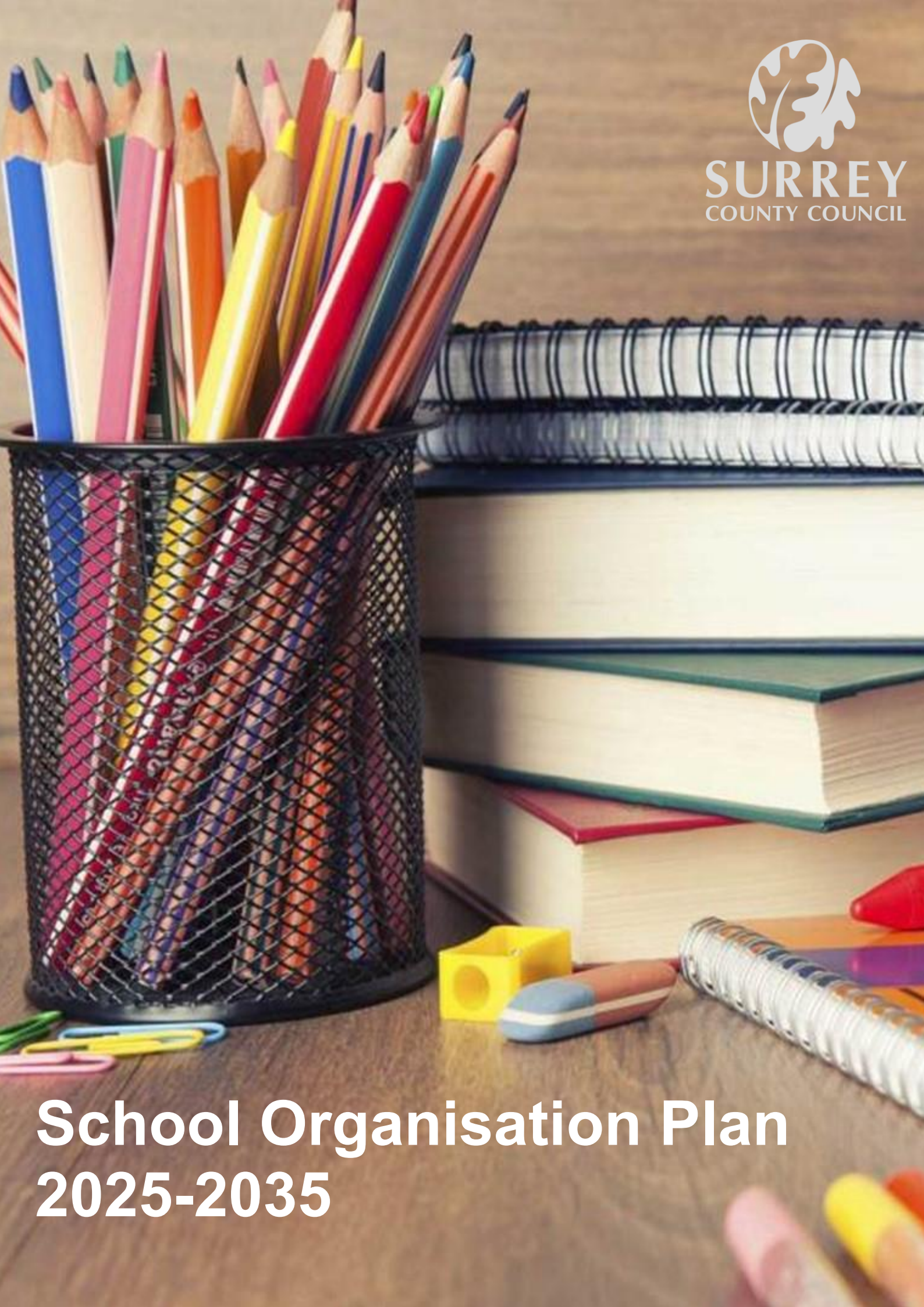




SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL



School Organisation Plan 2025-2035

Foreword

Education is the key to transforming outcomes and we want our nurseries, schools, and colleges to equip our children and young people to make good choices about their life and wellbeing. We want to ensure that children are both seen and heard and can learn in environments where they feel safe and can grow.

We envision Surrey's pupils and young people leading healthy, active, and fulfilling lives, supported by nurseries, schools, and colleges that equip them to make informed choices about their lives and wellbeing. Every child and young person should have confidence that their education will pave the way for success in life, enabling them to maximize their skills and seize employment opportunities. This vision is in harmony with the Surrey Lifetime of Learning Strategy, which emphasises equity in education, ensuring that no learner is left behind, and supports children and young people in achieving their goals

95% of Surrey's state-funded schools are currently providing a good or outstanding education for our children and young people. It is vital that the strategies and principles laid out in this plan, and which fundamentally underpin our school organisation decisions, support us in maximising the equality of opportunity and quality of provision across all different age groups, need types and quadrants of the county.

Across Surrey, we are proud of our partnerships and the outcomes that these partnerships achieve for our young people. We want to nurture our existing partnerships in an ever-shifting educational landscape, whilst working to forge new relationships so that we can continue to make school organisational decisions that create a sufficiency of school places across the county and secure educational provisions that are sustainable in the long term. We strive to discuss collaborative solutions in terms of school organisation that will help to protect our small and vulnerable schools to ensure their long-term viability and sustain the value that they bring to our school community.

We will work collegiately to plan school organisation in Surrey with our schools, academy trusts, dioceses, partners, and stakeholders to ensure that they feel supported in providing the highest quality of education for our children and young people to achieve the best long-term outcomes. We want to invest locally to support children and young people to have their needs met closer to home. We will constantly strive to do better and to tackle inequalities because diversity is important to us; we are building belonging and including everyone to help each other grow.

This plan outlines our objectives to deliver locally provided education that is accessible within communities, aiming to support every child and young person in living, learning, and growing to achieve success.



