Department for Education

# Forecasting demand for SEND provision for School Capacity Survey 2025

## Guidance for Local Authorities

**May 2025**

# Summary

*The purpose of this document and the reasons for collecting the data.*

This guidance is intended to support local authorities (LAs) to produce forecasts of demand for specialist school and alternative provision places for pupils with Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs) in line with the data requirements for the School Capacity Survey (SCAP) 2025. This guidance is intended to supplement and support the department's guidance on how to complete the SCAP survey.

## How the data are used

The forecast data asked for will help in ensuring that there is sufficient support available for children and young people when they need it, in the most efficient way. Collecting forecasts of demand for specialist provision will help support both the Department for Education (DfE) and the local government sector to better identify the location and number of specialist school places that may be needed in future. The forecasts will allow the DfE to explore options for evolving our capital funding methodologies and strengthening the targeting of that funding over time. However, we would expect to appropriately consult with LAs before using any LA-produced forecasts for funding purposes, and no decisions have yet been made as to how any future funding systems might operate in practice.

## Expectations of the SCAP collection

In asking for this information, we recognise the challenges of forecasting demand for specialist provision, given the range of potential placements and the varied way they are organised through each LA's local offers of services and provision for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Close collaboration between local authority capital, high needs revenue, and SEND and AP teams is needed to ensure forecasts are realistic and reflect the LA's overarching strategy for delivering special educational needs provision.

SCAP 2023 was the first time many LAs will have been asked to produce detailed forecasts of future demand for specialist places. We therefore recognise that processes and methodologies for producing said forecasts may still be less robust and mature than those used for producing mainstream pupil forecasts. It may require local authorities to involve individuals or business areas who may not have much previous experience of completing the School Capacity Survey, especially SEND and AP teams and those responsible for high needs revenue funding.

This guidance is therefore intended to support all LA colleagues undertaking this task, building on approaches and techniques used in previous surveys and those that LAs may be familiar with from producing their mainstream pupil forecasts.

Given the variety of factors that play a role in forecasting potential demand for specialist provision and the variation in the way it is organised, **LAs are free to adopt whatever forecasting approach they think works best for their local circumstances,** as long as their chosen approach:

a) produces the required outputs for the SCAP collection, and
b) aligns with basic principles set out in this guidance.

We expect LAs to include details of their chosen specialist provision forecasting methodology in addition to their mainstream methodology as part of their SCAP return, and the DfE may work with LAs to better understand their individual forecasting approach as part of SCAP data cleaning.

A key objective of the first few years of data collection is to identify forecasting techniques, approaches and considerations that contribute to LAs producing reliable forecasts of future SEND demand, so that this best practice can be shared and incorporated into future collections. As this is only the third annual collection, we will continue to keep the recommended methodology under review.

Whilst LAs should produce forecasts which are as robust and reliable as possible, we wish to be clear that **we do not expect perfection.** We expect to continue to work with LAs and the wider sector in future years to improve our collective approach to the forecasting of specialist demand, and we welcome continued feedback on the approaches and guidance set out below.

# Changes from SCAP 2024 guidance

*Details of what has changed since the last survey.*

There are no changes to the instructions and advice given in this guidance. In response to feedback, we have added to the worked example to fill in some previous gaps in the explanations of the calculations.

# The forecast data required

*Explains what data you should submit.*

As with previous surveys, we are asking LAs to provide the DfE with data on the capacity of their special schools, SEN units and resourced provision (see the main SCAP guidance for more information on capacity) as well as forecasts of demand for various forms of specialist provision.

Regardless of the exact methodology a local authority may choose to use, all LAs will ultimately need to provide the following forecast information as part of SCAP:

a) Forecasts of the number of pupils resident in the LA in each year group who are expected to have an EHCP and who will require a placement in specialist provision (as defined below):
    - for primary year groups, for 5 academic years from 2025/26 to 2029/30
    - for secondary year groups up to year 11, for 7 academic years from 2025/26 to 2031/32.

b) These forecasts will need be broken down by the type of provision these pupils are expected to attend. These categories are:
    - SEN units & resourced provision in mainstream schools
    - State-funded special schools (LA-maintained schools, special academies, non-maintained special schools[1])
    - Independent schools (independent schools and independent special schools)
    - Alternative provision (PRUs, AP academies and any other AP)[2]

LAs do not need to produce forecasts for pupils with EHCPs attending mainstream provision (except those in a formal SEN unit or resourced provision) as these pupils should already be captured in LAs existing mainstream forecasts. For SCAP, **all forecasts of specialist demand will be collected at local authority level**.

