



Member Webinar

Dorset Local SEND Reform Plan
16 June 2026



Working together | ambitious for **Dorset**

Introduction

- Government driven – White Paper ‘Every child achieving and thriving’ published 23 February 2026 setting out a long-term plan to improve inclusive education and outcomes for all children.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reform consultation to shape legislation – closed 18 May 2026.
- Under the Local Authority’s leadership all system partners are required to design and deliver a Local SEND Reform Plan and submit to the Department for Education (DfE) for approval.
 - Draft submitted 15 May
 - Final submission 19 June
- The DfE have committed to clearing 90% of High Need Block deficits if the plan is approved – total deficit for Dorset is £150m, 90% is £135m.

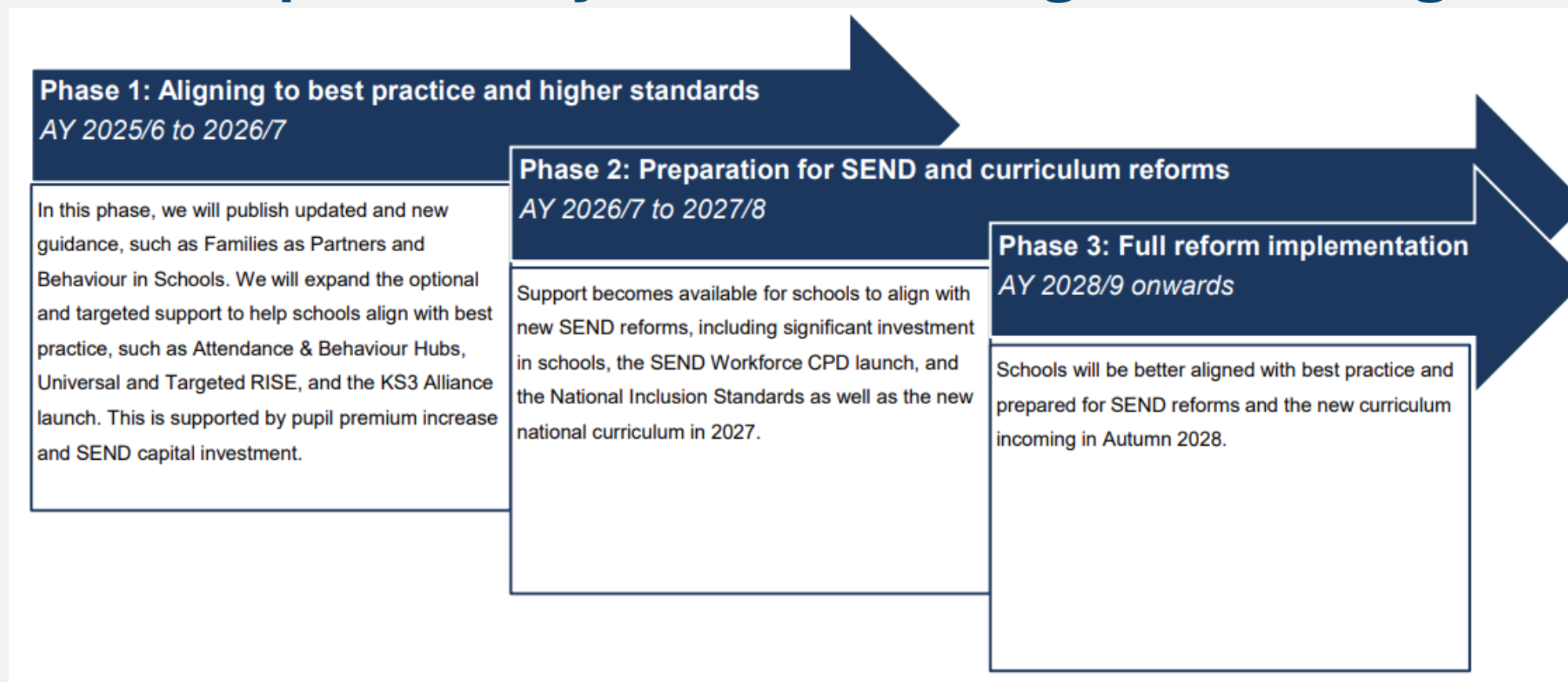
Purpose of this session

- Raise awareness of SEND reforms
- Note what all councils have been directed to do
- To share our plan's vision and goals
- To note the governance routes

