



Northumberland County Council

Agenda Item 7 School Forum : 22 November 2023 Special Education Needs Update

1. Purpose of Briefing Note

To provide Schools Forum with an update on SEND for the academic year 2022-23, including challenges faced and action taken to date or planned.

2. Recommendations

That the Schools' Forum notes the report and is invited to:

- Consider implication of information presented in relation to relevant financial reports
- Make comment on data and activity detailed within it.

3. Background

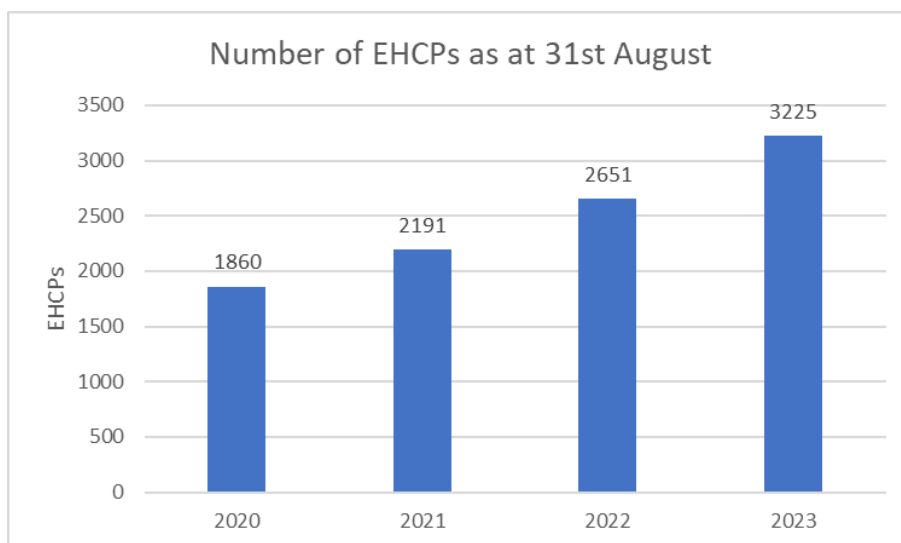
Since introduction of the 'free on demand' delivery model by the SEND Service in September 2020, referrals have continued to increase year on year. In order to ensure demand can be met without requiring increased funding, the service has undergone delivery transformation throughout 22-24. The SEND Service are confident that these models are sustainable for projected demand over the next two academic years (to August 2025).

Increases in EHCP numbers witnessed locally, and nationally, continue to put pressure on the High Needs Block through top up and associated demand for special school places.

4. Quantitative Data

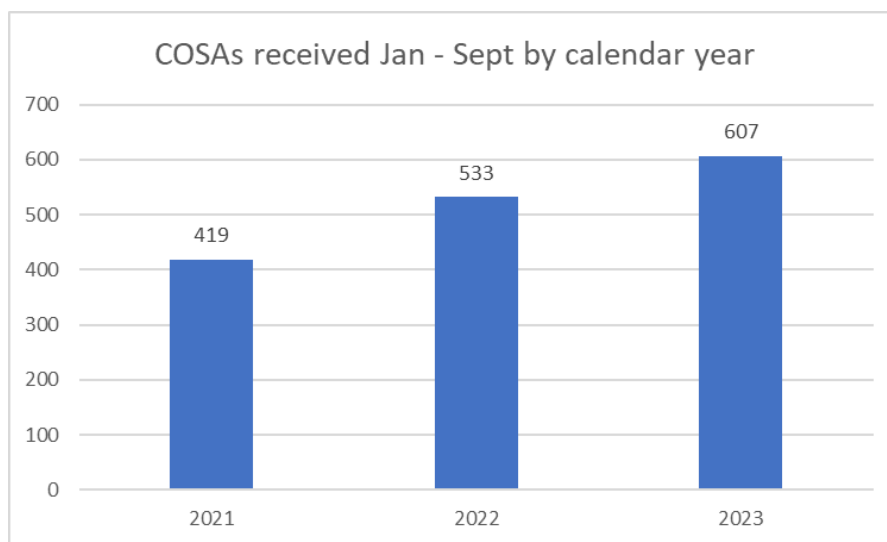
SEND support and EHCP data

Over the last 4 years, the number of EHCPs has increased at a similar rate in Northumberland as across England. In Northumberland there has been a 73% increase in the number of EHCPs since 2020.