Clare Curran
Cabinet Member
Children, Families and Lifelong Learning



Julia Katherine
Director
Education and Lifelong Learning

Duties and Legislation

Under specific legislation and subsequent amendments, local authorities have statutory duties for providing school places as follows:

- Ensure sufficient schools for providing primary and secondary education to meet demand (Education Act 1996)
- Increase opportunities for parental choice (Education and Inspections Act 2006)
- Ensure fair access to educational opportunity (Education and Inspections Act 2006)
- Keep special educational provision under review, including planning, commissioning, and monitoring (Children & Families Act 2014, Section 27)
- Act as the lead strategic commissioner of education and training for 14- to 19-year-olds in provision other than schools (The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009)

In relation to the provision of education for children with special educational needs, the following legislation and statutory guidance is also applicable:

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2022)
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Vol 2 (Care Planning Placement and Case Review) and Vol 3 (Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers)
- Equality Act 2010
- Children and Families Act (2014)
- SEND Code of Practice: 0-25 Years (2015)
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations (2014)
- Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions (2017)
- The Mental Capacity Act Code of Practice: Protecting the vulnerable (2005)

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 increased the strategic role of local authorities as champions of pupils and parents, and a duty to act as commissioner of school places, rather than the sole provider. The main legislation governing school organisational changes is found in sections 7-32 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, as amended by the Education Act 2011.

In addition, the Department for Education has also issued the following:

- Opening and Closing Maintained Schools (October 2024).
- Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools (March 2025).
- Making significant changes to an open academy and closure by mutual agreements (both October 2024).
- The Free School Presumption— Departmental advice for local authorities and new school proposers (May 2024).

Under Surrey County Council's scheme of delegation, decisions relating to school organisation within the remit of the council are delegated to the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, except in the case of opening or closing schools, where the Leader of the Council makes the final decision.

As the role of the local authority has evolved to being a strategic commissioner of a mixed school system, the Council wishes to work closely with all schools in Surrey, irrespective of their school status.

However, we recognise that schools, Governing Bodies, Diocesan Authorities, Academy Trusts, the Regional Director (RD) on behalf of the Secretary of State and the Department for Education (DfE) all have collective duties and roles to play in planning, providing, and funding school places.

Pupil Place Planning Principles

As the statutory and strategic commissioner of educational provision, effective pupil place planning is an essential process that enables the council to work with schools and stakeholders to commission and create high quality school places. To deliver this strategic role in an open and transparent way, a set of clear school organisation principles underpin our approach.

- To undertake a robust and comprehensive approach to forecasting the number of children and young people requiring school places in mainstream, specialist, and other provision
- To fulfil the requirement to meet the need for school places ensuring sufficient places for Surrey residents who require them and maximising the options for parents
- That all school organisational changes should promote the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) into mainstream settings
- To consider the challenges and actions that may need to be taken to ensure sustainability of existing small local schools. [Sustainability Strategy and Federation Policy](#) (strategy to be reviewed for the 2025-2026 academic year)
- Typically, Published Admissions Numbers (PANs) will be in multiples of 30, and school provision is generally co-educational
- Where new schools are needed, primary schools should be at least two forms of entry (420 places) and secondary schools should be four forms of entry (600 places) or larger
- New primary schools should provide from Reception year to Year 6. Pre-school provision should be included if a need for this is identified
- New secondary schools should provide from Year 7 to Year 11, and if a need is identified, sixth form provision should be included
- To promote and strengthen local links between schools that would benefit the schools and the community
- Latent or vacant capacity in neighbouring areas should be used to meet demand, where these schools are within a reasonable distance
- For those children whose additional needs cannot possibly be met in a mainstream setting, even with the benefit of additional specialist resources, to ensure there are sufficient state-maintained specialist school places locally for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- To utilise maintained provision as the preferred option where it is providing good outcomes for children and representing value for money. Non-maintained and specialist independent sector will only be utilised if there is no maintained setting that is appropriate to meet needs available
- The provision of state maintained Alternative Provision will be available to serve pupils, parents/carers, and schools on a local basis through the provision of planned short-term educational placements. To be flexible in providing school buildings that do not create future surplus places but safeguard a sufficiency of places
- Decision making processes on proposals should consider factors that are inextricably linked with school organisation, such as the admissions processes, parental preferences, school size, published admission numbers and school transport.

Pupil Place Planning Context

The National Context

Nationally, the pattern of demand for pupil places in England is changing. The population attending primary and nursery schools peaked in 2019 and the figures have been dropping since then. This is primarily due to the continued reductions in the birth numbers since 2013, although there was a larger drop in the national population in 2021 which may have been connected to the pandemic. The primary population is expected to continue to decrease until the end of the projection period. The secondary school population is projected to increase until 2027 before then slowly decreasing throughout the rest of the projection period.

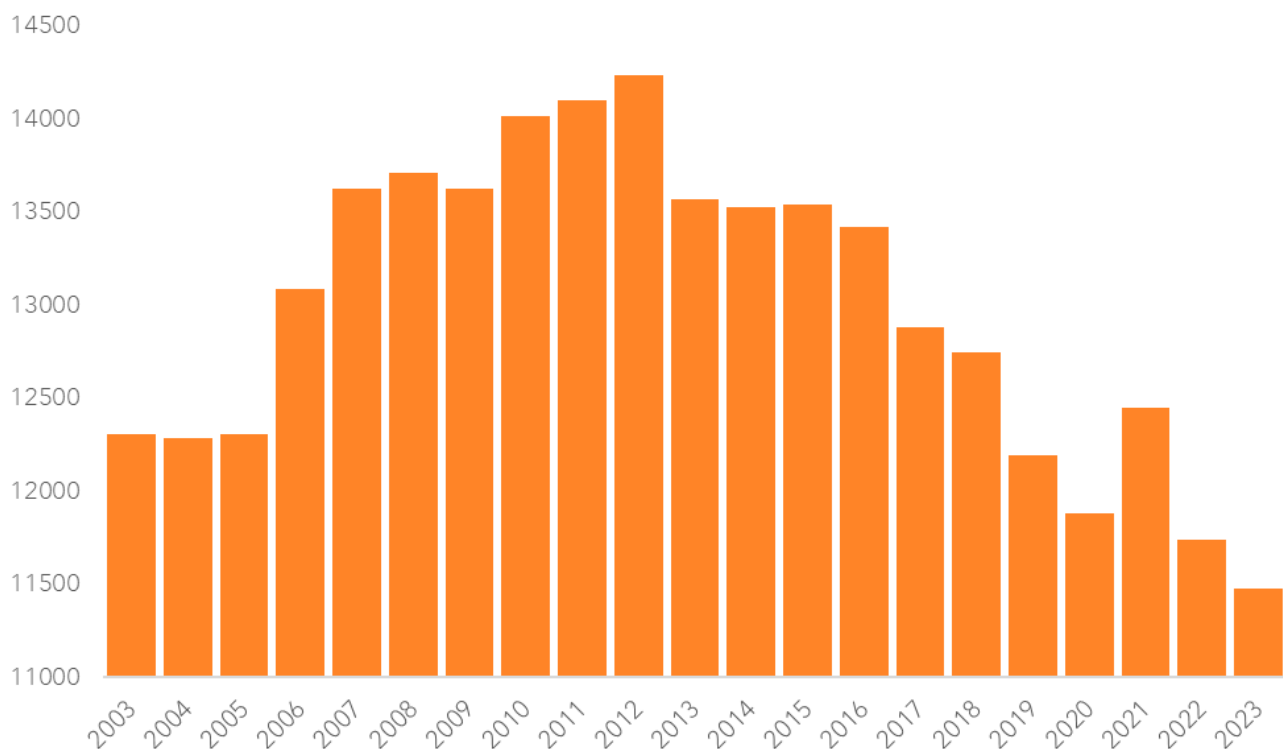
At a national level, the population in specialist schools has been increasing and is projected to peak in the short term. As the smaller cohorts of pupils from lower birth rate years make their way through educational phases, there may be a decrease in demand in line with the declines in population.