Schools White Paper and SEND Reform – key points

- Addresses national challenges in attainment, disadvantage, SEND, and attendance.
- Government aims for all education settings and schools to be inclusive and able to support children with SEND and those facing disadvantage.
- Introduces three layers of SEND support:
 - Targeted support (school-led)
 - Targeted Plus (with education/health input)
 - Specialist support via an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP)
- Expectation that more support will be delivered in mainstream schools without needing an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- Children with existing EHCPs will keep their plans until they complete their current phase of education; new assessments begin from 2029–30 transition points.

Schools White Paper – Every child achieving and thriving timeline



2026

Phase 1 Alignment to best practice

2026-2027

Preparation for curriculum & SEND reforms

2028-2029

Full implementation phase

Investment in the system

An additional £4b in reforms between 2026-27 and £3.7b in Capital (2025-26 to 2029-30)

Inclusive Mainstream Fund - £1.6bn

For to schools, colleges and early years settings, to spend on targeted support for children with additional needs, such as small group support for literacy or numeracy.

National training for all EY, School and Post-16 staff – over £200m

To ensure that all staff get new training to support children with SEND.

Experts at Hand - £1.8bn

For LA and health services to give EY settings, mainstream schools and colleges direct access to expert support - 40 days per average primary school and 160 days per average secondary school.

Education Psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists - over £40m

To fund training for over 200 more educational psychologists per year from 2026 and 2027 and ensure there is a SaLT advanced practitioner in every Integrated Care Board (ICB) area.

Support for local areas to deliver the new system - £200m

To transform local SEND services and build a cohesive, child-focused, inclusive system. This funding will strengthen LAs' strategic planning, commissioning, leadership capacity and engagement with the education sector.

Best Start in Life Family Hubs – over £200m

For every Best Start Family Hub to enable each hub to have a SEND practitioner to offer direct support to children and families.

High Needs Capital - £3.7 billion

To create 60,000 new specialist places, including tens of thousands of places in inclusion bases and new special school places.

Dorset Council Plan Alignment



Provide high quality and affordable housing



Grow our economy



Communities for all



Respond to the climate and nature crisis

Workforce, Inclusion & Local Collaboration

- Good homes for families that allow for continuity of education.
- Availability of local affordable housing for teachers, SEND specialists supporting recruitment, retention and stability.

Raising attainment & reducing disadvantage gaps, trust-led system, workforce development

- Strong education outcomes are directly linked to economic growth.
- Higher workforce skills, improved attainment.
- Reduction in disadvantage gap.
- Skilled workforce to support children.

Inclusion, Early Intervention, Universal Offer (three-tiered support offer)

- Local inclusive mainstream provision, early help, and community-based SEND support.
- Best Start Family Hub in every community to support the whole community – babies upwards.

Estate Management and sustainable school environments

- Sustainable school buildings
- Transport arrangements

5 principles of SEND Reform

Early

- Needs should be identified and supported sooner to improve outcomes and prevent escalation into more costly provision.

Local

- Children and young people with SEND should, where possible, learn in their local school. Special schools continue, but for those with the most complex needs.

Fair

- Schools should be properly resourced to meet common and predictable needs, without families having to fight for support.

Effective

- Reforms should be grounded in data and evidence, with all interventions grounded in effective practice.

