

Education Places Sufficiency Strategy 2027 - 2032

The right place at the right time



Buckinghamshire
Council

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Foreword

Buckinghamshire is proud of its strong and diverse education offer, including primary, secondary, grammar, specialist, early years and post-16 provision. Together, our schools, providers, parents, carers and partners play a vital role in helping children and young people succeed, supporting thriving communities and making Buckinghamshire an attractive place for families to live and work.

Ensuring that every child and young person has access to a high-quality education is one of the most important responsibilities of any local authority. In Buckinghamshire, this responsibility is becoming increasingly complex as we respond to changes in population, meeting need for specialist support, and wider pressures across the education system.

This Education Places Sufficiency Strategy sets out a clear and balanced approach to meeting these challenges over the next five years. It reflects the council's commitment to working in partnership with parents and carers, schools, academy trusts, early years providers, post 16 providers and the Department for Education to ensure that provision keeps pace with changing needs.

The strategy highlights both the opportunities and pressures facing the system. Planned housing growth will shape where new places are required, while falling rolls in some areas will require careful management to maintain sustainable schools. At the same time, the significant rise in children and young people with SEND means that expanding local, inclusive provision is more important than ever.

The national SEND reforms signal a move towards greater inclusion, with more children with SEND being educated in mainstream settings. This will be supported by a new 'Experts at Hand' offer, providing expert advice and services from education and health professionals into mainstream education settings. The development of Support Bases and Specialist Bases within mainstream settings will ensure that children can access the right support for their individual needs, while remaining part of their local community.

At its heart, this strategy is focused on securing the best outcomes for children and young people. By strengthening local provision, making effective use of resources and maintaining a strong focus on inclusion, Buckinghamshire is taking a proactive approach to ensuring that every child can access the right place, at the right time.

This is a shared endeavour, and its success will depend on continued collaboration across the education system. I welcome this strategy as an important step in supporting children and families in Buckinghamshire, now and in the future.

Errol Albert, Corporate Director Children's Services

Summary

Buckinghamshire's education system is one of the county's greatest strengths and one of the council's most important assets. Our schools, early years and further education providers, academy trusts and wider education partners play a vital role in helping children and young people achieve their potential, supporting thriving communities and contributing to Buckinghamshire's economic success. The quality of education provision is also a key reason why families choose to live in Buckinghamshire. For September 2026 entry, 93.48% of secondary pupils and 98.21% of primary pupils were offered one of their preferred schools. These figures reflect both the strength of the Buckinghamshire education system and the importance of continuing to plan effectively to meet future need.

It is important to us that every child and young person in Buckinghamshire has the opportunity to attend a good school and access high-quality education close to home, enabling them to achieve their potential and thrive within their local community. This aim directly supports the first priority in Buckinghamshire Council's Corporate Plan - Opportunity and aspiration for all - and also contributes to the priorities of Thriving communities and Shaping great places by ensuring that education provision supports strong local communities and keeps pace with growth and development.

Buckinghamshire is changing. Significant housing growth is planned across the county, population patterns continue to evolve and the needs of children and young people are becoming increasingly complex. As a result, education place planning must remain responsive and adaptable. This strategy provides a long-term framework for planning education, childcare and SEND provision, while recognising that needs will change over time. The strategy will be informed by the emerging Buckinghamshire Local Plan, changes in child population cohorts and their needs and the findings of the council's annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment. As the Local Plan progresses and proposed growth locations become confirmed, the council will review and refine education place planning to ensure provision remains aligned with future development and community needs.

This is therefore a dynamic strategy. While it sets a long-term direction to 2032, education place planning is an ongoing process. The council continuously monitors demographic trends, housing growth, migration patterns, admissions data, childcare sufficiency, SEND needs and other factors that influence place requirements. The strategy will be reviewed regularly and refined where necessary to ensure that planning and investment decisions remain responsive to changing circumstances and informed by the latest available evidence.

Buckinghamshire Council has a statutory responsibility to ensure there are sufficient, high-quality education and childcare places for children and young people across the county, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This strategy sets out how the council will meet these duties between 2027 and 2032, guided by the vision of providing 'the right place at the right time'.

The strategy responds to a changing and challenging context. While additional places are required in some areas, others are experiencing falling rolls and surplus capacity. At the same time, the number of children with SEND continues to rise significantly, placing increasing pressure on specialist provision, funding and transport. Expanding early years entitlements and wider financial pressures across the education system add further complexity.

The council will take a balanced and flexible approach that includes expanding provision where demand is growing, particularly in areas of housing development, while working with partners to manage surplus places elsewhere. Increasing local SEND provision and improving inclusion in mainstream schools is a key priority, enabling more children to be educated closer to home. These strategic intentions are closely aligned with the direction of national education and SEND reforms, which place a strong emphasis on inclusion and strengthening support within mainstream settings.

Delivery will rely on strong partnership working across the education system, including with schools, multi-academy trusts, early years providers and the Department for Education. The recently established Strategic Education Partnership Board will play a key role in bringing partners together to support strategic planning and delivery. Multi-academy trusts, as key decision-makers within the system, will be vital partners in shaping and delivering education provision. Funding will be secured through government grants and developer contributions, with a focus on value for money and sustainability.

The council will continue to take a proactive and disciplined approach to managing changing need, optimising the use of local provision, reducing reliance on high-cost placements and ensuring that resources are used efficiently and sustainably. Planning and investment decisions will continue to be informed by local need, emerging national policy and the latest available evidence.

This strategy is a key mechanism through which the council will deliver its Corporate Plan 2026–2031. By ensuring education, childcare and SEND provision in the right locations, it supports opportunity and aspiration for all children and young people, helps shape and strengthen local communities and ensures vulnerable children and young people receive the support they need to thrive. Through effective planning, partnership working and targeted investment, the strategy will help ensure that every child and young person can access suitable education provision in the right place at the right time.

To support delivery of the strategy, regular progress reports will be provided to ensure continued progress against its objectives.

Overall, the strategy aims to ensure that all children and young people in Buckinghamshire can access suitable, high-quality education provision that supports their needs, outcomes and future opportunities.

Aims

This strategy directly supports the council's [Corporate Plan 2026 – 2031](#) and contributes to all five corporate priorities:

- **Opportunity and aspiration for all:** By ensuring sufficient high-quality education and childcare places, enabling children and young people to access education that supports achievement, skills development and future life chances.
- **Shaping great places:** By planning education provision alongside housing growth, creating sustainable communities with access to local schools, childcare and support services.
- **Thriving communities:** By working in partnership with schools, early years providers, families and communities to ensure provision reflects local needs.