Requests for EHC Needs Assessment (Consideration of Statutory Assessment, or 'COSA)

There has been a 45% increase in the requests for EHC needs assessment made January to September between 2021 and 2023. Approximately 10% of requests were declined during 2022-23, in line with the legal test detailed within the Children and Families' Act 2014. This puts increasing pressure on special school places, top up funding from the High Needs Block and the rapidly increasing need for mainstream settings to consistently offer high quality ordinarily available provision.



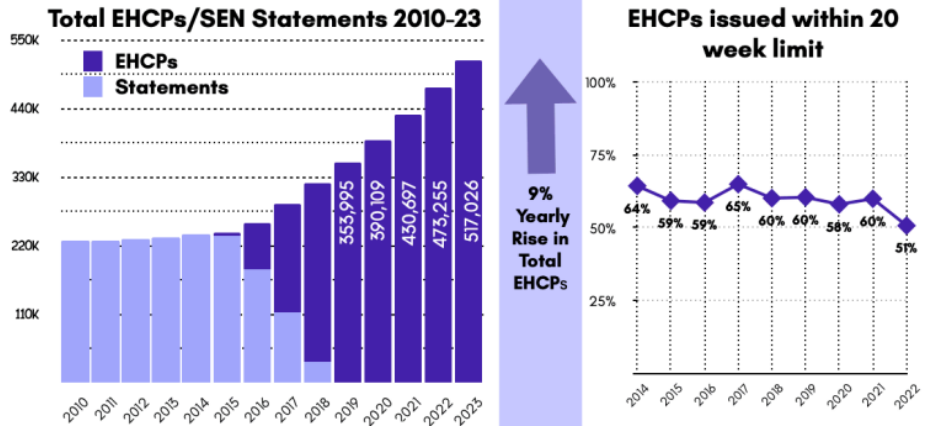
Statutory EHCP assessment and review team caseload:

- In the North East, EHCP caseworkers have an average caseload of 201 EHCPs per officer at Spring SEN2. The average caseload of a Northumberland officer is twice that of the North East average.
- Northumberland sits just above the North East average for EHCNA per 10,000 CYP
- In 2019, an EHCP Officer had approximately 240 EHCPs in their caseload. In July 2023, an officer had approximately 380 EHCPs in their caseload.
- In 2019, an EHCP Coordinator had approximately 40 new EHC needs assessments on going. As at July 2023, an EHCP Coordinator had, on average, 90.

Educational Psychology Service statutory caseload:

- 699 requests for an EHCP led to a request for educational advice to be completed by an Educational Psychologist in 2022-23. There has been a 39% increase in the number of educational advices per Educational Psychologist.
- The EP team attended 302 visits to schools as part of their SLA offer during 2022-23, on top of statutory work completed.

National and regional comparatives:

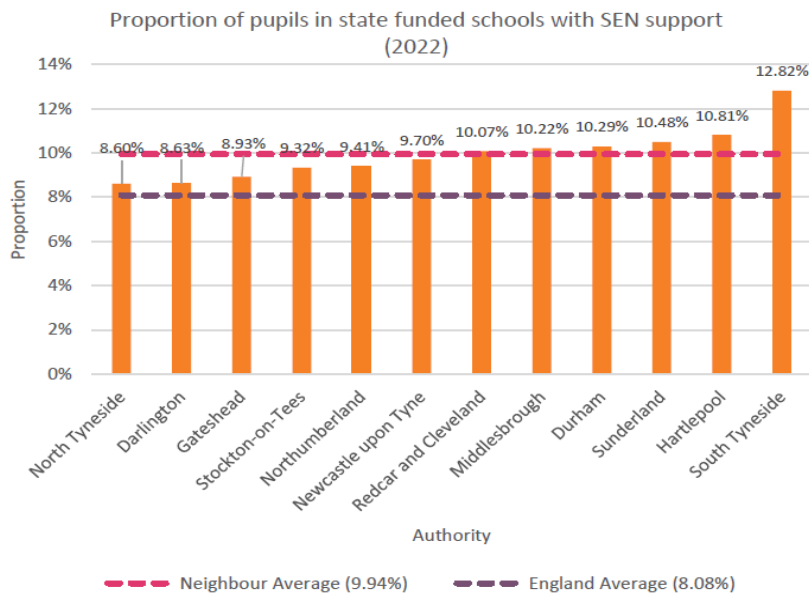


Since 2014, Section 36 (8) of the Children and Families Act 2014 states “the LA must secure an EHC needs assessment if after having regard to views expressed within the evidence submitted that:

- A) the child or young person has, or may have, SEN, and
- B) It may be necessary for special educational provision to be made”.

