

Trends in special educational needs & the SEN stress-test 2024

August 2025



Introduction

- This document presents an analysis of **special educational needs (SEN) trends nationally** and the ways in which these **trends vary between local areas**.
- It has a particular **focus on**:
 - Number and rates of children with SEN.
 - Types of need.
 - Profile of provision used to respond to these needs.
 - Spending on independent and non-maintained special schools (i.e. specialist provision that is used when children's needs cannot be met locally).
- The latter half of this document – the SEN stress-test – recognises that local authorities are experiencing different pressures. We **use 7 indicators** to identify those who we think are experiencing the most pressures and stresses in relation to SEN provision.
- The first SEN stress-test was produced in 2014. **This is the update for 2024.**

A note about comparisons with previous years

- SEND reforms mean that some historical comparisons can be problematic. This is because:
 - **Since 2017**, information on primary need relates to those with **SEN Support & EHC plans**, whereas prior to 2015 it was School Action Plus & Statements.
 - EHC plans cover **young people up to the age of 25**, whereas the previous SEND regime covered **young people aged 18 and under**.
 - A new primary need of **Social, Emotional and Mental Health** was introduced in 2015. The primary need of **Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties** was removed in 2015 (but SEMH is not a direct replacement).
- There have also been changes to some local authority boundaries. Specifically:
 - Starting from 2020, data for **Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole** is recorded **jointly**.
 - From 2022 data for **Northamptonshire** was split into **North Northamptonshire** and **West Northamptonshire**.
 - From 2024 data for **Cumbria** was split into **Cumberland** and **Westmorland & Furness**
- Data for these local authorities are omitted from any analysis where comparisons with earlier years are made (but included in analysis of 2024 in isolation).

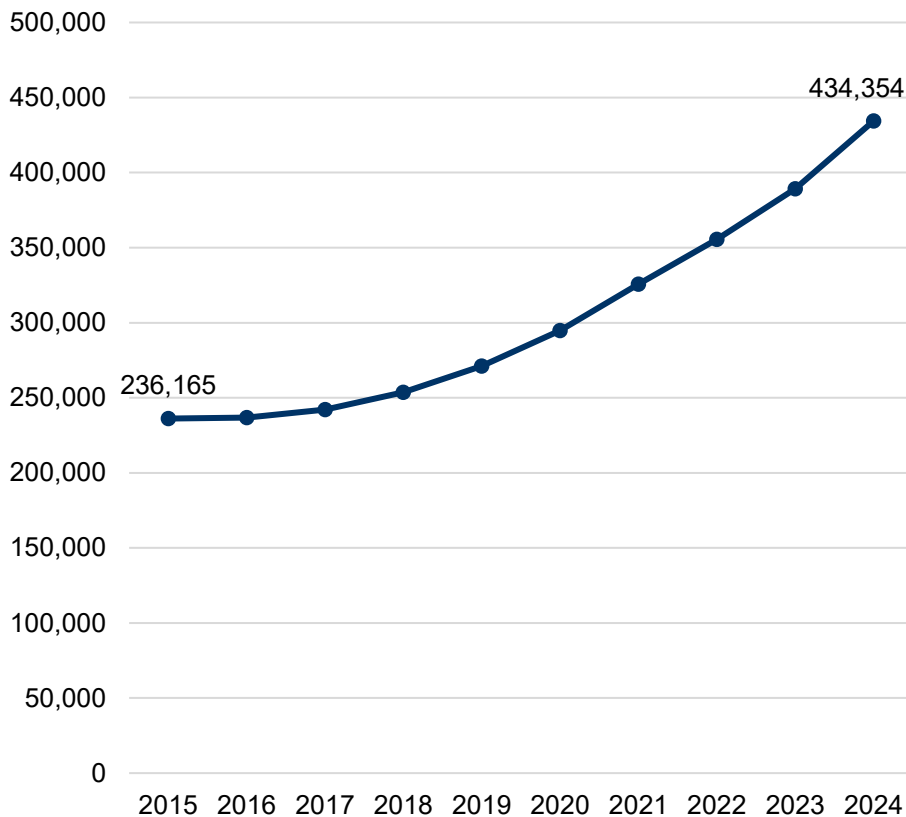
SEND reforms under review: key updates

- In December 2024, the Education Select Committee launched its inquiry [‘Solving the SEND Crisis’](#). It will focus on:
 - How to **stabilise the system** in the short term
 - How to make mainstream schools and other educational settings more **inclusive** to children with SEND
 - **Increasing the capacity** of SEND provision
- A report from the [Public Accounts Committee](#) in January 2025 also **warned that urgent action is needed** from the government and that there is currently no clear, costed plan to measure progress.
- In response, the government has said it aims to produce a **fully costed plan by April 2026** and a plan for **dealing with council SEND deficits this summer (2025)**, alongside a plan on **inclusive education in schools by the end of the year (2025)**.
- This introduces **new uncertainty** on the implementation trajectory of the [2022 SEND review](#) and concerns about the pace of reform in the sector, particularly in light of a changing political landscape following the 2024 general election.

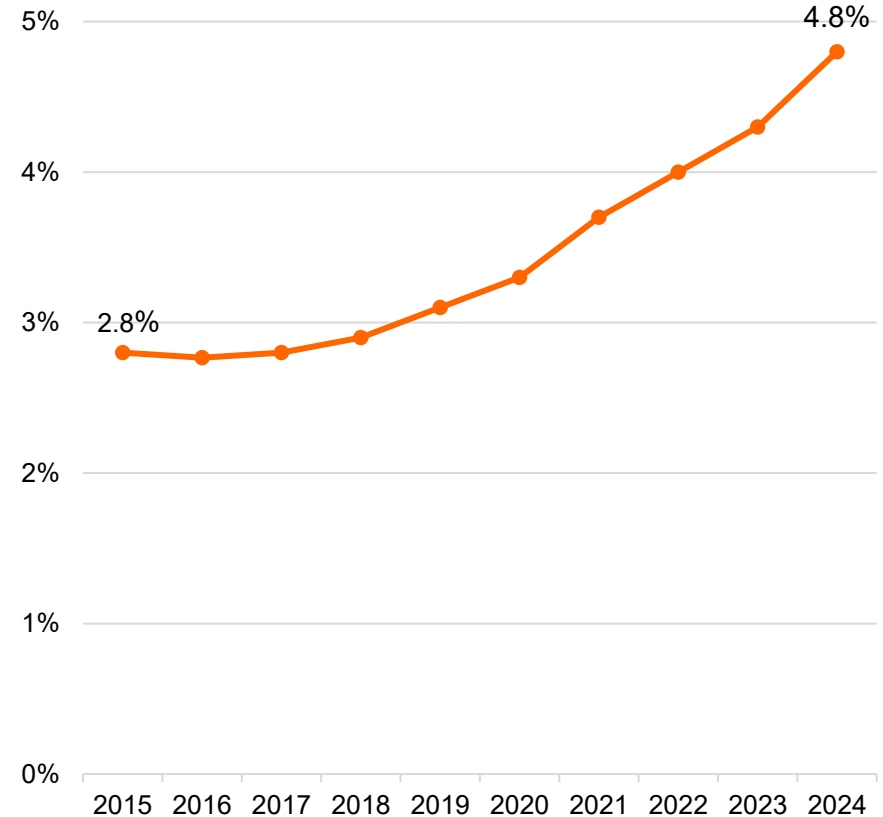
The National Picture

Number and percentage of pupils with EHC plans or statements in England (2015-2024)

