

Special Educational Needs Provision in Altrincham and Sale West

January 2026



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Member of Parliament for
Altrincham and Sale West

Foreword

Not a week has gone by since I became an MP when someone hasn't contacted me about Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Whether its a parent in need of help for their child, a teacher sharing their concerns about the system, or someone sharing their story in the hope that others don't have to go through the same. I speak to parents at my weekly surgeries who are exhausted from having to fight for their child. Their stories are heart breaking. I am so grateful to everyone who takes the time to share their story with me, including at the local roundtable events I have organised on this issue. But at the same time, I worry deeply about the ones we never hear from - the parents who can't or don't know how to advocate for their child's needs.

After over a decade of austerity and the lasting impacts of the pandemic, it is clear to everyone that we need urgent and systemic reform. It will not be possible to achieve long-lasting change whilst the system is in constant crisis, so I am pleased with the immediate increase in funding for SEND the Government has provided. I look forward to the release of the reforms in the Schools White Paper, which will be published soon. I promise you that as your MP I will always fight for all children and young people to have their needs met so that they can thrive.

It is these stories that have made me write this report. I want to set out the background to the challenges we face in SEND locally, what the Government has done to start to address these challenges, and what more is needed from future reform. Each page is shaped by the conversations I have had with those impacted by the crisis in SEND.

I hope you find that your voice is reflected in this report and that the information within it is helpful.



SEND: A System in Crisis

As of January 2025, there are over 1.7 million school pupils in England with identified SEN (19.6% of all pupils). Of these pupils, around 1.3 million receive SEN Support and around 0.5 million have Education, Health, and Care Plans. In Trafford, the most common needs for pupils with SEND are Speech, Language and Communication, autism and Social and Emotional Mental Health. In Altrincham and Sale West, 10.8% of mainstream pupils have SEN support and 2.8% have an Education and Healthcare Plan (EHCP).

Timeline of reforms

- 2001: Special Educational Needs and Disability Act
Extended disability discrimination legislation to schools, colleges and universities, making it law for them to not discriminate against disabled pupils and make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils.
- 2014 reforms: Children and Families Act 2014 introduced EHCPs but have led to poor implementation and accountability, severe funding shortages, difficulties in accessing support and increased adversarial legal battles.
- 2016: Basic SEND training compulsory for trainee teachers, meaning SEND training is part of all trainee teacher's training. However, this still leaves a big gap among those who completed their training before this time.
- 2023: New SENCo qualification introduced
- October 2024: £1 billion in emergency SEND funding
- March 2025: £740 million allocated for 10,000 new places for pupils with SEND
- December 2025: Government launches national conversation on SEND seeking parents, teachers, and other stakeholders input; £3billion investment to create 50,000 specialist places in mainstream schools.
- January 2026: £200 million funding for SEND training for teachers in every school, college, and nursery

New SEND Places

Councils have a statutory duty to provide school places that meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.

As well as specialist schools, Trafford Council have developed specialist provision within mainstream schools through the establishment of Small Specialist Classes in the primary sector and Resourced Provisions in the secondary sector.

Small specialist classes (SSC) enable pupils with complex special educational needs to have their needs met within a mainstream school. Each class is made up of around 10 pupils with an EHCP who are supported by experienced and well trained staff. Where possible, pupils spend time in the main classes in the school when they are able to cope with the social and educational demands of the classroom.

In March 2025, the Government announced £740 million additional funding to create 10,000 new places for pupils with SEND. This is being invested to deliver adaptations, expand specialist units in mainstream and create new places in special schools.

