

Specialist Provision for Special Educational Needs in Swindon

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Specialist Provision for Special Educational Needs

Executive Summary

The research is designed to:

1. Strengthen understanding of the demand for specialist provision for children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), the potential future trajectory and associated cost implications for both children's and adult services.
2. To identify the key drivers behind:
 - The comparatively high proportion of children and young people in Swindon subject to a statement of SEN (EHC);
 - The consistently high demand for special school and SRP placement.
3. To align:
 - Families' perspectives;
 - Insight from schools and practitioners;
 - Strategic awareness of commissioners;
 - Opportunities within the SEND Reforms;
 - Learning from other local areas.
4. To propose supply and demand-side solutions to secure a sustainable level of high quality specialist provision for children and young people with SEND in Swindon.

There are 4 main phases to the research:

- i) **Data analysis** - A detailed analysis of key data to strengthen understanding of the trends, potential future trajectory and cost implications.
- ii) **Stakeholder workshop** - A workshop with a range of key stakeholders, based upon Outcomes Based Accountability, designed to:
 - Share the findings from the data analysis;
 - Develop a range of plausible hypotheses re the key drivers behind the data trends.
- iii) **Fieldwork** - To test and strengthen the hypotheses generated at the stakeholder workshop:
 - In depth interviews with a small sample of families of children and young people with SEND to explore their aspirations and the support they rely upon to achieve them, including networks and community links;
 - Desk top and other research to collate learning and interesting practice from other local areas, including SEND pathfinders that have succeeded in reducing reliance on specialist provision;
 - Discussion with service teams and specialist providers to understand the challenges and opportunities within existing systems, processes, professional practice and working culture(s);

- iv) **Analysis and reporting** - To analyse evidence and data collected during the research and report on findings and high level options to secure a sustainable level of high quality specialist provision for children and young people with SEND in Swindon

The data analysis suggests that Swindon identifies and statements relatively high numbers of children and young people with SEND at a cost that is consistently higher than many other LAs. In addition, a higher proportion of children in Swindon attend a specialist resourced provision or special school than in most other similar local authorities.

Within this context, outcomes overall are no better and sometimes less positive than those achieved by children and young people with SEND in other LAs. *(It is important to note however that 4 special schools are judged “good” by OfSTED and 1 “outstanding”. This will reflect OfSTED’s view that progress is also good or outstanding in these schools.)*

These trends suggest that either:

- A higher proportion of children and young people in Swindon present with complex SEND than in many other local areas – perhaps inflated by families moving into the area, attracted by the level and quality of its specialist provision, or
- Policy and practice in Swindon, however, unintentionally, channels a higher proportion of children and young people with SEND towards statemented and/or specialist provision.

The research did not identify specific demographic factors that might lead inevitably to higher rates of statementing or the need for more specialist provision.

Anecdotal evidence is reported that families may be encouraged to move to Swindon by its relatively high number of good and outstanding special schools. However, while this may hold true in a small number of instances, the research found nothing to suggest that this occurs at a scale that could have more than a marginal impact on overall trends.

The hypotheses tested during the field work suggested a number of ways in which existing policy and practice contribute to a culture of dependency that, in turn, results in a relatively heavy reliance on specialist provision.

Current trends suggest that, unless something changes, the reliance on statutory provision is likely to remain high and that the LA will have to invest further in specialist provision. There is no evidence to suggest that this is due to a particular set of demographic challenges. Rather, the research has highlighted the extent to which current policy and practice however, unintentionally, channels at least a proportion of children and young people with SEND towards statemented and/or specialist provision. This has important capital and revenue implications that are likely to be exacerbated over the next few years when a greater proportion of the pupil population will be of secondary school age – limiting the extent to which the funding within the Early Years and Schools Blocks will be available to subsidise higher spending within the High Needs Block.

High levels of demand for specialist services and provision for SEND in children’s services risks being translated into similarly high demand for adult services at a time when the focus increasingly is on promoting independence and resilience in individuals, families and communities.

The SEND reforms provide an ideal context within which to deliver the kind of change needed to build a sustainable model that delivers improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND by supporting at all points the independence and resilience of individuals and families. To do so requires:

System change, at the heart of which is integrated, collaborative commissioning, supported where appropriate by pooled and/or aligned funding.

Cultural change, characterised by:

- Empowering and involving families and young people as co-producers;
- Person-centred and outcomes focused working;
- Prevention and early identification and intervention;
- Sustained, long-term, joined-up working from 0-25.

Functional change, including

- Single point of contact for families;
- Integrated, outcomes-focused, support planning, 0-25;
- Peer support and family leadership;
- Integrated personal budgets.

Recommendations

The priority should be to work with key stakeholders to develop a system-wide approach focused as much on reducing demand for specialist provision as on meeting that demand in the most cost-effective way possible. This requires significant and concerted action over time to change culture as much as policy and practice. Within this context the SEND reforms are an important opportunity to review and refresh the approach to SEN support in Swindon, providing the context within which to develop a culture and working practices that are inclusive by nature and have at their heart:

- A relentless focus on improving outcomes;
- Person-centred practices;
- Co-production

Central to the approach should be:

1. Strengthening further the strategic overview and commissioning for SEND – based upon a rigorous analysis and monitoring of outcomes.
2. Building capacity across the system, particularly in mainstream schools.
3. Developing the workforce so that being outcomes focused and person-centred is at the heart of their practice.
4. Refreshing SEND/EHCP processes, focusing particularly on the SEND Banding descriptors and the role of the SEN Panel.
5. Promoting innovative responses to the SEND of children and young people, by working together with families to design the kind of help and support they need to exercise greater control over their lives.

1. Introduction

Background to the research

- 1.1 A report to Cabinet in September 2014, highlighted the relatively high proportion - compared to national, regional and statistical benchmarks - of children and young people in Swindon:
 - Subject to a statement of SEN;
 - Placed in specialist provision - special school or specialist resourced mainstream provision (SRP).
- 1.2 The report also reported an increasing demand for places in some provision and associated cost pressures.
- 1.3 The report proposed to commission research to strengthen the LA's understanding of the drivers behind these trends as the basis for the development of options to reduce the trends and/or manage the cost implications.

Managing Adult Demand

- 1.4 The Managing Adult Demand programme identifies 3 priorities in response to the potentially unsustainable social and financial costs associated with high levels of life-long dependency on service provision:
 - i) To enable people to lead more fulfilling lives through enhanced choice and independence – taking personal responsibility for using their own resources where possible.
 - ii) To build the capabilities and skills of communities (service users), carers and the workforce to facilitate greater independence.
 - iii) To continue to protect the most vulnerable people in Swindon

SEND Reforms

- 1.5 The SEND Reforms set out in the Children and Families Act (2014) emphasise the importance of giving families more choice and control over the support upon which they rely through, e.g. person centred approaches and co-production. However, there is also a potential risk that the reforms could simply raise expectations of a more extensive and potentially more expensive pattern of specialist provision.
- 1.6 The reforms introduce a number of important technical changes that require the local authority and its partners to:
 - Commission more services jointly so that they meet the holistic needs of children and young people (0-25) with SEND;
 - Publish a clear and transparent 'Local Offer', that tells parents and young people what support is available and what they can expect;
 - Introduce a more streamlined assessment process, integrating education, health and care services;
 - Replace statements of SEN and Learning Difficulty Assessments with a single Education Health and Care (EHC) Plan for all children and young people with SEND between the ages of 0-25;

- Provide the option of a personal budget for families and young people with an EHC Plan;
 - Do more to help young people with SEND to prepare for adulthood.
- 1.7 The new Code of Practice integrates guidance on the pre-16 SEN system and post-16 learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities. For the first time the Further Education sector will be included in the list of organisations that must have regard to the Code.
- 1.8 Education, health and social care services need to work more closely together so that children and young people with SEND are identified early and receive the support they need as soon as possible. They need to focus relentlessly on improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND and earn the trust and confidence of their families.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

- 1.9 A Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for children with a disability or complex need in Swindon is planned to:
- Understand current provision and where there are gaps
 - Understand the needs of disabled children and those with complex needs now and in the future
 - Forecast future demand for services and identify trends in need
 - Provide insight into what works well, what could be improved, and suggestions for innovative practice from both service users and people delivering the services.
 - Map requirements to the existing service specification and develop a new Service specification for community health services to meet the needs of these children and young people.

2. Purpose of the research

- 2.1 To strengthen understanding of the trends in demand for specialist provision for children with SEND, the potential future trajectory and associated cost implications for both children's and adults services.
- 2.2 To identify the key drivers behind:
- The comparatively high proportion of children and young people in Swindon subject to a statement of SEN (EHCP);
 - The consistently high demand for special school and SRP placement.
- 2.3 To align:
- Families' perspectives;
 - Insight from schools and practitioners;
 - Strategic awareness of commissioners;
 - Opportunities within the SEND Reforms;
 - Learning from other local areas.
- 2.4 To propose supply and demand-side solutions to secure a sustainable level of high quality specialist provision for children and young people with SEND in Swindon.

3. Approach

3.1 There are 4 main phases to the research:

- i) **Data analysis** - A detailed analysis of key data to strengthen understanding of the trends, potential future trajectory and cost implications.
- ii) **Stakeholder workshop** - A workshop with a range of key stakeholders, based upon Outcomes Based Accountability, designed to:
 - Share the findings from the data analysis;
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- iii) **Fieldwork** - To test and strengthen the hypotheses generated at the stakeholder workshop:
 - In depth interviews with a small sample of families of children and young people to explore their aspirations and the support they rely upon to achieve them, including networks and community links;
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 - Discussion with service teams and specialist providers to understand the challenges and opportunities within existing systems, processes, professional practice and working culture(s);
- iv) **Analysis and reporting** - To analyse evidence and data collected during the research and report on findings and high level options to secure a sustainable level of high quality specialist provision for children and young people with SEND in Swindon

4. Data analysis

Identification of SEND in Swindon.