- **Supporting the most vulnerable:** By increasing inclusive education provision that meets needs, expanding mainstream SEND capacity and ensuring children with higher needs can access the right support closer to home.
- **Quality and value** – making best use of available resources and capacity to provide high-quality provision while delivering value for money.

This strategy contributes to the following strategic priorities outlined in the [Children's Services Strategy 2026 - 31](#):

- **Learn and Achieve:** Ensure every child and young person can access inclusive education that enhances their life chances. We will provide local opportunities that enable learning close to home, alongside friends, and within their community.
- **Local and High-Quality Provision:** Work collaboratively with partners to secure high-quality local support and provision that meets the diverse needs of children and young people, improve their outcomes, and deliver value for money.

This strategy also supports the ambitions of the Opportunity Bucks programme by helping to reduce inequalities in access to education and childcare. The strategy helps to ensure that children and young people, particularly those living in areas experiencing greater disadvantage, can access high-quality local provision that supports their learning, wellbeing and future opportunities.

Buckinghamshire's approach is closely aligned with its local SEND Reform Plan and the national SEND reforms, which place a strong emphasis on early intervention, inclusion and strengthening support within local mainstream provision. Through the development of the Experts at Hand model supporting increased specialist capacity in mainstream schools and targeted growth in local specialist provision, the council will continue to reduce reliance on high-cost independent and out-of-county placements where appropriate. Success will be measured not only by the number of additional places created, but by the outcomes achieved, including increased access to local provision, a higher proportion of children and young people with SEND supported within Buckinghamshire, improved inclusion in mainstream settings and a sustained reduction in usage of independent provision over time.

This strategy is closely aligned with Buckinghamshire's [SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025-2030](#) and provides the framework for delivering its sufficiency and inclusion ambitions. In particular, it supports the strategy's focus on strengthening local provision, increasing inclusion within mainstream settings, expanding specialist capacity where needed and ensuring children and young people with SEND can access support as close to home as possible. Together, the two strategies aim to improve outcomes and reduce reliance on out-of-county and independent provision where appropriate.

Our vision: The right place at the right time

We want every child and young person in Buckinghamshire to have the chance to reach their full potential—no matter their background, their needs, or where they live. That means making sure all children can go to a good school close to home, where they can experience learning that unlocks their potential, builds confidence, and prepares them for their future.

Delivering the right place at the right time supports the council's wider corporate priorities for Buckinghamshire, to be a place where everyone can thrive, communities are strong, vulnerable residents receive the support they need and housing growth is matched by the infrastructure required for sustainable places.

Introduction

This strategy sets out:

- the legislative context for ensuring sufficient good quality and suitable school places for every child, including those with SEND, from early years to post 16
- our priorities going forward and the funding sources available
- the opportunities, challenges and risks associated with the delivery of this strategy
- a summary of our current projections of place need by phase and type

The strategy covers the period 2027-2032, with the evidence base underpinning it continuously updated through annual sufficiency assessments, demographic monitoring and regular forecasting reviews.

The council's statutory role in education provision

The council has a range of statutory duties to ensure sufficient, high-quality education and childcare provision, fair access and support for parental preference. The Council is required to:

- forecast the school places required to meet need
- ensure sufficiency of early years and childcare places (including wraparound care)
- plan provision, including funding or commissioning new schools or expansions where needed
- ensure appropriate SEND provision
- provide free home to school transport for eligible children
- ensure appropriate post-16 provision, delivered through partnership working

Further detail on the council's statutory duties is set out in Appendix A.

Context

Buckinghamshire has a diverse education system, with a wide range of provision, including mainstream, selective and special schools, as well as early years and further education providers. Many schools are academies, voluntary aided or foundation schools. The council works closely in partnership with schools, trusts and the Department for Education to plan and deliver places. School places are managed across planning areas to reflect how children typically move through schools. The emerging need for education places is monitored throughout the year using a range of data sources, including school census information, live admissions data, birth and migration trends, housing development data and childcare sufficiency assessments. This enables the council to respond proactively to changes and regularly update its planning assumptions. The key factors shaping the requirement for education places in Buckinghamshire are summarised below.

Education in Buckinghamshire

Key facts

System context

School system

235

schools including pupil referral units and local authority maintained nurseries

School planning overview

20

primary planning areas

5

secondary planning areas

Early years and childcare

96%

of providers rated Good or Outstanding

Growing and changing demand

In-year school admissions

3,843

in-year applications (2024/25)

Exclusions

33 → 48

permanent exclusions increased 2022/23 to 2023/24

Demand varies across the county



Growth in housing areas
Falling rolls in some places

Key pressures

SEND growth

+159%

increase in EHCPs (2014 – 2026)

Home to school transport pressures

+44%

transport cost increased (2020/21 – 2025/26)

75%

of spend on SEND transport

Complexity of SEND need



Increasing numbers of children with multiple or high level of need

While the requirement for primary places is starting to fall, growth continues in areas with new housing. Secondary requirements are increasing. There has also been a significant increase in the number of children and young people with SEND, alongside greater complexity of need. This has increased the need for both specialist provision and support within mainstream schools.

Buckinghamshire's education landscape is shaped in part by its selective secondary education system, which influences pupil movement across the county. This strategy focuses on ensuring that sufficient education places are available across the county and, where additional secondary capacity is required, the council works collaboratively with schools, academy trusts and the Department for Education to explore appropriate expansion opportunities across the education system, including within existing grammar schools.

A proposed Local Plan for Buckinghamshire is being finalised. As it develops, the scale and distribution of growth may continue to evolve. The council will keep education place requirements under review and update delivery plans as necessary to ensure that education infrastructure responds to future development patterns and remains aligned with local need.

The Local Plan will guide housing, employment and infrastructure growth across the county to 2045. In response to updated national planning requirements, the draft plan identifies a need for around 91,000 new homes by 2045, representing a significant increase in growth compared to previous plans. Development is expected to be delivered through a combination of urban extensions, new settlements, development around transport hubs and growth within existing towns and villages. This level of growth will create substantial demand for education infrastructure, requiring careful planning to ensure that sufficient early years, school and SEND provision is available in the right locations and at the right time, to support sustainable communities. While the Local Plan will require significant expansion of, and therefore investment in, new education places, there remain areas of the county where little or no housing growth is

proposed. These areas are also experiencing falling rolls due to low birth rates and migration, creating significant viability issues for schools and settings.

