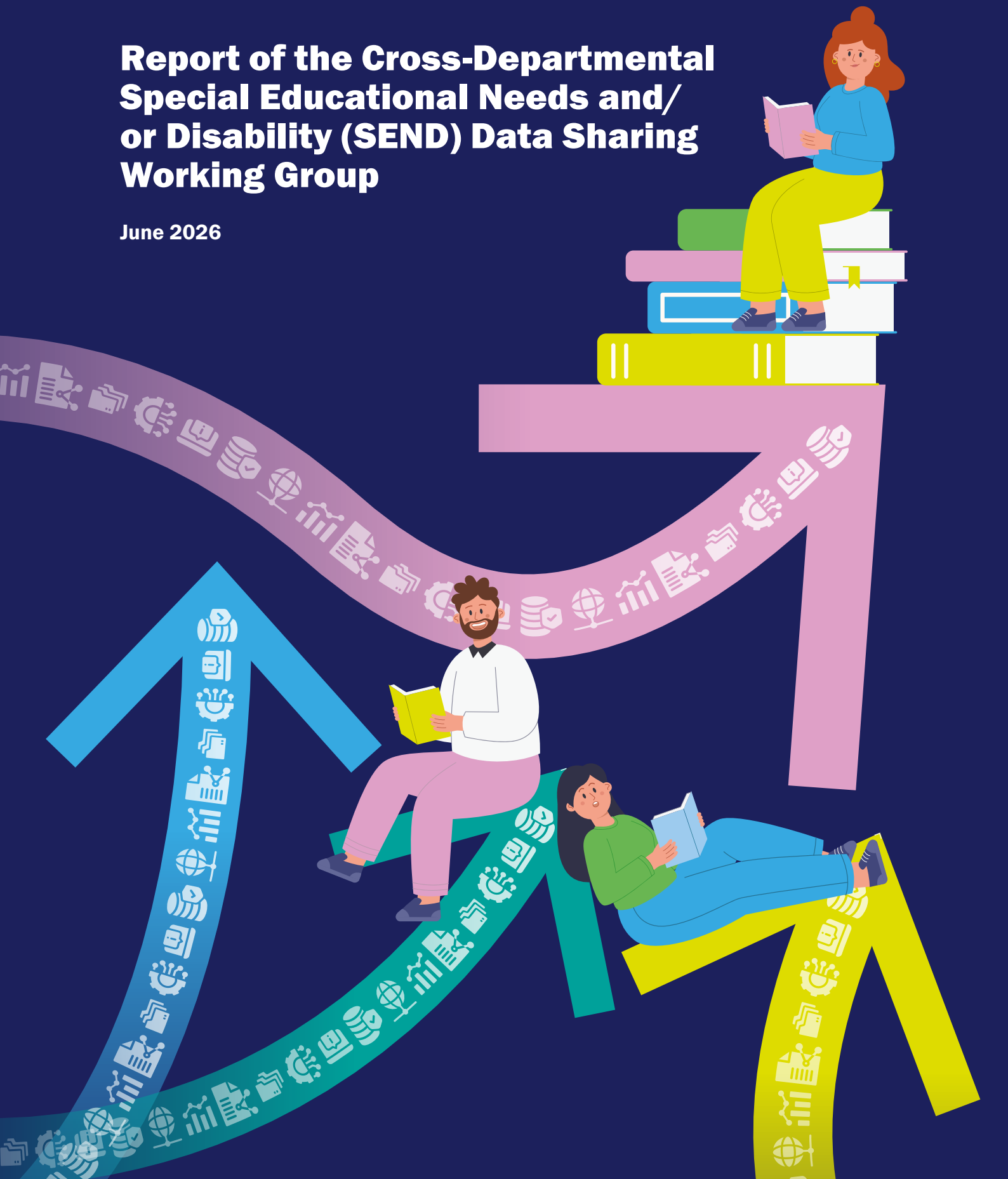
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An Roinn Geilleagair

Report of the Cross-Departmental Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) Data Sharing Working Group

June 2026



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Executive Summary

Issue

Better support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a Programme for Government priority, reinforced by proposals set out by Minister Archibald in June 2025 to reform pathways and supports for school leavers with SEN.

While significant data is collected across education, health and other partners, it is not consistently shared, linked or used to inform a whole-system view of need and outcomes. Data is held across multiple organisations and systems without common standards, interoperability or governance, limiting the ability to plan effectively or assess outcomes over time.

Approach

A cross departmental working group was established in January 2026 to consider opportunities for data sharing to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). A scoping exercise was undertaken between January and June 2026, informed by stakeholder surveys and a series of data deep-dive presentations.

This report presents the findings of that cross-departmental scoping exercise, setting out the current data landscape, opportunities for improved information sharing, and potential next steps to support more effective planning and delivery of services for children and young people with SEND.

Scope

The focus of the review is on improving post-school transitions and enabling more joined-up planning and delivery of services. Sharing data that is relevant and useful has a crucial underpinning role in this context.

Structure

This paper is structured to set out the policy context and background to the SEND data sharing work, including the Public Accounts Committee recommendation and the establishment of the cross-departmental working group. It then outlines the approach to the data scoping exercise, including stakeholder engagement and methodology. The main body presents findings by organisation, covering current data landscapes, key challenges, and identified data requirements. The paper concludes with the key findings from the scoping exercise along with annexes providing further detail and early analysis.

Summary

The scoping exercise concludes that improving SEND data sharing is both necessary and achievable but requires a coordinated cross-departmental approach. Key priorities include enabling lawful and proportionate data sharing, improving interoperability, and strengthening analytical capacity.

Additional evidence that aligns with the data scoping exercise findings is provided by the recent Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) whole-system evaluation of Further Education (FE) provision for learners with SEN/D. The final report reinforces the working group's conclusions and highlights the need to improve the consistency of data collation and analysis, information sharing across transitions, and the use of data to support system-level planning and evaluation.

Through the scoping exercise, the working group has developed a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the SEND data held across organisations and the systems used to capture it as well as potential and existing legal gateways.

As a result, stakeholders involved in the working group are now better positioned to make targeted and proportionate data requests, based on a stronger understanding of what data is held and by whom. Data sharing, however, is not an end in itself. Capacity and analytical capabilities is required within recipient organisations to effectively use the information to maximise outcomes for the cohorts in question.

The next steps set out a phased and deliverable approach aligned to existing reform activity. These include a number of short-term actions already underway or planned for early implementation, alongside longer-term considerations required to support more systemic change.

Key Findings

A summary of the findings is set out below:

1. Terminology and System Alignment
   - Terminology and system design in relation to SEND are not coterminous across education, health and post-school provision.

2. Data Types and Legal Gateways for Data Sharing
   - The nature of data held and required by stakeholders varies.
   - Operational data – Unique client-level transition data e.g. digital datasets for individual learners
   - Microdata – pseudo anonymised/de-identified data
   - Aggregate data – population data to aid planning at a Departmental & system level
   - The exercise has highlighted where there are current examples of legal gateways being used to share personal data to support SEND learners' transitions into post-school education.

3. Governance
   - The SEND data sharing working group was a time-limited group with a specific scoping focus. In view of this, a more established governance structure is required to oversee data sharing arrangements in support of SEND learner transitions in the long term.

4. Early Progress

- Early progress has been made with DE's provision of aggregate statistical data. This information will provide stakeholders with improved visibility of the volume and profile of learners transitioning from school, including indicative levels of support need, thereby supporting more effective planning and resource allocation.

5. Data Requirements and Flows

- The tables below summarise key data requirements, data owners and intended recipients identified through the scoping exercise.

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Number of pupils on SEN register (by category, stage, region, school provision, year group)	**DE**	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of pupils on medical register (from Year 10 onwards, including special schools)	**DE**	**DfE, DAERA***
School exclusions and non-attendance data for pupils with SEN	**DE**	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of SEN learners progressing into DfE funded provision, broken down by destination**	**DE**	**DfE**
SEN learner attainment and qualifications data	**DE**	**DfE, DAERA***
Data on destinations from special schools**	**DE**	**DfE, DAERA***

* By home location and location of provision where possible/appropriate.
** Note DE's School Leavers' Destination statistics do not currently include Special Schools; however, new destination codes are being introduced to support the future collection of destination data for special school leavers.

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Learner support needs by type (including interventions and reasonable adjustments)	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of SEN learners disaggregated by type of support they need	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of SEN learners disaggregated by type of support they are receiving	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of SEN and medical needs register learners broken down by year group who are in receipt of school delegated health care	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***
SEN and medical register learners broken down by SEN profile/ medical category and year group who are on a reduced timetable	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***
Data on learners with a transition plan – Year 10 SEN learners' stage 3 with/without a transition plan	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***

* By home location and location of provision where possible/appropriate.
** SEN data is held across both EA and school systems. SEN Stage 1 data is primarily held within school management systems, with EA holding data on SEN Stage 2 support delivered by Local Impact Teams and SEN learners Stage 3.

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
SEN school leavers identified as potentially eligible and planned for within adult learning disability services	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA***
SEN school leavers awaiting an adult learning disability assessment, including length of waiting times in each Trust	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA***
SEN school leavers who have been assessed for adult learning disability services, including those who have met/not met the learning disability assessment criteria (broken down by year, for e.g. last 3 years)	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of people assessed for adult learning disability services (including those meeting/not meeting criteria)	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA***
Data on young people with learning disabilities known to services	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of children assessed as having a disability including a learning disability	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA****
Data on Deprivation of Liberty by age and/or any other breakdown***	**DoH/HSC Trusts**	**DfE**
Number of SEN and medical needs register learners broken down by year group that have DoH involvement	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE**

* By home location and location of provision where possible/appropriate.
** By urban/rural or preferably SDZ/DZ where possible/appropriate.
*** Data breakdown available for under 18's (DoH) and over 18's (HSC Trusts) only

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Learners with a disability/SEN	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Information on the nature of the learner's disability/SEN	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Access requirements (e.g. physical access, sensory needs)	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Reasonable adjustments previously in place	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Exam or assessment arrangements (e.g. extra time, reader/ scribe, assistive technology)	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Technical assistance/specialist support needs	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Transition or handover information from school/ previous provider	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
EA assessments or statements	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
What support has been funded previously and by whom	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Any personal care assistance required	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
JCQ documentation completed at the previous place of study (Form 8, Form 8RF with Assessor's Certificate, Form 9, and supporting evidence)	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
SEN file alongside a Transition Plan	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Data on transition planning	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
For discrete provision, an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that transfers from school to college	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Specialised medical support requirements e.g. epilepsy/ diabetic	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Behavioural and attendance history relevant to transition planning	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Information on personal care/medical needs of young people transitioning to FE	**HSC Trusts**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Outcomes and implications for children with a statement of SEN who transition to FE (e.g. access arrangements, any classroom or additional assistance, pathways following FE, NEET information, any Allied Health Professionals involvement, cost implications)	**FE Sector**	**EA, DE**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Formal Statement	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**
EA transition plan	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**
Changes to Statements including transport information	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**
Annual Reviews for young people known to the service - a copy/ access to digital record to gain updates and if needed to provide updates	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**
Post-school pathways and destinations	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**
Transition planning for young people with complex needs	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Post-school destinations for all pupils, including children with SEN in mainstream schools	**DE**	**DAERA*** **

*** By home location where possible/appropriate.

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
YPBAS questions x SEN status (specifically Year 11/12 careers module)	**DfE**	**DE**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Post-school options available to young people and families	**DfE Careers Service**	**HSC Trusts**

The table below summarises key data requirements and intended recipients identified through the scoping exercise that currently cannot be fulfilled.

Data required	Data recipient
SEN school leavers who transition into Adult Health and Social Care, broken into day opportunities and day care**	**DfE, DAERA***
The nature of adult learning disability Health and Social Care packages secured by SEN school leavers or those aged 16-25 (e.g. number of days in day opportunities/day care)**	**DfE, DAERA***
SEN school leavers (or citizens aged 16 – 25) identified as requiring direct payments to secure support workers to enable access to further education, training, or other pathways	**DfE**
Proportion of young people with personal care needs who transition into FE colleges	**DfE**
Learning difficulties recorded within health services where they may not be classified as a disability	**DfE**
Number of young people with personal/medical care needs coming through to FE colleges	**DfE**
Data on SEN school leavers identified as requiring direct payments to secure a support worker to assist with personal or other social care needs so they can access further education or other training pathways	**DfE**
Nature/breakdown of adult health and social care provided to those who have moved from children services to adult services	**DfE**
Number of SEN learners progressing to apprenticeships (AppsNI)***	**DfE, DAERA***
Learners who have received careers guidance****	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Where a diagnosis is pending, evidence that a formal referral has been made	**FE Sector, CAFRE**

* By home location and location of provision where possible/appropriate.
** Can partially be answered but not broken down by SEN school leavers as don't differentiate between 18 y/o and 40+ y/o for example. May be answered by DE on new Special School destinations.
*** DE publishes annual School Leaver Destination statistics; however, apprenticeships (AppsNI) are not identified as a distinct destination category. School leavers who enter an apprenticeship are recorded within Training codes.
**** All school pupils should receive Careers Education when in school which includes careers information, advice and guidance. DfE Careers Service should also be able to confirm learners who have received DfE Careers Services.

Next Steps

A summary of the next steps is set out below:

1. **Formal data requests and data-sharing agreements where required should be established to support the exchange and use of available data.**
   a. DfE will explore the possibility of amending the Careers Service DSA with the Education Authority (EA) to examine the potential for the exchanged dataset also supporting DfE Skills for Life and Work and Apprenticeships programmes.
   b. DfE, the EA and the FE sector will work together to explore and develop appropriate arrangements for sharing relevant SEND learner information, where lawful and operationally feasible, to support effective transition planning and learner outcomes. Consideration will be given to the EA leading this work, with support from DfE and FE sector colleagues as appropriate.
   c. DfE will publish aggregated data received from DE to support planning and review of DfE provision. Building on this foundation, established arrangements for sharing and publishing aggregated statistical data and research will be reviewed and refined, to develop a more comprehensive evidence base to inform future post-school transitions policy and delivery.
   d. DE are committed to supporting the provision of data as needed regarding children with Special Educational Needs in keeping with agreed protocols and Data Sharing Agreements. DE is also content to work with other departments and EA colleagues to explore the feasibility of an access-controlled hub-and-spoke approach for the sharing of data with relevant partners.
   e. DoH will work through the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) to identify, coordinate and collate data from Health and Social Care Trusts in respect of agreed priority SEND-related data requirements identified through the SEND Data Sharing Scoping Exercise, including assessing data availability, consistency and mechanisms for sharing information. DoH will work with DfE, DE, the EA and other relevant partners to improve access to relevant information, where lawful and proportionate, to support policy development, service planning and improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

2. **Appropriate governance arrangements should be established to oversee implementation and ongoing data sharing.**
   An existing oversight group should be tasked with providing the necessary governance for continued data sharing. Officials will identify the most appropriate forum to fulfil this role.