Local authority forecasts should include all pupils with an EHCP (including those who may still be awaiting or undergoing an assessment for such but who are nonetheless occupying a specialist place) which the LA is responsible for maintaining and commissioning special educational provision for under the 2014 Children and Families Act[3].

[1] Whilst LA commissioning processes for NMSS may differ from other state-funded schools, NMSSs are state-funded as they are maintained by way of a funding agreement with the Secretary of State and receive capital funding directly from the DfE for the purposes of condition and general maintenance.
[2] Forecasts should just cover those pupils with EHCPs. We are not seeking to collect forecasts for all pupils requiring alternative provision, including pupils without an EHCP, at this time.
[3] The 2014 Children's and Families Act contains duties relating to pupils with special educational needs, including preparing and maintaining Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and securing the special educational provision named in in a young person's EHCP.

This will generally include all children with such needs that are resident in the local authority, or for whom the LA is otherwise responsible, regardless of where the provision they may attend is located. LAs should include in their forecasts any of their own pupils with an EHCP who attend specialist provision in a neighbouring authority. Similarly, an LA's forecasts do not need to include pupils who attend specialist provision of any description in their area but are resident in another local authority's area.

SCAP is only concerned with school-aged pupils with an EHCP (i.e. Reception up to Year 11). **LAs do not need to provide forecasts for people with EHCPs in any form of early years or post-16 provision** (including school based nurseries and school sixth forms). Similarly, at this time we are not seeking to collect forecasts of pupils attending AP settings who do not have an EHCP.

For further information on the definition of specialist provision, including the definition of a SEN unit and resourced provision, please see the main SCAP survey guide.

For pupils with EHCPs in alternative provision, where pupils do not spend the whole academic year in these settings, forecasts should represent the total number of pupils expected to need a place at any point within the academic year. There may be valid double counting between your alternative provision and mainstream forecasts, as these pupils will in practice need a place in both.

**Table 1: Example of what is being requested**

*The table below is an illustration of a completed forecast. The example below is an example of a 5-year primary forecast of an LA's pupils with EHCPs who the LA believes will require a place in a state-funded special school. Similar tables will be requested for secondary, and for each of the other categories of provision as described above. Data below is illustrative only.*

| Planning Area Code | 1100003 | Primary - Special schools (LA-maintained, special academies, non-maintained special schools) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Academic year** | **Primary** | | | | | | |
| **Forecasts** | **Reception** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** |
| 2025/26 | **44** | **62** | **60** | **76** | **75** | **84** | **100** |
| 2026/27 | **47** | **44** | **63** | **62** | **79** | **75** | **89** |
| 2027/28 | **39** | **47** | **45** | **64** | **63** | **82** | **79** |
| 2028/29 | **45** | **42** | **51** | **49** | **66** | **65** | **85** |
| 2029/30 | **43** | **46** | **44** | **53** | **50** | **68** | **68** |

# Forecast methodology

*Explains potential methods to establish a forecast methodology.*

This section outlines the factors that you should consider within your forecast methodology. This section also includes our recommended methodology, which can be broadly broken down into the following three main steps:

- Step 1 - Establish overall pupil population numbers.
    - Produce a forecast for the overall number of pupils who will be **resident** in your local authority, by age or year group. LAs may wish to use similar modelling approaches to those used for producing mainstream pupil forecasts, or you may already have this data.
- Step 2 - Establish the number of pupils with EHCPs.
    - Apply a prediction around future rates of EHCPs to produce a forecast of the number of pupils resident in your local authority expected to have an EHCP by age or year group.
- Step 3 – Forecast Pupil Placements.
    - Apply a prediction on where any pupils with EHCPs are likely to be educated e.g. in a special school, integrated into mainstream provision, placed into a dedicated SEN unit, etc.

The steps above, and elaborated on below, represent **just one possible approach**, and other forecasting approaches may be viable. See the 'Alternative Approaches' section below for further detail of other possible forecasting approaches you may wish to consider.

## Step 1 - Establish overall pupil numbers

**You may already have this data available as part of your mainstream pupil forecast methodology.**

LAs should initially establish a forecast of the total anticipated number of pupils in each year group (including pupils without EHCPs or any other form of SEND need) that will be resident in your local authority, and for which you are potentially responsible under Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014. This forecast can then act as a base from which to calculate the smaller subset of pupils resident in your LA that are likely to require some form of specialist provision. This also enables LAs to factor in the impacts of additional local factors such as migration or local housing development, in line with existing best practice for producing mainstream pupil forecasts.

