodge School* emphasises that small classes and "high levels of pastoral support" were central to helping a pupil with autism and complex mental health needs reintegrate into school life. Likewise, *The Tower School's* success with pupils who previously experienced educational trauma is attributed to carefully structured environments, consistent staffing, and sensory friendly rooms.

Boarding provision, by contrast, is extremely limited, only a few ISA specialist provision schools offer any form of residential arrangement. Where it exists, it tends to support young people requiring stability, calm routines, and therapeutic continuity rather than traditional extended-day models.

## 2.3 AGE DISTRIBUTION AND PATHWAYS

### Early Years (0–4)

A handful of ISA specialist provision schools offer early years places and typically on a very small scale. These settings often cater for children whose needs are evident very early, particularly communication and sensory processing differences.

Though not formally categorised as early years, there are parallels with the work of *The Hive* at Salterford House School, where young autistic pupils, including nonverbal children and those with gestalt language profiles (GLP), began making rapid progress once transitioned into a low arousal, specialist setting.

### Primary (5–11)

Primary aged pupils account for 25% of ISA SEND enrolments. Needs at this stage often relate to:

- sensory overwhelm
- early anxiety
- language and communication
- undiagnosed autism
- dyslexia and other specific learning differences

In these early years, schools regularly report pupils who "mask" distress in larger classes. The Hive's case study includes six and seven year olds who arrived after experiencing "multiple years in Reception" or isolation within mainstream, only to thrive in a smaller, specialist setting where their communication could be understood and valued.

### Secondary & Post-16 (12–19)

The secondary years dominate ISA SEND school provision. This reflects national trends, but the case studies reveal

deeper reasons: by adolescence, unmet needs can trigger crisis points. Persistent anxiety, behaviour linked to emotional dysregulation, or spiralling non-attendance often lead families and local authorities to seek specialist alternatives.

ISA secondary SEND schools commonly provide:

- structured, low stimulus classrooms
- predictable routines
- regulated transitions between lessons
- therapeutic support integrated into the school day

### Personal, vocational and academic pathways

Schools like *Southover Partnership*, *Grow*, *The Tower School* and *Lady Byron* illustrate the impact of this approach. Their pupils often arrive with:

- long gaps in learning
- histories of exclusion or school refusal
- complex autism + SEMH profiles
- trauma and attachment difficulties

Yet with the right environment, these same pupils progress to:

- GCSEs
- BTECs and vocational qualifications
- supported college placements
- apprenticeships
- A Levels
- higher education

For example, a student at *The Southover Partnership* (Finchley) who joined with multiple failed placements and severe dysregulation went on to complete vocational qualifications, develop healthy peer relationships, and progress to a supported college course with increasing independence.

In terms of broad categories of need, national data from the past two years shows that pupils with SEND in the maintained sector present with categories of needs similar to those seen in specialist independent schools, including complex autism, SEMH, trauma, and significant gaps in learning. However, the fact that students with EHCPs have been placed in the independent sector demonstrate that local maintained schools have not been able to meet need more cost-effectively, whether due to individual complexity of need or lack of capacity.

According to the Department for Education's Special Educational Needs in England 2024/25 release, there are now 482,640 pupils with EHC plans in state-funded and independent schools, an 11.1% rise from 2024 ([DfE, 2025](#)).

National data for SEND students shows that, at Key Stage 4, attainment gaps remain substantial: pupils receiving SEN support are over 22 months behind peers without SEND, although this has narrowed over the past decade ([Educational Policy Institute, Annual SEND Report 2024](#)). Exclusions also differ sharply: analysis shows that SEND learners face significantly higher suspension and

exclusion rates, with rises against 2023/2024 ([FFT Education Datalab, 2024](#)). This contrasts with outcomes from the independent sector, as per the examples in this report. Taken together, the data demonstrates that, while state schools and independent schools serve pupils with similar broad categories of need, the state sector as a whole has been unable to enable the stronger academic and vocational outcomes for complex pupils which have been seen in settings such as The Southover Partnership, Grow Independent School, The Tower School, and Lady Byron School. State schools quite simply often lack the capacity to offer the consistent structure, therapeutic support, and tailored pathways that specialist independent SEND schools routinely provide, while also being hampered by high student numbers and environmental factors which are difficult for them to address.

### Post-19 (19–25)

Only a small number of ISA schools extend into post-19 provision (3%), but where they do, it is highly targeted.

The data shows that post-19 routes are especially common in:

- SLCN (Speech, Language & Communication Needs)
- MLD (Moderate Learning Difficulties)
- Autism and ADHD

These are precisely the learners who benefit most from extended preparation for adulthood. *Longdon Park's* Key Stage 5 and vocational programmes demonstrate how a carefully sequenced curriculum, including carpentry, hospitality, and creative media, supports independence, confidence and consistent onward progression.

## 2.4 SEND TYPES CATERED FOR

The pupils identified with SEND are an extremely diverse group; there is no single profile, nor a uniform set of needs. Their requirements span a wide spectrum, ranging from cognitive and learning differences to social, emotional, communication, sensory or physical needs, and the support they require varies just as widely. Different pupils need very different types of provision, often highly tailored to their individual strengths, challenges and developmental pathways.

## THE PUPILS IDENTIFIED WITH SEND ARE AN EXTREMELY DIVERSE GROUP; THERE IS NO SINGLE PROFILE, NOR A UNIFORM SET OF NEEDS

SEND profiles in ISA specialist provision schools reflect the complexity of modern need:

- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** is the most common identified need, present in 76.6% of ISA specialist provision schools.

- **Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)** needs appear almost as frequently, affecting 74.1% of ISA specialist provision schools.
- **Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)** occur in around a quarter of ISA specialist provision schools and are often closely linked with autism.
- **Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)**, including dyslexia, dyspraxia and Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), feature in approximately one in five ISA specialist provision schools.
- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)** and broader general learning difficulties follow closely behind in prevalence.

However, the most telling insight is not the frequency but the overlap: schools list an average of 2–3 needs per pupil cohort, with some listing up to seven.

This mirrors what schools describe on the ground:

- *Moon Hall* supports pupils with dyslexia who may also have anxiety, processing difficulties or sensory needs.
- Pupils at *The Tower School* all have a primary diagnosis of Autism with additional needs such as anxiety and social communication challenges.
- *The Unicorn School* supports pupils with communication difficulties, motor needs, and overlapping learning barriers.

## THE EVERYDAY REALITY IS THAT NO SINGLE CATEGORY CAPTURES A CHILD'S FULL PROFILE, NEEDS OVERLAP, INTERACT, AND SHIFT OVER TIME.

### 2.5 WHY OVERLAP IS SO COMMON

The combination of Autism + SEMH, the most common pairing in ISA specialist provision schools, is a recurring theme in the case studies.

Pupils often experience:

- overwhelming sensory environments
- communication barriers
- high anxiety
- difficulty navigating social expectations
- masking and burnout
- deteriorating mental health
- reduced attendance or withdrawal from education

These combined pressures can lead to the kinds of crises described in multiple narratives:

- A young person at Arnold Lodge who had withdrawn entirely from mainstream due to severe mental health

challenges.

- Students at Grow who could no longer enter their mainstream school buildings due to trauma and school-based anxiety.
- Pupils at Lady Byron who had completely disengaged prior to joining, despite being academically able.
- Learners at The Southover Partnership (Kingsbury Manor) who required high structure and mentoring to rebuild trust and emotional regulation.

ISA schools succeed not because needs are simple, but because their structures allow them to work with complexity.

## 2.6 EHCP PROVISION AND DEMAND

ISA specialist provision schools collectively support more than 11,000 EHCPs. In practice, a typical ISA specialist provision school educates a cohort where almost all pupils have an EHCP, and in most settings this includes nearly the entire school population.

However, there is huge variation due to the variation of setting size:

- Some settings support only a handful of plans.
- A small number support over 200.
- The highest, More House School, has 411 EHCPs and is a large specialist literacy and communication-based school.

These high-capacity “anchor” schools play an important and integral system role: they absorb need across regions and provide stability for young people requiring specialist, multidisciplinary provision. Without this independent specialist capacity, the impact on the state sector would be significant: the [Solving the SEND Crisis](#) (Education Committee, 2025) report describes the maintained system as operating under “unsustainable pressure,” with widespread provision gaps and an inability to meet current

levels of need.

This aligns with the experiences of schools such as:

- **Moon Hall**, which supports a large cohort of pupils with SpLD and ASC through highly structured literacy-led provision.
- **Longdon Park**, offering extensive KS4 and KS5 academic, vocational and therapeutic pathways that meet a broad range of learner profiles.
- **The Southover Partnership**, which responds to exceptionally high levels of demand and complexity through flexible, community-embedded provision.

While these examples illustrate the diversity of specialist independent settings, they do not all sit in the same category. Across ISA specialist schools, 10% provide 119 or more EHCP placements each, demonstrating the scale of need absorbed by what we describe as High-Capacity Anchor Schools. These large settings act as regional stabilisers: they take on significant caseloads, maintain multidisciplinary in-house expertise, and prevent additional pressure falling onto already overstretched state-sector provision (as highlighted in the [Solving the SEND Crisis report and gov.uk](#)).

However, small ISA specialist schools also play a vital system role. They provide precision environments that meet specific needs, such as highly individualised therapeutic programmes, niche specialisms, or low arousal settings that are not replicable in larger schools. Their agility allows them to stabilise pupils in crisis and offer bespoke provision for learners whose profiles cannot be accommodated in mainstream or high-capacity settings. Indeed, even mainstream small ISA schools have a vital role to play in providing students with a quieter environment and more personalised approach, regularly meeting needs within their standing offer in a way which prevents escalation to more intensive placements.

## SECTION 3: AGE-SEND CROSS ANALYSIS

### How needs evolve across phases, and how ISA schools respond in practice

#### 3.1 OVERVIEW: NEEDS EVOLVE WITH AGE

The data shows that most SEND categories continue well beyond Key Stage 4, extending into FE (16–19) and often persisting into early adulthood. This is entirely expected: needs linked to autism, ADHD, language and communication, and SEMH do not resolve at the end of Year 11, if anything, they often intensify as academic expectations increase, independence becomes essential, and social and emotional demands become more complex to navigate. ISA schools therefore play a crucial role in supporting pupils through this highly sensitive

period of transition.

Evidence from the maintained sector reinforces this picture. The [Solving the SEND Crisis](#) report describes the system as operating under “unsustainable pressure”, with gaps in provision and capacity that already limit timely support for young people moving into post-16 pathways. It notes that rising complexity, stretched services, and fragmented support arrangements all contribute to fragile transitions into adulthood, especially for those with autism, SEMH or multi-layered needs.

This aligns with what ISA case studies show in the real world: the shift from adolescence to adulthood is one of the most vulnerable points in a young person’s educational journey. Stability, continuity, and specialist input are crucial, yet this is precisely the stage at which

many pupils experience reassessment, funding uncertainty, or placement changes.

It is vital that funding and placement stability are not disrupted during this period. Cutting, reducing or delaying support for a pupil in the middle of this transition risks undoing years of progress, increasing crisis presentations, and pushing pressure back onto a maintained sector that is already struggling to meet existing need.

### 3.2 WHY POST-16 CONTINUITY MATTERS

For many pupils, reaching Year 11 is not a natural “end point”. Instead, it is a time when:

- anxiety spikes
- confidence can wobble
- routines change
- friendships shift
- exams create new pressures, and
- decisions about the future can feel overwhelming

This is precisely when specialist settings must hold pupils most carefully.

The case studies included in this report demonstrate this vividly.

- At Arnold Lodge School, a pupil with autism and severe mental health needs successfully re-entered education, completed A Levels and progressed to university, an outcome only possible because the school provided stability and relational safety during the delicate Years 12–13 window.
- Lady Byron School’s KS4 leavers, all autistic, all with high anxiety, achieved a 100% positive destination rate because transition planning began early, combined with therapeutic support and key-worker relationships that continued into post-16 preparation.
- Longdon Park School’s two-site model provides a coherent, sequenced pathway from KS2 to KS5, ensuring pupils with autism, SEMH and overlapping needs experience smooth transitions into vocational or academic routes. Their Longdon Parkway site operates like a small college, offering carpentry, hospitality, creative media and life-skills programmes. The school has achieved five consecutive years of 100% positive destinations, illustrating the critical role of structured post-16 continuity

This is exactly what the age SEND data describes: post-16 is not an optional extra, it is a critical phase of SEND provision. Destabilising funding would undermine outcomes and future prospects for the most vulnerable learners.

### 3.3 HOW NEEDS PRESENT AT DIFFERENT AGES

Each SEND category behaves differently across a child’s educational lifespan, shaping their needs in distinct ways at each stage. The data shows the broad patterns; the case

studies reveal what this looks like in lived reality.

### Autism (ASC/ASD)

88% of autism specialist settings include FE, reflecting the lifelong nature of autistic profiles.

Autistic pupils often:

- manage primary with coping strategies
- struggle in upper KS2 as demands grow
- reach crisis in lower secondary (sensory overload, pace of change)
- require therapeutic support in KS3–4
- and need high support transition pathways into adulthood-support transition pathways into adulthood

You see this in:

- Grow Independent School, supporting autistic learners experiencing severe school-based anxiety.
- The Southover Partnership, where autistic pupils require years of relational, therapeutic support to rebuild trust and achieve independence.

### SEMH (Social, Emotional & Mental Health)

SEMH needs frequently intensify in adolescence.

Data shows that 90% of SEMH specialist provision settings extend into FE, but fewer offer post-19, reflecting the complexity of sustaining therapeutic support beyond school.

Case studies highlight SEMH trajectories clearly:

- At Grow, pupils overcome trauma histories and rebuild social confidence through relational practice and outdoor learning.
- At Lady Byron, pupils arrive with years of non-attendance and high anxiety; by KS4 they are confident enough to progress to work placements and college.
- [Your Ideas Independent Specialist School](#) provides a clear example of how trauma-informed, relationship-led environments can support pupils whose needs have escalated due to chronic school anxiety, developmental trauma and repeated placement breakdowns. Many children join the school after long periods of school refusal, low attendance and disengagement, often arriving with very low self-esteem and gaps in learning. The school’s developmental, rather than chronological, approach enables pupils to rebuild emotional security before re-engaging with academic learning. Each child receives an individually designed curriculum shaped by their emotional development, interests and EHCP priorities. Safety, trust and relational consistency form the foundation of the model, with learning mentors and teachers working closely to help pupils feel calm, secure and ready to learn.
- At Kingsbury Manor, a pupil with early aggression and dysregulation matured into a mentor and Student Voice representative by his later years.

## Speech, Language & Communication Needs (SLCN)

SLCN specialist settings have the highest continuation rates into FE and Post-19. This reflects growing research: language challenges impact social transition, independence, emotional regulation and employment readiness.

Case studies echo this pattern:

- At *The Unicorn School*, A pupils communication needs required intensive support, including signing, 1:1 interventions and SaLT input. By adolescence, they became confident, communicative and socially engaged, but his progress required ongoing specialist input across multiple years.
- The Hive shows how early intervention for SLCN changes outcomes radically, some pupils vocalised or used AAC for the first time because the environment allowed communication to flourish.

## Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)

SpLD needs, such as dyslexia and dyspraxia, do not vanish at age 16.

Schools like *Moon Hall* demonstrate this:

- Older learners benefit from structured literacy teaching, assistive technology, and specialist assessment far beyond Key Stage 3.
- Their outcomes, outperforming national SEN averages and matching or exceeding national norms, show how sustained specialist support can transform trajectories.

## ADHD/ADD

ADHD specialist settings have one of the highest FE continuation rates (97.6%).