The number of children in alternative provision schools fell substantially in 2021 and 2022 as the pandemic reduced the opportunities to refer children. Figures rose by 4.9% in academic year 2024-25 and are now similar to pre-pandemic levels.

Surrey Context

In Surrey, the pattern of demand for pupil places has largely been reflective of the birth rate, alongside migration and housing trends.

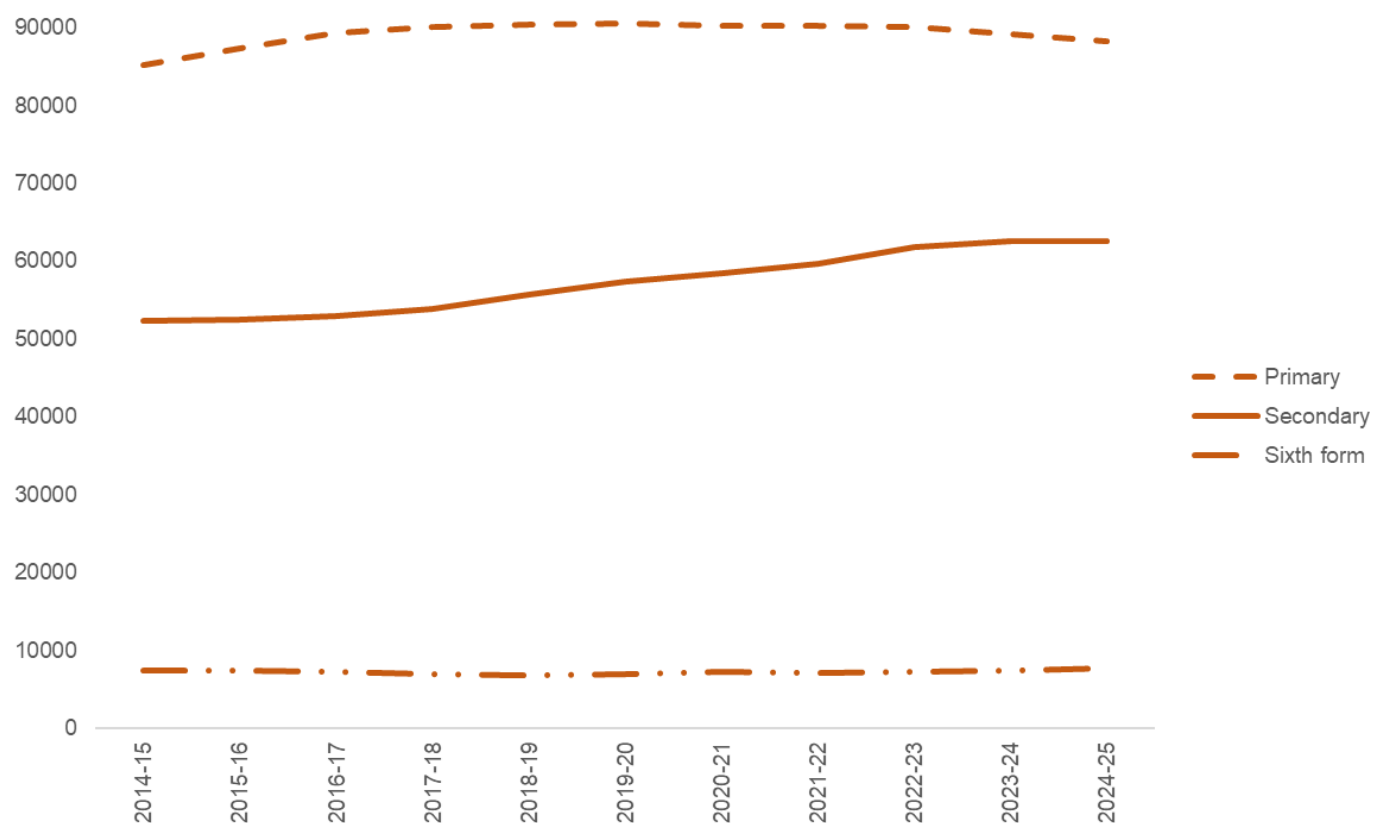
Births in Surrey 2003-2023



Birth trends in Surrey have largely followed the national trend; the county experienced an increase in births up to 2012 with growth of 22% in that time, followed by a significant birth decline in 2013. The number of births in Surrey has continued to decline since and in 2023 the birth rate was the lowest in the county since the 1980s, with a decline of 2763 children, or 19% from the peak in 2012.