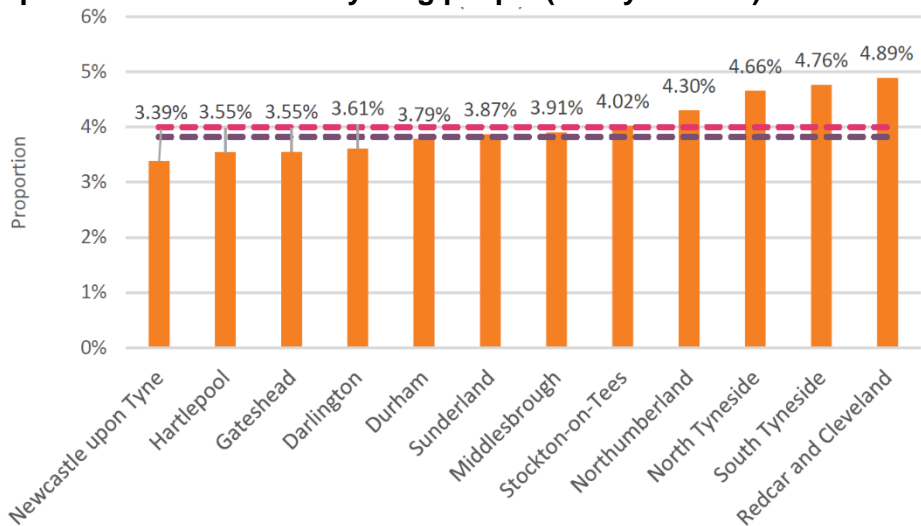
This low threshold leaves need for alternative approaches to supporting young people, and settings, in making provision within budgetary constraints.

48.3% of EHCPs were issued within the statutory 20 week timescale during the academic year 2022-23. This compares to 71.2% in timescale 2021-22, with the reduced compliance with statutory timescales being the result of increased volume of requests, reduced number of Educational Psychologists and a static EHCP caseworker capacity.

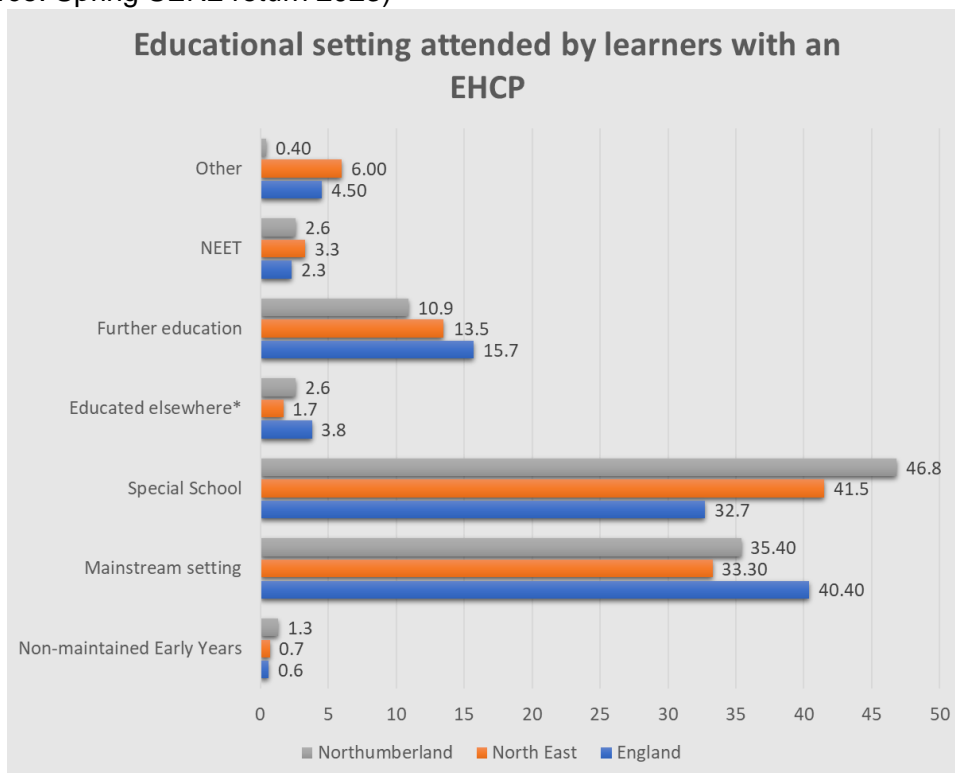


A lower proportion of pupils attending maintained schools were recorded as being in receipt of SEN support than the regional average as at end of 2022. However, there were a higher proportion of pupils with an EHCP.