Schools often adapted exam arrangements (e.g., 40% extra time, individual rooms, rest breaks), essential for academic success.

ADHD profiles become more exposed with increased academic demand, making post-16 support crucial.

## Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)

MLD specialist settings show strong FE and post-19 continuation.

The data suggests that MLD is frequently accompanied by:

- working memory challenges
- slower processing speed
- social communication needs, or
- emotional vulnerabilities

This is reflected in the *Grow School* case study, where a Year 11 pupil with MLD, language difficulties and trauma needed:

- intensive 1:1 teaching

- functional skills pathways
- ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) courses
- vocational qualifications, and
- relational mentoring

Their progress, 100% attendance, Level 2 skills, new friendships, work experience and renewed confidence, demonstrates the value of extended specialist support.

## 3.4 THE IMPACT OF HIGH-EHCP SETTINGS

The EHCP outlier data shows a small number of ISA schools carrying exceptionally high EHCP loads (119–364+).

These schools tend to:

- span wide age ranges (often 3–19)
- support multiple complex needs in combination
- run integrated therapy teams
- provide specialist equipment or learning technology
- and offer robust post-16 transition programmes

In the case studies, these characteristics mirror schools like:

- *Moon Hall* (SpLD/ASC, integrated literacy model)
- *Longdon Park* (KS2–KS5, vocational routes, extensive off-site learning)

These “high-capacity hubs” are vital in regional planning, offering dedicated support designed to absorb learners with complex needs, allowing access to the specialist provision required, alongside other educational pathways.

## 3.5 WHY AGE-SEND ANALYSIS MATTERS FOR THE NATIONAL SEND CONVERSATION

The data reveals a truth that policymakers often miss:

- SEND is developmental, not episodic
- Needs are not tied to a school phase, they evolve with it

ISA case studies offer powerful real-world proof of the need for age-appropriate, targeted support within each phase of education. With the right support at the right time:

- Pupils who couldn't enter school buildings at 12 are completing GCSEs at 16
- Teenagers who experienced trauma at 14 are studying at university at 19

This age-SEND cross analysis highlights that:

- early identification supports stability later, but some needs simply cannot be identified until they emerge in secondary school.
- secondary and post-16 provision need to include emotionally informed environments and flexible, personalised pathways.
- transition support must be integrated, not bolted on

ISA schools are uniquely well placed to provide this continuity.

## SECTION 4: FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

### Understanding costs, value, variation and what they reveal about the SEND landscape

#### 4.1 OVERVIEW: A MARKET DEFINED BY NEED, NOT BY UNIFORMITY

Whenever fees for schools which offer specialist placements are being analysed, it is vital to understand that information about fees is not readily available in all cases. Where students have an EHCP, they are often placed on individually negotiated fees, which are not published on the school's website or on any central register. Instead, these individually negotiated fees are scrutinised by the Local Authority or SEND Tribunal, under existing legislation, to ensure they represent efficient use of public resources - i.e. no alternative placement can meet the student's needs at a lower cost. Also, some specialist schools negotiate bulk fees for their standard provision offer directly with Local Authorities, rather than allowing privately funded placements, and may therefore not publish fees on the school's website. The analysis of fees below is based on publicly available information, which may miss significant numbers of placements, particularly those catering for the most complex needs.

#### In ISA Specialist Provision Schools:

- Median termly fees typically sit between £17k and £21k, depending on need type.
- Annual equivalents generally range from £52k to £63k for most categories.
- Some settings operate at significantly lower fee levels, particularly small primary or early-intervention SEMH/ASC schools.
- A very small number of placements exist at the upper extreme (e.g., £116k per term), reflecting bespoke, highly intensive therapeutic packages for pupils with extremely complex profiles.

#### Understanding the Two Halves of the Sector: Charitable and For-Profit

The ISA specialist provision landscape comprises two broad legal structures:

1. **Charitable (not-for-profit) schools**  
These reinvest all surpluses directly into provision, strengthening staffing, training, specialist facilities, therapeutic teams and curriculum development. Their model is mission-driven and focused on long-term sustainability.
2. **For-profit specialist providers**  
These operate through company structures, but in practice within the SEND sector surpluses are typically modest and reinvested into:
  - expanding capacity where local need is acute
  - developing specialist estates and therapeutic hubs

- recruiting and retaining highly trained staff
- stabilising provision for cohorts with highly complex profiles

Being “for-profit” in this context does not mean operating in ways that prioritise revenue over children’s needs. Providers operate under cost-scrutiny, with fees determined by need profile rather than business model. Many for-profit schools’ shoulder some of the highest-complexity placements in the country, roles that require infrastructure the maintained sector cannot replicate at scale.

#### Why Both Halves of the Sector Matter

Taken together, the charitable and for-profit schools form a balanced and interdependent ecosystem. They enable ISA specialist schools to:

- absorb substantial high-need caseloads that the maintained system cannot accommodate
- rapidly scale provision in response to regional demand
- build and maintain specialist environments (low-arousal spaces, sensory rooms, therapy suites) that would otherwise be unavailable
- provide stability and continuity for pupils whose needs are too complex for mainstream or local authority special schools

Without both arms of the sector working in parallel, capacity, flexibility and resilience would drop sharply, increasing pressure on an already overstretched maintained SEND system.

These headline numbers echo what the case studies reveal: there is no “standard” SEND learner, and therefore no standard cost. Fees are simply the financial expression of the needs being met, staffing intensity, therapeutic programmes, safety requirements and multidisciplinary input. Discussing fee levels without these variables is analytically empty and tells us nothing about effectiveness, value for money or system contribution.

#### 4.2 WHY COSTS VARY: THE STRUCTURAL REALITIES BEHIND THE NUMBERS

The financial data points to three key drivers of cost variation. These are consistently reflected in the case studies.

##### 1. Complexity of Need and Therapeutic Intensity

Higher fees typically reflect:

- multidisciplinary staffing (psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapy)
- embedded therapeutic frameworks
- low sensory classrooms or bespoke environments

- high supervision ratios
- specialist equipment or assistive technology

For example:

- Moon Hall School invests heavily in specialist dyslexia teaching, all literacy teachers trained to Level 4, 5 or 7 SpLD, resulting in outcomes that far exceed national SEN averages.

These models are intensive because the needs are intensive.

## 2. Age Range and Staffing Model

Settings spanning multiple phases (e.g., 7–19) typically fall within mid-to-high-cost brackets.

This is not administrative overhead, it reflects:

- the need for flexible, multi-phase staffing
- Year-on-year curriculum adaptation
- transitional support between phases
- broader therapeutic integration

## 3. Individualisation and Bespoke Placements

A small number of extreme high-cost placements represent bespoke, high acuity support, usually for:

- pupils with multiple needs
- very low cohort sizes
- extremely high staffing ratios
- high safeguarding considerations
- specialist therapeutic frameworks

These placements are the exception, but they underscore an important point: costs follow complexity, not the other way around.

## 4. Why State and Independent SEND Costs Cannot Be Compared on a Like-for-Like Basis

The Government's widely quoted £24–25k "average cost" of a SEND placement in the state sector is not a real per-pupil cost but a statistical construction derived by dividing total High Needs Block expenditure by the number of pupils supported. This figure folds together everything from top-up funding to centrally retained LA SEND services and often excludes the substantial additional expenditures that local authorities carry, such as home-to-school transport and capital depreciation. Crucially, state special schools benefit from significant hidden subsidies including government-funded buildings, LA-funded specialist teams, and guaranteed employer and pension protections. Independent specialist schools, by contrast, must fund all buildings, therapeutic teams, maintenance, overheads and infrastructure directly from their fees, making any surface-level fee comparison fundamentally invalid. As the Institute for [Fiscal Studies](#) shows, the £24k is a system average, not the cost of educating a pupil with complex needs in a maintained special school. This is echoed in the Department for Education's [High Needs](#)

[operational guidance](#), which clarifies that the baseline £10,000 place funding is merely a starting point, with real costs heavily shaped by individual need and top-up funding arrangements.

Independent specialist schools typically educate pupils with higher complexity, lower incidence profiles, those requiring intensive therapeutic input, multidisciplinary staff teams, and bespoke environments that many maintained settings cannot provide. Their fees represent the full cost of delivering the provision to meet these greater needs, not an inflated figure: they must cover staffing, therapy provision, estates, maintenance, regulatory compliance, and specialist facilities without the state funding support that maintained special schools receive

The "average pupil cost" recorded, by contrast, in LA expenditure for the High Needs Block, variably includes costs of centrally funded services and is diluted by the inclusion of alternative provision costs for part-time pupils, distorting the true cost. Indeed, as covered in more detail below, this average ignores the substantial subsidies enjoyed by maintained schools, in areas such as capital expenditure, business rates, insurance, recruitment and safeguarding support. Comparing this diluted, subsidised average per pupil cost for maintained schools, which often cater for a lower average level of need, with the true, unsubsidised cost of catering for higher needs in the independent sector, is extremely misleading.

The datasets available through [Explore Education Statistics](#) further demonstrate how varied and multi-layered High Needs spending is across local authorities, reinforcing that the state average bears little resemblance to the realities of individual placement costs.

## 4.3 FEES BY NEED TYPE: WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

Across need categories, the median termly fees in ISA specialist setting are::

- **SLCN:** £21,163
- **MLD:** £20,319
- **Autism:** £20,305
- **SEMH:** £19,314
- **SpLD:** £18,089
- **ADHD/ADD:** £17,372

These medians reflect broad patterns in staffing and environment.

### SLCN at the Top End

- Higher fees reflect:
  - specialist SaLT teams
  - structured communication programmes
  - intensive staff training
  - integrated communication rich environments

Schools like The Unicorn School demonstrate why this

matters: pupils with language and motor difficulties need highly adapted teaching, specialist communication strategies, movement-based learning and intensive 1:1 language work.

### **Autism & SEMH in the Mid-Range**

Autism and SEMH specialist settings cluster around £19k–£20k per term. Despite similarities in median cost, their models can be very different:

The Tower School invests in sensory friendly classrooms, predictable routines, and nurture-based classes for pupils whose autism and anxiety escalated in larger groups.

Grow Independent School uses relational practice, forest school, mentoring, and trauma informed approaches, cost drivers linked to staffing ratios and pastoral intensity.

### **SpLD at the Lower End, but with huge variation**

SpLD specialist settings average lower termly medians but show very wide ranges. This is unsurprising:

- Some schools operate literacy specialist mainstream models.
- Others (such as Moon Hall) provide fully specialist multisensory teaching, leading to significantly higher achievement and correspondingly higher intensity.

## **4.4 NO CLEAR LINK BETWEEN FEES AND EHCP VOLUME**

One interesting finding is that high fees do not mean that there will be a high volume of students with EHCPs, and vice versa.

For example:

- Some schools with a high number of pupils with EHCPs (for example, 150–350) are able to operate within moderate cost levels because they use well-organised, consistent specialist support models that can be scaled across the school.
- Some high-cost placements support only a small number of pupils with EHCPs because they are designed to meet very complex needs.

Case study echoes:

- Moon Hall supports a very large cohort of EHCP pupils but operates a coherent, specialist literacy model rather than a bespoke therapeutic one.
- The Hive supports a small group of very young pupils with highly specialised sensory and communication needs, low numbers but high individualisation.

This explains why the data finds no strong correlation between cost and EHCP count: SEND cost is primarily a function of individual needs, not scale.

## **4.5 COSTS REFLECT NEEDS: NOT QUALITY OF PROVISION**

Across ISA specialist provision, fee variation is driven overwhelmingly by the needs of pupils and the intensity of provision required, not by differences in organisational quality. Median fees reflect the complexity of staffing models, therapeutic input, clinical involvement, and the need for tailored environments, not any variation in standards. Local authorities commission independent placements primarily for pupils with higher-complexity, lower-incidence needs that cannot be accommodated locally, meaning fee differences reflect the cost of meeting need, not differences in efficiency or quality.

National evidence reinforces this point. The [Solving the SEND Crisis report \(Education Committee, 2025\)](#) identifies that the SEND system is under “unsustainable pressure”, resulting in inconsistent support and significant provision gaps across England. This means that talking about fees without reference to need produces a distorted picture. In SEND education, cost follows need, and any attempt to compare costs without acknowledging this relationship is substantively meaningless.

## **4.6 REGIONAL VARIATION: HOW LOCAL NEED, CAPACITY AND COMMISSIONING SHAPE COSTS**

ISA regional fee differences, higher in the South West, London North and the Midlands, and lower in London South, the North and the East, mirror national patterns of need, specialist capacity, staffing costs, and local authority commissioning behaviour. These differences reflect England’s wider SEND landscape, where regional inequality in funding and provision is well-established.

Recent national analysis by [Policy Exchange \(2026\)](#), reported in [The Guardian](#), shows that SEND spending increased 65% in the wealthiest councils but only 51% in the most deprived, leaving high-need areas “trailing behind.”

Government evidence confirms substantial variation in how local authorities commission SEND provision.

- [Ofsted](#) and [CQC’s Area SEND Inspections and Outcomes \(2025\)](#) show wide differences in local SEND arrangements, with many areas delivering inconsistent experiences due to variable strategic planning and commissioning capacity.
- The DfE-funded [Joint Commissioning in Local SEND Partnerships report \(2025\)](#) highlights major differences in commissioning maturity, leadership, and the ability of local systems to plan effectively.
- The [House of Commons Library Local Area SEND Dashboard \(2025\)](#) shows stark regional differences in EHC plan rates, tribunal activity, and funding pressures, illustrating how local systems’ constraints shape commissioning decisions.

These disparities directly affect costs. In regions with

limited specialist capacity, Local Authorities rely more heavily on independent providers, often for high-need, high-complexity pupils, resulting in higher local median fees. ISA case studies reflect this system reality, showing that regions lacking specialist provision turn to independent schools to fill gaps (e.g. Salterford House establishing The Hive following LA requests).

Regional variation in fees is not a sign of inconsistency within the independent sector. It reflects documented national inequalities in SEND funding, differing Local Authority commissioning capacity, local need profiles, and regional infrastructure constraints.

Local Authorities and SEND Tribunals are required to consider value for money when choosing placements for students with EHCPs. There is a significant body of precedent cases from the Upper Tier Tribunal which determine the very limited extent to which parental preference for a more expensive placement would be accepted if a less expensive placement is capable of meeting the student's needs. The clear consequence of the existing legal system is that students will only be placed in relatively more expensive placements if those placements have, by reference to the law, been deemed to be an efficient use of resources. In other words, students will not be placed in relatively more expensive placements if there is a viable, less expensive placement in the local area.

**This legal framework ensures that, when students are placed in independent settings, the cost will have been scrutinised by a Local Authority or a SEND Tribunal and a decision will have been made that there is currently no local setting which could meet the student's needs at substantially lower cost.**

## 4.7 UNDERSTANDING VALUE IN SEND PROVISION

SEND cost discussions often focus narrowly on price. The case studies offer a more meaningful picture of value:

- **Re-engagement:** Grow School restored full attendance for a pupil who had been out of education for 20 months.
- **Academic achievement:** Moon Hall delivered GCSE outcomes above national SEN averages.
- **Destinations:** Lady Byron achieved a 100% positive post-16 destination rate.
- **Independence:** The Southover Partnership supported pupils into apprenticeships and independent living.
- **Communication breakthroughs:** The Hive enabled non-verbal pupils to vocalise and interact confidently.

These outcomes are not “added extras”; they are the return on investment for personalised, relational, specialist provision.

