

19th November 2024

SEND Developments including Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Education and Skills - Councillor Kaur

1. Aim

This report will provide an overview of the developments and achievements by the SEND Service (Special Educational Needs) during the 2023/24 academic year.

2. Recommendations

For the committee to note the progress made and the impact of the work carried out by the SEND Service.

For the committee to recognise the growing demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) which subsequently increases the pressure on the costs and capacity.

3. Report detail

3.1 What do we know?

Walsall Council's SEND Services have been on a significant journey of improvement in recent years. Following Ofsted and CQC's Local area SEND inspections in June 2019 and June 2022, an Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) was agreed by the Council, NHS England and the Department for Education in October 2022. The APP set out key areas where the Council needed to make progress, and identified actions on how the plan would be achieved. The APP focused on the outstanding key areas for improvement from the 2022 Inspection:

- The poor-quality EHC plans, which do not accurately reflect children's and young people's special educational needs, and do not adhere to the statutory timescales for completion.
- The poor quality of the local offer, which does not meet the requirements of the code of practice.

In November 2023, a review of these outstanding areas for improvement took place which concluded that formal monitoring was no longer required, due to the positive progress that had been made.

The inspectors stated we had made clear and sustained progress against the activity in our APP and that there was evidence that our work is having a positive impact. The evidence provided, alongside the feedback from partners, demonstrated the range of actions in place to continue and accelerate improvement. These included:

- The local area redesigned processes which has resulted in improved EHCP timeliness.
- Development of a new Quality Assurance (QA) framework
- A plan in place to monitor and improve the quality of annual reviews. Parent representatives told them that the quality of annual reviews has improved since the SEND revisit in June 2022 and have felt heard and valued throughout the process although this was still an area for further improvement.
- A Walsall-focused Local Offer which has been co-produced with children, young people and their families. FACE representatives reported that parents and carers find the Local Offer accessible, easy to navigate and appreciate the use of jargon free language.

The APP review also highlighted the strong relationship between the Council and our Parent/Carer Forum, the relationships being built with our SENCOs and Inclusion Leads and the close collaboration with our health partners.

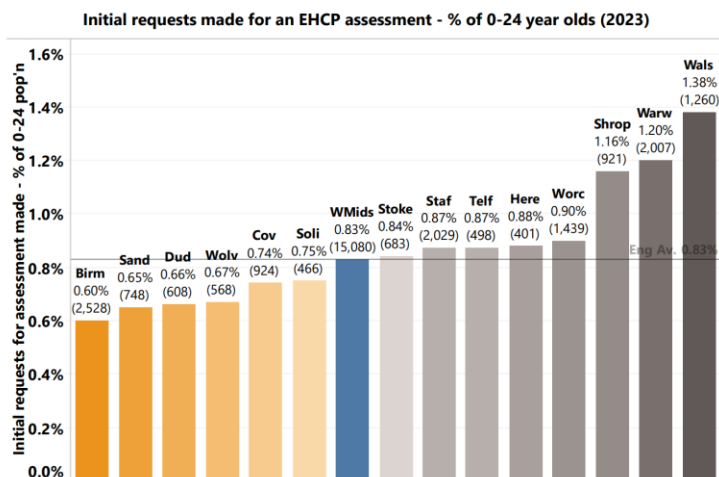
As stated, we have made significant strides in ensuring that the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are identified and assessed in a timely and effective manner. For example, the average number of weeks to complete the full EHCP assessment and issue process is 20 weeks currently and has consistently been within statutory timeframes for 80% of applications on a month-on-month basis. Although it is recognised, we have further work to do, including improvements within the annual review process.

3.2 EHCP demand and growth

We continue to receive high numbers of requests for assessment. In 2023 Walsall received significantly more requests for assessment than other Local Authorities in the West Midlands and Nationally. The peak of growth for EHCP's was at the latter end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 due to the large backlog of requests that had not been processed prior to this time. 300 of the EHCP's agreed in 2023 were due to the backlog. This means that out of the 1260 total plans, 960 were not due to the backlog. This was still significantly higher than the West Midlands in general and the England average.

This is partly due to significant improvements in identifying and assessing the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in Walsall. However, a large proportion of requests are from parents suggesting that there is further work to do with schools and ensuring they are following the graduated approach prior to application and working with families to understand and meet the needs of their child through Ordinarily Available Provision.

The request rate for an EHCP across the West Midlands is in line with the England average. However, there is marked variation across the region, with the request rate in Walsall over double that of Birmingham.



Source: Education, health and care plans: England 2024.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-special-educational-needs-sen>