We expect that for most LAs this step is likely to be similar to approaches used to calculate forecasts for mainstream pupil numbers (usually for intake years). You may wish to consider using similar (or the same) modelling or assumptions you have used to produce your mainstream forecasts, however LAs should consider other various considerations specific to SEND pupils mentioned below.

One **critical difference** to mainstream is that you should only establish the number of pupils for each year group who will be **resident** in your area, and who the local authority therefore has responsibility for commissioning special educational provision for under the 2014 Children and Families Act and making alternative provision for under the 1996 Education Act. LAs should ensure the forecast approach does not count pupils from other LAs.

### Step 1.1 - Current and historical resident pupil population

We suggest that LAs use relevant population-based data for estimating the number of pupils who **currently and historically** live in your local authority. Potential sources of population data include:

- Office for National Statistics – including Live Birth Data
- GP registration data
- Early Years census data

This step of the process is likely to be very similar to the recommended approach to forecasting mainstream pupil numbers for intake year R, so for a full example of how to calculate reception year groups numbers, please see the relevant mainstream forecasting guidance.

### Step 1.2 – Establishing future population forecasts

Having established current resident pupil numbers for each year group, LAs will need to establish a forecast for the relevant future years. Our recommended method for doing so is to use a population **cohort progression rate** which requires the use of data on the current and historical resident populations. This technique assumes there will be a consistent increase/decrease to the number of pupils who are resident in the local authority in the next academic year for each cohort.

Population numbers for year R can be forecast using population data described in step 1.1. Population data will not be available for the final year of reception forecasts required. As with mainstream, you will need to produce a population estimate or use an external source of population or birth forecasts.

For a worked example of how to establish a cohort progression rate for each year group, please see the guidance for producing mainstream pupil forecasts.

Whether using the cohort progression rate or not, you should consider the following factors when establishing future population forecasts:

Out of area pupil placements

Depending on local factors, any methodology used for producing mainstream forecasts may be affected by flows of pupils travelling from other local authorities to attend local schools. LAs will therefore need to ensure that any methodology it applies, only represent changes to their resident population, e.g. population cohort numbers created by the movement of children taking up residence in the local authority or moving out of area.

Migration

The impact of migration on the number of residents should generally be accounted for in line with the practice applied to mainstream forecasts. However, LAs should also consider whether some specific instances of migration (e.g. refugee resettlement) are likely to result in increased demand for specialist provision, for example due to additional health needs or a higher prevalence of Social, Emotional & Mental Health issues. If you anticipate specific migration factors having a disproportionate impact on specialist place demand, you should consider whether this may require making additional adjustments at an appropriate stage in your forecast methodology i.e. to anticipated EHCP rates etc.

Housing

Unlike mainstream forecasting, LAs should avoid accounting for potential pupil inflow from significant housing developments in neighbouring authorities. LAs should only include developments that are likely to increase the potential pool of pupils that they will themselves be responsible for commissioning additional specialist places for under the 2014 Children and Families Act.

Other factors

As when producing their mainstream forecasts, LAs may need to make further adjustments to account for specific local circumstances. Full details of relevant factors can be found in the associated guidance on producing mainstream forecasts, but some of the most common ‘other factors’ used in mainstream forecasting may have additional SEND specific considerations to be aware of.

This is not an exhaustive list of considerations. Where LAs are applying any form of adjustment for other factors, they should ensure they are considering whether said adjustment has any relevance and/or potential impact on the number of pupils requiring specialist provision the LA may be responsible for.

## Step 2 – Establishing the number of pupils with EHCPs

Having established the total number of pupils likely to be resident in your area (and for which you are likely to be responsible) you should now establish the number of pupils, by year group, that are likely to have an EHCP and require some form of special educational provision (including in mainstream).

### Step 2.1 – Current and historical number of pupils with EHCPs

We expect that most LAs should have access to their own historical data on resident EHCPs by year group. If this data is not available for any reason, LAs can use the DfE's published SEN2 data.

### Step 2.2 – Establishing forecasts of pupils with EHCPs

To establish the number of pupils with EHCPs in future years, LAs should calculate the EHCP rates. This is the proportion of the resident population calculated above that have an EHCP.