3. **Longer-term opportunities for improved data sharing should be explored.**
   Notwithstanding the outcome of the NISRA Data Office's pathfinder projects (with funding confirmed for three years) consideration should be given to a centralised, access-controlled hub and spoke system where information is supplied and retrieved by relevant practitioners. Access would be controlled, providing safe access to agreed levels and types of information for those young people with SEND. This may include consideration of capabilities being developed through the Education Information Solutions (EdIS) programme where appropriate. Any future arrangements would be subject to funding, agreed governance and data sharing arrangements, and the EdIS transformation timetable.

SECTION ONE

Overview of Cross-Departmental Special Educational Needs (SEND) Data Sharing Working Group

Background

1.1 On 22 May 2025, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) made the following recommendation:

PAC Recommendation 6 – Data Sharing:

'The Committee recommends that, within the next six months, DfE establish a data sharing agreement with DE and Department of Health bodies. Once the agreement is in place, data should be shared regularly to plan for the transition of young people with SEN and/or physical disabilities into further education, training or employment, and inform the design of relevant courses.'

1.2 The recommendation was partially accepted, with DfE advising that further scoping was required to understand the scale, complexity and resource implications before committing to specific actions or timelines.

1.3 It was agreed that:

- a cross-departmental working group would be established by January 2026
- initial scoping would be completed by June 2026
- PAC would be updated following completion of this work

SEND Data Sharing Working Group

1.4 A cross-departmental SEND Data Sharing Working Group was established in January 2026 under the DE SEN Reform Operational Implementation Group to examine data sharing relating to young people with SEN and/or disabilities.

1.5 Membership includes representatives from:

- Department for the Economy (DfE)
- Department of Education (DE)
- Department of Health (DoH)/Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG)
- Data Institute/Public Health Agency (PHA)
- Department of Finance (DoF)/Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)
- Department for Communities (DfC)
- Education Authority (EA)
- Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts
- Further Education (FE) Colleges
- College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)/Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

SECTION TWO

SEND Data Scoping Exercise: Overview of Approach

2.1 A scoping exercise was undertaken between December 2025 and June 2026 to identify the SEND data currently held across organisations and understand the data requirements necessary to support effective service planning, delivery and outcomes.

Working Group Engagement

2.2 A series of working group meetings were held to develop a shared understanding of the SEND data landscape across member organisations. These sessions provided detailed overviews of the data currently held and the systems used to capture it. They also helped to identify gaps and opportunities for data sharing.

2.3 Meetings were held as follows:

- **23 February 2026**: Overview of the SEND data landscape within DfE
- **25 March 2026**: SEN data held by the EA, and FE sector processes
- **21 May 2026**: SEN data held by HSC Trusts
- **4 June 2026**: Review meeting

Stakeholder Engagement

2.4 DfE undertook targeted stakeholder engagement to inform the scoping of SEND data requirements and data sharing challenges. This engagement included structured surveys and written submissions from member organisations.

- **Survey to DfE Skills and Education Group policy branches (Annex B):**

Conducted in December 2025 (6 responses), this survey identified a wide range of SEND data requirements across business areas within DfE.

- **Survey to FE colleges and private training providers (Annex D):**

Conducted in April to May 2026 (36 responses), this survey highlighted significant challenges in accessing timely and complete SEND information to support learner planning and provision.

- **Survey to HSC Trusts (Annex E):**

Conducted in April to May 2026 (4 responses), this survey identified barriers to timely and consistent data sharing across services to support transition planning.

- **Written Submissions**

DE, EA, FE Sector and CAFRE/DAERA provided written submissions outlining the data currently available within their organisations, as well as their specific data sharing requirements and challenges.

2.5 The following sections present the findings of the data scoping exercise, structured by organisation.

SECTION THREE

DfE SEND Data Scoping Exercise

Approach

3.1 The first phase of the scoping exercise identified SEND data requirements within DfE to support education and training provision. This informed the subsequent approach to scoping data needs across the wider SEND data ecosystem.

3.2 The scoping exercise included:

- **Survey to DfE Skills and Education Group policy branches (Annex B)**

Conducted in December 2025 (6 responses), this survey identified a wide range of SEND data requirements across business areas within DfE.

- **DfE stakeholder engagement**

A series of meetings were held between January and February 2026 to gather detailed data needs across policy areas:

12 January 2026: DfE data sharing needs meeting - overview

26 January 2026: 14-19 Framework Branch

5 February 2026: Apprenticeships Delivery and Performance Branch

9 February 2026: Higher Education Student Support Branch

12 February 2026: Careers Strategy, Delivery and Performance Branch

19 February 2026: Apprenticeship Policy and Strategic Engagement Branch

20 February 2026: NISRA Data Office (SEN Pathfinder Project)

26 February 2026: Community Information Branch

26 February 2026: Director of Further Education

- **DfE reporting**

A progress report outlining key SEND data needs across DfE was issued to DfE Directors on **18 February 2026**.

Current DfE Data Landscape

- **DfE Careers Service existing microdata access**

DfE Careers Service has an established annual data sharing arrangement with the EA, enabling the transfer of a Year 10 pupil dataset into the DfE Client Information Management System (CIMS). The data is currently provided annually in October/ November and from November 2025 includes indicators for SEN, disability, and medical conditions. This enables DfE Careers Advisers to access up-to-date pupil information to support targeted guidance and effective planning for pupils with additional needs. The data exchange is for all DENI post primary schools including Special schools and SEN learners in mainstream.

- **HE Student Support Branch, DfE**

Student Support Branch's data needs are currently met through existing data sharing agreements. Data sharing agreements are in place between DfE and the EA in relation to student support applicants; and separate agreements are in place between DfE, the EA and the universities and colleges here in relation to the sharing of Needs Assessment Reports in connection with the Disabled Students' Allowance.

- **FE Sector Performance Branch, DfE**

FE Division have data sharing agreements in place with the FE colleges to allow for two-way sharing of data. The legal gateway for this is the Further Education Order NI 1997.

Key Findings from Survey

3.3 The survey identified consistent challenges in accessing and using SEND data across DfE to support effective planning, policy development and service delivery.

- **Fragmented data requirements**, with multiple business areas seeking different SEND data to support policy, planning and delivery
- **Limited access to comprehensive and linked data**, particularly across education and health systems, restricting a full understanding of learner needs and outcomes
- **Gaps in forward-planning data**, including limited visibility of learners with SEND approaching transition points, impacting financial planning and provision
- **Limited visibility of post-school pathways and outcomes**, including progression to FE, training, employment or NEET
- **Inconsistent availability of data on support needs and interventions**, such as reasonable adjustments, attendance and exclusions
- **Constraints on data sharing and integration**, with information held across separate systems and limited clarity on wider sharing arrangements
- **Operational and strategic impacts**, including reduced ability to plan provision, allocate resources and develop effective programmes and pathways

DfE Data Requirements as Identified Through Survey Responses and Stakeholder Engagement

3.4 Two categories of data requirements emerged from the scoping exercise – microdata and aggregate data - with the majority of DfE's information needs relating to aggregate data.

(i) Microdata

To aid careers planning, the DfE Careers Service identified the following microdata needs:

- Learners' most relevant overarching SEN category condition
- SEN and medical register
- Pupils' leavers destination

(ii) Aggregate data

DfE Skills and Education Group policy areas identified the need for the following data:

- Number of pupils on SEN register (by category, stage, region, school provision, year group)

- Number of pupils on medical register (from Year 10 onwards, including special schools)
- School exclusions and non-attendance data for pupils with SEN
- Number of SEN learners progressing to apprenticeships (AppsNI)
- Number of SEN learners progressing into DfE funded provision, broken down by destination
- SEN learner attainment and qualifications data
- Learner support needs by type (including interventions and reasonable adjustments)
- Number of SEN learners disaggregated by type of support they need
- Number of SEN learners disaggregated by type of support they are receiving
- Number of SEN and medical needs register learners broken down by year group who are in receipt of school delegated health care
- SEN and medical register learners broken down by SEN profile/medical category and year group who are on a reduced timetable
- Number of SEN and medical needs register learners broken down by year group that have DoH involvement
- Data held on destinations from special schools
- Data held on learners with a transition plan – Year 10 SEN learners' stage 3 with/without a transition plan
- SEN school leavers identified as potentially eligible and planned for within adult learning disability services
- SEN school leavers awaiting an adult learning disability assessment, including length of waiting times in each Trust
- SEN school leavers who have been assessed for adult learning disability services, including those who have met/not met the learning disability assessment criteria (broken down by year, for e.g. last 3 years)
- SEN school leavers who transition into Adult Health and Social Care, broken into day opportunities and day care
- The nature of adult learning disability Health and Social Care packages secured by SEN school leavers or those aged 16-25 (e.g. number of days in day opportunities/day care)
- Number of people assessed for adult learning disability services (including those meeting/not meeting criteria)
- Data on young people with learning disabilities known to services
- SEN school leavers (or citizens aged 16 – 25) identified as requiring direct payments to secure support workers to enable access to further education, training, or other pathways
- Proportion of young people with personal care needs who transition into FE colleges, noting the issue of young people with support needs who are not captured through education processes, and how their needs might be anticipated in advance
- How learning difficulties are recorded within health services where they may not be classified as a disability
- Number of young people with personal/medical care needs coming through to FE colleges
- Data on SEN school leavers identified as requiring direct payments to secure a support worker to assist with personal or other social care needs so they can access further education or other training pathways
- Number of children assessed as having a disability including a learning disability
- Nature/breakdown of adult health and social care provided to those who have moved from children services to adult services

- Data on Deprivation of Liberty by age and/or any other breakdown, and what the process is by which Trusts alert others to ensure safeguarding protocols are met

3.5 A formal request for aggregate SEND data was submitted to DE. Further detail on the data requested and DE's response is set out in Annex C with resulting analysis in Annex I.

Progress

3.6 During the DfE scoping exercise the following areas of progress were noted in relation to microdata in use by DfE's Careers Service and official statistics from DE's School Census, Young Persons' Behaviours and Attitudes Survey and potential for research from the forthcoming Longitudinal Education Outcomes NI research database.

- **Enhancements to Careers data systems (CIMS)**

From 2025/26, additional data indicators have been incorporated into CIMS:

- Disability Code
- SEN Stage
- SEN Code
- Pupil Medical Flag
- Medical Code

These enhancements support delivery of the Careers Action Plan 2025–2028, including improved identification and targeting of those most in need, particularly learners with SEN.

In addition, CIMS is also currently being updated to enable the manual recording of pupils in Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools. It is proposed that this data will also be included in the annual EA Year 10 data transfer in November 2026, pending amendment to the DSA.

The location of learners subject to Exceptional Teaching Arrangements, is also manually updated on CIMS by Careers, through partnership working and information sharing with Schools and EOTAS (Education Otherwise Than At School) provision.

- **Careers Service improved destination tracking**

Careers Service currently undertakes an annual exercise to determine the first/immediate destination of Year 12 leavers, including those not in education, employment or training (NEET), with ongoing careers support prioritised and provided up to age 18. A Destinations report for internal use is produced in January for the previous academic year.

Careers Service currently produce Year 12 destination data for Special Schools. It is planned to enhance the destination report by SEN, disability and medical data for the 2025/26 Year 12 cohort i.e. January 2027 destination report.

Subject to costs and enhancements to Careers CIMS System, Careers Service are exploring the potential of extending their SEN destinations exercise to include Years 13–15 school leavers. Such a development would provide data on all post school destination pathways followed by all SEN learners (including health destinations) across all leavers age groups, which will be particularly helpful as learners in special schools typically remain in school beyond year 12 and up until age 19.

- **DE School Census**

As mentioned previously, following the identification of a broad range of SEN-related data requirements from DfE policy areas, a formal request for aggregate data was submitted to DE as set out in Annex C.

Initial analysis is presented in Annex I. Work is ongoing to further develop this analysis, including the creation of an accessible dashboard to ensure the information can be more easily interpreted and effectively used to support policy development. Feedback will be sought on the extent to which this additional data meets DfE's aggregate data requirements for planning post school transitions, and the analysis/dashboard will be reviewed and refined as necessary in collaboration with the DE statistical team.

- **FE College Enrolments**

A new question, 'Did you have a Statement of Special Educational Needs in school?', will be asked of FE college students enrolling from the 2026/27 academic year onwards, the data for which will be included in the end-of-year Consolidated Data Return (CDR) extract, used to produce statistics on FE Sector Activity, including Essential Skills, Traineeships and Apprenticeships.

- **Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS)**

The 2025 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS) was carried out in 90 schools (47% of all post-primary schools) across Northern Ireland between September 2025 and February 2026. Data on a wide range of topics including future intentions (post 16 and beyond), personal wellbeing and school experience, were collected from 8,875 pupils in Years 8 to 12 via a short online survey carried out by NISRA staff in schools.

Following stakeholder engagement, which highlighted an identified need, SEN data was collected for the first time this year and was collected directly from schools prior to completion of the survey. This data will enable departments to compare behaviours and experiences of pupils with and without SEN.

NISRA intend to work with DE to identify whether SEN details can be made available from the School Census data to reduce the burden on schools and enhance the quality and consistency of the data collected.

- **Research from the Longitudinal Education Outcomes for Northern Ireland (LEO NI) database**

The existing Education Outcomes Linkage (EOL) dataset links several datasets held by DE; the School Census (including Attendance data), the School Leavers Survey and the Exams database. However, it does not include pupils attending special schools, limiting the completeness of analysis for young people with SEN.

The Longitudinal Education Outcomes for Northern Ireland (LEO NI) research databasebrings together the DE schools' data with data on apprenticeships, further and higher education data. It further enhances the EOL dataset, by extending coverage to include pupils in special schools. This will enable more comprehensive analysis of learner pathways and outcomes for this cohort.

A UK Research and Innovation Policy Fellow will be undertaking research using this database to examine education pathways and outcomes for learners with SEN, helping to strengthen the evidence base and supporting policy development in this area.

- **EPIC Futures NI**

A Stranmillis study Transform: Exploring Pathways and Barriers for Young People with Disabilities, funded by EPIC Futures NI, set out to explore the challenges and issues facing young people with special educational needs (SEN) as they transition from full-time school education into further education, training, employment or day-care provision (https://www.stran.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Purdy-et-al-2026-Transform-Project.pdf)

The research included an interactive mapping tool detailing existing post school opportunities for special school leavers across training, further education and day care/day opportunities provision. It is the first time such a mapping exercise has been completed and DfE officials are working with Stranmillis to identify ways to sustain and build on this tool as a valuable information resource for policy makers, service users and providers.

