

Suffolk SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026-30



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Executive Summary

Suffolk's SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026–2030 sets out how Suffolk County Council and its partners will ensure that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), aged 0–25, have access to the right support, in the right place, at the right time. This is a holistic approach and sees integrated education, health and care planning as a critical priority, in alignment with the NHS Long Term Plan and the SEND Code of Practice. This strategy is grounded in robust data, co-produced with families, schools, health and care providers, and community partners and governed through the Local Area Partnership.

Headline Demand and Trends

Rapid growth of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs): The number of EHCPs in Suffolk has risen from 9,314 (Oct 24) to 11,476 (Sept 25), an increase of 23.2%, with overall levels of SEND now at 19.7% of school-age pupils. 5.4% of pupils have EHCPs and 14.3% receive SEN Support. Autism and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs are growing fastest, while speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) remains the largest primary need for pupils with SEND (EHCP or SEN Support). The percentage of EHCPs completed within the legal timeframe of 20 weeks is improving but remains below national averages.

System pressures: Suffolk continues to rely heavily on independent and non-maintained special schools, which are often distant and costly. Previous demand projections indicated that by 2025, at least 550 new specialist education places were needed, particularly for children with Autism (ASC), Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD), Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). There are also significant pressures in post-16 and early years pathways, and travel times remain a persistent issue for coastal and rural localities.

Current Capacity and Gaps

Capacity delivered: Capital Programme Phases 1–2 have delivered 150 new specialist places in 2025, with a further 160 planned. Work to develop satellite sites for special schools and resourced units in mainstream schools is underway. An Alternative Provision (AP) Team has been established for children and young people with EHCPs, and governance has been strengthened through the Strategic Improvement Board (SIB), Strategic Operations Group (SOG) and six subgroups.

Gaps: Despite these efforts, there are still clear gaps across ASC/SLCN/SEMH, with pressure points in SLD/MLD, and continued reliance on independent placements and alternative provision. Early years and post-16 sectors require additional capacity, and travel times remain significant for many families.

This strategy is a live, measurable plan. It prioritises mainstream inclusion first; grows local specialist places where most needed; embeds a tiered AP model as an intervention—not a destination; integrates education-health commissioning with shared dashboards; and sets clear assumptions and an early review trigger in response to national SEND reforms.

Strategic Priorities for 2025–2028

Strengthen mainstream inclusion through the Suffolk Mainstream Inclusion Framework (SMIF), workforce development, and a county-wide inclusion toolkit.

Expand local Suffolk specialist places to reduce reliance on independent and out-of-county provision.

Tighten Alternative Provision pathways and outcomes tracking to ensure clear entry/exit criteria and prioritise reintegration.

Early intervention and Emotionally-Based School Attendance concerns focus to reduce exclusions and persistent absence, and to improve transitions into adulthood.

Travel and place-based planning to reduce travel times and align placement planning with housing growth and accessibility standards.

Joint commissioning and Health Integration to secure therapy resources, ensure equitable access, and deliver financial sustainability. Health partners play a critical role in ensuring that children and young people with SEND receive timely, equitable access to therapies, mental health support and specialist health services.

Measuring Success

Operational Success Measures	Strategic Success Measures
Improved timeliness and quality of EHCPs.	Stronger co-production and engagement with families, schools and partners.
Preparation for Adulthood - Increased post-16 figures for education, employment and training (EET), increased supported internships	Compliance with statutory health transition planning at age 14+.
Improved timescales on access to health therapeutic provision (for example SALT, Occupational Therapy and physiotherapy within 18 weeks)	Effective governance, risk management and continuous improvement through annual refresh cycles, dashboards and regular reporting.
Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Referral to Treatment timescales for SEND cohorts	Finance and value for money - High Needs Budget trajectory, invest to save impacts, commissioning Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
Diagnostic pathways - Referral to Assessment timescales for Autism and ADHD	Increased sufficiency of local specialist and mainstream places.
Access and travel - decreased median travel minutes, % of pupils travelling for less than 45 minutes	Improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND, including educational attainment, attendance and successful transitions to adulthood.
Alternative Provision - increased reintegration rates and decreased duration in placements	Reduced reliance on independent placements and travel times.

Purpose, Scope and Audience

Purpose:

The Suffolk SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026–2030 sets out how Suffolk County Council and its partners will ensure that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), aged 0–25, have access to the right support, in the right place, at the right time. The strategy aims to expand local capacity, strengthen inclusion, and improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. It is grounded in robust data, co-produced with families, schools, health and care providers and community partners, and governed through the Local Area Partnership.

Scope:

Timeframe: 2026–2030

Cohorts: Children and young people aged 0–25 with SEND, including those with **Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and those receiving SEN Support.**

Coverage: All education phases (early years, primary, secondary, post-16), specialist and mainstream settings, alternative provision and transitions into adulthood

Alignment: The strategy is aligned with the Suffolk SEND Strategy 2024–29, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), the Local Area Inclusion Plan, and related workstreams. It is reviewed annually to ensure it remains responsive to changing needs and priorities. Its priorities are in line with the NHS Long Term Plan and the SEND Code of Practice.

Audience:

This strategy is intended for:

- Suffolk County Council (SCC)
- Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)
- Schools and colleges
- Early years settings
- Alternative provision providers
- Parents and carers
- Children and young people with SEND
- Community partners and stakeholders

The strategy provides a shared framework for all partners to work together to deliver sufficient, high-quality SEND provision across Suffolk, ensuring transparency, accountability and continuous improvement.

Co-Production and Engagement

Co-production and meaningful engagement are at the heart of Suffolk's SEND Sufficiency Strategy. Suffolk is committed to working in partnership with children, young people, families, education settings, health and care providers and the wider community to ensure that the strategy is informed by lived experience, reflects local needs and is responsive to feedback.

Children and young people were asked as part of the work by the Multi-Schools Council what is important to them about school and what would make their day better. Their responses, captured below, have a theme of having the right support in school.

"My form teachers
is brilliant, genuine
and funny, she's
kind and not strict"

"I had a mental
breakdown in French and
could speak to him (LSA)
about anything".

"When my teacher
doesn't rush
through instructions
I feel like she has
heard me when I
told her this helps"

"Giving me more time,
so I can help
understand what
you're asking of me"

"I'm supported with
what I want to do in
school"

"If I know what's
happening I can make
smaller decisions"

"If there was greater
awareness around hidden
disabilities, people would
know how to support me."

"Making sure that the
school has a quiet
room that we can
access"

"Giving me
reassurance. being
kind, listening to each
other is important and
makes me happier"

Suffolk Parent Carer Forum are the strategic partner for the Local Area Partnership. When co-producing the SEND Strategy 2025-2029 they told us the below about the importance of school and support.

“We all want our children to have an education but too many find barriers make it difficult such as lack of support, missed provision, discrimination, no school place, or the wrong school place.”

“We really worry about our child’s education but more than that, we worry about their mental health.”

“We wait for everything. We wait for referrals, we wait for assessment, we wait for support.”

“Getting the right school placement for our child can feel like a battle too. There is a lack of special school places and trained staff to meet our child’s needs. We long for the good practice we hear about to multiply so that all our children can have the equality of great support.”



Suffolk Local Context (Needs & Trends)

Suffolk's SEND landscape is characterized by rapid growth in demand, evolving patterns of need, and persistent system pressures that shape the priorities of this strategy.

Levels of SEND and Growth

- Overall levels of SEND: 19.7% of Suffolk's statutory school-age population (21,819 pupils) were identified with SEND in 2024/25, an increase of 1,551 from the previous year.
- EHCPs: 8,837 statutory school aged children and young people had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in 2024/25, representing 5.4% of all pupils—up from 7,860 in 2023 (+12.4% in one year). Whilst the overall number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in Suffolk has risen from 9,314 (Oct 24) to 11,476 (Sept 25), an increase of 23.2%
- SEN Support: 14.3% of pupils receive SEN Support, up from 13.5% last year.
- Growth trajectory: The total number of children and young people with an EHCP (ages 0–25) has increased by 87% since 2018/19, with Suffolk's rate of increase outpacing both national and regional averages.

Changing Profile of Need

- Most common primary need: Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) account for 20.8% of all SEND pupils. (For pupils with an EHCP, Autism accounts for 30%, with SLCN at 19.3%)
- Fastest rising need: Autism has increased from 9.8% of cases in 2015/16 to 15.4% in 2024/25.
- Declining need: Moderate learning difficulty (MLD) has declined as a primary need, now representing less than 9% of cases (down from 18% in 2015/16).
- Other significant needs: Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) (19.7%), Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD - including dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia) (14.5%) and Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) (8.9%) also represent substantial proportions of the children and young people with SEND.

System Pressures and Timeliness

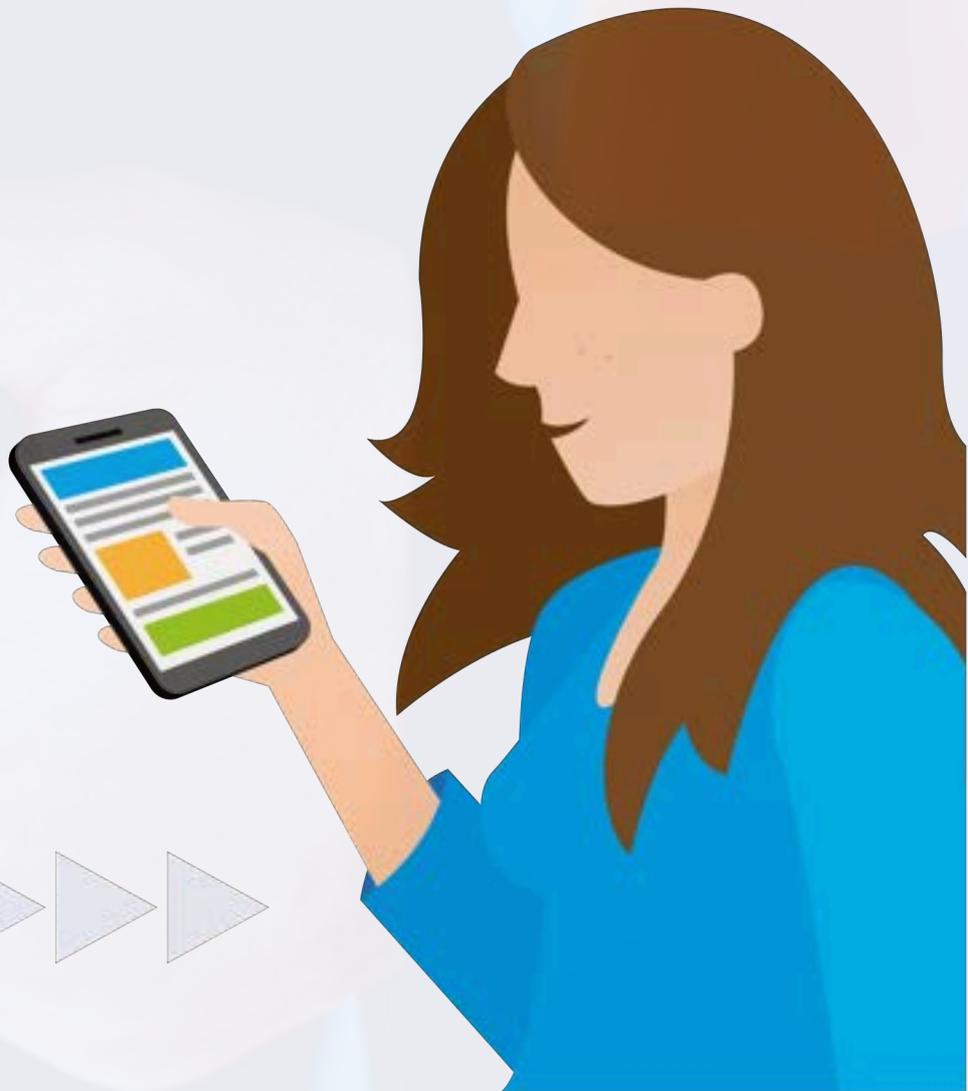
- Percentage of EHCPs completed within the legal 20-week timeframe: Only 25.4% of EHCPs were issued within the statutory 20-week timeframe in 2024, compared to 45.9% nationally. Over one in five plans (22.3%) took more than a year to complete.
- Assessment requests: Requests for EHC needs assessments rose by 29% in 2024 (2,784 total), with Suffolk approving 85% of requests—well above the national average of 65%.
- Personal budgets: The number of personal budgets has increased by 55% since 2019/20, with Suffolk now accounting for 10% of all such budgets nationally.

Geography, Vulnerable Groups, and Access

- Geographic variation: Demand is rising in all areas, with particular pressure for specialist places in the North and West of the county.
- Travel: Significant numbers of children travel 45+ minutes to school, especially from coastal and rural areas.
- Vulnerable groups: Higher rates of persistent absence and exclusions are seen among children and young people with an EHCP. There is an ongoing focus on reducing NEET (Those young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) and improving transitions into adulthood.

Forecasting and Future Demand

- Projections for 2029: Depending on scenario, Suffolk is forecast to have between 22,400 and 24,500 pupils with SEND by 2029.
- Scenario modelling: The SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) uses four scenarios for forecasting future demand, including maintaining current prevalence, continuing recent increases in diagnosis, following national trends and mirroring increases seen in statistical neighbours.