Over the last three years, four primary schools have closed in Buckinghamshire due to falling rolls and schools no longer being financially viable. While closure will always be a last resort, continued reduced migration and low birth rates in some areas may mean that further closures need to be considered. Where there are closures or admission numbers need to be reduced, we will seek to reuse surplus accommodation for the benefit of the local community. For example, following the closure of Mary Towerton School in Studley Green in 2023, the buildings were repurposed to provide SEND provision as a satellite school for Chiltern Wood Special School. This new provision opened in September 2024, creating 32 additional education places, increasing local provision and reducing the need for more expensive out of county placements.

The system also faces wider pressures. Families are making more in-year school applications, the need for alternative provision is increasing, and settings and providers are operating within tighter financial constraints. The cost of home to school transport has risen significantly, particularly for children with SEND. Future requirements may also be affected by fee changes in the independent school sector.

The post-14 and post-16 education landscape is also evolving. Through the government's devolution agenda, greater responsibility for skills funding and planning is expected to transfer to local areas, creating opportunities to strengthen vocational and technical pathways that meet local workforce needs. National reviews, including the [Young people and work review](#) led by Alan Milburn, may also influence future expectations around post-14 provision and progression routes. These developments may change the type, location and capacity of post-14 and post-16 provision that is required in Buckinghamshire. The council will continue to monitor these changes and as the legislative context becomes clearer, the strategy will respond accordingly to ensure education provision remains aligned to local needs and national priorities.

These trends, particularly the growth in SEND and the rising cost of transport, highlight the need to strengthen local provision in line with the SEND reforms. Over time, the strategy will support a gradual shift towards greater use of local, state-funded provision, including mainstream schools, Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs) and inclusion units, and special schools. This will reduce reliance on independent placements where appropriate, by increasing local capacity and improving inclusion so that more children and young people can be educated closer to home.

The council's Corporate Plan identifies education, skills, support for vulnerable residents, sustainable growth and strong communities as key priorities. Education place planning is a critical enabler of these ambitions, ensuring that infrastructure keeps pace with growth and that children and young people can access education and support within their local communities.

Further detail on the Buckinghamshire context is set out in Appendix B.

Priorities

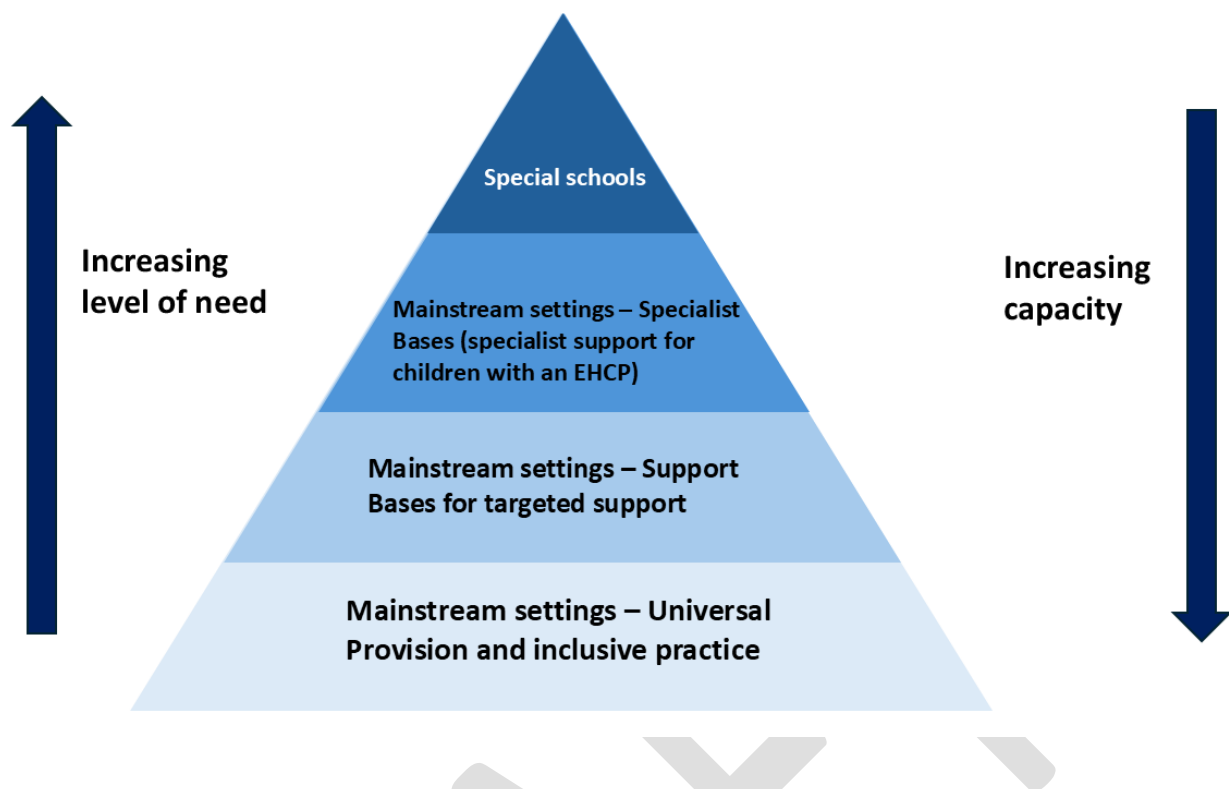
Five priorities will drive activity over the next five years:

Priority 1: Expanding mainstream capacity. We will focus particularly on areas where housing growth drives demand, as set out in the proposed Local Plan. Through a combination of new provision, school expansions and effective use of existing capacity, we will ensure that children and young people can access high-quality education close to home, while supporting sustainable communities and future population growth.

Priority 2: Supporting children with SEND. We will ensure the school system is effectively meeting the needs of children and young people in the appropriate setting.

National SEND reforms and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act set a clear direction towards greater inclusion, with more children and young people supported within mainstream settings through earlier intervention, strengthened universal provision and access to specialist expertise. Buckinghamshire is supporting this through the co-design of shared inclusion principles, tools and a local practice model that will help schools and services embed consistent, inclusive approaches. A local Experts at Hand model is being developed to provide timely access to multi-disciplinary specialist advice, capacity building and support. By strengthening confidence, capability and inclusive practice across the system, more children and young people will be able to access the right support at the right time and thrive within their local community where appropriate. Together with the National Inclusion Standards and the increasing emphasis on inclusion within the Ofsted framework, these developments provide important levers for change while ensuring specialist provision remains available for children and young people with the highest level of need.

