

Market Position Statement **Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools 2026**

2026



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**

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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 education provision that the council currently commissions or may wish 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.

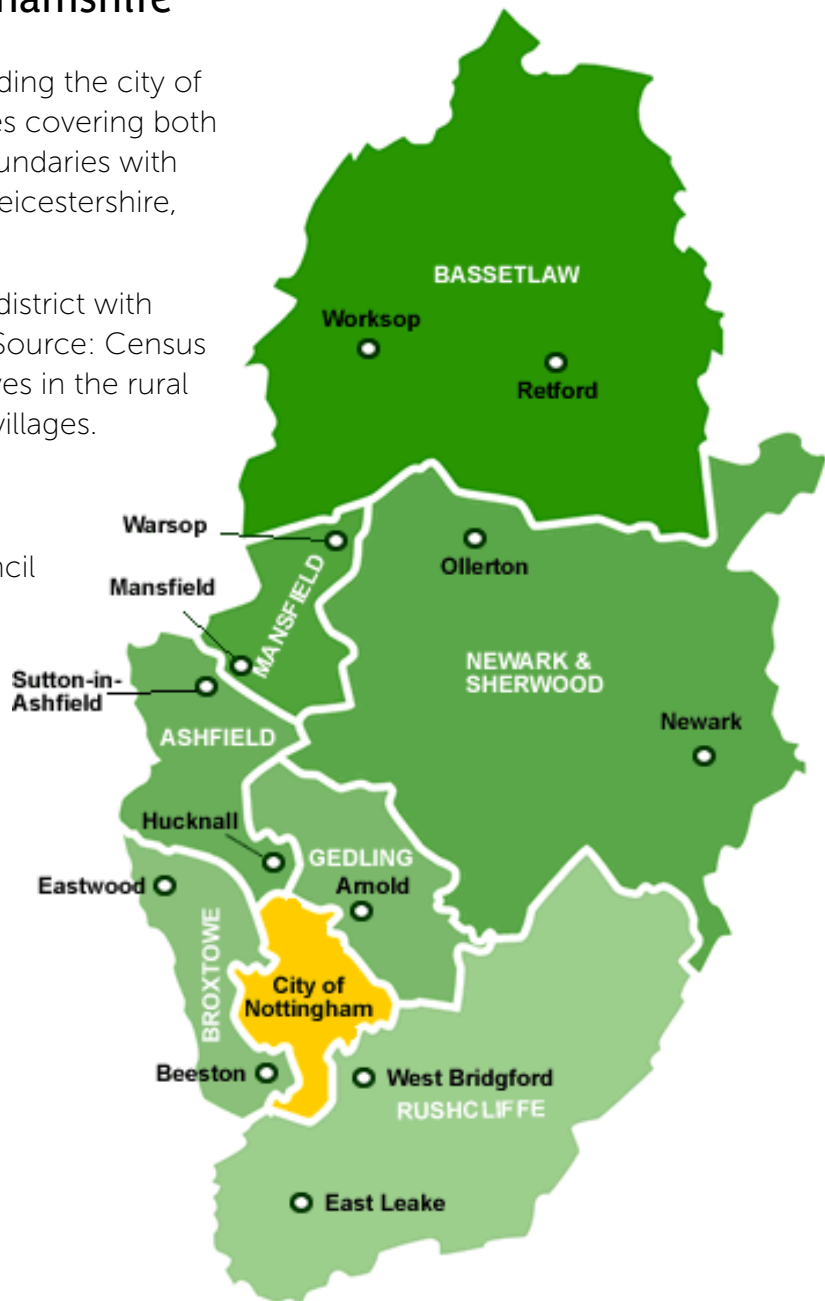


Fig 1: The districts and boroughs of Nottinghamshire

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).

Independent non-maintained school provision (INMSS) in Nottinghamshire

Most pupils within Nottinghamshire who experience a range of complex special educational needs are receiving their education provision within maintained schools and academies in the county. There remains a small proportion of the schools' population whose needs cannot be met by this provision.

Nottinghamshire County Council has recently established a framework for Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS). This framework enables the Council to commission INMSS placements to meet the needs of Nottinghamshire children and young people. The framework is intended to be dynamic and expand over time. As such, the Council is keen to develop and maintain strong, collaborative relationships with high quality providers of education who can support groups of pupils with complex needs across the full spectrum of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The INMSS framework includes providers who will offer specialist education to children and young people who are not attending mainstream or maintained special schools. Provision will be available for children and young people with an ECHP across all key stages including provision for Post 16 students. Children and young people accessing specialist education will be those who are the statutory responsibility of Nottinghamshire County Council and will therefore be resident in the county (or the responsibility of Nottinghamshire County Council as a Looked After child).