A very simple model could simply involve taking an LA's most recent available EHCP rates (e.g. for the 2024/25 academic year) and rolling this forward to all future years. This would represent a scenario where the LA assumes that no increase or decrease to EHCP rates is expected over forecast period (although the total numbers of pupils with EHCPs may still increase/decrease depending on underlying pupil numbers). However, for many LAs such an approach may not adequately capture recent trajectories of rising or falling demand for specialist provision or any actions that an LA may be taking to develop their local offer, such as an expanded mainstream offer.

An LA's EHCP rates are likely to change over time, in response to a range of factors. LAs will therefore need to consider how to appropriately model future EHCP rates in respect of the requested forecast years. Exactly how LAs forecast their future EHCP rates will be highly dependent on their local circumstances and should account for any local strategy LAs may have in place for managing overall demand for new EHCPs.

LAs may therefore prefer to estimate potential increases or decreases in their local EHCP rates by looking at recent trends of growth/decline in EHCP rates. For example, by using an average (or weighted average) of recent historical rises/fall in EHCP rates.

**It is critical that LAs also consider any national or local policies that may have an impact on the forecasts of pupils with EHCPs.** For example, a local authority may have experienced significant increases in their EHCP numbers in recent years and may therefore be actively pursuing local policies to ensure more pupils' special educational needs can be met without requiring an EHCP. This may be by investing

in early intervention and identification of appropriate SEND support measures which may reduce demand for EHCPs as the children age. Where such policies are planned or underway, LAs may need to make some assumptions about the efficacy and timeliness of the outcomes of any local reform agenda. It is therefore important that LAs prepare these forecasts with appropriate input from any relevant business areas (e.g. local SEND strategy teams).

Whatever methodology LAs may choose to use to establish their future trends in EHCPs, LAs should ensure they 'sense check' the resulting rates and forecasts of pupils of EHCPs to consider if they represent a scenario that could feasibly materialise in practice. In making this determination LAs should consider a range of local and national factors including:

- any perceived demographic ceilings on overall demand;
- any local strategy or reforms which may impact on the need for SEN to be met through new EHCPs;
- whether any calculated figures suggest significant falls in EHCPs from year to year (i.e. that would mean unrealistic numbers of EHCPs would have to cease to be maintained);
- your participation in one of the DfE SEND intervention programmes such as the Safety Valve Programme and 'Delivering Better Value', including any actions and agreed targets/trajectories relating to overall EHCP rates you may have agreed as part of these programmes;
- the potential impact of policy and legislative changes.

Example

In the following fictional example, 'Appleford Local Authority' has forecast the total number of pupils it expects to be responsible for under the 1996 Education Act and the 2014 Children and Families Act *(NB: only three years shown for illustration purposes. All data is fictional. LAs should use their own EHCP data).*

Year R forecasts have been generated using the historical trend in the resident pre-school population. Forecasts for year groups 1-11 have been generated using the actual resident pupil numbers in academic year 2024/25 and the expected cohort growth. The expected cohort growth is based on historical changes in resident pupil numbers as the cohorts move up through the year groups.  For more advice on this, please see the main SCAP guidance.

**Table 2: Resident pupil numbers, actual and forecast, for the primary phase**

| | Year R | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2024/25 actual resident pupil numbers | 4486 | 4491 | 4436 | 4539 | 4766 | 4824 | 4773 |
| 2025/26 forecast | 4,440 | 4,526 | 4,518 | 4,459 | 4,552 | 4,766 | 4,824 |
| 2026/27 forecast | 4,445 | 4,480 | 4,553 | 4,541 | 4,472 | 4,552 | 4,766 |
| 2027/28 forecast | 4,420 | 4,485 | 4,507 | 4,576 | 4,554 | 4,472 | 4,552 |
| 2028/29 forecast | 4,400 | 4,460 | 4,512 | 4,530 | 4,590 | 4,554 | 4,472 |
| 2029/30 forecast | 4,395 | 4,440 | 4,486 | 4,535 | 4,543 | 4,590 | 4,554 |

**Table 3: Current EHCP rates for the primary phase**

| | Year R | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2024/25 EHCP rate | 2.30% | 2.60% | 2.90% | 3.50% | 3.30% | 3.60% | 3.90% |

To forecast the potential number of pupils with EHCPs in future years, the LA has sought to establish a future EHCP rate for the relevant year groups. After considering its historical and current EHCP rates, and the potential impact of local reforms, the LA believes the EHCP rates will remain at current levels. The LA therefore chooses to roll forward its most recent EHCP rate as its forecast rate for all future years. It can then use this rate to calculate the number of EHCPs that might be expected in each year group over the forecast period.