Demand Modelling and Forecasting Methodology

(Note for reader: Forecasting methodology is under continuous development and will be updated as further triangulation of data is assimilated. This will include enhanced use of Section 23 notifications data, Early Years Census, Mental Health in Schools Team datasets and CAMHS referral to treatment data)

The forecasting methodology used in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is based on a proportion of the population that will have an EHCP. This is then used for each of four different scenarios:

- Scenario 1: maintaining the Suffolk levels of SEND in 2023/24 (16.7%) to the Suffolk school-age population from 2023/24 to 2028/29
- **Scenario 2: Assuming the increase in SEND diagnosis between 2015/16 to 2023/24, continuing this increase for Suffolk pupils in SEND cases until 2028/29 (~0.3% increase year on year)**
- **Scenario 3: Using the average increase in children and young people with SEND between 2015/16 to 2023/24 for England, continuing this increase in children and young people with SEND to the Suffolk school age population until 2028/29 (~0.5% increase year on year)**
- Scenario 4: Using the average increase in children and young people with SEND for Suffolk's Children's Services Statistical Neighbours Benchmarking Tool neighbours between 2015/16 to 2023/24, continuing this average annual increase in children and young people with SEND from 2023/24 until 2028/29 (~0.5% increase year on year)

Scenario 1 is showing a drop in the number of children and young people with EHCP's. It is not felt that this will happen in the current system, so this scenario has been dropped for forecasting purposes. The percentage increase for Statistical Neighbours and England Average, are the same in 2025/26 at 0.5%. This forecasting therefore only shows scenario 2 and scenarios 3 and 4 merged as one.

Assumptions made for Forecasting

- Suffolk wishes to have 42% of statutory school aged pupils with an EHCP at an appropriate local special school, as per the national average.
- Suffolk wishes to have a further 11.6% of statutory school aged pupils with an EHCP at a unit, this is the average of the 2021/11 to 2024/25 figures.
- In terms of capacity, we are only including places at special school places and units
- This model is just looking at the totality of the statutory school age pupils with an EHCP, it does not take account of pupil's needs or school phase/Key Stage.
- Unmet need has been set at different levels, from 0 to 1,800

Calculation of Unmet Need

	Number
Special school requests in both 2023/24 and 2024/25	687
Special school requests in both 2024/25 and 2025/26	556
Ave. of special school requests in both years	622
Special school requests in 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27	63

The data was calculated by comparing the requests for special schools each of the three years 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27, any requests that appeared in two or more years are shown as the level of unmet need. The data was taken on 2 December 2025, and was only for requests that were LA or LA and PP.

Cascade model at 42% Special schools and 11.6% Units

Scenario 2: Assuming the increase in SEND diagnosis between 2015/16 to 2024/25, continuing this increase for Suffolk pupils in SEND cases until 2028/29

	Predicted no. of Special school places required per scenario (exc. Unfilled requests)	Special school requests unfilled	No. of Special school places required	No. of Special school places	Gap between need and places in Special Schools	Predicted no. of unit places required	No. of unit places	Gap between need and places in units	No. of Special school and unit places needed	No. of Special school and unit places available	Gap between need and places in Special Schools/ Specialist Units*
2025/26	2,093	-	2,093	1,834	259	578	710	-132	2,672	2,544	-128
2026/27	2,183	-	2,183	1,943	240	603	710	-107	2,786	2,653	-133
2027/28	2,257	-	2,257	2,005	252	624	710	-86	2,881	2,715	-166
2028/29	2,314	-	2,314	2,050	264	639	710	-71	2,953	2,760	-193

* A negative indicates the number of additional spaces that are required

Scenario 3/4: Using the average increase in SEND cases between 2015/16 to 2024/25 for England, continuing this increase in SEND cases to the Suffolk school age population until 2028/29

	Predicted no. of Special school places required per scenario (exc. Unfilled requests)	Special school requests unfilled	No. of Special school places required	No. of Special school places	Gap between need and places in Special Schools	Predicted no. of unit places required	No. of unit places	Gap between need and places in units	No. of Special school and unit places needed	No. of Special school and unit places available	Gap between need and places in Special Schools/ Specialist Units*
2025/26	2,280	-	2,280	1,834	446	630	710	-80	2,911	2,544	-367
2026/27	2,463	-	2,463	1,943	520	681	710	-29	3,144	2,653	-491
2027/28	2,627	-	2,627	2,005	622	726	710	16	3,353	2,715	-638
2028/29	2,768	-	2,768	2,050	718	765	710	55	3,533	2,760	-773

* A negative indicates the number of additional spaces that are required

Summary of additional special school and unit places required using the cascade model at 42% for Special schools and 11.6% for Units

	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Ave. Scenario 2 and 3
2025/26	128	367	247
2026/27	133	491	312
2027/28	166	638	402
2028/29	193	773	483

This forecasting methodology for specialist places required is based on a scenario where there are no changes to the current SEND system in Suffolk, resulting in the same patterns and expectations. The average of the two scenarios used provides a figure of additional specialist places required for each year, with each scenario providing an upper and lower tolerance threshold.

This average figure presents a total number of additional places required across the forthcoming 4 years of 1,444 if nothing was to change within the current system.

Baseline of Current Educational Placement Provision

Suffolk's SEND system comprises a diverse range of provision across mainstream, specialist, alternative, early years and post-16 settings. The current baseline reflects both the scale of local investment and the ongoing challenges in meeting rising demand.

Mainstream Provision

- Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP): All mainstream schools are expected to deliver a graduated response to SEND, supported by the Suffolk Mainstream Inclusion Framework (SMIF), Specialist Units and outreach services. This also includes access to universal health services and targeted individual support from therapeutic services including Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Mental Health Services.
- Specialist Units attached to mainstream schools: There are 520 places in specialist units attached to mainstream schools, providing targeted support for children with complex needs within a mainstream environment.
- Outreach: Specialist teachers and teams provide outreach to mainstream schools, supporting inclusion and capacity building.

Special Schools

- Capacity: Suffolk has 1,543 places in maintained and academy special schools, offering provision for a range of needs including autism, SLD, MLD, SEMH and SLCN.
- Satellites: The county has developed satellite classes and units to extend specialist provision closer to local communities.
- Independent Sector: 228 pupils are placed in independent or out-of-county special schools, reflecting ongoing sufficiency gaps and the need for highly specialist provision.

Alternative Provision (AP)

- Pupil Referral Units (PRUs): Suffolk operates 10 PRUs, providing 394 places for children and young people who are unable to attend mainstream or special schools.
- Independent AP: 66 places are commissioned in independent alternative provision settings, with a focus on reintegration and improved outcomes.
- AP Team: A dedicated AP Team has been established to manage the unplaced cohort of children and young people with an EHCP and reduce reliance on independent sector placements.

Early Years (0–5)

- High Needs Funding: 1,079 high needs funding applications were received in 2021/22, up from 780 the previous year, reflecting rising demand in early years settings.
- Inclusion Fund: 568 inclusion fund applications were made, up from 246, supporting children with emerging and complex needs in PVI (private, voluntary, and independent) settings.

Post-16 and Preparing for Adulthood (PfA)

- Further Education (FE): 744 FE places are commissioned for young people with SEND, with an additional 93 places in independent providers and 75 bespoke post-16 packages.
- Supported Internships and Employment Pathways: Suffolk is investing in supported internships and employment pathways to improve transitions into adulthood and reduce the rate of young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).
- Community Inclusion: The PfA Steering Group oversees the integration of post-16 and adulthood pathways into sufficiency planning.

Use of school places, Travel Patterns, and Quality Indicators

- Use of school places: Specialist and Alternative Provision settings are operating at or near capacity, with waiting lists for some types of provision.
- Travel: Significant numbers of children travel 45+ minutes to school, particularly from coastal and rural areas, highlighting the need for more local provision.
- Quality: Ofsted and CQC inspection outcomes, parental confidence and annual review completion rates are monitored as part of the quality assurance framework.

Maps and Tables

Detailed maps and tables of provision by type, locality and phase are maintained and regularly updated as part of the sufficiency dashboard and capital programme overview. These will be included in the published strategy appendices.

Significance:

This baseline highlights both the strengths and the ongoing challenges in Suffolk's SEND system. While significant investment has expanded capacity and diversified provision, rising demand, geographic variation and persistent gaps in specialist and post-16 places continue to drive the need for further action.



Sufficiency Gaps and Challenges

Despite significant investment and ongoing expansion of provision, Suffolk continues to face a range of sufficiency gaps and system challenges that impact children and young people with SEND, their families and the wider education and care system.

Quantified Gaps by Need and Locality

- **Autism (ASC):** Autism has seen the largest increase in prevalence among SEND needs in Suffolk, rising from 9.8% in 2015/16 to 15.4% in 2024/25. Despite this growth, there are significant gaps in timely access to diagnostic pathways and specialist provision. The JSNA highlights a large backlog for autism referrals, with 2,525 patients awaiting assessment as of June 2025, and only 1% of open referrals receiving a first appointment within the recommended 13 weeks. This delay in diagnosis and support means many children and families face prolonged uncertainty and limited access to appropriate educational placements. The rising demand for ASC support is not matched by local capacity, resulting in extended waits and pressure on mainstream settings. Geographically, the shortfall in ASC provision is particularly acute in the North and West of Suffolk, where families often face long travel times to access specialist services, further compounding the challenges of timely and effective support.
- **Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN):** SLCN remains the most common primary need in Suffolk, accounting for 20.8% of SEND pupils. The JSNA identifies persistent shortfalls in specialist places and targeted interventions, particularly in early years and primary phases. Although identification rates have improved, the rapid increase in demand has outpaced the development of specialist provision. Mainstream schools often lack the resources and expertise to meet complex communication needs, leading to delayed progress and increased referrals for more intensive support. Geographical disparities are evident, with rural and coastal communities experiencing greater difficulty in accessing SLCN support, resulting in uneven provision and longer waits for intervention outside urban centres.
- **Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH):** SEMH needs have grown substantially, now representing 19.7% of SEND pupils. The JSNA notes that identification typically peaks in secondary school, reflecting developmental and societal pressures. However, sufficiency of specialist SEMH provision remains inadequate, especially in rural and coastal areas. Extended waiting times for assessment and limited access to specialist placements result in over-reliance on independent and out-of-county schools, as well as increased travel times for families. Geographically, the lack of SEMH provision is most pronounced in Suffolk's rural and coastal districts, where families face significant barriers to accessing timely and appropriate support, often requiring travel to distant settings or reliance on external placements.

- **Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD):** SLD accounts for 2.4% of Suffolk's SEND cohort, showing a slight decline from 3.1% in 2015/16. The JSNA highlights that while overall numbers are relatively stable, there are persistent gaps in specialist provision for children and young people with SLD. Access to appropriate educational settings is limited, particularly for those with the most complex needs, resulting in some families having to seek placements outside Suffolk or in independent schools. Geographically, the shortfall is most pronounced in rural and coastal areas, where specialist SLD provision is sparse, leading to longer travel times and increased pressure on families to secure suitable placements.
- **Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD):** MLD represents 8.9% of Suffolk's SEND population, a significant decrease from 18.0% in 2015/16. Despite the reduction in prevalence, the JSNA identifies ongoing challenges in sufficiency, particularly in mainstream settings where resources and expertise to support MLD are often limited. The decline in numbers may reflect changes in identification and categorisation but does not necessarily indicate that needs are being met more effectively. Geographical disparities are evident, with rural and coastal communities experiencing greater difficulty accessing specialist support for MLD, and families in these areas often facing longer journeys to access appropriate provision.

Post-16 and Early Years: There is a growing need for additional capacity in post-16 and early years provision, reflecting both demographic growth and increased identification of need at transition points.

Reliance on Independent and Out-of-County Placements

- **Independent sector:** Suffolk continues to rely on independent and out-of-county placements for a significant number of children and young people with complex needs. This reliance is costly, can involve long travel times and may impact family life and inclusion in local communities.

Travel and Accessibility

- **Travel times:** Many children and young people, particularly those living in coastal and rural areas, travel 45 minutes or more to access suitable provision. This places additional strain on families and the transport system, and highlights the need for more local, accessible options.

System Pressures

- **Capacity and Use of Places:** Specialist and alternative provision settings are operating at or near capacity, with waiting lists for some types of provision. This limits flexibility and responsiveness to changing patterns of need.
- **Workforce:** Recruitment and retention of specialist staff, including teachers, therapists and support staff, remains a challenge and can impact the quality and consistency of provision.
- **Financial Pressures:** Rising demand, increased complexity of need and reliance on high-cost placements are driving significant pressures on the High Needs Block (HNB) that funds placements and support for children and young people with SEND, and overall system sustainability.

Inclusion and Mainstream Pressures

- **Mainstream inclusion:** While the Suffolk Mainstream Inclusion Framework (SMIF) and workforce development initiatives are strengthening inclusive practice, there remain challenges in ensuring that all mainstream schools are equipped and confident to meet a broader range of needs.
- **Exclusions and Emotionally Based School Attendance difficulties:** Persistent absence and exclusions are higher among children and young people with an EHCP, and there is an ongoing focus on reducing exclusions and supporting children and young people experiencing emotionally based school attendance difficulties (EBSA).

Data and Forecasting

- **Dynamic demand:** The rapid and unpredictable growth in EHCPs and changing profile of need make forecasting and planning for sufficiency increasingly complex. The trajectory planning model is continually being refreshed to provide more accurate, scenario-based projections.