*Your Ideas Independent Specialist School* highlights how even very small settings can deliver exceptional value by transforming outcomes for pupils with the most entrenched barriers to engagement. Working with children affected by trauma, school-based anxiety, ADHD and autism, the

school specialises in re-engagement after prolonged nonattendance or repeated placement breakdown.

Its developmental curriculum model, built holistically around each child's emotional stage, enables pupils to rebuild trust in education, develop confidence and re-establish consistent attendance. Although operating with only eight pupils, the school secured a ‘Good’ rating in all areas at its first Ofsted inspection in March 2025, underscoring the effectiveness and proportional value of its personalised, therapeutically grounded approach.

The case demonstrates that “value” in SEND provision is not simply a matter of scale or cost, but the ability to deliver stability, renewed engagement, emotional recovery and long-term learning pathways for children who might otherwise disengage from education entirely, or, sadly, suffer the deeply personal cost of self-harm and suicidality.

More House School provides one of the clearest illustrations of high value within moderate fee levels. Despite fees that sit below most independent specialist providers, the school secures sustained academic success for a large cohort of pupils with complex profiles, including those with autism, dyslexia, speech and language needs, ADHD and overlapping difficulties. The majority progress to further or higher education, and attendance levels remain exceptionally strong at 93%, despite pupils travelling from 29 local authorities.

The value extends beyond outcomes for enrolled pupils. More House's outreach, training and research partnerships amplify the impact of its model across hundreds of mainstream schools. Its CPD-accredited Level 3 and Level 4 SEND practitioner awards, its Class Mapping Tool, and its annual Adaptive Teaching conferences are examples of how specialist expertise can be mobilised to strengthen the wider system. This illustrates how independent specialist schools can deliver exceptional value for public expenditure by combining strong outcomes, cost-effectiveness and system-wide improvement.

## ISA SCHOOLS ARE NOT OPERATING ON THE MARGINS OF THE SEND SYSTEM; THEY ARE ENABLING IT TO FUNCTION.

## 4.8 WHY THIS MATTERS FOR COMMISSIONING AND SYSTEM REFORM

The financial analysis leads to three system level insights:

1. SEND provision cannot be standardised, cost naturally varies with need, intensity and therapeutic requirements.
2. Looking only at price misses the true measure of value, stability, attendance, independence and long-term outcomes matter more, not to mention the

self-evident value of minimising the incidence of self-harm and suicide linked to unmet needs.

3. Independent schools are key strategic partners, they provide capacity, expertise and flexibility at a time when local systems are overwhelmed.

ISA schools are not operating on the margins of the SEND system; they are enabling it to function.

## SECTION 5: ANALYSIS BY ISA REGION

### 5.1 DISTRIBUTION OF PROVISION ACROSS ENGLAND

Specialist provision within ISA schools is spread across all regions of England, but the distribution is far from uniform. The North has the greatest number of settings, with 50 schools, followed by the Midlands with 44. At the other end of the spectrum, both London North and the East host only 15 settings each, representing the lowest levels of regional capacity.

This uneven geography shapes the lived experience of both the independent and the maintained sector. In regions with fewer specialist settings and low maintained provision, parents may face longer travel times and a narrower set of appropriate options, even when need is high. Conversely, regions with more settings do not necessarily have easier access. Higher numbers of schools can reflect higher absolute demand, meaning that the apparent supply may still fall short of the level of need in the area.

This becomes clear when comparing regions such as the North and Midlands. Although these areas host the largest clusters of ISA specialist provision, case studies such as Grow Independent School in Lancashire demonstrate that there can still be a genuine need and demand for additional independent provision, to ensure the area has the capacity required to meet escalating and increasingly complex needs, particularly for students who re-enter education after prolonged absence or school refusal.

#### Regional Examples of Specialist Provision Responding to Local Need

- **Grow Independent School (North West)** re-engages learners who have been out of education for up to 20 months due to trauma and anxiety, demonstrating how independent schools expand capacity in regions with high EBSA prevalence.
- **The Hive at Salterford House School (East Midlands)** was developed directly in response to local authority requests, providing early-years and primary innovation for children whose needs fall between mainstream and special school pathways.
- **Connect at Heathfield Knoll (West Midlands)** shows how alternative provision embedded within a mainstream school meets local demand for flexible, hybrid models.
- **More House School (South East)** educates pupils from 29 local authorities, highlighting how high-capacity specialist schools support regional systems facing pressure in autism and SLCN pathways.

These examples show how independent specialist schools increase local choice, reduce travel-to-learn, and relieve pressure on maintained capacity.

### 5.2 REGIONAL COST PATTERNS: UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCES

Costs also vary across ISA region, but these differences do not indicate varying quality or efficiency. Instead, they reflect local need profiles, staffing models, therapeutic intensity, and differences in the availability and transparency of provision.

Median termly fees are highest in London North (~£18,854), the South West (~£18,400), and the Midlands (~£18,150). Regions such as London South (~£15,391), the East (~£15,000), and particularly the North (~£12,868) sit lower on average.

These differences reflect structural realities:

- Regions with higher median fees typically host more complex specialist environments requiring multidisciplinary clinical teams, intensive therapeutic provision, or bespoke secondary-to-FE pathways.
- Regions with lower medians often have a larger number of small, primary-phase or narrowly focused settings, where needs require fewer clinical inputs and therefore lower staffing intensity.
- The North's lower median reflects a concentration of smaller SEMH/ASC settings focused on relational stability and re-engagement, rather than high-cost clinical models.

Some of the most therapeutically intensive environments, for example, specialist SEMH or ASC schools in the Midlands with integrated therapy, naturally sit at the upper end of regional fee ranges. Case studies such as Longdon Park School show how resource-intensive life-skills and vocational pathways for KS4–KS5 learners contribute to higher placement costs.

Regional variation in cost reflects variation in the complexity of need being met, not variation in quality or value.

### 5.3 RANGES AND VARIABILITY: WHAT THEY REVEAL

Beyond the medians, the range of fees within each region offers important context.

The Midlands has the widest fee spread, from approximately £2.7k to £116.7k per term, an unusually large range driven not by inconsistency, but by diversity. This region contains everything from small primary settings with low therapeutic intensity to highly specialised placements requiring extensive staffing and bespoke individualisation.

London North and the South west also show relatively wide ranges (reaching ~£29k), reflecting the availability of higher-complexity specialist schools within these areas. By contrast, the East's narrower range reflects a more consistent type of provision in the sample.

Possible reasons for regional differences include:

- Variations in local authority approaches, for example, how they interpret different categories of need when considering EHCP applications, or how they balance support with expectations around attendance, can influence parents' experiences of the process.
- Differences in family experiences and attitudes toward education can shape how parents perceive the value of EHCPs and the extent to which they feel able to navigate the system.
- Levels of family financial resources can affect access to independent school placements and the ability to seek independent professional assessments when engaging with the SEND Tribunal process.
- The presence of charities and specialist service providers in certain regions, for example, organisations such as Wider Ambition in Worcestershire/Warwickshire, may create the impression of regional patterns in high-cost placements for autistic pupils. However, expansion into neighbouring areas like Herefordshire or Gloucestershire may reveal similar levels of need across a wider geographic area.
- Independent providers operating on a commercial basis may be more likely to establish new schools in areas where fee-paying demand is sustainable and where local authority partnership dynamics are favourable.

## 5.4 TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLICLY LISTED FEES: UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

The regional analysis also reflects differences in what information is publicly available, because this report draws solely on fee information in the public domain, primarily school websites and published fee schedules. This naturally produces gaps: not all specialist settings publish full fee structures because many placements are commissioned directly by local authorities under bespoke arrangements. These commissions often involve individually costed packages, making standardised public price-posting neither practical nor appropriate.

Across the dataset:

- London West has the highest share of non-posted fees (40.9%)
- The North (36%) and Midlands (31.8%) also show elevated proportions

- The East shows 0% non-posted fees, with all settings publishing fee information

Rather than indicating a lack of transparency or quality, these patterns reflect how commissioning works in different local authority areas:

- Regions with more pupils requiring complex, multi-agency or bespoke provision are more likely to use individually negotiated Local Authority-commissioned placements, which do not lend themselves to published price lists.
- Higher proportions of Local Authority-commissioned packages typically correlate with a more hands-on commissioning role, especially for autistic learners, pupils with SEMH needs, or those requiring integrated therapeutic input.
- Regions where all schools publish fees tend to have more standardised provision types, where listing a typical termly or annual fee is meaningful and feasible.

Case studies illustrate this clearly. In parts of London, for example, settings such as The Southhover Partnership work closely with local authorities to design highly individualised, therapeutically embedded pathways. These placements are typically commissioned on a per-pupil basis and therefore do not sit within a standard fee table, which is why they are not publicly posted.

The presence or absence of publicly listed fees is not a marker of transparency or provision quality. It simply reflects the reality that complex pupils often require individually costed packages, and that many regions use Local Authority commissioning models where fees are negotiated rather than posted. This is a feature of the system, not a flaw in the data.

## 5.5 TRAVEL, ACCESS AND LOCAL CHOICE

For families, the geography of specialist provision directly shapes access, stability, and daily experience. In ISA regions where specialist provision is less densely distributed, including parts of the East and North London, there are simply fewer appropriate settings within a reasonable radius. Here, "lower density" refers not to population levels but to the lower availability of specialist schools per square mile, meaning even urban families may face long travel-to-learn journeys. For autistic pupils, those with sensory processing differences, and young people experiencing anxiety or emotionally based school avoidance, long travel times can significantly increase dysregulation and reduce attendance stability.

Conversely, in ISA regions with more independent and specialist provision, such as the North or Midlands, local choice appears broader, yet demand remains high. The Hive at Salterford House emerged precisely because local mainstream and special-school capacity could not meet the complexity of need, despite regional provision. This demonstrates that proximity alone does not guarantee suitability; what matters is the fit between provision type and pupil profile.

Case studies reinforce the importance of locality. Grow Independent School (Lancashire) successfully re-engaged pupils who had been unable to enter mainstream buildings due to extreme anxiety. Their re-engagement depended on short travel distances, relational consistency and community-rooted practice. When provision is appropriate *and* local, outcomes accelerate.

National evidence underscores this. The National Association of Special Schools (NASS) told Parliament that *“when children are placed in schools at distance from home, engagement from their local authority tends to be poor”* reducing oversight, communication and timely intervention.

This human impact is profound. Being closer to home supports:

- emotional regulation
- attachment and family contact
- continuity in health and therapeutic services
- predictable routines
- reduced fatigue and stress

For many SEND learners, these are foundational to learning.

There is also a significant financial dimension. Local authority transport for SEND learners, especially when routes involve single-pupil taxis, escorts, or long distances, can be extremely high. This is widely documented across Local Authority expenditure analyses, where SEND transport is frequently one of the fastest-growing high-needs cost pressures ([example national reporting: Local Government Association transport analysis](#)). Although not all regions publish detailed cost breakdowns, it is widely recognised that long-distance transport can add £8,000–£9,000 per pupil per year to placement costs. There may be additional costs for students who require a chaperone to accompany them to and from school, or other specialist support.

Because much of the independent specialist provision exists within communities where maintained capacity is limited, it keeps more SEND learners closer to home, reducing stress on families, lowering transport costs, improving Local Authority engagement, and enabling stable, relational, everyday routines that make learning possible.

The independent sector plays a vital role in ensuring that SEND provision is genuinely local. Without it, many more pupils would travel far greater distances, at higher emotional and financial cost, with poorer oversight and reduced opportunities for positive outcomes.

## 5.6 “REGIONAL FIT” BETWEEN NEED AND PROVISION TYPE

ISA specialist provision schools do not simply “exist” across the map, they adapt to local patterns of need. This is a key part of the national picture and is strongly grounded in the dataset.

## THESE REGIONAL DIFFERENCES ARE NOT INCIDENTAL; THEY ARE RESPONSIVE TO LOCAL NEED, LA COMMISSIONING PATTERNS, AND THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROFILES OF PUPILS IN EACH AREA.

- Northern regions show a concentration of SEMH/ASC settings designed around re-engagement with education, small-group learning and relationship-led practice, matching the higher proportions of complex SEMH profiles recorded across many northern LAs.
- Midlands providers frequently support multi-phase cohorts (7–18 or 7–19) and extensive KS4–KS5 pathways, reflected in their higher median fees.
- London regions host more therapeutic, highly personalised ASC/SEMH provision, often flexibly commissioned, matching the high complexity and intensive casework of pupils referred by metropolitan LAs.
- The South west shows a cost pattern aligned with specialised therapeutic and sensory-informed environments, explaining its higher typical costs.

These regional differences are not incidental; they are responsive to local need, LA commissioning patterns, and the developmental profiles of pupils in each area.

## CONCLUSION

The national landscape of SEND provision is changing rapidly, driven by rising levels of need, increasing complexity in pupil profiles, and escalating pressure on local systems. As demand has grown, the independent sector, particularly ISA specialist and mainstream schools, has expanded its SEND capacity at a pace the state sector has been unable to match. This is partly because independent providers have the flexibility to adapt quickly: they can open new specialist pathways, develop bespoke therapeutic models, restructure staffing, and scale provision without the long capital, staffing and governance timelines that constrain local authority and maintained systems. As a result, ISA schools now form a significant and stabilising part of England's SEND infrastructure. The data in this report shows that they are not operating at the margins of the system; they are educating thousands of pupils with EHCPs, responding to a broad spectrum of needs, and providing continuity across the key secondary and post-16 phases where national capacity is under the greatest strain.

Across the ISA network, this contribution takes many forms.

- Large research-led providers like More House improve outcomes at scale while supporting hundreds of mainstream schools through outreach.
- Hybrid models like Connect at Heathfield Knoll bridge the gap between mainstream and specialist provision for pupils who would otherwise fall out of education.
- Small trauma-informed settings like Your Ideas re-engage children who cannot cope in larger environments due to school-based anxiety and developmental trauma.
- Specialist dyslexia schools such as Moon Hall demonstrate how targeted expertise can radically transform attainment trajectories.
- Vocationally rich, multi-site schools such as Longdon Park provide extended pathways into adulthood for learners with autism and SEMH.

This breadth illustrates why independent specialist provision is an essential, flexible and innovative part of the national SEND system.

Across the ISA network, schools are educating learners whose needs frequently overlap - autism, SEMH, SLCN, ADHD, and specific learning differences seldom appear in isolation. This aligns with national patterns, where complexity rather than single-label need now defines the typical SEND profile. ISA schools reflect this reality in practice, offering environments where small class sizes, therapeutic integration, consistent relationships and personalised pathways are not enhancements but core components of the offer.

The demographic picture, with 73% of pupils with SEND in ISA schools aged 12 or over, mirrors the system-wide challenges around adolescence, school-based anxiety, attendance, and suitability of mainstream provision at Key Stages 3 and 4. ISA schools are absorbing pupils at precisely the stage where many mainstream settings struggle to maintain stability and engagement, providing a crucial safety net for young people at risk of prolonged absence or disengagement. Many of the case studies show pupils arriving after long gaps in education, unsuccessful placements, or escalating mental health needs, and subsequently reestablishing attendance, trust and progress once the right specialist environment is in place.

Outcomes across ISA schools demonstrate what is possible when provision is aligned to need. Whether helping pupils rebuild emotional regulation, supporting re-entry into learning after trauma, enabling access to GCSEs and vocational pathways, or guiding young people into further education, apprenticeships and university, the collective evidence shows that ISA schools are contributing meaningfully to national SEND outcomes. They also support a high number of pupils with EHCPs, more than 11,000 in this dataset, illustrating the scale at which independent schools can meet the needs that the maintained sector would otherwise struggle to meet.