Several schools in Trafford have benefitted from this funding:

- Brentwood School – further funding to support the expansion of 80 places (increased from the original 45 places proposed) and inclusion of individualised learning spaces
- Broadoak School - creation of a 25 place Resourced Provision for September 2026
- Broomwood Primary School, Oldfield Brow Primary School, Kingsway Primary and Templemoor Infants - creation of new 10-place small specialist classes, bringing the number of places at primary SSCs to 158
- Delamere Special School - funding to create break-out spaces to support the needs of the children
- Wellington High School and Lostock High operate a resourced provision which is providing 55 secondary places
- Small grants scheme – to support primary or secondary mainstream schools to develop in-house inclusion/ nurture group provision

Education, Health and Care Plans

638,745

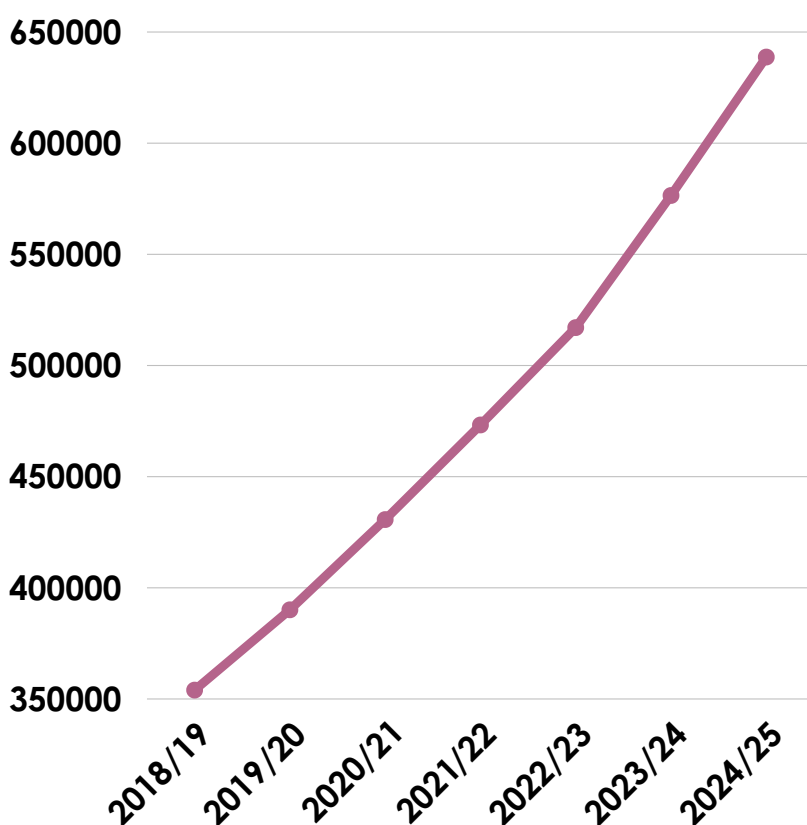
Number of EHCPs across England as of January 2025

3283

EHCPs in Trafford as of June 2025

Many parents have told me of how the process of obtaining an EHCP for their child is “exhausting” and “frustrating”. All too often, parents tell me that the EHCP process feels like a fight. One parent described it as a “long and arduous journey” to get the right support in place for their child, another said they had to “fight tooth and nail” to get their child’s plan in place. Too often, parents feel that the process relies on their ability to advocate for their child, resulting in a challenging and lengthy process. Despite the difficult process of obtaining an EHCP, and the lack of support available without one, some parents told me that they’re “not worth the paper they’re written on”. For others, an EHCP has been the only way their child has been able to access support, whether in a mainstream school with adaptations or specialist provision.

Total Number of EHCPs in England



Specialist Provision

I believe that making mainstream schools more inclusive is essential, particularly since most children with SEND attend these schools. However, at the moment fewer than one in ten mainstream schools have the facilities to provide specialist support for students with SEND. We must also ensure that mainstream schools can fulfil the needs of pupils with SEND and where this is not possible, there is specialist and alternative provision available.

It is important that we recognise that every child has different needs - some benefit from being based in a mainstream school with extra support or alternative provision one day a week, whereas others require dedicated one-to-one support. Often, one family will tell me that the provision at a specific school was wonderful for their child, and another family will tell me that the exact same provision did not work for their child. We cannot have a one size fits all approach as there is such a wide variety in children's needs.