Health Services Sufficiency

- **CAMHS Waiting times:** The JSNA highlights significant pressures on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in Suffolk. Waiting times for assessment and intervention remain a major concern, with demand for mental health support rising sharply among children and young people with SEND. The JSNA reports that, as of mid-2025, waiting lists for CAMHS assessments—particularly for neurodevelopmental pathways such as autism and ADHD—are substantial. For example, only 1% of open autism referrals in the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (SNEE ICB) area received a first appointment within the recommended 13 weeks, with over 2,500 children and young people awaiting assessment. This backlog reflects both increased demand and limited service capacity, resulting in delayed access to diagnosis and support, and placing additional strain on families and educational settings.

- **Therapy Workforce Capacity:** The JSNA identifies persistent shortfalls in therapy workforce capacity, including speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy. Demand for these services continues to outpace supply, particularly in early years and primary phases. Workforce shortages are exacerbated in rural and coastal areas, where recruitment and retention of specialist therapists is especially challenging. The limited availability of therapy professionals leads to longer waiting times for assessment and intervention, and restricts the ability of schools and settings to deliver timely, targeted support for children with complex needs. The JSNA emphasises the need for investment in workforce development and service expansion to address these gaps and ensure equitable access to therapy services across Suffolk.
- **Autism:** As of June 2025, there were 2,525 children and young people with open suspected autism referrals in the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (SNEE ICB) area. Critically, only 1% of these received a first appointment within the recommended 13 weeks, evidencing a considerable backlog and extended waiting times for assessment and diagnosis. This delay impacts timely access to support and specialist educational placements, with families often facing long periods of uncertainty. The JSNA also notes that therapy workforce capacity—such as speech and language therapy and occupational therapy for autistic children—is insufficient to meet rising demand, especially in rural and coastal areas, further limiting access to early intervention and ongoing support.

Significance

These sufficiency gaps and challenges underline the need for a strategic, system-wide response—expanding local capacity, strengthening mainstream inclusion, improving commissioning and value for money and ensuring that all children and young people with SEND can access the right support, in the right place, at the right time.



Strategic Priorities 2026 - 2030

The strategic priorities for Suffolk's SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026–2030 are directly aligned with the overarching ambitions of the Suffolk SEND Strategy 2024–2029. These priorities are designed to address the most pressing sufficiency gaps, drive inclusion and ensure that all children and young people with SEND can access the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

1. Strengthen Mainstream Inclusion

- Aim: Ensure that more children and young people with SEND can thrive in mainstream settings, with the right support and reasonable adjustments.
- Actions: Embed the Suffolk Mainstream Inclusion Framework (SMIF), invest in workforce development and roll out a county-wide inclusion toolkit. Support schools to deliver the graduated response and “ordinarily available” provision and monitor impact through dashboards and peer networks.
- Alignment: This reflects the SEND Strategy's focus on inclusive practice, early intervention and building confidence and capacity in mainstream schools.

2. Expand Local Specialist Provision

- Aim: Reduce reliance on independent and out-of-county placements by increasing the number of specialist places within Suffolk.
- Actions: Deliver new special school places, grow specialist units resource bases (SRBs) and satellite classes and ensure sufficiency for key needs (autism, SLCN, SEMH, SLD, MLD) in areas of highest demand.
- Alignment: This priority supports the SEND Strategy's commitment to local, high-quality provision and reducing travel times for families.

3. Tighten Alternative Provision (AP) Pathways and Outcomes

- Aim: Ensure that AP is used effectively and only when necessary, with clear entry and exit criteria and a strong focus on early intervention and reintegration.
- Actions: Define AP's role for children and young people with SEND, track outcomes through attendance and progress dashboards and align AP with EHCP cohorts via the new AP Team.
- Alignment: This supports the SEND Strategy's ambition to reduce exclusions and persistent absence and ensure that all children have access to appropriate education.

4. Early Intervention and Focus on EBSA (Emotionally Based School Attendance difficulties)

- Aim: Reduce exclusions and persistent absence and improve transitions into adulthood by intervening early and supporting children at risk of disengagement.
- Actions: Strengthen early years pathways, invest in multi-agency support for EBSA, and ensure smooth transitions at key points (early years, primary to secondary, post-16).
- Alignment: This priority is central to the SEND Strategy's vision for early help, prevention and preparing for adulthood.

5. Travel and Place-Based Planning

- Aim: Reduce travel times for children and young people with SEND and ensure that provision is accessible and aligned with local need.
- Actions: Use proximity planning, travel training and align placement planning with housing growth and accessibility standards. Develop local provision in rural and coastal areas to address geographic inequalities.
- Alignment: This supports the SEND Strategy's commitment to equity, accessibility and reducing barriers for families.

6. Joint Commissioning and Health Integration

- Aim: integrated education, health and care planning. Health partners play a critical role in ensuring that children and young people with SEND receive timely, equitable access to therapies, mental health support and specialist health services—aligned with statutory duties and local priorities.
- Actions:
 - Secure Therapy Resources
 - Expand capacity for Speech and Language Therapy (SALT), Occupational Therapy (OT) and Physiotherapy to meet rising demand.
 - Implement workforce development plans in partnership with Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and NHS providers.
 - Reduce waiting times for therapy interventions, with clear targets and monitoring.
 - Embed Health in Governance
 - Ensure ICB representation at all levels of SEND governance (SEND Improvement Board, SEND Operational Group, Joint Commissioning subgroup).
 - Align sufficiency planning with ICS priorities and NHS Long Term Plan commitments for children and young people.
 - Integrated Pathways for SEMH & EBSA
 - Develop joint protocols between education and health for Emotionally Based School Attendance difficulties (EBSA) and SEMH needs.
 - Strengthen links with CAMHS and early help services to provide timely, multi-agency support.
 - Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) Health Transitions
 - Implement statutory health transition planning for CYP aged 14+, ensuring smooth handover to adult services.
 - Establish joint clinics and transition coordinators for complex health needs.
 - Data, Outcomes & Accountability
 - Introduce shared KPIs for health and education, including:
 - Therapy access within 18 weeks.
 - CAMHS referral-to-treatment times for children and young people with SEND.
 - Compliance with health transition protocols.
 - Publish integrated dashboards on the Local Offer to monitor progress and impact.
- Alignment: This priority underpins the SEND Strategy's focus on partnership, sustainability and making best use of resources.

These strategic priorities are underpinned by a commitment to:

- Co-production and engagement with families, schools and partners
- Effective governance, risk management and continuous improvement
- Annual review and refresh to ensure responsiveness to changing needs and emerging challenges

Together, these priorities will ensure that Suffolk's SEND system is ambitious, inclusive and sustainable—delivering improved outcomes for all children and young people with SEND, in line with the county's SEND Strategy.



Inclusive Practice & Mainstream Core Standards

Vision and Commitment

Suffolk is committed to ensuring that every child and young person with SEND can access high-quality, inclusive education within their local community. The aim is to reduce reliance on specialist and independent placements by strengthening the capacity and confidence of mainstream schools and settings to meet a broader range of needs

Key Strategic Approaches

1. Graduated Response and Early Intervention

Graduated Response: Suffolk's approach is rooted in the SEND Code of Practice's "Assess, Plan, Do, Review" cycle. The Suffolk Inclusion Toolkit and SENCO Toolkit provide practical resources for schools to identify needs early and implement effective interventions. The universal offer includes the Inclusion Support Line and regular Inclusion Support Meetings, enabling schools to access specialist advice without referral delays.

Early Intervention: Multi-professional consultation models, such as Solution Circles and SEND Support Consultations, empower mainstream schools to address Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and other challenges at the earliest stage. Feedback from schools highlights the value of these approaches in building staff confidence and capacity.

2. Workforce Development and Sharing Good Practice

Training and Networks: Whole-school training is provided free to all mainstream schools, with high uptake across the county. SENCO forums and specialist teacher outreach ensure that staff are equipped to support a diverse range of needs. The focus is on embedding inclusive practices and sharing evidence-based approaches that have demonstrated positive impact.

Peer Support: Networks such as the Teaching Assistant Network and Mental Health Network foster collaboration and peer learning, supporting the development of inclusive cultures across settings.

3. Universal, Targeted, and Specialist Offers

Universal Offer: Resources, training and networks for all schools, including the Suffolk Inclusion Toolkit, Essential SENCO Toolkit and Education Psychology Analysis of Additional Needs Tool (AANT). This universal offer supports school professionals to identify strengths and areas of need and plan inclusive support.

Targeted Offer: Multi-professional consultations, Solution Circles and Delivering Better Value programme interventions.

Specialist Offer: Bespoke advice and assessment/intervention work, ensuring timely support where needed.

4. Professional Development and Quality Assurance

Professional Development: Programmes such as 'New to SENCO' and 'Essentials' training address essential knowledge and understanding of SEND, focusing on early identification and the graduated response.

Inclusion Support Meetings: Available for schools and settings, these meetings with specialist teachers are a first stage of the graduated response and ensure that inclusive practice is embedded from the outset.

Monitoring and Impact

The impact of inclusive practice and mainstream core standards is monitored through:

- School and setting self-evaluation against the SMIF
- Participation in SENCO forums and peer networks
- Uptake and feedback from training and support offers
- Inclusion dashboards and regular reporting to the SEND Improvement Board

Significance

By embedding the graduated response, investing in workforce development and providing a robust universal, targeted and specialist offer, Suffolk is building a culture of inclusion across all mainstream settings. This approach ensures that children and young people with SEND are identified early, supported effectively and able to thrive in their local schools—reducing the need for specialist placements and improving outcomes for all.

Alternative Provision (AP) Pathway

Suffolk's new Alternative Provision Strategy 2026–2030 sets a clear vision: all children and young people, including those with SEND, should access high-quality, timely education tailored to their needs, with AP used as an intervention—not a destination. The strategy is shaped by national reforms, local priorities and extensive co-production with Children and Young People, families, schools, and AP providers.

Vision and Principles

Personalised, needs-led support: Suffolk's AP offer is designed to be flexible and responsive, supporting healthy development, independence and preparation for adulthood, employment and training.

Voice of the child: The strategy puts Children and Young People at the centre of decision-making, with co-design and partnership working as core principles.

Inclusion and prevention: The aim is to increase the number of Children and Young People flourishing in mainstream provision, reduce exclusions and suspensions and ensure AP is used early and effectively to prevent escalation.

Three-Tier Model for Alternative Provision

Suffolk's AP pathway is structured around a nationally aligned three-tier model, ensuring the right support at the right time:

Tier 1: Targeted early support within mainstream schools to address emerging needs promptly, reducing the likelihood of exclusion and promoting inclusion.

Tier 2: Short-term placements in AP settings for Children and Young People needing more intensive, time-limited support, with a clear focus on reintegration to mainstream education.

Tier 3: Longer-term AP placements for Children and Young People who may not return to their previous mainstream school, with a strong emphasis on preparing for successful transition to new settings or sustainable post-16 destinations (e.g., further education or employment).

Pathway Delivery and Improvement

Tier 1 first approach: Suffolk prioritises early, targeted support in mainstream settings, reserving AP placements for those who need them most. This approach is designed to reduce dependency on full-time AP and ensure Children and Young People remain connected to their communities and mainstream education wherever possible.

Integrated working: The AP pathway is delivered in partnership with schools, AP providers, health and social care, ensuring holistic support for Children, Young People and their families.

Clear entry and exit criteria: AP placements are based on assessed need, with transparent processes for referral, review and reintegration.

Reintegration as a priority: Every AP placement includes a plan for reintegration or progression, with regular reviews and multi-agency input.

Commissioning, Quality, and Governance

Sufficiency and commissioning: Suffolk undertakes regular gap analysis and sufficiency planning to ensure AP is available where and when needed, with robust commissioning arrangements and a focus on quality and outcomes.

Data and impact: Outcomes are tracked through dashboards, audits, and stakeholder feedback, with a focus on attendance, progress, reintegration rates and post-16 destinations.

Governance: Oversight of AP is provided by the Alternative Provision and In Year Fair Access Protocol Team within the Education Access Service, with annual delivery plans and scrutiny by the Education and Children's Scrutiny Committee and SEND Improvement Board.

Strategic Priorities for AP

- Increase the number of Children and Young People supported in mainstream settings and reduce exclusions.
- Ensure appropriate use of specialist AP, with a focus on early intervention and reintegration.
- Strengthen multi-agency working and co-design with Children, Young People, families and practitioners.
- Improve data sharing, quality assurance and commissioning to ensure AP is effective, efficient and sustainable.
- Reduce the number of Children and Young People without education and address unsustainable budget pressures.

Measuring Success

Success will be measured through:

- Increased numbers of Children and Young People remaining in or returning to mainstream education.
- Improved attendance, attainment and post-16 outcomes for Children and Young People in AP.
- Reduced exclusions, suspensions and numbers of Children and Young People without education.
- Positive feedback from Children, Young People, families and partners.
- Robust data and quality assurance embedded in the SEND and AP dashboard.

In summary:

Suffolk's AP pathway, as set out in the new Alternative Provision Strategy 2026–2030, is ambitious, inclusive and focused on early intervention, reintegration and preparation for adulthood. It is delivered through a three-tier model, robust commissioning and strong partnership working—ensuring that AP is an intervention, not a destination and that every child and young person receives the right support, in the right place, at the right time.



Early Years (0–5)

Suffolk recognises that early identification and intervention are critical to improving outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The sufficiency of early years provision is a key priority, reflecting both rising demand and the importance of inclusive, high quality support from the earliest stages of a child's education.