The overall aim of the INMSS framework is to secure a provision pathway for pupils who have a range of complex educational cognitive; social, emotional, and mental health; and physical needs. A range of provision will be commissioned across the county that is robust; resilient; flexible and creative and which matches the range of needs of this vulnerable cohort of pupils.

Providers are expected to be able to deliver services that meet the academic, vocational, social, emotional, physical, and psychological health needs of pupils identified by Nottinghamshire County Council.

Local and national drivers

The percentage of pupils in England with an EHCP increased to 5.3% in 2025 from 4.8% in 2024, which includes all state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools, pupil referral units and independent special schools (Source: DfE Headline facts and figures 2024/25). This has led to increasing demand for specialist education provision, which has been an ongoing trend nationally in recent years.

Nationally Children and young people in non-maintained special school placements increased from 4,059 in 2023/24 to 4,334 in 2024/25 and placements for children and young people in independent schools increased from 33,541 in 2023/24 to 37,825 in 2024/25.

In Nottinghamshire children and young people in non-maintained special school placements increased from 94 in 2023/24 to 102 in 2024/25 and placements in independent schools increased from 325 in 2023/24 to 410 in 2024/25 (Source DfE SEN provision by school type in England 2023/24 and 2024/25).

Due to the increased demand for specialist education placements, there is a need to develop the provider market to ensure there is sufficient capacity to meet the different needs of children and young people, although autism and social, emotional and mental health needs are the most prevalent.

Key Message: INMSS provision in Nottinghamshire key trends, gaps and challenges

- An increase is required in the number of providers on the framework or expansion of existing provision to increase capacity to meet current levels of demand. There is currently a significant number of placements made through spot purchases.
- More providers are required who are located within Nottinghamshire and within districts where there are high levels of demand. They need to be accessible using main transport routes. The north of the county Bassetlaw has always been a challenge, but providers are required in all areas.
- There is a need to reduce transport times and costs by enabling children and young people to be educated within their local communities.
- More provision is required to meet the needs of children and young people with complex and challenging needs, including those with autism and associated conditions. Providers need to ensure their staff can access training to be equipped to deal with particularly challenging behaviour.
- There is a need for schools who can offer a holistic, therapeutic and nurturing provision to meet complex needs.
- Providers who have access to community spaces and resources to enrich and enhance their offer to children and young people are currently limited.
- More provision is required for younger children from age 5 to 7 years.



3 Demand

There are currently 808 children and young people accessing INMSS placements through Nottinghamshire County Council.

The demand for independent non-maintained school placements has continued to rise over recent years. In 2023-24 there were 279 referrals for placements and 177 spot purchases. In 2024-25 there were 468 referrals and 227 spot purchases. In 2025-26 to date (09.02.26) there have been 352 referrals and 250 spot purchases. This demonstrates the current reliance on spot purchases to meet the level of demand for independent school placements.

Key characteristics of children and young people currently in independent school placements:

70% of pupils attending an independent school placement are male and 30% are female.

The highest percentage of pupils are in key stage three followed by key stage four then post 16. The lowest percentage are in key stage one as can be seen in the table below.

Table 2: Pupils attending INMSS placements by key stage

District / Borough	Percentage (%)
One	2
Two	14
Three	37
Four	27
Post 16	19
Post 19	1

The highest number of pupils live in Ashfield district followed by Gedling and Mansfield. The lowest percentage are in Broxtowe as can be seen in the table below.

Table 3: Pupils attending INMSS by district (where the child/young person lives)

District / Borough	Percentage (%)
Ashfield	22
Bassetlaw	11
Broxtowe	9
Gedling	15
Mansfield	15
Newark	14
Rushcliffe	14

In terms of primary special educational need (SEN) the highest percentage of pupils have Autistic Spectrum Condition, followed by Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs and Other as can be seen in the table below.

Table 4: Pupils attending INMSS placements by primary SEN

Primary SEN	Percentage (%)
Autistic Spectrum Condition	54
Social, Emotional, and Mental Health	23
Other	9
Speech, Language and Communication Needs	4
Moderate Learning Difficulty	3
Severe Learning Difficulty	2
SEN Support but no Specialist Type of Need	2
Specific Learning Difficulty	1
Hearing Impairment	1
Physical Disability	1

