

DE/2026-039 – Freedom of Information Request

Request:

Please provide the following information for the most recent three years available:

- The number and/or percentage of children recorded with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in preschool education and funded early years provision and any relevant preschool census or childcare survey statistics

As well as:

- The number and/or percentage of children registered in early years childcare settings with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Any centrally held analysis relating to accessibility or sufficiency of childcare provision for children with SEN or disabilities

And:

- Any relevant figures or breakdowns of waiting lists or unmet demand for SEN-appropriate childcare

Department Response:

I refer to your request under the above legislation for information about on children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in preschool education, funded early years provision and childcare in Northern Ireland. You also requested disaggregation by Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT). This request, received on the 6 March, was for:

Please provide the following information for the most recent three years available:

- 1. The number and/or percentage of children recorded with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in preschool education and funded early years provision and any relevant preschool census or childcare survey statistics*

As well as:

- The number and/or percentage of children registered in early years childcare settings with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN)*
- Any centrally held analysis relating to accessibility or sufficiency of childcare provision for children with SEN or disabilities*

And:

- 4. Any relevant figures or breakdowns of waiting lists or unmet demand for SEN-appropriate childcare.*

Please see the table below which shows the number and percentage of children recorded with SEN in pre-school education and funded early years provision from the school census for three years for which data are available. Please note that full coverage of the 2023/24 school census is not available due to Action Short of Strike (ASOS). For further information relating to the impact of

ASOS please see the [notes for readers](#) section of the 2023/24 enrolments bulletin.

| Health and Social Care Trust of School | SEN Count 2022/23 | SEN % 2022/23 | SEN Count 2024/25 | SEN % 2024/25 | SEN Count 2025/26 | SEN % 2025/26 |
|--|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Belfast | 643 | 14.6 | 700 | 16.0 | 622 | 14.3 |
| Northern | 543 | 9.7 | 491 | 9.0 | 504 | 9.6 |
| South Eastern | 412 | 10.3 | 383 | 10.1 | 405 | 10.4 |
| Southern | 473 | 9.3 | 507 | 10.2 | 406 | 8.1 |
| Western | 516 | 13.1 | 457 | 12.0 | 445 | 11.9 |
| Total | 2,587 | 11.2 | 2,538 | 11.3 | 2,382 | 10.7 |

Source: NI school census

Notes:

Data is based on pupils enrolled on Census day i.e. The Friday of the first full week in October (In 2025/26 this was the 10 October 2025)

Figures include children in Voluntary and Private Pre-schools, nursery schools, nursery and reception classes in primary schools and pre-school aged pupils in Specialist Provision or Special schools.

Compulsory primary education in Northern Ireland begins at age 4; therefore, these figures include only children aged 2–3. Some age-4 pupils may be included if they have deferred starting pre-school and/or primary school by one year, as permitted under The School Age (Northern Ireland) Act 2022.

Information relating to point 2 is not held by the department.

In relation to points 3 and 4 of your request, information on the accessibility and sufficiency of childcare for children with SEN, including unmet demand, is available in Chapter 8 (Figures 8.1– 8.4) of the [Childcare Survey bulletin](#). As this survey represents the first exercise of its kind, these data are not available as a three-year time series. Furthermore, the information cannot be disaggregated by Health and Social Care Trust. Where further breakdowns are available, they are provided by deprivation quintile and by urban/rural classification.