I was thrilled to recently attend the opening of the new wing at Brentwood School in October (pictured right). Brentwood do fantastic work in supporting and educating children and young people with SEND. Every time I visit I'm struck by the dedication and passion of all the staff and the happiness of the pupils. The new wing will be a fantastic asset for the school. We need more facilities, space and places to support children with special educational needs locally and this is an important contribution to that mission.



The recent announcement of £3 billion in funding to create 50,000 specialist places in mainstream schools will reduce the demand for places at specialist schools, as mainstream schools will be able to better accommodate pupils. It will mean young people can have their needs met at a school closer to home with the right facilities, while also mixing with other classes for subjects or parts of the day. It will also create calming spaces, supporting neurodivergent children who may feel overstimulated by busy school environments, as well as breakout spaces - giving children the support they need to access mainstream education.

Advocating for Families



In October 2024 I held my first SEND roundtable event for local parents (pictured left). We were joined by Tom Ross, the leader of Trafford

Council and Councillor Karina Carter, Executive Member for Babies, Children & Young People at Trafford Council. Following this meeting, it was important to me to share parents' experiences of the system with the Minister for School Standards and push for improvements on their behalf (pictured top right).

I recently held my second roundtable with stakeholders (pictured below right) to discuss the issues with SEND services. I am very grateful to all the parents and carers who came and shared their stories of the SEND system. We were also joined by representatives from Trafford Council - Councillor Karina Carter and Karen Samples, Director of Education, Standards, Quality and Performance at Trafford Council. It was clear from that event, and from each time I talk to parents, how exhausting and emotionally draining navigating the system is for them. When discussing the lack of support after their child's diagnosis, one parent told me they "have to find a network of broken parents" to find the necessary support for themselves and their child.

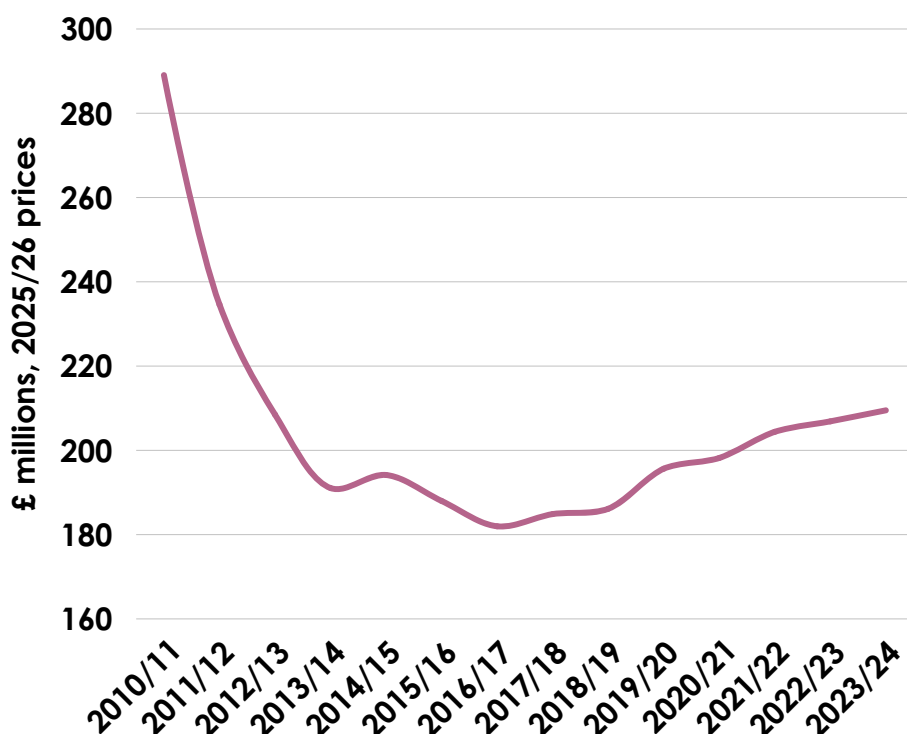
After the roundtable, I had the opportunity to speak to the Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, when she visited Broadheath Primary School (pictured right). I was pleased to be able to relay parents' views ahead of the SEND White Paper.