The illustration below is a graduated approach to inclusion, with support matched to a child or young person's individual needs. Most children and young people will have their needs met through high-quality universal provision and inclusive practice within mainstream settings, while some will benefit from additional targeted or specialist support within a mainstream setting. For a smaller number of children and young people with the highest level of need, specialist provision, including special school placements, may be the most appropriate way of supporting them. As needs develop and change, provision should remain flexible, enabling children to benefit from support that is proportionate to their needs and in line with their wishes, while maximising opportunities to learn within their local community wherever appropriate.



As part of this priority, we will:

- ensure there is sufficient inclusive early years and childcare provision to meet the needs of families.
- work with schools and providers to develop a long-term plan to enable more children with SEND to be educated in mainstream settings, creating a more inclusive educational landscape. Earlier identification of need and consistent application of the graduated approach are critical.
- reduce reliance on independent or out of county placements by increasing specialist provision in mainstream schools for children with autism, speech and language needs, social, emotional, and mental health needs, and learning disabilities (including in new schools). There will be a particular focus on primary provision in the North and secondary provision county wide.
- expand special school provision in accessible central locations, including providing wider post-16 options for young people with complex needs.
- ensure there is enough alternative provision for children who need it.

Priority 3: Tackling surplus school place capacity. We will provide robust projections to enable an accurate understanding of need, and work in partnership with schools, trusts and the Department for Education to manage the financial pressures associated with falling rolls. Where appropriate, we will support schools to make better use of surplus capacity, helping to maintain sustainable provision while always doing what is best for children.

Priority 4: Expanding pre-school provision. We will focus on those wards where gaps have been identified and expand provision in line with the offer of 30 hours free childcare from 9 months old. We will work closely with early years providers, schools and developers to ensure sufficient, high-quality and inclusive provision is available where families need it most. This will improve access to early education and

childcare provision, help support school readiness and ensure provision keeps pace with changing demographics and housing growth.

Priority 5: Expanding wraparound provision. We will work with schools to achieve this at every school site. By increasing access to before and after-school provision, we will help families balance work and childcare responsibilities, improve access to local support and contribute to better outcomes for children. We will work collaboratively to ensure provision is sustainable, inclusive and responsive to local need.

Measures of success

We will measure our progress against the strategy using the following success measures, aligned to its key priorities:

Success measure	Strategy priorities this measure meets	Corporate plan priority
Every child is offered a suitable school place within a reasonable distance of home	Priority 1: Expanding mainstream capacity Priority 2: Supporting children with SEND	Opportunity and aspiration for all Supporting the most vulnerable
Fewer primary planning areas have significant surplus capacity	Priority 3: Tackling surplus school place capacity	Shaping great places
More SEND specialist places, including Post 16 provision, are available across the county.	Priority 1: Expanding mainstream capacity Priority 2: Supporting children with SEND	Supporting the most vulnerable
A higher proportion of children and young people with SEND are learning in local mainstream schools.	Priority 1: Expanding mainstream capacity Priority 2: Supporting children with SEND	Supporting the most vulnerable Thriving communities
Home to school transport costs per passenger per day for SEND provision are reduced as more children and young people are able to access to local, suitable education provision.	Priority 1: Expanding mainstream capacity Priority 2: Supporting children with SEND	Shaping great places
More 2 and 3–4 year olds from Opportunity Bucks areas attend early years and childcare settings.	Priority 4: Expanding pre-school provision Priority 5: Expanding wraparound provision	Thriving communities

Opportunities

Planned housing growth offers a significant opportunity to deliver new education provision in the areas where it is most needed. This includes designing new schools and expansions that support inclusive

practice, integrates early years and SEND provision and encourages sustainable travel within local communities.

In areas where there is surplus capacity, there is scope to make better use of existing buildings. This may include expanding early years provision, increasing SEND support or co-locating other services that benefit children and families. This approach supports improved access, more efficient use of public resources, and ensures that provision remains sustainable and meets the needs of local communities. Surplus places will be managed in partnership with schools and trusts through approaches such as reducing admission numbers, adjusting catchment areas, greater collaboration between schools or, where necessary, making changes to how schools are organised locally. Where changes are required, these will be carefully considered, with a focus on maintaining high-quality provision and strong local communities. Schools will be encouraged to work together to improve sustainability and opportunities and outcomes for pupils and staff, including through federations and multi-academy trusts.

Further detail is set out in Appendix C.

Challenges

The council is operating within a complex and changing environment. Responding effectively requires balancing expansion and reduction in different locations at the same time, making the best use of school buildings where they are currently located, which may not always align to need.

The number of children and young people with SEND continues to rise, alongside increasing complexity of need. This is creating growing demand for specialist provision, support services and transport, while placing additional pressure on local capacity, workforce availability and funding. Ensuring sufficient provision is available in the right place and at the right time will require a significant and sustained response across the education system.

Financial pressures present a major challenge for schools, early years providers and the council. Rising costs, increasing SEND support needs and continued reliance on high-cost independent and out of county placements are placing significant pressure on the Dedicated Schools Grant and home to school transport budgets. While national funding initiatives provide important support, long-term sustainability will depend on strengthening local provision, increasing inclusion and making the most effective use of available resources.

Other challenges include managing in-year admissions pressures, ensuring sufficient childcare places in line with expanded entitlements, responding to significant planned housing growth and adapting to changes in national policy and legislation, including those relating to SEND, skills, education funding and post 16 provision.

Resource intent

Delivering this strategy will require effective use of resources across the council and in partnership with education providers to align local provision with strategic priorities. Resources will be prioritised to areas of greatest need, with a focus on delivering the best outcomes for children and young people while making

efficient use of available capacity. The scale of growth proposed through the Local Plan will require sustained investment in the council's capacity to plan, commission and deliver education infrastructure to ensure delivery of the strategy's aims.

High-quality data and forecasting will continue to inform evidence-based decision-making and ensure that plans respond to changes in need.

Consideration will be given to workforce capacity across the system, including the availability of teachers, SEND specialists and early years practitioners. Supporting a sustainable workforce will be important to ensuring that provision can meet need.

Finance intent

The council takes a planned and balanced approach to funding education provision, using a combination of government grants and developer contributions. The government's Basic Need grant and Section 106 contributions from new housing developments proposed within the Local Plan are integral to providing the infrastructure required to deliver this strategy. The council takes an active role in assessing the education impact of proposed developments and identifying the education infrastructure required to support new communities. This evidence informs negotiations with developers and helps ensure that Section 106 contributions and education site requirements reflect the projected need for school, childcare and SEND provision arising from growth.

Investment will be prioritised, focusing resource particularly where there is housing growth and increasing need for SEND provision, supported by a deliverable capital programme aligned with identified need.