Number of children with EHC plan or statement

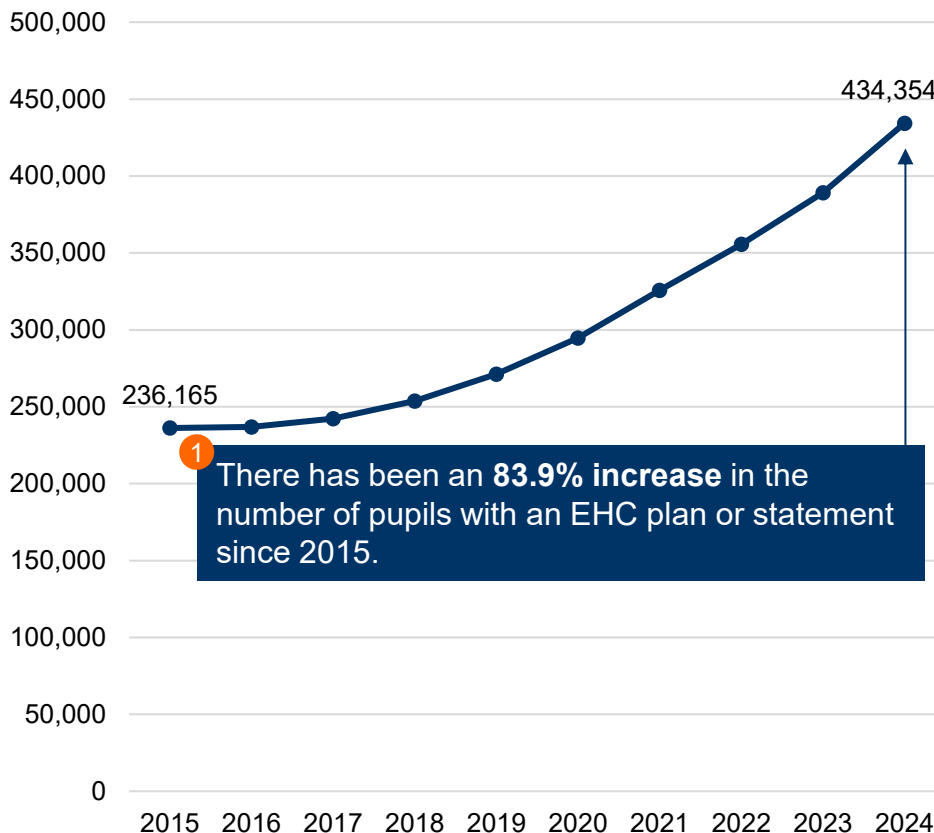


Percentage of school children with EHC plan or statement

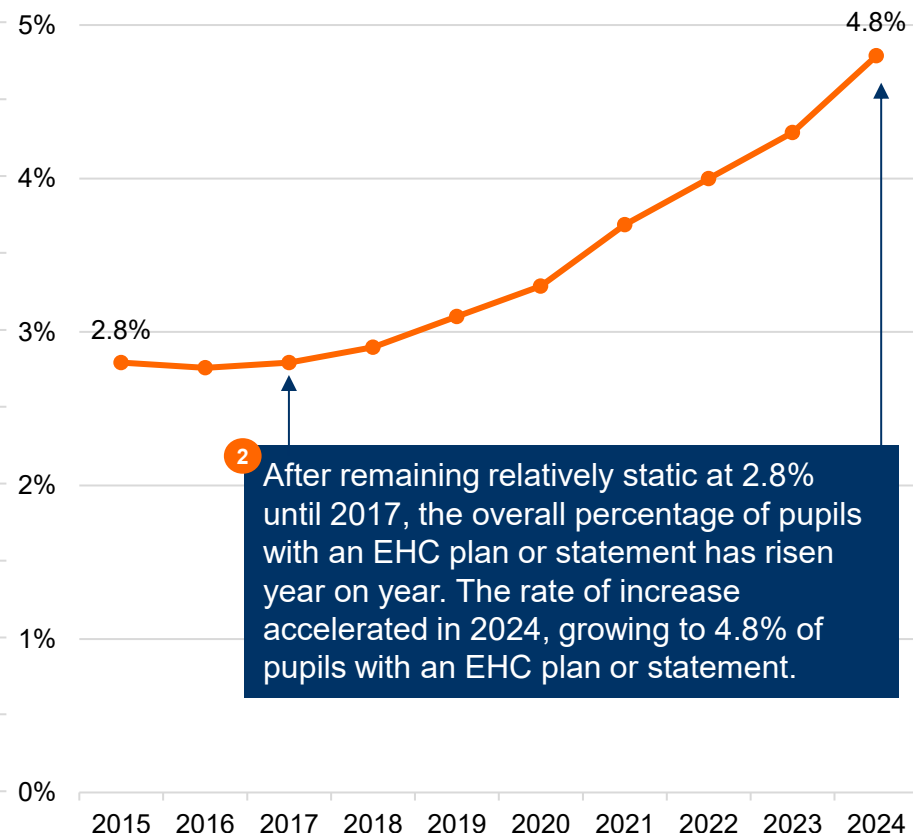


Number and percentage of pupils with EHC plan or statement in England (2015-2024)

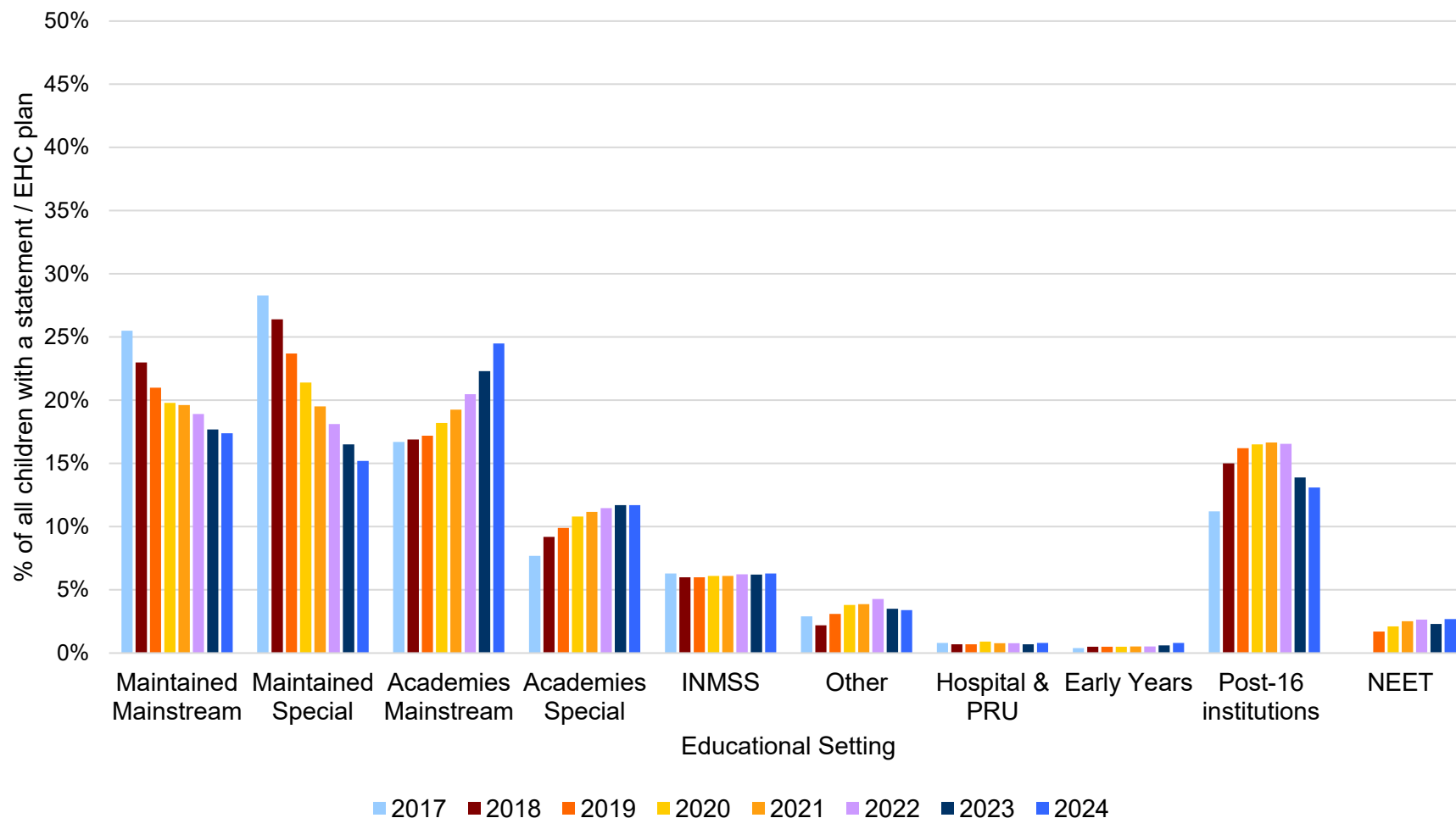
Number of children with EHC plan or statement



Percentage of school children with EHC plan or statement

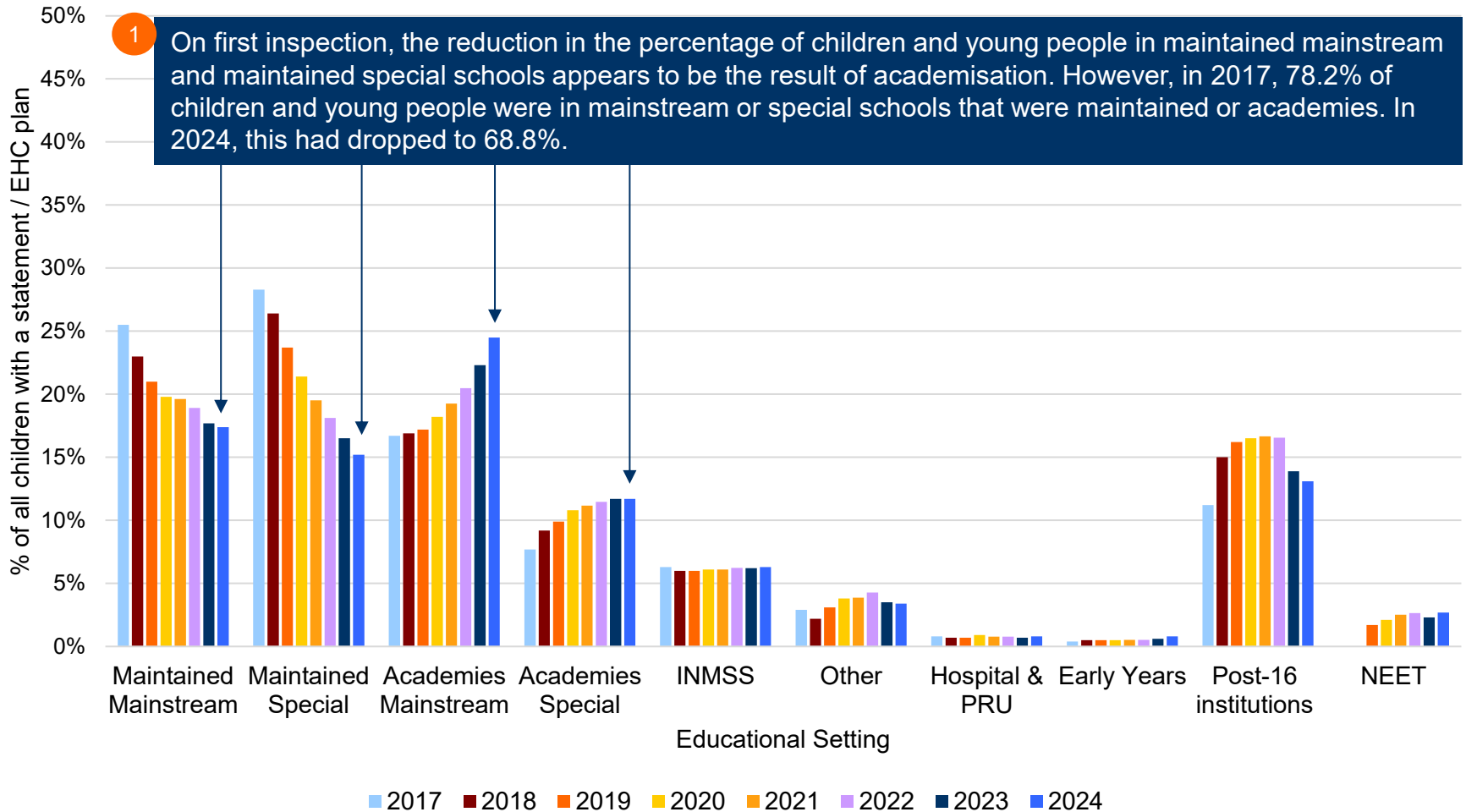


Placement of children & young people with an EHC plan or statement in different settings (2017-2024)