Shared

- Education, health, and care services should work in genuine partnership with families, teachers, experts and representative bodies

Where we are and how we got here

Strong foundations and recognised system leadership

1. Ofsted “*Children in Dorset received exceptional services*” and *Children and young people with SEND and their families are placed at the heart of all that leaders do... This culture of working together results in continual improvement to secure the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their families...The voice of children and young people with SEND is highly valued.*”
2. Selected as Wave 1 Families First for Children Pathfinder – national recognition of innovation
3. Mature, well managed system with strong and improving multi-agency partnerships and co-production

What we have already delivered

- ✓ Inclusion Hubs (phase 1 complete) reducing reliance on distant / high-cost placements
- ✓ Strengthened SEND Coordinator (SENDCO) and Early Years Practice including Valuing SEND (VSEND) rollout for earlier identification of need
- ✓ Established locality-based model and family help offer enabling integrated support
- ✓ Strong specialist workforce (Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists) forming the basis of the Expertise at Hand Offer

Where we are and how we got here

Some of the impact so far

1. Key Stage 2 outcomes for EHCP pupils above national average
2. Measurable improvement in attainment (8-9% increase across core subjects)
3. Increasing ability to support children locally

Challenges we must now address

1. Rising EHCP demand and complexity
2. Pressure on High Needs Block and independent placements
3. Variability in inclusive practice across education settings
4. Growing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and Elective Home Education (EHE) trends

DfE four Building Blocks of the plan

Strengthening inclusion across education settings – organising places and provision to meet as many needs as possible, as close to home as possible, with all settings and providers moving towards a shared understanding and consistent practices around inclusion.

Access to specialist support and local placements – improving collaboration between settings and deploying expertise from a range of specialist and expert sources, to support schools and settings to meet the needs of children and young people earlier and locally.

System leadership, local partnership collaboration and co-production – putting in place the enabling conditions across a local area that ensures planning and provision reflects the local area & is joined up, including strategic co-production with parent carers and children and young people.

Encouraging inclusive culture & behaviours – using funding and shared accountability towards a system that works for children and families while achieving value for money.

This is where we are going (data and finance projections / ambitions)

Our ambition (next 3 years)

1. A coherent 0-25 inclusive system where more children thrive in mainstream settings
2. Support delivered earlier locally and without escalation wherever possible
3. Stronger workforce confidence and consistency across all settings
4. Improved parental confidence and experience

Key system shifts (outcomes)

1. Slower growth in EHC Plans through earlier intervention
2. Reduction in Education Health Care Needs Assessment (ECHNA) requests over time
3. More children supported at SEN Support Level in mainstream
4. Reduction in Elective Home Education (EHE) and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)
5. Increased access to specialist support with diagnosis

This is where we are going (data and finance projections / ambitions)

Financial ambition

1. Reduce spend on independent specialist placements (ISP)
2. Reduce reliance on out of area provision
3. Shift investment to local inclusion (bases and mainstream capability)
4. Deliver a sustainable High Needs Block and improved value for money

What success looks like

1. More children educated close to home
2. Consistent inclusive practice across all settings
3. Improved attendance, stability and outcomes
4. A system that is financially sustainable and trusted by families

Data projections / ambitions

Projected without reform

EHCPs **6360**
unmitigated trajectory

Education Health and Care Needs
Assessment (EHCNA) requests
1021 each year

Children and Young People in
Elective Home Education (EHE)
90 in 2026

Other local authority arrangements,
including Education Other than at
School (EOTAS) **191** in 2026

Increase spend to HNB of **£21m**
between 2025/26 and 2026/27

Dorset SEND Reform Plan

Projected with reform

EHCPs **5559** by 2029
2% slow in growth

Education Health and Care Needs
Assessment (EHCNA) requests
970 each year - **5% reduction**

Children and Young People in
Elective Home Education (EHE)
75 in 2029

Other local authority arrangements,
including Education Other than at
School (EOTAS) **175** in 2029

Reduction of HNB increase to **£6m**
between 2026/27 and 2027/28

Reduction of 23 placements in
special schools and 64 in
independent special schools

Our vision for inclusion and excellence in education

In Dorset, we want all babies, children and young people to be healthy, happy and safe, feel valued and understood, and achieve meaningful outcomes that enable them to lead fulfilling, independent lives. Through inclusive education, high-quality support and a strong partnership, we will ensure all children and young people are empowered to reach their full potential.