- **ETI evaluation of FE provision for SEN/D learners**

DfE recently commissioned the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to undertake a whole-system evaluation of FE provision for learners with SEN/D. The final report reinforces the working group's conclusions and highlights the need to improve the consistency of data collation and analysis, information sharing across transitions, and the use of data to support system-level planning and evaluation.

Summary of DfE Scoping Exercise

3.7 The engagement within DfE has highlighted that the primary requirement across DfE is for aggregate data rather than microdata to support policy development, planning and service delivery. The aggregate data is required on a timely basis.

3.8 Positive progress has been made during the lifetime of the working group through the provision of aggregate statistical data from DE as well as the integration of SEN variables in ongoing statistical collections and research. Both these developments will aid future understanding of population trends.

SECTION FOUR

Further Education (FE) Sector SEND Data Scoping Exercise

Approach

4.1 The scoping exercise included:

- **Survey to FE colleges and private training providers (Annex D)**

Conducted in April to May 2026 (36 responses), this survey highlighted significant challenges in accessing timely and complete SEND information to support learner planning and provision.

- **Written Submission**

A representative from the FE sector provided a written submission on current SEN data sharing challenges and priority data requirements, identified through engagement with the FE Learning Support Sector Working Group.

Current Data Landscape

- **Key Findings from Survey**

The survey identified consistent and systemic challenges in how SEND information is shared with FE providers, limiting effective transition planning and support delivery.

- **Reliance on self-reporting**, with information largely dependent on learners and parents rather than structured sharing from schools or statutory services
- **Inconsistent and incomplete information**, with key details (e.g. access needs, prior support, transition plans) often missing, outdated or non-standardised
- **Poor timeliness**, with information frequently received too late (e.g. at or after induction) to support proactive planning, despite clear need for pre-enrolment access
- **Weak and fragmented transition processes**, particularly for learners without SEN statements, with no consistent or formalised handover arrangements
- **System and governance barriers**, including lack of a centralised data-sharing mechanism, GDPR/consent constraints, and unclear data-sharing protocols
- **Limited and inconsistent multi-agency engagement**, with variable input from schools, EA and transition services
- **Operational and learner impacts**, including delays in putting support in place, duplication of assessments, and learners starting courses without appropriate provision

FE Sector Data Requirements as Identified Through Survey Responses

4.2 The FE Sector identified the need for the following data to enable earlier more effective support and planning. The majority of data is operational in nature:

- Confirmation that a learner has a disability/SEN
- Information on the nature of the leaner's disability/SEN
- Access requirements (e.g. physical access, sensory needs)
- Reasonable adjustments previously in place
- Exam or assessment arrangements (e.g. extra time, reader/scribe, assistive technology)

- Technical assistance/specialist support needs
- Transition or handover information from school/previous provider
- Earlier access to EA assessments or statements
- Clearer guidance on what support has been funded previously and by whom
- Any personal care assistance required
- JCQ documentation completed at the previous place of study (Form 8, Form 8RF with Assessor's Certificate, Form 9, and supporting evidence)
- A full and up to date SEN file alongside a Transition Plan, providing current and meaningful information
- Confirmation that learners have received relevant, realistic careers guidance to ensure they are appropriately prepared for their chosen course
- Evidence of transition planning that supports learners to develop practical strategies to promote independence and adjustment to college life, where possible.
- For discrete provision, an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that transfers from school to college
- Stronger collaboration with EA services and schools to support effective transitions, particularly for learners with complex needs
- Where a diagnosis is pending, evidence that a formal referral has been made. In most cases, the College currently undertakes significant effort to source and clarify this information
- Specialised medical support requirements e.g. epilepsy/diabetic
- Behavioural and attendance history relevant to transition planning
- Information on personal care/medical needs of young people transitioning to FE

Written Submission from FE Sector - SEN Data Sharing Challenges and Requirements

Student Information Sharing for SEN: Challenges and Data Needs

4.3 The six Further and Higher education colleges collect student SEN and support-related information through the EA, parents/guardians, previous place of study and from students. A centralised, consent-driven, and protocol-led approach of sharing data would significantly improve transition outcomes while reducing duplication and administrative strain.

Summary of Challenges for FE Colleges

- Documentation provided from the EA is often partial (e.g. missing Transition Plans or unsigned reports). Colleges are left making decisions without full evidence or understanding of students' needs which leads to delays and repeated requests for information.
- Transition Teams are supportive but overstretched. FE colleges report inconsistent access across colleges due to staffing limitations.
- Inter-agency collaboration between schools, EA, and colleges is inconsistent and the differences in processes and responsibilities create inefficiencies.
- Schools provide SEN and supporting documentation (e.g. Form 8) at varying times and standards. This creates gaps in planning support before enrolment and can result in the over assessment of students when information is not provided.
- The EA hold additional information which would be relevant to effective transition, i.e. behaviour management, attendance concerns etc. Often colleges are not aware of historical issues until they begin to present at FE.

Recommended Improvements/Data Needs

I. Centralised Digital Transition Pack

Develop a standardised digital "transition pack" for each student, including:

- SEN statement or profile
- Transition Plan
- Form 8/Form 8RF/Form 9 (with AAO where applicable)
- Diagnostic and supporting evidence
- Behavioural/attendance concerns

This would ensure that students are not over-assessed at FE Colleges, and colleges are receiving the information required from one source. Develop formal protocols between schools, EA, and colleges covering:

- Data sharing
- Roles and responsibilities
- Timelines

II. Consent Managed at School/EA Level

Schools and the EA should ensure consent is obtained and recorded before transition which would remove delays caused by re-seeking permissions later.

III. Remove Duplication for Disabled Students' Allowance Applications

If the EA already holds verified diagnostic evidence, students should not need to resubmit it for Disabled Students' Allowance which is also managed by the EA.

IV. Structured Annual Transition Meetings

Consideration to inviting FE colleagues to transition meetings, particularly for individuals with complex needs. This would enable colleges to review incoming students, identify support needs early and address concerns early.

Summary of FE Sector SEND Data Scoping Exercise

The scoping exercise has shown the primary need is for operational data.

The findings highlight systemic issues in the timeliness, completeness and coordination of data sharing between schools, the EA, and FE providers, as well as opportunities for improvement through more structured, standardised and collaborative approaches.

SEND data sharing - From School to Next Steps

SCHOOL
LEARNING AND SUPPORT

→

TRANSITION
ASSESSMENTS, PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING

→

POST-SCHOOL DESTINATIONS

Information across different systems

Schools
Learning and support

Health and social care
Health and support needs

Careers services
Guidance and aspirations

Education Authority
Assessments and transition planning



Possible destinations

Further education

Employment

Health and social care services

Training

Higher education

SECTION FIVE

Department of Education (DE) SEND Data Scoping Exercise

5.1 DE provided the following written submission summarising input provided by DE policy teams regarding current and emerging data requirements to support improved outcomes for children and young people with SEN. It sets out key priorities in relation to understanding post-school destinations, alongside planned developments in data sharing arrangements with DAERA and DfE.

Written Submission from DE - SEN Data Requirements and Data Sharing Arrangements

- **Post-School Destinations and Data Sharing Arrangements**

Relevant policy teams in DE were consulted on their SEN data needs. The primary data need identified is to understand post-school destinations for all pupils, including children with SEN. The destination will often be FE, but also will include Higher Education, employment, and placements in the health care system, such as day opportunities.

DE intends to share pupil data at age 16 with DAERA and DfE, following the passage of the Post-Compulsory School Age Bill through the Assembly, with data also shared to DE by DAERA and DfE. This will primarily support understanding of FE opportunities in colleges and CAFRE and is expected to involve linked individual-level data to produce aggregated outputs.

- **Existing Data Sharing Arrangements with Health (Children in Care)**

DE have an existing Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) in place with DoH in relation to children in care. HSC Trusts complete a survey using pupil identifiers provided by schools, which enables DE to link health information to its education datasets, including the census, attendance data and school leavers survey, before returning the linked information to DoH.

SECTION SIX

Education Authority (EA) SEND Data Scoping Exercise

6.1 EA provided a data deep-dive presentation to the working group, alongside the following written submission on current SEN data systems, key limitations and data sharing considerations. Together, these outlined how SEN information is distributed across multiple systems and highlighted opportunities to improve data sharing, particularly to support transition planning and understanding of post-school outcomes.

Written Submission from EA - SEN Data Systems, Limitations and Data Sharing Requirements

- **Overview of SEN data and systems in EA**

The EA holds SEN-related data across a number of systems reflecting different stages of the SEN journey and the organisational responsibilities involved. There is no single end-to-end SEN system at present. The systems are primarily used for operational purposes: to support children and young people at different stages of the SEN code of practice.

SEN stage 1: At school level, SEN data supporting early and school-based interventions is primarily held within school management systems. Most schools currently use SIMS, with a transition to Bromcom underway. These systems are owned and managed by schools and hold pupil records relevant to stage 1 SEN support.

SEN stage 2: A new support model was introduced last year with Stage 2 support now provided by SEND Local Impact Teams (LITs). These teams use a dedicated LITs management information system for referrals and case management.

SEN stage 3: Statutory SEN processes including assessments, placements and annual reviews are now managed through EA Connect. Placements and annual reviews have been live since December 2023, with statutory assessment functionality introduced in January 2026. Referrals for statutory assessment made prior to January 2026 are managed on MRI Education (a back-office case management system expected to be replaced in due course).

Additional SEN-related services such as SEN Medical, Sensory Services and Educational Psychology also hold data relevant to children and young people with SEN. A wider set of services including Education Welfare, EOTAS, safeguarding-related functions and youth services may also capture information relating to children and young people with SEN. The level of systemisation varies across these service areas, with some continuing to rely on local Excel or SharePoint solutions, and some using MRI Education.

Caveats and limitations
Given this landscape, SEN data is distributed across multiple systems with differing levels of maturity, ownership and standardisation. Data definitions, completeness and timeliness can vary depending on the system and service area. The information presented to the working group was therefore high level and indicative rather than a comprehensive catalogue. This reflects the purpose of the discussion, which was to provide contextual understanding rather than a definitive statement of scope or completeness.

- **Integration between systems**

At present, there is limited automated integration between SEN systems. Data is most commonly shared through extracts or manual processes rather than real-time interfaces. Whilst there are clear opportunities to improve integration over time, this remains dependent on wider system changes, data standards and agreed governance arrangements.

- **Forward planning and change**

EA is currently managing several major system transitions, including the move by schools from SIMS to Bromcom, the phased implementation of EA Connect, and the replacement of MRI Education. These changes are being progressed on different timelines and remain subject to business priorities, capacity and funding.

Alongside this, work has commenced on developing a SEN data catalogue to improve transparency and understanding of what data is held where. This catalogue is explicitly a work in progress and will continue to evolve as systems change.

Any future data migration or consolidation activity will be aligned to business priorities, capacity and funding, and taken forward on a phased basis. Benefits anticipated from progressive improvement include improved consistency of SEN information, better analytical insight for evidence-based decision making, and reduced reliance on manual data handling.

- **Indicative timelines**

It would not be appropriate at this stage to set out definitive timelines for a full transition to a fully integrated SEN data environment. Current timelines relate to specific system implementations rather than an overall end-state. Longer-term improvements will be incremental and subject to ongoing funding, governance and cross-agency collaboration.

- **Data sharing considerations**

There are clear opportunities for improved data sharing, including with Departments, Colleges, Health Trusts, and services supporting transitions and post-school outcomes for children and young people with SEN. Any expansion of data sharing would need to operate within existing legal, governance and information assurance frameworks and be progressed on an agreed, case-by-case basis. This remains an area of active interest rather than a set of defined commitments at this point.

- **EA's data sharing requests**

It would be useful to know the outcomes and implications for children with a statement of SEN who transition to FE given it's a continuum of support.

For example:

- access arrangements
- any classroom or additional assistance
- pathways following FE
- Not in Employment, Education or Training info
- if they know Allied Health Professionals involvement
- cost implications

to allow us to ascertain what the difference is, if any, and how we could be working together on this prior to a young person leaving school.

Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS):
It is our understanding that DE don't hold post transition information. There is occasional work completed with EA Post 14 Transition services for pupils with SEN transferring from statutory education, although this is not regionalised across EOTAS centres.

To better capture the impact of the work of EOTAS for those pupils that transition to Further Education, it would be useful for EA to receive quarterly attendance returns/pupil engagement updates to help validate the educational readiness/reintegration work EOTAS progresses. Often feedback on pupils' successes occur incidentally, usually 3 -5 years later when past pupils return to tell staff what they are doing/have achieved and appreciate better what the service was trying to help them achieve. It would be useful for EA to know how many former EOTAS pupils go on to achieve post 16 qualifications as that is currently not known.

SECTION SEVEN

Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts SEND Data Scoping Exercise

Approach

7.1 The scoping exercise included:

- **Survey to HSC Trusts (Annex E)**

Conducted in April to May 2026 (4 responses), this survey identified barriers to timely and consistent data sharing across services to support transition planning.

- **Written Submission**

A representative from the HSC Trusts provided a written submission on the transitions database and the statutory functions report.

Current Data Landscape

- **Existing data sharing arrangements between DoH and DE**

Community Information Branch in DoH has two data sharing arrangements currently in place:

- They receive aggregate data on autism in the school cohort from DE broken down by Section 75 variables – age, sex, urban/rural, year, SEN stage. It is considered a good indicator of prevalence of autism; and
- They receive client level data on attainment from DE for children in care only.

- **Key Findings from Survey**

The DoH survey, although with limited responses, identified consistent challenges in data sharing to support transitions for young people with SEND.

- **Inconsistent and ad hoc data sharing**, often dependent on individual schools; in some cases, little or no routine information is received
- **Poor timeliness**, with data not shared early enough to support proactive planning
- **Limited health involvement**, particularly in Annual Reviews and transition processes, reducing multidisciplinary input
- **Variable quality and completeness of information**, with no standardised regional dataset
- **System and governance barriers**, including non-integrated IT systems, GDPR concerns, and reliance on manual or formal requests
- **Late transition planning**, with insufficient visibility of post-school pathways

HSC Trusts Data Requirements as Identified Through Survey Responses

7.2 HSC Trusts identified the need for the following data:

- Consistent and timely sharing of the formal Statement
- EA transition plan
- Changes to Statements including transport information
- Annual Reviews for young people known to the service - a copy/access to digital record to gain updates and if needed to provide updates

Earlier, clearer and more consistent access to transition-related information would significantly strengthen outcomes for young people with SEND, particularly:

- Earlier identification of post-school pathways and placements to enable coordinated planning for equipment, environmental adaptations and workforce preparation
- Improved visibility of post-school options available to young people and families
- Earlier multi-agency transition planning for young people with complex needs, aligned to NICE guidance recommending initiation of planning from age 13–14. This would support a preventative, anticipatory and collaborative approach across education, health and social care

Written Submission – Transitions Database and Statutory Functions

- **Health Trusts Transition Database**

This is a database shared by Children's Disability Services and Adult Disability Services which contains data relating to those young people known to a Trust who have SEN and meet the criteria of a Learning Disability. The database does not include all those young people in schools with a SEN who have learning difficulties or other special educational needs who are not known to the Trust. Also, it does not include all those young people with SEN who do meet the criteria of Learning Disability but chose not to be referred to social services.