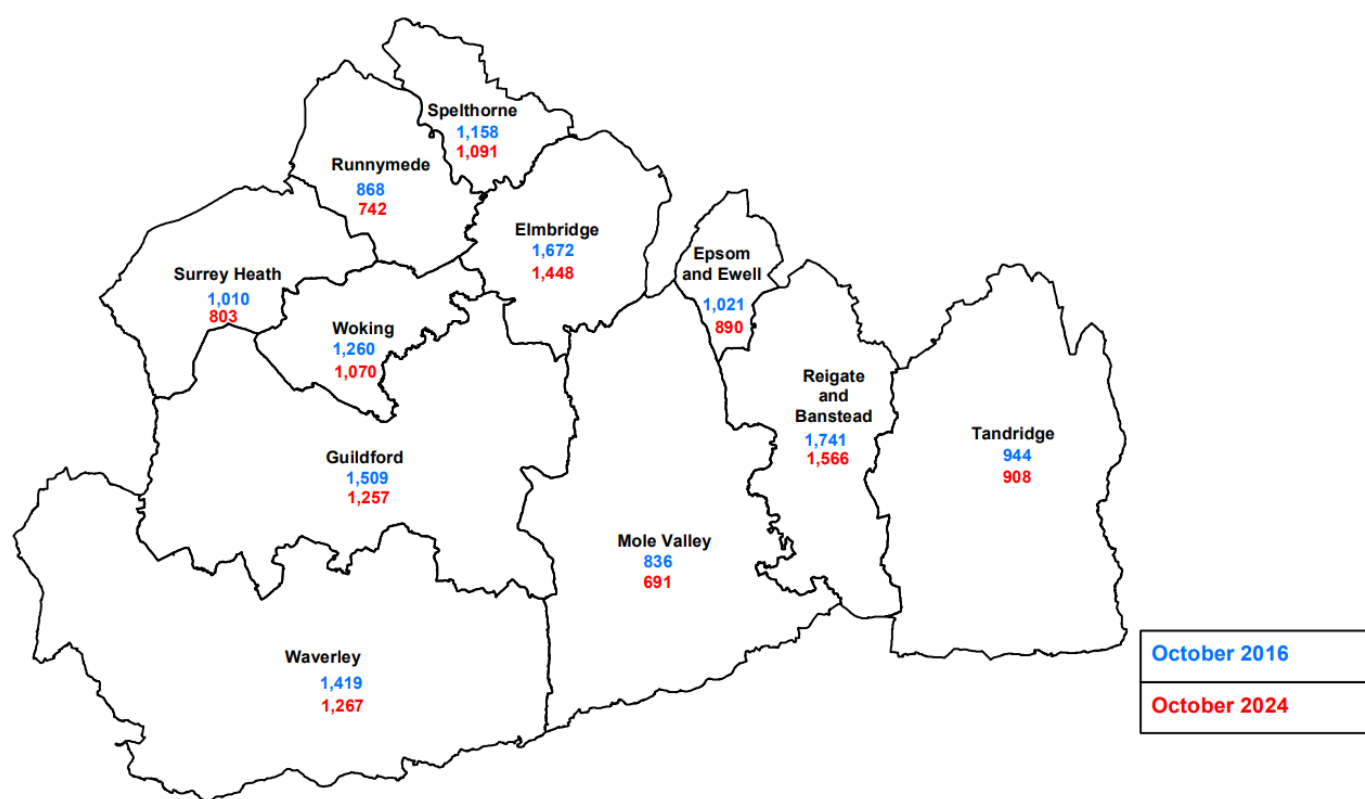
Population of Surrey's state-maintained schools

Source: January school census 2015-2025



The decline in birth rate means that Surrey has seen a fall in the number of pupils in primary education in the county, with year groups Reception to Year 2 being the most significantly affected. At the height of Surrey's pupil population in October 2016, there were 13,438 children who had just started in Reception classes at Surrey primary phase schools. By October 2024, this number had fallen to 11,735 children, which is a decrease of 1,703 or 12.7% - equivalent to 56 fewer classes.

Map illustrating the number of primary aged pupils by borough as of the October 2016 and October 2024 School Census



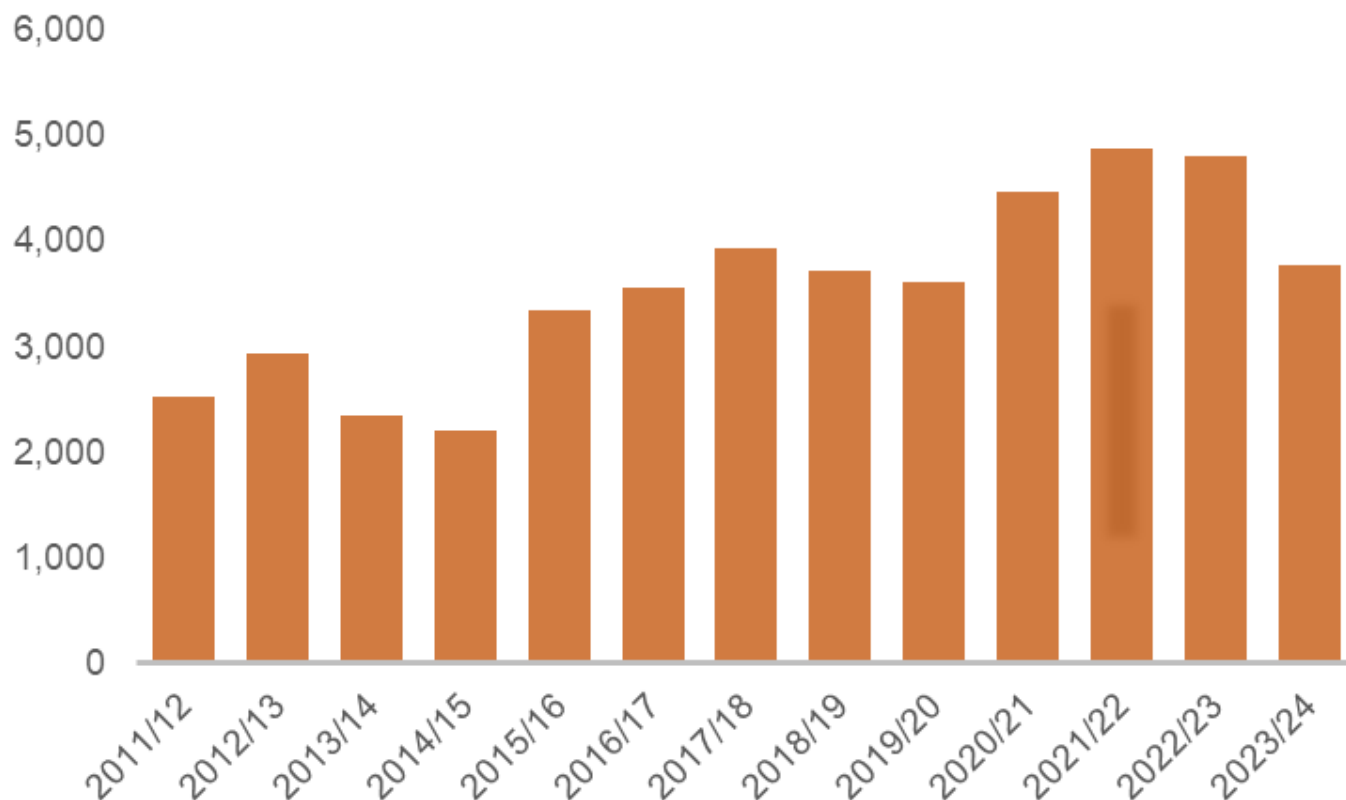
Any growth in the number of primary pupils over the next three to four years is expected to be generated by additional pupils created from new housing, with underlying demographic trends remaining generally static.