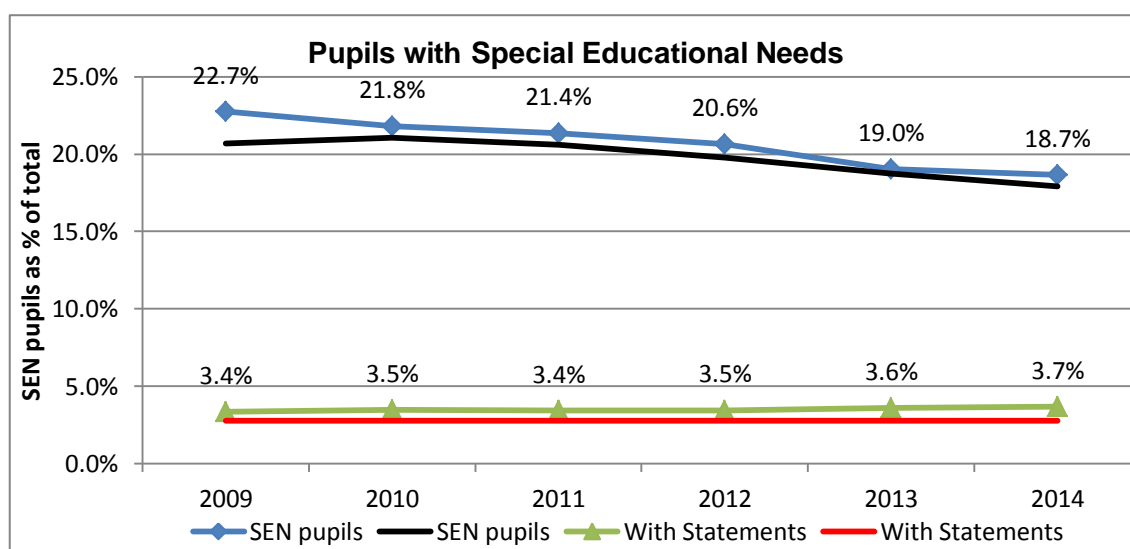
- 4.1 Although it has fallen gradually, the proportion of children and young people in Swindon identified as having SEND remains consistently above national benchmarks: Specifically, the proportion of children and young people identified as having SEND is:
- Below national and regional benchmarks at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2;
 - Broadly in line with national and regional benchmarks at the end of Key Stage 1;
 - Significantly above national and regional benchmarks at the end of Key Stage 4.

Figure 1

Proportion of SEN Pupils out of all pupils at the end of each Key Stage (2012/13)	Swindon	England	South West
Early years/Foundation	9%	12%	11%
Key Stage 1	19%	20%	20%
Key Stage 2	20%	23%	23%
Key Stage 4	28%	21%	20%

- 4.2 The proportion of children and young people in Swindon with a statement of SEND continues to rise slightly. This compares to a national trend that has remained steady and is above national benchmarks.

Figure 2

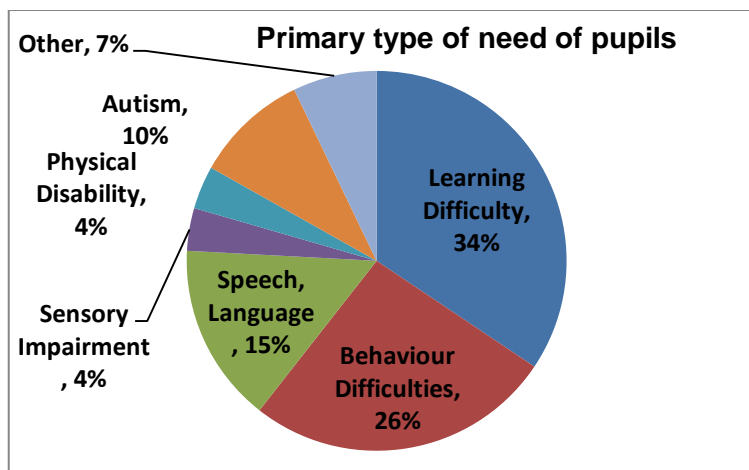


- 4.3 The number of requests for statutory assessment has increased consistently each year from 180 in 2008 to 239 in 2012-13. Similarly, the number of new statements issued rose each year from 2010 to 2013.
- 4.4 Compared to national benchmarks:
- Identification of children and young people with behaviour, emotional or social difficulties (BESD)¹ is relatively high;
 - Identification of children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and specific learning difficulties (SPLD) is relatively low.

¹ This is superseded in the new SEND Code of Practices by the new category of social, emotional and/or mental health needs (SEMH)

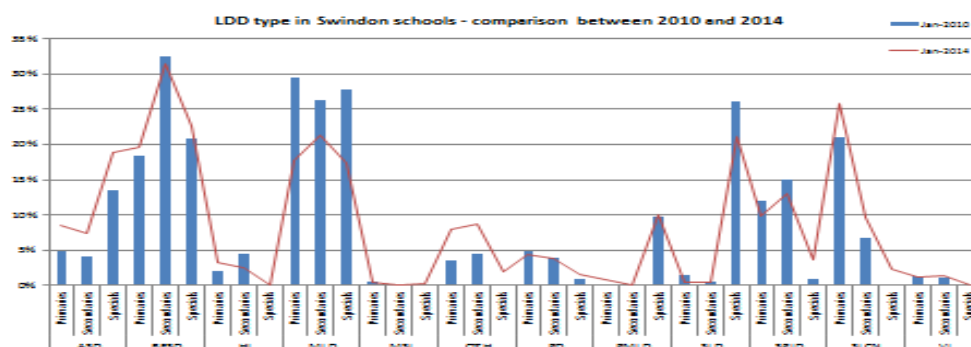
- 4.5 A higher proportion of children and young people have their SEND categorised as “other” than is the case nationally.

Figure 3



- 4.6 Since 2010 growth in identified SEND is evident in:
- Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) – although this remains in line with or slightly below national benchmarks;
 - BESD – particularly in the primary sector;
 - SpLD – in special schools;
 - SLCN - in primary and special schools.
- 4.7 Since 2010 fewer children and young people have been identified as having:
- Moderate learning difficulties (MLD);
 - Severe learning difficulties (SLD) – in special schools;
 - SpLD – in secondary schools.

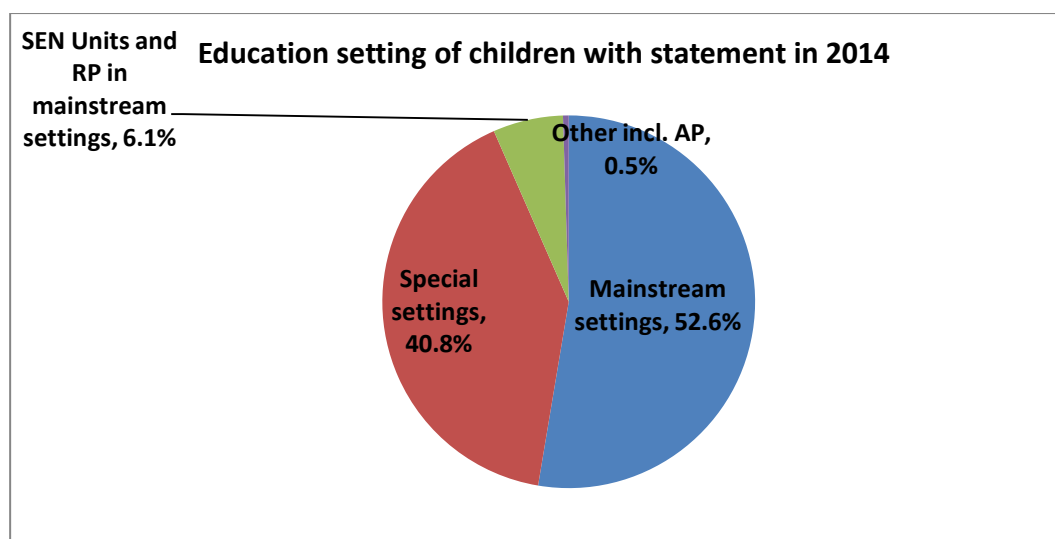
Figure 4



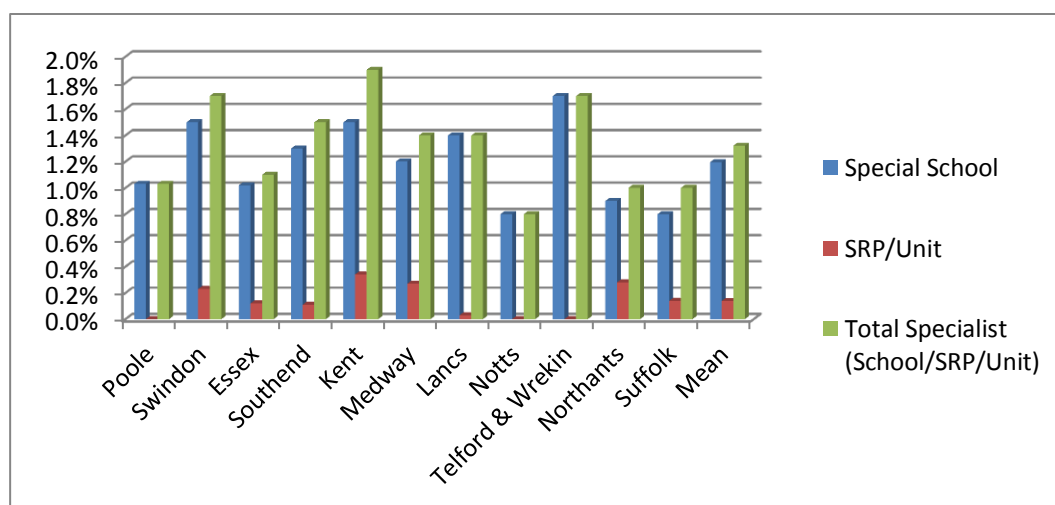
- 4.8 Compared to national benchmarks:
- A relatively high proportion of statemented pupils attend a mainstream school or, to a lesser extent, a specialist resourced provision (SRP);
 - A relatively low proportion of statemented pupils attend a special school.

Despite this, a high proportion of children in Swindon attend a specialist resourced provision or special school compared to national and statistical neighbour benchmarks.

Figure 5



Children in Swindon attending specialist provision



- 4.9 There are significant pressures for secondary special school places with the shortfall in places expected to peak in 2016. Pressures are particularly significant for:

- Uplands – with significant challenges projected at post-16;
- St Luke's – with significant challenges projected at Y7 in 2015.