Financially, ISA provision spans a wide range, reflecting the diversity of need and intensity of support rather than inconsistency. Analysis shows that a school's EHCP volume is not a predictor of its fees. Fee levels are instead driven by qualitative factors, such as clinical input, specialist staffing, and the complexity of pupils' needs, rather than simple headcount. Value is demonstrated through stability, progression, independence and long-term outcomes. This positions ISA schools' provision as a flexible and responsive part of the SEND landscape, able to adapt to different profiles and regional pressures.

Regionally, ISA schools help address uneven national capacity. In areas with limited local provision, they reduce travel distances and add choice; in areas with high need, they support local authorities to meet statutory duties and prevent escalation to crisis placements. In several case studies, independent schools created new specialist pathways directly in response to local authority requests, a clear indication of partnership and shared purpose.

Taken together, the findings show that ISA specialist provision schools play a vital, connected and solution-focused role within the national system. They offer capacity where it is lacking, expertise where it is scarce, and continuity for pupils whose journeys span beyond single phases or labels. Most importantly, they deliver environments in which children and young people who

have struggled elsewhere can feel safe, understood and able to thrive.

The contribution of ISA schools is therefore not supplementary, it is integral. As national reforms continue to unfold, the evidence presented here demonstrates that independent schools are essential partners in ensuring that every child with SEND can access provision that meets their needs, supports their aspirations and leads to meaningful, sustainable outcomes. ISA's role in SEND reform reflects this centrality: ISA welcomes the Government's ambition to strengthen and modernise the SEND system, recognising that rising complexity, increasing demand and uneven capacity require thoughtful structural attention. ISA specialist provision schools are committed to partnering constructively in

the design of reforms, while also carrying a responsibility to articulate clearly and confidently the operational realities faced by their settings. As SEND reform moves toward implementation, stability must remain a central objective; funding adjustments, commissioning shifts and process changes must be carefully phased to avoid destabilising existing specialist capacity. ISA schools are prepared to work constructively with the Government and local authorities to ensure that reform strengthens, rather than fragments, provision for children and young people with complex needs. Reform will be most effective when policy ambition is grounded in delivery experience. ISA is committed to supporting system improvement through collaborative engagement and to helping ensure that emerging frameworks reflect the practical demands of high-acuity SEND provision.

# APPENDIX A

## DEMOGRAPHICS & PROVISION ANALYSIS

**Objective:** Understand the population and distribution of SEND provision across ISA specialist provision schools.

**Number on Roll & Pupils by Age:** [Analysis of school sizes and age distribution.](#)

### Key Points at a Glance

- Most pupils are aged 12 or over (secondary).
- Primary-aged pupils (5–11) making up a quarter of the total.
- Early years (0–4) is a small share and offered by fewer schools.
- A small number of very large schools sit alongside many medium-sized schools.
- Boarding exists in a minority of schools and varies widely in size.

### School Size (Number on Roll)

Looking at the total number of pupils in each school. To make the figures realistic, zeros were excluded and so the smallest number on roll is 3. This avoids counting schools with a recorded zero as if they had pupils.

Minimum: 3

Maximum: 504

Average (mean): 63

Middle value (median): 44

Typical range (25th–75th percentile): 23 to 83

### Pupils by Age

Pupils are grouped into three broad age bands: 0–4 (early years), 5–11 (primary), and 12+ (secondary and post-16). Totals across all schools:

- 0–4: 291 pupils (2% of all pupils)
- 5–11: 3256 pupils (25%)
- 12+: 9379 pupils (73%)
- FE (16–19): 50 settings (14% of total settings)
- Post-19 (19–25): 10 settings (3% of total settings)

Looking only at schools that cater for each age group (ignoring zeros):

- 0–4: offered by 7 schools; typical per-school median 4 pupils (max 148).
- 5–11: offered by 161 schools; typical per-school median 13 pupils (percentile range roughly 1–19, max 201).
- 12+: offered by 186 schools; typical per-school median 40 pupils (percentile range roughly 14–65; max 376).

### Dominant Age Groups

- 12+: 186 schools

- 5–11: 161 schools
- 0–4: 7 schools
- Empty: 2 schools

### Boarding vs Day

A small share of schools offer boarding. Where boarding exists, it varies widely in size and proportion:

- Boarding schools: 5 (1% of all schools)
- Day schools: 349
- Total boarders: 186
- Typical boarding size (median): 33 pupils
- Average percentage of boarders (mean): 37%

### Key Takeaways

- It's a secondary-heavy provision: over half of pupils are 12+.
- Primary remains substantial: about a quarter of pupils are 5–11.
- Early years is limited to fewer, often smaller settings.
- Most schools are medium-sized; a few very large schools shape the upper end.
- Boarding is rare and uneven.
- Most schools cover ages roughly 7–18 (about a 10-year span), while a few extend up to age 25, suggesting post-16 or specialist provision.

### SEND Types Catered For:

**Normalised terms** to consistent categories so we can count accurately. Examples:

- **Autism (ASD/ASC)** combined ASD, ASC, "Autism", "Complex ASD".
- **SEMH** included "SEMH", "EMH" (typo/legacy), and "Complex SEMH".
- **Speech, Language & Communication (SLCN)** included "SLCN", "Speech & Language / S&L", "Communication / Social Communication", **CLN**, and **DLD** (Developmental Language Disorder).
- **Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)** included "SpLD", **Dyslexia**, **Dyspraxia/DCD**.
- **ADHD/ADD** merged ADHD and ADD.
- **LD (generic)** captured "LD", "Learning Difficulties/Needs", and **Global Developmental Delay (GDD)**.
- Also captured: **MLD**, **SLD**, **PMLD**, **FASD**, **ODD**, **OCD**, **PDA**, **HI**, **PD** (physical), **Down Syndrome**, **EBD** (legacy term), **EBSA**, **EHCP**, **Complex Needs**, **Behavioural support**, and broad indicators (**SEN**, "SEND needs", "Wide range of SEND", "Mixed abilities").

### Most commonly catered-for categories

(Top 10 by frequency; percentages are of all schools)

Category	Schools	Percent of schools
<b>AUTISM</b>	157	76.6
<b>SEMH</b>	152	74.1
<b>SLCN</b>	53	25.9
<b>SpLD</b>	43	21
<b>ADHD/ADD</b>	42	20.5
<b>MLD</b>	24	11.7
<b>Learning Difficulties (unspecified)</b>	20	9.8
<b>SLD</b>	14	6.8
<b>ODD</b>	4	2
<b>PMLD</b>	3	1.5
<b>Global Developmental Delay (GDD)</b>	2	1
<b>PD (Physical Disability)</b>	2	1
<b>PDA</b>	2	1
<b>FASD</b>	2	1
<b>Downs Syndrome</b>	1	0.5
<b>HI (Hearing Impairment)</b>	1	0.5

### Co-occurrence (which needs tend to be catered together)

Top 10 cooccurring needs (i.e., categories that tend to be catered for together in the same school) ASD/ASC/ Autism → AUTISM; S&L/Communication/SLCN/DLD → SLCN; EBD/EMH/Anxiety/Trauma/OCD/EBSA → SEMH; Dyslexia/Dyspraxia/DCD → SpLD; ADD grouped with ADHD.

Category A	Category B	Schools	Percent of schools
<b>AUTISM</b>	SEMH	119	58
<b>AUTISM</b>	SLCN	46	22.4
<b>ADHD/ADD</b>	AUTISM	42	20.5
<b>SEMH</b>	SLCN	39	19
<b>ADHD/ADD</b>	SEMH	33	16.1
<b>AUTISM</b>	SpLD	30	14.6
<b>SEMH</b>	SpLD	23	11.2
<b>SLCN</b>	SpLD	21	10.2
<b>MLD</b>	SEMH	20	9.8
<b>AUTISM</b>	MLD	19	9.3

## How many categories each school listed

- **Mean:** 2.25 categories per school
- **Median:** 2
- **Mode:** 2
- **Range:** 1 to 7

## What this suggests

- Autism and SEMH dominate provision, and they co-occur very frequently (119 schools). This implies many settings position themselves to support both neurodevelopmental (Autism/ADHD) and social-emotional/mental health needs together.
- Communication-related needs (SLCN, including DLD) often show up alongside Autism and SEMH, reflecting the communication profile common in those cohorts.
- SpLD (esp. Dyslexia/Dyspraxia) appears in around

a fifth of schools, and often alongside SLCN and Autism—consistent with overlapping profiles of literacy/coordination and language needs.

- The learning difficulty spectrum (MLD/SLD/PMLD) is present but materially less common than Autism or SEMH in this dataset. Where MLD appears, it often co-occurs with SEMH.

**SEND types not listed** (based on the UK SEND Code of Practice and extended reference list):

- Visual Impairment (VI)
- Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI)
- Physical Disability
- Severe Speech Disorder

## Age-SEND cross-analysis

Most categories extend into FE (16–19);

## Post-19 provision varies by need

Category	Schools (n)	% include FE (16-19 overlap)	% offer Post-19 (19+)	% offer Post-19 (20+)
SLCN	53	94.3	39.6	9.4
MLD	24	91.7	41.7	12.5
AUTISM	157	88.5	31.2	4.5
SpLD	43	93	32.6	4.7
ADHD/ADD	42	97.6	31	4.8
SEMH	152	90.1	26.3	4.6

## EHCPs (Education, Health, and Care Plans):

- **Total EHCPs: 11,156**  
The total shows the aggregate scale of EHCP provision across all settings.
- **Mean: 53**  
The mean indicates the typical load if EHCPs were distributed evenly
- **Median: 41**  
The median represents the middle setting, so half of settings have  $\leq 41$  EHCPs; it's robust to outliers, making it a better indicator of a "typical" setting than the mean when the distribution is uneven.
- **Std. dev.: 50** (quite spread)  
SD captures spread/variability; a value around 50 suggests large differences between settings (some very small, some very large)
- **Min-Max: 0 – 403**  
Min/Max show the range of provision sizes—from settings with no EHCPs recorded to very large specialist provision.
- **Quartiles: (25<sup>th</sup>/50<sup>th</sup>/75<sup>th</sup>) 19/41/78**  
Quartiles show where the middle 50% of settings sit. Here, half of settings lie between 19 and 78

- **90th percentile  $\approx 119$**

The top 10% of settings have  $\geq \sim 119$  EHCPs. This highlights high-capacity hubs where workload and case complexity may be concentrated, guiding specialist staffing and priority

## High outliers (EHCPs) and their aligned age bands & SEND lines

- 364 — Age 8–18; Dyslexia, DLD, DCD
- 275 — Age 3–19; ASC
- 211 — Age 3–19; ASD, SpLD, Anxiety, Communication
- 186 — Age 6–18; ASC, SLCN, ADHD, SEMH, SpLD

## Why this matters:

These settings sit well above the IQR (the middle 50% of the data) upper fence, evidencing exceptionally high EHCP volumes relative to other settings. These are large specialist provision (e.g., broader age ranges reaching into FE, multi-category support such as ASC/SLCN/ADHD/SEMH/SpLD, or focused specialist profiles like Dyslexia/DLD/DCD).

## EHCPs vs key SEND categories

Looking at the six most common categories from the dataset.

Category	Schools (n)	Mean EHCPs	Median EHCPs	Std Dev (sample)	Min	Q1 (25th %)	Q3 (75th %)	P90 (90th %)	Max
SpLD	43	81	78	70	0	23	114	154	364
ADHD/ADD	41	63	54	46	0	30	87	119	186
MLD	24	62	53	52	1	16	113	132	151
AUTISM	155	54	42	45	0	21	73	114	275
SLCN	53	68	44	64	0	28	89	150	364
SEMH	149	49	39	42	0	18	69	110	211

## Financial Analysis

Measure	n	mean (£)	median (£)	min (£)	max (£)	range (£)	Q1 (£)	Q3 (£)	IQR (£)
Termly mid (£)	155	19421	19314	2700	116700	114000	13188.75	24250	11061.25
Termly low (£)	155	16137.53	16237	2700	116700	114000	10164.5	20550	10385.5
Termly high (£)	126	23022.55	24589.5	3670	52415	48745		29000	13861.75
Yearly mid (£)	155	58262.99	57942	8100	350100	342000	39566.25	72750	33183.75
Yearly low (£)	155	48412.59	48711	8100	350100	342000	30493.5	61650	31156.5
Yearly high (£)	126	69067.64	73768.5	11010	157245	146235	45414.75	87000	41585.25

### By stage coverage (median termly fee):

- Early years (0–4): £16,006
- Primary (5–11): £19,157
- Secondary (11–16): £19,314
- FE / 16–19: £18,925
- Post-19 (19–25): £20,345

### By stage coverage (median yearly fee):

- Early years (0–4): £48,018
- Primary (5–11): £57,471
- Secondary (11–16): £57,942
- FE / 16–19: £56,775
- Post-19 (19–25): £61,035

### Broadest age ranges appear in mid-to-high-cost settings

Many high-cost providers span 5–18 or 7–19, reflecting:

- Multi-phase staffing
- Long-term therapeutic frameworks
- High transition-support input
- Wider age bands usually accompany higher wraparound support.

### EHCP volumes are highest in moderate-to-high-cost settings

Examples:

- SpLD/ASC settings with £18–£30k mid-fees have EHCP cohorts of 80–200+.
- High-end therapeutic SEMH settings show 50–150 EHCPs.

Larger EHCP cohorts often indicate well-established provision capable of managing the scale and acuity of need.

## Fees vs SEND type

SEND Category	Median Termly Fee (£)	Missing Fee %	Median Yearly Fee (£)
<b>SLCN</b>	21163	30.8	63488
<b>MLD (Moderate Learning Difficulties)</b>	20319	22.7	61172
<b>Autism (ASD/ASC)</b>	20305	25.8	60914
<b>SEMH</b>	19314	22.6	57942
<b>SpLD</b>	18089	30.2	54266
<b>ADHD/ADD</b>	17372	24.4	52115

- SLCN is highest (termly £21,163, yearly £63,488), with MLD second (termly £20,391, yearly £61,172). MLD's missing-fee share is ~22.7% (moderate), whereas SLCN and SpLD have higher missing shares (~30%).
- Autism (ASD/ASC) and SEMH are ~£20k termly: Autism £20,305 and SEMH £19,314; yearly medians are £60,914 and £57,942, respectively.
- SpLD's termly median is £18,089 (yearly £54,266) and its missing-fee share is ~30.2%, which is among the highest.
- There is no strong positive link between the fees of a setting and volume of EHCPs.
- There is a large cost variation within the same need type

Example:

- SEMH settings range from £5k to £48k per term.
- ASD-led settings range from £4k to £36k.

This market is not homogeneous — 'SEMH' or 'ASC' settings vary dramatically in model, intensity, and student profile. Price variation often reflects complexity of need, staffing model, and scope of therapy rather than inefficiency.

**Existing legislation includes a strong emphasis on Local Authorities ensuring value for money when placing students in independent settings.**

### Missing fees (possible LA-funded correlation)

Fees listed are more common in high-EHCP settings by looking at missing fee share across EHCP quartiles:

- Q1 (≤25th percentile EHCPs): 28% missing
- Q2 (25–50th): 18.4% missing
- Q3 (50–75th): 22.4% missing Q4 (>75th): 20.8% missing

- While individual large EHCP providers might rely on LA funding (so fees are “not listed”), overall the pattern here shows more listed fees as EHCP count rises.

## Settings by ISA Region

There is an uneven distribution of provision across ISA regions. Families in low-volume areas may face reduced local choice, longer travel times, and heightened placement competition. High-volume ISA regions may appear better served, but this may mask higher absolute unmet demand because need may also be high.