Financial pressures within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), particularly the High Needs Block, are a significant factor shaping this strategy. Like many local authorities, Buckinghamshire is experiencing continued growth in need for SEND support and specialist provision. This has increased pressure on High Needs funding, home-to-school transport budgets and the wider education system. Strengthening local provision, increasing inclusion and making the best use of available resources are therefore essential not only to meeting sufficiency needs, but also to supporting the long-term sustainability of the local SEND system.

The Government's High Needs Stability Grant will provide important short-term financial support and help councils manage accumulated DSG deficits through delivery of local SEND reform plans. However, long-term sustainability will depend on transformational change across the system. This strategy supports that transformation through investment in local specialist provision, increased specialist capacity within mainstream schools and earlier intervention approaches that enable more children and young people to access the right support closer to home.

Key funding sources include:

- **The Basic Need Grant**, which comes from the Department for Education (DfE). This money is based on forecasts of the number of school places needed in the future and varies year on year.

- **The High Needs Provision Capital Grant**, which helps create or improve places for children with special educational needs or those needing alternative provision. Funding in future years is uncertain.
- **Housing developers** contribute to the cost of new school and childcare places when new homes are built. These contributions are essential; without them, the council wouldn't be able to provide the extra places needed.

Investment decisions will support delivery of the Corporate Plan by prioritising education infrastructure in growth areas, managing education places to meet local needs, increasing local SEND provision and upholding quality and value for money for residents. By reducing reliance on high-cost independent and out of county placements where appropriate, expanding local capacity and supporting inclusion, the council aims to improve outcomes for children and young people while making the most effective use of finite public resources.

Additional funding may also come from government grants for Early Years or new Free schools, proceeds from the sale of unneeded former education buildings, contributions from school budgets or academy bids for condition improvement funding; as well as maximising bids to other DFE schemes, for example to expand sixth forms or school-based nurseries.

Making the most of capital funding

The council will:

- apply for the maximum levels of government funding available and use grants wisely.
- work proactively with planning colleagues, developers and other partners to secure education infrastructure required to support housing growth. This includes identifying the need for new schools, school expansions, childcare provision and SEND provision, securing appropriate Section 106 contributions and school sites through the planning process and ensuring that children have safe and suitable walking routes to school.
- keep a clear pipeline for capital projects, making sure costs and timelines match the need for places.
- ensure value for money. This includes making best use of existing buildings, repurposing surplus capacity to add places cost effectively, considering lower-cost options such as expansions, and ensuring new provision is sustainable. Expanding local SEND provision and promoting inclusion will also help reduce reliance on more costly placements and manage transport costs, as well as supporting better outcomes for children and young people.
- continue to explore additional funding opportunities and work with partners to make best use of available resources.

Risks and mitigations

Risks associated with delivering this strategy are detailed below.

Risk	Mitigation
School place requirement may change due to housing delivery,	This will be managed through regular review of forecasts and updating plans to reflect the latest information.

migration patterns or national policy changes.	
Uncertainty around funding levels and rising costs	This will be addressed through careful financial planning, prioritisation of investment and securing external contributions wherever possible.
Continued rising need for SEND provision, and associated transport costs	This will be addressed through prioritising increasing local provision, supporting inclusion in mainstream settings and reducing reliance on independent and out-of-county placements.
Changes to provision, such as reducing admission numbers or reorganising schools, may have an impact on local communities.	These potential impacts will be carefully considered using an Equality Impact Assessment, with decisions informed by consultation and a clear focus on achieving the best outcomes for children and young people.
Workforce capacity across the education system may also affect delivery	This will be monitored and addressed through partnership working and forward planning.

Appendices

Appendix A: The council's statutory duties

The council has a range of aligned statutory duties in relation to ensuring the sufficiency and quality of school places, ensuring fair access to educational opportunity and promoting parental preference. These duties must be delivered within a complex, financial, legislative and educational landscape which requires the council to work in partnership with providers including school leaders, academy trusts together with diocesan boards and the DfE. Our statutory responsibilities include:

Strategic Planning: The council forecasts future requirements for school places for children of statutory school age, including for SEND pupils, and shares this data with providers to support commissioning and delivery. We must submit an annual report of current school place capacity and future pupil projections to the DfE; this informs the capital grants the council receives to fund new schools or places. The council also supports a diverse market of providers through annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessments.

Early Years & Childcare: While the council only has two maintained nurseries (operating from three sites) that it has direct responsibility for, the council must ensure there is sufficient childcare available for parents and wraparound care (8am-6pm) for all school-age children. The local authority also has a duty to ensure there are sufficient early education places.

Primary & Secondary mainstream places: The council funds and commissions expansions or new schools where growth exceeds current capacity and is also the decision maker in relation to a reduction of PAN (Planned Admission Number) or the closure of maintained and voluntary controlled/aided schools. In the case of academies, the council works with the Department of Education and academy leaders to inform decision making in relation to the need for new schools or significant changes in existing schools including the expansion or reduction of places.

Post-16 Education: For ages 16–19 and 19–25 (with EHCPs), the council works with the Education and Skills Funding Agency to address gaps in the type of provision available, either through existing providers or new Independent Learning Providers.

SEND Provision: Under the Children and Families Act 2014, the council ensures sufficient suitable provision for children with SEND. Parents (or young people) have the right to request a particular school or other setting to be named in an EHCP. The local authority must name that placement unless it would be unsuitable for the child's age, ability, aptitude or special educational needs; or the attendance of the child would be incompatible with the efficient education of others or the efficient use of resources. The council therefore needs to meet its statutory duties by working with mainstream and special schools to promote inclusion, increasing specialist places for those children with SEND who require them and working with independent providers where appropriate to meet children's needs.

Home to School Transport: The council must provide free home to school transport for "eligible" children, which includes those whose nearest school is beyond a statutory distance criterion and those whose SEN needs mean that they cannot reasonably be expected to walk or use public transport.

Appendix B: Buckinghamshire context

Local areas and school types

Buckinghamshire is divided into 20 areas for planning primary school places and 5 for secondary schools (including grammar, upper, and a separate area for the University Technical College). These areas reflect how pupils typically move through schools based on catchment zones and feeder schools.

The county offers a wide variety of education providers, including:

- Academies, voluntary-aided, voluntary controlled and foundation schools
- Grammar and non-selective secondary schools
- Infant, junior, and all-through schools
- Early years and childcare providers
- Special schools and schools with SEND support units
- Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)
- A University Technical College and a Further Education college

Buckinghamshire is one of the few counties with a mostly selective secondary school system. This is an important consideration in education place planning which influences parental preferences, pupil movement and patterns of need across the county. Forecasts and sufficiency assessments therefore take account of these established patterns when assessing future need and planning secondary school capacity. The council's role through this strategy is to ensure sufficient secondary school places are available overall, working with schools, academy trusts and the Department for Education.

