

December
2025

State of Dorset Children



According to the latest estimates from the ONS there are 67,150 0 to 17 year olds living in Dorset. As a proportion of our total population this has remained relatively stable since 2020 at around 17% of the population compared to a figure of 21% for England and Wales.

Between 2025 and 2035 the number of 0-4 year olds is expected to decrease by about 800 while the number of 5-15 year olds is projected to decrease by about 5,800.

Big Numbers Box

67,150 total children

Sources 2 and 3

419* Children and young people in care in Dorset

63% Pupils with an EHC Plan educated in mainstream schools

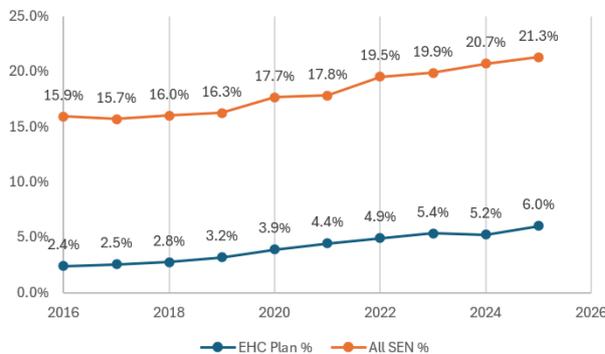
69 Looked after children in every 10,000 in Dorset

Primary school children with an EHC SEN plan 3.7%

25% Percentage of pupils achieving 9-5 in English and Maths (Free School Meals Gap)

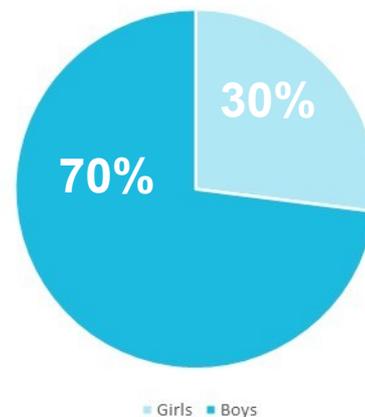
Box 1: Special Educational Need³

SEN Pupils in Dorset Council Schools



The percentage of children with Special Educational Need has increased in Dorset each year since 2017. The figure has increased from 17.8% in 2021 to 21.3% in 2025. The percentage with either a statement or an EHC Plan has more than doubled over the past ten years, from 2.4% to 6.0%.

Dorset Council School Pupils Education, Health and Care (EHC Plan)



- One in four pupils with an EHC plan has an Autistic Spectrum Condition and just over one in five have speech language and communication needs.
- It is likely that a pupil may have more than one special educational need.
- 63% of pupils with an EHC Plan are educated in Mainstream Schools in Dorset.
- 70% of Dorset Council school pupils with an EHC are boys and 57% with SEN Support are boys. This is very similar to the national picture. The proportion of girls with SEN is increasing.

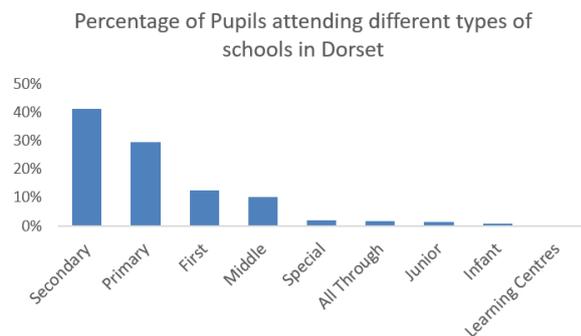
Acronyms

EHC = Education, Health and Care Plan
FSM = Free School Meals
SEN = Special Educational Needs
* Doesn't include unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Box 2: Education

- We currently have just over 46,300 pupils attending schools in Dorset.
- There are 158 schools in Dorset with a small number operating in more than one location across the Council area.
- Different areas of Dorset have either a two-tier system which have a Primary (including Junior and Infant) and Secondary and other areas have a three-tier system which includes Primary, Middle and Secondary. Also some Secondary schools run from 11 to 18 including a sixth form whilst others are from 11 to 16. There are no grammar schools in the Dorset Council area.

- Just over 40% of Dorset Council's school pupils attend Secondary Schools and 10% attend Middle Schools. 45% attend Primary Schools including infants and Juniors. Approximately 2% attend Special Schools and less than 1% attend Learning Centres. School sizes vary dramatically from the biggest Secondary School with just over 2,000 pupils to small rural schools with less than 50 pupils.



Box 3: Post-16 opportunities⁴

- The percentage of 16 and 17 year olds in Dorset in education or training in 2024 was 91.6% - a bit higher than the South West at 90.7% and very similar to England 92.1%.
- Accessing services is a considerable issue in rural Dorset. Approximately 44% of Dorset residents fall within the top 20% most geographically deprived in England for access to a range of services, including schools.
- Travel time to the nearest further education college by public transport/walking in Dorset is 31 minutes—one of the 10 highest of any Unitary Authority in England. This compares to 21 minutes for England and 25 minutes for the South West.
- However, Dorset has strong participation in 'Higher' level apprenticeships, with 3,333 participants aged 16 and over per 100,000 population. This compares to 2,369 in the South West and 2,031 nationally, making Dorset one of the highest-ranking Unitary Authorities in England.
- There are two levels of a 'Higher' apprenticeship Level 4 and Level 5:
 - Level 4 apprenticeships are equivalent to the first year of an undergraduate degree, or a Higher National Certificate.
 - Level 5 apprenticeships are equivalent to a foundation degree, or a Higher National Diploma.

Sources

- 1 2022-trend based ONS population projections
- 2 2024 MYE, 0-17 year-olds, ONS
- 3 Dorset Council, Children's Services October 31 2025
- 4 Local Government Inform 2024/25