- North (50 settings) and Midlands (44) have the highest volumes.
- East (15) and London North (15) have the smallest clusters.

## ISA Regions With Higher-Cost Concentration

From median comparisons:

- South West, London North, and Midlands show higher median fee levels.
- London South and North have lower medians.

Interpretation:

- Higher medians correlate with more complex-needs settings in those ISA regions.
- Lower medians correlate with simpler provision, or more missing fees suppressing the median.

ISA Region	Settings	With Fee	Missing Fee	Missing Fee (%)	Median Fee	Mean Fee	Min Fee	Max Fee
<b>East</b>	15	15	0	0.00%	£15,000	£16,047	£11,000	£22,630
<b>London North</b>	15	14	1	6.70%	£18,854	£17,385	£4,263	£29,910
<b>London South</b>	33	31	2	6.10%	£15,391	£13,342	£2,800	£22,666
<b>London West</b>	22	13	9	40.90%	£16,237	£16,871	£6,546	£25,000
<b>Midlands</b>	44	30	14	31.80%	£18,150	£20,686	£2,700	£116,700
<b>North</b>	50	32	18	36.00%	£12,868	£12,946	£3,900	£22,600
<b>South West</b>	26	20	6	23.10%	£18,400	£17,471	£7,529	£29,800

## Volume of provision

- The North has the largest number of settings (50), followed by the Midlands (44).
- London North and East have fewer settings (15 each), which can affect local choice and distance-to-provision planning.

## Typical costs (medians)

- London North and the South West show higher typical median fees (£18,884 and £18,400) than other regions.
- Midlands medians are also relatively high (£18,150), while London South and the North sit lower (£15,391 & £12,868).

## Ranges & variability

- The Midlands exhibits the widest fee range (min ~£2.7k, max £116.7k), driven by specialist/bespoke offers and mixed listing practices.
- London North ranges up to £29,910; South West up to £29,800; East up to £22,630, reflecting available higher-cost specialist provision.
- London West has a high share of missing fees (41%), suggesting non-posted prices or LA commissioning; the North also has 36% missing and the Midlands 32% missing.

## Missing fee patterns

- ISA Regions with higher missing fees (e.g., London West, North, Midlands) likely feature LA-funded or bespoke arrangements where list prices aren't used or vary widely.
- Conversely, East has 0% missing, along with a relatively low number of settings and low deviation in fees, which may reflect limited diversity of provision and capacity for catering for more complex individual needs in that region.

## Top 10 (ranked by mid termly fee)

The highest mid-term fees (top 10) reveal a pattern:

- Many high-cost placements are SEMH, ASC, complex

needs, often with multi-disciplinary teams.

- Most include multiple overlapping needs: SEMH + ASC + ADHD + trauma, etc.
- Many explicitly list multi-disciplinary staff (OT, SALT, psychologists, clinical leads).
- Upper ranges reach £48k per term and £116.7k on day-fee basis, indicating:
  - High staffing intensity
  - Integrated therapeutic input
  - Specialist environments for complex behaviours or co-morbidities

This reflects the reality that specialist SEMH/ASC support is inherently resource-intensive and cost-loaded due to staffing, safeguarding ratios, and therapeutic requirements.

This reinforces that cost drivers align with settings supporting multiple high-acuity needs, not with single-need profiles.

Mid-term fee	Fee range	Ages	EHCPs	SEND profile
£42,525	£37,050 – £48,000	5-16	114	SEMH
£34,757	£17,100 – £52,415	5-18	78	SEMH, ASC
£34,230	£29,910 – £38,550	11-20	62	ASC Complex learning difficulties, ASD
£34,000	£24,000 – £44,000	6-16	46	SEMH
£31,831	£13,333 – £50,330	7-16	116	SEMH, ASC, ADHD
£31,150	£25,000 – £37,300	7-19	18	SEMH, SpLD, SLCN
£29,350	£25,000 – £33,700	7-18	23	SEMH, SpLD, SLCN
£28,400	£20,380 – £36,420	7-19	91	ASC, ADHD, Dyslexia
£28,350	£25,000 – £31,700	11-19	29	ASC, SLID, SEMH, SLCN, PD
£27,700	£22,700 – £32,700	4-11	1	ASC, SpLD

### FULL CASE STUDIES

1	Arnold Lodge School
2	Grow Independent School
3	Heathfield Knoll School
4	Longdon Park School
5	Moon Hall School
6	More House School
7	Northeast Manor School
8	Orchard Education
9	Pear Tree School
10	Pivot
11	Salterford House School
12	The Lady Byron School
13	The Southover Partnership
14	The Southover Partnership
15	The Southover Partnership
16	Your Ideas Independent School

The Southover Partnership is an independent SEND specialist school based in North West London, supporting up to 75 children and young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Based across three small sites, it offers a personalised, trauma-informed approach, designed for pupils who may find mainstream education difficult to access. The provision focuses on building strong, supportive relationships and creating safe learning environments where each child's individual needs are understood, enabling them to develop emotionally, socially and academically.

Student T joined the Southover Partnership School in January 2025 following a breakdown in his mainstream placement and significant concerns around behaviour, attendance, emotional wellbeing, and community-based risk. Despite a turbulent start to the year, he has settled exceptionally well. His attendance has increased from 44% in his previous school to 93% at The Southover Partnership, demonstrating a strong commitment to his education. Although travel distance has resulted in some lateness, he is consistently motivated to attend and engage, which represents significant progress based risk.

A key area of success is Student T's growing insight into his own needs and how they affect his behaviour, learning, and relationships. He has independently researched traits relating to his diagnoses and has begun applying strategies to manage his anxieties and attention related difficulties. He is increasingly confident in advocating for himself, plays an active role in decisions about his education and care, and is taking genuine interest in his wellbeing and future. His ability to reflect on his actions and ask questions about expectations shows substantial emotional maturity. He is increasingly confident in advocating for himself, plays an active role in decisions about his education and care, and is taking genuine interest in his wellbeing and future.

Behaviourally, Student T has made marked improvements. Although he has a history of involvement with the Youth Offending Team and risky peer associations, he is no longer under youth justice monitoring and is supported effectively within school through therapeutic and relational approaches. He manages his SEMH needs with greater consistency, engages appropriately with peers and adults, and increasingly uses discussion rather than confrontation to understand boundaries or decisions. While impulsivity, inappropriate language, and emotional regulation remain areas of need, he demonstrates a willingness to listen, repair relationships, and learn from incidents.

Academically, Student T is thriving. He engages positively in all lessons, produces high quality work, and is generally focused and attentive. He independently requests "brain breaks" when needed, showing improved self-regulation. He is studying six GCSE subjects, including STEM, and has

completed his mock exams with predicted grades of 4 and above across all subjects. His ambition is to pursue a vocational pathway at college in September 2026, and he is working purposefully towards this goal.

The Southover Partnership has implemented a comprehensive, personalised programme to support his reintegration and progress costed at £82,142.33. This includes

- 1:1 specialist teaching with bespoke adaptation
  - The costing for the above specialist 1:1 education is £50,740.40
- Therapeutic input including 12 direct counselling interventions
  - The total cost of student Ts direct therapeutic intervention is £960
- A carefully structured induction tailored to his emotional and behavioural needs
- Flexible timetabling and an extended transition plan
- Therapeutic approaches are embedded throughout the school day, focusing on emotional regulation, communication skills, and readiness for learning
- Opportunities for community integration, trips, and social experiences
  - The above elements are included within the organisation base costs which also includes building costs, universal therapeutic intervention, curriculum costs etc which is £30,442.23

The school's attachment informed model ensures Student T experiences predictable routines, safety and trust, which are essential to his development. Specialist interventions and curriculum adaptations ensure the learning environment is accessible, motivating, and developmentally appropriate.

These strategies have contributed to substantial improvements in his attendance, behaviour, engagement and academic performance. He is developing the confidence, independence, and resilience needed to manage complex feelings and to remain safe within both school and community contexts. His progress is supported by data from attendance records, teacher assessments, mock exam results, and qualitative feedback from staff and carers.

Student T's journey at SPS demonstrates that with specialist provision, therapeutic support, and a strong relational culture, he can succeed academically and socially. He continues to progress towards his GCSEs and is preparing confidently for a vocational college pathway, representing a significant turnaround from his previous educational trajectory.

When Student B arrived at Southover, she carried with her a long history of anxiety, trauma, and broken trust from previous schooling, with her previous placement breaking down in Year 7. She had spent several months out of education, relying heavily on a respite worker and occasional tutoring. Diagnosed with Autism, ADHD, Developmental Coordination Disorder, Sensory Processing Disorder, Hypermobility, and significant anxiety with PDA traits, she entered Southover determined not to be deceived by adults again. She avoided instruction, rejected rules, and guarded fiercely the identity of an academically gifted child who should never need help.

Southover's £90,302 provision was built around creating safety, consistency, therapeutic support, and a personalised transition, all of which were crucial for a student with her profile. The school began by offering an extremely slow, carefully attuned integration plan. For almost a year, Student B spent limited time on site, supported primarily by her Key Worker, the adult who became her emotional anchor in school. Staff worked closely with her parents, both of whom engaged deeply in her journey, providing Student B with a stable, predictable routine.

Her respite worker remained a key figure, even working onsite after school in the early months to help bridge trust between home and Southover staff. This collaboration was a turning point; Student B learned that adults at Southover were safe, consistent, and prepared to stay with her even when she tested boundaries.

The £90,302 provision included:

- Key Worker support across the school day
- 1:1 specialist teaching with bespoke adaptation
  - The total cost of the two above elements is £56,295.89
- Therapeutic input including 18 direct SALT interventions and 18 direct OT interventions
- The total cost of student Bs direct therapeutic intervention is £3,600
- Flexible timetabling and an extended transition plan
- Close multiagency collaboration and family work
- Opportunities for community integration, trips, and social experiences
  - The above elements are included within the organisation base costs which also includes building costs, universal therapeutic intervention, curriculum costs etc which is £30,442.23

In her first years, academic progress was secondary to emotional repair and relationship building. She was often oppositional, struggled deeply with sensory regulation, and

avoided contact with peers. Clothing sensitivities meant she frequently removed garments when overwhelmed; emotional flashpoints could block whole lessons. Yet she slowly grew more able to remain in the building, tolerate expectations, and accept the presence of trusted adults.

By late Year 9, once secure attachments had formed, something shifted. She began allowing structured learning, first in English, her strength, and then in maths, historically a source of high anxiety. Timely medication adjustments in Year 10 further improved her ability to reflect on her actions and tolerate staff perspectives.

Her academic outcomes soon reflected her growing trust and stability.

- GCSE English Language – Grade 7
- ELC Maths – Level 3
- ELC History – Level 3

Now in Year 11, she is studying:

- English Literature GCSE (predicted 7)
- History GCSE (predicted 4)
- Film Studies GCSE (predicted 6)
- Functional Skills Maths Level 1 (on track to pass summer 2026)

The most striking outcomes, however, are social and emotional. Student B now attends school willingly and participates in assemblies, trips, and whole school events, something unimaginable when she joined. She no longer requires her parents or respite worker on visits. She has even presented in front of others and now runs a lunchtime club attended by peers. While she still prefers the predictability of adult interaction, she is accepted and understood by her cohort, giving her a secure space to express her personality. Her punctuality has improved, and although mornings remain difficult due to poor sleep routines, her attachment to Southover is evident in her commitment to attending each day.

Today, Student B is preparing to move on to an A level provision, a realistic and exciting next step for a student who, only a few years earlier, could barely walk through a school door.

The £90,302 placement has delivered significant academic qualifications, renewed confidence, emotional stability, social integration, and a clear onward educational pathway, transforming Student B's relationship with education and with herself.

Student L joined The Southover Partnership with significant needs: autism spectrum disorder, limited verbal communication (often single words), reduced confidence, and difficulty sustaining attention. Mainstream settings were unable to meet these needs. Through SPS's personalised, specialist provision, she has progressed from requiring intensive 1:1 support to functioning more independently across the curriculum. Her parents' aspirations for her, to develop her voice, find her place in the world and function confidently as an individual, are now being realised.

Since joining The Southover Partnership, Student L has shown exceptional commitment to her education, maintaining over 95% attendance every year. Her transition into the setting, although initially challenging due to sensory sensitivities and feelings of overwhelm, has become a significant area of success. With structured routines, highly trained staff and an attachment informed model, she has settled fully and now engages with almost all aspects of school life. Where she previously resisted adult led tasks, she is now participating positively in structured learning, accepting direction, and developing increased independence.

A key parental concern on entry was Student L's difficulty forming and maintaining friendships in primary school. She has now built positive and meaningful relationships with her peers and interacts confidently with staff. She demonstrates social curiosity, even greeting unfamiliar students appropriately, which represents a major developmental step and aligns with her family's aspirations for her to communicate and connect meaningfully with others.

Student L has made notable improvements in her personal care and independence. Initially requiring significant support, she can now manage most aspects of personal care with minimal prompting. She is more aware of her environment, is making informed food choices, and is increasingly willing to try new meals. Her sensory tolerance has also improved considerably. She no longer requires noise cancelling headphones, is less anxious, and engages more consistently throughout the school day thanks to a predictable routine and safe, trusted relationships with staff.

Her progress is evident academically and socially. Student L attends 100% of scheduled lessons, consistently applies herself, and is preparing for Functional Skills qualifications in English and maths as she enters Year 10. She accesses the curriculum with increasing independence, requires reduced levels of scaffolding, and has been awarded several in school certificates recognising her personal growth, confidence and effort, all of which have contributed to improved self-esteem.

The annual cost of Student L's placement is £78,385.96, which reflects the intensive, personalised and therapeutic support required to ensure her safety, stability, academic development and long-term independence.

Student L's outcomes have been achieved through a comprehensive programme of intervention, including:

- Specialist teachers, who adapt the curriculum developmentally and meaningfully delivered in small groups of 3 students which also allows for relationships to be formed
- Direct 1:1 specialist teaching assistance to support education and social skills
  - The cost of the above elements is £44,343.62
- A bespoke and carefully phased induction tailored to her needs
- Regular communication with parents, ensuring consistency between home and school
- Therapeutic approaches embedded throughout the day to support emotional regulation
- A detailed Pupil Profile enabling all staff to respond effectively to her strengths, triggers and motivators
- A whole school attachment informed culture, prioritising relationships, safety and trust.
  - The above elements are included within the organisation base costs which also includes building costs, universal therapeutic intervention, curriculum costs etc which is £30,442.23
- Access to specialist therapies and interventions targeting communication, social interaction and sensory regulation including 18 interventions of OT and 18 interventions of SALT.
  - The total cost of student L's direct therapeutic intervention is £3,600

Short-term targets, attendance data, teacher feedback and recent termly reports all demonstrate sustained and measurable progress. Student L is now achieving most of her developmental and personal targets and is successfully working towards a vocational pathway that reflects her strengths, interests and future ambitions.

The specialist environment, therapeutic culture and personalised support offered at SPS continue to be essential in enabling Student L to thrive socially, emotionally and academically.

## ORCHARD EDUCATION

Orchard Education is an independent special school for 95 learners aged 11–16 years, each with an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) across all four areas of need (communication and interaction, cognition and learning, SEMH, and sensory and/or physical needs). The school operates at full capacity across two sites and serves learners from four local authorities, predominantly Northeast Lincolnshire. All Northeast Lincolnshire learners are transported to school daily by The Orchard Learning Support Assistants staff, in school owned fleet vehicles, providing a robust safeguarding layer that builds a trusting positive relationship with families. Demand for placement is high: this year The Orchard received over 140 consultations for just 24 places.