Dorset will deliver this vision by establishing a more inclusive, preventative and locally responsive system, underpinned by Dorset's Expertise Offer (our Experts at Hand model), building confidence and capability across settings to identify and meet needs earlier.

This is how we are going to do it

Our goals are to...

Identify needs earlier and deliver timely support in the right setting

- increasing the proportion of children whose needs are met through SEN support, evidenced by improved attainment, attendance and a reduction in ECHNA requests as confidence in mainstream provision grows.

Strengthen inclusive, local provision

- education settings meet a wide range of needs confidently and consistently, with more children and young people supported locally, reduced variation in inclusive practice and improved access to key professionals.

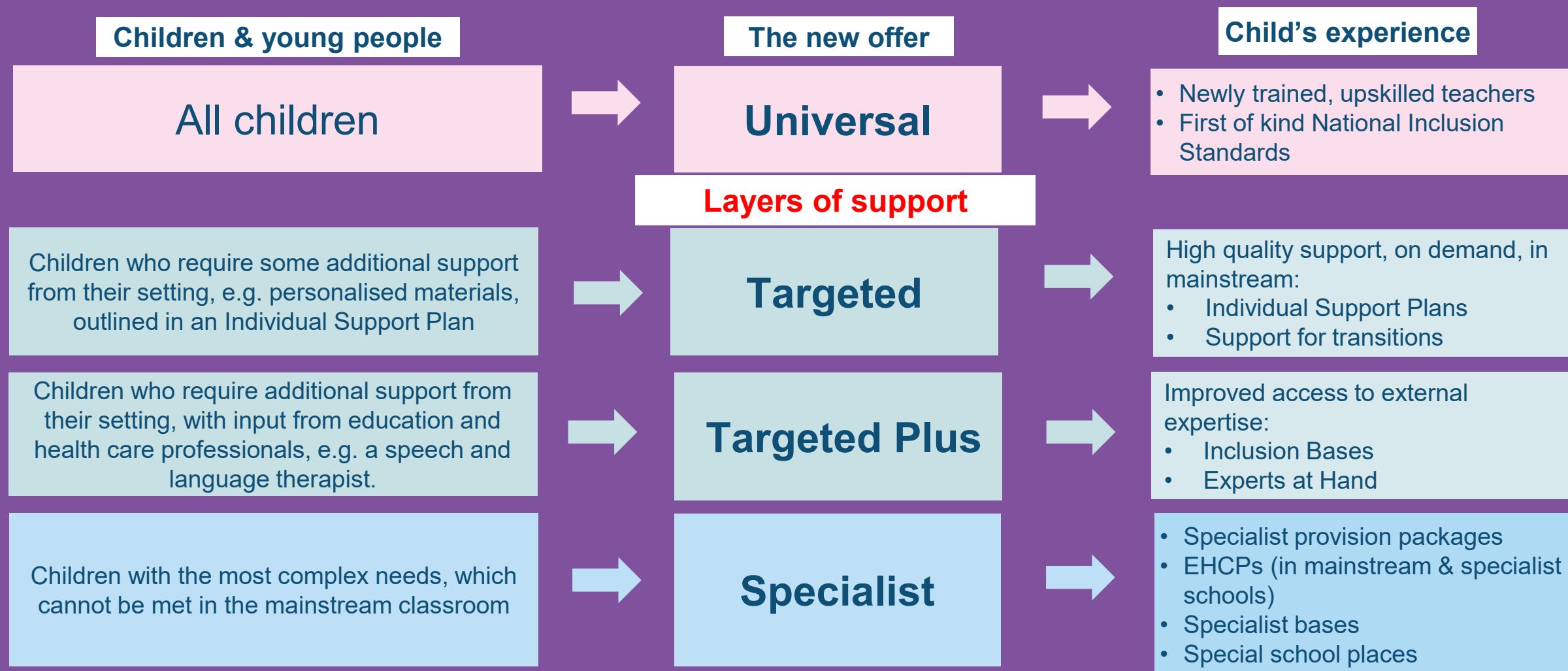
Improve outcomes and experiences for children, young people and families

- delivering clearer pathways and improved communication so families understand and have confidence in the support available, measured through improved satisfaction, reduced disputes and more positive transition experiences.