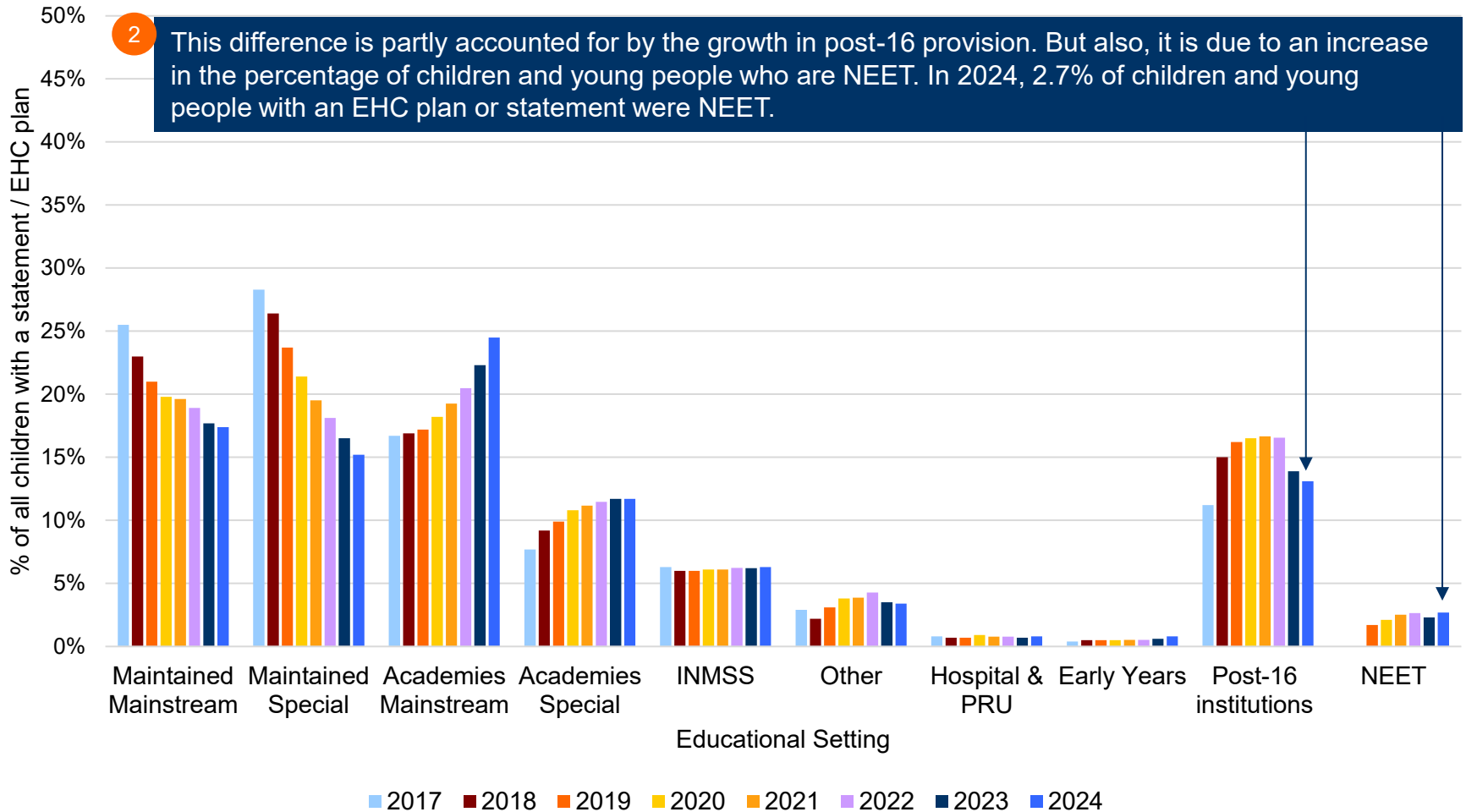


Notes: INMISS = Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools. PRU = Pupil Referral Units. NEET = not in education, employment or training. The percentages do not total 100% because the chart excludes "Unknown" data

Placement of children & young people with an EHC plan or statement in different settings (2017-2024)

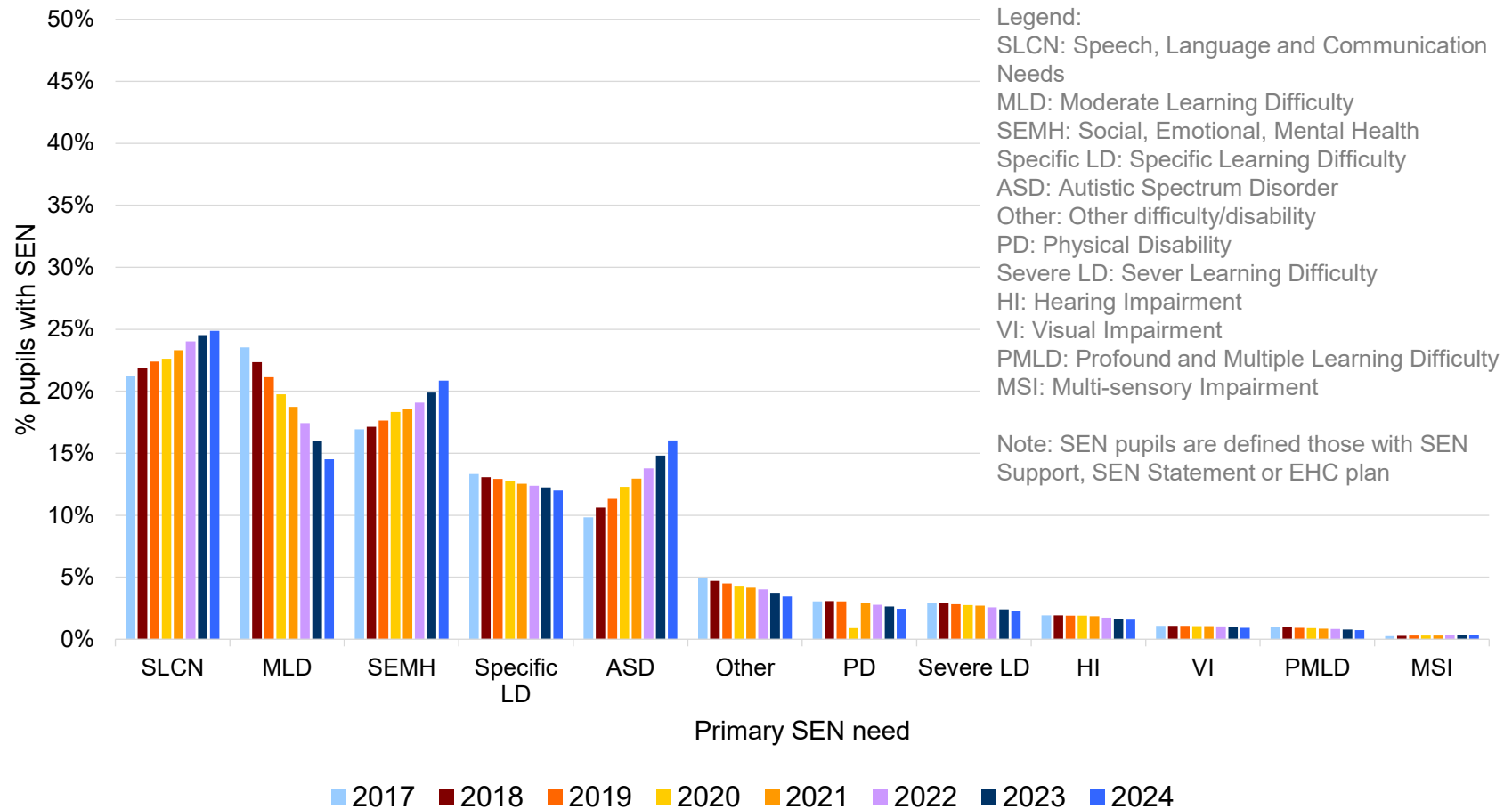


Placement of children & young people with an EHC plan or statement in different settings (2017-2024)