**Table 4: Initial forecast EHCP numbers for the primary phase**

| | Year R | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2025/26 forecast | 102 | 118 | 131 | 156 | 150 | 172 | 188 |
| 2026/27 forecast | 102 | 116 | 132 | 159 | 148 | 164 | 186 |
| 2027/28 forecast | 102 | 117 | 131 | 160 | 150 | 161 | 178 |
| 2028/29 forecast | 101 | 116 | 131 | 159 | 151 | 164 | 174 |
| 2029/30 forecast | 101 | 115 | 130 | 159 | 150 | 165 | 178 |

In this fictional example, due to the variance in the current EHCP rates, the forecast number of pupils with an EHCP in year 4 for 2026/27 onwards suggests shrinkage of the year 3 cohort as it moves into year 4. However, as it is likely that those existing EHCPs would continue to be maintained, the LA has applied a protection so that the total EHCPs in any given cohorts will never reduce below the number it possessed in the previous academic year (marked in table 5 with a *).

**Table 5: Updated forecast EHCP numbers for the primary phase**

| | Year R | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2025/26 forecast | 102 | 118 | 131 | 156 | 150 | 172 | 188 |
| 2026/27 forecast | 102 | 116 | 132 | 159 | 156* | 164 | 186 |
| 2027/28 forecast | 102 | 117 | 131 | 160 | 159* | 161 | 178 |
| 2028/29 forecast | 101 | 116 | 131 | 159 | 160* | 164 | 174 |
| 2029/30 forecast | 101 | 115 | 130 | 159 | 159* | 165 | 178 |

In this example and so far within this recommended methodology, the forecast of pupils with EHCPs is the total number of pupils with EHCPs regardless of the provision type the pupil is placed in.

## Step 3 – Forecasting Pupil Placements

The final stage of forecasting demand for specialist provision is to establish the likely placement destination of the pupils with EHCPs identified above (i.e. what type of institution/type of provision each pupil will attend). Not every pupil with an EHCP will require access to a specialist place, and many will be educated entirely within mainstream provision with appropriate additional SEND support. Such pupils **should already be captured by LAs' existing SCAP reporting on mainstream forecasts** and do not need to be reported again separately.

For all other pupils with EHCPs, we are again asking LAs to provide separate forecasts for primary and secondary-age pupils with EHCPs that will require provision in:

- SEN units and resourced provision
- Special schools (including maintained special schools, special academies, and non-maintained special schools)
- Independent provision (both in mainstream independent schools and independent special schools)
- Alternative Provision

LAs will need to produce a separate forecast for each category of provision listed above. For the purposes of submission to the SCAP collection, each of these categories will have a special planning area code and name.

In some instances, forecasts for SEN units, resourced provision and alternative provision may include pupils that also access mainstream provision (at the same time or at certain points in the academic year). This may result in such pupils also being captured in an LA's mainstream forecasts (potentially 'double counting' such

pupils). This is expected as these pupils will in practice need a place in both mainstream and specialist provision.

For pupils with EHCPs in alternative provision, where pupils do not spend the whole academic year in these settings, forecasts should represent the total number of pupils expected to need a place within the academic year.

Pupils with EHCPs who are not expected to be placed in any of the categories above do not need to be included in the specialist provision forecasts.

**Step 3.1 – Current and historical EHCP placements**

To establish the likely destination for pupils with EHCPs, we recommend you initially assess current and historical patterns of pupil placements (SEN2 data is likely to be helpful).

**Step 3.2 – Establish placement rates**

You can establish historical rates of pupil placement in your area for each type of provision for any given academic year by using the formula: Number of pupils in relevant provision type divided by total number of pupils with EHCPs.

Having established your relevant historical placement rates, you will need to determine the likely rates of pupil placement in future. As with establishing future EHCP rates, you will need to decide whether to establish your future placement rates by using averages of recent data, a weighted average, or other trend-based approaches.