However, the secondary sector continues to see increasing numbers of pupils as the larger primary cohorts from the birth peak are now in secondary education. However, this is expected to fall over the next five years as the impact of the lower birth rate makes its way into secondary schools. Again, any long-term increases in pupils are expected to come primarily from new housing.

New housing developments can result in an increase in the number of pupils that need a place at Surrey schools. Regional plans and government policies seek to increase the level of housing that the county should provide. Currently, planning permissions for housing fall within the remit of the eleven district and borough councils within Surrey.

To support the projecting of pupil numbers, local councils share this information with Surrey County Council by providing data on housing permissions and trajectories, which are incorporated into long term pupil place forecasts.

Number of new homes completed in Surrey



However, this may change shortly as Surrey has been selected for the first wave of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and is proposing to move to a unitary model. This will mean that, in the long term, the remit for housing planning permission will be delivered by the new unitary council, giving greater access to planning permission data for use in place planning projections. This is increasingly important because additional housing is now the primary cause of place planning pressures in Surrey and so it is a significant contributor to the place planning challenges that some areas of Surrey now face.

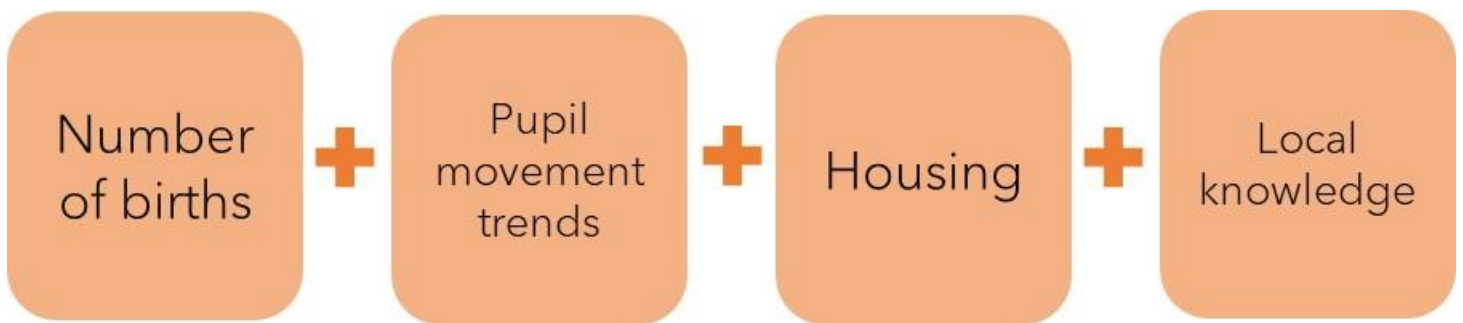
Pupil place planning in Surrey

Effective pupil place planning is an essential process that enables us to work with schools and stakeholders to commission and create high quality school places where they are needed. These fulfil the requirement to meet the basic need for school places and provide the right level of preference for parents.

We undertake a robust and comprehensive approach to pupil place planning that projects the number of children requiring school places in both mainstream and specialist schools. But looking into the future is challenging and uncertain, and whilst our pupil projections consider current and past trends, they do not attempt to predict the possible effect of any future changes until they happen, and their impact can be quantified.

Pupil projections for mainstream schools

In projections for mainstream school places, schools are split into 'planning areas' for both primary and secondary phases. Planning areas do not have geographical boundaries but are schools that are grouped to reflect local geographical barriers (such as major roads or rivers), reasonable travel distances and existing pupil movement patterns. Therefore, some planning areas may include schools that are in different boroughs or districts. It is anticipated that there may be some planning areas that will need to be reviewed and adjusted to reflect unitary changes.