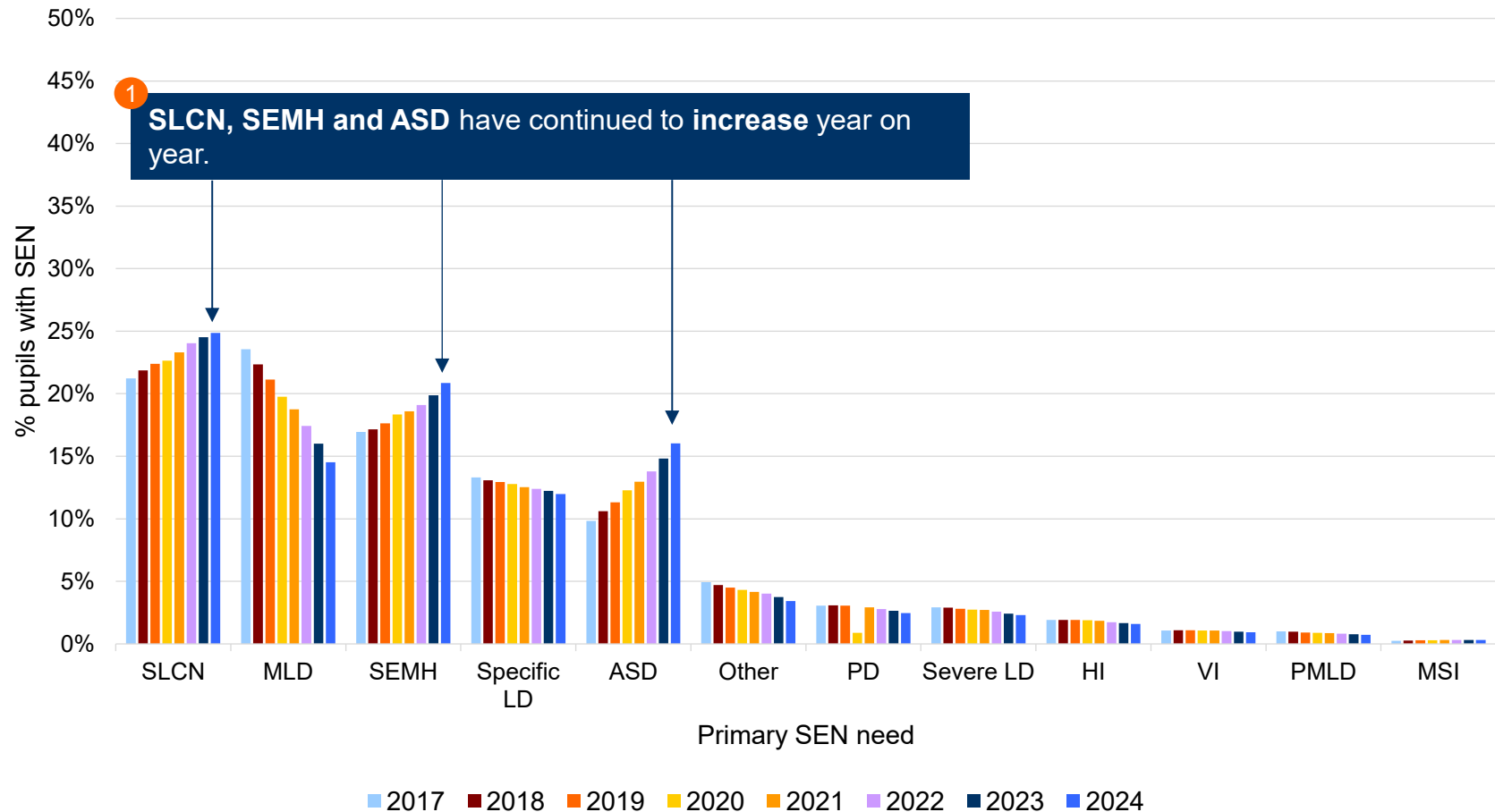
Primary need among SEN pupils (2017-2024)

(state funded primary, state funded secondary and special schools)



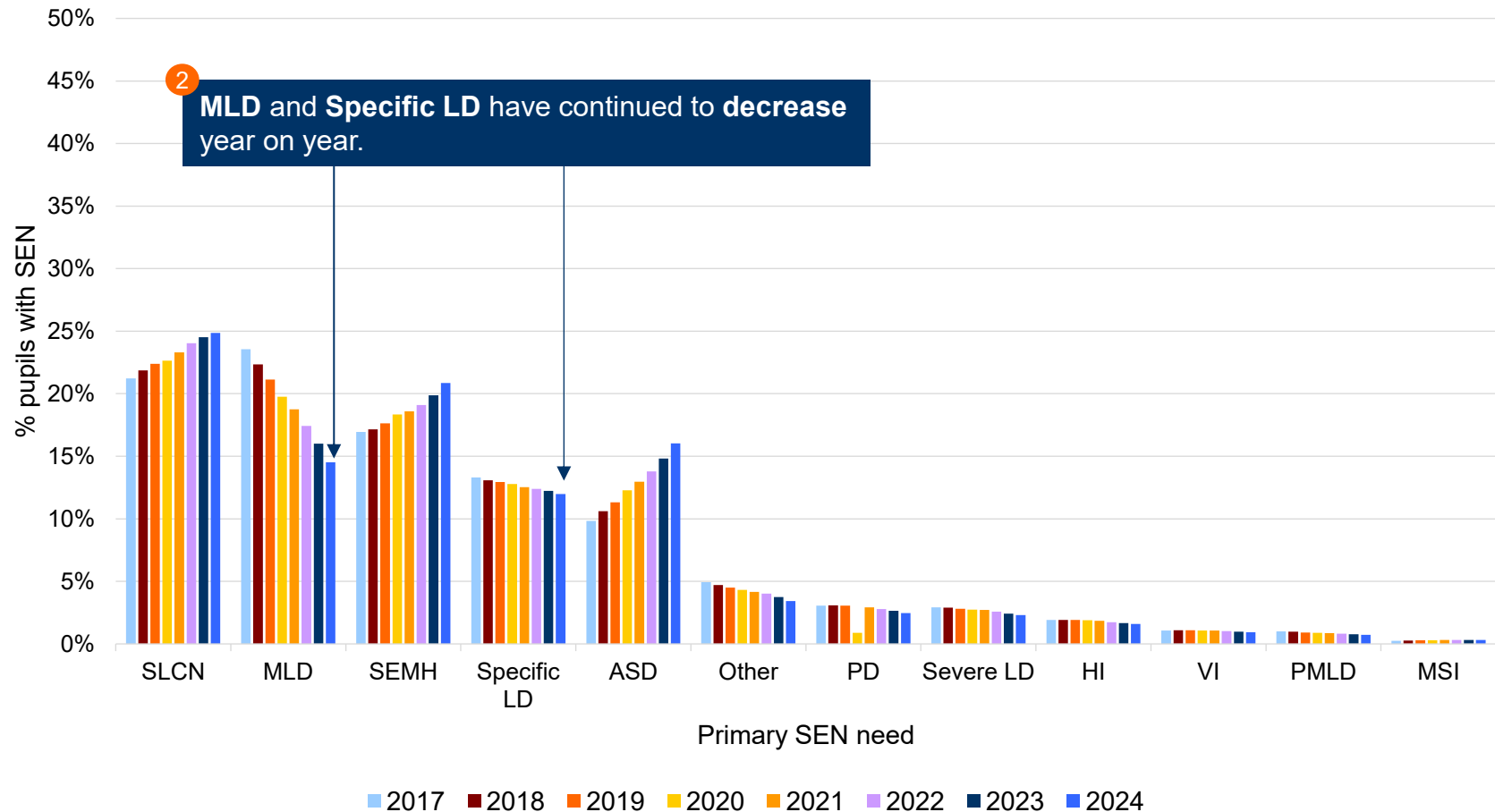
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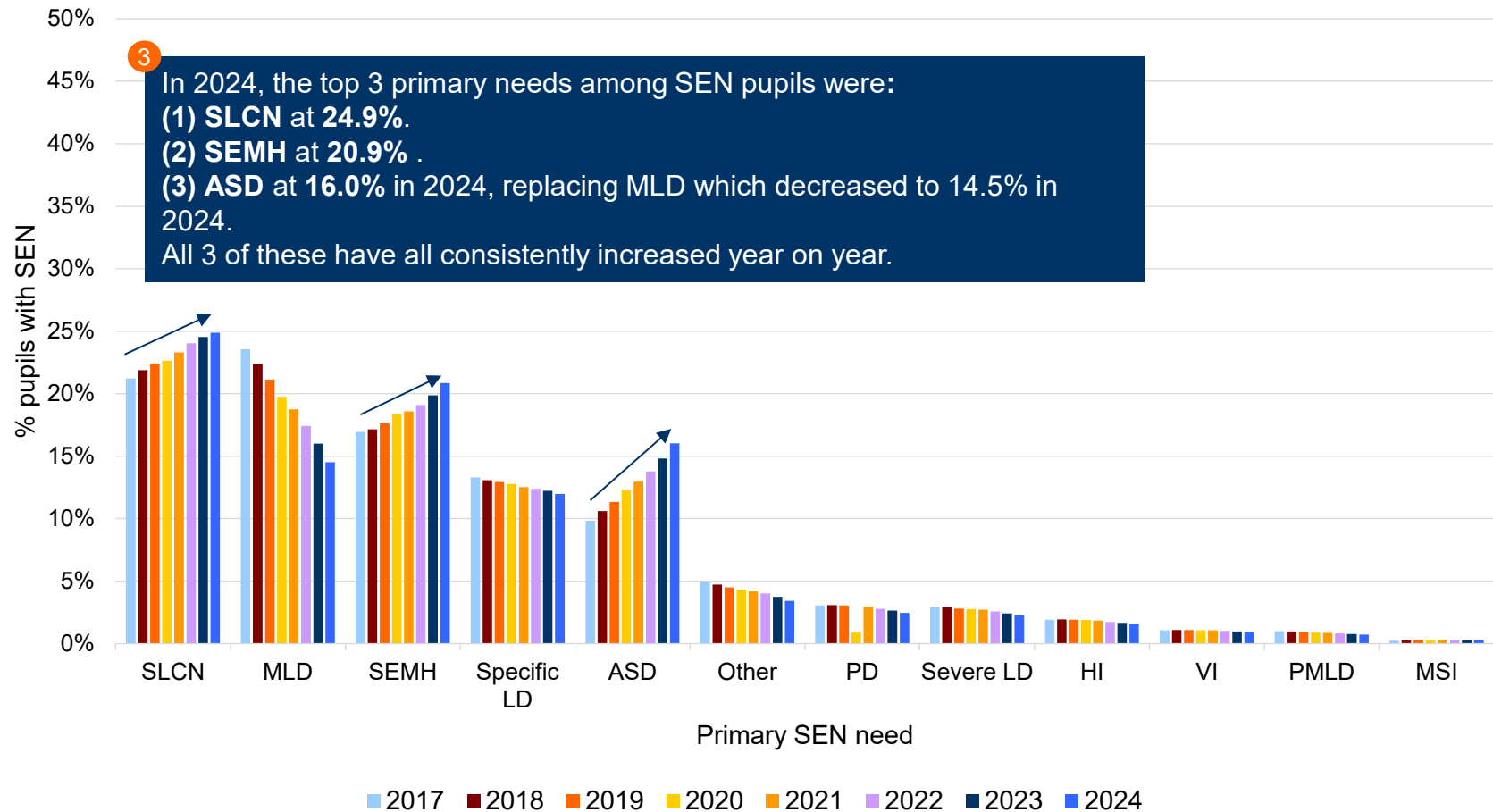
Primary need among SEN pupils (2017-2024)