Proportion of children and young people (0-25 years old) with an EHCP



Mainstream settings cater for fewer learners with an EHCP in Northumberland than across England as a whole (data source: Spring SEN2 return 2023)



More robust panel meetings and NCC staff training have been designed to ensure that placement more closely aligns with the Children and Families’ Act 2014, supporting Northumberland in more positively shaping the picture moving forwards. A greater proportion of learners with an EHCP will be catered for by ‘mainstream’ settings moving forwards.

SEND Service data 2022-23: Number of referrals made by schools

	High Incidence Needs Team				Low Incidence Needs Team	
	Autism Support	Emotional Wellbeing & Behaviour Support	Specific Learning Difficulties Support	Speech, Language and Communication Support	Sensory Support	Portage
Staff no.	11.5	9.8	3.8	11.4	16	7
Whole school activity	66	154	10	140	491	N/A
Individual child/ young person support	1630				6230	3771

HINT have witnessed an increase in referrals for individual child level support of 14.3%, and for whole school support of 208% between 2021-22 and 2022-23.

LINT have witnessed an increase in referrals of 19% between 2021-22 and 2022-23.

There was an overall increase of 32% 2021-22 to 2022-23 for input into EHC needs assessments.

Workforce Development (Training Delivered into Schools)

During 2022-23, HINT offered 123 school-based courses – a 30% increase from the previous academic year. 2,304 delegates attended sessions, representing 103 schools. A further 47 courses were created and made available through Learning Together's online platform. 12 Cygnet and 15 Safety Intervention training courses were also delivered.

During the same period, LINT delivered 148 training sessions with almost 16,000 individual forms of engagement across all teams.

5. Challenges and actions

Challenge	Action taken / planned
Compliance with statutory EHCP timescales resulting from high and increasing number of requests for EHC needs assessment.	Review of banding model to support more pupils more effectively at SEND Support. Improved paperwork with peer support and challenge in place. Use of locum work to support more timely EP advice. Development of improved EHCP content and more effective EP educational advice, reducing time required and increasing quality of EHCPs. Consultation on restructure of statutory teams to maximise capacity of those with statutory function.
Impact of increasing EHCP numbers on High Needs Block.	See separate report.
Collaborative working with schools to consistently deliver Ordinarily Available Provision, meeting the needs of today's pupil population.	Clear and regular SENCo communication. Development of OAP, to be review 2023-24. Stronger focus on whole school support, over individual referral, and reasonable adjustments from central services. Introduction of standardised SEND evaluation tool with development of SEND review during 2023-24, promoting a consistent benchmark for best practice. Development of new ways of working from 2023-24 by the HINT team to meet demand without increased funding.

Suspensions of young people with SEND, or not recognised as having SEND, resulting from unmet need.	Joint Inclusion, Virtual School and SEND work to support and challenge settings, identified through Inclusion Panel (led by SORT) where appropriate. Inclusion Summit 2023 (SORT) and follow up work.
Number of young people with SEND who are NEET.	Improved ways of working for the PfA/career team. Work with North East LEP, Whole School SEND and partners across the region and county. Skills and other provider development to make provision for those most at risk of being NEET.
Complaints resulting from capacity challenge.	Creation of a new post to support timely annual review administration. New post created to support client relations and mediation. New mailbox dedicated to enquiries, FOI, SAR and complaint. Recruitment review to increase EP capacity.
Impact of poor mental health on school engagement for an increasing number of children and young people.	Joint Senior Mental Health Lead, CARE, trauma informed practice and mental health support team projects launched and continued development underway. Project bid to specifically target those not currently attending education through person-centred and consistent approaches.

6. Conclusion

Local and regional pictures broadly align to those nationally in relation to high and increasing levels of additional need within the population. Impact of these trends also align with the unsustainable demand on both statutory functions and on funding and services supported by the High Needs Block. Teams providing preventative and training-based services, as well as reactive support, have been adapted further, since changes made in September 2020, to maximise their positive impact whilst remaining static with regards to workforce size.

Whilst well received by families and schools to date, with survey results supporting positive feedback, it is important to forecast and prepare for future demand, particularly in relation to top up funding linked to EHCPs.

Mike Finlay
October 2023