“You have to find a network of broken parents” to find the necessary support
- local parent

Funding

Trafford Council Funding



Schools receive funding per pupil each year. Local authorities currently cover the costs of the SEND system. For pupils with an EHCP and a high level of needs, schools fund their support up to a set amount, and anything above that comes from the Dedicated Schools Grant statutory override rather than the Local Authority.

From 2028 onwards, future costs will be managed, in full, within the overall government budget. Local authorities will not need to cover SEND costs from their general funds after the end of 2027-28. Since central government has more levers to reform the system as a whole, this means they will have more flexibility to affect change.

Trafford Council has been particularly disadvantaged by funding formulas for council budgets, meaning Trafford has the lowest level of funding for SEND out of all the Local Authorities across the North West.

At my most recent SEND roundtable, when I asked what would be the single most effective way for the Government to spend money on SEND, one parent immediately said that we should fully ringfence funding. Like with the pupil premium, this would increase accountability as schools would have to publish exactly how they are spending the money.

Another issue raised was the academy transition of schools. A SEND Co-ordinator at a local school present at the roundtable noted that since this change, the resources for SEND support had dramatically decreased and it became less streamlined to access support.

Waiting Lists

At the end of 2024,

52%

of EHCPs were issued
within 20 weeks in
Trafford

Trafford Council issued 393 Education and Healthcare Plans in 2024. Of these, 52% were issued within the 20 week deadline. This is compared to 45.9% of all plans issued across England in 2024. In 2023, Trafford Council issued 511 EHCPs and in 2022 they issued 436.

There are vast discrepancies across the country in how long the EHCP process takes. For example, in Windsor and Maidenhead, 95.3% of EHCPs were issued within the 20-week limit in 2024, whilst for Surrey it was only 16.2%.

Private Assessments - Autism and ADHD

Nationally, waiting lists for autism and ADHD assessments continue to be incredibly high. As a result of the lengthy waiting lists for assessments, many families feel their only option is to pay privately, which can cost thousands of pounds. If medication is recommended following an ADHD diagnosis, this can incur further costs. Additionally, not all private providers are recognised by the NHS, meaning parents can pay significant sums for an assessment that doesn't then allow them to obtain support or medication for their child.

For anyone seeking an assessment through the NHS, the Right to Choose system means patients can choose to have their care carried out by any provider within NHS England. This means that if someone's local waiting lists are particularly long, they have the right to ask their GP to be referred to a provider of their choice. I want everyone to be able to access an assessment on the NHS through their local provider as a service standard.

“My daughter was failed by a system that is broken, her needs were ignored, her education was disrupted and she was looked at in a monetary value.”

- a local parent who had to pay for their child's assessment

An area of particular concern in terms of accessing support is the overlap between SEND and looked after or care experienced children. Care experienced children are much more likely to have adverse life experiences, trauma, exposure to substances in womb – all of which increase the likelihood of neurodivergent conditions.

Child Poverty & SEND

Free School Meals Eligibility

Eligible for FSM

Not eligible for FSM

As of 2024/25 2,174,743, or 22.7% of all pupils are eligible for free school meals (FSM). 6,277,466, or 74.3% of pupils are not eligible for FSM.

Eligible for FSM

Not eligible for FSM

Of pupils with an EHCP:

- 43.8%, or 194,569, **are** eligible for FSM
- 56.2%, or 249,850 are **not** eligible

Eligible for FSM

Not eligible for FSM

Of pupils with no identified SEN:

- 22.2%, or 1,513,362, **are** eligible for FSM
- 77.8%, or 5,309,763, are **not** eligible

Children from families with the lowest incomes receive free school meals (FSM). I am pleased that from September 2026 more children will be eligible for free school meals. This is expected to lift 100,000 children out of poverty by the end of the Parliament.