A high proportion of Buckinghamshire schools are academies, voluntary aided or foundation schools. The council does not currently have the power to expand or reduce places in academy schools and does not own the buildings in the case of voluntary aided and foundation schools. This means that we must lead by influence and work in partnership with the DfE, Diocesan Boards and Academy leaders.

School type	Number	Proportion Maintained	Proportion Academy
Primary	184	68%	32%
Secondary	35	11%	89%
All Through	2	0%	100%
Special	10	80%	20%
Total	231	59%	41%

Changing need

Across the country, the number of children in primary and secondary schools has grown—by 15% and 12% since 2009. In Buckinghamshire, the increase has been even higher: 16% for primary and 20% for secondary. Nationally, around 11.7% of primary and 11.5% of secondary school places are unfilled. In Buckinghamshire, these figures are lower—7.7% and 7.6%—which means schools here are generally fuller.

In 2023 overall, the requirement for primary school places in Buckinghamshire started to fall. However, this varies by area—places with lots of new housing are still seeing growth. Secondary schools in Buckinghamshire have continued to see rising need, with 2,800 more pupils between 2021 and 2023, although this is likely to flatline as the primary bulge moves through. Again, this is strongest in areas already experiencing significant housing development, particularly in Aylesbury, High Wycombe, and Princes Risborough/Haddenham.

Looking forward, Buckinghamshire is expecting further changes, with major housing developments planned across the county.

Nationally, the Government is introducing new planning laws to tackle the housing shortage. In response, Buckinghamshire Council is preparing a new single Local Plan that will cover the entire county. The proposed new Local Plan for Buckinghamshire sets out 91,000 new homes by 2045.

Changes to national education, skills and employment policy are likely to influence future need for post-14 and post-16 provision. Through the government's devolution agenda, greater responsibility for skills funding and strategic skills planning is expected to be devolved to local areas, creating opportunities to strengthen technical and vocational education pathways that better reflect local economic priorities. National reviews, including the [Young People and Work Review](#) led by Alan Milburn, may also shape future policy relating to progression routes, employability and the relationship between education and the labour market. These developments could affect the mix, scale and location of provision required across Buckinghamshire. The council will continue to keep emerging policy and legislative changes under review and will adapt its approach to education place planning as further detail becomes available.

As Buckinghamshire changes, it's important to ensure that the right education places are available in the right areas. The county's geography is diverse, with both large towns and small rural villages. Areas experiencing rapid growth, particularly in the north, will need new education provision. Meanwhile, other areas may face sustainability challenges due to changing population patterns. Our task is to help maintain enough provision to meet current needs and plan for future demand, whilst remaining conscious of the financial viability of providers.

Increasing number of children with recognised SEND

Alongside housing growth, Buckinghamshire is also seeing a sharp rise in the number of children and young people with recognised Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

In 2014, the county maintained 3,160 Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). As at 27 May 2026, the number of maintained EHCPs is 8,175. This reflects the national trend, with more children being diagnosed with autism, speech, and language difficulties, and emotional or mental health needs. Buckinghamshire faces the challenge of ensuring that the right support and provision is in place to meet the needs of all learners and needs are becoming more complex. Currently c. 33% of children and young people with an EHCP require specialist provision. Although more specialist places have been created in mainstream and special schools, Buckinghamshire, like other councils, is relying more on independent schools to assist with both meeting needs, which can be complex. These are often more expensive which puts pressure on budgets, including that for transport to these schools. Should this trend continue, there may be as many as

12,000 children with an EHCP by 2032, although future demand will be influenced by a range of factors, including the impact of national education and SEND reforms.

Expanding early years and childcare entitlements

The early years sector has changed significantly over the last few years. Since 2017, working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds have been entitled to 30 hours of free childcare per week. This was extended in 2024 to include younger children, and from September 2025, parents were able to access up to 30 hours of free childcare per week for children aged 9 months up to school age. The government also expects schools to offer wraparound childcare (before and after school) from 8am to 6pm to support working families.

Buckinghamshire is doing well in this area, with more families taking up free childcare than the national average—78% for 2-year-olds and 93% for 3- and 4-year-olds. The quality of childcare is also high, with over 96% of providers rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

Despite this strong performance, the council still faces challenges in making sure there are enough childcare places that are high quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive across all parts of the county.

In-Year admissions

Buckinghamshire schools face pressure when families apply for places during the school year or outside the usual deadlines—especially when schools are already full. In 2024/25, 3,843 in-year applications were made to the council's Admissions team, with additional applications made directly to those schools that manage their own admissions. Parents can apply to any school, not just the nearest one, but if a school has no space, the application may be refused. Children may then be offered a place at the nearest school with availability. Due to the uncertainty in predicting migration trends (as well as the impact on end of Key Stage 2 published SATs) many schools are reluctant to admit bulge classes to accommodate in-year admissions as there is no guarantee that the class will fill (which impacts on their funding).

To support vulnerable children or those without a school place, the council uses the Fair Access Protocol. This allows the council to work with schools to ensure that these children can obtain a place.

Rising number of exclusions and need for alternative provision

Local authorities must ensure that pupils who are permanently excluded still receive full-time education. This involves the provision of alternative settings like Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). These settings aim to support pupils back into mainstream schools.

Both locally and nationally, suspensions and exclusions are rising. In Buckinghamshire, the number of permanent exclusions increased from 33 in 2022/23 to 48 in 2023/24. Despite this rise, the county's exclusion rate remains lower than the national and regional averages. Work continues to proactively reduce suspensions and exclusions; however, the need for alternative provision and specialist support services continues to grow.

Financial pressures

Schools and early years providers in Buckinghamshire are facing growing financial challenges. Although overall school spending has increased nationally, schools are still feeling the impact of rising costs—

especially due to inflation and higher energy bills. At the same time, more children are being identified with additional and complex needs, which puts extra pressure on funding.

According to the IFS Annual Report, school spending per pupil is set to rise by 1.6% in 2024–25, reversing earlier cuts and bringing funding back to 2010 levels. Much of this increase is going towards supporting pupils with special educational needs. Since 2019, total school spending has grown by £8 billion, with per-pupil spending rising by over 11%. The gap between primary and secondary school funding has also narrowed, with secondary schools now spending only 11% more per pupil than primary schools. Looking ahead, the cost of supporting pupils with high needs is expected to rise sharply—by £2.3 billion between 2024–25 and 2027–28—which could place further strain on school budgets.