Our core fees are c£35,700 and include transport, therapeutic interventions, qualified learning support assistants, qualified teachers, small class sizes, a specialist SEND curriculum with appropriate resources, a healthy freshly made menu of breakfast and lunch choices, counselling and welfare support, uniform, and additional, further resources and services.

Learners typically arrive at The Orchard at different points throughout the academic year, often following negative educational experiences, placement breakdowns, exclusion, or extended periods outside of education. Many join with low confidence, academic attainment up to six years below age-related expectations, and complex safeguarding needs requiring careful, relational, trauma-informed support. The school serves a highly disadvantaged cohort: 40% of learners live in the lowest deprivation decile nationally, and 51% live in the lowest three deciles. To support its school community, The Orchard provides food hampers each holiday to learners and families, funds holiday activity places with Grimsby Town Football Club, and offers a rich extracurricular programme including coding, sport, reading enrichment, residentials such as PGL, and the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

The learners at The Orchard contribute actively to the local community through a planned social skills curriculum. The Orchard has gained national recognition for its cross generational work with local care homes, where learners build meaningful relationships, reduce social isolation, and challenge public misconceptions of SEND. Across the last two years, learners have raised over £5,000 for charities including Grimsby Food Kitchen, The Salvation Army, Women's Aid and Macmillan Cancer Support, as well as independently buying, preparing, and delivering care packages to see the direct impact of their actions. Community engagement directly supports Preparation for Adulthood, employability skills, and independence. All learners take part in structured careers education, workplace experiences, and employer visits, supported by strong partnerships with local businesses. Last year,

100% of The Orchard's leavers transitioned successfully into apprenticeships or college courses, having achieved Functional Skills and/or GCSEs in English Language and Maths. The impact of The Orchard's provision is clear in its outcomes: attendance has risen to 96%, above the national average for state maintained special schools, and up from 73.87% at the point of joining the Melrose Education family. The school has achieved a 50% reduction in physical interventions for two consecutive years, a 47% reduction in suspensions vs prior years, and engagement has increased from 67.99% to 83.72%. Reading outcomes have improved dramatically - from 72% to 99% meeting the phonics threshold - due to the school's embedded Read Write Inc. approach. In our annual survey, 100% of children, and parents, feel safe at The Orchard.

Most importantly, The Orchard's mission - *putting learners at the HEART of every decision and championing every learner* - is reflected in the voices of its families:

- My son has transformed into a confident and more social young man, achieving an impressive 96% attendance – something we never thought remotely possible... he is well on track with his GCSE Maths and English.”
- “Thank you for believing in my son... He's a different boy since attending The Orchard.”
- “The school have made my son's learning fun... I feel listened to and valued... they are a community of support, love, and laughter – thank you.”
- “I'd like to thank the school for giving me my child back.”

These testimonies reflect the value of Orchard's work: lives are being changed, trust is being rebuilt, and learners who once doubted their futures now believe in their own potential.

## **YOUR IDEAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL**

We are a small specialist school of eight pupils that specialises in working with children with ADHD, autism and school based trauma.

*Your Ideas* is a school that supports children with social and emotional difficulties such as anxiety and school refusal, resulting from developmental trauma and adverse childhood experiences, as well as differences in communication and learning. Children who join our school are often experiencing significant school anxiety, low self-esteem and are disengaged from education. They are likely to have experienced failed school placements, low attendance and disruption before coming to us. As a result, children come to Your Ideas School with varying levels of knowledge, skills and understanding and many will not be working at the national average level for their age. We provide them with an education that is tailored to their individual needs and interests, enabling them to build trust, gain confidence, and to re-engage with and progress their learning. We want children to experience both academic and personal success.

Our curriculum approach considers the challenges that children face and thus is developmental, rather than chronological. Students are assessed on entry to our school in a range of ways, to build a picture of their emotional development as well as their academic ability. This includes gathering assessment information from previous school

settings, parent/carer meetings, Education Health Care Plans and any other multi-agency reports. The curriculum is then designed for each individual child, taking into account their academic and SEMH development, their EHCP and their areas of interest. Children's personal and social development is considered central to everything that we do, with the aim of helping to create well-rounded and happy children.

It is our priority to ensure that children feel psychologically and physically safe first, in order to learn. We will prioritise social, emotional, mental wellbeing as the first essential building block in a child's learning journey. This will lay the foundation for children to engage in learning at a level and pace that is appropriate to their developmental stage, rather than their chronological age. We aim for children to build trusting relationships with their learning mentors/teachers, to become confident, curious, inquisitive learners.

Staff aim to help children to feel safe, become more emotionally resilient and be better placed to engage with life and learning. We want children to feel safe, supported and ready to learn.

We opened in April 2024 and had our first Ofsted in March 2025. We were rated 'good' in all areas.

## **MORE HOUSE SCHOOL**

More House School's outcomes for SEND pupils are extraordinary and reflect high aspiration. The fees are surprisingly low and sit below almost every other (if not actually every other) independent special school provider. The school is working currently with more than 275 other schools across the UK, including many state-maintained mainstream schools, supporting them to build genuinely inclusive classroom and school environments.

### **Firstly, I strongly support the government's ambitions to make mainstream schools more inclusive and able to support far more children with additional needs.**

However, I am really worried that a focus on putting specialist hubs into schools does not follow the best scientific research, will fail our young people, and will not represent value for money in terms of cost, and young people's social and academic outcomes. Such hubs too often promote social division and isolation. They mark neurodivergent young people out as different from their peers, separating them from some of their classes. They can act to disenfranchise classroom teachers from the SEND process, fostering a notion of SEND support happening in a special unit rather than being the everyday responsibility and skill of all teachers. They can reduce pupils' development of independence and social integration skills. Too often, aspirations for SEND pupils in mainstream schools are insufficiently aspirational.

I believe More House School is able to offer tangible, practical and proven-effective solutions to support the government's SEND reform ambitions.

### **More House School:**

More House School in Frensham, Surrey, is the largest SEND-specialist school in the United Kingdom, with a pupil roll of over 500, all of whom have complex diagnoses of SEND. The school is a charity and delivers extraordinary outcomes for its students (above the national averages at GCSE and A' Level), a majority of whom are funded by 29 different local authorities. There are currently 411 EHCPs in the school. In the last 30 years, More House School has grown from being a school of 65 pupils to its current roll of more than 500.

Placements at More House School cost the equivalent of a state-maintained special school.

Our fees are:

- **between £22,056 and £26,607 per year for day placements** (depending on age);
- between £33,096 and £37,647 per year for weekly boarding placements (depending on age); and
- between £36,114 and £40,665 per year for full boarding placements (again depending on age).

More House School's pupils, aged eight to 18, face the

challenges of Specific Learning Difficulties, Speech & Language weaknesses and associated Special Educational Needs, including Autistic Spectrum Conditions. Many of them join the school having experienced trauma in their previous educational settings, some have spent significant periods out of school, and a majority are frightened of the future, worrying they will never succeed in education or offer value to society.

More House School delivers a mainstream, academic curriculum, with all of our pupils taking a breadth of GCSEs and equivalent BTecs at 16 years old, most then continuing into the Sixth Form, and a majority progressing to university, despite previously believing such a pathway impossible for them. We train every one of our teachers, whatever their academic subject-specialism, to understand the common barriers to learning experienced by neurodivergent learners, and to deliver the mainstream curriculum using strategies that empower all children in the classroom to thrive and to make the best possible progress.

More House School achieves schoolwide attendance of 93%, despite being a SEND-specialist school with pupils commuting from 29 different local authority areas, and has had only 1 permanent exclusion in the past 5 years.

### **The scientific base:**

More than two decades' proof of the success of our educational model has, more recently, been complemented by powerful research published by the University of Cambridge's Centre for Attention Learning and Memory (CALM; part of the Medical Research Council's Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit). The CALM research, stretching over a period of some 12 years, examined the success of recognised learning and support strategies associated with specific diagnostic labels. Their findings show that a diagnosis, whether it be of Dyslexia, Developmental Coordination Disorder, Dyscalculia, Developmental Language Disorder, ADHD, Autism, Sensory Processing Disorder, is not a strong predictor of the classroom approaches which will be most suited to that child or young person. This is not suggesting that any of these diagnoses is unsafe, but that science now recognises the many grey areas shared between diagnoses, and that although a child might have a primary diagnosis, they will almost certainly have elements of others, whether formally diagnosed or not.

Possibly the most helpful starting point for engaging with the Cambridge CALM centre research is this published paper: [Cognitive Dimensions of Learning in Children With Problems in Attention, Learning, and Memory - PMC](#). There are many other papers published from the wide-ranging study.

## Informing the educational model:

The research evidence provides a clear rationale for a Learning Beyond the (diagnostic) Label approach in every classroom, addressing the four key areas of skill-weakness which are common amongst all of these differing combinations of diagnoses.

The 4 key skill areas: Language, Attention, (working) Memory and Processing (LAMP).

Where classroom teachers, for any age-group of child and in any subject discipline – whether A' Level Chemistry, or Year Nine Psychology, or Year Five English – are able to employ teaching strategies which support pupils' Language, Attention, Working Memory and Processing, all pupils, whether neurotypical or neurodivergent are enabled to access the curriculum, to feel safe and engaged, and to make astonishing progress.

**This is true inclusion**, and the essence of excellence in teaching and learning. It empowers students to build their self-esteem and belief, and to become independent in their learning. It enables them to discover their potential, and to realise it. Through this approach, mainstream classroom teachers are able to serve well the needs of neurodivergent children with a range of diagnoses.

## Support for schools and teachers:

- ITTECF

Whilst the DfE's ITTECF (Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework) recognises the need to support SEND, in its current form it still fails properly to embed SEND, with SEND mainly recognised only in teaching standards 2 and 5. More House School has adapted the '*Learn that*' and '*Learn how to*' statements throughout the ITTECF, yielding the **More House Practice Model**, as an effective tool supporting classroom teachers and school leaders to deliver comprehensively inclusive learning environments, using practical strategies.

- Resources for teachers

More House School has developed an innovative **Class Mapping Tool** which supports non-SEND-specialist classroom teachers to build a heat-map of the strengths and weaknesses of the class cohort in relation to the four key skill areas, generating a raft of practical inclusive teaching strategies aligned with learners' needs.

- Online training

More House School has designed and now delivers **online nationally accredited (CPD Standards) Level 3 and 4 SEND Awards for teachers** and teaching assistants,

upskilling them to become confident 'Beyond The Label' inclusive classroom practitioners.

- ITT

More House School already supports two university-based initial teacher training providers, and is teaming up with a local SCITT (School Centred ITT).

- University research partnerships

More House School is currently involved in research projects with four different universities:

- University College London's Institute of Education,
- University of Oxford,
- University of East Anglia (working with Professor Joni Holmes, who led the University of Cambridge CALM project; and
- University of Southampton.

We also now have funding approved for a PhD researcher who will commence research in October 2026.

- Support of schools

**More House School currently supports more than 275 schools across the UK** to be more inclusive in their teaching and to improve their support of neurodivergent children or those with SEND. This includes state-maintained and independent schools, multi-academy trusts, primaries, secondaries and post-sixteen providers.

- Conferences

More House School delivers an annual **Adaptive Teaching Conference** in Surrey, attracting schools from across the state-maintained and independent sectors. This March's conference is titled 'Intentional Inclusion'. We will also deliver our first conference in the Midlands this summer, aiming to support more schools across the Midlands, Wales and the North of England. We are regularly invited to speak at events.

- Professionals' events

More House School hosts regular Professionals' events, supporting educational professionals in schools and beyond to build their understanding of truly inclusive classroom and school-wide practice. This includes considering the impact of schoolwide policies such as zero-tolerance behaviour, and the challenges posed for neurodivergent pupils.

## Summary:

Whilst some pupils' complex special needs will require a specialist environment, there is huge potential for state-maintained mainstream primary and secondary schools to become far more accessible to neurodivergent children and those with SEND, who too often feel unable to cope within such environments.

The government's aim to support more children with additional needs in mainstream schools is achievable, but will be most successful if implemented through the highly cost-effective and empowering More House School educational model, already being practised in an increasing number of mainstream school environments.

The More House School team is eager to share this learning with the Department for Education but, so far, has failed to make its voice heard. Our charitable mission is to empower children and young people with SEND to transform their futures. We are committed to enabling far more young people, across the UK, to thrive in school.

## Useful links:

[Cognitive Dimensions of Learning in Children With Problems in Attention, Learning, and Memory - PMC](#)

[Centre for Attention Learning and Memory – Centre for Attention Learning and Memory](#)

[Home - More House School](#)

[Training & Outreach - More House School](#)

## **PEAR TREE SCHOOL**

Pear Tree Projects was formed in 1990, and we are proud of the fact that we have staff remaining with us from the 90s and early 2000s. The stability and consistency this represents is valuable to the service delivery. The education element evolved into a registered school in 2003 as a result the need to provide education to students living in our residential homes who could not access mainstream education.

Our area of specialism is looking after children who have experienced severe and complex trauma in their early lives. Many have lived through experiences that have left lasting psychological harm, and in some cases, this has led to the development of challenging behaviours that require a highly structured, closely supervised environment. The school is designed to respond sensitively and consistently to the evolving needs of each student.

The school is based on two farms near to the residential homes where they live. The important point to recognise is that the school is an authentic working environment, it is a school 'on' a farm 'not' a school with a small farm attached. The therapeutic value of this kind of environment for children who have had negative experiences of education is significant. It is a warm welcoming nurturing environment full of sympathetic supportive but stimulating learning opportunities many of which are created by the environment.

Prior to admission to Pear Tree School, most students' attendance rates could be described as very poor if at all. Many students don't have an education placement due to a transient existence within the care system or school exclusion. When in school, absenteeism regularly occupies the range from "persistent" to "sever". This all changes when a child is placed in a Pear Tree Home. The reasons for this is a holistic approach to restructuring a child's educational experience. It starts at home!

A safe and stable home life in a sympathetic environment with a consistent therapeutic approach. This approach places a high value on education and the importance of engaging in their life and meaningful experiences every day. The definition of home life in this context is the place where they go to sleep each night, their residential placement. A sympathetic but stimulating environment that is full of learning opportunities. Seeing and experiencing new things is a regular part of school life. There is always something to look forward to. This in itself is often a new concept. The school staff (along with support from the residential team) present a "values based" approach ensuring that all students are both physically and emotionally safe. Safe from their past lives, safe from abuse and uninhibited in their ability to grow to their full potential. Activities and experiences are designed to initially inspire students to want to engage in their education, as a result they are motivated to learn, developing skill sets on the back of incremental and sequential learning opportunities. These learning experiences are known to students to increase their skill sets to be utilised in adult hood and increase employability. The culture and ethos of the school rewards the values of regular attendance, engagement and progress. Rewards are in the form of individual verbal positive praise, increased accreditation and group praise in the form of certificate acknowledgement for 100% attendance at presentation day. The progress felt through all of the above results in increased self-esteem and self-confidence. As a result, school life becomes "magnetic" and students want

to continue during weekends and holiday times. As a result, attendance rates increase and are sustained. Average attendance rate is 98%

Progress is measured in a holistic way also. Only a small number are considered resilient enough to complete GCSE's although possible, however this is not the only measure of educational achievement. From a very low starting point student achieve many AQA unit awards as part of an ongoing learning and achieving process from the onset. BTEC and Functional Skills at all Levels are the usual way forward.

We have also developed a tool to measure progress in a holistic way. Our Personal Holistic Competence Assessment System has been developed over a thirty-year period and is supported by an independent research paper by a leading forensic psychologist who studied ten years' worth of data. The system works on the basis of marginal gains and asks 170 key questions. It is common for students to come in with an initial assessment of 30% and leave with an assessment in the 90% or even 100%.