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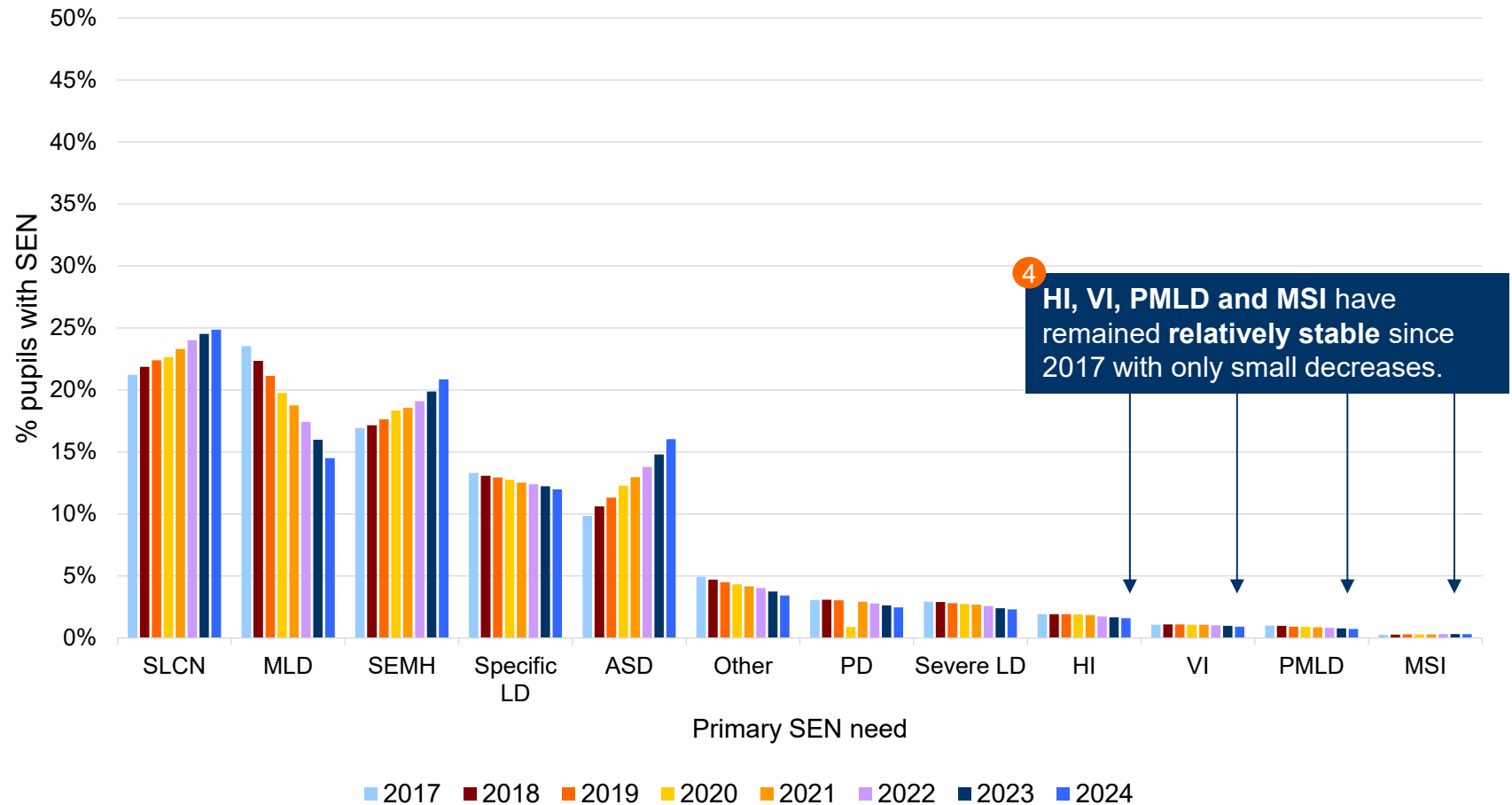
Primary need among SEN pupils (2017-2024)

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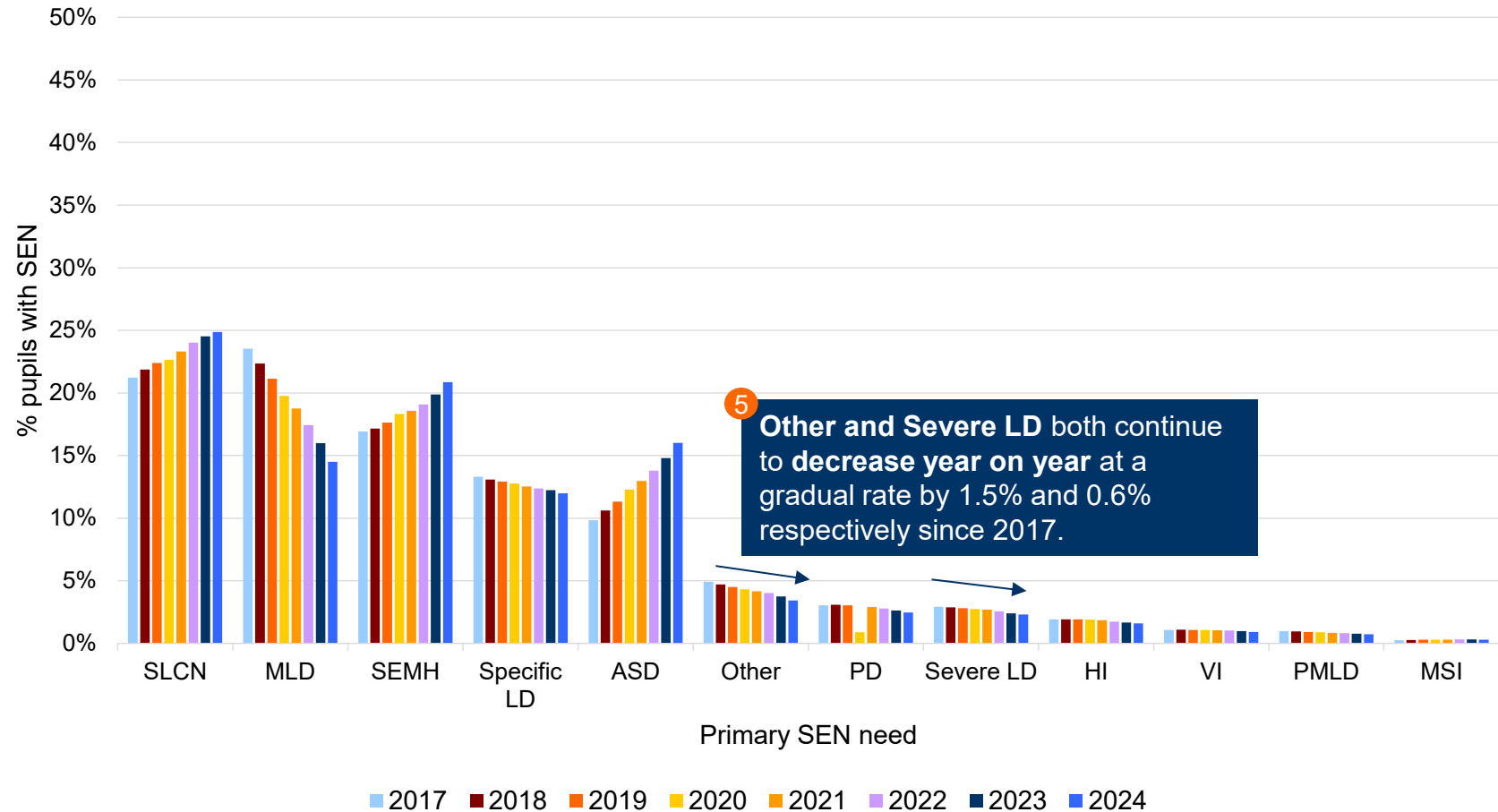
Primary need among SEN pupils (2017-2024)

(state funded primary, state funded secondary and special schools)