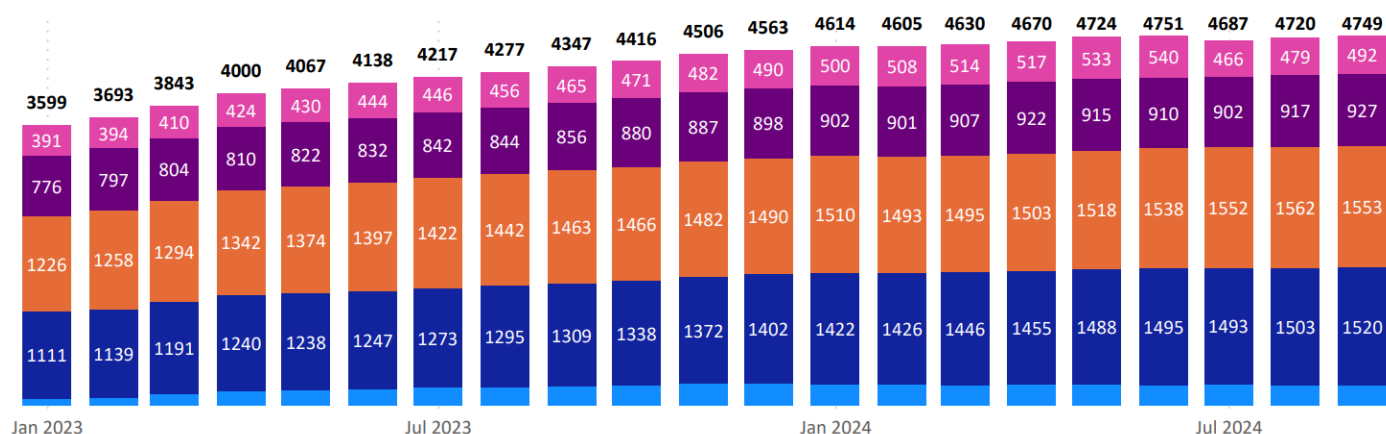
Key Findings

- **Walsall's** request rate **continues to increase** and remains the highest across the region
- The request rate in **Shropshire** has almost doubled from 2022 to 2023
- **Dudley** was the only local authority that saw a **fall** in their request rate

We are now maintaining 4745 Education Health and Care Plans (October 2024), the growth of plans has now plateaued, primarily due to the activities associated with the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan. This includes more robust decision making processes, having a multi-disciplinary approach to decision making, including SENCO's, health partners, social care partners, Virtual School and Educational Psychologists. The funding for Walsall EHCP's comes from the High Needs Funding Block of the DSG. This is used to provide additional funding for mainstream schools to ensure the provision in the EHCP can be met and it is also used to fund school places in specialist settings. Obviously, as the number of EHCP's has increased the financial pressure has increased on the DSG. This is monitored regularly at the DSG Board meetings.

Number of CYP for whom the local authority maintains an EHC Plan by Month & Age Group

● (Blank) ● Under 5 ● Age 5 to 10 ● Age 11 to 15 ● Age 16 to 19 ● Age 20 to 25 — Total

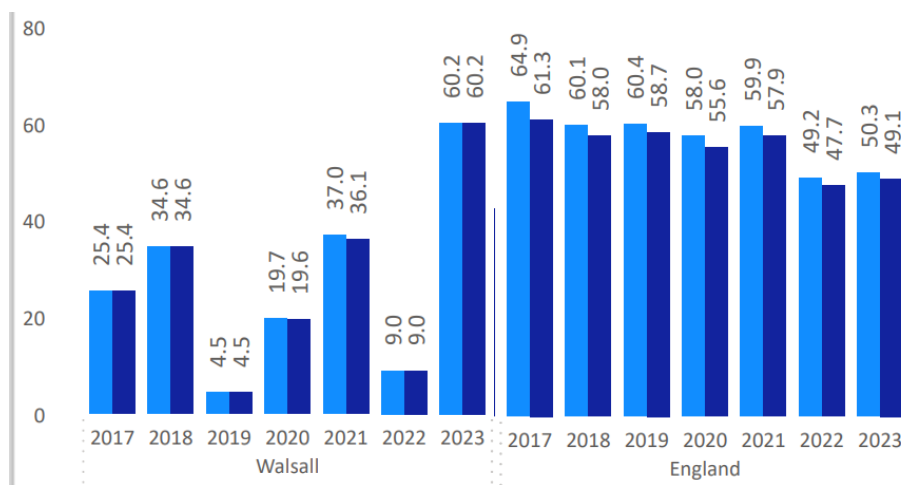


Although our requests for assessment are high, we are still able to adhere to statutory time scales for assessing and issuing plans. The significant progress that has been made is being sustained, the timeliness (new EHCP's assessed and issued within the statutory timescale of 20 weeks) has improved from 9% at the end of 2022, to 50% at the end of

2023, to a rolling 12 month average today of 78%, with a consistent monthly attainment of circa 80%. This is well above the national average of 50%.

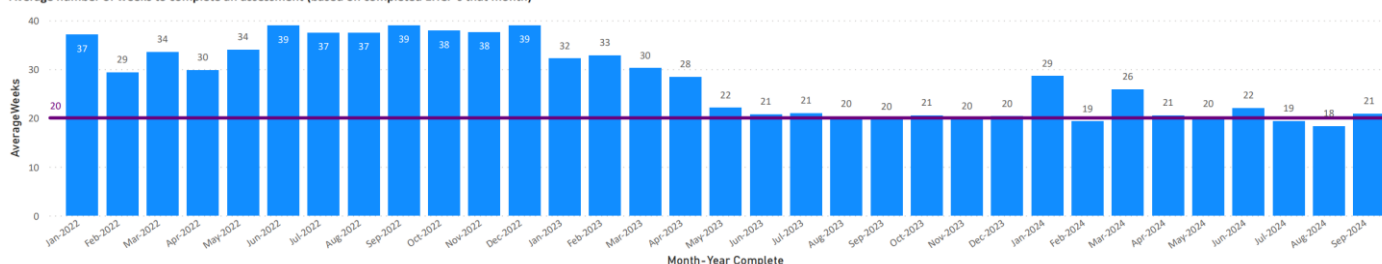
% of new EHCP's issued within 20 weeks (SEN2 published data)

● Percentage of new EHCPs issued within 20 weeks (excluding exception cases) ● Percentage of new EHCPs issued within 20 weeks (including exception cases)



Average number of weeks to complete an assessment (based on completed EHCP's that month)

Average number of weeks to complete an assessment (based on completed EHCP's that month)



3.3 What have we done?

The following report will now demonstrate some of the improvements that have been made, how they have been sustained over the past 12 months, followed by the further areas for improvement identified for 2024/5 and onwards.

