

REPORT TO SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

16 October 2025

Commissioning High Needs Places for 2026/2027 in Special Schools, Additional Resource Provisions (ARPs) and Alternative Provisions

1. Purpose of the Report

Schools' Forum members to consider the proposed commissioned places in special schools, Additional Resource Provisions (ARPs) post 16 providers, independent non-maintained special schools and alternative provisions for the academic year 2026/2027.

2. High Needs Place Funding 2026/2027

A series of discussions have been held with colleagues from the SEND Service to identify the number of children/young people who are due to transfer into new settings at the beginning of the academic year 2026/2027. An analysis of parental preference and TFC recommendations has been carried out to inform future commissioned place discussions for 2026/2027. All specialist settings have been contacted to confirm commissioned places for the academic year 2026/2027 based on the actual take-up of places in September 2025 and future projections, where available.

As of September 2025, there is a total of 1075 children and young people on roll in our special Schools. The number of Education, Health and Care plans being issued continues to increase each year. Current data from the Delivering Better Value Diagnostic work and analysis of SEN 2 trends, indicates a yearly percentage increase of around 12%. The majority of our special schools are at capacity, with some operating in-year waiting lists. It is anticipated these places will be utilised through the year as new EHCPs come through the statutory process.

Two new Additional Resource Provisions will open in the Autumn term of 2025. An Autism Provision, based at Redby Primary School offering 16 places and an Autism Provision at Hetton Lyons Primary School, which also creates an additional 16 places. Both of these provisions are currently accepting consultations. We are currently actively planning for a further SEMH Primary provision in the Coalfields area and a Cognition & Learning primary ARP in the East of Sunderland.

Appendix A identifies an increase in the Local Authority's commissioning arrangements for 2026/2027. The process identifies that commissioned numbers for Additional Resource Provisions and Special School places in 2026/27 will increase to 1839 in 2026/7 compared to 1802 in 2025/6. However, within this there is an overall predicted decline in Post 16 Independent Specialist Provision (predominantly ESPA and Hedley's College) and a growth in Additional Resource Provision numbers with the planned opening of two new provisions. Specialist School places remain largely unchanged due to some growth in capacity in 2025/6. Physical capacity to increase places in most of our local special schools is now a challenge. However, Together for Children are proactively exploring an expansion to our Additional Resource Provisions (see section on growth).

Pressures

- Numbers at Portland have been increased to 208. The school can accommodate the increased capacity but is now at its physical capacity in terms of space.
- Harry Watt is now operating from 2 sites with 190 pupils on roll, representing the maximum capacity of the two sites
- Despite a significant increase to Columbia Grange numbers there remains a waiting list in place for this school and given the rise in complex ASD presentations, this is unlikely to change and we continue to commission and use 10 places in the Nest provision, which provides a waiting list initiative to support children who have plans which name Columbia Grange
- The sharp rise in permanent exclusions experienced across the City means pressures on places for Alternative Provision and in particular 6-day provision remain acute as described the September paper to Schools' Forum. This is partly mitigated by School's Forum agreement to commission AP providers like East Boldon Alternative Provision (EBAP), Springboard and Education Plus NE.

Growth

- In response to the need to develop the City's early intervention offer, TfC have worked with Consilium Evolve and the DfE to expand the age group Evolve can work with and it now offers places to pupils in KS2 (from October 25)
- We are consulting on a proposal to create a further Additional Resource Base for SEMH at Gillas Lane and are in active discussions with several other schools around future plans for both Primary and Secondary ARPs
- We are consulting on a proposal to create a new primary ARP for Cognition and Learning in Valley Road Primary school
- Due to the pressures on places for 6-day provision across the City we have commissioned 45 places at East Boldon Alternative Provision, 40 places at Springboard and 16 places at Education Plus NE. A paper was shared with Schools' Forum in September on this development. Places are available to schools via VPP for short term intervention support.
- TfC are working with The Link School to convert their conference facility into suitable day 6 provision for up to 32 pupils. This will follow the assessment hub model and is expected to open September 2026. Renovation works will be undertaken in two phases with phase 1 being completed by September 2026 (additional 16 pupils) and phase 2 completed by September 2027 (another additional 16 pupils.)
- As provision increases at Link School and other registered providers, the use of unregistered providers to meet our statutory responsibilities for permanently excluded pupils will decrease. We will continue to work with unregistered provision to support them in becoming registered provision.