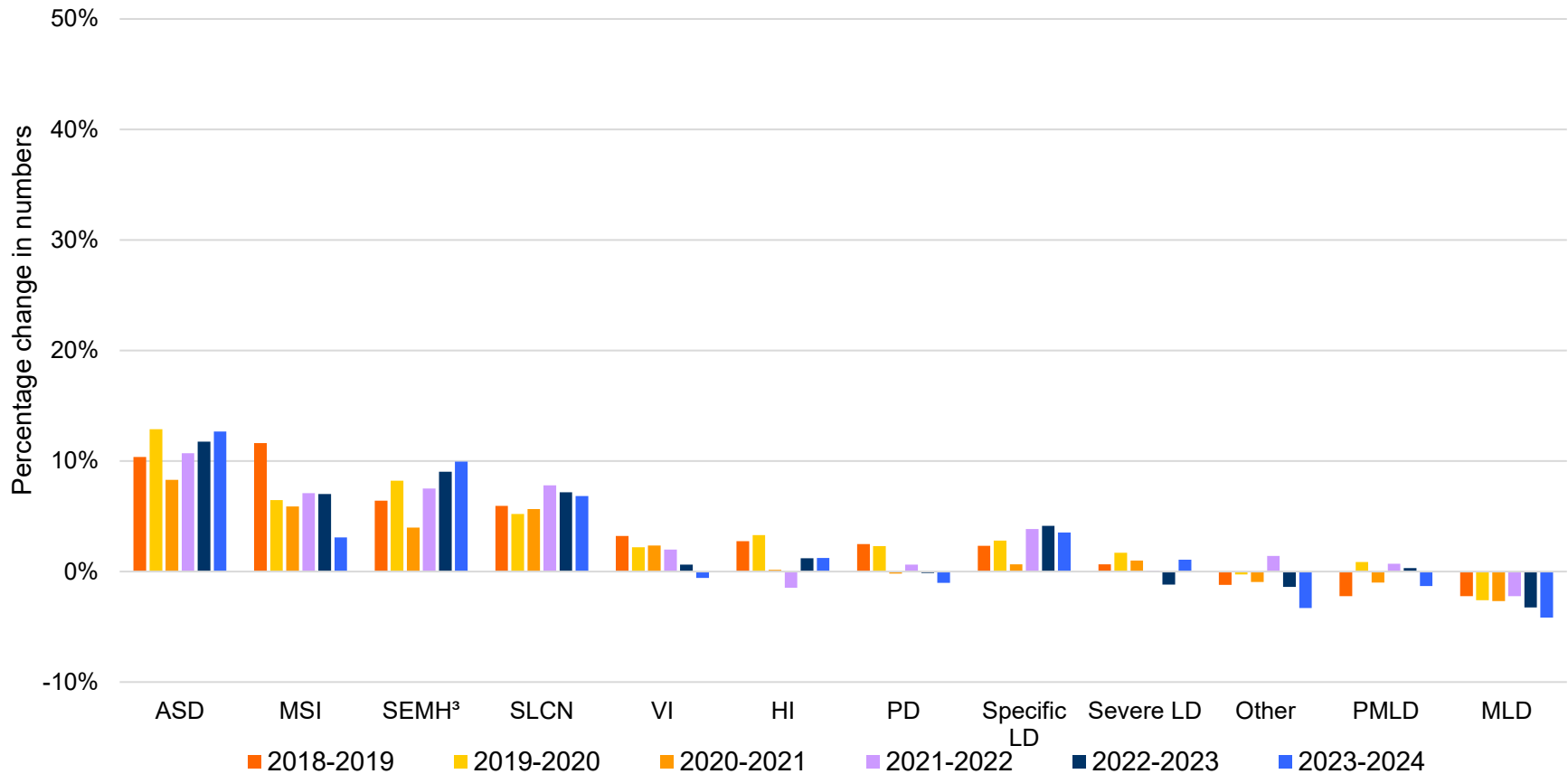
Primary need among SEN pupils (2017-2024)

(state funded primary, state funded secondary and special schools)



Percentage change in numbers by primary need (2018-2024)

(state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special)



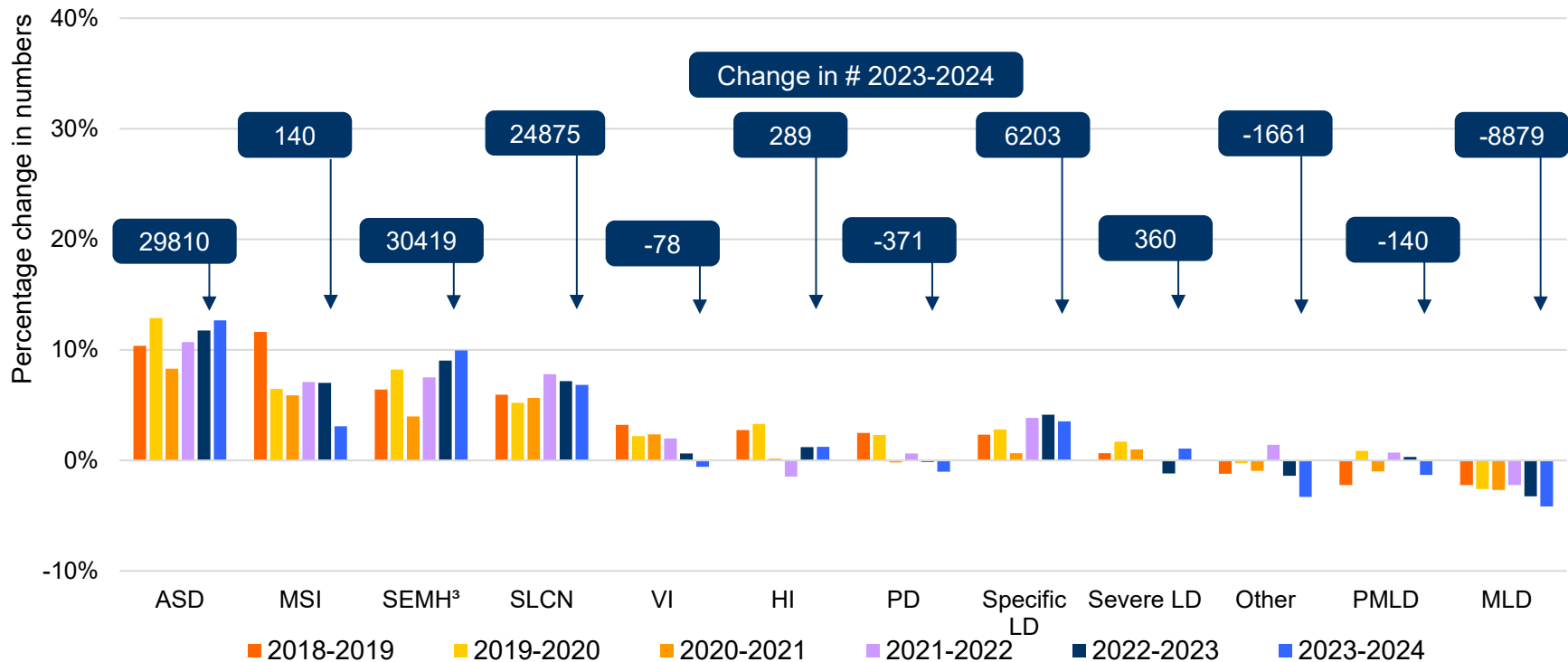
Percentage change in numbers by primary need (2018-2024)



(state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special)

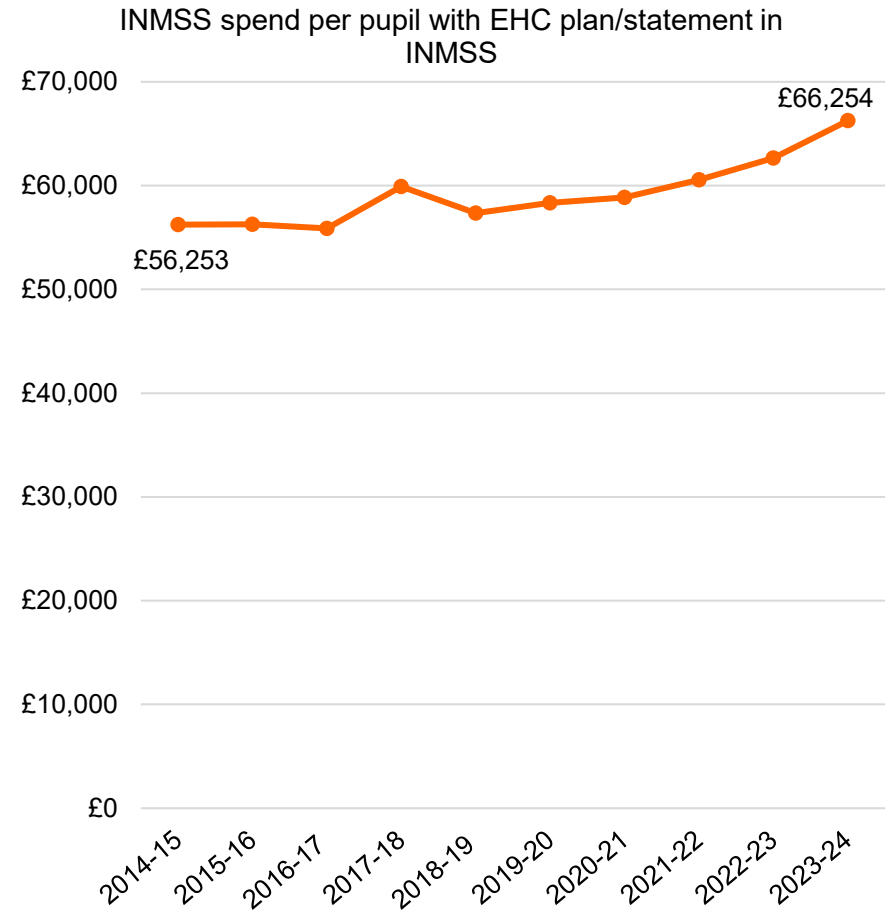
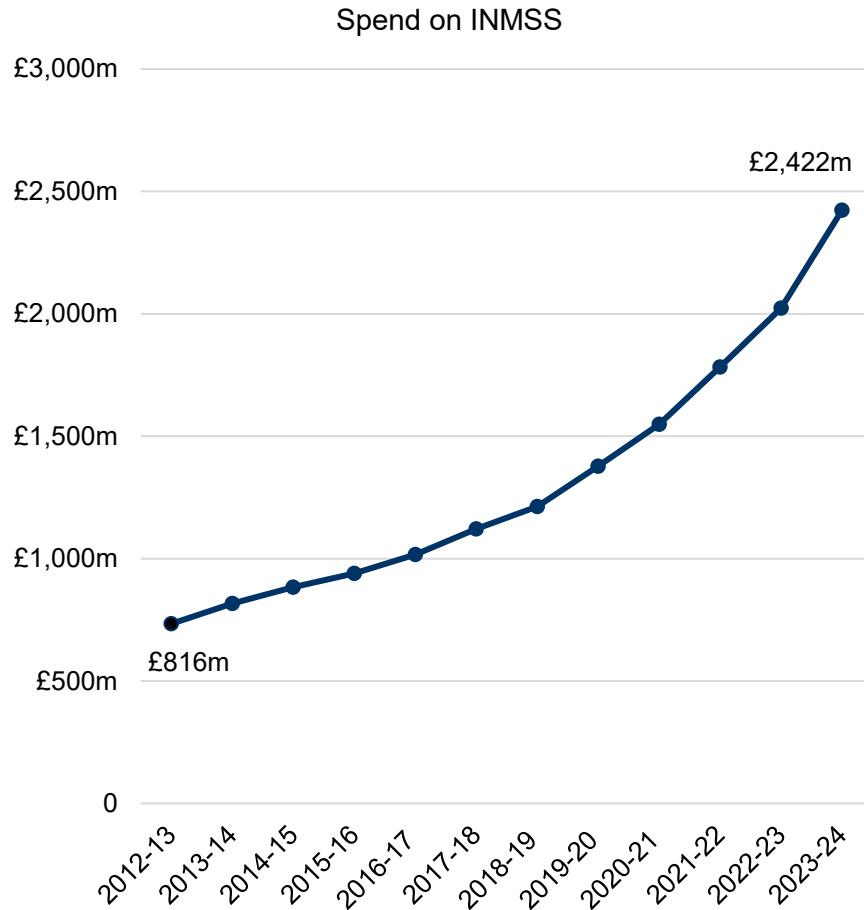
Overall, most primary need categories have experienced **consistent year-on-year growth** in pupil numbers.