Statutory Timescales for EHC Needs Assessments

- In the calendar year 2024, 78% of new EHCPs have been issued within 20 weeks. The average number of weeks to complete an assessment continues to improve, with assessments taking on average 20 weeks.
- We have identified the timeliness of annual reviews is still an area for improvement and the 'The Annual Review' project started in September 2023. This includes a weekly meeting to identify individual children who require actions and tasks called the 'Weekly Orders'. EHC officer training has taken place focusing on annual reviews. This includes clarity about timelines, the legislation, what their role and what decisions can be made. Schools are being alerted to which annual reviews are due and when they will be required to submit their paperwork. The EHC team have completed online learning modules on Annual Reviews.

Recruitment and retention of staff

- We have a valued permanent EHC team. 80% of colleagues have now been with us for over a year.
- We have successfully restructured the EHC team to enhance our service delivery. We now have three annual review teams assigned to specific wards in Walsall, each consisting of three casework officers and a senior casework officer. In addition, we have established a new assessment team comprising four casework officers and a senior casework officer.
- To further strengthen our support, we have appointed a senior complaints and compliance officer, (IPSEA Law Level 3 qualified) supported by a casework officer (IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) Law level 1 qualified) and administrative staff, who focus on managing our tribunals and complaints.

Induction and training programme

- All recently recruited staff have participated in a comprehensive 12-week induction and training programme.
- This programme included engaging guest speakers, featuring internal colleagues from SEN Finance and SEN Transport, as well as external partners such as the Designated Clinical Officer, who emphasize the vital connections within our work.
- All staff have received IPSEA training in basic SEND law.

Additionally Vulnerable Learners

- We have a dedicated Additionally Vulnerable Senior Casework Officer who oversees all children and young people within this category, ensuring that their unique needs are addressed effectively. He works closely with our Inclusion Hub, Youth Justice Teams and our Designate Social Care Officer to support the most vulnerable children and young people in Walsall.
- Within the additionally vulnerable team we also have a dedicated caseworker that works within the virtual school and a caseworker that works solely with young people that are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or training) with a plan.

Walsall's Local Offer

- We have recently appointed a Local Offer and Engagement Lead to further strengthen our outreach efforts and enhance the support services we provide to the community and to continue to develop our Local Offer

SENCO Engagement and Inclusion resource development

- In January 2023, we established the Inclusion Steering Group, comprising 18 Special Educational Needs Coordinators from various educational settings across the borough.
- In April 2023 we appointed an Inclusion Development Lead, a key role dedicated to the development, co-production, and implementation of Walsall's New Graduated Approach and Early Inclusion Framework.
- Walsall's Early Inclusion Framework offers a range of resources, tools, and training to all settings to ensure the effective and consistent implementation of the New Graduated Approach.
- The Inclusion Development Lead has ensured that settings and schools across the borough have access to the tools, resources, advice, and guidance needed to create more inclusive and supportive learning environments and pathways for all children and young people.
- The Walsall SENCO Forum is now an established and integral part of our approach to strengthening inclusive practices across the borough. At our most recent forum, over 100

SENCOs, Inclusion Leads, and setting-based SEN Support Staff attended, demonstrating a high level of engagement and commitment to professional development.

- The forum has become a vital platform for collaboration, where staff can share best practices, address emerging challenges, and work together to improve the quality and consistency of SEND provision. Feedback from attendees has consistently highlighted the positive impact of these sessions in supporting inclusive education across schools and settings.

Educational Psychology Service (EPS) development

- EPS recruitment continues to improve. The EPS team has grown from a workforce of 2.8 FTEs in Sept 2022 to 9.8 FTE in Nov 2024.
- The EPS continue to develop our traded relationships with schools. We currently trade with 52% of state funded settings with Walsall. The demand for our service remains high with settings increasing the number of sessions they wish to purchase.
- Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme, Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support (SCERTS) and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) training delivered by the EPS to support schools meet the needs of their students as part of their graduated response is highly rated.
- 81% of Education Psychology reports are submitted within 6 weeks of allocation and 93% within 7 weeks (this financial year to date).
- A high level of parental satisfaction with EP statutory work. 93% of responses indicated high levels (strongly agree or agree) of overall parental confidence and satisfaction in EP practice, assessment and reports.
- Specialist Educational Psychologists recruited to support Children in Care through the Virtual School and young people involved with the Youth Justice Service.

Co-production with all partners

- Our Self Evaluation Framework (SEF), SEND & AP Strategy and SEND & AP 12 Month Plan has been co-produced with parents, carers and families (including FACE, Walsall's Parent Carer Forum); children and young people who have lived experience; early years settings; schools; colleges; frontline practitioners; the voluntary and community sector; our Local Area Inclusion Board (LAIB) and the NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board.
- Our Working together for better SEND and Alternative Provision strategy, Appendix A, sets out our ambitions over the next five years. Our aims are centered on providing effective, high-quality learning provisions and fostering strong joined-up partnerships to improve outcomes.