Underoccupancy

- North View: Currently has some Capacity due to a large year 6 cohort, which left in 2024/5 It is anticipated spaces will fill this academic year
- Sunningdale: Early Years' provision has some spaces due to recent expansion but these are likely to fill fairly quickly as under the 5 EHCP cohort is a significant growth area. There is no spare capacity in the main site of the school
- Hetton ARP: We have seen a decline in young people remaining open to Speech & Language Intensive Intervention Team in secondary. This is currently a criterion of the provision with places allocated via Language panel. We are looking to review allocation of places as feel there is still need across the City but we may need to also

look a slightly broader designation for the offer, whilst retaining the language specialism of the ARP

- Communication Hub: Has ran under occupancy during 2024/5. However, we have worked with the setting to revise the entry criteria and moved to offer to VPP, which does seem to be increasing referrals

Independent Non-maintained Specialist provision

Schools' Forum members are asked to note that in 2024/2025 we commissioned 116 places for children accessing independent specialist and / or non-maintained schools (compared to 114 in 2023/4) and a further 73 specialist post 16 placements Post 16 placements (compared to 79 in 2023/4). There are currently 99 children on roll in Independent Specialist and / or Non-Maintained schools as of October 10th 2025. However, it is likely there will be further places required as a result of tribunal challenge or placement breakdown in specialist settings throughout the current academic year. The greatest cost pressure in terms of the independent sector remains Ashbrooke, with 55 placements at an average cost of £96,000. Placements at Ashbrooke are still subject to strong pressure from parents and a high number of tribunal appeals for this setting.

Out of borough placements

Schools' Forum members are asked to note that in 2024/5 we had 47 children with EHCPs placed in Sunderland Schools. However, we placed 43 children within placements located in other Local Authority areas. Consultation requests from other neighbouring Local Authority areas are an ongoing concern, particularly for Columbia Grange, Harry Watt and Sunningdale and we are continuing to work with neighbouring LAs to deal with these in a more proportionate manner. However, often these requests are part of an active tribunal so other LAs are compelled by law to consult.

Post 16 places

The numbers of young people accessing Specialist Post 16 placements has slightly reduced in 2024/5. We also ask Forum to note we plan to increase commissioned places with Sunderland College from 180 to 200 in 2026/7. Despite some increase in Sunderland placements, most of this increase is due to increased demand from other Local Authority areas, in particular Northumberland, therefore ultimately cost neutral for Sunderland as funding is recouped via the ESFA import / export arrangements. However, as the Education Partnership Northeast is based in Sunderland it is our responsibility to inform ESFA of commissioned numbers for the whole group and we have worked with the College to predict the need of the group. Overall whilst Post 16 places have increased this represents a potential cost saving due to the decline in Independent Specialist placements.

Recommendations

School Forum members are asked to:

- (i) Consider and comment on the information provided in the report.
- (ii) Agree to the proposed commissioned numbers for 2026/27 in order for a submission to be made to the ESFA by November 2025
- (iii) receive an updated report in the meeting to be held in January 2026 should any changes have been made to the numbers presented in the report.

If you have any queries in relation to the above report, please contact Ronnie Lynn, Strategic Lead – Education (Alternative Provision), or Pamela Robertson, Strategic Lead – SEND (Special Schools, Additional Resourced Provisions and Post 16 places), in the first instance.