- **Statutory Functions Report**

Adult Disability Servies report on the number of adults who attend day care and day opportunities. This is a point in time report at 31st March each year and is not a live document.

Projections of those likely to attend FE colleges could be developed using the Children's Services database subject to Trust representatives attending transitions meetings in school and populating the database.

A significant barrier has been identified in terms of transport. Families often request full-time day-care placements due to the provision of transport by Health Trusts. More support provided around transport and travel training may result in more young people availing of further education and developing their independence. A reality on the ground is that families do not wish to use their social security benefits on potentially expensive means of transport such as a taxi.

Future Data Landscape

- **Encompass System for Health Data**

The Encompass system is the regional digital health and care record for Northern Ireland. It is designed to provide a single, integrated electronic record across Health and Social Care services, thereby improving the availability, consistency and sharing of patient information.

The continued rollout of Encompass is expected to improve the availability and consistency of health and social care data across services. This includes relevant information relating to children's and adult services, where captured within Health and Social Care systems, and presents opportunities to strengthen data sharing and support more coordinated planning across organisations.

SECTION EIGHT

CAFRE and DAERA SEND Data Scoping Exercise

CAFRE Data Requirements

8.1 CAFRE's requirements as an education provider in relation to SEN data sharing are consistent with those of the wider Further Education (FE) sector and primarily focus on operational data.

8.2 CAFRE identified the need for the following data to enable earlier more effective support and planning:

- Confirmation that a learner has a disability/SEN
- Information on the nature of the learner's disability/SEN
- Access requirements (e.g. physical access, sensory needs)
- Reasonable adjustments previously in place
- Exam or assessment arrangements (e.g. extra time, reader/scribe, assistive technology)
- Technical assistance/specialist support needs
- Transition or handover information from school/previous provider
- Earlier access to EA assessments or statements
- Clearer guidance on what support has been funded previously and by whom
- Any personal care assistance required
- JCQ documentation completed at the previous place of study (Form 8, Form 8RF with Assessor's Certificate, Form 9, and supporting evidence)
- A full and up to date SEN file alongside a Transition Plan, providing current and meaningful information
- Confirmation that learners have received relevant, realistic careers guidance to ensure they are appropriately prepared for their chosen course
- Evidence of transition planning that supports learners to develop practical strategies to promote independence and adjustment to college life, where possible.
- For discrete provision, an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that transfers from school to college
- Stronger collaboration with EA services and schools to support effective transitions, particularly for learners with complex needs
- Where a diagnosis is pending, evidence that a formal referral has been made. In most cases, the College currently undertakes significant effort to source and clarify this information
- Specialised medical support requirements e.g. epilepsy/diabetic
- Behavioural and attendance history relevant to transition planning
- Information on personal care/medical needs of young people transitioning to FE

DAERA Data Requirements

8.3 From the rural perspective, DAERA are keen to explore opportunities for the following variables/metrics. With home or provision location included in any data, urban/rural or Data Zone (DZ)/Super Data Zone (SDZ) geographies could then be reported.

8.4 By home location and location of provision where possible/appropriate:

- Number of pupils on SEN register (by category, stage, region, school provision, year group)
- Number of pupils on medical register (from Year 10 onwards, including special schools)
- School exclusions and non-attendance data for pupils with SEN
- Number of SEN learners progressing to Apprenticeships (AppsNI)
- SEN learner attainment and qualifications data
- Learner support needs by type (including interventions and reasonable adjustments)
- SEN school leavers identified as potentially eligible and planned for within adult learning disability services
- SEN school leavers awaiting an adult learning disability assessment, including length of waiting times in each Trust
- SEN school leavers who have been assessed for adult learning disability services, including those who have met/not met the learning disability assessment criteria (broken down by year, for e.g. last 3 years)
- SEN school leavers who transition into Adult Health and Social Care – ideally broken into day opportunities and day care
- The nature of adult learning disability Health and Social Care packages secured by SEN school leavers or those aged 16-25 (e.g. number of days in day opportunities/ day care)
- Number of people assessed for adult learning disability services (including those meeting/not meeting criteria)
- Data on young people with learning disabilities known to services

By home location:

- Post-school destinations for all pupils, including children with SEN

By urban/rural or preferably SDZ/DZ

- Number of children assessed as having a disability including a learning disability.

Written Submission from CAFRE and DAERA - SEN Provision, Data Needs and Rural Considerations

8.5 The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) and the Rural Affairs Division within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) provided the following written submission outlining key issues relating to SEN provision, including increasing demand, the growing complexity of need, and the challenges experienced in rural areas. It also highlighted opportunities to improve data sharing and strengthen cross-departmental collaboration to support better outcomes for young people with SEN and/or disabilities.

- **CAFRE: SEN Provision, Learner Needs and Data Sharing**

CAFRE is aware of the Post-School SEN Project led by the Department for the Economy, which is exploring the provision, options, and barriers faced by young people with SEN and disabilities as they transition from school.

Across both Higher Education and Further Education delivered at CAFRE, there has been a sustained increase in the number of learners presenting with SEN requirements and disabilities. In addition to rising numbers, the complexity and variety of needs among these learners have also grown significantly. The availability of Student Support Services, as well as the support required for effective pedagogy delivery, is kept under continual review to ensure that learners and staff have access to the appropriate services, technologies, and skills they need. Future learner demographics in CAFRE's FE/HE (including work-based and apprenticeship) delivery is expected to align with trends in NI post school settings and UK Landex Colleges and CAFRE will continue monitoring SEN prevalence and complexity of need within the cohort of learners enrolled.

The DAERA Knowledge Framework directs CAFRE to provide curriculum qualification-based learning commencing at Level 2. All CAFRE programmes have an academic entry requirement and only after academic entry requirements are met are support requirements progressed.

CAFRE recognises the importance of smooth transitions and progression into all levels of FE and HE provision. Ease of access to learner SEN details previously held in a school or FE setting would certainty aid transition.

- **DAERA Rural Affairs Division: Rural SEN Challenges and Data Considerations Feedback - Review Report (June 2025)**

DAERA officials would like to note that the Review of Post-School Education, Skills and Training Provision, and associated legislative protections, for Young People with Special Educational Needs includes the following key points concerning rural provision:

- Page 23 - Options/Choices - Notes regional imbalance in availability of different types of provision resulting in insufficient places to meet demand and limited options especially for those with physical or sensory disability disabilities (e.g. wheelchair user in rural area with two training options - hairdressing or car mechanics).
- Page 26 – Transport – Accessibility and affordability is also a huge issue, especially in rural areas where options are constrained, and wheelchair accessible vehicles are scarce.

Whilst these are the only references in the report made in terms of rural, DAERA would note that much of the anecdotal feedback the department receives from key voluntary and community sector stakeholders, would indicate that the lived experience of those young people with SEN shows that all the challenges cited in this report, not just the two above, which specifically reference rural, are exacerbated and felt hardest in rural communities throughout NI, particularly those furthest away from cities and main towns.

Page 13 – 1.30 notes that Higher Education Support is targeted at groups which include those from areas of high deprivation, those with a disability (physical, sensory or learning), adult returners and those who have experience of the care system. Young males from low socioeconomic backgrounds are monitored. HE providers are also free to provide support to any under-represented groups they wish, over and above the target groups identified by the Department.

DAERA would like to note that in relation to targeting areas of high deprivation statistics, rural stakeholders have throughout the co-design process to inform 'Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041' raised significant concerns about the NIMDM and there is a need for greater understanding across government which recognises the diversity of rural areas and that pockets of deprivation within rural communities are lost when scaled up to a DEA or council level.

DAERA officials are continuing to explore and consider learning from academics in Queens University Belfast for example who have been doing work in this area to develop a more granular understanding of deprivation in rural areas.

DAERA officials are also engaging with NISRA to explore any opportunities to review the 2017 Multiple Deprivation Measures.

DAERA Rural Data Hub

DAERA launched the Rural Data Hub in December 2025, Rural Data Hub | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in efforts to integrate existing NISRA Census 2021 data into a single, accessible interface, tailored for rural analysis. Its key feature is the ability to create bespoke area profiles at lower geographies by selecting data zones and generating interactive charts with rural/urban comparisons, which can be downloaded for ease of interpretation.

DAERA would ask DfE officials to consider how data could be presented on an urban/rural basis, in line with the Programme for Government Wellbeing Indicators, to assess need and monitor impact on rural communities throughout NI.

Understanding Rural

In line with the emerging rural policy, namely 'Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041' (Public Consultation on Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041 | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs) which launched for public consultation on 9 March 2026, indicating that collective efforts across the Executive are needed to better understand the needs and opportunities within rural communities across NI.

DAERA officials would also like to offer the opportunity for DfE officials to utilise the DAERA Forum for Rural Organisations, which includes representatives from several regional and sub-regional rural focused voluntary and community sector groups, to help inform the scoping and design work.

DAERA Social Farming

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) 2016 Framework aims and objectives have been considered in the design and planning of the Social Farming Support Services for Northern Ireland and subsequent Social Farming Capital Grant Schemes.

The Social Farming Support Service has been delivered by the Rural Support Charity and funded by DAERA through the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework.

The Social Farming Support Service is responsible for preparing Social Farms to achieve their Social Farming Standards which are crucial in ensuring the farms are a safe environment for participants and in a position to receive referrals from stakeholders, predominantly from the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts.

Through the administration of the Social Farming Support Service, Rural Support liaise with the Health and Social Care Trusts on all matters relating to Social Farming, most notably in relation to health and safety requirements that are required to be in place on the farm before referrals from the Trusts can be made.

Since 2016, the Social Farming Capital Grant Scheme has provided funding totalling over £234,000 to 59 successful applicants (including repeat applicants). This is an average of £3,980 per farm in previous iterations of the Scheme.

In the 2025-2026 Social Farming Capital Grant Scheme, the maximum capital grant rate available was increased from £4,999 to £10,000 to provide further assistance to eligible farms and to counteract construction inflationary costs.

The value of Grant Aid in the Letters of Offer issued under the 2025-2026 Social Farming Capital Grant Scheme amounts to £120,131.40 which was issued to 15 successful recipients. This is an average of £8,008.76 in Grant Aid to each recipient of the Scheme.

Consideration about future DAERA social farming related schemes are ongoing.

- **Existing DSA**

There is an existing data sharing agreement with the EA, DfE and CAFRE in relation to Needs Assessments in connection with the Disabled Students' Allowance within HE. This may provide a useful starting point for considering future data sharing arrangements. It would be beneficial to review the scope, legal basis, and operational effectiveness of this agreement to determine whether it could be adapted to support the wider SEN-related data-sharing requirements under consideration, including potential inclusion of local HSC Trusts.

- **Future Involvement**

CAFRE would welcome continued engagement and involvement in ongoing discussions with DfE and the FE sector as the next phase of this work develops.

SECTION NINE

Key Findings

Terminology and System Alignment

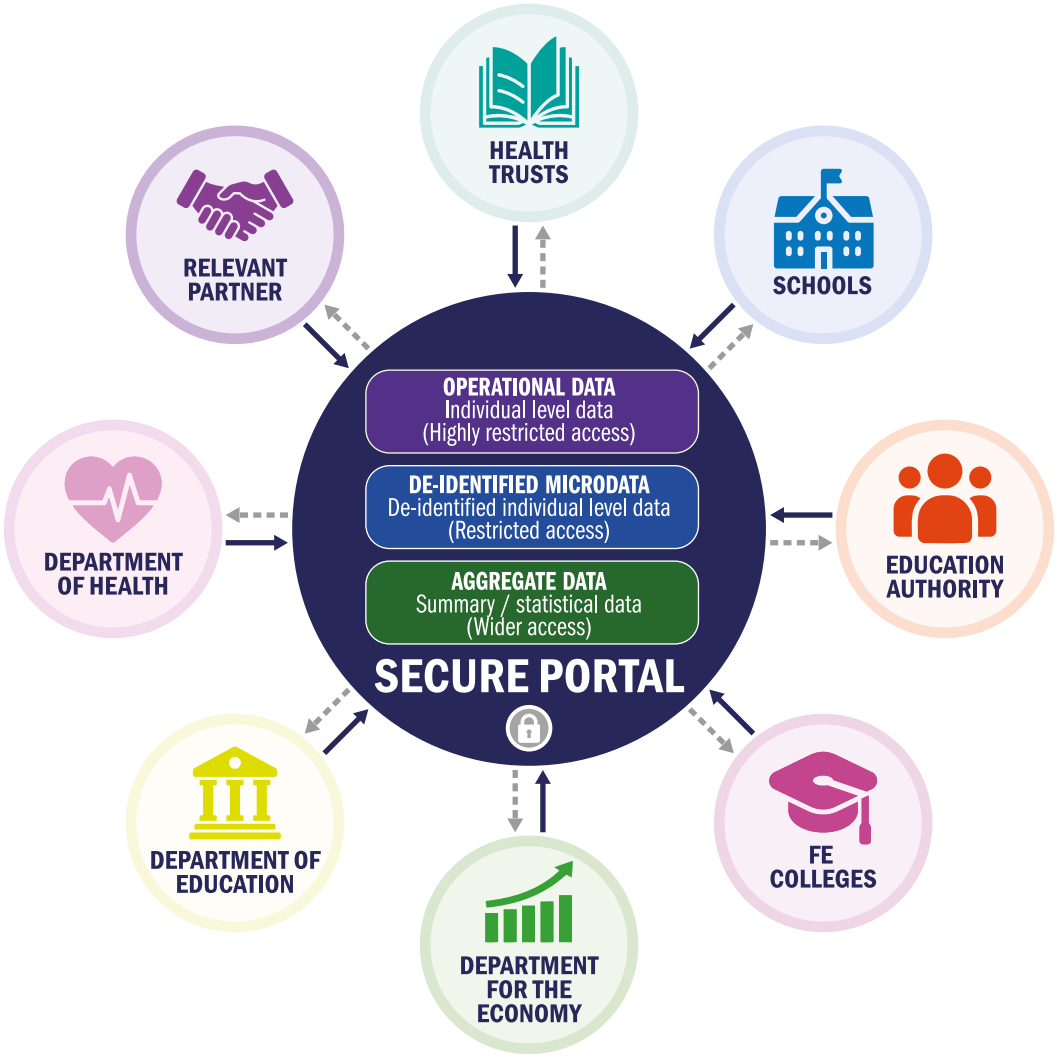
9.1 Terminology and system design in relation to SEND are not coterminous across education, health and post-school provision. The term *Special Educational Needs* applies specifically within the statutory school system, where it is underpinned by legislation, defined assessment and statementing processes and relates to supports needed to enable access to education. Beyond school, support is delivered through different legislative frameworks, eligibility criteria and definitions, including learning disability and broader disability categories, which do not align directly with SEN. This reflects a system where support continues through different mechanisms and departmental responsibilities, rather than through a single, continuous framework.