Working together for better SEND and Alternative Provision (AP)

Special Educational Needs, Disability and Alternative Provision Strategy 2023-2028



Health and Social Care SEND Developments

- Children and Young People's (CYP) voice is heard and captured within EHCP health advice and within community and acute projects such as our award winning 'Little Voices' project.
- Co-production of resources and strategic plans with both the parent carer forum (FACE) and with wider parent participation.
- Multidisciplinary Autism Strategic group was set up to shape the diagnostic pathway and pre and post diagnostic support off to our CYP and their families in Walsall.
- Support programme in place for our educational colleagues to support CYP and their families by attending and offering bitesize health training via the SENCO forum.
- All health advice quality assured by the Designated Clinical Officer.
- Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) in post from July '24 this has significantly benefitted children and young people up to the age of 25. Commissioned by Children's Services, the DSCO is effectively collaborating across Children and Adult Services to establish a robust Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) pathway, ensuring comprehensive contributions to statutory assessments.
- A new generic social care form has been designed, developed, and implemented across the workforce. This initiative ensures a consistent and clear approach to providing high-quality advice focusing on EHCP Sections D, H1, and H2. All submissions are now returned within the statutory six-week timeframe, enhancing compliance and service quality.
- Weekly SEND surgeries are now offered across all social care services. The DSCO provides practitioners with up-to-date information on legislation and guidance, enhancing their knowledge and skills around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This initiative leads to better support and outcomes for children and young people.
- An essential training programme titled "How to Write Good Social Care Advice" has been produced and delivered by the DSCO across services. This guidance is designed to improve the quality of advice and outcomes for children and young people, ensuring practitioners are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge.

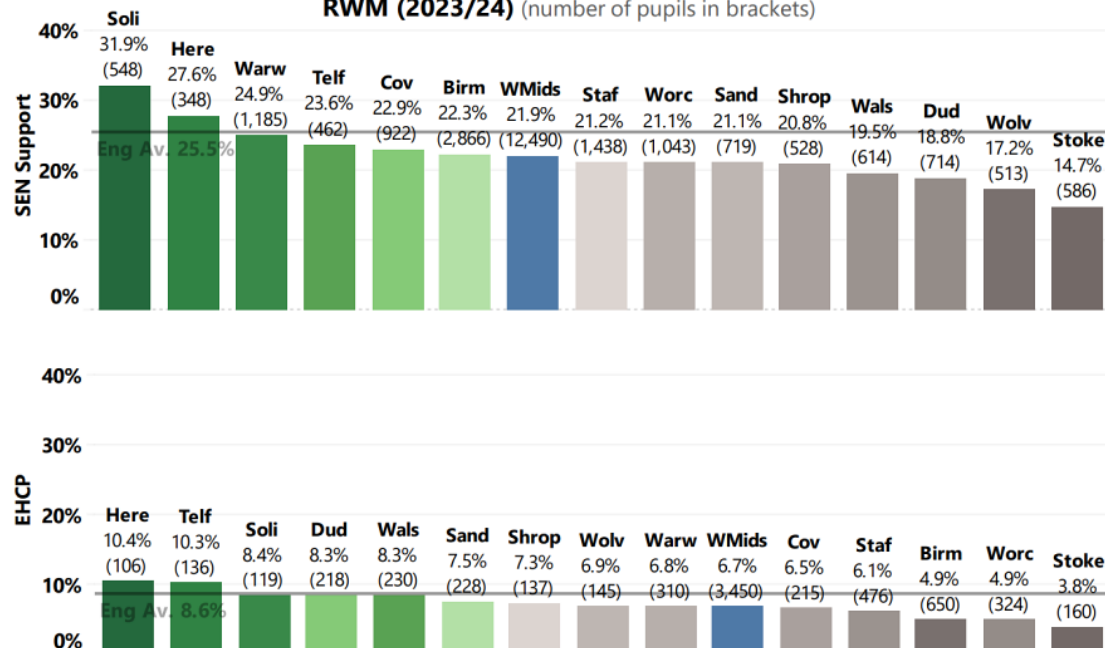
3.4 What difference have we made?

Through our Early Inclusion Framework, collaborative multi-agency approach and innovative service delivery models, we have successfully enhanced outcomes. Our

commitment to continuous improvement and responsiveness to the needs of our community ensures that we continue in our fast-paced improvement journey in supporting children and young people with SEND.

3.4.1 Key Stage 2 outcomes for children with an EHCP are in line with the England average and are higher than the majority of other Local Authorities in the West Midlands. The outcomes for children that are SEN support are below that of the majority of our West Midlands counterparts. and below the England average. This is an ongoing area for development with our schools and settings.