We have made our systems available to 'all' and free to use on our website. This was funded through our Research and Development programme and budget.

As a result of feedback regarding the above we developed two apps for 'anyone' to use. These are self-assessment apps and are Emotional Wellbeing Indicator app and Preparation for Employment App.

Indeed, they address the two really important issues in life and in-fact one of the most important outcomes we are particularly proud of is our ability to promote a work ethic and an employment culture. Whilst data is difficult to confirm we believe we have more students in employment post 18 than any other comparable service.

The significance of this is that the student / young adult is much more likely to break negative cycles of abuse and develop positive functioning patterns of behaviour resulting in the absence of needing ongoing services. In short, student in our school have the opportunity to become taxpayers and contribute to society in a way they never would have been able should their initial trajectory prior to admission have continued. They are an investment in all our futures.

Education costs are currently £1047.87 per week. However, we have many students on legacy fees significantly less than this. School fees were incorporated into our residential fees for the first approximately 15 years of running. Increased expectations and administrative requirements resulted in separate itemisation. However, I believe the total costs are currently mid-range of what is available in the marketplace for a significantly higher standard of service.

Much of our history and development can be read separately, our school is unique and has much to offer the wider education community. We have 100% track record of Outstanding inspection results before transferring to ISI where we feel we have found our cultural home. The details of this are far more complicated than one email, however the department of education is based within a five-minute drive of our school. Please accept an open invitation to come and see, interact and experience our school, stay and have lunch, you will learn so much and we are delighted to share everything we have and know. Best wishes.

# MOON HALL SCHOOL

## About the school

Moon Hall School Reigate is a not-for-profit, registered charity providing specialist day education for pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD). The school delivers outstanding outcomes for pupils with dyslexia and associated learning differences through a fully integrated specialist model. Every pupil has a recognised special educational need, and over 65% hold an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). When provision is designed entirely around the needs of dyslexic learners, students exceed national expectations academically and personally. Moon Hall shows that specialist provision can be delivered at good value.

Moon Hall supports 200 pupils aged 7–16 with:

- Specific Learning Difficulties (primarily dyslexia)
- Associated Speech, Language and Communication Needs
- ADHD
- Literacy-related anxiety
- Average or above cognitive ability

Many arrive after prolonged difficulty in mainstream despite reasonable adjustments and PINS inclusion measures. These are not pupils requiring high-cost residential or complex SEMH placements. They are academically able young people whose literacy needs have not been met early or intensively enough where the LEAs and local schools themselves state they cannot meet needs. Moon Hall works with 12 LEAs.

## Base Annual Fee (including VAT):

£28,596 per pupil

This includes:

- Specialist small-class teaching
- Embedded literacy intervention
- Pastoral support
- Access to Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) and

Occupational Therapy (OT) general support

- Where EHCPs require 1:1 SALT or OT, this is transparently costed and added according to need. Moon Hall reinvests all surplus into provision and community support. We support local authorities, families and mainstream schools through free professional forums, teacher training and family workshops.

## Model of Provision

Moon Hall operates a fully integrated specialist model. Key features:

- Specialist teachers trained in SpLD deliver all lessons
- Small class sizes (typically 8–10 pupils)
- No routine withdrawal from core teaching
- Literacy embedded across the curriculum
- Continuous standardised progress monitoring
- Strong pastoral and wellbeing support

This avoids fragmented “bolt-on” support and reduces reliance on TA substitution models.

## Outcomes

### Academic

- Significant literacy catch-up
- GCSE results aligned to cognitive ability (often above national figures)
- Strong progression to sixth form, FE and apprenticeships

Our outcomes far exceed national averages for pupils with SEN (30.4%) and especially those with EHCPs (< 7%) achieving passes in both English and Maths. They also surpass the national all-pupil average for Grade 4+ ( $\approx$  67%, Ofqual 2025) — a remarkable achievement for a cohort where 100% have SEN and over 85% hold EHCPs.

### Social and Emotional

Pupils often arrive with:

- Literacy-based trauma
- Avoidance and anxiety
- Reduced attendance

Following placement we see:

- Improved engagement
- Significant increased attendance
- Stronger peer identity
- Restored academic self-belief
- Family situation settled

The combination of specialist teaching and belonging is central to improved long-term outcomes:

- Contribution to the Wider SEND System
- Beyond pupil placements, Moon Hall:
- Hosts free SENCo forums
- Provides teacher CPD and specialist training
- Runs family workshops
- Offers diagnostic assessment services (means tested or free)
- Shares best practice with mainstream settings

## Offer to Work More Closely with Local Authorities

Moon Hall is keen to:

- Engage earlier in assessment discussions
- Support joint commissioning conversations
- Provide transparent cost modelling
- Share literacy and intervention expertise
- Reduce tribunal escalation through earlier fit decisions

We believe closer collaboration with local authorities can:

- Improve outcomes
- Reduce long-term cost
- Increase parental confidence
- Stabilise the SEND system

## Conclusion

Moon Hall School Reigate demonstrates that:

- Independent specialist SpLD provision can be delivered at moderate cost (or indeed lower cost vs mainstream)
- Strong outcomes are achievable through integrated specialist teaching
- Collaboration with Local Authorities can improve system sustainability

# **NORTHEASE MANOR SCHOOL**

## **About the school**

We are a small independent charity catering for neurodivergent young people aged 7 – 19. At Northease Manor 100% of our students have SEND, 98% have an EHCP on which the local authority has named us as there are no other appropriate placements available for the young person. The remainder of students are awaiting this decision to take place and pay privately. The young people have a range of needs which includes autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADHD, Cerebral Palsy, Williams Syndrome, visual impairment, hearing impairment, Tourette's, OCD, PDA, dyspraxia, hypermobility, chronic fatigue syndrome, anxiety, sensory issues, dysphoria and depression. Most young people have multiple diagnoses. Our enquiry rates remain high, with 35 enquiries in January alone; and we are full.

We provide small classes (max 8), a full therapy provision of SaLT and OTs, plus integrated therapy assistants, dyslexia intervention via two additionally qualified dyslexia specialist teachers (level 5). We have a Pastoral team of five who are all DSL qualified and have mental health first aid certification as well as a mental health lead, a psychotherapist one day a week (we hope for two days shortly), and teaching staff who are highly trained in SEND.

## **Fees/costs**

The school has single costs for all students and those with EHCPs of £32,000 + VAT, with no hidden extras for supplies, lunch or classes taken. All students have complex needs; however, the cost remains fixed for all. While some may not have the need for OT written in their EHCP they may need dyslexia intervention etc, others may benefit from counselling but not need therapy intervention. Therefore, as a school we find the flat rate of £32,000 plus VAT more straightforward to apply.

However, as a school we are under constant financial pressures. We did not have a fee increase last year, after the LAs negotiated a three-year deal previously, and have requested an uplift to £35,000 p.a. + VAT for 2026-27 and have received a categorical 'no' from local authorities. We remain the lowest cost option for local authority specialist placements. As an independent school however, we have been expected to fund support that should be provided by CAMHS as well as salary uplifts, increases to National Insurance and cost of living expenses that other schools have also faced.

## **Outcomes**

Our attendance in term 1 this year was 88.5%, higher than our local authority schools and the national average, this is even though there are 7 students out of our 115 on reduced timetables due to medical needs and increased anxiety.

Many of our young people were previously out of school before coming to us and had spent a year or more in EOTAS packages whilst waiting for an appropriate placement. At Northease Manor they want to come to school as they know their needs will be met, they will be with friends who understand them, and they will receive an education that stretches them whilst also supporting them.

Our young people access GCSEs, functional skills and entry level qualifications and achieved a value added last year of 0.62, with some subjects generating much higher - English (1.92 Value Added), creative subjects like Art (2.50 Value added), Photography (2.00) and Textiles (2.25), and physical subjects like sports studies (2.33).

**Note:** The value added is based on baseline testing and predicted grades on entry to Northease in year 7, or from testing elsewhere at this transition point if they join us later, to the actual grades obtained at GCSE.

More importantly, our young people find peers who accept them, understand their differences and embrace their strengths whilst learning to manage their challenges. They access travel training, preparation for adulthood classes, life skills as well as all classes provided at mainstream secondary schools. Our students are able to have personalised timetables if they have strengths or challenges that we can accommodate – for example a year 9 student gained a 9 in maths GCSE so is taking Higher Maths in year 10 and Statistics in Year 11. Year 11 students have been able to transition back into mainstream colleges for 6<sup>th</sup> form provision having been equipped with the skills they need to manage in a neurotypical environment.

In order to provide a well-rounded offer we also provide a full range of enrichments including swimming, table tennis, football, yoga, gym, chess, Dungeons and Dragons, Lego therapy, arts projects, Forest School, Duke of Edinburgh bronze and silver awards and choir. Families report that the feeling of overwhelm their children have experienced and the masking they have been forced to continue stops when they come to Northease Manor. The highly trained, nurturing environment we provide allows their children to be who they really are, and families tell us they finally 'have their child back'.

# **PIVOT**

## **WHO WE ARE**

Pivot is an independent specialist education provider operating across Leeds and Kirklees for learners aged 8–18 with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP). We exist to ensure every child with complex needs has the opportunity to thrive, by creating safe, relationship-centred environments, bespoke pathways, and strong wraparound support for families.

We serve children and young people who have not found a place to thrive in mainstream settings. They come to us with complex needs and very real strengths. Our job is to create the right conditions for both to be seen. When we get it right, attendance returns, confidence grows, and the path to a positive future becomes visible again.

## **WHAT WE OFFER**

Pivot provides a range of tailored placements: on-site provision for SEMH and neurodivergent learners; low-stimulus LINKs classes; and flexible outreach packages for EBSNA learners to re-engage gradually. Every learner is assessed on entry by a specialist central team comprising a SENCO/strategic teaching lead, teaching & learning lead, mental health practitioner, and qualified social worker, keeping EHCPs live and interventions timely.

Our stage-not-age curriculum runs across four pathways, Primary/Secondary Core, LINKs, Nurture, and Outreach, blending academic, vocational, and life-skills learning with enrichment and therapeutic support. Quality assurance is embedded through formative assessment, internal and external moderation, and leadership-driven improvement recognised by inspectors.

## **HEADLINE OUTCOMES**

In 2023–24, Pivot achieved a GCSE English pass rate of 83.3% and a Maths pass rate of 87.5%. Learners met or exceeded an average of 82% of their EHCP targets. All Year 11 learners progressed to college, training or employment. Zero learners are recorded as NEET in the latest destinations snapshot across Leeds and Kirklees cohorts.

For learners with Education-Based School Avoidance (EBSA), Pivot's approach delivers meaningful attendance recovery, stabilising learners who arrived at 0% attendance into sustained patterns. Learners progress to trusted further education and specialist providers including Bradford College, Leeds City College, Kirklees College, and WNSILC.

## **PUBLIC VALUE & SYSTEM CONTRIBUTION**

Pivot raises outcomes for learners who are least well-served by mainstream settings, while helping public services

control costs and demand. Our central team deflects inappropriate statutory referrals by working alongside families and school teams, solving issues earlier and only escalating cases at the right threshold, reducing pressure on children's social care.

With staffing at approximately 65% of total cost, compared to over 80% typical in mainstream, efficiencies are passed to commissioners. Our charges are consistently below the approximately £62k average cited by the IFS for comparable placements. Predictable, multi-year commissioning enables stable staffing and lower per-place costs while protecting quality.

We coach schools on alternative provision, advise headteachers pre-exclusion, and share compliance practice, improving inclusion at individual and system level. Central admissions handle 400+ parent calls annually, signposting to SENDIASS and the Local Offer, reducing friction for families navigating the system.

## **WORKFORCE & GROWTH**

Staff grew from 49 in September 2020 to 172 in September 2025, with 26 internal promotions in 2024/25 and funded qualifications for 11 staff at a cost of £70k. An annual CPD allowance of £500 per staff member supports ongoing development. Independent of national pay scales, Pivot benchmarks pay and rewards performance within a balanced benefits package, helping attract and retain talent across the region.

*Every child can make progress in the right place with the right people. Our job is to keep building those places, to keep training those people, and to keep faith with families who have been told it cannot be done.*

## **ARNOLD LODGE SCHOOL**

A pupil with an EHCP for Autism and significant and complex Mental Health Needs, who had spent extended periods of time out of education, successfully completed their A Levels at Arnold Lodge School which enabled them to study at degree level and pursue their dream of working in the field of Zoology.

Pupil A had a strong attainment profile in primary school. They became increasingly anxious in Year 7 following their transition to a mainstream, state secondary school and were referred to CAMHS in Year 9. Pupil A received a diagnosis of Autism and continued to suffer from increasingly severe and complex mental health challenges, for which they received regular intensive psychological treatment from CAMHS. Due to their difficulties, Pupil A started to be educated at home by the Flexible Learning Team as they found it increasingly difficult to access the school site and join lessons. CAMHS stated that attending school was a major contributing factor in the course of Pupil A's illness and, following their withdrawal from mainstream state education, there was a noticeable reduction in their level of depression and risk. However, their isolation increased and the decision was made to reintegrate them into school. This failed and they remained under the care of the Flexible Learning Team. They managed to sit 5 GCSEs.

To study A Levels, Pupil A wanted to join a mainstream school with a Sixth Form. They had an interest in animals, especially giraffes, and were keen to do well in Maths and the Sciences. Pupil A's aspiration was to complete a Zoology degree so that they could become a zookeeper and work with giraffes.

Pupil A joined Arnold Lodge Sixth Form to study A Levels in Biology, Geography and Maths. They had an enhanced four-week transition programme to support their reintegration into an educational environment, including 1:1 sessions with their Key Worker, opportunities to get to know their teaching staff and time spent in their 'safe space'.

Pupil A worked with their Key Worker to create a Pupil Profile, which was shared with their teachers, and a Care Plan was put in place to ensure there were clear and agreed steps to manage Pupil A's emotional needs. Pupil A also had Exam Access Arrangements put in place of a separate room, rest breaks and 25% Extra Time.

Pupil A had a reduced timetable [4.5 days per week]. Whilst in lessons, Pupil A was able to listen to music and take rest breaks. They formed a strong and trusting relationship with their Key Worker who was available to support them during lessons and at unstructured times of the school day.

Pupil A benefitted hugely from the small class sizes and high level of pastoral support that Arnold Lodge, as an independent educational setting, was able to provide.

Pupil A completed the whole of Year 12 and Year 13 at Arnold Lodge School, without any periods out of education,

and achieved A\* (Biology), A\* (Maths) and A (Geography). They went on to study a BSc in Animal Sciences (Ecology and Conservation) at a Russell Group University, which included a Year in Industry. They lived independently on the university campus for the entirety of their degree course.

Pupil A's mother emailed the school to tell us that Pupil A graduated with a 1st class degree. The email ended with the following:

'We never had any doubts about Pupil A's academic abilities. But they wouldn't even have managed to get to university without the support and encouragement that you and everyone at Arnold Lodge gave them. We will always be so thankful that they came to ALS, which was exactly what they needed.'

From early on, Pupil A wanted to work with animals. They demonstrated significant resilience and strength in their determination to reintegrate into a school setting in order to complete their A Levels. Without these qualifications, they could not have pursued their degree course of choice, which in turn will now enable them to fulfill their aspirations. The small size of Arnold Lodge School and the high level of personalised education and pastoral care they received provided the environment they needed to be successful and realise their potential.