9.2 The cross-departmental data sharing scoping work has therefore sought to identify and analyse differences in data definitions, types, flows and legislative gateways, and assess how these impact on data sharing and continuity. This early analysis highlights several aspects for further consideration, including system alignment, system interoperability, and the potential role of common or unique identifiers, which may be required to enable data to be linked and shared effectively across organisational boundaries. Addressing these issues will support more effective data sharing despite differing terminology and organisational remits, and contribute to a more coherent, whole-system approach to SEND transitions.

NISRA's Data Office received confirmation of funding via the Public Transformation Fund in May 2026. The pathfinder project will test the feasibility and value of linking health and education data to support earlier intervention, better planning and improved long-term outcomes.

The work plans to bring together partners across NISRA, Department of Education, Department of Health, Department for the Economy, Education Authority, Public Health Agency and Health Trusts to test joint working and improve data use. This medium-term project is intended to help shape the future data sharing landscape.

9.3 A hub and spoke system, where information is supplied and retrieved by relevant practitioners, is one type of technical solution that should be considered to underpin a whole-system approach to SEND transitions. In such a system, access would be controlled, providing safe access to agreed levels and types of information on young people with SEND based on agreed governance and data sharing. The digital pack described by the Further Education Sector provides one example of the type of information required. Any assessment of the feasibility of a hub and spoke model or similar technical solutions should also consider the capabilities being developed through the Education Information Solutions (EdIS) programme.



Access to information is controlled according to role, purpose and data sensitivity.

Data Types and Legal Gateways for Data Sharing

9.4 The scoping highlighted requirements for different levels of data.

- **Operational data – Unique client-level transition data e.g. digital datasets for individual learners**
- **Microdata – pseudo anonymised/de-identified data**
- **Aggregate data – population data to aid planning at a Departmental & whole system level**

9.5 While not all data shares require a data sharing agreement, any shares of record level information will require a data sharing agreement with appropriate governance and privacy protections in place, as well as a lawful basis for the sharing and processing of the data.

9.6 Under the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, a public authority or organisation carrying out a specific task in the public interest may process personal data under the 'public task' basis providing the processing is necessary to carry out a statutory function. As data relating to an individual's health conditions are special category data under UK GDPR an additional substantial public interest condition must be satisfied to carry out the processing lawfully.

9.7 The exercise has highlighted where there are current examples of legal gateways being used to share personal data to support SEND learners' transitions into post-school education.

Case Study

The sharing of SEND information between the Education Authority and DfE's Careers Service to ensure the effective provision of careers advice to young people is one such example. The legal basis for the data share includes the Education Act (NI) 2014, The Employment and Training (NI) Act 1950, the Employment (NI) Act 2016 alongside the 'legitimate interests' and 'public task' lawful bases under Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR. The processing of special category data relating to SEN and disability has a lawful basis in UK GDPR/Data Protection Act as a matter of 'substantial public interest' and meets the conditions outlined in Articles 6 and 9(2)(g) of the GDPR, and Schedule 1, paragraphs 6(1) and 6(2)(b) of the Data Protection Act 2018 for processing special category data.

9.8 The introduction of the Data Use and Access Act 2025 coincided with a legislative consent motion in Northern Ireland which brought into force section 35 of the Digital Economy Act (DEA) 2017. The powers under section 35 of the Act allow specified persons, for example a public authority or person providing a service to a public authority, to disclose information related to a specified objective related to the improvement or targeting of a public service provided to individuals and to improve the wellbeing of individuals and/or households. The disclosure of information under the DEA 2017 is subject to a code of practice. However, it is important to note that these powers currently do not cover the sharing of Health and Social Care information.

9.9 While specific arrangements relating to the operation of these powers in Northern Ireland are yet to be finalised, there is clear potential for this legislation to enable data sharing between various organisations, such as DE, DfE and Education providers, to better target support for those young people with SEN during transitions into post-school education.

9.10 It is worth noting that under the current SEN Code of Practice (1998) together with the Supplement to the Code of Practice (2005) there are already statutory requirements on data sharing in place, including the requirement that health information is shared between HSC Trusts and the EA and that the EA should seek the consent of young people with statements, who are moving on to FE or training, to share relevant information with FE Colleges and training providers.

9.11 Looking ahead, the SEND Act (NI) 2016 and the new Code of Practice and SEN regulations (once commenced) are expected to place a much stronger emphasis on joined-up working, earlier planning, and better continuity across education, health and social care, particularly at transition points.

9.12 The Children's Services Cooperation Act (NI) 2015 is highly relevant to SEN and disability data sharing as it establishes a statutory duty on public bodies (Children's Authorities) to co-operate in order to improve the wellbeing of children and young people. While the Act does not explicitly mandate data sharing, it provides a clear legislative framework and enabling environment for it, as effective cooperation across education, health and other services inherently depends on the timely and appropriate sharing of information. This is particularly critical for children and young people with SEN or disabilities, whose needs typically span multiple services and require coordinated planning and delivery. The Act also enables the sharing of resources and joint working, reinforcing the expectation of more integrated, cross-departmental approaches. Importantly, reviews of the Act's operation have identified data sharing as a key area where improved collaboration is required, highlighting both its centrality to achieving better outcomes and the fact that its full potential has yet to be realised in practice. In this context, the Act can be seen as an important policy lever supporting more joined-up, data-informed approaches to SEN and disability services.

Governance

9.13 The SEND data sharing working group was a time-limited group with a specific scoping focus. In view of this, a more established governance structure is required to oversee data sharing arrangements in support of SEND learner transitions in the long term. It is beyond the remit of this working group to determine how this should be done but we have made some initial suggestions below that could be explored further.

9.14 One possible option would be for the work of the group to be continued under the oversight of the Department of Education chaired SEN Reform Central Strategic Committee. As the senior cross-departmental governance forum established under the DE SEN Reform Agenda and Delivery Plan, it may be well placed to provide strategic oversight of SEND data sharing. With representation from key departments including Education, Health and Economy, as well as the Education Authority, it provides an established mechanism to oversee data sharing challenges, dependencies and risks. Its remit to approve high-level policy decisions, ensure cross-departmental alignment, and monitor reform impact should enable the Committee to drive a coherent, system-wide approach to improving the consistency, accessibility and use of SEND data to support planning, transitions and outcomes for learners.

9.15 An alternative option would be to utilise the Joint Health and Education Oversight Group (JHEOG) with an expanded membership and remit to include DfE representatives and transition issues.

9.16 A further possibility would be for oversight to sit with the cross-departmental Children and Young People's Strategy Monitoring and Reporting Board. While this Board provides strategic direction and supports collaboration across a range of policy areas affecting children and young people, its broader remit and focus on high-level strategy delivery may limit its effectiveness in providing the sustained, operational oversight required to progress detailed data sharing arrangements specifically in support of SEND transitions.

Early Progress

9.17 Early progress has been made with DE's provision of aggregate statistical data. This information will help to inform sectors on the number of children transitioning from school and their needs. Examples of analysis are provided in Annex I.

9.18 Positive progress has also been made through DE's SEN transformation programme which is already delivering, alongside more recent Public Transformation Fund initiatives including the NISRA Data Office and DfE's Transitions and Pathways Project, which are at an earlier stage of development. Together, these initiatives reflect a shared focus on improving outcomes for learners who face challenges or barriers during their education journey.

Data Requirements and Flows

9.19 The tables below summarise key data requirements, data owners and intended recipients identified through the scoping exercise.

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Number of pupils on SEN register (by category, stage, region, school provision, year group)	**DE**	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of pupils on medical register (from Year 10 onwards, including special schools)	**DE**	**DfE, DAERA***
School exclusions and non-attendance data for pupils with SEN	**DE**	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of SEN learners progressing into DfE funded provision, broken down by destination**	**DE**	**DfE**
SEN learner attainment and qualifications data	**DE**	**DfE, DAERA***
Data on destinations from special schools**	**DE**	**DfE, DAERA***

* By home location and location of provision where possible/appropriate.
** Note DE's School Leavers' Destination statistics do not currently include Special Schools; however, new destination codes are being introduced to support the future collection of destination data for special school leavers.

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Learner support needs by type (including interventions and reasonable adjustments)	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of SEN learners disaggregated by type of support they need	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of SEN learners disaggregated by type of support they are receiving	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of SEN and medical needs register learners broken down by year group who are in receipt of school delegated health care	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
SEN and medical register learners broken down by SEN profile/ medical category and year group who are on a reduced timetable	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***
Data on learners with a transition plan – Year 10 SEN learners' stage 3 with/without a transition plan	**EA****	**DfE, DAERA***

* By home location and location of provision where possible/appropriate.
** SEN data is held across both EA and school systems. SEN Stage 1 data is primarily held within school management systems, with EA holding data on SEN Stage 2 support delivered by Local Impact Teams and SEN learners Stage 3.

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
SEN school leavers identified as potentially eligible and planned for within adult learning disability services	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA***
SEN school leavers awaiting an adult learning disability assessment, including length of waiting times in each Trust	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA***
SEN school leavers who have been assessed for adult learning disability services, including those who have met/not met the learning disability assessment criteria (broken down by year, for e.g. last 3 years)	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of people assessed for adult learning disability services (including those meeting/not meeting criteria)	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA***
Data on young people with learning disabilities known to services	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA***
Number of children assessed as having a disability including a learning disability	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE, DAERA****
Data on Deprivation of Liberty by age and/or any other breakdown***	**DoH/HSC Trusts**	**DfE**
Number of SEN and medical needs register learners broken down by year group that have DoH involvement	**HSC Trusts**	**DfE**

* By home location and location of provision where possible/appropriate.
** By urban/rural or preferably SDZ/DZ where possible/appropriate.
*** Data breakdown available for under 18's (DoH) and over 18's (HSC Trusts) only

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Learners with a disability/SEN	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Information on the nature of the learner's disability/SEN	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Access requirements (e.g. physical access, sensory needs)	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Reasonable adjustments previously in place	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Exam or assessment arrangements (e.g. extra time, reader/ scribe, assistive technology)	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Technical assistance/specialist support needs	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Transition or handover information from school/previous provider	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
EA assessments or statements	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
What support has been funded previously and by whom	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Any personal care assistance required	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
JCQ documentation completed at the previous place of study (Form 8, Form 8RF with Assessor's Certificate, Form 9, and supporting evidence)	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
SEN file alongside a Transition Plan	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Data on transition planning	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
For discrete provision, an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that transfers from school to college	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Specialised medical support requirements e.g. epilepsy/ diabetic	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Behavioural and attendance history relevant to transition planning	**EA**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Information on personal care/medical needs of young people transitioning to FE	**HSC Trusts**	**FE Sector, CAFRE**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Outcomes and implications for children with a statement of SEN who transition to FE (e.g. access arrangements, any classroom or additional assistance, pathways following FE, NEET information, any Allied Health Professionals involvement, cost implications)	**FE Sector**	**EA, DE**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Formal Statement	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**
EA transition plan	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**
Changes to Statements including transport information	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**
Annual Reviews for young people known to the service - a copy/ access to digital record to gain updates and if needed to provide updates	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**
Post-school pathways and destinations	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**
Transition planning for young people with complex needs	**EA**	**HSC Trusts**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Post-school destinations for all pupils, including children with SEN in mainstream schools	**DE**	**DAERA*** **

*** By home location where possible/appropriate.

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
YPBAS questions x SEN status (specifically Year 11/12 careers module)	**DfE**	**DE**

Data required	Data owner	Data recipient
Post-school options available to young people and families	**DfE Careers Service**	**HSC Trusts**

The table below summarises key data requirements and intended recipients identified through the scoping exercise that currently cannot be fulfilled.

Data required	Data recipient
SEN school leavers who transition into Adult Health and Social Care, broken into day opportunities and day care**	**DfE, DAERA***
The nature of adult learning disability Health and Social Care packages secured by SEN school leavers or those aged 16-25 (e.g. number of days in day opportunities/day care)**	**DfE, DAERA***
SEN school leavers (or citizens aged 16 – 25) identified as requiring direct payments to secure support workers to enable access to further education, training, or other pathways	**DfE**
Proportion of young people with personal care needs who transition into FE colleges	**DfE**
Learning difficulties recorded within health services where they may not be classified as a disability	**DfE**
Number of young people with personal/medical care needs coming through to FE colleges	**DfE**
Data on SEN school leavers identified as requiring direct payments to secure a support worker to assist with personal or other social care needs so they can access further education or other training pathways	**DfE**
Nature/breakdown of adult health and social care provided to those who have moved from children services to adult services	**DfE**
Number of SEN learners progressing to apprenticeships (AppsNI)***	**DfE, DAERA***
Learners who have received careers guidance****	**FE Sector, CAFRE**
Where a diagnosis is pending, evidence that a formal referral has been made	**FE Sector, CAFRE**

* By home location and location of provision where possible/appropriate.
** Can partially be answered but not broken down by SEN school leavers as don't differentiate between 18 y/o and 40+ y/o for example. May be answered by DE on new Special School destinations.
*** DE publishes annual School Leaver Destination statistics; however, apprenticeships (AppsNI) are not identified as a distinct destination category. School leavers who enter an apprenticeship are recorded within Training codes.
**** All school pupils should receive Careers Education when in school which includes careers information, advice and guidance. DfE Careers Service should also be able to confirm learners who have received DfE Careers Services.