Demand and Trends

Rising demand: There has been a significant increase in the number of young children identified with SEND in early years settings. In 2024/25 Suffolk received 2,277 high needs funding applications for early years, up from 1079 in 2021/22, reflecting a 111% increase in the space of three years. Inclusion Fund applications also rose sharply, from 568 to 1207 (112% increase) in the same space of time, reflecting growing complexity and earlier identification of need.

Changing profile of need: The most common primary needs in the early years cohort are speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), autism, and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. There is also a notable increase in children with complex and multiple needs requiring specialist support.

Current Provision

Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI) settings: Suffolk's early years sector includes a diverse range of PVI providers, many of whom are supported through the Inclusion Fund and specialist outreach.

High Needs Funding: The local authority provides targeted high needs funding to support children with emerging and complex needs in early years settings, enabling access to additional resources, specialist input and tailored interventions.

Assessment nursery: The need for an assessment nursery has been identified to support children with the most complex needs, though this project is currently paused pending Department for Education (DfE) decision..

Gaps and Challenges

Capacity: Despite increased investment, there remain gaps in specialist early years places, particularly for children with autism, SLCN and SEMH needs.

Workforce: Recruitment and retention of skilled early years practitioners, including those with SEND expertise, is an ongoing challenge.

Transitions: Ensuring smooth transitions from early years into Reception and primary school is a key focus, with a need for improved information sharing and joint planning between settings

Strategic Priorities

Improve assessment pathways: Strengthen early identification and assessment processes, ensuring timely access to support and specialist input for children with emerging needs.

Expand inclusion in PVI settings: Increase the capacity of PVI providers to deliver inclusive practice, supported by targeted funding, training and outreach.

Enhance health interfaces: Work closely with health partners to ensure integrated support for children with complex needs, including access to therapies and specialist services.

Support transitions: Develop robust transition planning processes to ensure children move smoothly from early years into school, with appropriate support in place from the outset.

Factor early years demand into modelling and commissioning: Ensure that sufficiency planning and commissioning reflect the rising demand and changing profile of need in the early years cohort.

Monitoring and Impact

Data tracking: Suffolk will continue to monitor demand, provision and outcomes for children with SEND in early years settings, using data from high needs funding applications, Inclusion Fund uptake and feedback from providers and families.

Quality assurance: The local authority will work with Ofsted, health partners, and the early years sector to ensure high standards of provision and continuous improvement.

Significance

By strengthening early years sufficiency, Suffolk aims to ensure that all children with SEND receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time—laying the foundations for successful learning, inclusion and lifelong outcomes.



Post-16 & Preparing for Adulthood (PfA)

Suffolk is committed to ensuring that young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are well prepared for adulthood, with access to high-quality education, training, employment, independent living and community inclusion. The sufficiency of post-16 provision and effective transition planning are central to improving outcomes and life chances for young people with SEND.



Suffolk is committed to ensuring that young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are well prepared for adulthood, with access to high-quality education, training, employment, independent living and community inclusion. The sufficiency of post-16 provision and effective transition planning are central to improving outcomes and life chances for young people with SEND.

Demand and Trends

Rising numbers:

- 16–19 age group: The number of young people with EHCPs increased by 12% from 1,736 in 2023/24 to 1,944 in 2024/25.
- 20–25 age group: The number of young people with EHCPs increased by 24.8% from 1,113 in 2023/24 to 1,389 in 2024/25.
- NEET risk: 88 young people in Years 12–13 were not in education, employment or training (NEET) in 2022/23, up by 33 in two years.
- Complex needs: There is a growing proportion of young people with complex needs requiring bespoke packages, supported internships, and specialist pathways.

Current Provision

Further Education (FE): 744 FE places are commissioned for young people with SEND, with an additional 93 places in independent providers and 75 bespoke post-16 packages.

Supported internships and employment pathways: Suffolk is investing in supported internships and employment pathways to improve transitions into adulthood and reduce NEET rates.

Community inclusion: The PfA Steering Group oversees the integration of post-16 and adulthood pathways into sufficiency planning, ensuring that young people have access to a range of opportunities beyond education.

Gaps and Challenges

Capacity: There is a need for additional post-16 places, particularly for young people with complex needs and those requiring specialist support. Geographical disparities are emphasised in the JSNA, with rural and coastal areas facing particular challenges due to the scarcity of local further education providers offering specialist SEND support, resulting in longer travel times and barriers to sustained engagement.

Transitions: Ensuring smooth and well-planned transitions from school to FE, employment and adult services remains a challenge, with a need for improved information sharing and joint planning. The JSNA also identifies a significant gap in sufficiency for children and young people transitioning from alternative provision (AP) or elective home education (EHE) into further education. The JSNA highlights that tracking and continuity of support for these learners is limited, with information about needs and previous interventions not always transferring effectively between settings.

Pathways to independence: There is a need to strengthen pathways to independent living, community participation and employment, particularly for young people with higher levels of need.

Strategic Priorities

Strengthen study programmes: Expand and diversify post-16 study programmes, including supported internships, traineeships and bespoke packages for young people with complex needs.

Improve transition planning: Develop robust transition planning processes, starting from Year 9, to ensure young people and their families are well prepared for adulthood.

Enhance employment and community pathways: Work with employers, colleges and community partners to increase opportunities for employment, volunteering, and community participation.

Integrate PfA governance: The PfA Steering Group will clarify transitions, reduce NEET risk and integrate PfA governance into sufficiency monitoring and commissioning.

Monitoring and Impact

Data tracking: Suffolk will continue to monitor demand, provision and outcomes for young people with SEND in post-16 settings, using data from EHCP reviews, NEET tracking and feedback from providers and families.

Quality assurance: The local authority will work with colleges, training providers and employers to ensure high standards of provision and continuous improvement.

Significance

By strengthening post-16 sufficiency and preparing for adulthood pathways, Suffolk aims to ensure that all young people with SEND are supported to achieve their aspirations, participate fully in their communities and lead fulfilling, independent lives.

Travel, Accessibility & Place-based Planning

Ensuring that children and young people with SEND can access the right support, in the right place, at the right time is a core principle of Suffolk's sufficiency strategy. Travel, accessibility and place-based planning are central to reducing barriers, supporting inclusion and improving outcomes for families across the county.

Travel Patterns and Challenges

Significant travel times: Many children and young people, particularly those living in coastal and rural areas, travel 45 minutes or more to access suitable provision. This places additional strain on families and the transport system, and highlights the need for more local, accessible options.

Cost pressures: Home-to-school transport costs for pupils with SEND are significantly higher than for their mainstream peers, with the average cost for a pupil with SEND in Suffolk at £9,000 per year—three times the mainstream average.

Place-Based Planning

Proximity planning: Suffolk is committed to aligning placement planning with housing growth and accessibility standards, ensuring that new developments include provision for SEND and that local options are available wherever possible.

Local provision: The strategy prioritises the development of specialist and inclusive provision in areas of highest demand, particularly in the North and West of the county and in rural and coastal communities where travel times are longest.

Accessibility standards: All new and expanded provision is designed to meet high standards of accessibility, ensuring that children and young people with a range of needs can access education close to home.



Strategic Priorities

Reduce travel times: By expanding local specialist and inclusive provision, Suffolk aims to reduce the number of children and young people who need to travel long distances to access suitable education.

Align with housing and population growth: Placement planning is integrated with local authority housing strategies and demographic forecasts to ensure sufficiency keeps pace with changing needs.

Travel training and independence: Suffolk invests in travel training and support for young people with SEND, enabling greater independence and smoother transitions to adulthood.

Carbon considerations: The strategy recognises the environmental impact of long-distance travel and seeks to minimise this through local provision and sustainable transport solutions.

Monitoring and Impact

Data tracking: Suffolk monitors travel patterns, costs and accessibility as part of its sufficiency dashboard, using this data to inform ongoing planning and investment.

Quality assurance: The local authority works with transport providers, schools and families to ensure that travel arrangements are safe, reliable and responsive to individual needs.

Significance

By embedding travel, accessibility and place-based planning into its sufficiency strategy, Suffolk aims to ensure that all children and young people with SEND can access high-quality education as close to home as possible—reducing barriers, supporting inclusion and improving outcomes for families across the county.



Financial Framework & Value for Money

Assumptions & Constraints

Delivery is contingent on High Needs Block funding, specialist workforce availability, capital approvals, and the timing/content of national SEND reforms. Material changes will trigger an early review to re-sequence actions and update trajectories.

Suffolk's SEND Sufficiency Strategy is underpinned by a robust financial framework that aims to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people with SEND, while delivering value for money and long-term sustainability for the High Needs Block (HNB) and wider system.

High Needs Block (HNB) Pressures and Sustainability

Rising demand and complexity: The number of children and young people with EHCPs in Suffolk has increased by over 12% in the last year alone, with overall SEND levels are now at 19.7% of school-age pupils. This has placed significant and growing pressure on the HNB, which funds specialist placements, therapies, and support services.

Deficit management: As part of the requirements from the Department for Education, Suffolk is developing and implementing a Deficit Management Plan (DMP) to address current and projected overspends in the HNB. This includes regular monitoring and reporting to the Strategic Improvement Board (SIB), Schools Forum and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), and is aligned with DfE guidance on HNB sustainability.

Capital Investment and Sufficiency

Invest-to-save approach: The SEND Capital Programme has delivered 150 new specialist places in 2025, with a further 160 planned. These investments are designed to expand local capacity, reduce reliance on costly independent and out-of-county placements and deliver long-term savings for the HNB.

Pipeline planning: Ongoing capital investment is informed by sufficiency modelling, demographic forecasts and scenario planning, ensuring that resources are targeted where they will have the greatest impact.

Joint Commissioning and Funding Streams

Joint commissioning: Suffolk is strengthening joint commissioning arrangements with health and care partners to secure therapy resources, ensure equitable access, and deliver integrated support for children and young people with SEND. This includes the development of a SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy and the use of pooled budgets where appropriate.

External funding: Suffolk actively seeks and utilises external funding streams, such as the SEND Intervention Support Fund (ISF), to drive rapid and effective improvements in priority areas identified through Ofsted/CQC inspection and local self-evaluation.

Value for Money and Continuous Improvement

Reducing high-cost placements: By strengthening mainstream inclusion and expanding in-borough provision, Suffolk aims to reduce reliance on high-cost independent placements and associated transport costs, delivering better value for money and improved outcomes for families.

Monitoring and reporting: Financial performance, value for money and impact are tracked through dashboards, annual reviews and regular reporting to governance boards. This ensures transparency, accountability and continuous improvement.

Benchmarking: Suffolk benchmarks its spend and outcomes against statistical neighbours and national averages to identify areas for improvement and share best practice.

Strategic risks: Key financial risks include HNB sustainability, sufficiency shortfalls, workforce capacity and capital delivery. These are actively managed through the Deficit Management Plan, capacity growth, quality assurance frameworks and regular risk reviews at SEND Improvement Board and the SEND Operational Group.

Significance

By embedding a strong financial framework and a relentless focus on value for money, Suffolk is committed to ensuring that every pound spent delivers the maximum possible benefit for children and young people with SEND, now and in the future.



Commissioning Intentions & Market Position

Suffolk Local Area Partnership is committed to shaping a diverse, high-quality and sustainable SEND provision market that meets the needs of all children and young people with SEND, aged 0–25. Our commissioning intentions are designed to ensure sufficiency, quality and value for money across maintained, academy and independent sectors, and to strengthen joint commissioning between education, health and care partners.



Shaping the Local SEND Market

Strategic market shaping: Suffolk will work proactively with maintained schools, academies and independent providers to ensure a broad and flexible range of provision, including specialist resource bases (SRBs), satellites and alternative provision. This includes regular sufficiency gap analysis and market engagement to identify and address emerging needs.

Quality standards and service specifications: All commissioned services will be required to meet clear quality standards, with robust contracts and service specifications in place. These will set out expectations for outcomes, inclusion, safeguarding and continuous improvement.

Commissioning for outcomes: Suffolk will prioritise commissioning arrangements that focus on improved outcomes for children and young people, including educational attainment, attendance, reintegration and successful transitions to adulthood.

Strengthening Joint Commissioning

Integrated commissioning: The Local Area Partnership will strengthen joint commissioning arrangements between education, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), health and care partners to secure therapy resources, ensure equitable access to support and deliver integrated, person-centred services.

SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy: Suffolk will develop and implement a SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy, setting out shared priorities, pooled budgets where appropriate and clear governance arrangements for joint decision-making and accountability.

Market Development and Sustainability

Supporting provider sustainability: Suffolk will work with providers to ensure financial sustainability, workforce development and resilience in the face of rising demand and changing needs.

Innovation and co-production: Suffolk will encourage innovation and co-production with children, young people, families and providers, supporting the development of new models of provision and pathways that respond to local priorities.

Reducing reliance on independent and out-of-county placements: By strengthening mainstream inclusion and expanding in-borough provision, Suffolk aims to reduce the need for high-cost, distant placements and ensure children can access support closer to home.

Monitoring, Quality Assurance and Market Position Statement

Market position statement: Suffolk will publish and regularly update a market position statement, setting out current and projected needs, commissioning priorities and opportunities for providers.

Quality assurance: All commissioned provision will be subject to regular quality assurance, contract monitoring and performance review, with clear escalation routes for addressing concerns.