However, there are notable exceptions: **MLD** has continued its year-on-year decline, while **PMLD** remains the most volatile category, marked by a decline in 2023-2024.



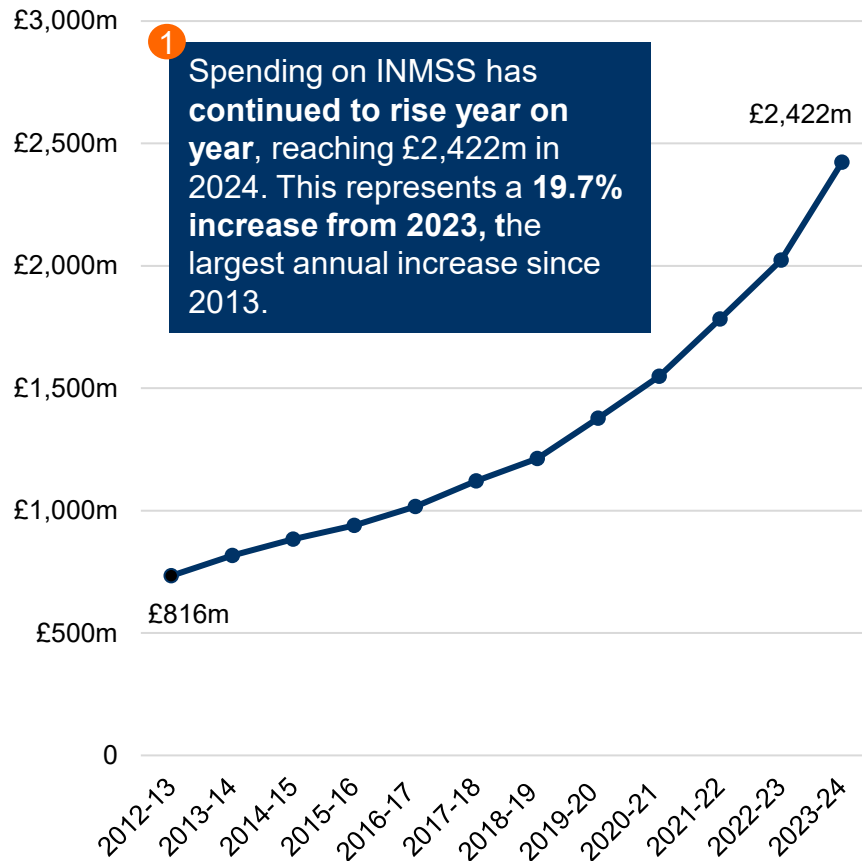
Spending on Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS)

(2013-2024)

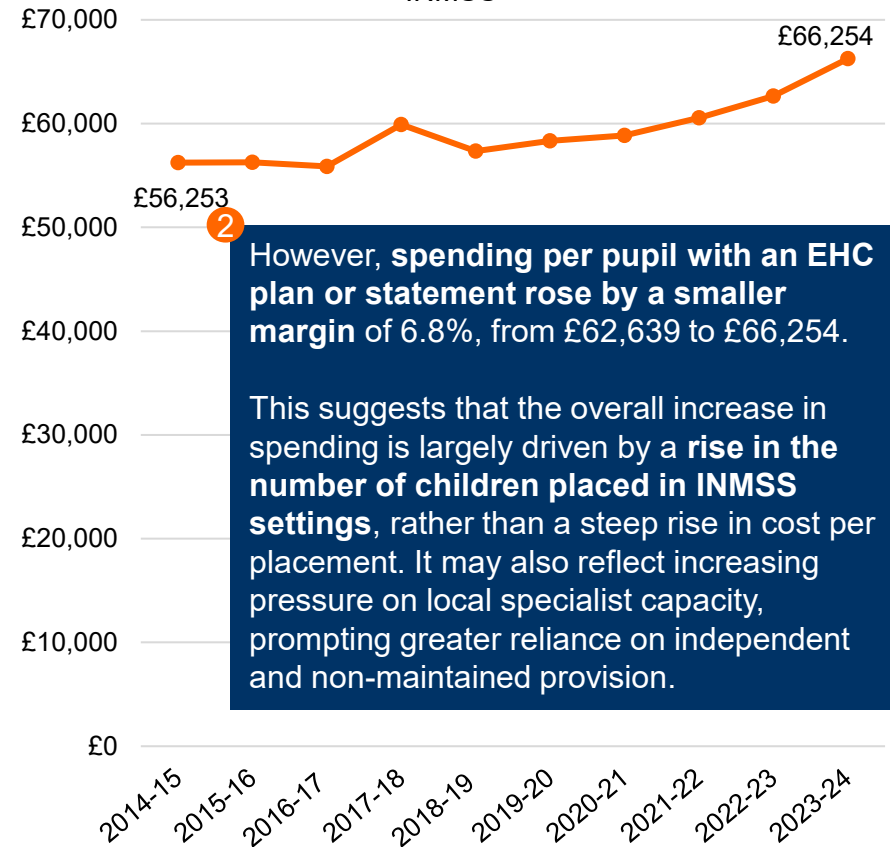


Spending on INMSS (2013-2024)