Ensure long-term sustainability and effective use of resources

- shifting towards prevention and inclusion, reducing reliance on high-cost and distant placements and securing better value for money over time.

Revision to SEND practice



Developing a strong universal offer for mainstream settings

Our ambition

- Every child to achieve and thrive in mainstream education wherever possible
- A preventative, inclusive and locally delivered system

What is changing

- Inclusive Mainstream Fund directly to schools from central government
- Stronger expectations on mainstream inclusion and accountability
- Earlier support for education settings to support inclusive practice



Experts at Hand

Dorset's Expertise Offer

an offer of support
to mainstream settings



Inclusion Bases

Growing our Local Specialist Provision

- Adding ~300 Inclusion Base places across all phases and localities across Dorset between now and 2030
- Increasing provision for Communication & Interaction and Social Emotional Mental Health needs
- Developing new provision for Cognition & Learning needs to create capacity in Special Schools and reduce use of INMSS
- Phased expansion aligned to SEND sufficiency analysis, with ~6 new bases commissioned each year
- Focus on early, local access and reduced travel times and expense

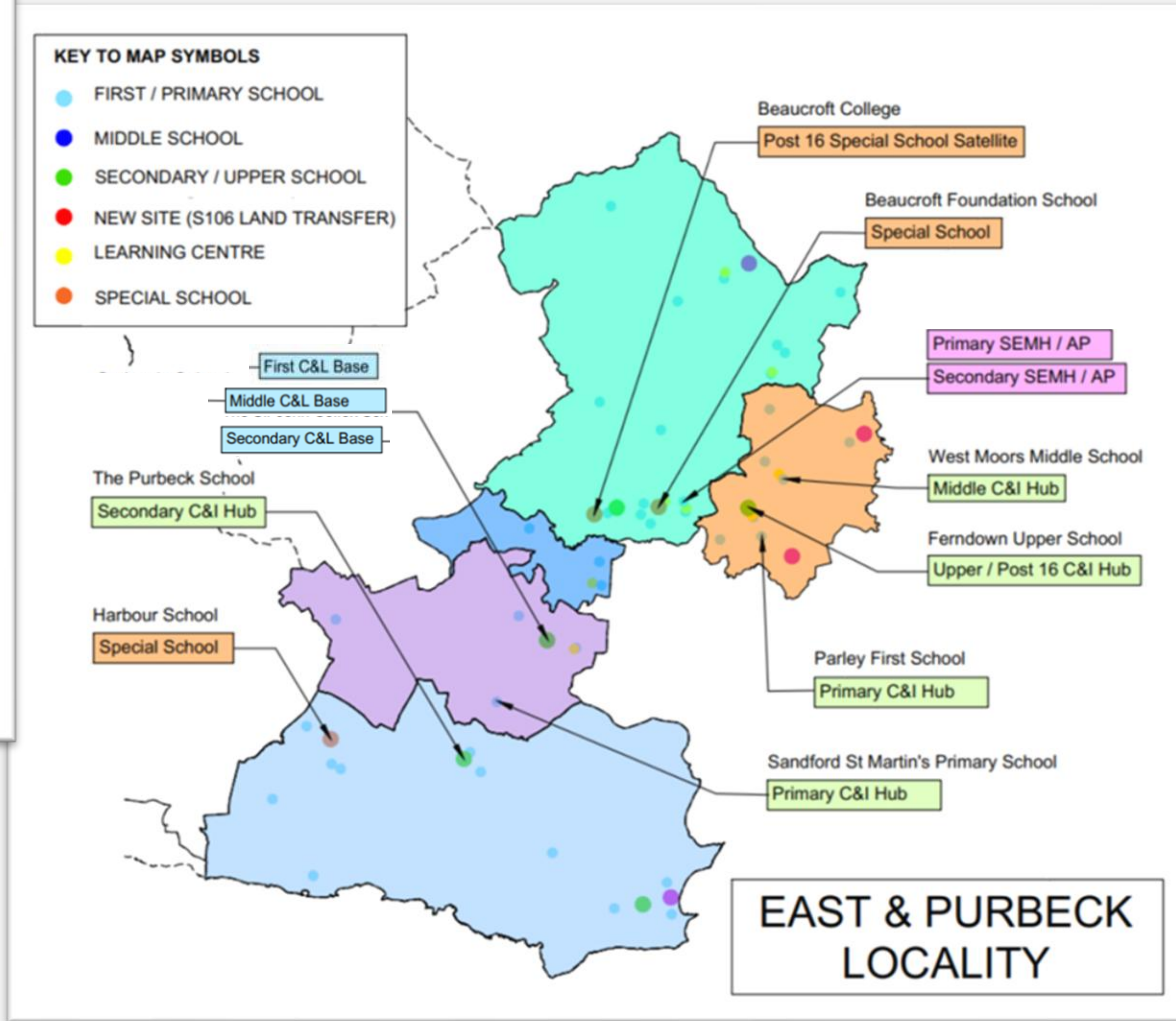
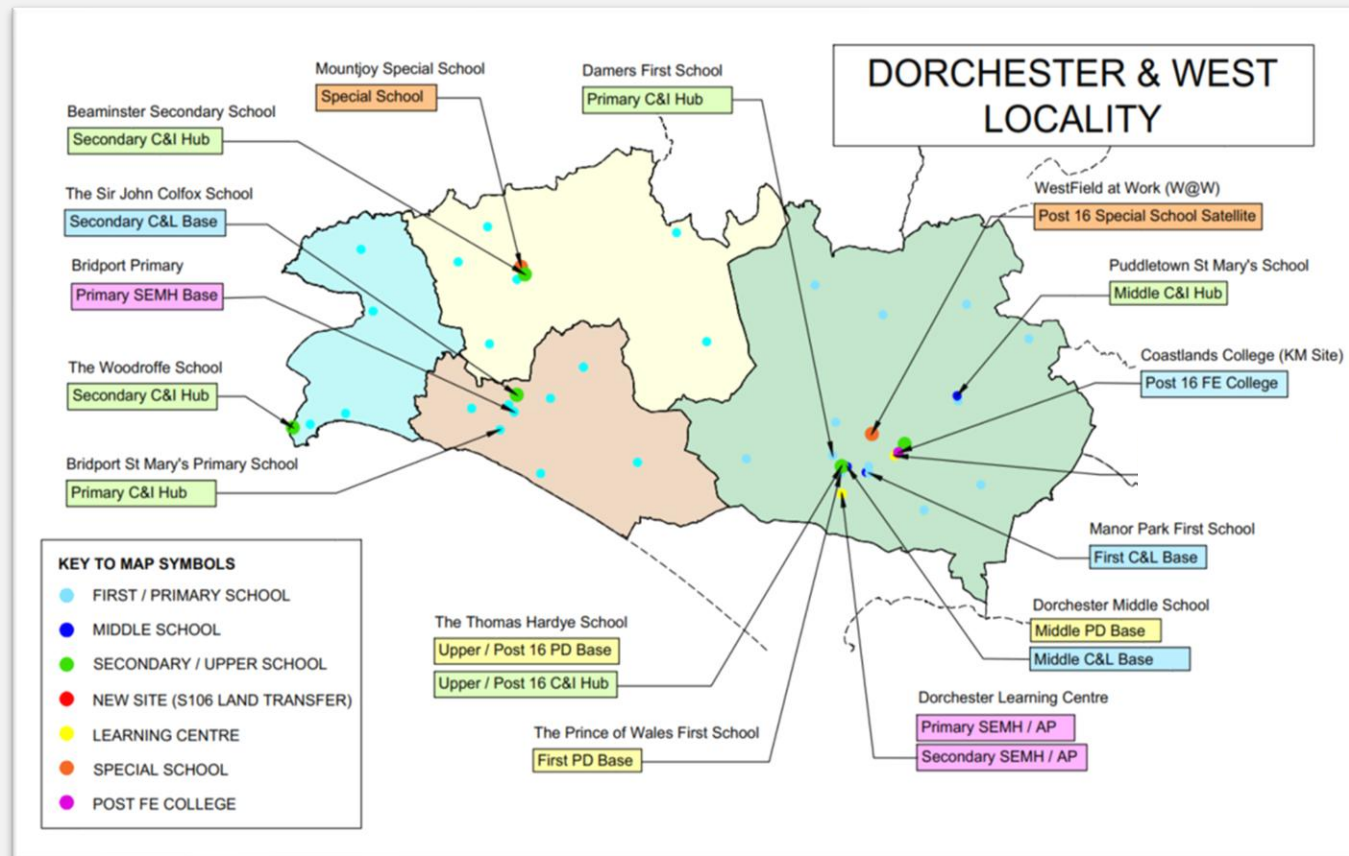
Capital approach