Stakeholder engagement: The council will maintain ongoing dialogue with providers, families and partners to ensure the market remains responsive, innovative and focused on delivering the best outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Significance

By setting clear commissioning intentions and actively shaping the SEND market, Suffolk Local Area Partnership aims to ensure sufficiency, quality and sustainability of provision—delivering improved outcomes for children and young people and value for money for the local area.

Capital Programme & Estates Plan

Suffolk's capital programme is a cornerstone of the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, enabling the expansion and modernisation of specialist and inclusive provision across the county. The estates plan is designed to ensure that all children and young people with SEND can access high-quality, accessible education as close to home as possible.

Strategic Aims

Expand local capacity: The capital programme is focused on delivering new specialist places, expanding existing schools and developing satellite and modular provision to meet rising demand and reduce reliance on independent and out-of-county placements.

Modernise and future-proof the estate: Investment is targeted at ensuring all SEND provision meets high standards of accessibility, safety and suitability for a diverse range of needs. Align with sufficiency modelling: All capital investment decisions are informed by robust sufficiency modelling, demographic forecasts and scenario planning to ensure resources are targeted where they will have the greatest impact.

Recent and Planned Investments

Phases 1–2: Delivered 150 new specialist places in 2025, with a further 160 planned. These include new special school places, expanded specialist resource bases (SRBs) and satellite classes.

Pipeline planning: Ongoing capital investment is guided by a published pipeline of expansions, SRBs, satellites and modular builds, with clear design standards, accessibility criteria and delivery timelines.

Estates Management and Accessibility

Condition and suitability: Regular condition surveys and estate reviews are conducted to ensure all SEND settings are safe, accessible and fit for purpose.

Accessibility standards: All new and refurbished provision is designed to meet or exceed statutory accessibility requirements, supporting inclusion and independence for children and young people with a wide range of needs.

Place-based planning: Capital investment is prioritised in areas of highest demand, particularly in the North and West of the county and in rural and coastal communities where travel times are longest.

Governance and Delivery

Programme oversight: The capital programme is overseen by the Strategic Improvement Board (SIB), with regular reporting to the Schools Forum, Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Education and Children’s Scrutiny Committee.

Annual review: The estates plan and capital pipeline are reviewed annually to ensure alignment with changing needs, emerging priorities and feedback from stakeholders.

Co-production: Investment decisions are informed by ongoing engagement with children, young people, families, schools and partners to ensure that new provision meets local needs and aspirations.

Monitoring and Impact

Dashboards and reporting: Progress on capital projects is tracked through dashboards and highlight reports, with clear milestones and delivery timelines.

Impact assessment: The impact of capital investment is measured through increased sufficiency of local places, reduced travel times, improved accessibility and positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Significance

The capital programme and estates plan are central to Suffolk’s ambition to deliver a modern, inclusive and sustainable SEND system. By investing in new and improved provision, Suffolk aims to ensure that every child and young person with SEND can access the right support, in the right place, at the right time—now and in the future.



Governance & Delivery Plan

1) Governance approach and oversight

Local Area Partnership governance. Delivery of the Sufficiency Strategy is overseen by the SEND Improvement Board (SIB)—independently chaired—with operational delivery aligned through the Strategic Operations Group (SOG) and six standing sub-groups: Quality & Performance; Communication & Co-production; Strategic Solutions; Preparing for Adulthood & Transitions; Joint Commissioning; Funding. This structure provides strategic grip, operational flow and clear escalation routes across education, health and care partners.

Scrutiny and assurance. Progress is scrutinised by the Education & Children’s Scrutiny Committee and through DfE stocktake sessions; the Sector-Led Improvement Partner (SLIP) provides external challenge to ensure best practice and rigour. A refreshed Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF) and Local Area Inclusion Plan (LAIP) are scheduled for completion by December 2025 to align governance, performance narratives and sufficiency priorities.

Strategic alignment. Governance is explicitly aligned to the Suffolk SEND Strategy 2024–2029, ensuring that sufficiency actions contribute to county-wide objectives on inclusion, outcomes and co-production.

2) Performance management & reporting

Dashboards and highlight reports. The partnership will maintain an integrated sufficiency dashboard (placements, Specialist units/ satellite capacity, independent reliance, travel time, EHCP timeliness, AP pathway outcomes, PfA trajectories, finance/Value for Money) with termly highlight reports and annual review. The SEND Inclusion Quality and Performance Group reporting will provide monthly pulse checks and narrative insight to reduce variability and identify systemic issues early.

Data sources. JSNA, school census, SEND cohort and vulnerable group datasets, AP referral/Children Missing Education data, High Needs Funding applications, inspection outcomes, transport costs and Office for National Statistics/Department for Education statistics feed the sufficiency indicators and scenario modelling.

Publishing and transparency: The approved strategy will be published via the Local Offer with standing agenda items across SEND Improvement Board/SEND Operational Group to maintain performance and risk visibility.

3) Risks & mitigations

Strategic risks include High Needs Budget sustainability, sufficiency shortfalls across ASC/SLCN/SEMH; SLD/MLD; post-16; early years, workforce capacity (specialist teachers, therapists), EHCP timeliness and tribunal pressures, therapy commissioning clarity, capital delivery and system communications.

Mitigations include the Deficit Management Plan, targeted capacity growth, Quality Assurance frameworks, introduction of the SEND AP team, therapy commissioning workstreams, highlight reports/action trackers and termly risk reviews.

4) Dependencies and interfaces

Alternative Provision (AP) Strategy 2026–2030: Ensures AP remains an intervention, not a destination, with tiered pathways, clear entry/exit criteria and reintegration priority—embedded within sufficiency planning and commissioning.

Capital & Estates Plan: Phased expansions (Specialist units, satellites, modular builds) and accessibility standards, targeted by locality demand and travel patterns.

Preparing for Adulthood Governance: Post-16 sufficiency and employment pathways with reduction targets for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), integrated via the PfA Steering Group.

SEND Strategy 24–29: Vision, commitments and outcome framework underpin annual sufficiency refresh and board reporting.

5) Delivery Plan

The delivery plan will operationalize the strategic priorities set out in the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, ensuring that all children and young people with SEND in Suffolk can access the right support, in the right place, at the right time. This plan will be designed and implemented at the start of 2026 alongside the SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy, to ensure that both documents are fully interlinked.

The SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy will be developed over Quarters 1 and 2 2026, setting out:

- Shared priorities and pooled budgets where appropriate.
- Governance arrangements for joint decision-making.
- Annual review cycles aligned with the SEND Sufficiency Strategy

Families and children and young people will be engaged in the co-production of health-related commissioning decisions, ensuring lived experience informs service design.

The Delivery Plan will be reviewed annually, with progress and impact reported to SEND Improvement Board, SEND Operational Group, and all stakeholders. The plan remains a live document, responsive to changing needs, feedback, and statutory requirements.

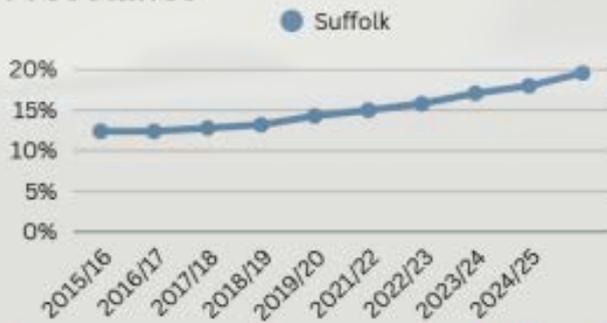
Appendix A - JSNA on a page summary



JSNA-on-a-page summary:

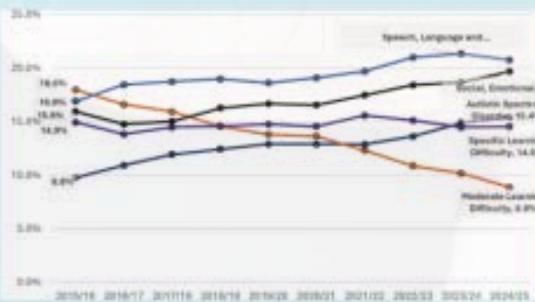
SEND Needs Assessment: 2025 data update

Prevalence



- **21,819 school-age children with SEND in Suffolk** (19.7% of all pupils in 2024/25)
- **5,959 with EHC Plans** (5.4%) – more than doubled from 2.5% in 2015/16
- **15,860 receiving SEN Support** (14.3%) - increased from 9.9% in 2015/16

Primary type of need in 2024/25



- **Speech, Language & Communication: 20.8%** (most common primary need)
- **Social, Emotional & Mental Health: 19.7%** (up from 18.7% in 2023/24)
- **Autism: 15.4%**, rising steadily (up from 9.8% in 2015/16)
- **Moderate Learning Difficulty** has halved since 2015/16 (18.0% → 8.9%)

System pressures

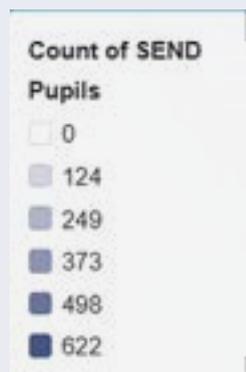
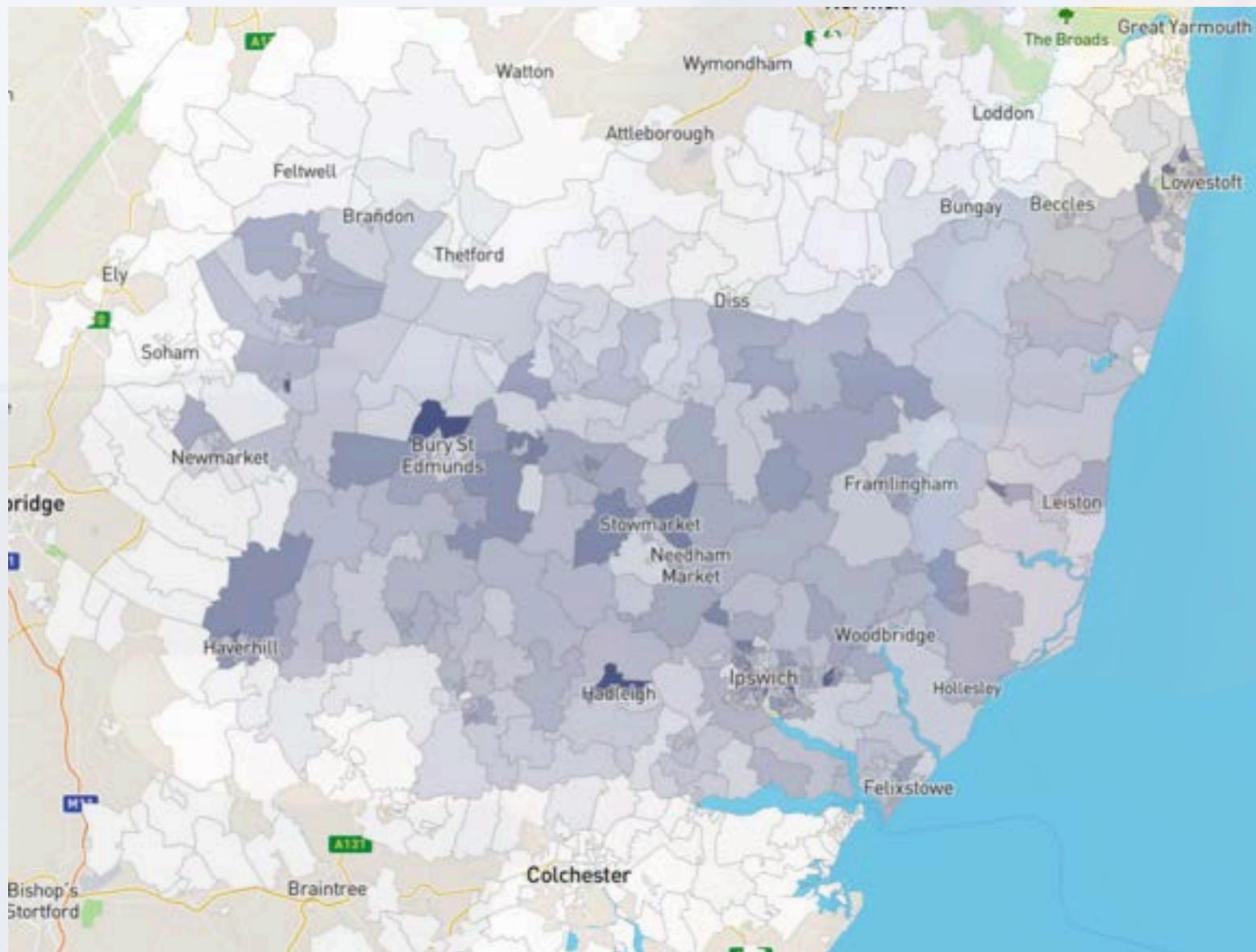


- **EHC needs assessment requests up by 29.0%** in 2024 (2,784 requests) compared to 2023 (2,159 requests)
- **25.4% of EHC plans were completed within 20 weeks in 2024** (across England in 2023, 45.9% were completed on time)
- **22.3% of EHC plans in Suffolk in 2024 were issued after 52 weeks**
- Timeliness is improving from 2023, but still below the national average