Costs of specialist provision

- 4.10 Swindon consistently budgets for and spends² more per pupil and as a proportion of its overall DSG on SEND/High Needs than national and regional benchmarks, e.g.:

² Although S251 SEN spend in 2012-13 did fall below the national benchmark

Figure 6

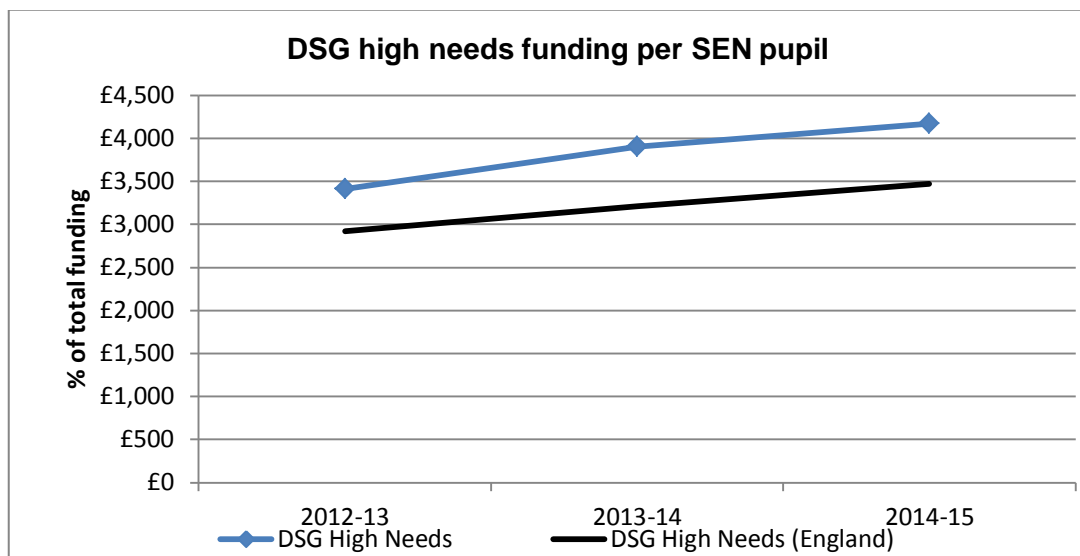


Figure 7

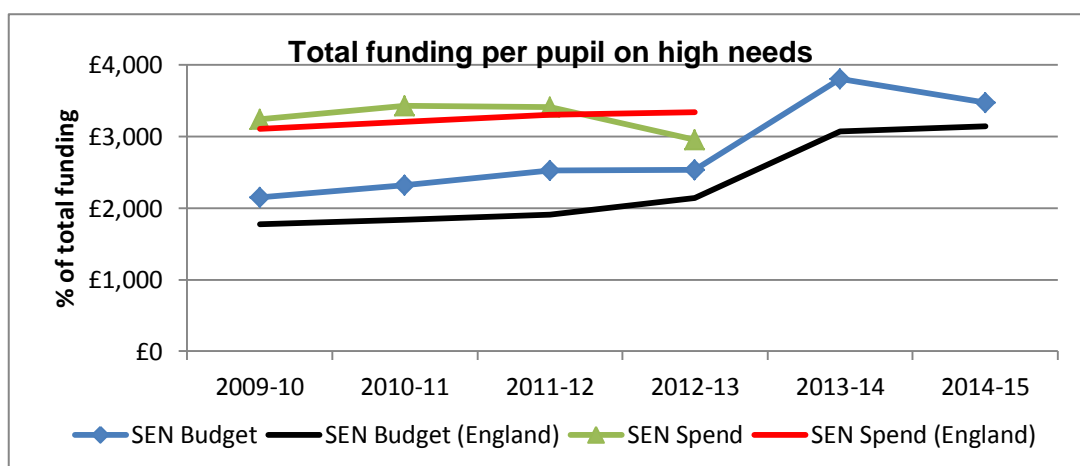
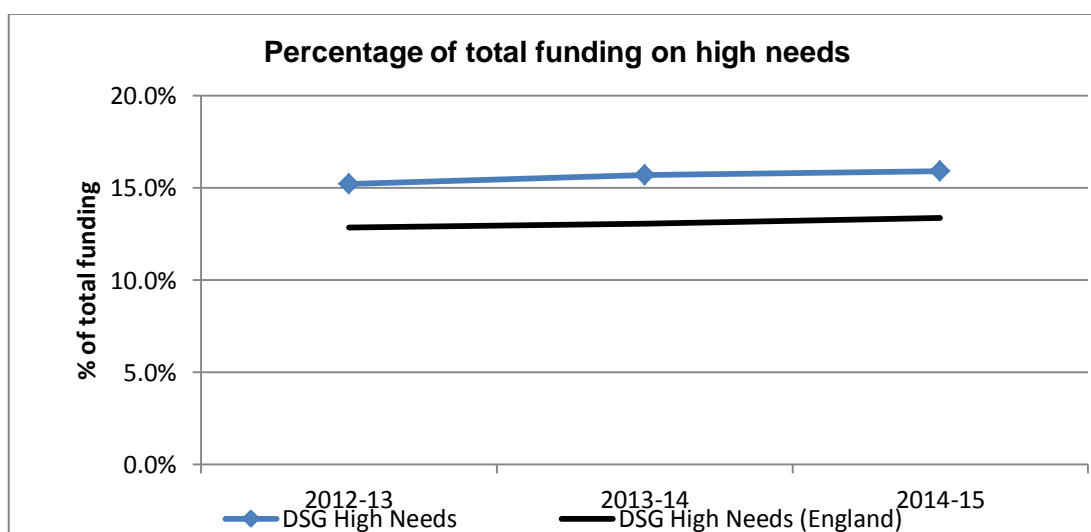


Figure 8



4.11 The High Needs Budget continues to spend more than the local formula and national allocation and continues to rise, e.g.:

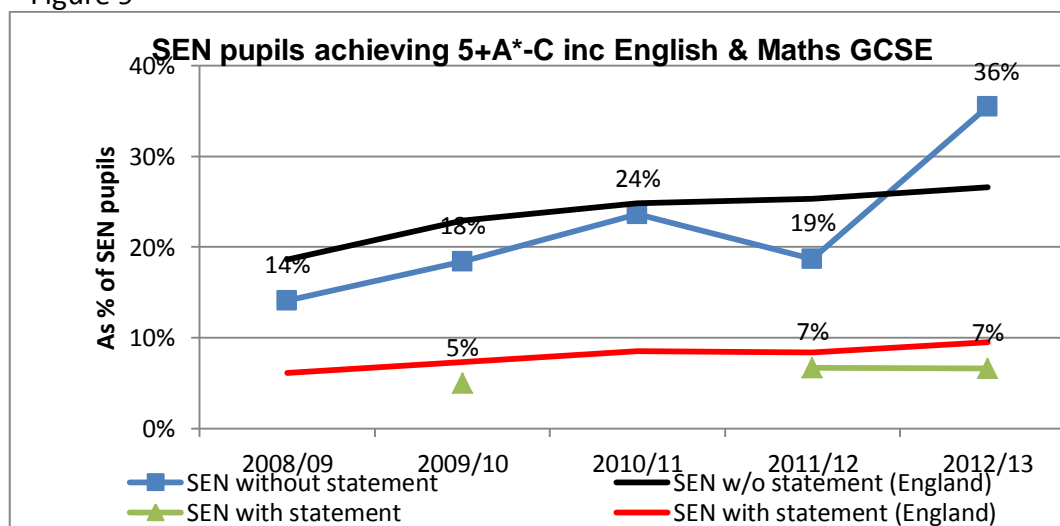
- The High Needs settlement for 2015-16 is expected to be £24.403m. Current projections are for expenditure of £26,420,509 an increase of £676,509 on 2014-15;
- The S251 SEN budget overall budget rose from £15.8m in 2012-13 to £20.2m in 2014-5³
- The High Needs budget per pupil rose from £3,413 in 2012-13 to £4,173 in 2014-15.

Outcomes for children and young people with SEND⁴

4.12 Achievement and progress at the end of KS4 for pupils with SEND is generally below national benchmarks, particularly for those with a statement of SEND, e.g.:

- The proportion of pupils with SEND that achieved at 5 A*-C GCSE, including English and maths fell below national benchmarks in 4 of the 5 years between 2008-09 and 2012-13⁵;
- The proportion of pupils with a statement of SEND that achieved at 5 A*-C GCSE, including English and maths remains consistently below national benchmarks;
- The proportion of pupils with SEND making expected progress in English has remained relatively stable and is slightly below national benchmarks;
- The proportion of pupils with a statement of SEND making expected progress in maths has remained stable and falls below national benchmarks.

Figure 9



³ However, the 2014-15 figure is actually just over £1m less than the previous year

⁴ Caution is required in interpreting outcome data as national benchmarks exist only for SEN children as a whole and do not relate to different kinds of specialist provision. This is because low numbers and the diverse needs of pupils in specialist provision make like for like comparison very difficult. It is important that 4 special schools are judged “good” by OfSTED and 1 “outstanding”. This will reflect OfSTED’s view that progress is also good or outstanding in these schools.

⁵ N.B. There was a significant increase in performance in 2012-13 in which 36% of children and young people with SEND achieved the benchmark standard compared to 27% nationally.