## **GROW INDEPENDENT SCHOOL**

The student is now in year 11 following a turbulent attempt at mainstream secondary school. After coming out of the Covid classroom bubbles in year 7, this student had not been able to access full time education within the mainstream setting. By year 9, student's attendance had dropped below 50% and the only education she received was through Grow's Outreach work when we operated as a tuition centre only.

The student completed year 9 only working on a one to one basis, in a learning support facility and with no peer interaction. Student struggled with severe anxiety and low mood due to this.

The student has a mild learning difficulty and her learning progress is affected by her poor attention and concentration. She is working significantly below that of her peers and struggled to keep up with the pace of learning in the mainstream setting, despite intervention. Student became the master of masking and smiled her way through school until she could not cover up her emotions any longer. The student then became withdrawn and stopped attending school due to severe anxiety. This impacted her extra curricular activities at home and she became isolated from peers and groups.

The student has significant difficulties with her expressive and receptive language skills and finds it hard to articulate

ideas in sequence. This, coupled with her slow processing speed, meant that she was unable to keep up with the pace of mainstream lessons.

The student demands a high level of attention and difficulties with attachments, feeling safe and developing a stable sense of self. She has a background of complex developmental trauma, attachment disorder and emotional vulnerability.

The biggest cause of this students' frustration and anxiety stem from others underestimating her based on her slow response which leads to her being misunderstood, patronised and embarrassed or even sometimes unseen and unsupported.

The student has aspirations of becoming a beautician and has high expectations of herself. She can often take on too much responsibility and therefore worries that if she does not make the most of her education now, she will not succeed in life. Therefore her absence from school had a negative impact on her self esteem and self value. The student participates in Dance outside of school and has a close bond with the 'Dance family'. The impact of her needs not being met in mainstream affected her ability to continue with her extra curricular activities due to feeling withdrawn and having extremely low mood.

## HEATHFIELD KNOLL SCHOOL

In line with national statistics, we were receiving increasing enquiries about children unable to cope in large mainstream education but did not meet the criteria for a special school. Children are falling through the gaps; missing in education. School refusal is rising to epidemic proportions and is a genuine phenomenon, often because there is no suitable setting where the child can thrive in the right environment.

The concept of Connect was born and the initiative to fill this gap in the market and to genuinely change the lives of children in the local area who otherwise might never access mainstream or independent education began. Research opportunities were limited; there is simply nothing else like Connect in the area for SEND children who need an academic offer alongside a nurturing, personalised, blended approach. Few, if any independent schools offer alternative provision within the same umbrella as the mainstream school. It is both innovative and unique and is in contrast to public perceptions of 'independent education'.

Connect is a small setting for up to 24 children of secondary age. It is a reimagined space (formerly a scout hut) that is now four modern classrooms centred around a social area called the breakout space, where our children learn how to socialise, interact and feel comfortable with their peers. We also have a kitchen to support the development of life skills, an OT-designed Sensory Integration room equipped with a hammock swing, BOSU balls, a black-out tent, peanut balls and more, and finally, a comfortable, quiet room which offers a sanctuary for those who need a time-out in order to avoid sensory overload and the associated repercussions.

Sensory processing is a condition that affects the vast majority of our children, which goes some way to explain why they were unable to cope in busy, loud classrooms elsewhere. Every aspect of Connect was developed with this in mind. Each classroom is low sensory, low arousal - the typical busy classroom wall displays are replaced with muted, calm, carefully selected displays; classrooms are uncluttered, minimalist and all contain, as standard, everything a child needs. No child should feel embarrassed to use resources that improve their experience of school life. Readily available at all times are: Ear defenders; Fidget toys; Busy feet; Writing slopes; Overlays for children with visual stress; Chrome books for assistive technology; Traffic light cards; Zones of regulation anxiety ladders.

While stand-alone as a provision, Connect is a valued part of the main school with children in Connect having the opportunity to integrate in the following ways:

- Socially - break/lunchtimes;
- The Arts - Art, PE, Food, Drama, Music;
- Specific subjects of strength - e.g., Maths/Science;
- With a small group using the facilities and/or main school teachers
- KS4 pathways (e.g. vocational strands, pure GCSE, hybrid; functional skills / entry level certificates)

Several pupils are now fully integrated into our mainstream school. Pupils from mainstream also access the Connect environment and this has led to pupils (suffering mental health crises) joining Connect full-time.

Other ways of connecting with the main school include house competitions, school trips, assemblies (if appropriate for the children) and using the subject specialisms in school to complement the SEND specialism in Connect. Inclusivity is key.

The impact of Connect has been phenomenal:

Child A: Arrived with very low self-esteem and high anxiety affecting attendance and participation. Through sustained emotional support, SaLT input, and structured social development over four years in Connect, he rebuilt confidence and skills. He is now completing KS4 qualifications, excelling in Functional Skills English and Maths, has formed friendships school-wide and represented the school in football.

Child B: Entered Connect after missing three years of education, presenting with high anxiety and unable to complete an ASD assessment. A phased transition, consistent small-class placement, and intensive support with routines and relationships enabled sustained re-engagement. He has now caught up to age-related expectations, is selecting GCSE options independently, and is accessing mainstream classes successfully.

Statistically, 85% of Connect pupils meet their academic targets, with many exceeding them. By designing bespoke pathways blending GCSEs, BTECs, Functional Skills & Entry Level qualifications, the team enables pupils to move from total educational withdrawal to achieving meaningful, recognised qualifications.

Inspectors noted that pupils with SEND 'achieve excellent levels of progress' and that their experience at Heathfield Knoll represents 'a profound transformation in the quality of their life'.

Parents' voices show that this improvement is sustained, not just a short-term boost. One parent shared that her son, who had experienced school avoidance since Year 1, now has strong friendships, has closed the gaps from three missed years, and is working at or above expected levels.

The team stays in close contact with families and coordinates with local authorities, autism support, CAMHS, OT and SaLT so pupils see the same strategies across home, school and services.

Connect staff work and reflect as a team; weekly meetings are used to share new resources, analyse tough days, and agree adjustments, so practice evolves rather than ossifies. Staff undertake regular training in autism, SEMH, trauma, and sensory processing, constantly asking, 'How can we improve this pupil's experience?' Inclusion begins at the pre-admission stage, with meetings with families, visits to

a child's current school, and the school also hosts training events for parents and SENCos from other schools. This commitment has produced a distinctive home-grown toolkit, such as personalised sensory ladders, individualised timetables and clear protocols for safe spaces that support pupils from their first taster day to post-16 transitions.

This expertise has shifted the culture of the entire school. Many mainstream colleagues have adopted Connect strategies, such as visual schedules and co-regulation, in their own classrooms. The Good Schools Guide describes SEND as the 'beating heart of Heathfield Knoll's identity' reflecting a school-wide cultural change rooted in the team's example.

Connect explicitly teaches pupils how their actions affect others, using PSHE, restorative conversations and everyday interactions to build empathy and responsibility. In mixed clubs, productions, house events and trips, Connect pupils stand on the same stage, sing in the same choir and compete in the same teams as their peers, reshaping how the whole community sees SEND. One parent writes, 'End of term assemblies invariably make me well up about the amount and degree of reasonable adjustments made and the way the Head and Head of Connect adjust to each child

as they give their award out'.

The impact is systemic; the team now receives referrals from at least eight local authorities and remains oversubscribed because there is 'simply nothing else like Connect in the area'. Parents testify to the life-changing difference made: 'They have given us our daughter back,' one parent shared, while another noted that 'without Connect, our child would still be out of school.'

Their success has driven growth in SEND across the main school: over a third of pupils now have EHCPs and nearly two-thirds are on the SEND register, yet inspectors still found a calm, positive climate. Natalie Packer, SEND consultant, describes Connect as 'a unique and high-quality provision for pupils with more complex needs within an independent school setting'.

Connect has shown that specialist SEND provision can sit at the heart of a small school, raising aspirations for pupils who were out of education and reshaping the culture for everyone else. It is integral to the Heathfield Knoll School family. In March 2026, Heathfield Knoll School was awarded Worcestershire Independent School of the Year.

## **THE LADY BYRON SCHOOL**

Our Key Stage 4 (KS4) leavers achieved a 100% positive post-school destination rate, with all pupils progressing into college or work placements. This success is particularly significant as the cohort consisted of students who were previously non-attenders before joining Lady Byron School, all of whom have a diagnosis of autism, an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), and experience high levels of anxiety and complex mental health needs. Despite these significant barriers, all students were supported to re-engage in learning, build confidence, and successfully transition into meaningful post-16 pathways.

Prior to joining Lady Byron School, many of our KS4 students had faced prolonged periods of school non-attendance due to significant social, emotional, and mental health difficulties. Several had disengaged completely from mainstream education, often as a result of unmet additional needs including autism spectrum conditions, high anxiety, and other complex mental health challenges.

These pupils arrived with low confidence, fragile self-esteem, and inconsistent learning histories. Our challenge was to re-establish trust in education, provide a nurturing and highly individualised learning environment, and equip each student with the confidence and skills needed to take their next steps towards adulthood.

*Outline the strategies or actions taken to address the challenge*

To address these challenges, the school implemented a multi-layered, therapeutic, and individualised approach:

**Personalised learning pathways:** Each student followed a bespoke programme balancing academic learning with vocational opportunities, life skills, and therapeutic support.

**Specialist support for autism and mental health:** Trained staff and external professionals provided tailored interventions addressing sensory needs, anxiety management, and emotional regulation.

**Robust pastoral and wellbeing structures:** Regular 1:1 sessions, mentoring, and key worker relationships helped students feel safe, valued, and supported.

**Careers and transition planning:** Early and sustained guidance ensured students explored realistic and aspirational post-16 options through college visits, work experience, and vocational tasters.

**Collaborative multi-agency working:** Regular reviews involving families, therapists, and local authority professionals ensured EHCP outcomes remained central to planning and progress.

**Flexible accreditation:** The curriculum offered accessible qualifications to recognise each student's progress and achievements, promoting a sense of success and self-efficacy.

All KS4 leavers successfully transitioned into further education or employment, representing a 100% positive destination rate. This achievement is exceptional given their histories of non-attendance and complex needs.

Students demonstrated significant improvements in attendance, engagement, and emotional resilience during their time with us. Qualitative feedback from students and families reflected increased confidence, reduced anxiety about transition, and a stronger sense of purpose and belonging. Staff noted measurable growth in self-regulation, communication, and independence.

Destination tracking data confirming all leavers progressed to college or employment placements. Attendance and engagement records showing substantial improvement across the cohort.

EHCP review data and progress evidence demonstrating that individual outcomes and targets were met or exceeded.

Student and parent/carer feedback gathered through review meetings, evidencing satisfaction with support and post-16 readiness.

Staff evaluations and reports highlighting significant social, emotional, and academic development.

## **LONGDON PARK SCHOOL**

On the last two OFSTED inspections Longdon Park School has been rated as Outstanding for our personal development for pupils. This rating is in relation to the resources we must enable us to provide experiences to give every pupils to improve their personal development and improve outcomes.

Longdon Park School has 14 different vehicles of varying sizes to be able to transport big groups of pupils, small groups and individuals if needed to experience off sites such as café trips, museums, theatre, horse riding, climbing and food shopping to name a few. These offsite activities/ experiences don't just allow our pupils to do something they really enjoy but provide them with functional skills to going into the real world such as interacting with members of the public, workers in shops, socializing with others and shopping.

In September 2023 we open our Longdon Parkway site that not only provided Key stage 4&5 pupils with an environment which was like that of a college but offered pupils the opportunities to gain skills, knowledge and experiences of vocational courses such as carpentry, Hospitality and Catering and creative media. This not only allowed our pupils to gain a vocation and a specific interest but gave them real life skills they would require on living school and being an adult.

Longdon Park school is Special Education School having up to 100 pupils which caters for children between the ages of 7-18 with a primary diagnosis of ASD. Longdon Park School

has two sites, Longdon Park School which is located in Derbyshire DE65 6GU for our pupils aged 7-14 Keystage 2&3 and Longdon Parkway located in Staffordshire DE142WD for our pupils aged 14-18 Keystage 4&5.

All pupils at both sites have designated time to our scheme, Preparing for Adulthood, which has been created to allow pupils to gain the skills, knowledge and experiences for real life as well as meeting their targets identified in their EHCPs.

All pupils also have enrichment on their timetables which allows them to choose an activity or activities of particular interest. This allows pupils to gain skills, knowledge and experiences linked to their EHCPs and preparing them for adulthood without knowing they are doing this. Longdon Park School has not had any pupils over the last five years with no destination. OFSTED rated us Outstanding for Personal development on our last two inspections.

We track our pupils on leaving school and the majority have remained in the destination upon leaving us after six months.

EHCP outcomes are being met currently for our 97 pupils As a school we pride ourselves on the education opportunities our pupils have in opposed to other settings as well as our outstanding personal development we offer our pupils. We continue to adapt and flex to the needs of all our pupils as and when this is provided which I believe sets us apart from other settings.

## **SALTERFORD HOUSE SCHOOL**

In February 2024, Salterford House School was approached by the [Integrated Children's Disability Service \(ICDS\)](#) with a proposal: to explore whether the school could develop specialist spaces for children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). At the time, the school had several recently vacated rooms, and the proprietor had already secured a change of use—from residential accommodation to educational spaces—creating an unexpected opportunity to rethink how the school could serve children with additional needs.

The initial request was small: to consider places for five children. However, once discussions began and ICDS shared over 100 EHCPs for consideration, the senior leadership team quickly recognised the scale of local need. Many of these children were not thriving in mainstream settings but were also not being prioritised for special school placement. They fell through a gap—children whose academic potential could not be realised because their sensory, emotional or communication needs were simply too great for large settings to accommodate.

Salterford House decided to step up and bridge that gap.

Families were initially hesitant. With empty rooms and no specialist staff in place yet, it was difficult for parents to envision a provision that didn't physically exist. But the school had a clear vision: a calm, child-centred programme rooted in specialist knowledge, therapeutic approaches and personalised learning pathways.

The first family to commit was the parent of a young autistic boy, later also diagnosed with ADHD. Although academically capable, he struggled to regulate in a class of over thirty children. He masked at school a lot of the time, only to “unravel” at home—placing enormous pressure on his single-parent family. As a Gestalt language processor, his communication needs were misunderstood in mainstream settings, and he was going to be deferred back into Reception despite his ability.

Salterford House staff, already trained in Gestalt language processing, immediately recognised what he needed:

A low-arousal, highly personalised environment  
A sensory space to regulate safely

Access to a speech and language therapist  
A child-centred, therapeutic curriculum

This child became the seed from which The Hive provision began to grow.

Building the Team and the Environment

By September, five children aged 5–7 had been agreed with the Local Authority and were fully funded for places at Salterford House. The school appointed:

A dedicated, highly experienced SENCO to lead The Hive

Three specialist teaching assistants with extensive

backgrounds in special schools

The transformation of the space continued throughout the summer. Sensory rooms, quiet breakout areas, structured learning spaces and therapeutic resources were carefully designed to meet each child's profile.

The first term provided immediate evidence that the approach was working.

Child 1, the school's first enrolment, began to speak more coherently, with fewer gestalt phrases and more self-generated language.

Child 2, aged seven, who had spent three years in Reception because his previous school could not safely meet his needs elsewhere, began to read for the first time.

Children 3 and 4, both non-verbal five-year-olds, slowly settled—developing eye contact, vocalising more, and engaging with staff. One child, a hyperlexic learner, astonished staff with his self-taught knowledge of prime and square numbers and began learning to communicate using AAC boards.

The calm environment, predictable routines, and bespoke support reduced the need for crisis-driven sensory regulation. Outbursts remained, but staff were trained, prepared and supported—creating safety and trust for the children and their families.