Appendix B - Geographical Distribution Maps

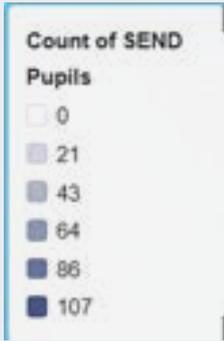
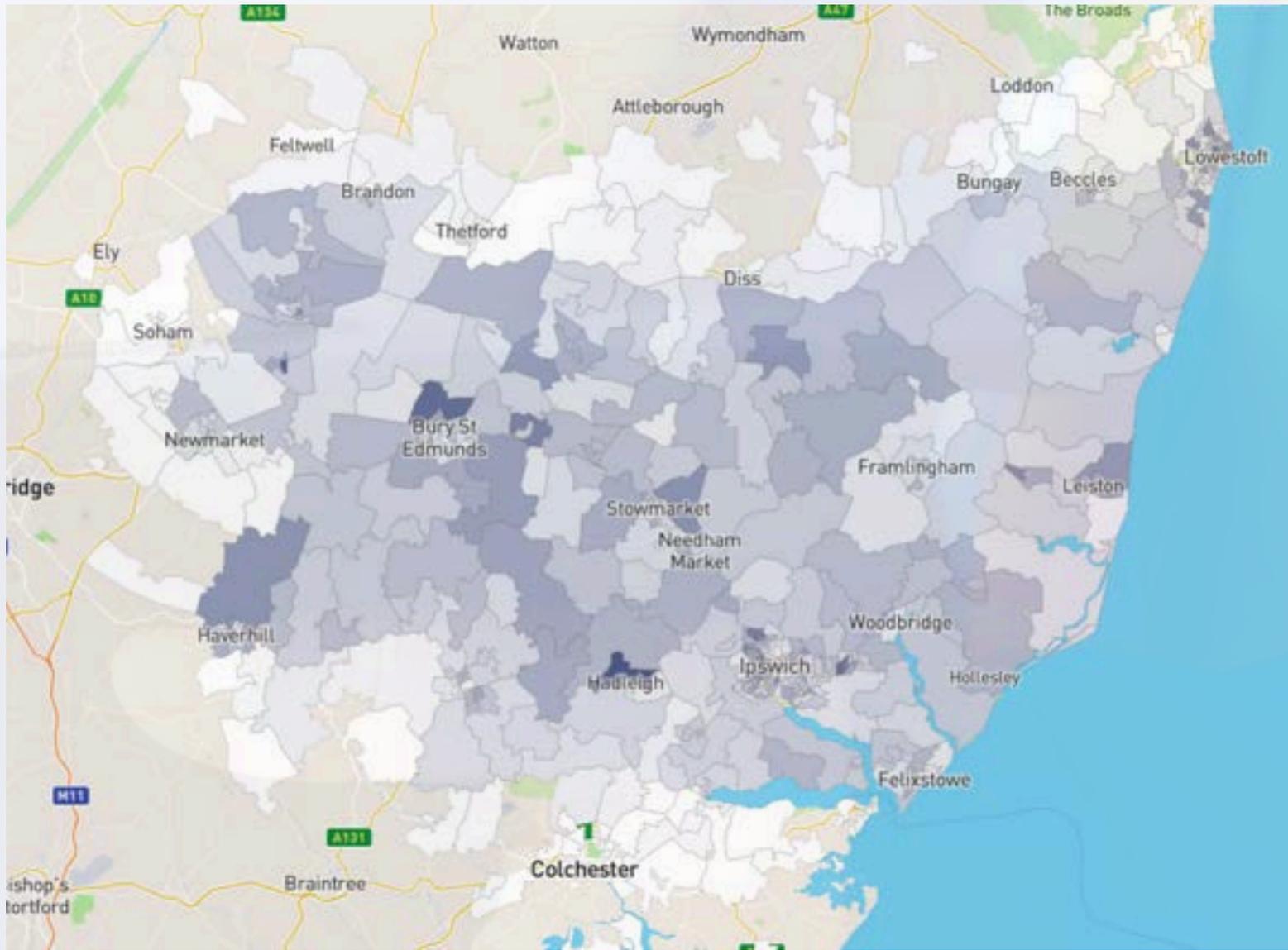
Distribution of all school age children and young people with an EHCP or on SEN Support organised by geographic location.

The map is based on pupil's residential postcodes. Data is suppressed for values below 3 and displayed as 0.



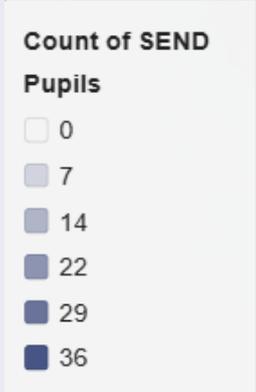
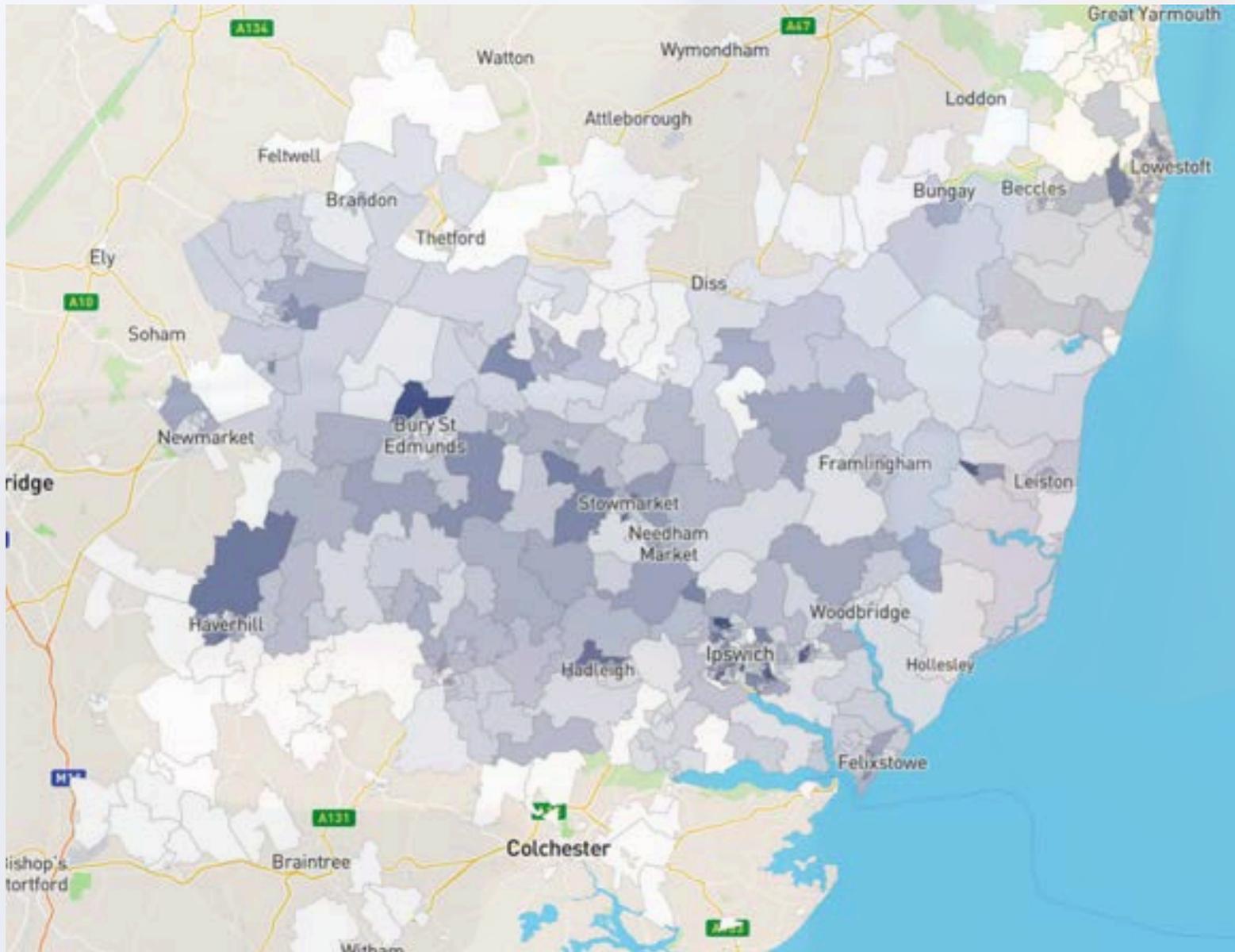
Distribution of school age children and young people on SEN Support organised by geographic location.

The map is based on pupil’s residential postcodes. Data is suppressed for values below 3 and displayed as 0.



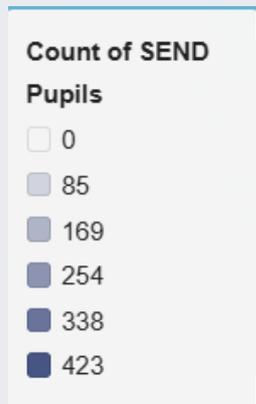
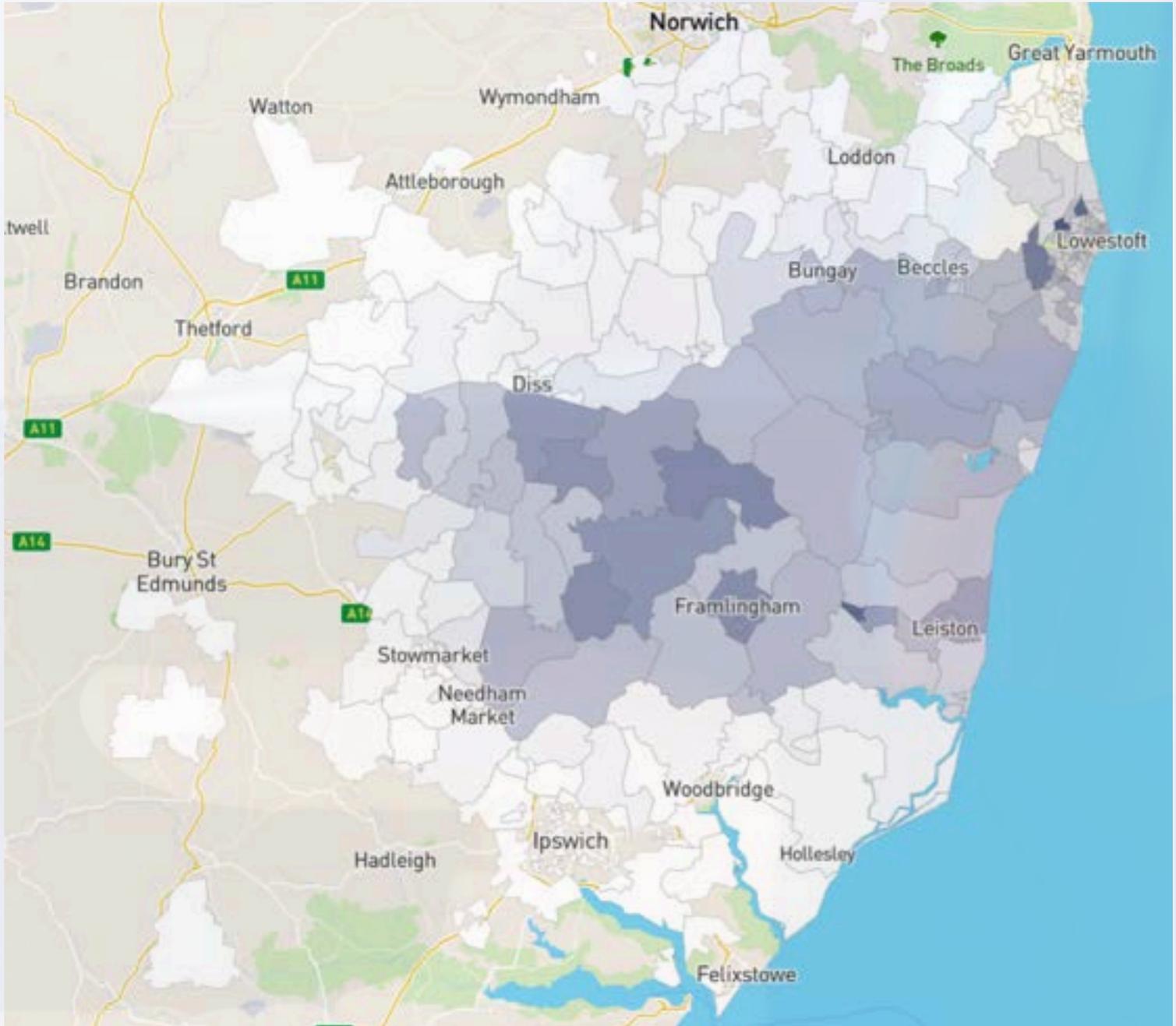
Distribution of school age children and young people with an EHCP organised by geographic location.

The map is based on pupil’s residential postcodes. Data is suppressed for values below 3 and displayed as 0.