Figure 10

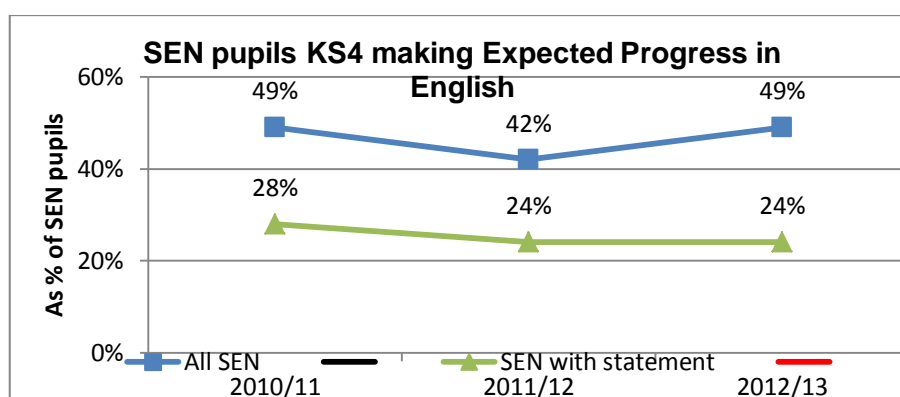
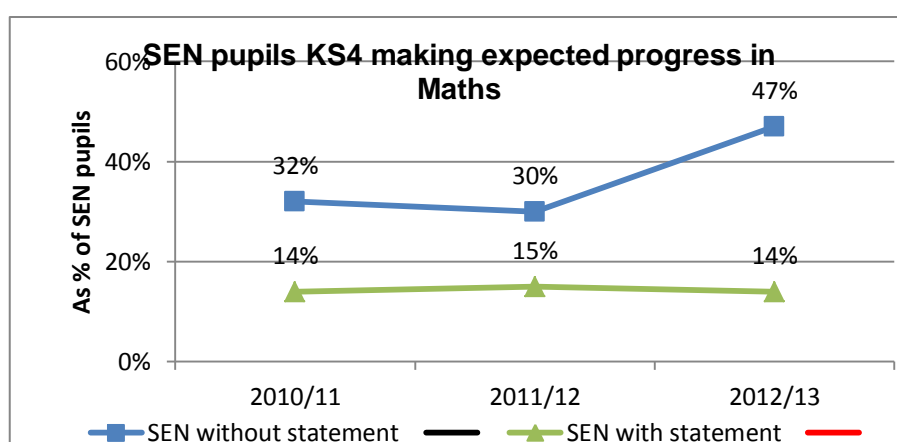


Figure 11



4.13 Achievement and progress at the end of KS2 for pupils with SEND is improving in reading and mathematics:

- The proportion of pupils with SEND achieving Level 4 in reading increased between 2011-12 and 2013-14. Over the same period the proportion of pupils with a statement of SEN achieving Level 4 in reading also increased;
- The proportion of pupils with SEND making expected progress in reading in 2013-14 increased by 3% from 2012-13 (when it was broadly in line with national benchmarks). Similarly the proportion of pupils with a statement of SEN making expected progress in reading also rose by in 2013-14 by 3% from 2012-13 (when it was broadly in line with national benchmarks);
- The proportion of pupils with SEND achieving Level 4 in maths increased between 2011-12 and 2013-14, although the proportion of pupils with a statement of SEN achieving Level 4 in maths fell over the same period;
- The proportion of pupils with SEND making expected progress in maths 2013-14 increased by 5% from 2012-13 (when it was broadly in line with national benchmarks). Similarly the proportion of pupils with a statement of SEN making expected progress in maths rose by in 2013-14 by 11% from 2012-13 (when it was broadly in line with national benchmarks);

Figure 12

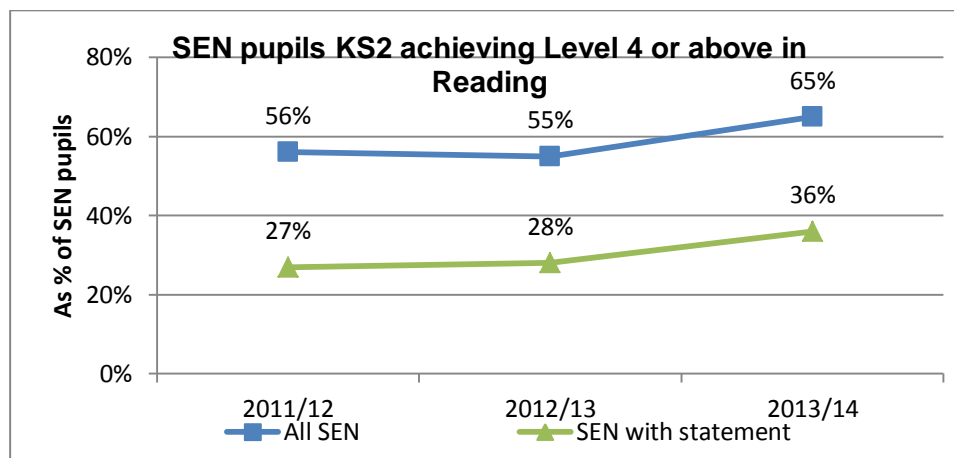


Figure 13

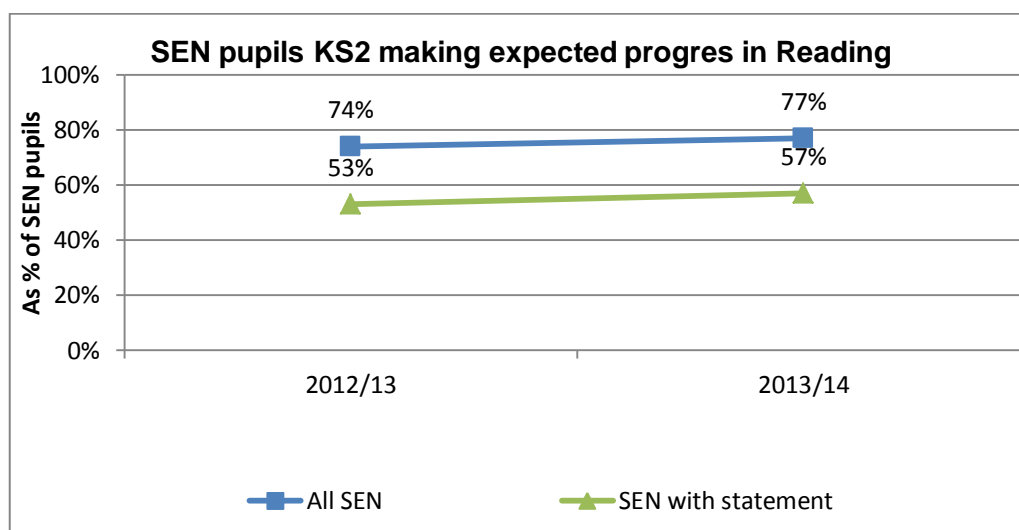


Figure 14

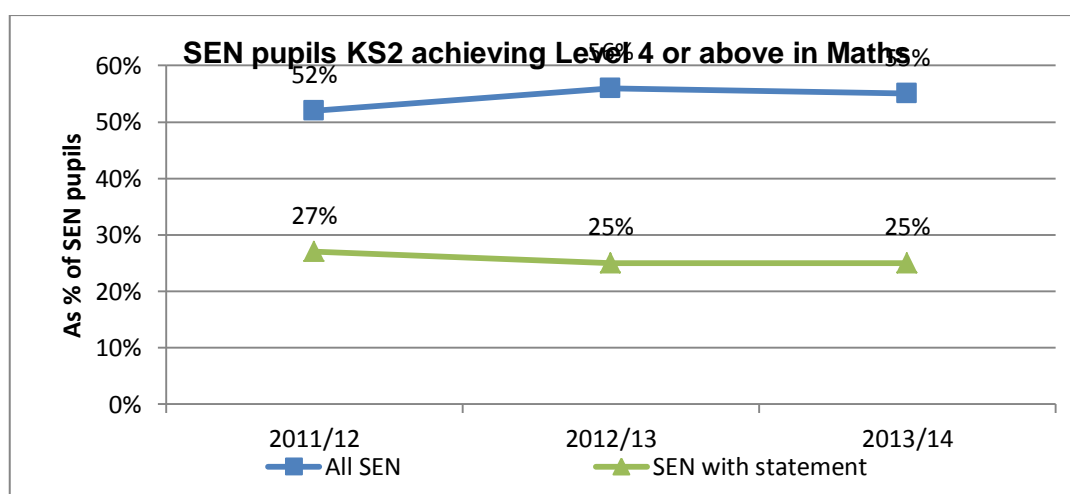
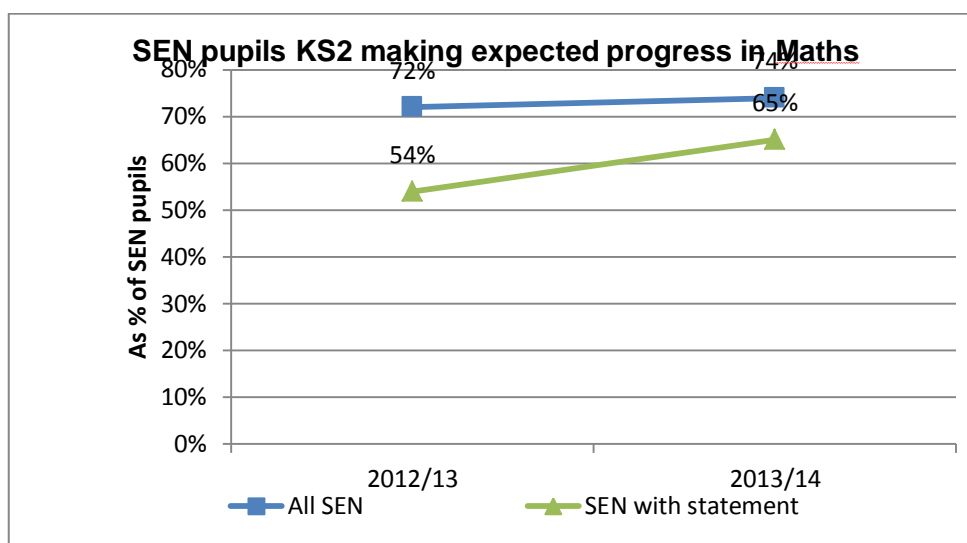


Figure 15



- 4.14 School attendance has not improved significantly for pupils with SEND in Swindon since January 2010. Pupils with SEND, particularly those with a statement of SEN, have higher levels of overall (OA) and persistent absence (PA) than national and regional benchmarks, e.g.:

Figure 16

Attendance – over 5 years	January 2010				January 2014			
	Not SEN	Act.	Act. +	State.	Not SEN	Act.	Act. +	State.
Overall Absence	4.9%	6.8%	8.5%	8.9%	4.7%	6.4%	7.4%	8.9%
Persistent Absence					3.3%	7.1%	10.4%	14.4%

Attendance – Jan 14	Swindon		England		South West	
	All SEN	Statement	All SEN	Statement	All SEN	Statement
Overall Absence	7.6%	8.9%	7.4%	8.2%	7.5%	8.2%
Persistent Absence	10.6	14.4%	10.2%	12.4%	9.9%	12.1%

- 4.15 Pupils with SEND, particularly those with a statement, are disproportionately more likely to be excluded from school:

Figure 17

Pupils receiving F/T Excl.	January 2010				January 2014			
	Not SEN	SEN Act.	SEN Act. +	State.	Not SEN	SEN Act.	SEN Act. +	State.
	1.6%	3.4%	10.0%	9.9%	1.2%	4.5%	10.5%	10.8%

F/T Exclusions Jan 14	Swindon		England		South West	
	All SEN	Statement	All SEN	Statement	All SEN	Statement
	8.6%	10.8%	6.1%	6.6%	6.4%	7.8%

- 4.16 The proportion of children and young people in Swindon who are “in need” (CIN) or looked after (LAC) that have SEND is well above national, regional and statistical neighbour benchmarks. This is particularly the case for children and young people with a statement of SEN.