- Primarily estate adaptation within mainstream schools
- Some targeted new build where required
- Capital requirement finalised through feasibility work, aligned to sufficiency need and value for money
- Assumed capital cost of each base is c£800k in 26/27 falling to £650k in 27/28

Why this works

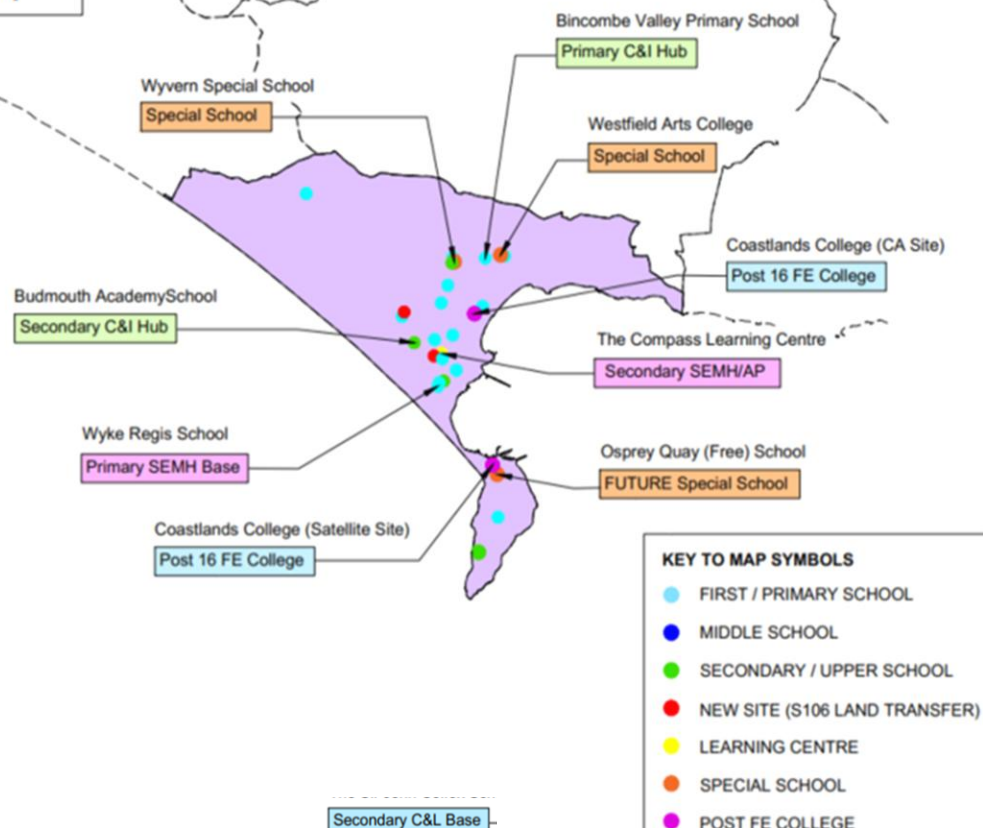
- Builds mainstream confidence and capacity
- Reduces escalation and cost over time
- Creates planned continuum, not reactive placements