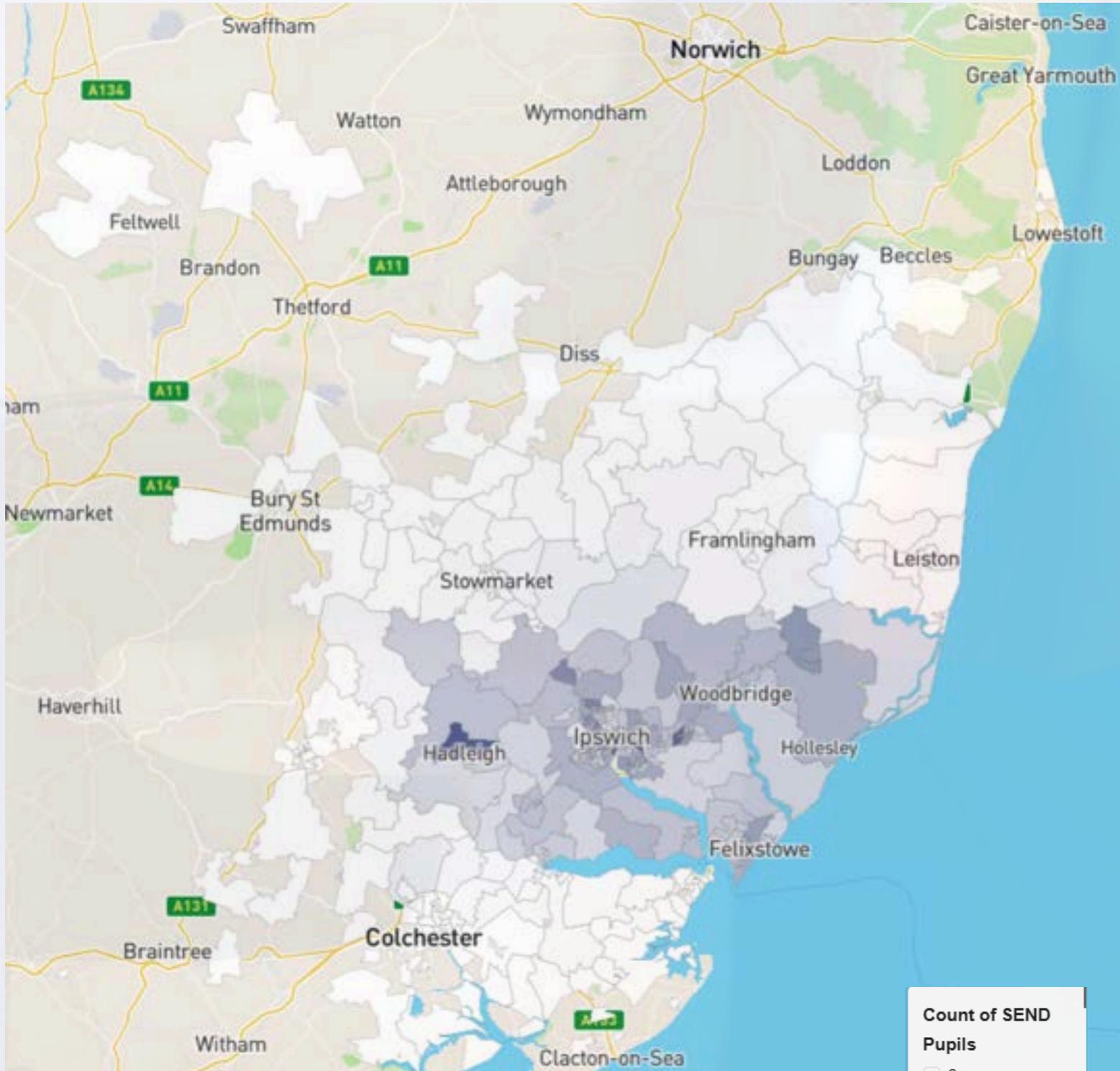
Distribution of all school age children and young people with an EHCP attending a school in the North of Suffolk, organised by geographic location.

The map is based on pupil's residential postcodes. Data is suppressed for values below 3 and displayed as 0.



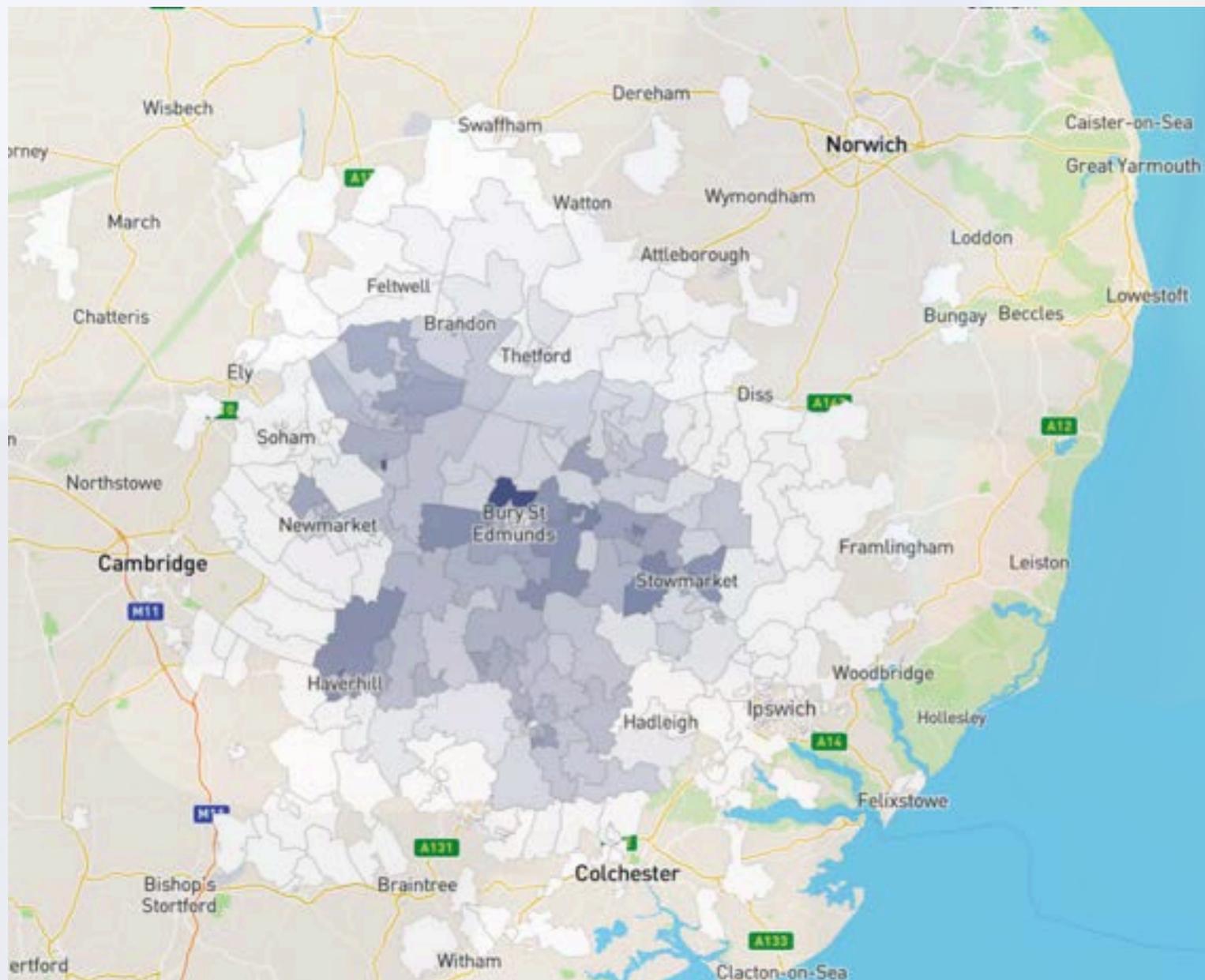
Distribution of all school age children and young people with an EHCP attending a school in the South of Suffolk, organised by geographic location.

The map is based on pupil's residential postcodes. Data is suppressed for values below 3 and displayed as 0.



Distribution of all school age children and young people with an EHCP attending a school in the West of Suffolk, organised by geographic location.

The map is based on pupil's residential postcodes. Data is suppressed for values below 3 and displayed as 0.

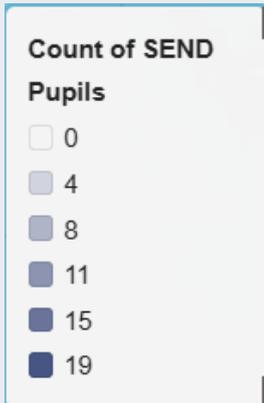
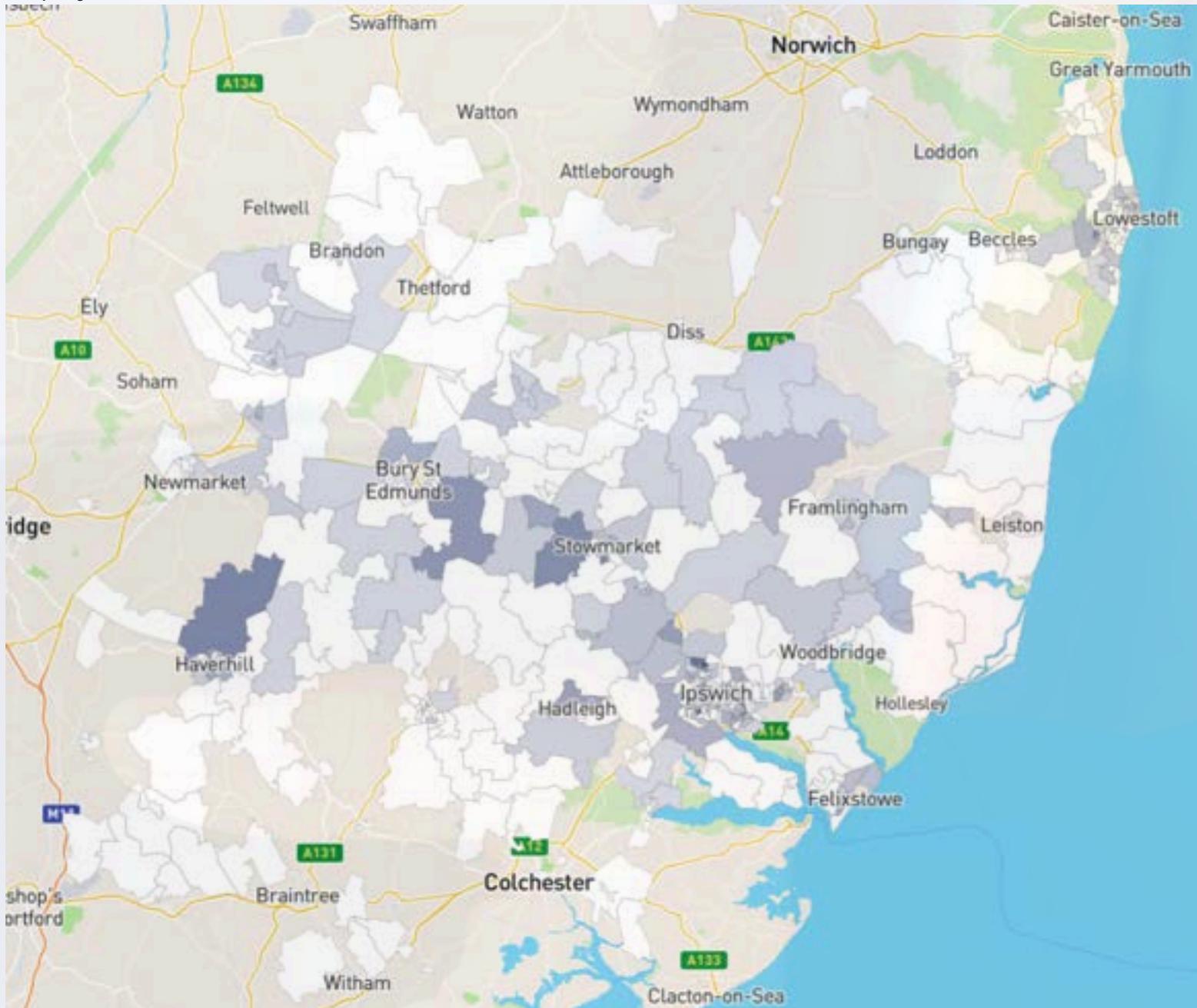