Next Steps

9.20 A summary of the next steps is set out below:

1. **Formal data requests and data-sharing agreements where required should be established to support the exchange and use of available data.**
   a. DfE will explore the possibility of amending the Careers Service DSA with the Education Authority (EA) to examine the potential for the exchanged dataset also supporting DfE Skills for Life and Work and Apprenticeships programmes.
   b. DfE, the EA and the FE sector will work together to explore and develop appropriate arrangements for sharing relevant SEND learner information, where lawful and operationally feasible, to support effective transition planning and learner outcomes. Consideration will be given to the EA leading this work, with support from DfE and FE sector colleagues as appropriate.
   c. DfE will publish aggregated data received from DE to support planning and review of DfE provision. Building on this foundation, established arrangements for sharing and publishing aggregated statistical data and research will be reviewed and refined, to develop a more comprehensive evidence base to inform future post-school transitions policy and delivery.
   d. DE are committed to supporting the provision of data as needed regarding children with Special Educational Needs in keeping with agreed protocols and Data Sharing Agreements. DE is also content to work with other departments and EA colleagues to explore the feasibility of an access-controlled hub-and-spoke approach for the sharing of data with relevant partners.
   e. DoH will work through the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) to identify, coordinate and collate data from Health and Social Care Trusts in respect of agreed priority SEND-related data requirements identified through the SEND Data Sharing Scoping Exercise, including assessing data availability, consistency and mechanisms for sharing information. DoH will work with DfE, DE, the EA and other relevant partners to improve access to relevant information, where lawful and proportionate, to support policy development, service planning and improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

2. **Appropriate governance arrangements should be established to oversee implementation and ongoing data sharing.**
   An existing oversight group should be tasked with providing the necessary governance for continued data sharing. Officials will identify the most appropriate forum to fulfil this role.

3. **Longer-term opportunities for improved data sharing should be explored.**
   Notwithstanding the outcome of the NISRA Data Office's pathfinder projects (with funding confirmed for three years) consideration should be given to a centralised, access-controlled hub and spoke system where information is supplied and retrieved by relevant practitioners. Access would be controlled, providing safe access to agreed levels and types of information for those young people with SEND. This may include consideration of capabilities being developed through the Education Information Solutions (EdIS) programme where appropriate. Any future arrangements would be subject to funding, agreed governance and data sharing arrangements, and the EdIS transformation timetable.

ANNEXES

Annex A: Terms of Reference of SEND Data Sharing Working Group

TERMS OF REFERENCE
Cross-Departmental Special Educational Needs (SEND) Data Sharing Working Group

1. Background

Supporting children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEND) is a priority in the Programme for Government, reflecting the Executive's collective commitment to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to thrive in our society.

This includes a commitment to the development of learning opportunities and skillsets of our young people in line with Northern Ireland's economic objectives and ambitions, ensuring clear pathways of opportunity for further training, education or employment at post 16 and post 19.

Key to this commitment is access to appropriate data and effective data sharing across relevant parties which has been recognised and endorsed by all e.g. DE SEN Reform Delivery Plan and DfE Minister's reform proposals etc.

2. Public Accounts Committee

The need for effective data sharing has been further highlighted by work of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on Skills who, in May 2025 recommended that:

- **Within the next six months, DfE establish a data sharing agreement with DE and Department of Health bodies. Once the agreement is in place, data should be shared regularly to plan for the transition of young people with SEN and/or physical disabilities into further education, training or employment, and inform the design of relevant courses.**

The recommendation was partially accepted, but the DfE Permanent Secretary indicated that it would not be possible to commit to an exact timeframe or actions without a thorough analysis of the scale of the work and associated resource commitments. The response highlighted the differences between the types or categories of information required by different parts of the system (contrasting population-level data needed for Departments to inform future planning and resourcing requirements, with person-specific information to enable smooth transitions from one provider to another). It further noted that the nature of these requirements mean that a single agreement is unlikely to be able to meet the needs of all parties and multiple agreements may instead be required, involving different organisations within the overall ecosystem. Therefore, the Public Accounts Committee has been advised:

- **Before committing to timeframes or specific actions on their recommendation, there is a need to fully scope and analyse the issues to understand the scale, complexity, and resource implications.**

The response further indicated that a working group would be put in place, with **an agreed Terms of Reference and Membership, by end January 2026. Initial scoping would be complete by the end of June 2026, and the PAC will be updated on the position and anticipated next steps once this has been completed.**

3. Purpose and Aims

This time-limited, cross-departmental project will map the current landscape of data relevant to post-school pathways and provision for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. It will identify key data holders and users, clarify data purposes and needs, determine the levels and types of data required, and assess both the legislative enablers and any constraints. The work will also highlight issues, barriers, and gaps in current data practices.

The scoping exercise will provide clear options for next steps, including recommendations on where formal data-sharing agreements may be required. The scoping stage will conclude by 30 June 2026. During the process, any additional opportunities for improving collaborative data sharing that emerge will also be flagged for further consideration.

4. Objectives

I. Clarify Data Needs

- Identify data needs in sufficient detail to inform what Data Sharing Agreements and Data Protection Impact Assessments are needed.
- Identify legislation to support data sharing.
- Identify data needs in sufficient detail to inform routine sharing or publication of aggregate data.
- Identify and build on areas of best practice.

II. Develop Recommendations

- Based on findings, make recommendations for the development of robust Data Sharing Agreements (DSAs) between the relevant authorities and agencies involved by 30th June 2026.

III. Stakeholder Engagement

- Engage with all relevant partners to understand their perspectives and user requirements.

5. Approach

In order to minimise the governance structures for the work undertaken by this group, it will sit under the Department of Education's SEN Delivery Plan - Operational Implementation Oversight Group (OIOG). It is anticipated that membership will be as follows:

Department	Policy area
Department of Education	SEN Reform Official Statisticians 16-18 Policy Officials Analytical Services
Department of Health	Learning Disability Policy Officials. Statistician SEN Strategic Policy and Performance Group, Analytical Services Data Institute Public Health Agency

Department	Policy area
Department for the Economy	Post-School Transitions Policy Officials 14-19 Framework FE Transformation FE Sector Performance FE Policy Analytical Services Careers Service Youth Inclusion (Training Providers) Apprenticeships Higher Education Economic Social Inclusion DPO
Department of Finance	NISRA
Department for Communities	Universal Credit Operations
Education Authority	Head of Data Services
Health and Social Care Trusts Identified by DoH April 2026	Belfast Trust Children Disability Services Belfast Trust - Adult Disability Services Southern Trust - HoS Children Disability Services South Eastern Trust - Adult Learning Disability Services Western Trust - Adult Learning Disability Services Western Trust Children Disability Services Western Trust Business Support Northern Trust - HoS Adult Learning Disability Services Northern Trust - HoS Adult Learning Disability Services Northern Trust HoS Children Disability Services
Further Education Colleges	Learner Support Management Information Officer Data Protection Officer
CAFRE	CAFRE Student Service Support Manager DAERA Statistician
Higher Education Representative	
SfLW + Apprenticeship Training Provider	

The membership of the group will be kept under review as the project progresses and members may be represented by deputies, as required. It is recognised that the level of input required across departments and delivery partners will vary, in line with their statutory responsibilities.

6. Cross Government Context

The project will complement and support existing departmental initiatives, including (but not limited to):

- DfE Post School SEN Reform Project;
- DE Special Educational Needs Reform Agenda and Delivery Plan 2025-2030;
- DfE Widening Participation;
- DfC Disability and Disability and Work Strategies; and
- DoH development of a Learning Disability Service Model for Northern Ireland ('We Matter').

Annex B: Survey to DfE Skills and Education Group policy branches

Introduction

A Citizen Space survey was issued to relevant DfE branches to identify what SEND information is currently received and to highlight areas where additional data is needed.

The survey opened on 11 December 2025 and closed on 18 December 2025, receiving 6 responses.

Survey Questions

Q1: What data from the Department of Education (DE) and/or Health data do you need?

Q2: What are you going to do with the data?

Q3: Who in your business area needs to access the data?

Q4: Does the data need to be shared outside of the Department for the Economy (DfE)?

Q5: What is the legislation that underpins what you will do with the data, e.g. Digital Economy Act, Education Orders etcetera?

Q6: Please provide a short user story, for example: “As a LEO statistician, I want to analyse linked SEN school data from DE, so that I can produce a publication on post-school education pathways for pupils with SEN. I can do this using the Digital Economy Act as the legal basis”.

Annex C: DfE SEND Data Request Completed by DE

The scoping exercise identified a wide range of SEND data requirements across DfE Skills and Education Group policy areas. A formal request for aggregate SEND data was submitted to DE. This annex summarises the aggregated data DE was able to provide, as well as listing the information that could not be supplied.

SEND data provided by DE (aggregate):

- Profile of pupil cohorts across the school system:
  - Overall number of SEN learners in mainstream schools, SPiMs and special schools by year group, by geographical area and a home location geo identifier
  - Number of SEN learners by SEN stage in mainstream schools, SPiMs and special schools by year group, by geographical area and a home location geo identifier
  - Number of SEN learners by SEN category in mainstream schools, SPiMs and special schools by year group, by geographical area and a home location geo identifier
  - Number of learners on the medical register in mainstream schools, SPiMs and special schools by medical category and year group
- Destinations of school leavers by SEN status (excludes special and independent schools)
- School exclusions by SEN status
- School non-attendance broken down by school types (mainstream, SPiMs and special), SEN status and medical category
- Data on SEN learners' attainment and qualifications

SEND data not available from DE:

- Reasonable adjustments in place for learners
- Number of SEN learners disaggregated by the type of support they need
- Number of SEN learners disaggregated by the type of support they are receiving
- Number of SEN and medical needs register learners broken down by year group that have DoH involvement
- Number of SEN and medical needs register broken down by year group who are in receipt of school delegated health care
- SEN and medical register learners broken down by SEN profile/medical category and year group who are on a reduced timetable
- Data held on destinations from special schools
- Data held on learners with a transition plan – Year 10 SEN learners' stage 3 with and without a transition plan

Annex D: Survey to FE colleges and private training providers

Introduction

A Citizen Space survey was issued to FE colleges, including Learning Support Services, CAFRE, and private training providers to identify what information they currently receive about learners with SEND that supports planning and delivery of learning and what additional information they would benefit from receiving.

The survey opened on 9 April 2026 and closed on 1 May 2026, receiving 36 responses.

Survey Questions

Q1a: What information does your organisation currently receive about learners with SEND that supports planning and delivery of learning?

Q1b: Please briefly describe how this information is provided (e.g. referral paperwork, learner self-disclosure, formal handover, ad hoc).

Q2: What additional information about learners with SEND would your organisation benefit from receiving to better plan and deliver learning?

Q3a: At what point does your organisation gain access to this information?

Q3b: At what point would access to this information be most helpful?

Q4: From whom do you currently receive information about learners with SEND?

Q5: Please comment on any issues with consistency, timeliness, or completeness of the SEND information you currently receive

Q6: Are there barriers that prevent your organisation from receiving or using relevant data about learners with SEND?

Q7: What changes to data sharing or information flows would most improve your organisation's ability to support learners with SEND?

Annex E: Survey to HSC Trusts

Introduction

A Citizen Space survey was issued to health stakeholders, including Health and Social Care Trusts and Children's and Adult Learning Disability services to identify what information they currently receive about young people with SEND that supports transition planning and what additional information they would benefit from receiving.

The survey opened on 10 April 2026 and closed on 1 May 2026, receiving four responses.

Survey Questions

Q1: What information or data does your organisation currently receive about young people with SEND from DE, EA, DfE or other bodies, that supports transition planning into adult health and social care?

Q2: At what point does your organisation gain access to this information?

Q3: Please comment on any issues with consistency, timeliness, or completeness of the SEND information you currently receive

Q4: What additional information would your organisation benefit from receiving from DE, EA, DfE or other bodies, to support more effective transitions for young people with SEND into adult health and social care?

Q5: At what point would access to this information be most helpful?

Q6: What barriers, if any, prevent your organisation from receiving or using relevant data about young people with SEND?

Q7: What changes to data sharing or information flows would most improve your organisation's ability to support young people with SEND?

Annex F: Statutory Functions and Transitions Data – Adult Learning Disability Services

The table below presents the Adult Learning Disability Statutory Functions data, which is collated annually by each Trust as at the end of March and submitted to SPPG.

Statutory Functions Data Headings – Adult Learning Disability Services
How many **adults** were referred for assessment of social work or social care need during the period?
Of those reported at 1.1 how many adults commenced receipt of social work or social care services during the period?
How many adults are in receipt of social work or social care services at 31st March?
How many adults are in receipt of social work support only at 31st March?
How many care packages are in place on 31st March in the following categories: (1) Residential Home Care (2) Nursing Home Care (3) Domiciliary Care – Include Care and Non-Care Managed Packages (4) Supported Living (5) Shared Lives - Adult Family Placements (long term placements)

The table below presents the Transitions data, which is completed by Children's Services on an ongoing basis to support transition planning to Adult Services within each Trust. This information is retained at Trust level.

Transitions Data Headings – Children's Services - Adult Learning Disability Services
Demographics: • Health and Care Number (HCN) • First Name (Name Known as) • Surname • DOB • Age • 18th Birthday • Address • Postcode • Living Status • Gender • Ethnicity • Religion
Key Worker/Team: • Named Worker (Children Services) • Children's Team Name (of Named Worker) • Referral Date to Adult Services • Transitions/Adult Link Worker(s) • Adult Named Worker/Care Manager Name and Name of Team
Legal Status of Child: • Child in Need • Children Looked After • On Child Protection Register
Urgent/Immediate Housing/Accommodation Required
Education/Training Status

Transitions Data Headings – Children's Services - Adult Learning Disability Services
School/Education: • Name of school registered with • Attending School • Education Configuration • Type of School • Date Leaving School
Diagnostic Assessment Applicable (Psychology): • Yes/No • If no reasons why Psychometric Testing (at aged 16+): • Date referred • Date completed
Learning Disability Diagnosis
Other Conditions
Complex Physical Health Care Needs
Palliative Care Considerations - (life limited within next year)
Is there a Care Plan (SW Pathway Plan) in place to meet assessed need and to support monitoring?
Is there a Positive Behaviour Support Plan in Place? Yes/No
Are there Communication Needs? • Description • Is an Interpreter Required Yes/No?
Restrictive Practice: • Are there Restrictive Practices in place?
Mental Capacity: • MCA/DoL
Are there presenting Forensic Issues requiring consideration?
Self-Directed Support (SDS) (Package currently in Place)
Carers Assessment Offered
Predictive Planning Needs (completed at 16 in discussion with Adult Services): • Short Break Required • Shared Lives Service • Day Opportunities • Day Care • Home Care (Domiciliary) • Staffing Ratio Requirements for undertaking tasks/supervision • Accommodation Needs • Further Education and Training • Employment • Unmet Need • ECR • Predictive Cost if known
High Cost Case (£100k+) Yes/No

Annex G: Statutory Functions – Children with Disabilities

The tables below outline the data collected during SPPG Statutory Functions reporting in relation to Children with Disabilities.