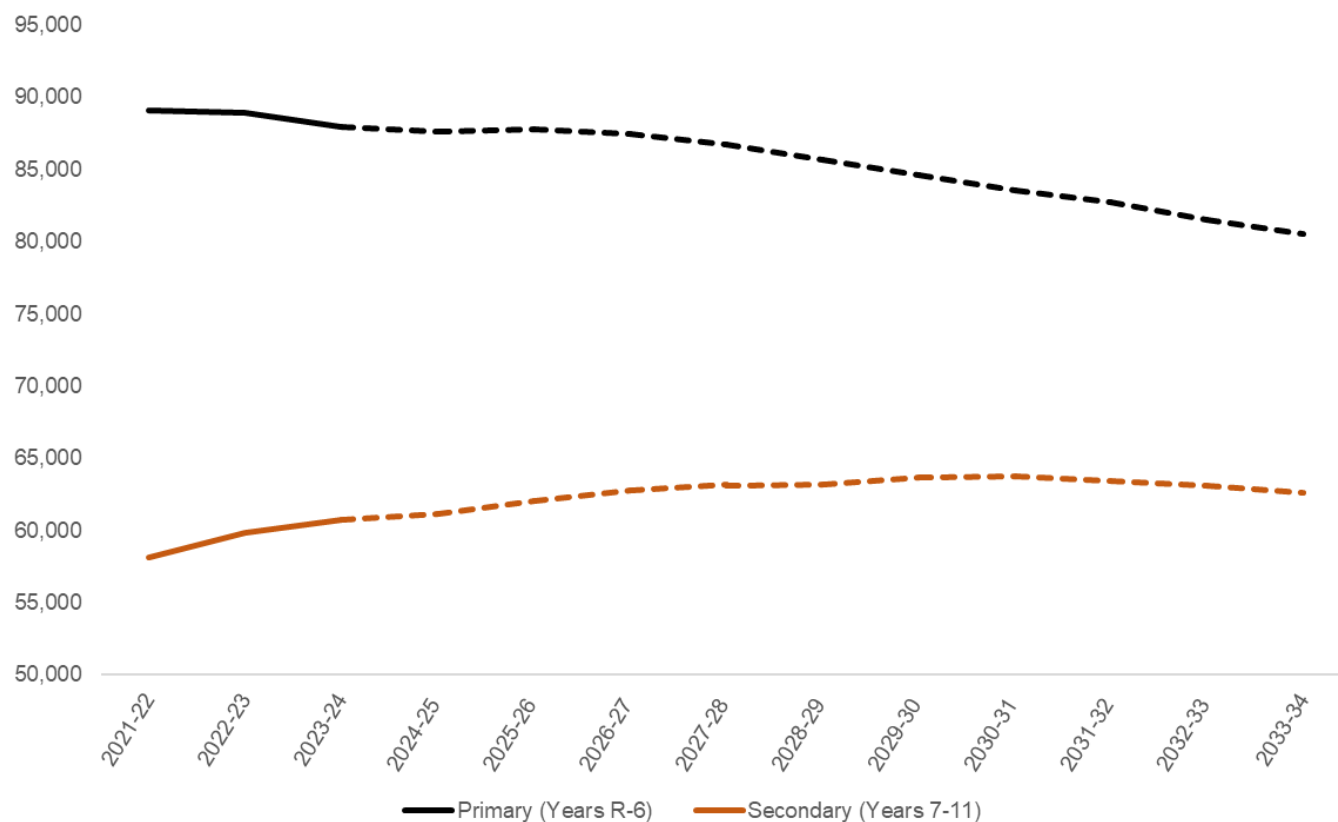


Birth and population data underpins all forecasts. Birth data is collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) by electoral ward and is published with a six-month lag (for example, data for births in 2024 is due for release in the summer of 2025). Underlying demographic trends are also considered using GP registration data and mid-year population estimates from the ONS alongside fertility rates and projections of the number of women of child-bearing age. Data on current pupils at Surrey schools is also collected from the School Census and used to track pupil movement patterns between schools, in and out of the county and between educational phases (such as primary to secondary). This allows us to establish pupil movement trends, which are then applied to population numbers going forward based on where children are resident or already attending school.

Housing permissions and trajectories are received from the district and borough councils and are combined with birth and pupil movement trends in specialised demographic forecasting software called 'Edge-ucate', which creates pupil projections in a variety of different formats. Projections are also informed by detailed local knowledge enhanced through consultation with parents and carers and good relationships with schools. The resulting pupil projections allow the council to ensure that every Surrey child who requires one is offered a school place.

Demand for mainstream school places

Projections of demand for mainstream school places



In the short term, the falling birth rate will mean the number of children requiring a primary school place is likely to have peaked in 2016/17. After that time any increases in primary school demand will largely be because of inward migration and housing, causing pockets of high demand in certain areas but a landscape of surplus places in others. Surrey's approach to school planning must therefore adapt to support small and isolated populations in its more rural areas, as well as the more concentrated urban populations.

In the secondary sector, demand is offset by approximately eleven years from birth. This means that the pressures faced in the primary sector are now transitioning into secondary schools. As such, the secondary school population is projected to increase in most areas in the short term, before stabilising and declining towards the end of the planning period. From this time, any demand pressures in secondary schools are likely to result from migration or additional housing.

Although school place demand is based on areas, it must also consider parental preference for mainstream, or school place requests for children with an EHCP, as parents/students are under no obligation to apply for a place at their nearest school. The council strives to meet parental preference wherever possible. Surrey County Council's planning is effective in this regard and for September 2025, the council has been able to offer a place at a preferred school to:

98.3% of Reception applicants

97.3% of Junior applicants

95.3% of Secondary applicants

Demand for places in mainstream schools also includes children with an Education Health and Care Plan whose needs can be met by mainstream educational provision. For September 2024, the council placed 39.9% of children open to SEND admissions in a mainstream school.

Small School Sustainability in Surrey

A small school is defined as a primary phase school with fewer than 210 pupils or a secondary school with less than 600 pupils. Small schools in Surrey can be grouped into three broad categories:

Small but full and thriving – these are schools that have an overall number of places that is fewer than 210 or 600 pupils, but where all places are full, the quality of education is at least good, and the school has a balanced budget.

Small with falling pupil numbers - these are schools that have an overall number of places that is fewer than 210 or 600 pupils, and where the number of pupils on roll is falling, occupancy is less than 90% and there are also challenges with leadership, standard and/or budgets.

Large but with falling pupil numbers – these are school whose overall number of places is higher than 210 or 600, but where the number of pupils on roll at those schools has fallen below 210 or 600. Schools in this group may also be experiencing challenges with leadership, standards and/or budgets.

Across our Surrey maintained school, we currently have:

17 schools that are small but are full and thriving

25 schools that are small and have falling pupil numbers

26 schools that are large but with falling pupil numbers

Schools receive money from central government based on the number of pupils they have on their roll. This means that schools with a high number of vacant places have less money for staff, resources, equipment, extracurricular activities, to pay bills and to carry out maintenance work.

While Surrey schools are recognised for their high performance and excellent results, the fall in the number of children has meant a higher number of surplus primary school places and the subsequent reduced funding from central government has meant that our small schools are facing difficult challenges.