In doing so, LAs will also need to consider whether there are any local factors that are likely to affect pupil placements in future, and whether their historical placement rates best reflect future placement practices in your LA, especially for major intake years (e.g. year 7). For example, if a new special secondary school is opening in an LA, it may significantly affect placement patterns for future Year 7s compared to previous cohorts. Additional examples of factors to consider might include:

- Opening new local specialist provision may result in a lower proportion of children being placed in independent provision.
- Local intervention measures focussed on earlier intervention, inclusivity and better support in mainstream provision might result in fewer pupils requiring formal SEN units or resourced provision, freeing up capacity for pupils who might have otherwise required a special school place.
- Local capital programmes delivering more SEN units/resourced provision may result in a rise of future pupils being accommodated in those settings.
- Any local SEND strategy or plan that may affect how pupils are placed in specific types of provision in future.
- Capacity constraints in existing provision (see below)

As the numbers of pupils with EHCPs in a given year group may be relatively small, LAs will also need to consider inherent volatility in your data set, as small changes in the number of placements from year to year may result in large percentage shifts. Depending on cohort size, LAs will therefore need to determine whether it is better to calculate future placement rates at individual year group level, or to do so first by some more stable grouping such as education phase or across another combination of year groups (e.g. Key Stage, Infants/Junior, etc).

Placement rates should also take account of how pupils are likely to move between provision types in practice. For example, pupils tend not to move between provision types once placed, so local reforms affecting pupil destinations are likely to have the largest impact of key transition or intake years (i.e. Year 7). In such instances there may be significant differences between the placement rates for existing pupils against the likely placement rates for particular future cohorts. LAs should ensure their assumptions about future rates consider this dynamic where this might have a meaningful impact on their forecasts.

For alternative provision, we are only seeking to collect forecasts of alternative provision pupils with an EHCP. Pupils attending alternative provision without an EHCP should not be included when determining the EHCP placement rates.

Once you have established appropriate placement rates for each requested forecast year, LAs can multiply the calculated rate for each provision type by the total number of pupils in each year group with EHCPs they established in Step 2 above. This will provide a forecast number of pupils in each year group that you expect to be placed in each type of provision for any given forecast year.

‘Reasonable Demand’ vs ‘Actual Placements’

LA forecasts of specialist place demand should as far as possible reflect demand for specialist places as is likely to be achievable within each LAs’ specific local context. For example, forecasts of demand should not generally indicate significant shifts in the balance of provision that **existing** pupils are attending, unless the LA can provide an explanation of some corresponding local change that might realistically result in such an outcome.

For some LAs we recognise that available and planned capacity in existing specialist provision may be a factor when they are considering how their future placement behaviour may evolve over the forecast period. For the purposes of the SCAP collection, LAs should present their forecasts **assuming that capacity will not be a barrier to making future placements,** just as an LA’s existing mainstream pupil forecasts assume the future availability of all necessary mainstream places.

We have chosen to take this approach to forecasting so we can better understand the true demand for specific forms of provision, and therefore the scale of any

possible shortfalls between said demand and existing capacity, without this being disguised by other assumptions. For example, should a shortfall of special school places materialise in future, an LA might assume it would result in pupils remaining in unsuitable mainstream settings for longer than would be desirable. However, reflecting increased demand for mainstream places in their mainstream forecasts would disguise the underlying demand for places in special schools. We therefore do not wish for LAs to artificially distort their forecasts in this way by attempting to forecast sub-optimal pupil placements based on their predictions about the future availability of the necessary places, or their access to additional capital funding in the intervening period.

### Example

Based on the example in step 2, Appleford LA forecasts in AY 2026/27 it will have 1062 secondary pupils with an EHCP. It also estimates that based on historical trends, the impact of new free school opening, and LA efforts to boost inclusivity in mainstream, that in AY 2026/27 approximately 32% of those pupils will require a placement in a specialist school.

Applying the 32% placement rate to the 1062 secondary pupils suggests a need for c.340 secondary special school places in AY 2026/27. However, even with the new free school opening, and other LA expansion projects in train, Appleford believes that by AY26/27 it is only like to have available capacity for around 330 special school placements.

For the purposes of SCAP, the LA should still therefore report a forecast of 340 special school places even though it may in practice need to find alternative accommodation for the 10 remaining children (for example via making additional independent placements or having them remain in less suitable mainstream provision whilst awaiting a place etc.).

However, this does not mean LAs should report forecasts based on entirely unmitigated demand for certain types of provision. Rather, LAs should be attempting to reflect demand from **the perspective of the LA acting as the commissioning body operating a financially sustainable local offer**; i.e. the demand a reasonable and effective LA will experience after taking account of existing placement policies, their local SEND strategy, likely pupil and parent preferences and any local reform measures as set out above.

This approach may, in some instances, require LAs to make adjustments to their estimated future placement rates if their approach to calculating these already reflects assumptions about how existing capacity constraints may affect future placement decisions. For example, an LA might be forecasting continued future rises in independent usage due to concerns that a lack of capacity in their state special schools has recently increased their reliance on such places.