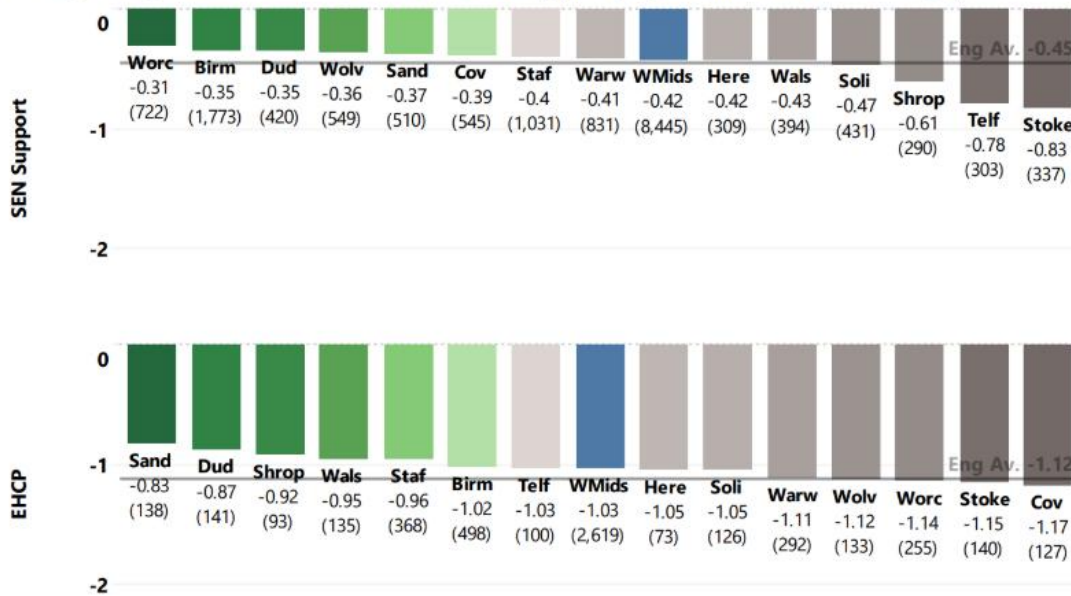
Percentages of EHCP and SEN Support pupils achieving the expected or higher standard at KS2 RWM (2023/24) (number of pupils in brackets)



Key stage 2 attainment (provisional), including pupil characteristics:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-key-stage-2>

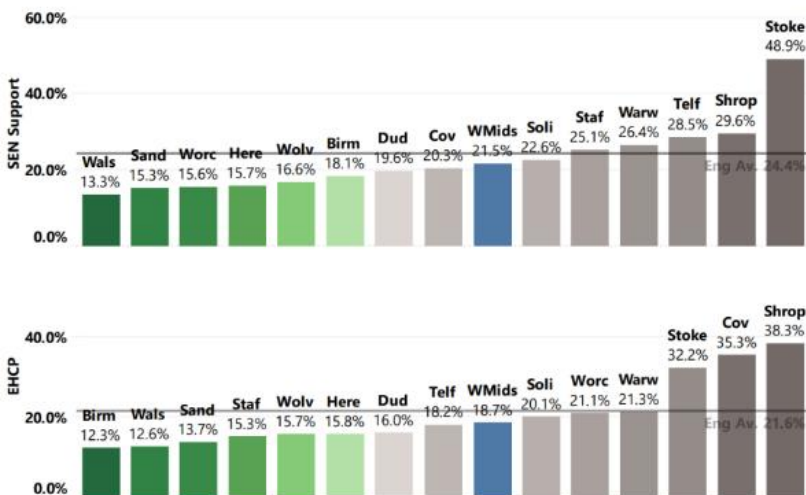
3.4.2 At Key Stage 4 it is a similar picture, the progress made by Walsall children with an EHCP is better than the England average. Children with SEN support although in line with the England average, are generally achieving less progress than our West Midlands counterparts.

Average Progress 8 scores of EHCP and SEN Support pupils (2022/23) (number of pupils in brackets)



3.4.3 Our Additionally Vulnerable Senior Casework Officer due to the work he does alongside the inclusion hub has had a significant impact on the number of exclusions and suspensions of children with an EHCP in Walsall.

Suspension rate of EHCP and SEN Support pupils (2022/23)

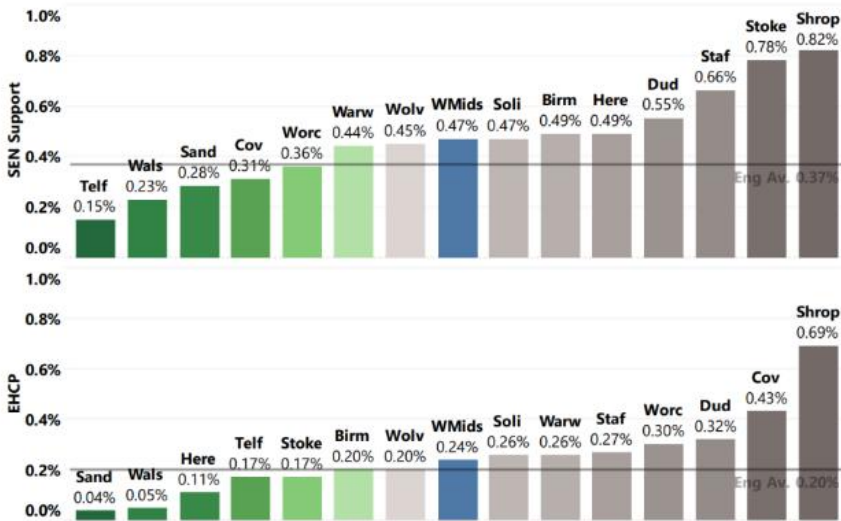


Key Findings

- **Walsall** had the lowest suspension rate for SEN Support pupils, and the second lowest rate for EHCP pupils in the region, with both rates well below the England averages.
- **Stoke** had a particularly high suspension rate for SEN Support pupils, at more than double the England average.

