

Scrutiny update: overview of school and EY places

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Pupil Numbers (mainstream)

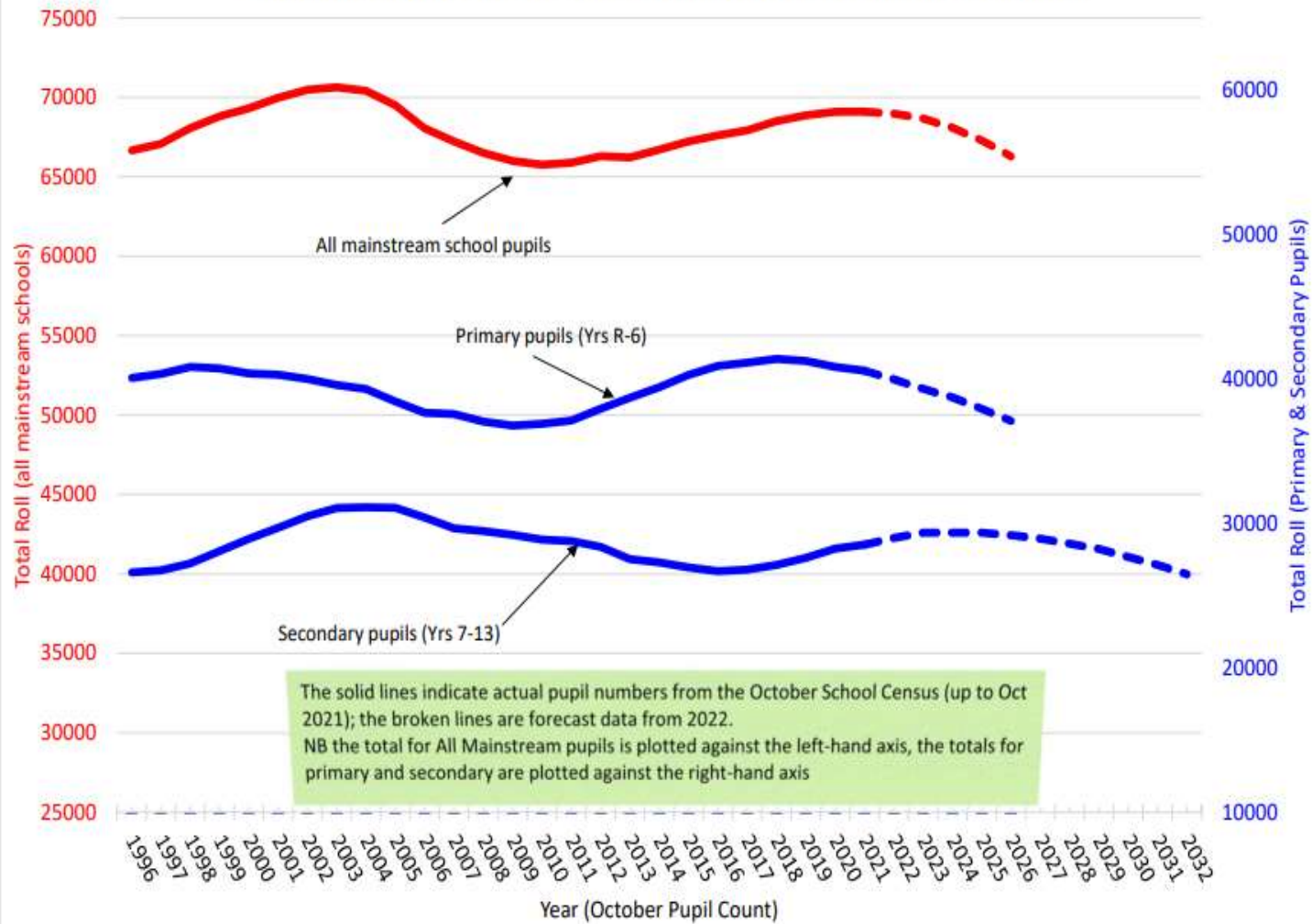
Liz Smith



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Chart A: Actual & Forecast Pupil Numbers in Somerset Schools



Key Trends

- 3476 fewer primary aged pupils forecast by 2026 compared to 2021 – a decline of 8.6%. In monetary terms this equates to 16.2m drop in pupil funding
- A forecast decrease in primary school rolls in 21 (out of 22) planning areas by 2026 when compared to 2021.
- 75.8% of primary schools are forecast to see a drop in pupil numbers from 2021 to 2026.
- Secondary aged pupil numbers which started to increase in 2017 are forecast to continue increasing until 2023 and plateau in 2024 and 2025 but then fall again until 2032
- A forecast decline in secondary school rolls in the medium to long term. The summary of change between 2021 and 2032 is 2173 fewer secondary aged pupils. In monetary terms this equates to 12.5 drop in funding?
- Bridgwater and Taunton secondary aged pupils are forecast to see further growth although the end of that period of increase is now in sight.
- Somerset's special schools have seen further growth in the number of pupils.
- Uncertainty regarding the long-term impacts of Covid-19 on pupil numbers.