Financial pressures within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) are a significant factor shaping this strategy and reinforce the need to strengthen local provision, increase inclusion and make the best use of available resources.

Like many local authorities, Buckinghamshire is experiencing sustained growth in relation to SEND support and specialist education placements. While Buckinghamshire has invested in expanding specialist capacity, there remains insufficient locally available provision. This has resulted in increasing reliance on independent and out-of-county placements, which are typically higher cost and frequently require longer transport journeys. These pressures have contributed to a growing DSG deficit and a significant increase in home-to-school transport expenditure.

Our financial position locally has informed the development of this Education Places Sufficiency Strategy. Buckinghamshire's DSG deficit is forecast to be £73.1 million March 2027 (£42.8m at March 2026), driven predominantly by expenditure within the High Needs Block exceeding available funding. This reflects the underlying challenge of rising demand, increasing complexity of need and insufficient local specialist capacity. The creation and expansion of inclusive provision within Buckinghamshire is therefore not solely a sufficiency response; it is also fundamental to the long-term sustainability of the local SEND system.

The Government has announced a High Needs Stability Grant to support councils with accumulated DSG deficits. Based on current forecasts, Buckinghamshire expects to receive approximately £38.5 million of grant funding, representing 90% of its forecast DSG deficit position at March 2026, subject to the approval and successful delivery of a Local SEND Reform Plan. Whilst this funding provides important short-term financial stability, it does not address the underlying mismatch between the number of places required, and funding, and therefore reinforces the need for transformational change across the local system.

This strategy directly supports that transformation by expanding local specialist provision, increasing inclusive capacity within mainstream schools through Support Bases and Specialist Bases, strengthening early intervention through the Experts at Hand model, and reducing reliance on high-cost independent placements where appropriate. By enabling more children and young people to access the right support closer to home, Buckinghamshire will improve outcomes, strengthen inclusion, reduce transport requirements and make more effective use of finite High Needs funding.

This approach aligns closely with Buckinghamshire's SEND Reform Plan and reflects the principle that achieving sufficiency, inclusion and financial sustainability requires investment in the right provision, in the right place, at the right time.

Home to school transport pressures

Buckinghamshire Council has a statutory duty to provide free home-to-school transport for eligible children aged 5 to 16. Eligibility is based on specific criteria, including distance from school, family income, safety of walking routes, and special educational needs or disabilities, as set out in the council's [Home to School Transport Policy](#). For students aged 16 and over, transport assistance may be available but is not guaranteed or free, as outlined in the council's annual Post-16 Transport Policy Statement.

There is no automatic entitlement to council funded transport from home to school or to another educational setting once a student is 16 and over. However, the council is required to facilitate the attendance of all those of sixth form age i.e. those students over compulsory school age who started their programme of learning before their 19th birthday. The council publishes an annual Post-16 Transport Policy Statement which provides information on the travel and transport arrangements available to young people who are above statutory school age.

Nationally, the cost of school transport has risen sharply, driven by increasing numbers of pupils with complex needs, longer travel distances, and inflationary pressures. In Buckinghamshire, the net cost of home-to-school transport rose from £24 million in 2020/21 to £34.5 million in 2025/26—a 44% increase. Notably, 75% of this expenditure relates to children and young people with SEND.

Independent schools' attendance

Nearly 8,800 children in Buckinghamshire attend mainstream independent schools across all year groups. From January 2025, independent school fees have been subject to VAT at the standard rate of 20%, which increases the fees charged to families.

Should a substantial number of families decide to leave the sector due to rising costs, there could be an increase in requests for places in state schools—especially in areas like Gerrards Cross, the Chalfonts and parts of High Wycombe. To date there is no evidence that this has been the case, but we will continue to monitor.

Summary of current projections and plans by phase and type

Pupil cohort projections are influenced by birth rates, migration patterns and housing growth. Forecasts are developed using a range of data sources, including school census returns, GP registration data, housing growth projections and historic patterns of demand. The methodology takes account of population change, parental preferences, cross-border movement and planned development, while specialist provision forecasts are informed by trends in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and placement needs. The projections summarised in this strategy are based on the best information available at the time of publication, including known housing developments. However, as outlined above, the Buckinghamshire Local Plan may lead to additional housing growth and changes in population distribution across the county. Forecasts are reviewed and updated on a rolling basis as new information becomes available including school census returns, admissions data, housing delivery information, demographic trends and emerging policy changes. This allows the council to continually test assumptions, monitor changing needs and refine planning decisions to support accurate and responsive education place planning.

Projections in relation to the need for SEND specialist places are based upon known patterns of demand both for an EHCP and for a specialist placement. These projections are much more difficult to predict than

the general child population, migration and housing trends. As outlined above, Buckinghamshire has recently seen a sharp increase in children with an EHCP and in numbers requesting specialist provision, which is expected to continue. There is therefore an urgent need to provide more local specialist places. Reforms to the SEND system may mean that in the longer term the exponential rise in the number of children with an EHCP is halted and numbers fall back to something closer to the current situation. The reforms may also lead to a higher proportion of children with SEND being educated within a mainstream setting or at an ARP or SEND unit attached to a mainstream school.

Therefore, as the Buckinghamshire Local Plan is finalised in response to national housing targets, and the impact of reforms to the SEND system is felt, **we will provide an annual update of projections to ensure they are fully responsive to any significant changes that may arise.** The current forecast need by phase is summarised below.

- **Early Years & Childcare:** 17,475 places currently available for under-5s against a population of 31,256. While overall sufficiency is good, gaps remain in wards such as Aston Clinton, Stone & Waddesdon, Buckingham, Chesham, and parts of Wycombe. Wraparound care is available in 89% of schools and full coverage is required by September 2026.
- **Primary Education:** Countywide surplus school place capacity of 7%, but this varies widely across the 20 primary planning areas, with a deficit of places forecast in areas of growth, e.g. Aylesbury Town, whilst a significant surplus of school places is forecast in other parts of the county. Planned new primary capacity by 2030 includes:
 - Orchard View Primary (420 places + 60 nursery + 12 SEND unit)
 - Hampden Fields Primary (630 places + 90 nursery + 18 SEND unit)
 - Salden Park Primary (630 places + 90 nursery)
- **Secondary Education:** Demand continues to rise, especially in Aylesbury and Wycombe. Planned new secondary capacity includes 360 places at Kingsbrook School expansion by 2027.
- **SEND Provision:** The number of children with an EHCP has doubled since 2014. A proportion of those children will require a type of specialist provision, and we do not currently have sufficient specialist places available within the County to meet this need. Specialist provision includes places at an ARP (Additionally Resourced Provision) or a SEND Unit within a mainstream school as well as places at a Special School. **Current plans will deliver 300 new specialist places by 2027, but further 600 specialist places may be needed by 2032.** There is also a need to provide more specialist post 16 provision for young people with an EHCP.