Data consistently shows that SEND is more prevalent among children who are eligible for free school meals and as such, are more likely to be living in poverty.

We know that low income and poverty are causally related to children's experiences, life chances, and outcomes.

Research from the Sutton Trust shows that children from poorer homes are less likely to secure an EHCP, less likely to get a special

school place, and their families are less likely to be happy with the support their children are receiving. Children with SEND who are eligible for free school meals therefore suffer a double disadvantage, with lower outcomes at age 16.

A report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that poverty is both a cause and an effect of SEND, as children with SEND are more likely to become poor, while children living in poverty are more likely to develop SEND. They face greater barriers than their peers in experiencing a happy and fulfilling education and greater barriers in achieving the qualifications that might create opportunities later in life.

Child Poverty & SEND

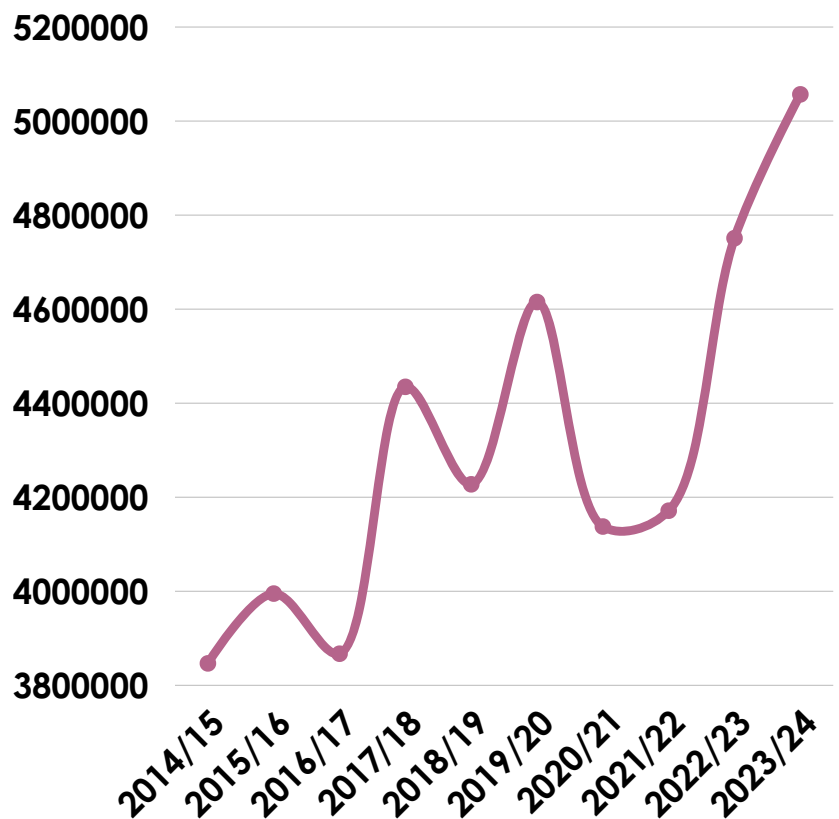
3243

children in Altrincham
and Sale West live in
poverty

In Altrincham and Sale West, of the total number of children in relative poverty, 71% come from working households.

Please note data for 2020/21 and 2021/22 was collected during coronavirus lockdowns so is less reliable - use caution when comparing data from these years to other years.

Number of Children in the UK in Poverty



It is incredibly worrying to me that there are children in Altrincham and Sale West growing up in poverty. The removal of the two-child benefit cap is expected to benefit an estimated 960 children in the constituency living in households affected by poverty. Combined with other measures 550,000 children will be lifted out of poverty by the end of this Parliament, a record achievement for any single Parliament.

With waiting lists for diagnosis of SEN conditions at record highs, many parents feel the only option is to pay for a private diagnosis. However, this can often cause a significant financial burden for families and is not an option available for everyone. When I speak to parents for whom a private assessment has meant their child has been able to access support, they often share their worries with me for the families who are not in a position to afford this. It is a concern I share and is something I often think about. The current system regularly requires parents to be advocates for their child, and that requires significant knowledge of legal guidelines, what support is available, and what their child is entitled to.