Challenges

- Planning school places within an academised system.
- Covid-19 came at time when there was already a decline in the number of births. The recovery in pupil migration in 2021 could be a new normal or a catchup from 2020
- Many schools will have to cut the number of classes they operate leading to staff redundancies. There could be viability issues for some of our smaller schools.
- Pockets of growth linked to large housing developments will still need to be managed and funded. Increased construction costs are of concern
- DfE require published forecasts to only include housing developments with a degree of certainty (eg full planning permission). Assessing likely impact of outline permissions has been made harder due to COVID and developers needing mitigation for Phosphates. All applications are taking longer to process.

Response

- Maintain good working relationships with Academy Trusts and DfE Regional Directors.
- If admission limits remain at current levels within the context of a falling roll then there is potential for volatility in the system. Consider reducing admission limits in line with pupil forecasts and mothball vacant classrooms. However we can only do this for Community and Voluntary controlled schools
- With a 50m condition backlog removal of poor condition buildings is now possible with a falling roll.
- Ensure those small schools not yet working in a formal partnership with another school are supported to secure that quickly. This could be within an LA initiated Multi Academy Trust
- Where there is growth work with developers to secure contributions and land where appropriate.



Pupil Numbers (SEND)

Phil Curd

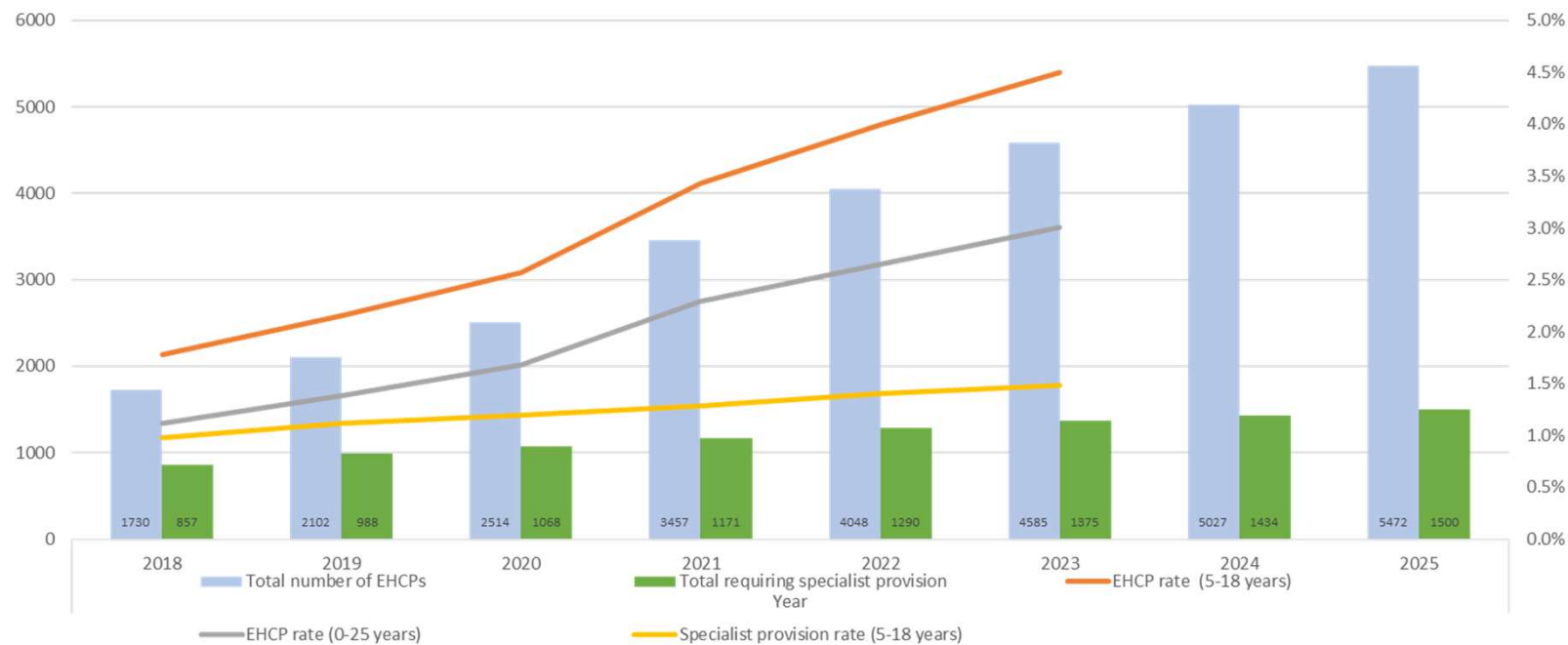


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Growth of Specialist Places

Since 2017, Somerset has seen a significant rise in the number of children with EHCPs. A trend that has been mirrored across the country, but amplified in Somerset as a result of the Council's historic 'low-statementing' approach. This has stimulated demand for additional places in special schools and resources bases.

Numbers and rates of EHC plans and specialist provision



Challenges

The demand for special school places is resulting in an ongoing over-reliance on places in Independent Non Maintained Special Schools (INMSS).

The cost of these places is comparatively high when viewed against the costs of places in state-maintained special schools.

At present, Somerset has around 300 children and young people placed in INMSS settings at an annual cost of £18m. This level of annual spend in the INMSS sector results in an ongoing pressure on the High Needs Block.

While there are many children that require places in specialist provision in order to have their needs met, there are children in special schools who, with the right support, could have their needs met in mainstream schools, freeing up places for those that need them.



Response

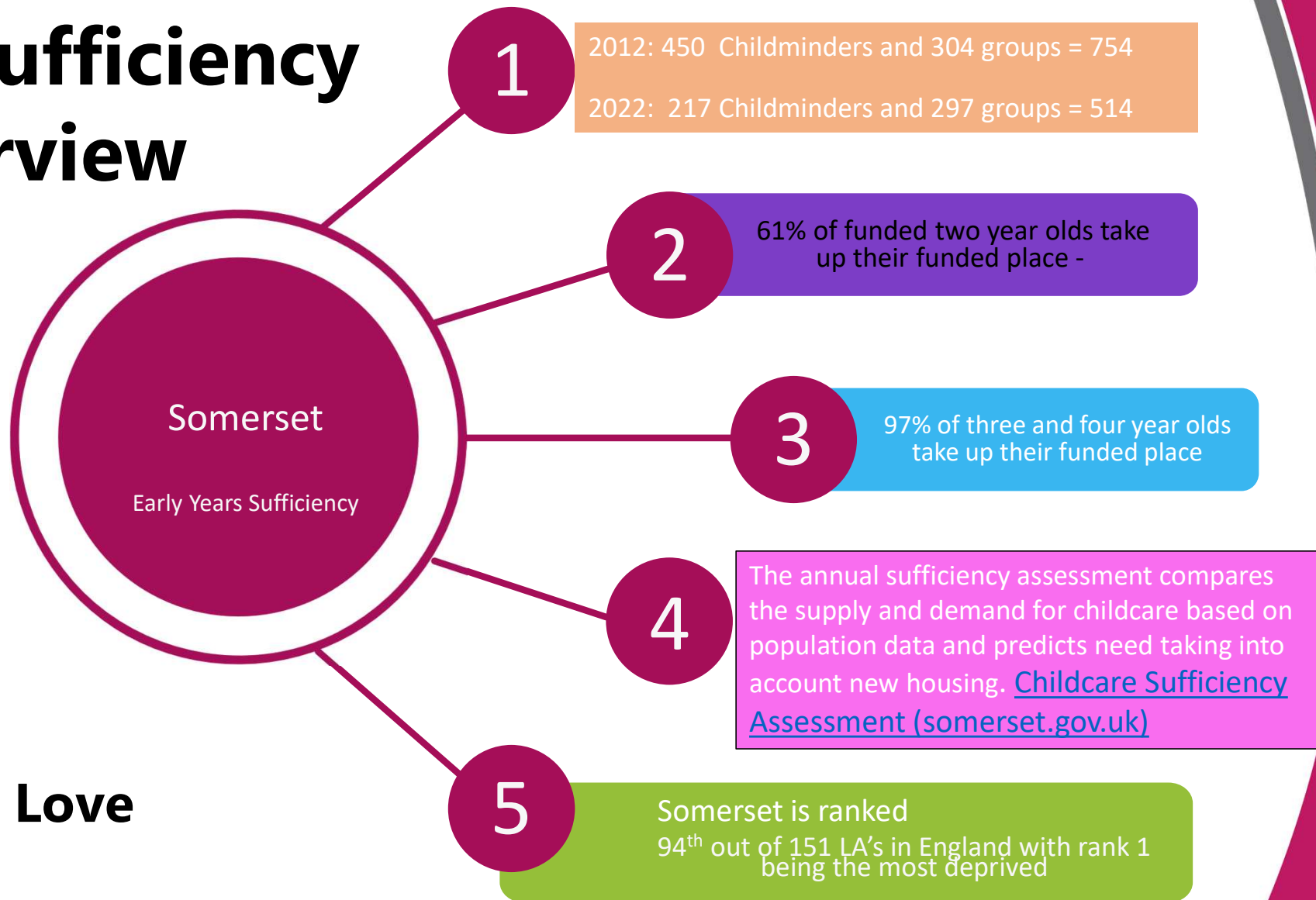
The ongoing demand for places has been partially offset by a £56m capital programme. Since 2018 we have delivered 10 significant special school and resource base projects providing 306 additional places at a cost of £49.25m. A £4.75m expansion project is underway at Sky Academy, providing another 40 places in time for September 2022.