Permanent and fixed period exclusions in England 2022 to 2023: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-exclusions>

Permanent exclusion rate of EHCP and SEN Support pupils (2022/23)



Key Findings

- As with suspensions, **Walsall** had a relatively low rate of permanent exclusions, with the second lowest exclusion rates for both EHCP and SEN Support pupils in the region.
- For both EHCP and SEN Support pupils, **Shropshire** had the highest exclusion rate in the region across all phases in 2022/23, at more than double the England average in both cases.

Permanent and fixed period exclusions in England 2022 to 2023: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-exclusions>

3.4.4 Walsall’s Local Offer has been extensively re-developed since the 2019 inspection and work continues, in partnership with parents and carers to ensure that it is accessible, is in line with the Code of Practice and meets the needs of our families and professionals in providing key information about services and support for children and young people with SEND.

Local Offer for Special Educational Needs and Disability

Discover all you need to know about education, health and care services in Walsall.

On the Local Offer website you can find information and advice about services, support and activities for children and young people aged 0-25 with special educational needs and disabilities all in one place.



www.send.walsall.gov.uk



3.4.5 The lived experience of children, young people and their families with SEND is central to our developments and co- production is fundamental within our continuing work. We value and will continue to listen to our SEND community. We will continue to learn from what they tell us and ensure their voices influence our work and developments. By working together in partnership, we will provide the right support at the right time, for all children and young people with SEND across our community and ensure we deliver the very best outcomes based on their needs. Our Parent Carer Forum produced the Working Together Charter which is at the heart of everything that we do in Walsall.

Walsall SEND – Working Together Charter

Actively listen at the first opportunity to ensure families receive the correct support.

Use Language that cares!

FEEDBACK...

Invest TIME for working together

YOU SAID... ...WE DID!

OPEN Communication

Be Transparent and CLEAR

Be OPEN HONEST and RESPECTFUL in ALL communications

ALL partners are involved and ACCOUNTABLE

Feel welcomed and cared for

"ENSURE everyone's VOICE IS HEARD"

Prepare children and young people for adulthood

Prioritise children and young people's aspirations!

Celebrate children and young people as they are

CARE for and about families lived experiences

Feel Valued and Included

Early intervention and support

A shared understanding

Working in partnership

Involve Include AGREE outcomes TOGETHER

COLLABORATION

COOPERATION

COOPERATION

COOPERATION

COOPERATION

Walsall SEND, Working Together Our Promise To You!

Make you feel important

AND are a part of your own journey

Listen to you with kindness and care right away!

HEAR what YOU have to say

Decide what will happen TOGETHER

Focus on what you want to do AND what makes you HAPPY

Tell the truth, be clear and share everything you need to know

Prepare you for for the future

Make you feel welcomed and cared for

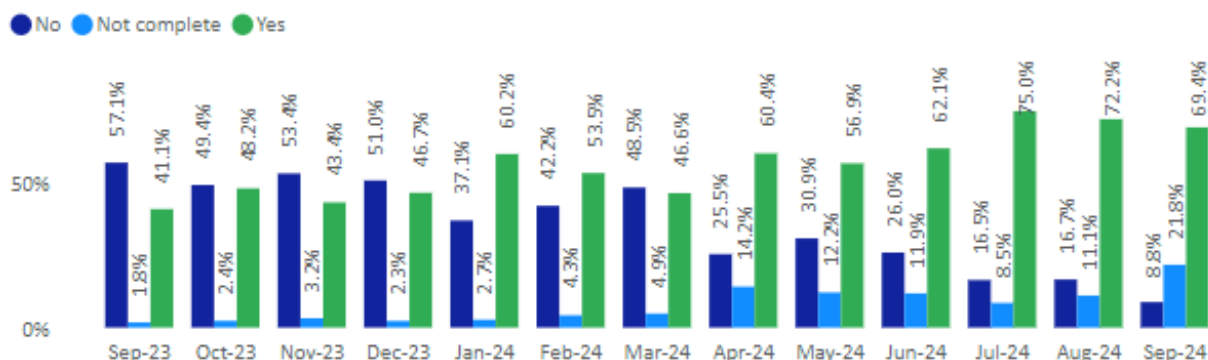
Spend TIME working together as a team

Make sure EVERYONE'S VOICE IS HEARD

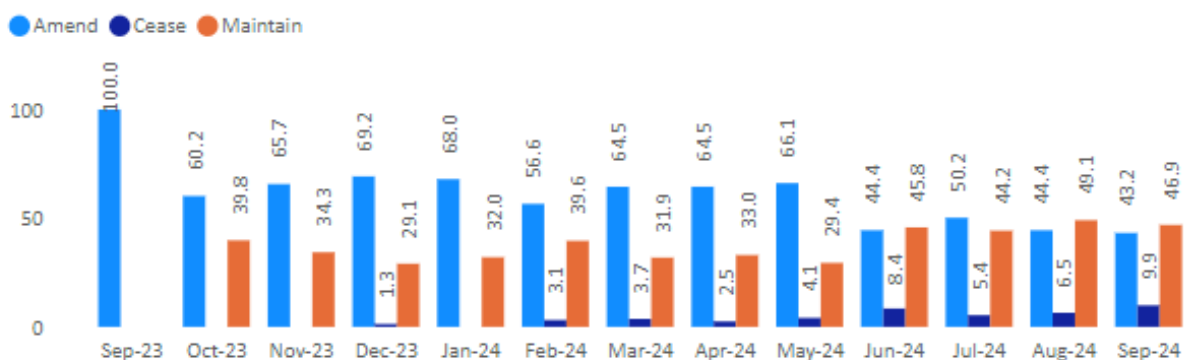
Celebrate BEING YOU! YOU ARE AMAZING!