HSCB Delegated Statutory Functions/Corporate Parenting Returns

Looked After Children

(i) Looked After Children with Statement of SEN

How many Looked After Children have a Statement of Educational Needs (SEN) by school status at period end? (At 31st March)

Statement of Educational Needs	M	F	Total
Primary school			
Secondary school			
Special School			
Total			

(ii) Looked After Children by Disability Type

How many Looked After Children are Disabled by major category at period end (At 31st March)

	<1		1-4		5-11		12-15		16+		Total		
Major Disability	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**Total**
Physical (Ex. Sensory)													
Sensory													
Learning													
Chronic illness													
Autism(ASD)/ Aspergers/ADHD													
Other (undefined)													
Total Children With Disability													
No Disability known													
Total Looked After Children													

(iii) Respite

Number of children provided with a short break who became Looked After by virtue of the short break arrangement (During 1st April to 30th September and during 1st October to 31st March)

This information is also collected by age; <1, 1-4, 5-11, 12-15 and 16+.

Name of Unit	Children/Young People		
	Total		
	No. of Ch/YP	Events/Episodes	Total Over night
Total			

Note: Information on respite should be provided for those children who received from both Foster Carers and Units.

The tables below outline the monthly workforce information requested by SPPG for Children with Disabilities teams across all Trusts.

Monthly Workforce Reporting

(i) Children's Social Services - Monthly Workforce Report

This information is collected for Bands 4-5 Support Staff (e.g. PAs, Family/Residential Support Workers), Bands 5-7 including Senior Practitioners (e.g. Professionally Qualified Social Work Staff) and Bands 7, 8a and 8b (e.g. Team Leaders and Managers).

	Headcount/ WTE					
Service Area		Covid Related Absence	Workforce Related Absence	No of vacancies	Total Absence/ Vacancy	% Absence/ Vacancy
Gateway						
Family Support						
LAC						
14+/16+ Leaving and Aftercare						

	Headcount/ WTE					
Service Area		Covid Related Absence	Workforce Related Absence	No of vacancies	Total Absence/ Vacancy	% Absence/ Vacancy
Fostering/ Adoption						
Residential Care/ Peripatetic Teams						
Independent Chairs						
RESWS (Belfast Trust only)						
Lakewood (SET only)						
Total						

(ii) Children with a Disability – Monthly Workforce Report

This information is collected for Bands 2-5 Support Staff (e.g. Residential Support Workers), Bands 5-7 including Senior Practitioners (e.g. Professionally Qualified Social Work Staff), Bands 5-6 (e.g. Professionally Qualified Nursing Staff), Bands 7, 8a and 8b (e.g. Professionally Qualified Social Work Staff - Team Leaders and Managers) and Bands 7, 8a and 8b (e.g. Professionally Qualified Nursing Staff - Ward Manager, Specialist and Senior Manager)

	Headcount/ WTE					
Service Area		Covid Related Absence	Workforce Related Absence	No of vacancies	Total Absence/ Vacancy	% Absence/ Vacancy
CWD - Community Team						
CWD - Medium/Long Term Residential Care by Facility:						
Somerton Road						
Willow Lodge						
Eden View						

	Headcount/ WTE					
Service Area		**Covid Related Absence**	**Workforce Related Absence**	**No of vacancies**	**Total Absence/ Vacancy**	**% Absence/ Vacancy**
The Ferns						
Glenmore Cottage						
Beechfield						
Bluebell						
Jasmine						
Avalon						
Sub-Total						
CWD - Residential Short Break by Facility:						
Forest Lodge						
Whitehaven						
Eden View						
Lindsay House						
Greenhill						
Oaklands						
Rosebud						
Sub-Total						
Total						

Annex H: NISRA Data Office and SEN Pathfinder Project

Introduction

This annex outlines the newly established NISRA Data Office and NISRA's SEN pathfinder project focused on improving outcomes for children with SEN through enhanced data linkage and cross-departmental collaboration.

Overview of NISRA Data Office

On 26 May 2026, Finance Minister John O'Dowd announced £102.6m of funding for six projects to continue to drive forward the transformation of public services. This includes an investment of £5.3m to establish the NISRA Data Office. Its role is to help government make better use of the data it already holds to improve public services and strengthen decision-making, while maintaining a strong focus on public trust, robust governance and clear public benefit. The Data Office brings together expertise in statistics, data linkage, governance and data skills to support policy development across Northern Ireland. The NISRA Data Office will work across the NICS and wider public sector to:

- Unlock the value of existing data
- Join data safely where the legal basis exists and there is a clear public benefit
- Improve how data is used in policy and service design
- Build skills and confidence in data use
- Support openness, transparency and public trust in how data is used
- Deliver better outcomes for people, communities and public services.

£5.3m investment will deliver:

- Two Data Pathfinder projects in Education and Health to highlight the power of integrated data for policy making and address key Programme for Government priorities.
- A stronger data-driven culture in government to provide better outcomes for citizens by strengthening the data literacy, capability and confidence of policy colleagues
- Increased interoperability and wider sharing of public sector data through established legal mechanisms.

Overview of SEN Pathfinder Project and Objectives

The project is a Transformation Fund pathfinder aimed at improving outcomes for children with SEN, aligned with Programme for Government priorities.

It aims to demonstrate how securely linked administrative data can support better planning, earlier intervention and more effective service delivery.

The Pathfinder will explore how linking health and education data can provide earlier insight into children's needs, support planning for provision and workforce requirements, and help ensure the right support is available at the right time.

It responds directly to Public Accounts Committee concerns about a lack of data sharing and the need for earlier intervention.

The work plans to bring together partners across NISRA, Department of Education, Department of Health, Department for the Economy, Education Authority, Public Health Agency and Health Trusts to test joint working and improve data use.

A key part of the project is to test the feasibility and value of data linkage, while aligning with other related data linkage projects to maximise impact and avoid duplication.

Annex I: Analysis of SEN Data Provided by DE

Introduction

This annex presents analysis of SEN data requested by DfE from DE to support understanding of need, service planning and outcomes for children and young people with SEN.

Work is ongoing to further develop this analysis, including the creation of an accessible dashboard to ensure the information can be more easily interpreted and effectively used to support policy development.

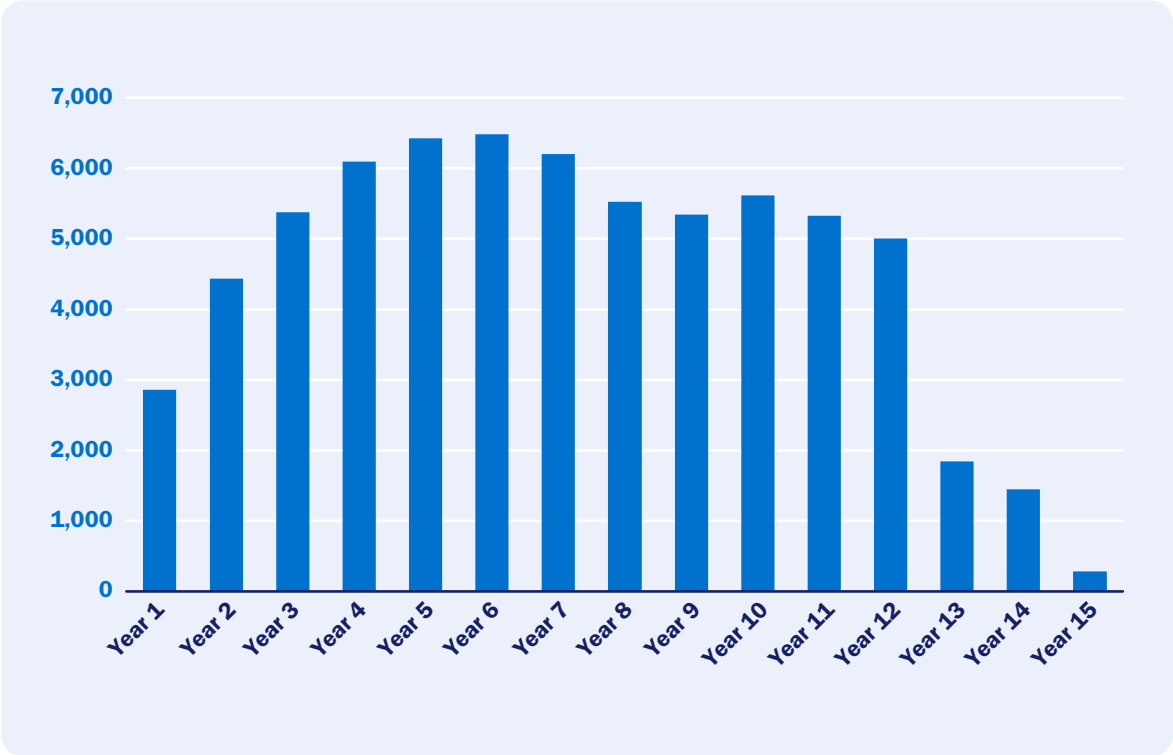
Feedback will be sought on the extent to which this additional data meets DfE's aggregate data requirements for planning post school transitions, and the analysis/dashboard will be reviewed and refined as necessary in collaboration with the DE statistical team.

In addition to the figures presented, a Local Government District (LGD) breakdown of the data is also available.

Analysis

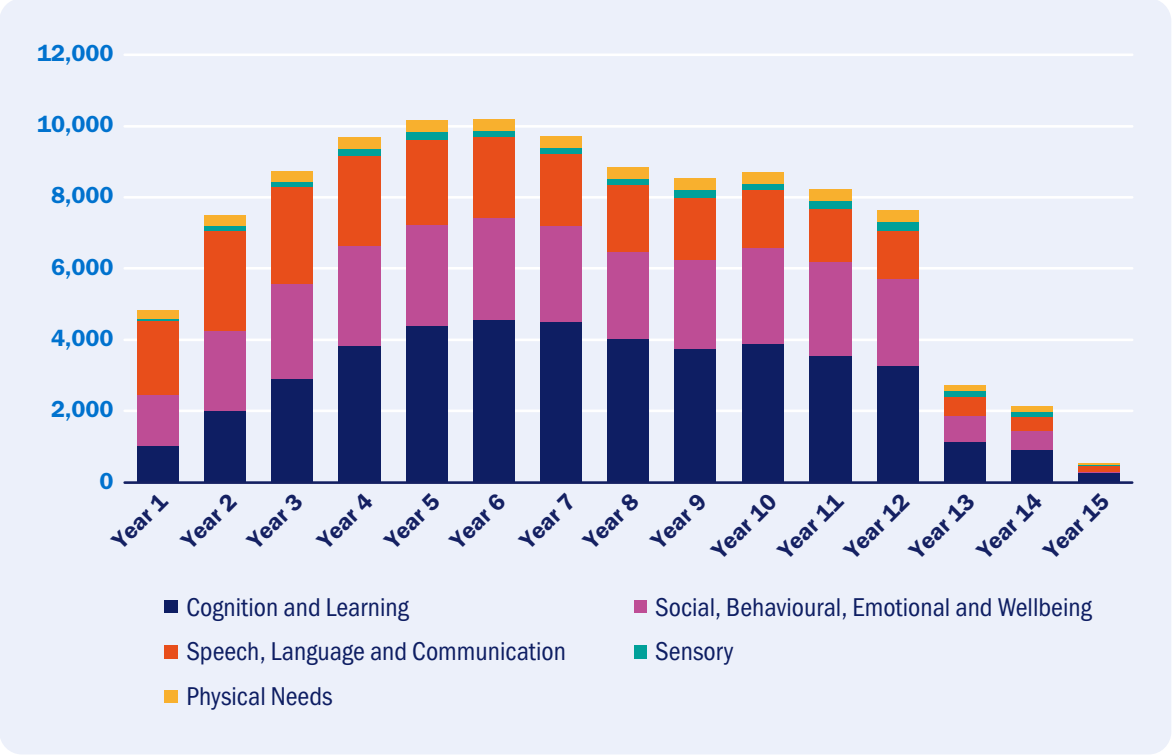
Data is sourced from the NI School Census and based on pupils enrolled on Census day i.e. the Friday of the first full week in October. In 2025/26 this was 10 October 2025.

Figure 1: Pupils with SEN by school year, 2025/26



Includes pupils in mainstream, Specialist Provision in Mainstream (SPiM) and special schools. Years 13 and 14 do not include a small number of pupils in SPiMS.

Figure 2: Pupils with SEN by SEN category and school year, 2025/26



Data refers to any special educational need rather than primary need as recorded by the school.

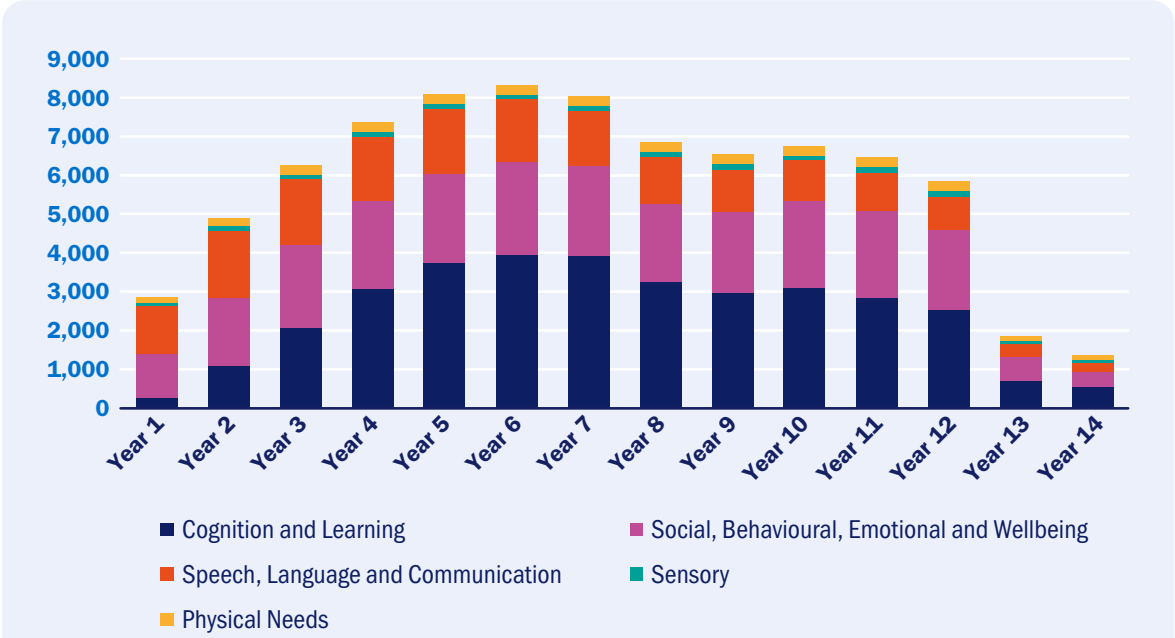
Pupils may appear in more than one SEN category.