In such instances, our recommendation is that whilst **existing pupils** may be unlikely to switch providers/schools once placed and should generally therefore continue to be forecast as occupying said places, **for any future pupil cohorts** LAs should instead attempt to reflect the principles outline above (i.e. that capacity is not a barrier, and LAs should report their first choice of placement in line with their local placement policies), even if this might seem to suggest an otherwise unrealistic shift away from prior patterns of placement.

### Example

Based on existing trends Appleford LA calculates that in AY 2026/27 approximately 7.2% of secondary EHCP pupils would require a placement in an independent school. However, it knows that this figure reflects the fact that shortages of local special places have already led to the LA commissioning increasing number of places in independent special schools. Based on the principles above, we are asking LAs to forecast demand for places they will face as a responsible commissioning body, rather than where said pupils may ultimately be placed. The LA determines that of 7.2%, approximately half might be happily accommodated in a local state funded special school if local capacity was available, as opposed to instances where that particular provision genuinely represents the best option for that pupil.

Therefore, Appleford LA continues to use its existing placement rates for any pupil cohorts already in the system (as they are now unlikely to move provision). However, for new pupils entering the system it reflects the true reasonable demand as outlined above. It therefore produces a forecast assuming only 3.6% of future pupils might require an independent place, whilst the remaining 3.6% are added to the existing state-funded special school place forecast.

This approach may result in LAs submitting forecasts of placements that will not ultimately reflect the reality of where their placements may be made. This is acceptable and **we will not be holding LAs to account for achieving or delivering their reported placement patterns**. Again, at this time we believe that this approach is a necessary compromise to help reveal demand for certain types of provision, which might have been otherwise have been disguised or hidden had we requested LAs provide more realistic, but ultimately less optimal, placement forecasts.

<u>Example</u>

The table below continues the fictional example of ‘Appleford Local Authority’ set out in step 2 above. The LA in this example has produced a table of anticipated placement rates for various types of provision for primary pupils based on a trend analysis of their historic data and consideration of their ongoing reforms. For the sake of this example the LA has chosen to consider the placement rate for the

primary phase as whole. In practice, LAs may prefer to establish individual placement rates for a range of different pupil age ranges (e.g., by year group or by key stage etc.)

**Table 6: EHCP pupil placement rates by provision type for primary phase[4]**

| Estimated Placement Rates | Mainstream | SEN Unit & Resourced Provision | Special Schools | Independent | Alternative Provision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2025/25 | 49.2% | 13.0% | 31.2% | 5.7% | 0.9% |
| 2026/27 | 48.3% | 13.3% | 32.0% | 5.5% | 0.9% |
| 2027/28 | 47.0% | 13.6% | 33.5% | 5.0% | 0.9% |
| 2028/29 | 47.3% | 14.0% | 33.0% | 4.5% | 1.2% |
| 2029/30 | 47.2% | 13.8% | 33.5% | 4.5% | 1.0% |

Pupils in mainstream are already counted in the mainstream forecasts and do not require a place in specialist provision. They do not need to be included. For the remaining types of provision, the LA can apply the rates set out above to the forecasts of pupils with EHCPs it produced in step 2, to produce an estimate for the number of pupils who will require specialist provision of that type for each relevant academic year.

Applying the special school rate to total EHCPs by year, provides a forecast for primary pupils in each year group who will need a place at state special schools as required by the SCAP return.

**Table 7: EHCP forecasts for primary phase**

| | Year R | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2025/26 forecast | 102 | 118 | 131 | 156 | 150 | 172 | 188 |
| 2026/27 forecast | 102 | 116 | 132 | 159 | 156 | 164 | 186 |
| 2027/28 forecast | 102 | 117 | 131 | 160 | 159 | 161 | 178 |
| 2028/29 forecast | 101 | 116 | 131 | 159 | 160 | 164 | 174 |
| 2029/30 forecast | 101 | 115 | 130 | 159 | 159 | 165 | 178 |

**Table 8: Special school pupil placement rates for primary phase**

| Estimated Placement Rates | Special Schools |
|---|---|
| 2025/25 | 31.2% |
| 2026/27 | 32.0% |
| 2027/28 | 33.5% |
| 2028/29 | 33.0% |
| 2029/30 | 33.5% |

[4] Figures are illustrative only, these figures do not represent what may be appropriate for any given LA.