3.4.6 The improvement journey that we are on with regards to our annual reviews mean that EHCP reviews the timeliness of decisions has improved from an average of 45% to an average of 70% in the last 12 months. Unfortunately, prior to September 2023 data was not accurately recorded and monitored and therefore we are unable to make a comparison before this point. Please note that statutory decisions that are being made are robust and appropriate, this means that the EHCP's are current and the right provision will be in place according to the EHCP.

Percentage of Annual Review Confirmed Meeting Dates that Met the 4 week deadline - Monthly



Percentage of Annual Review Responses by LA Outcome - Monthly



3.5 What are we going to do?

Our vision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is based on high expectations, inclusivity, and personalised support. Our aims are centred on providing effective, high-quality learning provisions and fostering strong joined-up partnerships to improve outcomes for all children and young people with SEND. Currently our children with SEN support are not achieving where they should be and this continue to be a focus moving forward.

We have co-produced priorities that shape and develop the progress of the service over the coming years. The issues highlighted within the report above will be addressed through the strategy and the 12 month plan that sits alongside it. The strategy has been formed around these priorities, highlights from the strategy follow, the full document provided as Appendix A.

3.5.1 Priority 1: Localised high-quality provision

- Continue to support schools and settings with following the graduated approach through training and support with a robust professional development program that

includes meeting all needs. This will impact on the progress and outcomes of children with SEN support.

- Develop the decision making processes to ensure that the correct support is going to the right child at the appropriate time.
- Develop additional high quality specialist places in line with the capital plan to meet growing need.

3.5.2 Priority 2: Early identification and help

- Ensure all plans are reviewed annually and that decisions are made in a timely fashion to maintain, amend or cease the plan.
- Ensure that our Local Offer website continues to help children and young people and their families find the local information and support from across Walsall.
- Implement a consistent Graduated Approach that will 'assess, plan, do and review' the support that has been put in place to meet the needs of each child and young person with SEND focussing on early intervention and recognition to get the provision right for children with SEN support.. Continue to manage requests for Education Health and Care plans, keeping within the statutory timescales.

3.5.3 Priority 3: Participate in decisions

Facilitate regular workshops with parents and carers and our children and young people, seeking their views to help us shape services.

- Continue to develop and improve the Local Offer website, to make it more accessible for children, young people and their families.
- Seek to use evidence of lessons learned from compliments and complaints to make continuous improvements to our services.

3.5.4 Priority 4: Supportive alternative provision offer

- Expand the range of alternative provision options available, including in-house provision, external providers, and specialist interventions, to ensure that every child and young person has access to appropriate placement.
- Implement rigorous quality assurance mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of alternative provision and drive continuous improvement.
- Support smooth transitions into and out of alternative provision, providing comprehensive support to facilitate successful reintegration into mainstream education or other pathways.

3.5.5 Priority 5: Children and young people feel valued and visible in their community

- Work with all our schools, early years settings, post 16 providers, social care providers, health providers and partners to be welcoming and ensure that children and young people have a sense of belonging regardless of their gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background or educational need.
- Further enhance our offer and support for children and young people to prepare for adulthood.

4. Financial information

4.1 The Dedicated Schools Grant is paid to Local Authorities to support the school's budget. The funding for resources for children and young people with EHCP's is through the High Needs Block of the DSG. The grant is split out into 4 funding blocks as detailed below.

The 2023/24 budget and forecast spend and the 2024/25 budget for each funding block is included within the table below.

Funding Block	2023/24 Budget £m	2023/24 Forecast £m	2023/24 Variance £m	2024/25 Budget £m
Schools Block*	109.032	108.101	(0.931)	114.224
CSSB	1.768	1.768	0.000	1.891
Early Years Block**	22.804	22.804	0.000	33.869
High Needs Block	54.518	60.977	6.459	58.059
Total	188.122	193.650	5.528	208.043

*This is shown after the academy recoupment as the DfE recoups this at source and pays to academies directly.

** The increase in the Early Years Funding in 2024/25 is due to the additional free childcare to be provided from April and September 2024.

4.2 High Needs Block - This block is to fund provision for pupils assessed as having high needs generally accessing provision through special schools, specialist resource provision (SRP) and additionally resourced provision (ARP) based within a mainstream school, pupil referral unit or independent and private residential settings. Funding is allocated to the LA based on a National Funding Formula and is then passed onto providers using a local funding formula.

4.3 Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn position

The table below details the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget and spend as at the end of the 2023/24 financial year.

Funding Block	2023/24 Budget £m	2023/24 Outturn £m	2023/24 Variance £m
Schools Block*	109.032	108.058	-0.974
CSSB	1.768	1.763	-0.005
Early Years Block**	22.814	22.271	-0.543
High Needs Block	54.518	62.915	8.397
Total	188.132	195.007	6.875

As at the end of 2022/23 there was a deficit balance on the DSG of £0.525m. Therefore, the cumulative deficit at the end of 2023/24 was £7.400m.

The underspend on the schools block funding was linked to growth funding to be allocated in 2024/25 in line with the agreed growth policy.