The council has a responsibility to protect the high-quality education that Surrey is known for and to ensure it is financially sustainable. Therefore, we are committed to working with schools to develop innovative solutions that work towards achieving long term sustainability for all schools.

However, we also must acknowledge the reality that in cases where the number of children remains too low and is not projected to increase, all outcomes must be considered, including that of school closure. We will work with school leaders and stakeholders to ensure that this is only proposed in cases where there are no better solutions available.

Demand for post-16 sixth form and college places

The law requires young people to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday (where they have not yet achieved a full level 3 qualification). Participation in education and training for those aged 16-18 (and up to 25 for those with an EHCP) is available in a range of forms:

- full-time study in a school, college or with a training provider; or
- full-time work or volunteering (20 hours or more) combined with part-time education or training leading to relevant regulated qualification; or
- an apprenticeship or supported internship.

Projection of demand is more complex for the post-16 age group due to the increased breadth of learner choice compared to those of statutory school age. Potential future demand is determined through analysis of population projections, provider capacity, funding allocations, travel to learn patterns and trends in participation at borough level. Availability of opportunities such as apprenticeships and supported internships are dictated by the labour market and as such can fluctuate creating unexpected pressures in other areas of provision.

The demand being seen within the secondary sector is increasing the pressure on Surrey's post-16 education and training market, further impacted by Surrey being a net importer of learners from neighbouring authorities. Demand is not uniform across the county and there will be pockets of local pressure, particularly in relation to availability of specific sector subject areas. Recent growth in demand for EHCPs is also increasing the pressure on providers offering specialist programmes designed for learners with additional needs and disabilities.

The council will work with education and training providers alongside local employers to ensure that all young people are encouraged and supported to participate in education and training leading towards sustained employment. This will require a balanced increase in places within school sixth forms and colleges as well as work-based learning opportunities which accommodate learner choice whilst also meeting skills gaps identified by local employers.

Pupil projections for specialist schools and units

In projections for specialist school places for children with Education, Health and Care Plans, Surrey uses the same basic demographic projections as for mainstream pupils and these are underpinned by the same birth, population, and housing data. Pupil movement trends are also determined in a similar way, using information from the school census alongside the council's pupil level information.

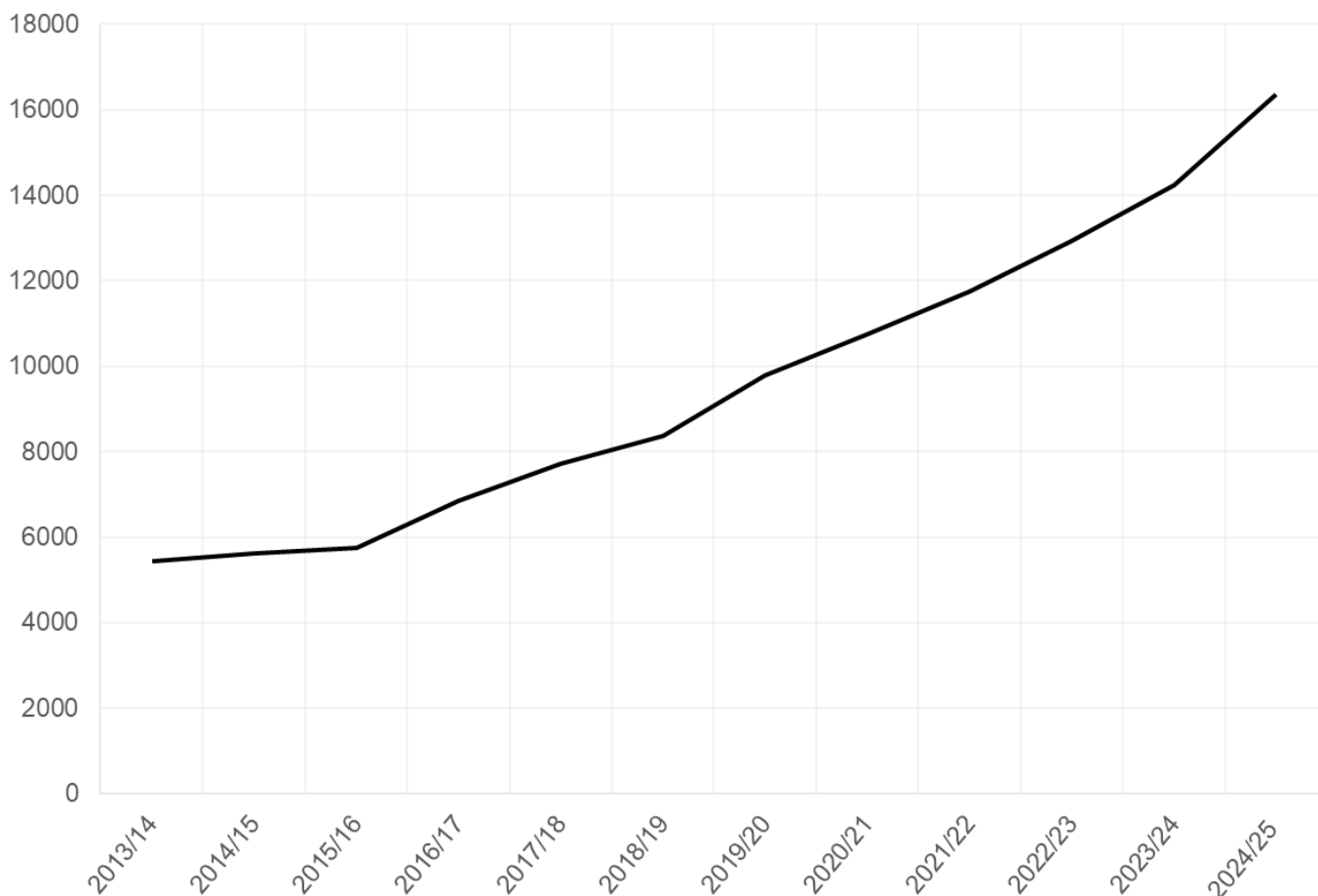
However, whilst the proportion of children with an EHCP attending a mainstream educational setting is included as part of our mainstream projections, the demand generated by those children whose needs mean they require a specialist school place is projected separately. Additional information relating to a child's special educational need, such as their primary need, must be considered, and a much broader range of educational settings, including those in the maintained, academy, non-maintained and independent sectors, are fed into these projections.