Year 1 Sensory does not include SPIM or special school pupils as these figures were suppressed in the data source.

Year 13 Social, Behavioural, Emotional and Wellbeing, and Speech, Language and Communication and Physical Needs do not include small numbers of pupils in SPIMs.

Year 14 Speech, Language and Communication does not include a small number of pupils in SPIMs.

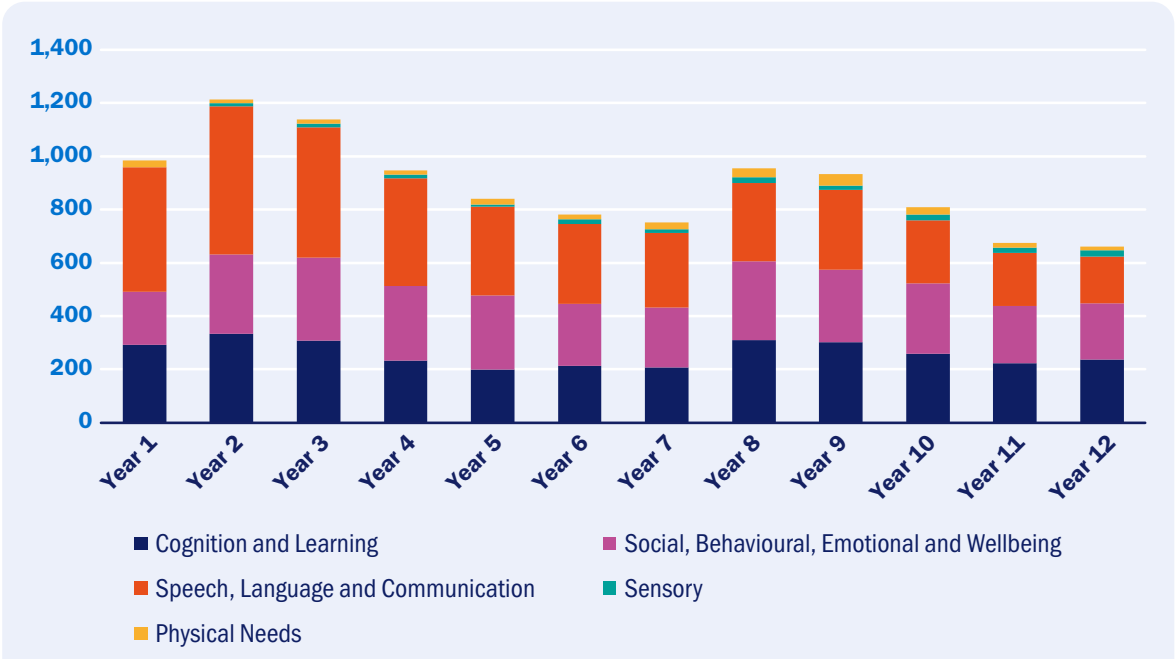
Figure 3: Pupils with SEN in mainstream class by SEN category and school year, 2025/26



Data refers to any special educational need rather than primary need as recorded by the school.

Pupils may appear in more than one SEN category.

Figure 4: Pupils with SEN in Specialist Provision in Mainstream by SEN category and school year, 2025/26



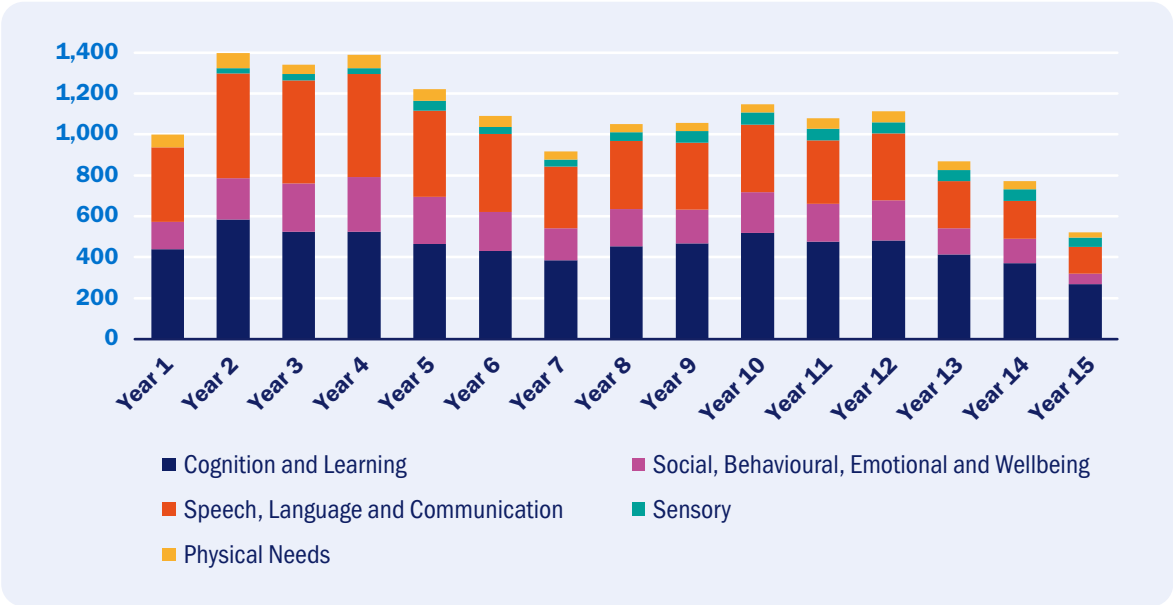
Data refers to any special educational need rather than primary need as recorded by the school.

Pupils may appear in more than one SEN category.

Year 13 and 14 figures are not included due to very small numbers of pupils.

Year 1 Sensory is not included as it was suppressed in the data source.

Figure 5: Pupils with SEN in special schools by SEN category and school year, 2025/26

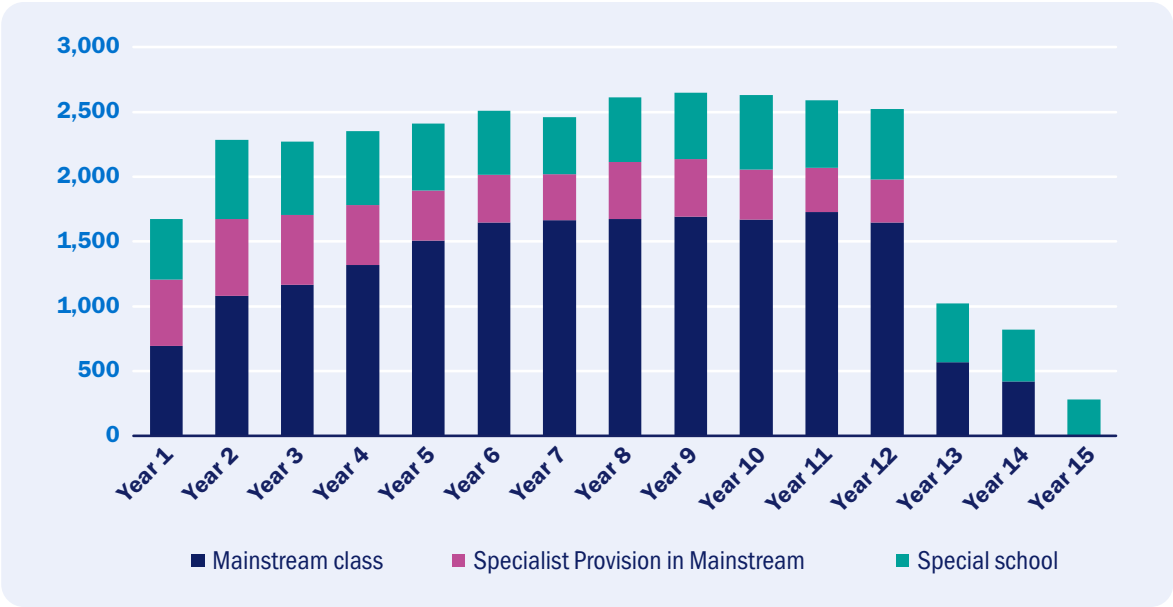


Data refers to any special educational need rather than primary need as recorded by the school.

Pupils may appear in more than one SEN category.

Year 1 Sensory is not included as it was suppressed in the data source.

Figure 6: Pupils with a SEN statement by school setting and school year, 2025/26

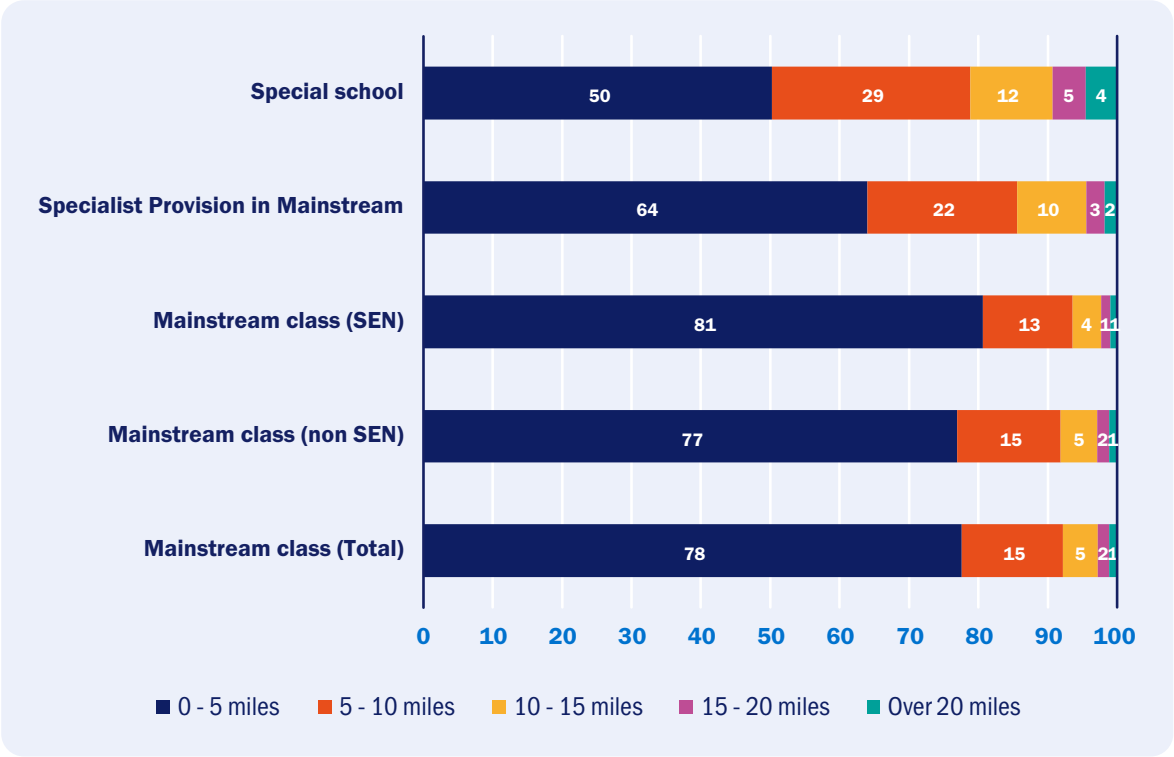


Years 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 11 and 12 SPIM figures and Year 8 & 14 special schools figures include a small number of SEN stage 2 pupils.

Year 13 SPIM is not included as it was suppressed in the data source.

Year 14 does not include a small number of pupils in SPIM.

Figure 7: Pupil distance between school and home, 2025/26



Figures include pupils in primary (including nursery, reception and year 1-7 classes), post primary and special schools. They do not include funded children in voluntary and private preschools nor nursery schools as this data is not available at a pupil level.

Figures include pupils at new stages 1 – 3 on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

Figure 8: Top 3 medical categories in school setting

School Setting	Medical category	Number of pupils	Percentage of pupils
Mainstream class	Asthma	26,418	35
	Other Medical Conditions/Syndrome	15,951	21
	Autism Spectrum Disorder	14,137	18
	All Conditions	**76,451**	**100**
Specialist Provision in Mainstream	Autism Spectrum Disorder	2,660	54
	Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD/ADHD)	563	11
	Asthma	458	9
	All Conditions	**4,928**	**100**
Special school	Autism Spectrum Disorder	3,748	39
	Other Medical Conditions/Syndrome	1,040	11
	Global Developmental Delay	942	10
	All Conditions	**9,567**	**100**

Figures include pupils in primary (including nursery, reception and year 1-7 classes), post primary and special schools. They do not include funded children in voluntary and private preschools nor nursery schools as this data is not available at a pupil level.

For the purpose of calculating 'All Conditions' totals, suppressed values (<5) have been replaced with 2.5. 'All Conditions' totals should therefore be interpreted with caution, as they are approximate.

Figure 9: List of medical categories

- Acquired Brain injury
- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD/ADHD)
- Anaphylaxis
- Anxiety Disorder (Includes social anxiety, phobia, school refusal, OCD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Asthma
- Cerebral Palsy
- Complex Healthcare Needs
- Dyspraxia/Development Co-ordination Disorder
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Developmental Language Disorder (Medical)
- Down's Syndrome
- Eating Disorder
- Epilepsy
- Global Developmental Delay
- Hearing Impairment
- Spina Bifida – with Hydrocephalus
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Other Mental Disorder
- Other Medical Conditions/Syndrome
- Physical Disability
- Psychosis
- Spina Bifida – without Hydrocephalus
- Visual Impairment

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
AppsNI	Apprenticeships Northern Ireland
CAFRE	College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise
CIMS	Client Information Management System
CwD	Children with Disabilities
DAERA	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
DEA	Digital Economy Act
DE/DENI	Department of Education/Department of Education Northern Ireland
DfC	Department for Communities
DfE	Department for the Economy
DoF	Department of Finance
DoH	Department of Health
DSA	Data Sharing Agreement
DZ	Data Zone
EdIS	Education Information Solutions
EA	Education Authority
EOL	Education Outcomes Linkage
EOTAS	Education Otherwise Than At School
EPIC Futures NI	Economic and Social Partnering for Inclusive Innovation and Collaboration in Northern Ireland
ETI	Education Training Inspectorate
FE	Further Education
HSC	Health and Social Care
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
JHEOG	Joint Health and Education Oversight Group
LEO NI	Longitudinal Education Outcomes Northern Ireland

Abbreviation	Definition
LGD	Local Government District
LITs	Local Impact Teams
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
OIOG	Operational Implementation Oversight Group
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PHA	Public Health Agency
SDZ	Super Data Zone
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SfLW	Skills for Life and Work
SPiM	Specialist Provision in Mainstream
SPPG	Strategic Planning and Performance Group
TRPSI	Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation
YPBAS	Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey