

Market Position Statement **Alternative Provision**

2026



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide key market intelligence, which will be useful to existing and potential providers in making business and investment decisions. It should act as a starting point for discussions between providers and Nottinghamshire County Council by highlighting the alternative provision that the council wishes to commission in the future.

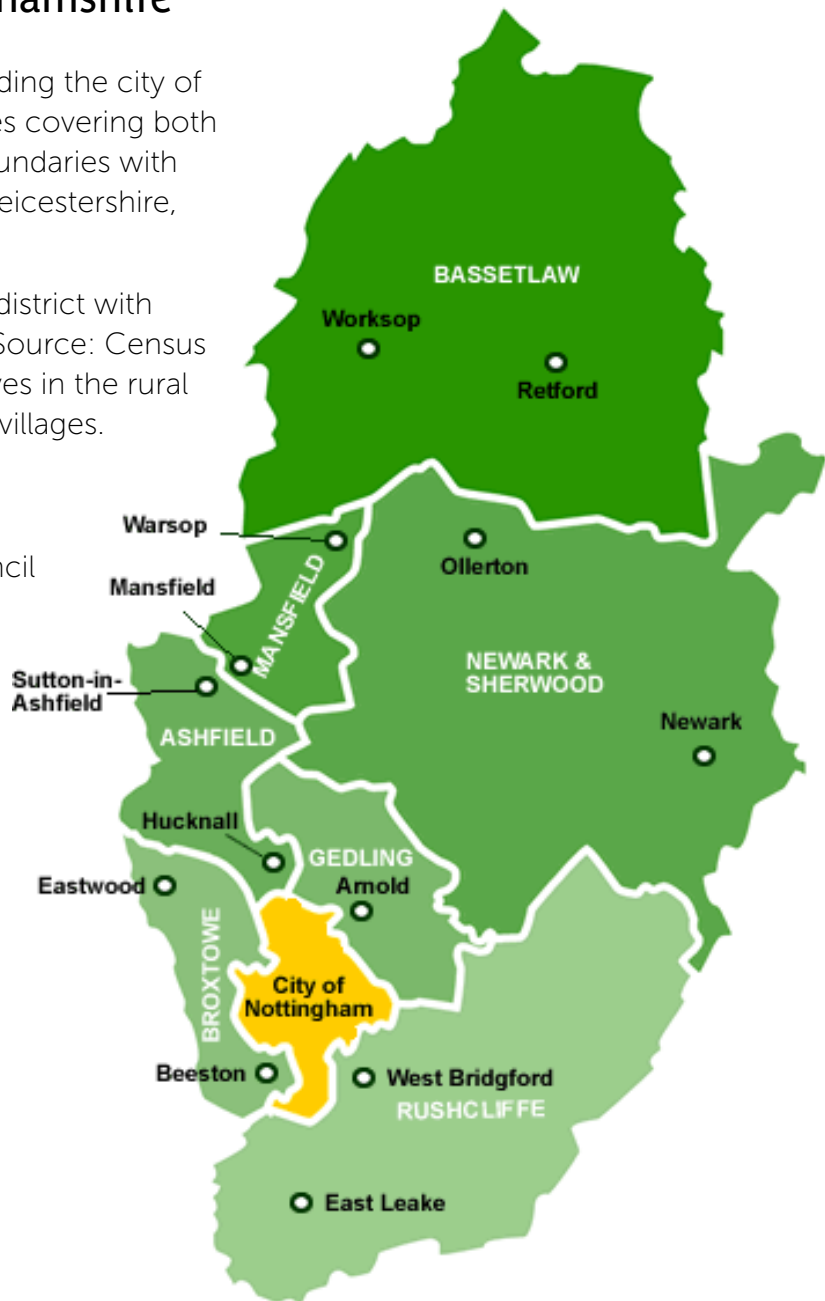
The county of Nottinghamshire

The county council area (excluding the city of Nottingham) is 805 square miles covering both urban and rural areas. It has boundaries with South Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, and Derbyshire.

Ashfield is the most populated district with Mansfield the least populated (Source: Census 2021). 20% of the population lives in the rural areas, mostly small towns, and villages.

Nottinghamshire has a two-tier structure of local government comprising of the county Council and seven district and borough councils. The county council is the eleventh largest local authority in the UK.

Fig 1: The districts and boroughs of Nottinghamshire



Key population data

Nottinghamshire has a population of 824,800, which is an increase of 39,000 since the 2011 census. The total population of Nottinghamshire is expected to increase by 67,000 people to 895,000 from 2019 to 2031, an 8% increase. Children and young people (0-17 years old) make up 20% of the population (Source: Census, 2021).

Nottinghamshire is a large diverse county, with some of the most deprived and affluent wards in the country. This is based on various factors, including income, employment, education, health, and disability. The levels of deprivation vary considerably across the county's seven districts. Nottinghamshire is ranked 9th most deprived out of 26 Shire Counties in England, and 101 out of 151 upper tier local authorities in England (1 being the most deprived). Mansfield is in the top 20% of most deprived districts in the country. Rushcliffe is within the top 3% of least deprived districts in the country (Source: Indices of Deprivation, 2019).

In Nottinghamshire, localities where there are higher numbers of families on low incomes are often those localities where children and young people are less healthy and do less well at school and are more likely to need the support of children's social care. 21,862 children in Nottinghamshire, 17.1 per cent of the whole school population, were eligible for free school meals in 2023/24 (Source: DFE, 2025).

13.7% of pupils attending a Nottinghamshire mainstream academy or special school has a special educational need or an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) (Source: School Census January 2025).

Table 1: Numbers of children and young people attending a Nottinghamshire mainstream academy or special school with or without Special Educational Needs (SEN) support and those with an EHCP

Phase	Number on roll (1)	Pupils with no known SEN provision		Pupils with SEN support		Pupils with statements or EHC plans		All pupils with SEN	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Primary	70,779	61,376	86.7	8,354	11.8	1049	1.5	9,403	13.3
Secondary	55,041	48,309	87.8	5,921	10.8	811	1.5	6,732	12.2
Special	1,320	0	0.0	0	0.0	1,320	100.0	1,320	100.0
Nottinghamshire	127,140	109,685	86.3	14,275	11.2	3,180	2.5	17,455	13.7

Source: School Census Data January 2025

The most common primary SEN needs for children and young people in Nottinghamshire are: (1) Social, emotional, and mental health (2) Autistic spectrum disorder (3) Speech, language, and communication needs (4) Moderate learning difficulty (Source: School Census January 2025)

2

Alternative Provision in Nottinghamshire

Nottinghamshire County Council commissions alternative provision for those children and young people of compulsory school age for whom it has statutory responsibility, who are without a school place; or where a maintained school or academy has been unable to fully provide an appropriate individualised educational/therapeutic package. This could be because of illness or other reasons. Alternative provision can also be used by schools for children on temporary exclusions as well as for children being directed to off-site provision to receive education intended to improve their behaviour. Alternative provision is accessible to children and young people with or without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) but is not intended as a substitute for special school provision.

Nottinghamshire County Council currently commissions alternative provision through an approved provider framework. The main objectives of alternative provision are to:

- To enable children and young people accessing alternative provision to achieve educational, social, emotional and health and wellbeing related outcomes.
- To improve children and young people's attendance and engagement with education.
- To improve children and young people's academic progress and attainment.
- To demonstrate reintegration and transition success for children and young people by promoting and encouraging clear planned and supported reintegration back to mainstream or progression into post 16 pathways.

- To raise aspirations of all children and young people accessing alternative provision

It is envisaged that the following groups of children and young people may require access to alternative provision, which may also include children looked after by the Local Authority:

- Children/young people who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools
- Those children/young people without a school place
- Children and young people who have an EHCP and whose needs cannot be met in Local Authority maintained or academy provision
- Children and young people who have an identified Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) need
- Children and young people who are disengaged from school and who are at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)
- Young offenders
- Pregnant teenagers and teenage parents

For children and young people with EHCPs the most prevalent groups are those whose needs cannot be met within a maintained or academy provision, those disengaged from school and at risk of becoming NEET and those with an identified social, emotional, and mental health need.

Local and national drivers

The Council has statutory duties to provide direct access to EOTAS. These are outlined in the following policy document [Delivery, or Commissioning, of Learning for Children and Young People through Education Other Than At School 2024-2028 | Nottinghamshire County Council](#) which confirms our duties under:



Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 requires Local Authorities to make arrangements to provide “suitable education at school, or otherwise than at school, for those children of compulsory school age who, **by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise**, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them”. Suitable education is defined as “efficient education suitable to the age, ability, aptitude and to any special educational needs”, the child (or young person) may have. This does not apply to young people who are within 6 weeks of the statutory school leaving age and not entered for any examinations.

Section 61 of the Children and Families Act 2014 states that a Local Authority in England may arrange for any **special educational provision** that it has decided is necessary for a child or young person for whom it is responsible to be made otherwise than at school or post 16 institution or a place at which early years education is provided. An Authority may only do so if satisfied that it would be inappropriate for the provision to be made in school or at such a place and before doing so the authority must consult the child’s parents or the young person.

For children receiving EOTAS under Section 61 of the Children and Families Act 2014, Local Authorities can arrange for ‘any special educational provision for children and young people educated otherwise than at school in circumstances where it would be inappropriate for the provision to be made in school. These EOTAS packages are put in place by Local Authorities, typically as part of a child’s EHCP. As these children and young people will have a wide range of education, health and care needs, the Provider will need to offer tailored education plans and secure outcomes as set out in the EHCP and individual learning plans.

Section 100 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires the Local Authority to provide full-time education for all permanently excluded children and young people who are resident within the county of Nottinghamshire. From the sixth school day of a permanent exclusion, the Local Authority is therefore statutorily responsible for ensuring that suitable full-time education is provided for children and young people residing in the county (unless there is evidence that the student is unable to access full time learning at that time).

Section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014 mandates that schools must make arrangements to support students with medical conditions, ensuring they can participate fully in school life. This places a statutory duty on the governing bodies of maintained schools, academies, pupil referral units and alternative provisions to support students with medical conditions. The aim is to ensure that children with both physical and mental health needs receive appropriate care and support while at school.

The Department for Education statutory guidance on arranging Alternative Provision 2025 outlines that alternative provision should be suitable to the child's age, ability and aptitude, and any special educational needs they have. There are responsibilities on Local Authority commissioners to ensure that alternative provision is good quality, registered where appropriate, and delivered by high quality staff with suitable training, experience and safeguarding checks. All children and young people should expect to receive the same high standard of education as their peers in mainstream school (or special school if applicable). *In respect of this Nottinghamshire has a quality assurance framework and contract management arrangements in place. Further details can be found in section 6 of this document.

Nationally there has been a significant rise in children attending alternative provision over recent years. This trend is mirrored in Nottinghamshire, which has led to the need for more sustainable and equitable models of commissioning.

Trends, gaps, and challenges

Recent trends

- Increasing numbers of children and young people requiring alternative education placements.
- There is a high number of referrals for children and young people with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) and anxiety related issues.
- There is a lack of provision for primary years and Post 16 throughout the county.
- A high volume of providers applying to join the approved provider framework with an increasing number of providers who offer online tutoring and education support.
- The providers who offer qualifications are mainly core subjects such as maths and English but not vocational qualifications.
- There is a limited number of providers registered as an exam centre. Providers have the perception it is NCC who have the responsibility to put pupils through their exams.
- A high percentage of providers are currently unregistered as an independent school and do not have Ofsted inspections. Providers are encouraged to register with the DfE where appropriate.



Gaps and challenges

- An increase in the number of providers with a physical base or staff who can meet with pupils' face to face in community settings. There is a need to encourage more social interaction to reduce isolation and associated anxiety.
- More providers who can offer functional skills and a range of qualifications such as GCSE and BTEC etc A range of courses such as humanities, geography, IT, business studies, catering etc.
- Providers who can offer exams arrangements, so pupils are encouraged to gain qualifications as part of alternative education.
- More providers who can offer support for primary years and Post 16.
- Providers who can offer therapeutic support for children and young people with SEMH and anxiety.
- More provision that covers rural areas, including Bassetlaw and Newark and the south of the county including the rural areas of Rushcliffe.
- More children and young people being educated in their local communities to reduce travel times and costs.
- Children and young people could access education at the same provision to offer more consistency, instead of multiple provisions, due to unregistered providers only being able to offer part-time packages.
- Online providers to be encouraged to consider registration with the DfE accreditation scheme to show their commitment to delivering high quality education and increase confidence in their provision.
- There have been occasions where the council have not been notified prior to exclusions. There needs to be a clear understanding and process in place if there is a potential risk to a child or young person's placement.
- All providers must be able to offer support at key transition points such as key stage 2 to 3 or details of Post 16 pathways. Information should include options for continuing in education and training as well as routes into employment. It should also support the transition from children to adult services. This could include life skills support such as money and budgeting.
- Reintegration into an appropriate destination, which could be mainstream school or Post16 options.

3 What do young people, and their families want from their specialist education provision?

Co-production activities with young people in specialist education settings in Nottinghamshire and consultation with their parents and carers have highlighted trends and themes as to what is working well in their settings and areas that could be improved.

The voices of young people

Recent engagement with young people currently accessing alternative provision in Nottinghamshire yielded a range of positive feedback regarding their experiences. Key strengths identified include:

- A strong emphasis on mental health and wellbeing, with access to therapeutic and counselling support.
- Tailored support mechanisms, such as structural adjustments and the option for personal time when needed
- Interest-led sessions that help children and young people remain engaged and focused.

In addition to the positive aspects, young people also shared constructive suggestions for future improvements to alternative provision. These include:

- Greater focus on preparing for adulthood, equipping children and young people with knowledge and confidence to navigate their educational and life transitions.
- Increased staffing levels and more opportunities for one-to-one support.
- Expansion of peer buddying schemes and social skills development to reduce social isolation and foster meaningful friendships.
- Enhanced learning content to ensure children and young people are enrolled in appropriate and relevant courses.
- Efforts to reduce stigma and negative perceptions associated with accessing Alternative Provision.



The voices of parents and carers

Parents and carers were engaged through surveys and focus groups to gather feedback on current alternative provision, including what is working well, areas for improvement, and aspirations for future development. Positive aspects identified included:

- Flexibility in teaching approaches.
- A relationship-based model that fosters trust and engagement.
- Availability of quiet spaces and small class sizes.
- A bespoke, interest-led learning model tailored to individual needs.

Areas for improvement and future aspirations identified included:

- Development of personalised and holistic support packages.
- Child-led learning that accommodates a broad range of learning styles.
- Increased focus on preparation for adulthood and development of life skills.
- Improved communication and collaboration between professionals, providers, parents, carers, and children and young people.
- Provision for academically able children and young people, including those with SEMH, social anxiety, and mental health needs, through small group or one-to-one formats.
- Reduction in waiting times between end of one provision and the start of another.
- Enhanced support for social interaction and relationship-building.



4 Demand

Children and young people with EHCPs

The Nottinghamshire County Council Children’s Commissioning Team commission alternative provision for those Children and Young People with EHCPs

In recent years there has been an upward trend in the number of children and young people with EHCPs requiring alternative provision, which is shown in the table below.

Table 2: Total number of new referrals and children and young people on roll 2022 to 2025

Year	Total number of new referrals for children and young people with an EHCP to access Alternative Provision	Total number of children and young people on a school roll with an EHCP and accessing Alternative Provision
2025 – 2026 (to 08.09.2025)	433	606
2024 - 2025	341	677
2023 - 2024	191	333
2022 - 2023	90	242

The geographical spread of demand (where the child or young person lives) for alternative provision has varied considerably in recent years – see table 3 below.

Table 3: Geographical breakdown by area (where the child or young person lives)

District / Borough	Total number of CYP on roll
Ashfield	86
Bassetlaw	97
Broxtowe	70
Gedling	97
Mansfield	83
Newark	73
Rushcliffe	100

There is a higher level of demand for alternative provision for children and young people in key stages 3 and 4 – see table 4 below.

Table 4: Ages of children and young people currently on roll

Age	CYP on roll	Age	CYP on roll	Age	CYP on roll
4	3	11	32	18	42
5	3	12	45	19	20
6	9	13	70	20	8
7	7	14	98	21	2
8	11	15	84	22	5
9	17	16	76	23	1
10	25	17	47	24	1

More males are accessing alternative education provision than females. In 2024-25 there were 445 males on roll compared to 232 females. In 2025 there are currently 396 males accessing alternative provision compared to 210 females.

There is a high number of children and young people accessing alternative provision with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs as can be seen in the table below.

Table 5: Primary special educational need of children and young people currently on roll

Primary SEN	CYP on roll
Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	318
Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH)	194
Hearing Impairment (HI)	1
Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD)	12
Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI)	2
Physical Disability (PD)	6
Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)	20
Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD)	3
Specific Learning Difficulty (SPLD)	2
Other Difficulty/Disability (OTH)	48

Children and Young People without an EHCP

The Nottinghamshire County Council Fair Access Team are responsible for securing and maintaining appropriate education for a range of vulnerable pupils who might otherwise be missing from education. Again, there has been an upward trend for children and young people without an EHCP accessing alternative provision as shown in table 6 below:

Table 6: Total number of children and young people accessing alternative provision without an EHCP

Year	Total number of alternative provision placements for children and young people without an EHCP
2024 - 2025	705
2023 - 2024	754
2022 - 2023	646
2021 - 2022	302

Table 7 below shows that Ashfield has the highest number of children and young people accessing alternative provision followed by Bassetlaw and Gedling. In recent years Bassetlaw has had the highest number of children and young people accessing alternative provision followed by Ashfield then Gedling.

Table 7: Geographical breakdown by area (where the child or young person lives) 2024-25

District / Borough	Total number of CYP
Ashfield	190
Bassetlaw	178
Broxtowe	29
Gedling	111
Mansfield	60
Newark	122
Rushcliffe	13
Out of county	2

There are higher number of referrals for children and young people without EHCPs in years 8 to 11 and for group provision, although there are still a significant number of pupils who require one to one support.

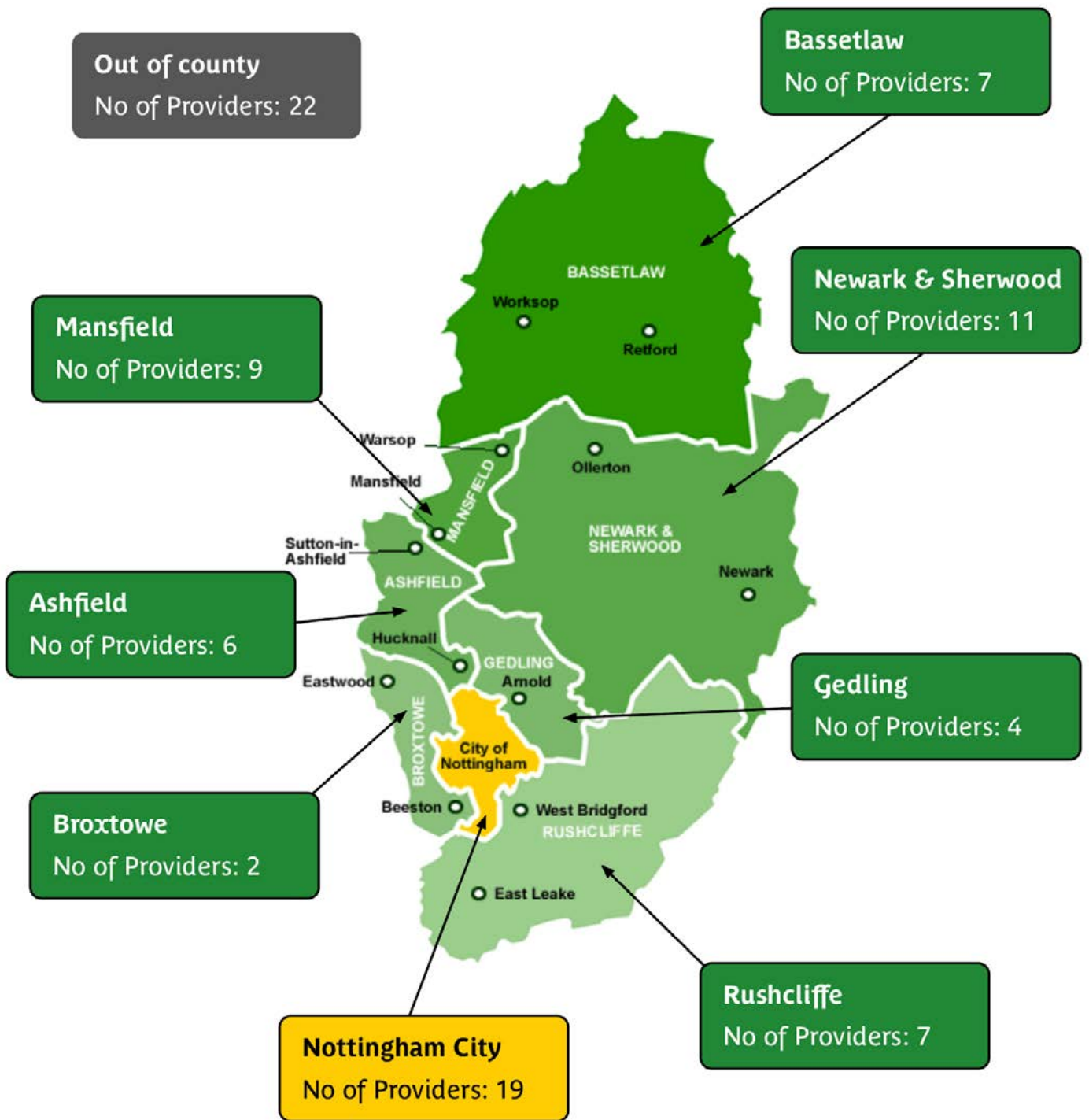
5 Supply

There are currently 127 approved alternative education providers (December 2025). 87 providers have a physical base where they offer provision, and 40 providers offer either online provision or are hybrid offering a mix of online provision and face to face in community settings.

Much provision in the County is concentrated around the Nottingham City area (22%), followed by 13% located in Newark and Sherwood district and 10% located in Mansfield district. There are a significant number of providers who are located out of county (25%), which are in neighbouring counties, including Derbyshire, Leicestershire, and Lincolnshire.

It is important to note that primary age provision should be located no more than 45 minutes from the home address and for secondary age no more than 75 minutes although ideally children/young people should be accessing provision as close to their home address as possible.

Fig2: Alternative education providers in Nottinghamshire



The figure above shows the distribution of providers across the county in terms of where their main operating base is located, although some providers may have other satellite bases or staff teams located around the county.

Just 3% of providers with a physical base offer support to children of primary age whilst 98% offer support to young people of secondary age and 60% offer support for post 16.

In terms of online and hybrid providers, 34% offer support to children of primary age, 98% offer support to young people of secondary age and 73% offer support for post 16.

Learners requiring provision will have diverse needs and placements are made using different categories, which include location, key stage, primary SEN and learning pathway. The different learning pathways includes a blend of providers offering a broad balanced curriculum (mainly academic and mainstream style), vocational provision, foundation learning and key skills, and a blended package including academic and vocational provision. Several providers offer therapeutic support such as animal care for children and young people with social, emotional, and mental health needs.

6 Quality

The quality of alternative provision is measured through three processes:

- Quality assurance framework self-assessments and validation
- Performance indicators
- Contract management reviews

Alternative education providers must meet Nottinghamshire County Council's Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) minimum standards for all core objectives. These core objectives include assessment and support planning, health, and safety, safeguarding and protection from abuse, fair access and diversity, client involvement and empowerment and management of provision. The provider will be required to self-assess against the QAF as part of a validation visit.

Performance Indicator (PI) workbooks are submitted by providers termly to capture student progress in relation to academic attainment, outcome stars and agreed targets. The outcome stars are the SEND outcomes, which were co-produced with young people:

- I need to be listened to and heard
- I need to be the healthiest I can be
- I need to be safe and feel safe
- I need to be accepted and valued by people I trust
- I need to be prepared for my future
- I need to enjoy life and have fun
- How young people feel about their education setting

Contract reviews take place with providers across agreed timeframes to facilitate an on-going dialogue between the provider and Nottinghamshire County Council to support service improvements. Providers are asked to submit a summary report covering areas of success and improvement, stakeholder feedback and student satisfaction and feedback, business continuity plans, service improvement plans, risk register, and evidence of all relevant insurance.

7 Support for providers

The Council aims to develop closer working relationships with providers through different routes:

- The monitoring and reviews of the quality of provision on a regular basis including termly and annual contract review meetings and quality inspections
- Termly provider meetings covering different topics including safeguarding updates and quality assurance related process. Provider meetings will be informative and give providers the opportunity to ask questions, give feedback and highlight any issues they are experiencing. It also gives providers the opportunity to network with other specialist education providers
- Key contacts within the contracts team to build positive relationships and drive service improvements. All alternative education providers will have a designated Contract Officer who will carry out their contract reviews and will be their point of contact for support
- Market development discussions to help ensure that the market is responsive to changing service user needs





Alternative Provision expenditure

This is the total expenditure for alternative provision for children and young people with and without an EHCP over the most recent financial years. This reflects the significant increase in demand for this type of provision.

Children with an EHCP:

2024-25 - £7,567,007

2023-24 - £4,642,203

2022-23 - £2,578,399

Source: Children’s Commissioning Team

Children without an EHCP:

2024-25 - £8,434,116

2023-24 - £5,306,834

2022-23 - £2,739,303

Source: Access to Learning Team



Contracting arrangements and commissioning intentions

When purchasing services, Nottinghamshire County Council, as a ‘Best Value’ authority is under a duty to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.” When undertaking a procurement this involves challenging how services are provided, consulting with service users, comparing the performance of suppliers, and using fair and open competition wherever possible to secure efficient and effective services. Nottinghamshire County Council runs tender processes through ProContract found at www.eastmidstenders.org where organisations can apply for contract opportunities.

Commissioning arrangements

To ensure the Council continues to meet demand and adapts to market feedback, a new alternative provision framework has been developed, which is anticipated to go live in May 2026 with a view to this commencing in January 2027. Providers will need to register on the Government’s [Find a Tender portal](#) and will then need to apply through the [East Midlands Tenders portal](#). The reference number for the tender is DN812426.

The proposed new framework will have different lots, which are currently anticipated to include:

- **Lot 1** – Transitional short term time limited placements commissioned via block booking arrangements designed to re-engage learners and support a successful return to mainstream education
- **Lot 2** – DfE accredited online provision offering short term, remote learning programmes in small groups or one to one
- **Lot 3** – Specialist individual tailored provision offering bespoke, longer-term programmes combining academic learning, vocational pathways, and wider personal development, mirroring current arrangements
- **Lot 4** – Tutoring provision delivered by qualified teachers to support academic progress, reintegration, and preparation for assessments and examinations

Each lot will have a set of method statement questions and quality assurance processes, tailored to the nature of the provision. This planned structure aims to enhance both quality and flexibility across the alternative provision offer and reflects market engagement outcomes and feedback from parents, ensuring the framework is responsive, inclusive, and capable of meeting the diverse needs of Nottinghamshire’s children and young people.

Providers on the existing framework will be expected to apply for the new framework once this goes live. If they choose not to apply for the new framework, they will no longer be able to receive referrals after December 31st, 2026.

Requirement to register as an Independent School

Advice from the Department for Education (DfE), entitled “Registration of Independent Schools” published in January 2016, stipulates that any alternative education provider (as defined by section 4 of the Education Act 1996) would need to be registered as an independent school, if it is providing:

- full time education for five or more learners of compulsory school age
- or where one or more such learners have an EHC plan or statement of special educational needs
- or where one or more learner is “looked after” by the Contracting Authorities.

Because of this requirement, there may be some providers who were originally categorised as alternative providers of education, but who will ultimately need to become registered as independent schools.

Commissioning priorities and overall objectives:

- To ensure that all children and young people receive a suitable education that meets their needs
- To offer services that are child centred and practice built on belonging, engagement and participation
- To provide a good standard of Alternative Provision with access to appropriate accreditation and qualifications, where applicable.
- To deliver a broad and flexible offer of academic, vocational or therapeutic education or learning.
- To promote, plan, prepare and support timely transitions into full time education or into the next steps of education.
- To meet the SEND requirements of children and young people and ensure any identified care, medical and/or health needs are met. This includes providing inclusive SEND support using evidence based approaches
- To encourage the development of social, emotional and regulation skills (e.g., resilience, communication, problem solving).
- To build rapport and positive relationships with children and young people and their parents/carers.
- To capture and use the voice of children and young people to inform education programme planning, ensuring it reflects their individual needs, interests and aspirations.
- To deliver personalised learning programmes that enable effective engagement and support progression into training, education and apprenticeships.
- To reduce stigma and negative perceptions associated with Alternative Provision.
- To collaborate effectively with multi-agency teams to meet the needs of children and young people and to contribute to relevant assessments and reviews.
- To ensure there are robust systems to track, monitor and analyse attendance and progress on a weekly and termly basis.
- Support children and young people to build independence and prepare for adulthood.

10 Summary

Nottinghamshire County Council supports the inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in education, within the communities in which they live. Where mainstream settings are unsuitable the Council works together with providers to secure high quality specialist alternatives. The commitment to inclusion extends into adulthood.

The most prevalent primary SEN needs are those children and young people with autism and associated challenging behaviours and those with social, emotional, and mental health needs, therefore we need to increase education provision to meet these specific needs. We also need to increase provision sited within Nottinghamshire so children and young people can be educated within their local communities and to reduce travel times and costs.

We welcome providers who can meet the specific gaps in existing provision:

- Providers with a physical base or staff who can meet with pupils' face to face in community settings across Nottinghamshire
- Provision that covers rural areas, including Bassetlaw and Newark and the south of the county including the rural areas of Rushcliffe.
- Providers who can offer functional skills and a range of qualifications, including GCSE and BTEC and a range of courses such as humanities, geography, IT, business studies, catering etc.
- Providers who can offer exam arrangements to enable pupils to gain qualifications.
- Provision for primary years and post 16
- Providers who are registered with the DfE so young people can be educated at the same provision instead of multiple provisions.
- Providers who can offer sensory and therapeutic provision.

All alternative education providers must be able to offer support at key transition points such as key stage 2 to 3 or details of post 16 pathways and reintegration into an appropriate destination, which could be mainstream school or Post 16. Information should include options for continuing in education and training, as well as routes into employment. It should also support the transition from children to adult services. This could include life skills such as money and budgeting.

We are seeking providers who can meet the needs of this vulnerable cohort whilst securing good outcomes and demonstrating value for money. We acknowledge that we need to work closely with all our partners to achieve our ambition of: **Right placement; right location; right time; right price.**



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