Figure 18

Children in Need with SEN		Swindon	England	S West	S. Neigh.
School-aged CIN as at 31/03/13	SEN	60%	58%	59%	59%
	S. Action	13%	16%	16%	15%
	S. A. Plus	19%	18%	17%	19%
	Statement	28%	24%	26%	25%

Looked After Children with SEN		Swindon	England	S West	S. Neigh.
School-aged LAC as at 31/03/13	SEN	75%	68%	74%	68%
	S Action/S A Plus	33%	39%	40%	39%
	Statement	42%	29%	34%	29%

However, the proportion of children and young people with SEND that are LAC, at 1.4%, is broadly in line with national, regional and statistical benchmarks⁶.

- 4.17 Young people with Learning Difficulties (16-18) are less likely to be engaged in positive learning activities or education, employment or training than their peers. The difference is broadly in line with national, regional and statistical neighbour benchmarks.

Figure 19

Post-16 activities (16-18) June 2014		Swindon	England	South West	Stat Neigh
% In Learning activities	LDD	78%	77%	77%	78%
	All young people	82%	81%	82%	81%
	Diff	4%	4%	5%	3%
% NEET	LDD	12%	11%	11%	11%
	All young people	6%	6%	5%	6%
	Diff	6%	6%	6%	5%

5. Fieldwork

- 5.1 The data analysis suggests that Swindon identifies and statements relatively high numbers of children and young people with SEND at a cost that is consistently higher than many other LAs nationally and within the South West. Within this context, outcomes overall are no better and sometimes less positive than those achieved by children and young people with SEND in other LAs. These trends suggest that either:

- A higher proportion of children and young people in Swindon present with complex SEND than in many other local areas – perhaps inflated by families moving into the area, attracted by the level and quality of its specialist provision, or

⁶ This may reflect that there is a relatively high proportion of children and young people in Swindon with a statement of SEN and a relatively low proportion that are LAC.

- Policy and practice in Swindon, however, unintentionally, channels a higher proportion of children and young people with SEND towards statemented and/or specialist provision.

Feedback from parents and carers

5.2 Interviews with parents and carers were designed to learn from their experience of having a child with SEND in Swindon. Swindon Parent and Carers agreed to extend the invitation to their members to be involved in the research. In the event 5 sets of parent/carers agreed to be interviewed:

- The parent of a Y10 student with Down's syndrome who had attended mainstream school throughout his educational career;
- The parent of a Y4 pupil who is currently not attending school and recently commenced a bespoke package of part-time individual tuition;
- The legal guardians of 3 grandchildren under the age of 8. Their Y2 granddaughter has a statement of SEN and attends her local junior school. She is due to attend a specialist resourced provision when she transfers to junior school;
- The parent of 3 boys between the ages of 6 and 10. Her eldest child was diagnosed with ASC and Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) eighteen months ago and her youngest is currently on the ASC diagnostic pathway. Both boys attend their local mainstream school;
- The parent of 2 children with an ASC diagnosis. Her son, aged 10, attends the Chalet special school while her 7 year old daughter, who was recently diagnosed with Aspergers syndrome, attends her local primary school.

In addition, 2 focus group discussions were conducted with the parents of pre-school children with SEND who attend the Special Tots and Koalas groups at the Saltway Centre.

5.3 Parents and carers were invited to share their experiences of the SEN system with a particular focus on:

- What had worked well for them so far and anything that worked less well;
- Their thoughts and feelings about the future;
- The support that parents, carers and their children receive;
- Any other support that they think their son or daughter needs;
- The choice they had in deciding what support their son or daughter and the rest of the family should get;
- Any other information that they wanted to share.

Connor

Connor (not his real name) is a 15 year old boy with Down's syndrome. He attends a mainstream secondary school and is hoping to take some GCSEs next year. Connor's dream is to be a Butlin's Redcoat. He plans to go to Swindon College when he leaves school.

Connor's mum, Jane (not her real name) gave birth at home. She did not know that anything was wrong until her health visitor came to visit and arranged for an emergency hospital admission. Jane did not know what to expect when she was told that Connor had Down's syndrome and received very little information or support at the time. Now as member of the Swindon Down's Syndrome Group, Jane has helped to create hospital resources for parents of a newly born baby with Down's – *it begins by saying "congratulations" because we believe that we should value the birth of a Down's Syndrome baby in just the same way as any other birth.*

Jane felt that professionals discouraged her from having high aspirations for Connor. She was advised that he would need to attend special school throughout his education career. However, Jane was determined that Connor should have the chance to succeed in mainstream school, although she was always willing to consider special schooling if things didn't work out for Connor.

Jane found out all that she could about Down's Syndrome, including the best ways to help Connor to learn. She managed to get a grant from Barclays Bank to pay for his mainstream nursery school until he was 3.

Jane was delighted with Connor's primary school. They were very welcoming, made adjustments to meet his needs and came along to training days offered by the Down's Syndrome Group. Things were more difficult after Connor's school merged with another school. Jane felt that the Headteacher and SENCO of the new school were less willing to accommodate Connor's needs and did not welcome her suggestions about how best to help him learn. She felt that the school did not meet the terms of Connor's statement in full and says that communication became less frequent.

Transitions have always been difficult. Jane feels that she has had to develop the knowledge and confidence to challenge professionals some of whom she feels have a narrow perception of the pathways available to young people like Connor. However, she is optimistic about the future and advises parents in a similar position to herself to *believe in your dreams*

Claire (not her real name) is 6. She has a twin sister and an 8 year brother. They live with their grandparents who are also Claire and her sister's legal guardians. Claire's brother is a looked after child.

Claire has had a statement since she was in pre-school and receives 25 hours of support from a teaching assistant. She is on the Autistic diagnostic pathway and also shows signs of attachment disorder. She requires a lot of support and attention. She has attended her local infant school but is due to transfer to a specialist resourced provision (SRP) when she transfers to junior school.

Claire's grandparents find looking after Claire and her brother and sister a full-time job. Her grandfather works shifts and is on call at short notice. They describe their journey so far as like "banging their heads against a brick wall", although they found support from staff from Saltway, where Claire attended pre-school very helpful. They appreciated the advice they were given about their various entitlements and the fact that they were able to take Claire's sister and brother with them sometimes.

When Claire started school, her grandparents felt like their support "dropped off a cliff" and they also lost many of the informal networks they had established with other families. They find it difficult working with so many different professionals and wish that support for the family as a whole was more joined up. They are particularly concerned at the moment because their social worker from the disability team left recently and has not yet been replaced.

They have recently received an amended statement that they think confirms that Claire will attend a SRP in September, although the wording leaves them a little unsure. They had to work hard to get this agreed as the educational psychologist initially thought that Claire would be able to succeed in a mainstream junior school.

They hope that eventually Claire will make enough progress to be able to attend her local mainstream school again.

Lorraine (not her real name) has two children with additional needs. Her son Jack is 10 and was diagnosed as autistic when he was 3½. Jack attends the Chalet special school. His sister Mary is 7. She was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome 2 years ago and attends her local mainstream school.

Lorraine says that Jack's needs became clear when he was young and that his assessment and decisions about his future education were relatively straight forward. He attended Special Tots and Koalas, which he and Lorraine found very useful. Jack is making good progress at the Chalet and is now much more communicative and sociable. Lorraine is very pleased with Jack's education so far and expects him to transfer to Uplands when he enters secondary education. She is reassured by developments at Uplands that promise to offer Jack a clear pathway up to the age of 25 that combines education and life skills.

Marie found mainstream pre-school very difficult and screamed every day for 2 hours. Marie's transition to mainstream school was planned very carefully – there were lots of meetings with her reception teacher and the school was prepared to be very flexible. At the time professionals were uncertain whether Marie had needs on the autistic spectrum and the decision was made to see how she coped as she moved from reception into Year 1. Unfortunately, Marie coped very poorly and she was eventually diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome.

Marie does not have a statement/EHCP. However, the school recognise her needs and make a lot of adjustments to meet them from within their own resources. Lorraine appreciates the very strong partnership that she feels she has with Marie's teachers, but is quite anxious about her secondary education.

- 5.4 Parents and carers interviewed as part of the research expressed a range of views about the kind of provision they wanted for their child. This included a parent of a boy with Down's syndrome who was determined that he should attend mainstream provision throughout his educational career, the legal guardians of a girl on the autistic spectrum who wanted their granddaughter to attend a SRP in the expectation that she will eventually be able to succeed in mainstream school, and the mother of a boy who has recently been diagnosed with ASD who is pursuing specialist provision.
- 5.5 Most of the parents that attended the focus group discussions were actively considering the most appropriate school placement as their child approached statutory school age. For some, this was clearly an immensely challenging and often stressful time for them.
- It's all I think about – it keeps me awake at night*
Gruelling
Heart wrenching
- 5.6 A major challenge for parents of pre-school children was deciding on whether they wanted their child to attend mainstream or specialist provision. They leaned heavily on advice from the professional who they knew and trusted best. Some parents who expected their child to need special school provision were particularly concerned as they had heard that the number of children requiring placement exceeded the number of places available.
- 5.7 Stories shared by parents and carers all included examples of where they had felt supported and things had gone well. Conversely, there were also times when they had found the process confusing and professionals less helpful making them feel that they had to battle to get the support that their child needed.
- What worked well for parents and carers?*
- 5.7.1 Parents and carers reported that the process worked best for them when:
- i. ***They felt treated as equal partners by professionals*** – as experts in their own child's development.
- Parents and carers valued the opportunity to work in partnership with professionals. Some had undertaken their own research which, together with experience gained over the years, gave them real knowledge and understanding to contribute
- Our son was struggling with his reading and his teachers had tried a number of different approaches to help him. I advised them that the best way was to stick to a one approach and give him the chance to learn through frequent repetition. This made a real difference.*
- We agreed about my daughter's issues and challenges and worked together in partnership.*

- ii. ***They felt that their child was welcome at school and that staff were prepared to go the extra mile to help them succeed.***

Parents and carers said that their child made the most progress when they were happy at school, felt welcome and were a valued member of the school community. The attitude of the headteacher and SENCO was critical, demonstrated in a readiness to make reasonable adjustments in response to the child's needs, provide additional support from within the school's own resources and, where necessary, seek additional information or training.

My son's primary school was very welcoming. His teachers put visual signs around the school to help him understand where everything was and supplemented the TA support in his statement from within their own resources. They also attended training sessions put on by the Down's syndrome group.

The teachers asked staff from Koalas to come into school to explain how they had worked with our granddaughter.

The reception teacher was also the SENCO. We had lots of meetings at the beginning to make sure that the early days went well and the school were really flexible.

- iii. ***They had ready access to information, advice and support from someone that they trusted.***

Each parent or carer identified someone who they had found particularly helpful and supportive. Sometimes this was a professional or group of professionals.

Staff from Koalas and Special Tots at the Saltway Centre were really helpful. They advised us of what support we were entitled to and allowed us to bring the other children when we attended the group with our granddaughter.

Parents of pre-school children at Special Tots and Koalas were unanimous in stating that "here" was where they got the information, advice and support they relied upon.

Parents and carers also valued support from other parents of children with SEN, including social media, and friends and neighbours. Parents and carers said that among their greatest difficulties was feeling isolated and alone and that simply talking to other parents who had similar experiences could be of great help. Support from the Swindon Parent and Carer group was seen as particularly beneficial, e.g. in signposting other sources of support or chasing up with professional on families' behalf.

Other parents understand and can point you in the right direction....however, I do find it dispiriting when I see other families fighting the same battle.

Pre-school was the first time when there was someone who really understood and made me feel at ease. They helped me to understand what my son needs – they helped us learn, understand and cope as a family.

iv. Professionals considered the family as a whole

Reliable access to respite or short breaks was a key priority for parents and carers. Being able to share the responsibility allowed parents and carers time and space to spend with other members of the family – including each other.

We were able to take all the family on a trip to Weston Super Mare organised by social services for a group of looked after children. Just having other people around who to help with our granddaughter allowed us to have a great day with her brother and sister – sometimes small things make a big difference.

What worked less well for parents and carers?

- 5.7.2 Parents and carers described a range of issues and challenges that they had faced in securing their child the help and support that they felt they needed. From these discussions a number of common themes emerged:

i. Transitions can be very difficult times for parents and carers

In every case, transition between different phases of education proved challenging and at times stressful for parents and carers. This appeared to be regardless of whether the transition was, e.g. from early years into full-time education or preparing for post-16 education. The challenges most commonly cited by parents and carers included:

- Having to build relationships with a new set of professionals who did not know their child and who may bring a different understanding of their needs.

The educational psychologist saw my son in school without me having time to prepare him in advance. She did not see him at his best in the 2 hours she was with him and gained a very limited view of his capabilities. As a result she had decided that he needed to go to a special school for the next stage in his education.

I did not agree with the educational psychologist that our granddaughter could succeed in a mainstream junior class. They could not offer the same level of small group and individual support as she had received in the infant school.

- Losing the formal and informal support on which they had previously relied.

Suddenly all the support we had disappeared. We didn't know any of the other parents and had no one to talk to about what was happening

ii. The statutory process can be very confusing

Parents and carers often found the statutory processes confusing and off-putting. Some parents and carers also found some of the language used in important documents difficult to understand and were sometimes unsure what was actually being said.

Some parents and carers also found some of the language used in important documents difficult to understand and were sometimes unsure what was actually being said.

We needed a simple explanation of the process that we could understand.

We needed someone who we could trust to explain the process to us and to tell us what was happening

The amended statement says that our granddaughter should attend the SRP – does that mean that she will attend the SRP or that she can if everything works out and they have a place?

iii. It can be difficult to work with a range of different services and systems.

A common theme was the extent to which parents and carer would welcome support from a single person who they trusted to help them navigate their way through a complex system.

Parents and carers cited as particularly challenging:

- Services having different processes and thresholds;
- Meetings where key agencies do not attend;
- The inability to have a single conversation about the needs of the family as a whole.

I became my own key worker and took responsibility for organising CHIN meetings myself. This was after a number of meetings when attendance was poor because professionals had not been informed of the next meeting.

We couldn't discuss the family in meetings as a whole as our grandson is Looked-After and we are legal guardians for our granddaughters

Our granddaughter can't have a short break under Aiming High because we have respite care for her.

iv. Frequent staff changes make it difficult to build trusting relationships

It is of critical importance for parents and carers that they are able to build stable and trusting relationships with the professionals who work with their child. Parents and carers find frequent changes in personnel particularly difficult and resent the need to constantly retell their story to professionals who they are not confident will be there for the long haul. While this was particularly the case for social workers, parents and carers also saw their relationship with the school's SENCO as critical. Although less common, the impact of any change in SENCO was often seen by parents and carers as significant.

Our granddaughter's social worker recently left and we have had no replacement. There have been frequent changes in social worker and we have had to retell our story constantly

The SENCO went on maternity leave almost as soon as my son started at his new school. Her cover was not trained and appeared unwilling or unable to adapt to his recently diagnosed disability.

v. Parents and carers find it difficult to get the support they need when they need it

Parents and carers reported that it was difficult to obtain support for their child early in their journey. In their experience, while securing a diagnosis appeared to

be a necessary pre-requisite to securing the support that they needed, this was not always accepted by educational professionals.

My son's school questioned his diagnosis. He received no support, no strategies. He was punished for being naughty and developed stress incontinence. In the end, I withdrew him from school on the advice of my GP and the ASC team. The CAMHS team are now involved.

It took a long time – too long - to get recognition that our granddaughter would not be able to manage in a mainstream junior school.

vi. Schools don't always appear able or willing to make the necessary adjustments to meet the needs of children with SEND

Parents and carers reported a wide range of experiences with their child's school. Where things worked well, they felt that their child was welcomed as a valued member of the school community, that their views as parents were listened to, and that the school went a long way to make the necessary adjustments to include their child. In other cases, they felt that the school was unable or unable to make the necessary adjustments to accommodate their child's needs and their views were not seen as important. On occasion, a change in school leadership or SENCO had a significant impact on their experience.

Everything changed after the schools merged.... I was not confident that my son received all the support that was set out in his statement.

I was told that no school could meet my son's needs.

The school was unwilling to pay for the (traded) services that my son needed. He couldn't see an educational psychologist because the school had already used up its time allocation.

The junior school said that they didn't have the space to offer our granddaughter small group work.

The school simply expected my son to conform. They did not take any account of his difficulties.

vii. Parents and carers find that some professionals appear to focus more on their difficulties or impairments than their strengths and talents

Some parents and carers felt that the assessment of their child and subsequent statement concentrated a great deal on their SEN - what he or she found difficult or could not do - and less on their skills and attributes.

viii. Not all professionals treat parents and carers as equal partners

Parents and carers reported that their relationships with professionals varied greatly – from those where they felt that they truly were treated as equal partners, experts in their own child's needs, to others who appeared to consider them more part of the problem than the solution.

I felt that the new SENCO did not want to listen to me and often told me how many years experience she had to draw upon.

I find that professionals become defensive when something isn't working.

I've never had a conversation about the outcomes I want for my son with professionals

ix. *Some professionals appear over-stretched and do not respond quickly to queries*

Parents and carers recognise that professionals invariably have heavy caseloads and can appear to be overstretched. For them, the concern is that statutory processes can a long time to complete and that some professional can be slow in responding to queries. This can leave them feeling uncertain about what is going to happen next.

We are finally moving towards getting an EHCP, although it has already taken longer than it is supposed to

Sometimes it can take 3 or 4 weeks to get a return call

The team feels over-stretched

What would make the biggest difference?

- 5.7.3 Parents and carers were invited to suggest changes that they felt would make the greatest difference to their experience of the SEN system and the support that their child needs. Common themes were:
- i. Someone to help parents and carers navigate the system
 - ii. Simple, clearly written information
 - iii. Many and flexible pathways for children and young people with SEND
 - iv. Stable and trusting relationships with key professionals
 - v. A more joined up system that treats the family as a whole
 - vi. Professional that are willing to listen to parents and carers and treat them as equal partners
 - vii. Access a wider range of support

Feedback from commissioners

Pupil place planning

The current pupil forecasting method used by Children's Services at Swindon Borough Council is the cohort survival method. To predict the number of school places that will be needed the cohort survival method incorporates and assesses the following information for each primary school based area:

- The proportion expected to enter school based on past experience;
- The "survival" of that cohort as it moves through school taking account of net migration which occurs in relation to schools' popularity and the effects of development in their area
- For each secondary school, a similar "survival" method, particularly taking account of transfer rates to the sixth form if there is one.