Appendix A

Special Units and Resourced Provisions								
Organisation / Provider	Type	2023/4	2023/4	2024/5	2024/5	2025/6	Current	Proposed 2026/7
		Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed	Actual	Proposed
Academy 360 (all through)	Academy	35	34	35	34	35	35	35
Biddick Academy - secondary	Academy	35	35	35	33	35	33	35
Farringdon Academy Secondary	Academy	35	35	35	33	35	33	35
Hetton School (11-16) Secondary	Academy	10	5	10	5	10	5	10
Oxclose Primary Academy	Academy	7	5	7	6	7	6	7
Oxclose Secondary Academy	Academy	12	14	12	11	12	11	12
Thorney Close HI - Primary	Maintained	12	14	12	12	12	12	12
Hudson Road (SEMH) NEW Primary	Maintained	-	-	16	12	16	12	16
Usworth Colliery Primary	Maintained	14	15	26	26	26	26	26
Hetton Lyons Primary New Sept 2025	Academy	-	-	-	-	16		16
Washington CAP Secondary	Academy	27	27	27	27	27	27	27
Redby Primary ASD ARP NEW Jan 2026	Academy	-	-	-	-	16	0	16
*Gillas Lane SEMH ARP (new)	Academy							16
JFK – Treehouse Provision Primary	Academy	24	24	24	24	24	24	24
*Valley Road C&L NEW	Academy							16
Mill Hill primary School ARP	Maintained	-	-	16	14	16	16	16
Total Special Units and Resourced Provisions		211	208	255	237	287	240	319

* Subject to successful consultations

Special Schools Including Post 16 Places								
Organisation / Provider	Type	2023/4	2023/4	2024/5	2024/5	2025/6	Current	Proposed 2026/7
		Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed	Actual	Proposed
Barbara Priestman Academy	Academy	175	178	192	198	192	191	198 (+6)
Columbia Grange – Primary	Academy	115	120	140	140	140	140	140
North View Academy – Primary	Academy	85	85	85	58	85	64	85
Portland Academy – Secondary	Academy	198	198	204	209	204	208	208 (+4)
Trinity New Bridge Academy* Secondary	Academy	134	134	134	133	134	133	134
Sunningdale School – Primary	Maintained	136	135	136	139	160	149	160
Harry Watt – ages 5-16	Academy	164	164	176	176	190	190	190
Total Special Schools* Including Post 16 Places		1007	1014	1067	1053	1105	1075	1115 (+10)

Alternative Language Provision in Schools and Academies								
Organisation/ Provider	Type	2023/4	2023/4	2024/5	2024/5	2025/6	Current	Proposed 2026/7
		Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed	Actual	Change
Valley Road Primary – Language Unit Provision – primary	Academy	10	8	10	8	10	8	0
Northern Saints Primary – Language Unit Provision	Maintained	10	7	10	8	10	8	0
New Penshaw Comm Hub (offers 12 week blocks 3 x per year) Primary	Academy	10	4	10	3*	10	4	0
Total Alternative Provision in Schools and Academies		30	19	30	19	30	20	0

* Based on average for each of the 3 termly placement

Alternative Provisions								
Organisation/ Provider	Type	2023/4	2023/4	2024/5	2024/5	2025/6	Current	Proposed 2026/7
		Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed	Actual	Proposed
KS1/2/3/4 Pupil Referral Service	AP	196	196	196	196	196	196	212 (+16)
Consilium Evolve - secondary	AP	48	48	48	48	48	48	48
Beacon of Light – secondary	AP	10	10	10	6	6	6	6
Foundation of Light - primary	AP	5	5	5	10			
Hopesprings Sea View Road – secondary	IS	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Hopesprings Millfield secondary	IS	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Hopesprings Southwick secondary	IS				4	4	4	4
EBAP secondary	AP				45	45	45	45
Education Plus NE	AP				8	16	16	16
Springboard	AP				24	40	40	40
Endeavor Academy 14-16 provision (registered) based at Biddick NEW								5
Total Alternative Provision - Other		285	285	285	367	381	381	402

Post 16

Post 16 (General FE and training Providers)								
Organisation/ Provider	Type	2023/4	2023/4	2024/5	2024/5	2025/6	Current	Proposed 2026/7
		Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed	Actual	Change
City of Sunderland	Post 16	127	129	150	179	180	180	200 (+20)
Springboard Sunderland Trust	Post 16	50	54	55	53	55	49	60 (+5)
Independent Specialist Providers	IS	73	74	74	73	*80	50	50 (est)
Specialist post 16 Funding	Post 16	25	40	40	46	*45	34	40 (est)
Non-Maintained Specialist Colleges	INMS	27	21	20	28	*20	23	25 (est)
Total Post 16 Places		302	318	339	379	380	336	375
* Estimates as places are spot purchased as required on an individual child basis through commissioning team								

Total Special: 1,115	Total Lang Provision: 30	Total Post 16: 375
Total ARP (all): 319	Total AP: 402	TOTAL 2,241