Appendix C: Options for responding to changing needs

Expanding places

New school places may be needed due to population growth or changing needs. The Government expects councils to expand schools that are performing well, based on Ofsted outcomes. Poorly performing schools should only expand if there's no other option, and improvement plans must be in place. There are currently only a small number of schools in Buckinghamshire that would not be deemed suitable for expansion due to poor Ofsted outcomes.

Large housing developments will likely lead to new schools being built. These schools should be located in communities to encourage walking and reduce travel distances. New schools may affect nearby schools as pupil numbers shift, so admissions need to be carefully managed. For instance, the council endeavours to open new schools when admission into Reception is around 15-20 pupils - adding one new year group each academic year until all seven year groups are in place for each form.

Surplus capacity within existing primary schools cannot always be considered when agreeing new schools within new major settlements/urban extensions to ensure effective planning/home to school transport. In these circumstances, any excessive surplus capacity in existing schools would need to be managed appropriately.

The cumulative impact of smaller housing developments may also require more school places. If existing schools can't expand due to site limitations, new schools may need to be considered.

The Government expects local authorities to manage the school estate efficiently and to reduce or find alternative uses for surplus capacity (for example, increasing the provision of early education and childcare) to avoid detriment to schools' educational offer or financial position. Local authorities are encouraged to consider the use of modular construction solutions for any physical building expansion and to consider all options for the reutilisation of space including via remodelling, amalgamations, or closure where this would be the best course of action. Permanent expansions will only be approved where the local need for places is deemed permanent.

Surplus places

We will work with school governing bodies, MATS, diocesan boards and the DfE to manage surplus places. Options for consideration include reduction of PAN and collaboration with other schools or multi academy trusts.

If a school has surplus physical capacity, there is an opportunity to explore other ways to use that space to meet local priorities. This could include offering more early years childcare or support for children with special educational needs (SEND). We would however need to be assured that any new early years or SEND provision would be of high quality and in a location that worked for children and families.

Closing a school is a last resort and indeed the Government expects Local Authorities to adopt a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but that the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in

the area. Proposers must show that they have carefully considered the following factors when formulating any closure proposals:

- demand for the school and availability of places across the wider area
- educational offer at the school
- transport and admissions implications
- loss of a community facility and the impact on the local residents
- alternatives to closure including federation and joining a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)

Collaboration between schools

Schools are encouraged to work together to improve education and manage financial and staffing pressures. Collaboration can range from informal partnerships to formal arrangements like federations or joining a multi-academy trust. The benefits of collaboration include:

- Better use of staff and resources
- More opportunities for pupils and staff
- Stronger financial stability
- Easier transitions for pupils between schools (e.g. infant to junior)
- Improved outcomes and staff retention, as shown in national reports

Federation means maintained schools share one governing body and headteacher but keep their individual legal status. This can help small or rural schools stay viable and offer more to pupils. It can also be a step toward full amalgamation. The council encourages neighbouring infant and junior schools to consider formal collaborative arrangements.

Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) are a single legal entity governing a group of academies. Some academies in Buckinghamshire are single academy trusts (SATs). A maintained school or SAT may apply to join a MAT.

National education policy promotes structured collaboration between schools through multi-academy trusts and other partnership arrangements. Collaboration can help schools share expertise, strengthen leadership, improve resilience and use resources more effectively.

Changing planned admission numbers (PAN)

Schools have a set number of pupils they admit each year. Changes to this number must follow national admissions code and be agreed with the relevant Admissions Authority (the Local Authority for community and controlled schools; governing bodies for Voluntary Aided, Foundation and Trust schools and Academies). Agreed reductions to PAN can help to manage changing needs in the local area in a planned way. A reduction in PAN will lead to a reduction in funding, but also expenditure.

Redefining catchment areas

Most Buckinghamshire Schools have a catchment area which provides local children with greater priority. The catchment area can be adjusted to balance pupil numbers and reduce long travel distances. In some cases, shared catchment areas may be introduced to help schools manage demand and ensure children can attend a nearby school.

Appendix D: Education sufficiency data

The latest education sufficiency data for Buckinghamshire is published on the Department for Education website at [Release home - School capacity - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

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Appendix E: Specialist provision – current settings

Special Schools

School	Need Type	Phase	Location
Alfriston School	Complex Needs / MLD	Secondary	South
Booker Park Community School	PMLD / Complex Needs	Primary	North
Chiltern Way – Bierton	SEMH & C&I	Primary	North
Chiltern Way – Prestwood	SEMH	Secondary	South
Chiltern Way – Wendover	C&I	Secondary	North
Chiltern Wood School	PMLD / Complex	All-through	South
Furze Down School	Complex / MLD	All-through	North
Heritage House School	PMLD / Complex	All-through	South
Kite Ridge	PMLD / Complex	Secondary	South
Pebble Brook School	Complex / MLD	Secondary	North
Shortenills	SEMH	Secondary	South
Shortenills Abbey	SEMH	Secondary	North
Stocklake Park School	PMLD / Complex	Secondary	North
Stony Dean School	Complex / MLD	Secondary	South
Westfield School	Complex / MLD	Primary	South

Additionally Resourced Provision

School	Need Type	Phase	Location
Amersham Side by Side	Complex / MLD	Secondary	South
Aston Clinton School	C&I	Primary	North
Bearbrook School	C&I	Primary	North
Bourne End Academy	C&I	Secondary	South
Carrington Infant	C&I	Primary	South

Carrington Junior	C&I	Primary	South
Claytons Primary	C&I	Primary	South
Elmtree Infant	C&I	Primary	South
Highworth School	Sensory & Physical	Primary	South
Holmer Green School	C&I	Secondary	South
Holtspur School	C&I	Primary	South
Juniper Hill	SEMH	Primary	South
Kings Wood School	C&I	Primary	South
Oak Green	C&I	Primary	South
Princes Risborough Primary	C&I	Primary	South
Princes Risborough School	C&I	Secondary	South
Sir William Ramsay	Sensory & Physical	Secondary	South
Stoke Mandeville	Sensory & Physical	Primary	North
The Disraeli School	C&I	Primary	South
The Kingsbrook School	SEMH	Secondary	North
The Misbourne School	C&I	Secondary	South
William Harding	C&I & S&P	Primary	North

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