- 5.8 Current projections, presented in Appendix A, suggest that, despite investing in a relatively high level of specialist provision in the past, the LA faces significant pressures for special school places over the next few years. This pressure will peak in 2016 and then reduce gradually. The best case scenario is that supply will meet demand by 2021, although other projections suggest that this may not be until 2025.
- 5.9 Swindon takes a sophisticated approach to pupil place planning for specialist SEND provision. Nevertheless, the relatively small population of pupils with complex SEND means that projections can vary quite significantly in response to, e.g. a Y6 bulge in one special school. It is unlikely, therefore, that pupil place planning for special schools can ever reach the level of precision as for mainstream schools, based upon predictable demographic factors, and that the various projections for secondary special school places, presented as Appendix X, should be seen as a best estimate of from a range of potential scenarios.
- 5.10 The research did not identify specific demographic factors that might lead inevitably to higher rates of statementing or the need for more in specialist provision. Demand for specialist provision tends to increase at key transition points – Years 5/6 and Year 12 – suggesting in some instances a lack of confidence that the next education phase will be able to meet a child or young person's needs as well as the current one. Otherwise, bulges can occur in different year groups at different times, making pressure for places hard to predict and to plan for.
- 5.11 The research has not been able to validate anecdotal evidence that suggests that families with children with SEND move to Swindon because it offers, for its size, a relatively high number of good and outstanding special schools. While this may be true in a small number of individual cases, the research found nothing to suggest that this inflow of families occurs at a scale that could have more than a marginal impact on overall trends.
- 5.12 Figure 20 shows the proportion of pupils attending mainstream schools and SRP and special school provision who live outside of Swindon. Figure 21 compares the proportion of pupils in special or SRP provision that moved to Swindon after 5 with

pupils in mainstream schools. Any difference noted between the 2 groups is not statistically significant

Figure 20

Pupils with Out of Borough Codes	%
Mainstream pupils	0.8
Special and SRP pupils	3.9

Figure 21

High Needs Pupils (Swindon residents only)	Domiciled in Swindon before age of 5		Moved to Swindon at 5 or above *	
Special schools	374	90.6%	39	9.4%
SRPs	144	93.5%	10	6.5%
Total	518	91.4%	49	8.6%
Pupils moving to Swindon at 5 or above *	%			
Mainstream pupils	6.6%			
Special + SRP pupils	8.6%			

5.13 The fieldwork was designed to explore and test a range of hypotheses that were generated following the data analysis and workshop with key stakeholders. The hypotheses were informed by discussion at the workshop and crafted as potentially plausible explanations for identified trends within the data that focused largely on the extent to which the current trends are driven by policy and practice. They also provided a useful stimulus for wider discussion, particularly with commissioners and practitioners.

5.14 The insight of commissioners was explored in a number of individual and small group discussions and also at a special meeting of the SEND Strategic Board.

Hypotheses

5.14.1 Swindon identifies and statements a relatively high proportion of children and young people because:

- The long-standing consensus that significant investment in specialist provision is the best way to meet the needs of the most vulnerable learners has not been subject to rigorous scrutiny based upon a robust analysis of outcomes;
- The response to a child's SEND is driven by a deficit model and does not focus sufficiently on the assets – strengths and talents - that the child, family, school and community can contribute to a more innovative and effective support package;
- There is a lack of confidence across the system that mainstream schools, particularly secondary schools, have the resources, expertise and confidence to meet a wider and more complex range of SEND without recourse to a statement (EHCP);
- Use of the Early Help Record identifies some needs that are more “social” than educational;
- Too few children have their needs identified and addressed early;

- Too few children with SEND make sufficient progress in response to the graduated response at School Action and School Action plus (now SEN Support);
- Too few children make sufficient progress in response to specialist intervention so that their needs can be met within “normal mainstream resources”.

5.14.2 More pupils are identified as having BESD/are excluded from school in Swindon than in many other LAs because:

- Too many pupils fail to have their SEND identified and addressed appropriately;
- The reliance of specialist provision has limited the extent to which the wider system has assumed responsibility for more vulnerable learners.

5.14.3 Swindon spends more on high needs pupils than many other LAs because:

- The long-standing consensus that significant investment in specialist provision is the best way to meet the needs of the most vulnerable learners has not been subject to rigorous scrutiny based upon a robust analysis of outcomes;
- Too many children and young people attend out of Borough specialist provision;
- There is too often a single agency – educational – response to needs that have a significant social and/or health element.

5.14.4 Outcomes for children and young people with SEND are no better and often less positive than those achieved by children and young people with SEND in other LAs because:

- The long-standing consensus that significant investment in specialist provision is the best way to meet the needs of the most vulnerable learners has not been subject to rigorous scrutiny based upon a robust analysis of outcomes;
- The reliance of specialist provision has limited the extent to which the wider system has assumed responsibility for more vulnerable learners;
- Educational outcomes for pupils with SEND are consistent with generally poor performance at the end of Key Stage 4;
- The response to a child’s SEND is driven by a deficit model and does not focus sufficiently on the assets – strengths and talents - that the child, family, school and community can contribute to a more innovative and effective support package.

Key messages

5.15 Feedback from commissioners demonstrated some support for each of the main hypotheses and suggested a number of ways in which existing policy and practice at least contribute to a relatively heavy reliance on statementing and specialist provision in Swindon. In particular, commissioners highlighted as priorities:

5.15.1 *Strengthening further the strategic oversight and commissioning of specialist SEND provision, based upon a rigorous monitoring of outcomes.*

Commissioners suggested that while operational management of specialist provision was relatively strong, more formal strategic oversight and commissioning could be strengthened further. They highlighted, in particular, a need to monitor more closely the impact of provision on outcomes and to use the intelligence gleaned to inform commissioning decisions at individual pupil and provision level.

We are not measuring the impact of any provisions we are not able to demonstrate where pupils get good outcomes, or where they are better than any other provision.

Specialist provision may get good outcomes, but may not be the only provision that could get good outcomes

5.15.2 Capitalising on the new Education, Health and Care planning process (EHCP) processes, to focus on outcomes and person-centred planning and encourage more innovative solutions to meeting pupil need

Commissioners recognise that current processes often focus more on the child or young person's learning difficulties or impairments than their strengths and talents or the support on which they rely within the family and wider community. This is also evident in the banding descriptors that the SEN Resource Allocation Panel (SENRAP) uses to decide the level of funding required to meet a child's SEN in an objective and consistent manner. Commissioners, and members of the SENRAP, recognise the risk that this approach could channel decision-making towards specialist provision at the expense of more innovative support arrangements.

New EHCP processes introduced under the SEND reforms are recognised as an opportunity to change the way in which the needs of children with SEND are assessed and decisions made about the type of support and provision best suited to help them succeed. Focusing on the outcomes that the child or young person should achieve, along with their goals, aspirations, strengths, talents and support within the family and wider community should help commissioners and practitioners to work together with families to co-design more innovative ways of providing support. However, this is a significant change in practice and may take time to embed.

We are beginning to work with families differently, but still recommending the same provision

5.15.3 Building capacity and confidence in mainstream schools to meet a wider range of SEND

Commissioners recognise that mainstream schools vary quite significantly in their confidence and capacity to meet SEND and that, while there is much excellent practice upon which to build, this is not consistently the case across all schools. They are concerned that relying too heavily on specialist provision could inhibit the development and dissemination of good, inclusive practice more widely.

A particular concern was the extent to which some schools rely on teaching assistants to provide much of the support children with SEND and that this may inhibit the development of more innovative, evidence-based practice⁷.

Although there are pockets of very good inclusive practice across primary and secondary mainstream schools, this is the exception rather than the rule

Specialist provision is always suggested as the solution when mainstream cannot meet need, or in a crisis however there is little innovation around mainstream schools meeting needs.

5.15.4 Strengthening opportunities for wrap around, multi-agency support and for longer in the child's educational journey.

⁷ It is also the case that many statements of SEN also specify provision in the form of TA hours.

Commissioners questioned the extent to which the level of multi-agency support and expertise that is available during the early years is sustained once the child enters full-time education. Ensuring that the EHCP process is genuinely multi-professional, resulting in a holistic pattern of support for the child's education, health and social care needs is a key priority within the SEND Reforms.

Feedback from practitioners

5.16 The views of practitioners were canvassed primarily through:

- Discussion with the High Needs Task and Finish Group - which includes representation from all Specialist Resourced Provisions and special schools. Attendance is also open to heads of a range of specialist services. A number of group members are also SENCOs;
- Feedback invited from members of a range of specialist support services, including members from the integrated services for disabled children.

5.17 Overall, practitioners were more challenging of the hypotheses, highlighting the quality of the work and impact of their special school, specialist resourced provision or service, often supported by examples of good practice. Where there was common ground between commissioners and practitioners it was largely around the need to:

- Use the opportunity of the EHCP process to focus more sharply on outcomes, person-centred approaches and innovative ways to meet a child's SEND;
- Build confidence and capacity in meeting SEND within mainstream schools.

When families are engaged AND involved in a child's support plan, outcomes are better for all concerned (Parents carry over strategies from school to home, they provide info to school that helps school engage the child, they practice therapy activities at home and in school)

Within the SALT department we are developing our skills with person-centred, solution focussed work. Close work with the parent support advisor also occurs. Clearer pathways in terms of what parental support can be offered within SBC would help with guidance.

It needs a WHOLE school approach at secondary to SEN in general....Some children with SEN (e.g. MLD) cope well at secondary as when children are put in ability groups, they are with a whole class of children at their level and not just one out of 30 as they were at primary school. Others with specific needs who are well supported at primary but without a SEN struggle at secondary as the support completely drops off.

All of the children at the SRP could not have their needs met within a mainstream school. This is regularly reviewed as the aim is to transfer them out whenever it may be possible. With children transferring in to the SRP then a lot of input and advice

5.18 Practitioners highlighted the real and potential benefits of specialist provision for children with more severe and complex needs, in particular:

- i. The importance of specialist provision as a tiered pattern of support for children with SEND.**

Practitioners emphasised the fact that some children with particularly severe and complex needs are unlikely to succeed without high levels of specialist intervention that are more easily delivered in specialist provision where there is also the advantage of economies of scale;

Advantages of specialist provision are often smaller class sizes and a higher adult-child ratio. If mainstream settings were supported to reduce class sizes and put a higher adult-ratio support in earlier, would this help some children to access mainstream

The Better Communication Research Project highlighted the necessity of a tiered approach to supporting children with Speech & Language difficulties....The percentage of children with severe speech and language difficulties in Swindon (without global learning difficulties) who require the specialist provision of an SRP is very small when compared to the overall number of children with speech and language difficulties.

ii. Examples for effective outreach work designed to build confidence and capacity in mainstream schools.

Several Specialist Resourced Provisions also provide an outreach services to mainstream schools.

We provide an outreach service from Even Swindon which helps the sharing of expertise. Courses are run at the SRP and additionally teaching staff and children are invited in to the SRP to experience the resources and methods of teaching used there.

- 5.19 Some practitioners highlighted the difficulties in judging the outcomes achieved by children in specialist provision in the absence of robust national benchmarks. This is exacerbated by the relatively small numbers and diverse needs of pupils, making like for like comparisons particularly challenging. Heads cite the fact that 4 of the special schools in Swindon are judged “good” by OfSTED and 1, Uplands, “outstanding” as confirmation of the positive outcomes achieved by their pupils. In addition, the Head of Uplands monitors progress against exacting benchmarks that reference the National Progression Guidance developed by the National Strategies⁸.