Specialist Provision

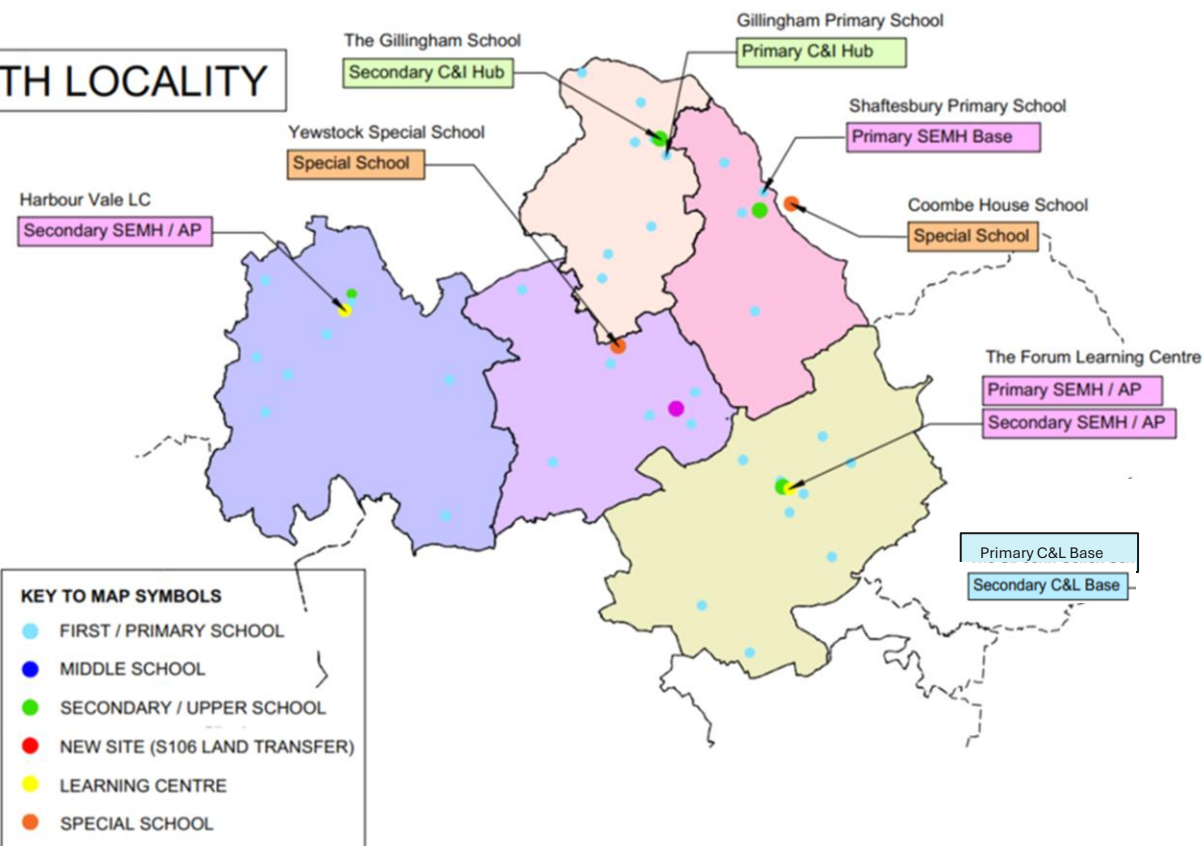


Specialist Provision

CHESIL LOCALITY



NORTH LOCALITY



Governance and oversight

- The Alliance for Inclusion and Excellence in Education, providing accountability for delivery and improvement.
- Political oversight - Cabinet 28 July.
- The multi-agency 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' group will drive the 3-year implementation plan.
- Dorset's Expertise Offer – co-ordinated by a new core LA team - linked to localities and delivered by a range of professionals.
- Commissioning arrangements tbc.

Dependencies

- NHS reforms
- Wessex Devolution
- Reforms to Children's Social Care
- Best Start Family Hubs and Best Start in Life Strategy
- Curriculum and Assessment Review
- Capital delivery outside of LA control
- Ofsted framework to recognise good inclusion

Questions