**Table 9: Special school forecasts for primary phase**

| | Year R | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2025/26 forecast | 32 | 37 | 41 | 49 | 47 | 54 | 59 |
| 2026/27 forecast | 33 | 37 | 42 | 51 | 50 | 52 | 60 |
| 2027/28 forecast | 34 | 39 | 44 | 54 | 53 | 54 | 60 |
| 2028/29 forecast | 33 | 38 | 43 | 52 | 53 | 54 | 57 |
| 2029/30 forecast | 34 | 39 | 44 | 53 | 53 | 55 | 60 |

# Alternative Approaches

The methodology set out above represents just one possible approach for producing forecasts of demand for specialist provision. LAs are free to apply other approaches if they feel this is appropriate for their area. All LAs should ensure they are detailing the approach they have taken in their special forecast commentary.

For example, some LAs may prefer to pursue a 'bottom up' forecasting approach, based on aggregating forecasts for individual institutions. Most pupils will remain in the school named in their EHCP for the duration of an educational phase. LAs may therefore be able to produce reasonable future forecasts by **identifying the number of pupils resident in the LA currently in each institution or type of institution, by age group, and progressing this cohort through the school.** Based on the LA's overall plan for managing high needs, it may be possible to make some assumptions about whether and for how long pupils currently placed in specialist provision will remain there, as well to anticipate numbers of additional pupils that may join in future years. This will provide a baseline number onto which LAs can model any future anticipated placement, changes to placement approaches, or other local factors such as changes in overall pupil numbers, for example due to migration or demographic growth. These institution level forecasts then can be aggregated up to produce an overall local authority level forecast.

Whatever approach is chosen, as this guidance sets out, planning and forecasting of high needs provision should involve any relevant teams across a local authority – including education service delivery and revenue and capital funding teams – and be overseen by senior leaders appraised of the need for a strategic approach and of the risks and issues involved.

Effective strategic planning is reliant upon a thorough knowledge of local needs and a clear vision for the support required to effectively meet existing and emerging needs. This should be underpinned by robust and timely data regarding existing placements, local demographics, trends over time of different types of need and age groups, and data on the capacity and performance of existing provision. Early identification of potential need in Early Years can also help LAs identify potential demand in advance of formal requests for support. This data can be used to identify the gaps in LAs' local provision offer. This information should be maintained as robustly and as often as possible, to ensure an LA's ability to plan and respond.

**Forecasts by year group vs phase**

To complete the SCAP template LAs will need to provide forecast pupils by year group. If following the approach outlined above this should be produced naturally as part of the recommended calculations. Where LAs may be choosing to calculate their forecasts through a different method, or have consistently relied on phase level information, it may be necessary to break down a phase-level forecast into year

group level figures. A number of methods may be appropriate for doing so, for example using existing or forecast numbers on roll as a guide for apportioning forecasts between year groups.

We recognise that for some pupils in special provision, year groups can be less meaningful than they are mainstream, and that special schools may primarily be organised internally according to ability or type of need, rather than age. However, producing year group level pupil forecasts still provides valuable contextual information. e.g. when particular cohorts may be aging into different forms or stages of provision. Accordingly, LAs should still attempt to provide forecasts that accurately reflect numbers in particular year groups, although we recognise that such figures may necessarily be less robust in comparison to mainstream pupils.

**Changes to your forecasting methodology from the previous SCAP collection**

SCAP 2023 was the first time many LAs will have been asked to produce detailed forecasts of future demand for specialist places**. As such, we are aware that the methodology used to produce these forecasts may develop and change over time. We encourage LAs to assess their methodologies and make changes where possible to improve the accuracy of the forecasts.**

## Validating your forecasts

Whatever forecasting method a local authority chooses to employ, the process of producing your forecast should be robust and analytically sound. Local authorities should ensure any relevant modelling or input data is fit for purpose and has been subject to appropriate quality assurance checks, including final sign-off by a suitable senior official(s) with relevant responsibilities for this area.

Final forecasts should be sense checked at a detailed and aggregate level. Checks should include comparisons to historical data and assessments of the accuracy of previous forecasts, which may indicate where inaccuracies exist. LAs should be aware that when checking provision type forecasts, previous forecasts accuracy may appear low if the provision type has a particularly small number of pupils forecast. However, assessing forecast accuracy at an aggregate level may provide more insights into any inaccuracies.

## Further Guidance

Additional guidance and support on completing SCAP, including the required fields in COLLECT, can be found in our school capacity survey guide. Should local authorities have any additional questions or queries about the content of this forecasting guidance please contact us at SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk.

Department for Education



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