

Written evidence submission from Schools North East

Schools North East is a charity set up in 2007 by schools and for schools. We are a movement for change, giving a voice to all 1,150 North East schools in the national education debate.

The lack of capacity across services that support children and young people has been a consistent and growing concern amongst schools in the North East. Since the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in demand on places in specialist schools and alternative provision, as well as on social care, educational psychologists, and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

In our State of the Region survey for the Autumn term 2023, over 90% of schools said that they are seeing rising numbers of students with SEND. More students have profound educational needs, often as a result of a lack of early interventions during the pandemic. Many schools said that numbers of SEND students, as well as those with an education, health, and care plan (EHCP), had doubled in the past few years. There have also been significant increases in speech and language and social and emotional mental health needs (SEMH).

Three quarters of schools said that they did not currently have capacity and resources to adequately support SEND students. Finance was a key challenge in accessing more staff with the right expertise. This is especially the case for smaller schools, primary schools, and those working in rural areas. And this is exacerbated by the lack of capacity in services outside of schools.

68% of schools said that they were seeing more student behaviour related issues than is usual for the Autumn term. 70% felt that students were not stage ready. Concern was generally higher at primary than at secondary, with gaps emerging as pupils move through primary school. Primary aged children have missed out on support during lockdown, leading to a lack of early identification of need, poorer concentration and stamina, and challenges in managing behaviour and emotions.

[Statistics from the Department for Education](#) show that the North East has some of the highest rates of need, which has been increasing since the pandemic. In the 2022/23 academic year, 4.6% of students in our region had an EHCP (compared with 4.3% nationally), and 13.9% had SEN (compared with 13% nationally).

School leaders in our region have expressed concern that there is currently a reality gap between what policymakers think schools do, and what schools actually deliver. The support schools offer children and young people has developed dramatically over the past decade, but especially during and after the pandemic. However, this increased offer has not been met with increased funding, expertise, or resources.

The rise in students with SEND is potentially the most serious concern for schools currently, but this is an area where policy thinking is severely underdeveloped. Schools and the services that support students are working at capacity and with stretched budgets. There is not yet a clear solution to address the crisis in SEND and AP.

January 2024