Count of SEND Pupils

- 0
- 103
- 207
- 310
- 414
- 517

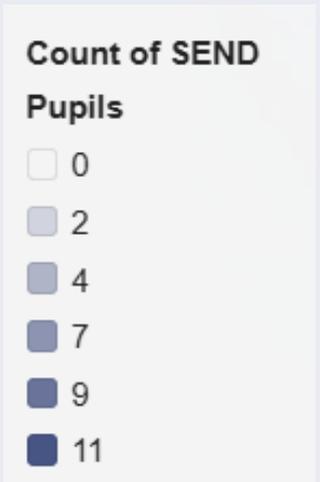
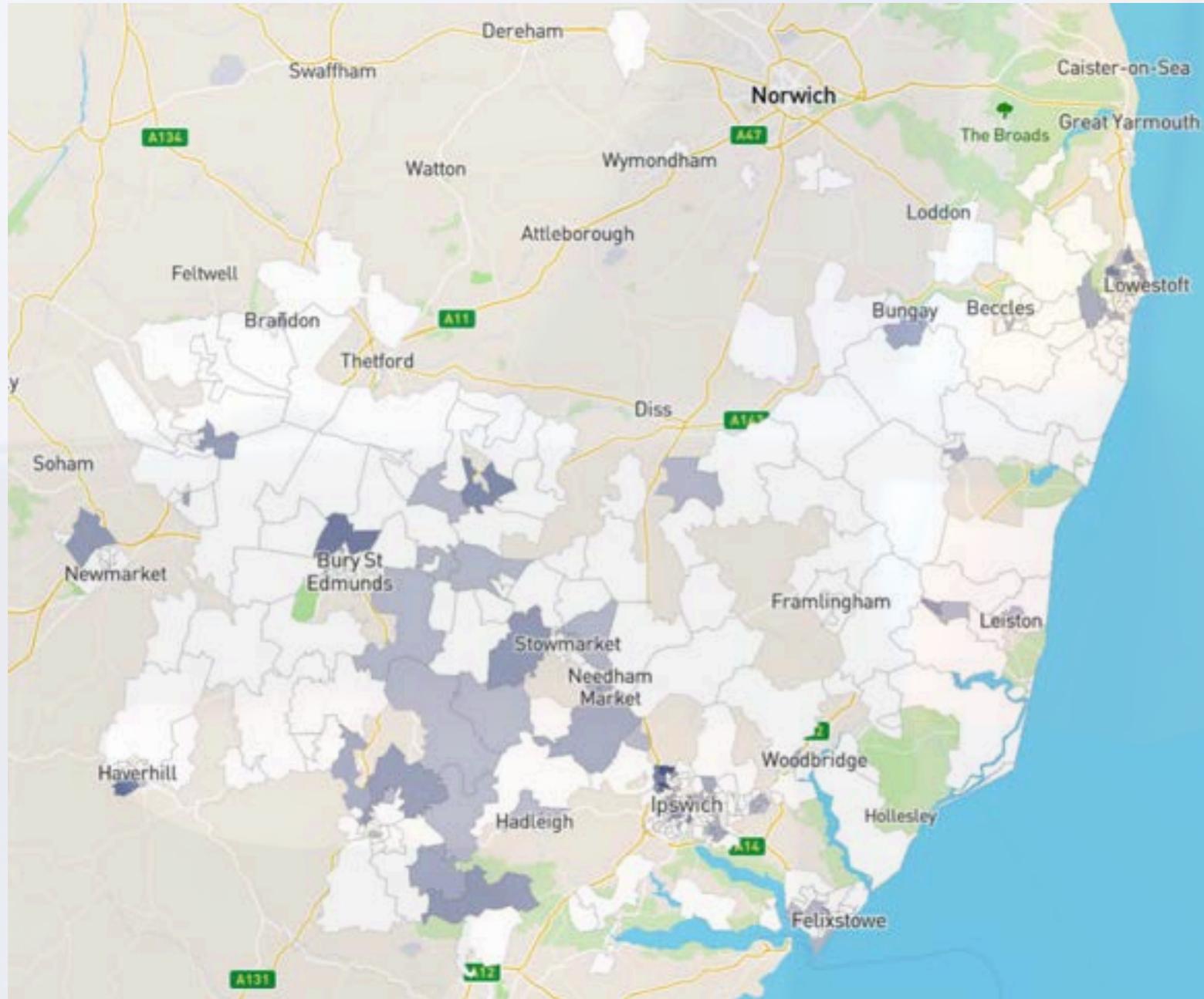
Distribution of all school age children and young people with an EHCP with a primary need of Autism attending a school in Suffolk, organised by geographic location.

The map is based on pupil's residential postcodes. Data is suppressed for values below 3 and displayed as 0.



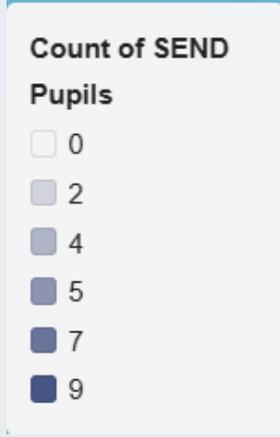
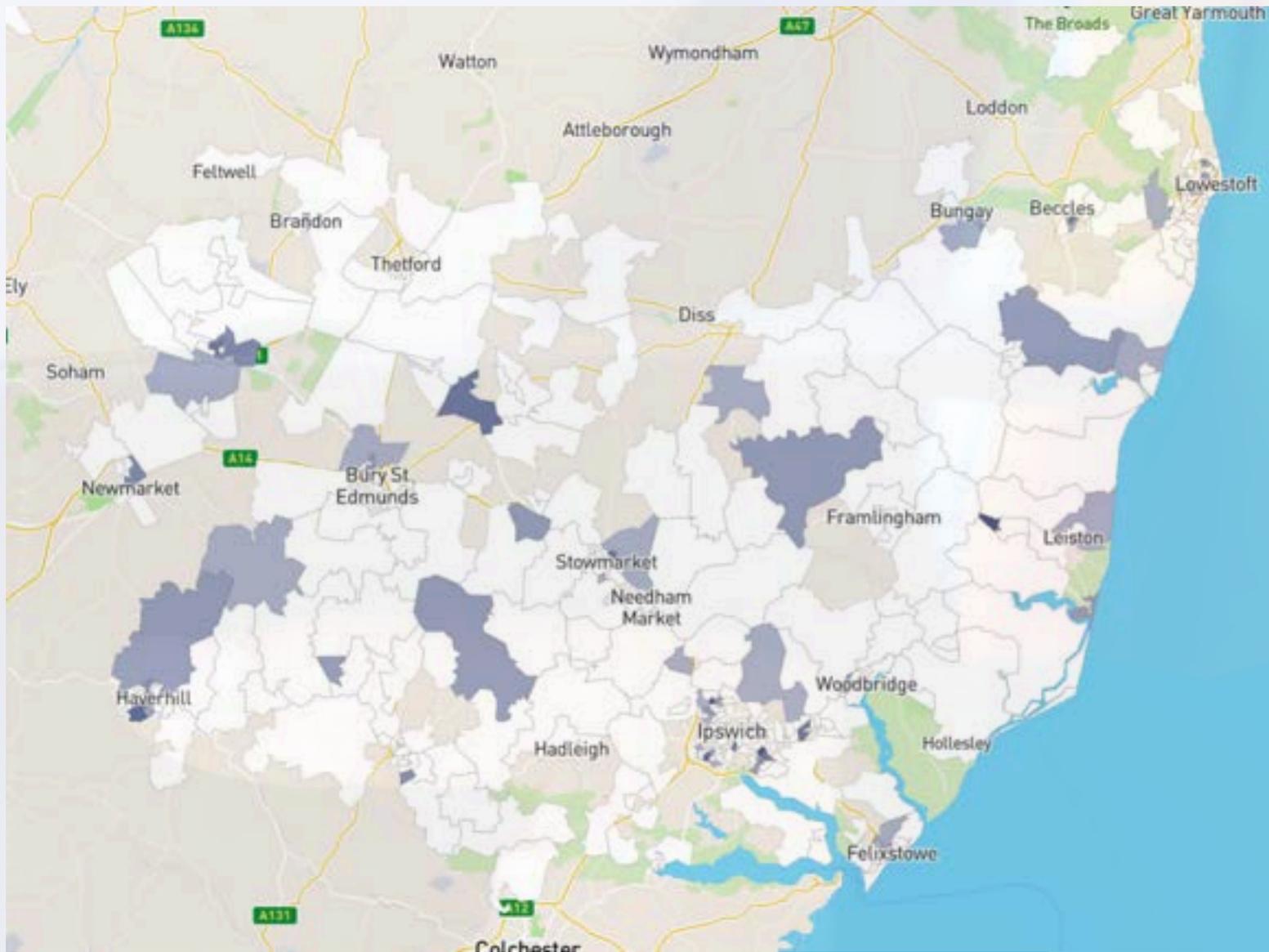
Distribution of all school age children and young people with an EHCP with a primary need of Speech, Language and Communication Needs attending a school in Suffolk, organised by geographic location.

The map is based on pupil's residential postcodes. Data is suppressed for values below 3 and displayed as 0.

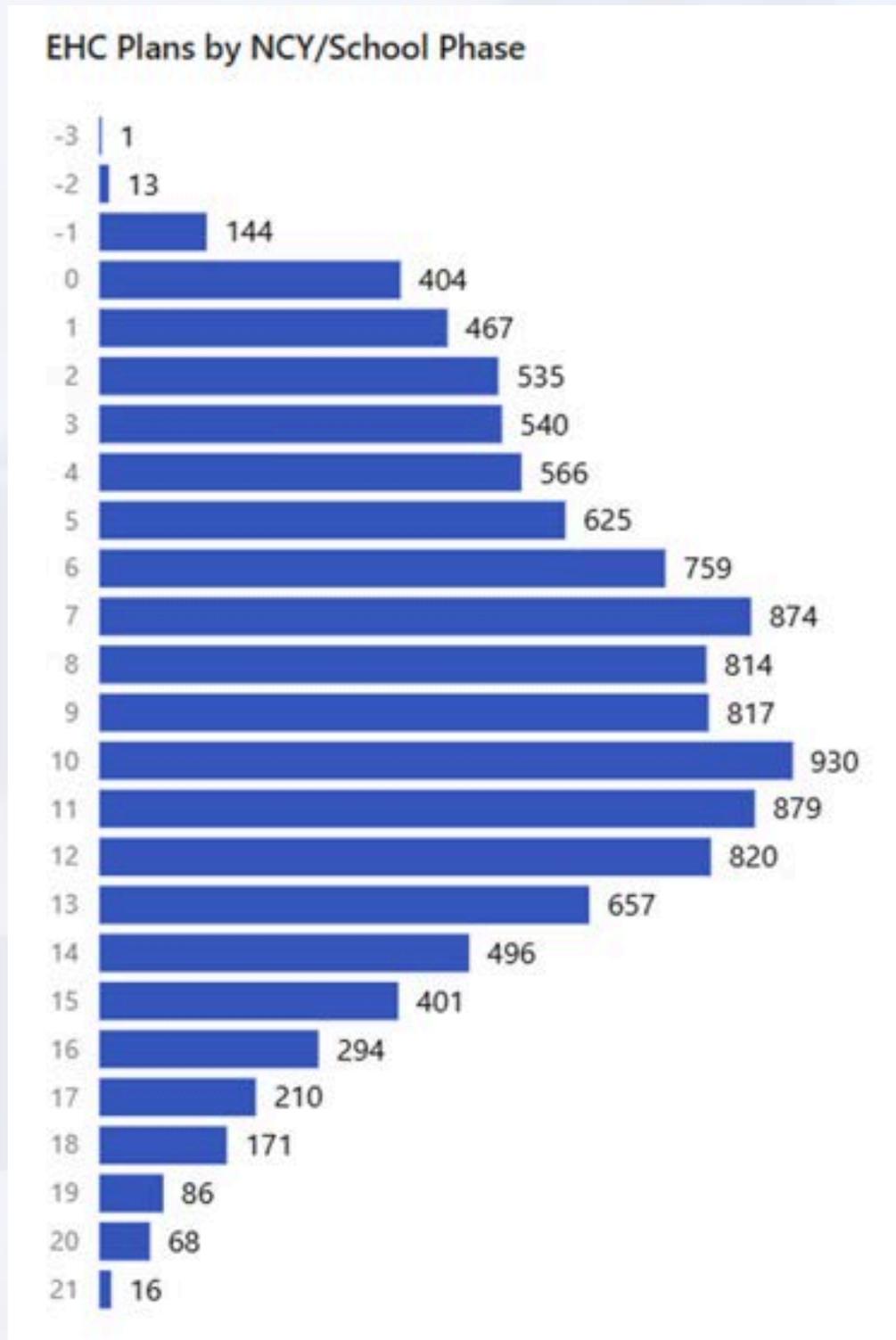


Distribution of all school age children and young people with an EHCP with a primary need of Social, Emotional and Mental Health attending a school in Suffolk, organised by geographic location.

The map is based on pupil's residential postcodes. Data is suppressed for values below 3 and displayed as 0.



Distribution of all children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan aged 0-25 as at 31.12.25



Appendix C - Statutory and National Policy Context

Statutory and National Policy Context

The Suffolk SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026–2030 is framed by a robust statutory and national policy landscape that sets out the duties and expectations for local authorities and their partners in meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Key statutory and policy drivers include:

- **Education Act 1996 (Section 14):** Places a duty on local authorities to ensure that there are sufficient schools for providing primary and secondary education in their area, including for children with SEND.
- **Children and Families Act 2014:** Establishes the legal framework for the SEND system, including the requirement for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), joint commissioning and the Local Offer.
- **SEND Code of Practice (0–25 years, 2015):** Provides statutory guidance on duties, policies, and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014, including the graduated approach, co-production and person-centred planning.
- **Department for Education (DfE) SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan (2023):** Sets out national priorities for improving outcomes, inclusion, and sufficiency of provision for children and young people with SEND and those requiring alternative provision.
- **High Needs Block (HNB) Sustainability Guidance:** Provides operational guidance for local authorities on managing and sustaining high needs funding, including the development of Deficit Management Plans and invest-to-save approaches.
- **Operational Guidance on the Notional SEN Budget (pre-16):** Clarifies expectations for mainstream schools in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND from their delegated budgets and supports the implementation of the Suffolk Mainstream Inclusion Framework (SMIF).

This strategy is also informed by relevant Ofsted and CQC inspection frameworks, national benchmarking and emerging policy developments, ensuring that Suffolk’s approach remains compliant, ambitious and responsive to both statutory requirements and local needs.

Data Sources

The local context analysis draws on a wide range of data, including:

- School census returns (mainstream, special, post-16, alternative provision)
- SEND cohort and vulnerable groups datasets
- Independent school data
- Health trust data
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- SEN” Statutory Return
- Social care and destination figures
- ONS population data
- DfE national statistics.