Specialist school place demand is currently analysed for each of Surrey's four quadrants (North East, North West, South East and South West) because it involves a significantly smaller number of pupils and because there is also a wider range of educational provision available. In Surrey, as is the case nationally, specialist provision does not just meet the needs of learners in the immediate surrounding area, so it has a far wider intake than most mainstream schools.

Specialist place sufficiency planning is also informed by detailed local knowledge enhanced through consultation with parents and carers and good relationships with local schools. This supports the strategic approach to evidence-informed place planning.

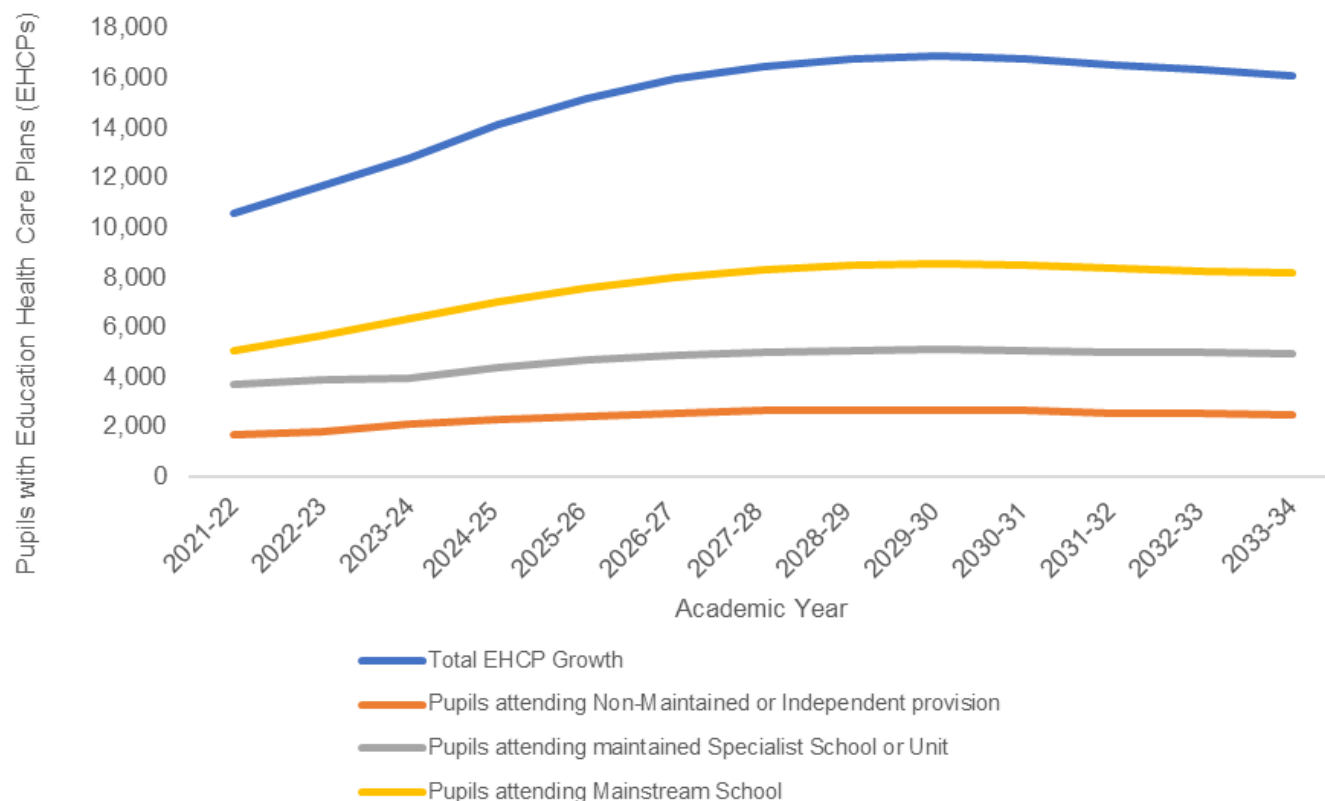
Demand for specialist school and unit places

All EHCPs for children and young people aged 0-25 maintained by Surrey



Since 2015, the number of pupils with an EHCP in Reception to Year 14 (ages 4 – 19 years) whose EHCP is maintained by Surrey and who require a specialist school place has more than doubled. Prior to this, pupils' additional needs and disabilities were identified in a Statement, and in the five years from 2010, there was growth of only 5% in the number of Surrey pupils with a Statement. The more recent increase in growth can potentially be attributed, in part, to the increase in the birth rate, the changes brought about by the Children and Families Act and the SEND Regulations in 2014, the 0-25 SEND Code of Practice in 2015, and the improvements to earlier identification of need.

Growth in EHCPs for pupils in years 0-14 and types of education provision attended



However, the need for specialist places is not uniform across the county and there are some areas where there are currently insufficient places to match the number of pupils with some SEND need types who require places. Developing and maintaining high quality specialist provision to match pupils' needs in the right areas of Surrey is therefore vital to ensure the correct availability of placements for the county's most vulnerable children and young people who have complex SEND and require specialist educational provision.

The number of maintained specialist school places in year groups Reception to Year 14 across Surrey has grown significantly by 34% over the past six years from around 3,320 in 2019 when the Capital Programme started to around 4,450 places now. Surrey County Council's [Safety Valve Agreement](#) with the Department for Education, which aims to eliminate the council's Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block (DSG HNB) deficit, includes a condition to deliver an ambitious Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Capital programme that will improve the long-term sufficiency of state-maintained specialist educational provision that meets the needs of communities across Surrey.

Between 2019 and 2023 Surrey's Cabinet approved the strategies and capital investment of c£260m for the SEND and AP Capital Programme. With this investment the programme is aiming to deliver a total of 2,440 permanent additional specialist school places across the county between 2019-2027 to create capacity for 5,760 places by 2030/31, which represents growth of 73% from 2019.