There is also a £2m capital approval available to deliver a specialist hub for up to 40 children in West Somerset and officers are working with the DfE to deliver a new special free school in South Somerset for 120 children.

In addition, officers are working with mainstream secondary schools to deliver a number of 'Enhanced Learning Provisions' which will those schools to support children's needs and reduce demand for places in special schools. Another project will deliver a Therapeutic Education provision for a small number of children. The Council's High Needs Capital Allocation will underpin this.



EY Sufficiency Overview



Sarah Love



Potential shortfall/surplus in places

EYC	Age 0-1	Age 2 year olds	Age 3 and 4 year olds (Summer)
Ansford and Wincanton (23)	-109	141	-51
Bridgwater (58)	-108	490	41
B.O.S and Cheddar (38)	8	363	251
Chard, Crewkerne, Ilminster (48)	1	296	28
Frome and Shepton Mallet (73)	-71	343	-98
Huish Episcopi (20)	-15	73	2
Street, Glastonbury and Wells (53)	32	371	225
Taunton (70)	91	630	48
Wellington and Wiveliscombe (31)	-31	180	40
West Somerset (17)	-22	132	-38
Yeovil and Stoke-sub-Hamdon (83)	-28	473	96

Key trends over the past ten years

- Significant reduction in Childminders over 50% decline
- Slight decrease in group provision (mainly rural)
- Decreasing birth rate
- Pandemic has changed parental demand
- Funding rates have not kept up with the increasing costs of the living wage and pensions

Challenges & Risks

- Reduction in the number of Childminders resulting in less parental choice
- Uncertainty/changes in parental demand/economic downturn
- Financial sustainability concerns, particularly in voluntary run groups
- Rising costs - inflation rate highest in 30 years
- Reduction of private fees income
- Lack of places in some rural areas and nurseries at full capacity in some urban areas
- Gap in knowledge of un-registered wrap around and holiday provision



Immediate pressures

Workforce crisis – difficulty recruiting qualified staff and retaining them means

- Reduced operational delivery /capping numbers. Closure of baby rooms leading to insufficient baby places across the county
- Insufficient wrap around and holiday provision for statutory aged children
- 5 nursery provisions will need to go out to tender due to change of ownership
- Not enough qualified staff to meet statutory staffing requirements

Sustainability and viability

- Cost of living % rising above the government funding increase %
- Rising business, inflation, fuel, utility and food costs plus National Living Wage increased by 6.8% (April 2022)
- Low funding rates result in low pay and poor benefits for staff
- Jobs in other sectors pay more for fewer responsibilities and shorter hours



Tackling the issues

- Somerset early years recruitment and retention campaign, also lobbying for a National campaign and working with SW LA's
- Working with DWP Work coaches to promote vacancies
- Funding job adverts through Dillington Advertising Services
- Promoting early years careers with partners in Colleges and at careers fairs
- Trying to find childcare solutions for parents through our Childcare Finder Service
- Raising the profile of working in early years
- Linking providers via EY Communities to share staff resources where possible



Transport Costs and Projections

Phil Curd



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Transport Costs

School transport is a significant cost pressure for the Council, with mainstream and specialist transport costing around £17m annually.

The cost of specialist transport has seen the most significant growth (£4.6m in 2018/19 to £6.8m in 2021/22) as the number of children travelling to specialist settings has increased.

In parallel, the cost of providing transport has increased significantly as a result of sector specific inflation, contractual increases (20%-30%) and rising fuel prices. These pressures are set to continue.

To offset these cost increases a number of interventions have been implemented:

- Introduction of an in-house big bus fleet
- A new Dynamic Purchasing System
- Expansion of Personal Travel Payment scheme
- Statutory-only approach to policy
- The purchase of route optimising software