6. A case for change

- 6.1 Current trends suggest that, unless something changes, the reliance on statutory provision is likely to remain high and that the LA will have to invest further in specialist provision. There is no evidence to suggest that this is due to a particular set of demographic challenges. Rather, the research has highlighted the extent to which current policy and practice however, unintentionally, channels at least a proportion of children and young people with SEND, who might otherwise have their needs met within the “graduated response”, towards statemented and/or specialist provision. This has important capital and revenue implications that are likely to be exacerbated over the next few years when a greater proportion of the pupil population will be of

⁸ Although the Progression Materials provide a useful benchmark against which to measure the progress of pupils working well below age expectations, the national data base upon which they are founded has not been updated since 2010

secondary school age – limiting the extent to which the funding within the Early Years and Schools Blocks will be available to subsidise higher spending within the High Needs Block.

- 6.2 High levels of demand for specialist services and provision for SEND in children's services risks being translated into similarly high demand for adult services at a time when the focus increasingly is on promoting independence and resilience in individuals, families and communities.

Policy drivers - SEND reforms and The Children and Families Act:

- 6.3 Reforms set out in the Children and Families Act (2014) challenge professionals to change the way in which they work with each other and families, to focus relentlessly on improving outcomes for children and young adults with SEND, give children and families more control and choice and, critically, to earn their trust and confidence. Extending the system up to 25 years is an opportunity to achieve a holistic vision of development from birth right through to transition into adulthood.
- 6.5 Since September 2014, several core processes support this vision:
- Replacing Statements of Special Educational Need and Learning Difficulty Assessments with a single coordinated assessment process and EHCP, with a focus on planning for whole-life outcomes;
 - The potential for a personal budget for some young people whose needs cannot be met by universal or targeted services;
 - Greater coordination between all the services that support children and their families, particularly requiring local authorities and health authorities to work together and encouraging joint commissioning.
- 6.6 The challenges are complex, deep-seated and involve many stakeholders - each with their own perspectives and priorities. Technical changes alone cannot and will not make the difference. Rather, the reforms demand fundamental, system-wide organisation and cultural change:
- *Asset-based*: focusing as much upon the strengths and resources within the family itself as providing targeted or specialist support;
 - *Proactive and preventative*: needs are picked up early and support is offered quickly;
 - *Empowering*: families know what they can expect and have more control over the decisions that affect them;
 - *Enabling*: staff work closely to share skills and knowledge and work seamlessly from assessment through to delivery

Dissatisfaction with the current system

- 6.7 The Reforms have been introduced because current arrangements do not work well enough for too many children, young adults and families. Children and young adults with SEND still achieve much poorer outcomes than their peers and many families believe that they have to battle to get the support they need. There is too little trust and confidence across the system. The roots of dissatisfaction can be summed up in the following themes that, while in no way unique to Swindon, emerged during the fieldwork phase of the research:

Adversarial relationships between families and statutory services:

- 6.8 Discussion with parents and carers illustrated that in Swindon, as is the case nationally, the relationship between families and public services is at times adversarial. While each of the parents and carers interviewed could identify positive experiences and professionals who they had learned to trust, for many the sense was of a battle - whether to get the diagnosis they believed would unlock the support they needed or to secure a place in the school of their choice.
- 6.9 Although each of the parents and carers had, to varying degree, taken steps to grow their understanding and knowledge of their child's needs and the SEN system as a whole, there was little evidence of statutory services consistently working alongside families to co-produce support. However, where this had happened, parents and carers felt valued and supported. An approach that is centred exclusively on the child's difficulties or impairment can miss opportunities to harness and build upon the circles of support within the family and wider community.

The 'cliff face' at key transition points:

- 6.10 Parents and carers find all transitions difficult, whether from early years to primary school, primary school to secondary school or, most significantly, from children's to adults' services. Sometimes it is simply fear of the unknown, having to build new relationships with new professionals. Transition can also involve a change in culture, in which previous expectations and established patterns of communication and support no longer exist.
- 6.11 Where young people transition to services funded by adult social care they are likely to experience a sharp drop in the value of their care and support. The system needs to focus on building the capacity and resilience of young people and their families to be able to thrive in context where support is less service or provision-led.

A complex array of services and systems

- 6.12 Even well-informed and relatively "savvy" parents and carers can find the complex array of services, systems and processes baffling. The plea from parents and carers was for clearer and more readily available advice and guidance but also, more powerfully, for a single point of contact and someone to help them navigate their way through the complexity.

7. Learning from other local authorities

- 7.1 Local authorities vary quite significantly in the proportion of their school population subject to a statement of SEN. Some, e.g. Newham, Nottinghamshire, Nottingham City, have consistently maintained statements for less than 1% of their pupils over several years. Conversely, others, like Swindon, have maintained statements for approaching 4% of pupils over a similar period. Few, if any showed trends that had changed significantly in either direction.
- 7.2 Local authorities that maintained a particularly low rate of statemented provision, tended to focus the statutory process on children and young people with the most complex SEND, with the largest proportion placed in special schools. These LAs have invested in building capacity and expertise in mainstream settings and secured the confidence of families that their child would receive the support they needed without the protection of a statement.

8. Opportunities for change

- 8.1 The SEND reforms are a once in a generation opportunity to change the way in which we work with children and young adults with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families so that they can shape the support that they need and achieve the best possible outcomes.
- 8.2 Learning from SEN Pathfinders and other third sector organisations offer examples of interesting and innovative practice that help to demonstrate how this ambition can be achieved.

An asset-based approach

- 8.3 Assessments all too often focus more on a child or young person's difficulties or impairment than their strengths and talents. Providing support for young people to do something they enjoy and make it accessible for other young people with disabilities to benefit from too fosters their confidence and builds the skills to participate in their wider community.

My Life is a member organisation in Wigan designed to understand people's aspirations and find ways for them to become involved in things that will make them happy and raise their ambition. It aims to challenge the perception that disabled people require charity and support and that they cannot contribute to society. Becoming a member of My Life requires committing to offer skills and to grow your capabilities. It directly challenges the notion that support needs are static.

Technology

- 8.4 Technology offers new ways for families and service providers to collaborate. Apps and websites enable young people and families to construct plans and share information in a way that suits them. The content can be updated regularly and can help celebrate successes and new achievements that can be shared across different settings. It also provides ways to receive real time feedback from families and increase the contribution of parent and pupil voice.

Greenwich have developed wiki websites that young people can use to host their "One Plan" – a concise plan that focuses on the positives in the young person's life and highlights tips to enable development. The wiki pages are owned by the family and young person, but practitioners and support workers can also feed in information and create a holistic record.

Peer support

- 8.5 Partnering young people with learning disabilities with non-disabled peers to provide support and companionship in normal service settings helps to foster confidence and inclusion into wider friendship circles and promote confidence to lead a more independent life in the future.

Best Buddies' vision is to create a society where people with learning disabilities are fully integrated into schools, communities and workplaces. A network of students, with and without learning disabilities, offer their time to a young person to provide peer support to establish a plan to raise their profile in the school, or colleague or wider community, and to build their confidence. Because their buddy attends the same school or college, the young person can integrate and make stronger connections than if an outside support worker fulfilled the role.

Of Course We Can developed by Active Impact in Gloucestershire organises "fun things to do" for small groups of disabled and non-disabled groups together. Their aim is to transform the notion of short breaks for disabled children and young people by providing adventurous or relaxing activities that can be enjoyed by all young people whether disabled or non-disabled

Empowering families and building their understanding

- 8.6 Helping families understand their role in the planning process and the support they can expect from statutory services can give them the confidence and belief to collaborate with professionals in designing and securing the support that their child needs to achieve their goals.

In Control's "Partners in Policymaking" programme aims to equip disabled adults and parents and carers of children with a disability to get to grips with the social care system so that they can feed into the planning process. A "Sharing the Challenge" workshop provides a space where families and practitioners can build new understandings and relationships.

New models of support

- 8.7 Creating a space for statutory and non-statutory services to come together to provide a holistic range of support for young people and their family. The team is held to account by a key worker that is selected by the young person and their family to best support them achieve their outcomes.

My Way in Derbyshire brings together the work of the children and young adult's, adults and Connexions services in an holistic, person-centred and outcomes focused approach to support planning. My Way facilitators enable young people and their families to develop their vision of how they want life to be and help them solve problems and overcome obstacles along the way. Before set up costs of approximately £180,000 are taken into consideration savings over the first year are estimated as approximately £200,000.

9. The way forward

- 9.1 The research identified a number of examples where commissioners and practitioners are already finding new and different ways to respond to the challenge, e.g.:
- The Early Bird programme aims to empower parents of young children with ASC to act as experts on behalf of their child and to work with schools to help them understand and meet their child's needs.

- Working closely with a group of Y11 students at Crowdies Hill, their families and providers, including Swindon College, to design bespoke packages of support that should enable them to make a successful transition to the College in Y12.

9.2 The SEND reforms provide an ideal context within which to deliver the kind of change needed to build a sustainable model that delivers improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND by supporting at all points the independence and resilience of individuals and families. To do so requires:

System change, at the heart of which is integrated, collaborative commissioning, supported where appropriate by pooled and/or aligned funding

Cultural change, characterised by:

- Empowering and involving families and young people as co-producers;
- Person-centred and outcomes focused working;
- Prevention and early identification and intervention;
- Sustained, long-term, joined-up working from 0-25.

Functional change, including

- Single point of contact for families;
- Integrated, outcomes-focused, support planning, 0-25;
- Peer support and family leadership;
- Integrated personal budgets.

9.3 Central to the approach should be:

- Strengthening further the strategic overview and commissioning for SEND – based upon a rigorous analysis and monitoring of outcomes.
- Building capacity across the system, particularly in mainstream schools.
- Developing the workforce so that being outcomes focused and person-centred is at the heart of their practice.
- Refreshing SEND/EHCP processes, focusing particularly on the SEND Banding descriptors and the role of the SEN Panel.
- Promoting innovative responses to the SEND of children and young people, by working together with families to design the kind of help and support they need to exercise greater control over their lives.