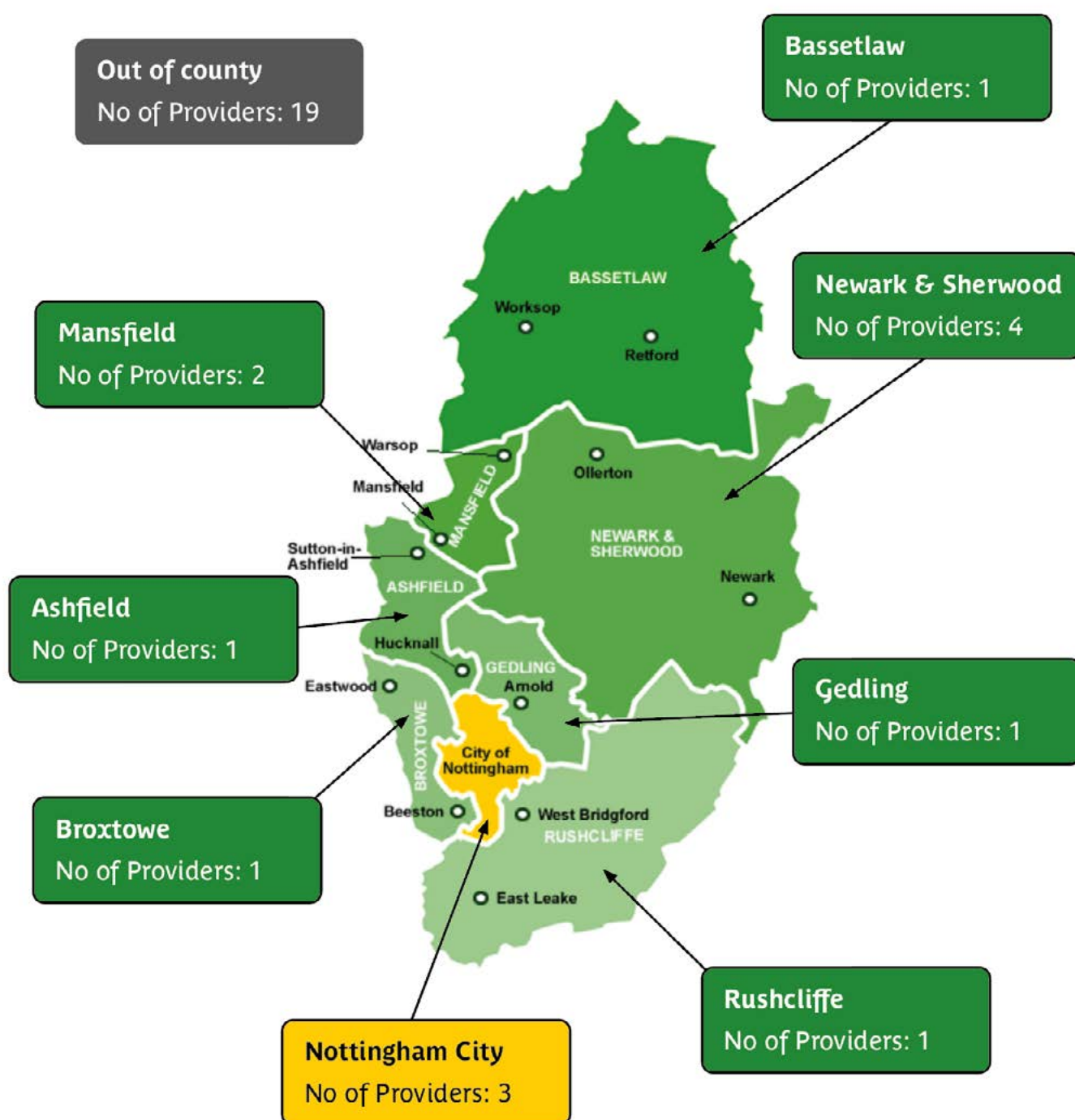


4 Supply

There are currently 23 providers on Nottinghamshire's INMSS framework with a total of 33 schools (January 2026). There are a high percentage of schools located out of county mainly in neighbouring counties, including Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and South Yorkshire.

It is important to note that in respect of secondary age young people, the location of the placement must be no more than 75 minutes travel time by car from the young person's place of residence. In respect of primary age children, the placement must be no more than 45 minutes travel time by car from the child's place of residence.

Fig2: Location of schools on Nottinghamshire's independent school framework



The figure above shows the location of schools on the approved provider framework. Several providers have multiple schools on the framework under a parent company.

Providers on the framework offer suitable educational provision for children and young people in one or more of the following:

- Key stage 1
- Key stage 2
- Key stage 3
- Key stage 4
- Post 16

All providers must ensure staff have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to plan and deliver a broad and balanced curriculum with a focus on accelerating progress in literacy and numeracy; deliver accredited courses to a wide range of abilities including Entry Level, GCSE and A level; are experienced in meeting the needs of students with SEND and have the ability to adopt and deliver appropriate interventions to support students with high levels of anxiety, mental health and therapeutic needs amongst others.

All providers are expected to provide appropriate arrangements and support for transition, which could be reintegration into a mainstream setting, transition between key stages and moving into progression destinations such as college.

The age range of the schools for providers on the framework varies with most offering places from age 7 upwards to age 18 or 19 years. There are a smaller number who offer places for younger children age 5 upwards and one school for ages 3-19 years. Most of the providers offer placements for children and young people with autism and associated difficulties. Many offer placements for children with social, emotional and mental health needs and one school offers specialist support for speech, language and communication needs.



5 Quality

The quality of INMSS provision is measured through three processes:

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

INMSS 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.

All providers will be expected to meet the current set of independent schools standards listed under [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#). The quality of all teaching and learning must be at least of the "Expected standard", in accordance with OFSTED inspection framework requirements. The effectiveness of both teaching and learning, as well as the quality of the development plans will be reviewed through the quality assurance processes in place.

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.

6 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 INMSS 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.

7 INMSS expenditure

This is the total expenditure for INMSS Placements for children and young people over the past two financial years, which reflects the significant increase in demand for this type of provision.

2025-26 - 42,214,186

2024-25 - 30,471,443

Source: Children's Commissioning 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.

The current INMSS framework consists of two lots as follows:

Lot 1 – Independent school block arrangement

Block contracts in each of the Nottinghamshire districts where providers can work closely with the Council to provide dedicated INMSS provision within the county and grow and shape the service in response to demand and need.

The Council is seeking INMSS providers who can offer a range of specialisms, and the framework allows for more than one provider in each area if the Council believes their offer can meet need, and there is clear evidence of demand for the type of specialism being offered.

It is intended that the creation of the block contracts will lead to guaranteed local placements, reduced travel time and transport costs, better provider/commissioner relationships and better outcomes for young people.

Lot 2 – Independent special school framework

In addition to the service described above the Council is also looking to create a list of approved INMSS for placements located within the county and outside of the Nottinghamshire area.

Education placements under this lot will be commissioned on an individual basis and will be required where the child or young person is not a suitable match to settings commissioned through Lot 1 and/or where there is insufficient capacity within Lot 1.

Providers will offer specialist education to children and young people who are not attending mainstream or maintained special schools. It will be available for children and young people with an EHCP across all key stages including provision for Post 16 students.

The existing framework is in place until April 2029 with further optional extensions until 20235. The intention is that this framework will be reopened at regular intervals throughout its duration.

Commissioning intentions and priorities:

- › To commission a blended approach to specialist education services. Block contracting arrangements will be for both DfE accredited online provision and for providers with a physical base within the districts and boroughs of Nottinghamshire to improve parity of provision across the County, reduce travelling time and create more in-county placements. Alongside this, we will also commission a Framework agreement for individual placements.
- › To procure provision that offers value for money
- › Secure services when and where they are needed
- › To strengthen and improve outcomes for children and young people accessing specialist education provision
- › Commissioning a range of provision that is robust; resilient; flexible and creative and which matches the range of needs of this vulnerable cohort of pupils
- › To enable children and young people accessing specialist education provision to achieve aspirational educational and personal outcomes and skills for independence and ensuring aspirations are at the centre of what we do
- › To raise attainment and narrow the attainment gap for children and young people accessing specialist education by providing personalised and interest led learning to meet individual needs through clear learning pathways and transitions
- › To prepare children and young people for the next phase in their education and preparing them for adulthood
- › Ensuring access to high quality provision to narrow the gap for those at risk of under achievement





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 who are located within Nottinghamshire and within districts where there are high levels of demand. They need to be accessible using main transport routes. The north of the county Bassetlaw has always been a challenge, but providers are required in all areas.
- Need to reduce transport times and costs by enabling children and young people to be educated within their local communities.
- More provision to meet the needs of children and young people with complex and challenging needs, including those with autism and associated conditions. Providers need to ensure their staff can access training to be equipped to deal with particularly challenging behaviour.
- There is a need for schools who can offer a holistic, therapeutic and nurturing provision to meet complex needs.
- Providers who have access to community spaces and resources to enrich and enhance their offer to children and young people.
- More provision is required for younger children from age 5 to 7 years.

All specialist 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.**



Further information

Please contact: childrens.qualityassessment@nottsc.gov.uk





**Nottinghamshire
County Council**

W nottinghamshire.gov.uk

T 0300 500 80 80

E commissioning.team@nottsc.gov.uk

 facebook.com/nottinghamshire

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