***“They tell me that
[my child] is lucky.
He shouldn't have to
be lucky to get the
education he needs.
No child should.”***

- local parent

Common Issues

Communication

One of the frequent frustrations parents share with me, and one of the reasons they often reach out to me for help, is the lack of adequate communication both with the parents themselves and across the various bodies responsible for their child's education and healthcare. One parent told me that after obtaining an EHCP for their child they received "no further communication from the SEN team despite numerous chaser emails and phone calls"

Early Years Intervention

Without early intervention, problems escalate and become significantly more complex. Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies is clear that when early help is missing, more children go on to need higher-level SEND support later in childhood. It is unacceptable that in the time between seeking support and accessing it, a child or young person's problems often significantly escalate and require more intervention compared with if they had been addressed when first identified.

The Government have said that by 2028, Best Start Family Hubs will act as a one stop shop for the whole community – offering parents a range of support, including a range of proven interventions, from child-focused speech and language sessions for toddlers to specialist parent and baby groups. They will be in every local area and build on the legacy of Sure Start in its ambition to give every child gets the best possible start in life. I have been pushing to ensure that these services are suited to the needs of and benefit residents of Altrincham and Sale West.

Tribunals

The number of families having to go to tribunal to access support has drastically increased in recent years, with cases overwhelmingly being found in favour of the applicant. Parents and carers often tell me how difficult and draining this process is. I do not think that a complex legal process should be a requirement for children and young people to access good, early support. It is important to reform the system, addressing the systemic issues and making support easier to access.

The Impact of the Right Support

Most of the time, when parents contact me about issues related to SEND, it's because they are really struggling and their child is not receiving the right support. When children are in the right setting they can flourish, and where this has happened parents tell me that it has changed their and their child's lives.

Being in the right environment shouldn't come down to luck. Every child deserves to have the appropriate support.

Pictured right: Connor talking to students from Stamford Park Primary
Pictured below: Connor addressing an assembly



Many of the individuals working in our education and healthcare system are doing an amazing job in incredibly difficult circumstances. However, we should not be relying on burnt out teachers and healthcare professionals to prop up a broken system.

“I regularly come home feeling stressed and saddened by the fact that I can’t do everything and therefore enough to support each child who needs help.”

- teacher of over 30 years

“Too often, schools are left to bridge the gap with limited input from external support services, despite not having the resources to do so effectively.”

- local headteacher

Future Reforms

The Government have laid out the principles guiding reforms to the SEND system. Reforms have been designed with parents, teachers, health teams, and experts. I was pleased to be able to feed back from my roundtable events and conversations with local parents to represent the people of Altrincham and Sale West in these discussions. The Government is currently engaging in a consultation process with local stakeholders to get the input of those most affected by the issues. It is the Government's mission to transform outcomes for all children, including those with SEND.

The five principles guiding the reforms are:

- Early – Children should receive the support they need as early as possible.
- Local - Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at a school close to their home, alongside their peers.
- Fair – Every school should be resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs.
- Effective – Reforms should be grounded in evidence and best-practice.
- Shared – Education, health and care services should work in partnership with one another, local government, families, teachers, experts and representative bodies to deliver better outcomes for all children.

There has been some progress addressing the immediate issues facing the SEND system. This includes creating 10,000 more specialist places in mainstream schools, providing more training for teachers, and introducing earlier intervention for speech and language needs. The Best Start Family Hubs will allow early access to intervention from SEND professionals where necessary and provide advice to parents.

I believe it will take time to fix the SEND system given the deep rooted issues facing it and I believe it is essential that we get it right - otherwise we risk letting down our children and young people.

I know how many people these reforms will affect, and the importance of getting them right. I am always available to support families struggling to navigate the system, whether by making enquiries on their behalf or representing their views in Parliament. Constituents should always get in touch if there is any way I can help.

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