The underspend on the Early Years Block is due to changes in actual pupil numbers paid for compared to the numbers of pupils when the funding was allocated.

The overspend on the High Needs block is linked to a number of pressures including increase demand on the service in line with increased EHCP numbers and increased costs of provision. The table below breaks the budget and spend for High Needs down further.

High Needs 2023/24 Outturn			
High Needs Expenditure 2023/24	Budget	Outturn	Variance over/ (underspend)
	(£m)	(£m)	(£m)
Place funding - Specialist Provision	9.284	9.584	0.300
Top-up funding - Mainstream Provision plus Specialist Units in Mainstream	11.629	14.202	2.573
Top-up funding - Out of Borough Schools	1.550	2.240	0.690
Top-up funding – Specialist Provision	15.442	14.729	(0.713)
Placements fees – Independent Special Schools/Colleges & Top-up funding Post 16 Provision	9.900	16.302	6.402
SEN Support Services	3.104	2.596	(0.508)
Alternative Provision incl. home & hospital tuition & outreach	1.800	2.108	0.308
Other provision	1.147	0.00	(1.147)
Tuition Costs	0.500	0.784	0.284
Personal Budgets	0.150	0.176	0.026
Therapies & other health related services	0.012	0.194	0.182
Total Budget / Expenditure	54.518	62.915	8.397

4.4 The High Needs Block outturn for 2023/24 set out in the table above, provides a breakdown of the £8.397m overspend by expenditure type. Additional information regarding the main reasons for the variances are set out below:

- Place Funding – increase in commissioned specialist places from September 2023 across various schools £0.300m.
- Top-up funding (mainstream) – EHCP growth and higher band rates in mainstream provision £2.573m.
- Top-up funding (out of borough schools) – combination of commissioned specialist places to meet need and demand and an increase in parents choosing out of borough mainstream schools £0.690m.
- Top-up funding (specialist) – budget set based on the total number of commissioned places in special schools, but a proportion of places are taken by out of borough pupils who are responsible for paying the top-up funding **(£0.713m)**.
- Independent Schools / Post 16 – combination of commissioned specialist places in the independent sector to meet need due to a lack of available places in and out of borough and an increase in the number of post 16 places in colleges £6.402m.
- SEN Support Services – realignment of the cost of central support services provided by the local authority **(£0.508m)**.

- Alternative Provision / Home & Hospital Tuition / Outreach – increase in the number of permanently excluded pupils requiring alternative provision in KS4 £0.308m.
- Other Provision – nil cost, this budget was initially unallocated and then used to support other pressures across the high needs funding block (£1.147m).
- Tuition costs – increased use of private tuition to support pupils not in provision full-time £0.284m.
- Personal Budgets – increased number of personal budget requests to fund agreed costs to support pupil needs £0.026m.
- Therapies & other health related services – increased provision of other types of support for pupils with additional needs, for example, behaviour, motivational therapy, etc. £0.182m.

4.5 As the High Needs block continues to forecast an increasing deficit position, the LA have developed a DSG Management Plan to outline the current trajectory of EHCP growth and expenditure as well as mitigating actions to reduce the deficit position in future years. This is a requirement of the DSG grant conditions. Schools Forum agreed an initial plan which was presented to Schools Forum in March 2023.

4.6 Following this, it has become apparent that the increase in EHCP numbers seen in recent years and increased costs have meant that the DSG position has significantly changed. The LA are working together alongside the Schools Forum High Needs working group to implement a reviewed DSG management plan to manage future costs and demands. The LA are also working with the ESFA to gain advice on best practice and gain reassurance that the actions put in place are appropriate and maximised. Work continues on an updated DSG Management Plan which will be presented to Schools Forum in 2025

4.7 The high needs working group has been established to support a full review of high needs funding and processes in Walsall and to support the implementation of the DSG management plan. Updates on the progress of the group are provided to Schools Forum on a regular basis.

4.8 Currently, DSG deficit balances are not included within the local authorities final accounts. Instead, they are held on a balance sheet and carried forward each year in line with current legislation. However, the DfE have confirmed that the statutory override will be removed at the end of the 2026/27 financial year. This means that any deficits at this point will then be included in the local authorities accounts and would need to be offset against other internal resources.

5. Reducing Inequalities

5.1 We are Walsall 2040

We want to create a Walsall where all children, irrespective of background or ability, have access to good education and can lead fun, safe and healthy lives. We want to ensure services are there now and, in the future, to support children and families and that they can access a range of activities to have fun, grow, learn, and thrive locally. Resilient children and thriving families are key to ensure Walsall's children can achieve their potential become successful adults from 2040 and beyond. As partners, we will focus on supporting the first one thousand days in a child's life to give them the best start. We will work together to close

the gap in child poverty and educational inequalities and create a borough of opportunity for children and young people.

6. Decide

6.1 The committee may decide to request further information on the work the EHC team is doing with our vulnerable groups.

The committee may decide to request further information on the progress made after 12 months of the strategy being in place.

The committee may require further updates if the National picture of SEND changes over the coming months.

7. Respond

7.1 Any recommendations made by the committee will be responded to by the appropriate service area.

8. Review

8.1 The actions and outcomes within this report are monitored by Access & Inclusion SMT and Children's Services DMT and through a monthly performance board. Highlight reports are also provided to the Transformation project board.

Background papers

Appendix A Walsall SEND and AP strategy 2023-26

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