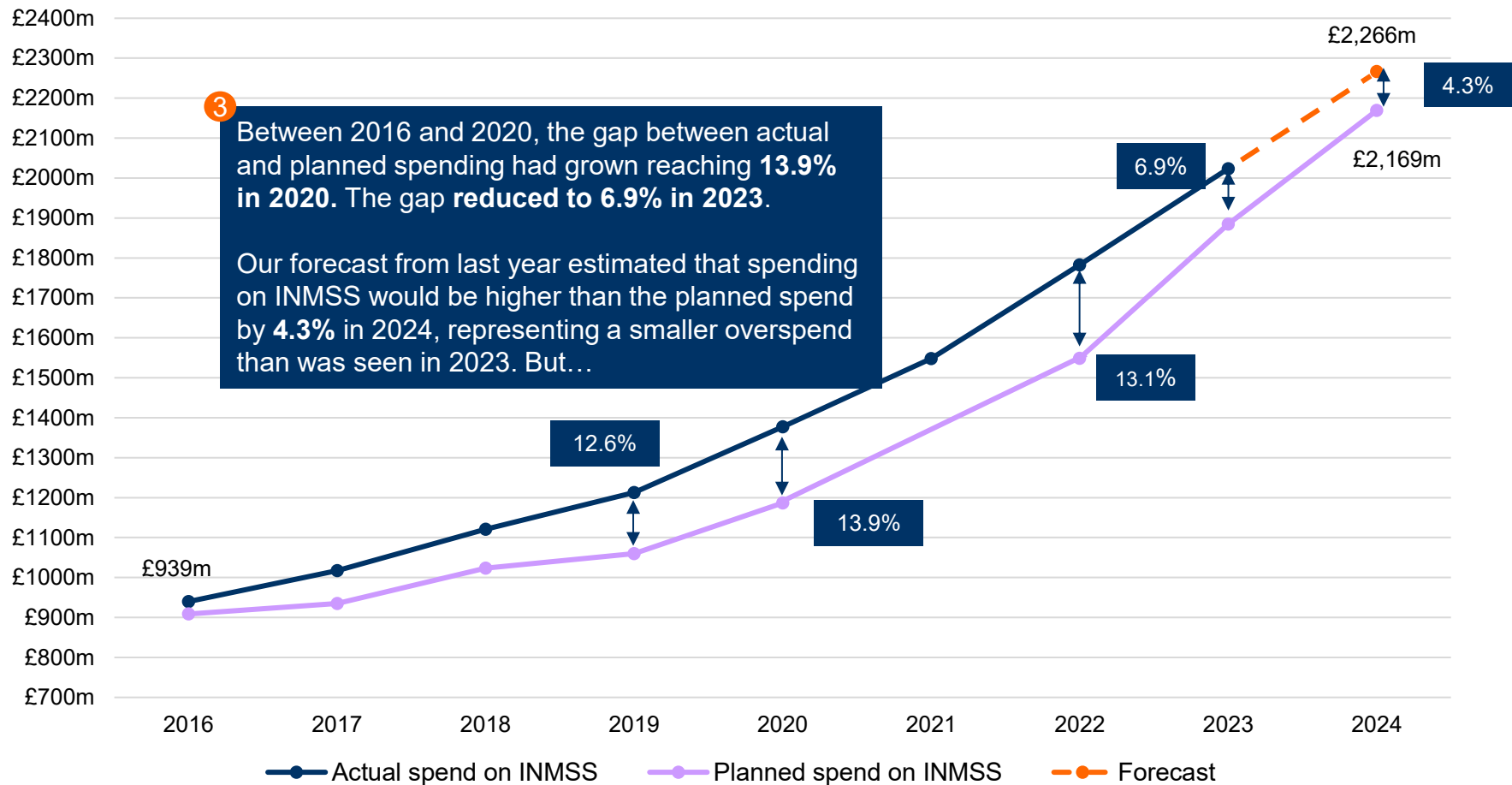
Spend on INMSS



INMSS spend per pupil with EHC plan/statement in INMSS

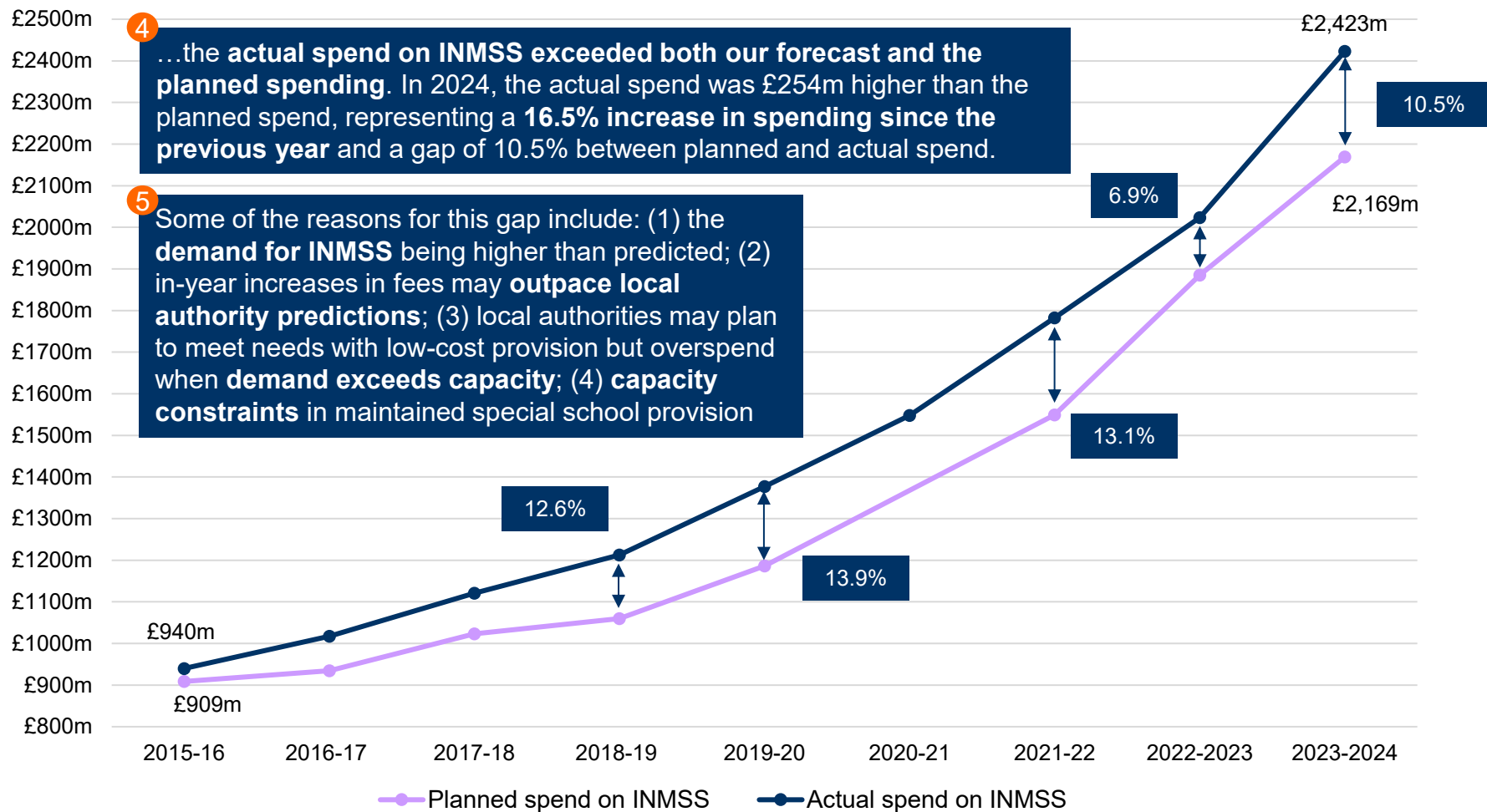


Planned spending on INMSS vs actual spending on INMSS (2016-2024)



N.B due to the COVID-19 pandemic data for planned spend in 2020-2021 was not collected so data is missing for 2021.

Planned spending on INMSS vs actual spending on INMSS (2016-2024)



N.B due to the COVID-19 pandemic data for planned spend in 2020-2021 was not collected.

The SEN Stress-Test

Looking beyond national averages to decipher substantial differences between local authorities

Key indicators for the stress-test

National averages can hide the fact that local authorities are experiencing very different pressures in relation to SEN trends. We use seven indicators to explore the variation in local pressures in relation to SEN trends. From this we can identify the local authorities experiencing most stress.

For the first time this year we have also included the local authorities experiencing the least pressures.

Seven key indicators for 2024 & change over time 2019-2024

Percentage of pupils with EHC plan or statement (2024)

Percentage change in number of pupils with EHC plan or statement (2019-2024)

Percentage of children and young people with EHC plan or statement placed in INMSS (2024)

Percentage change in the number of children and young people with EHC plan or statement placed in INMSS (2019-2024)

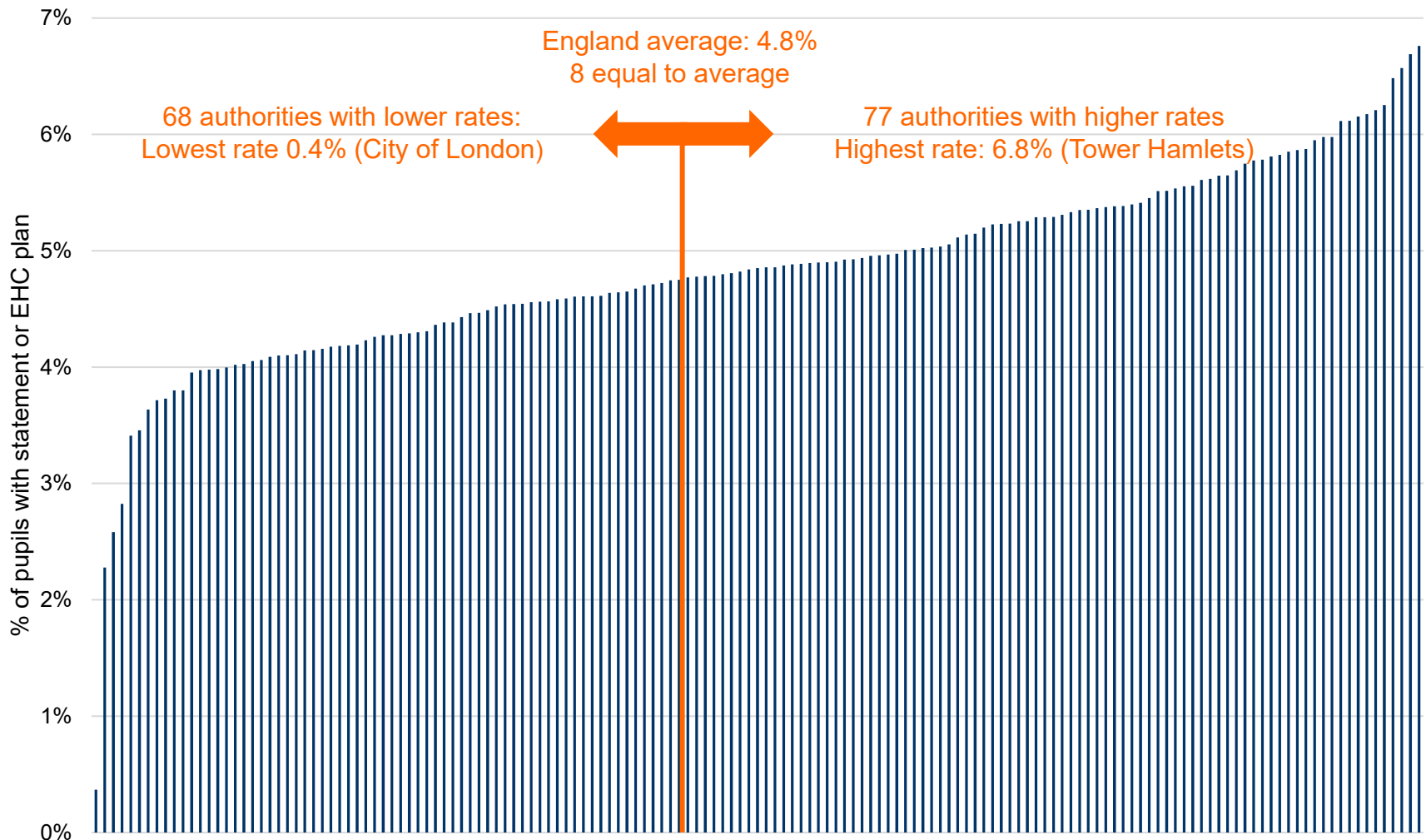
Percentage of SEN pupils with a primary diagnosis of ASD (2024)

Percentage change in the number of SEN pupils with a primary diagnosis of ASD (2019-2024)

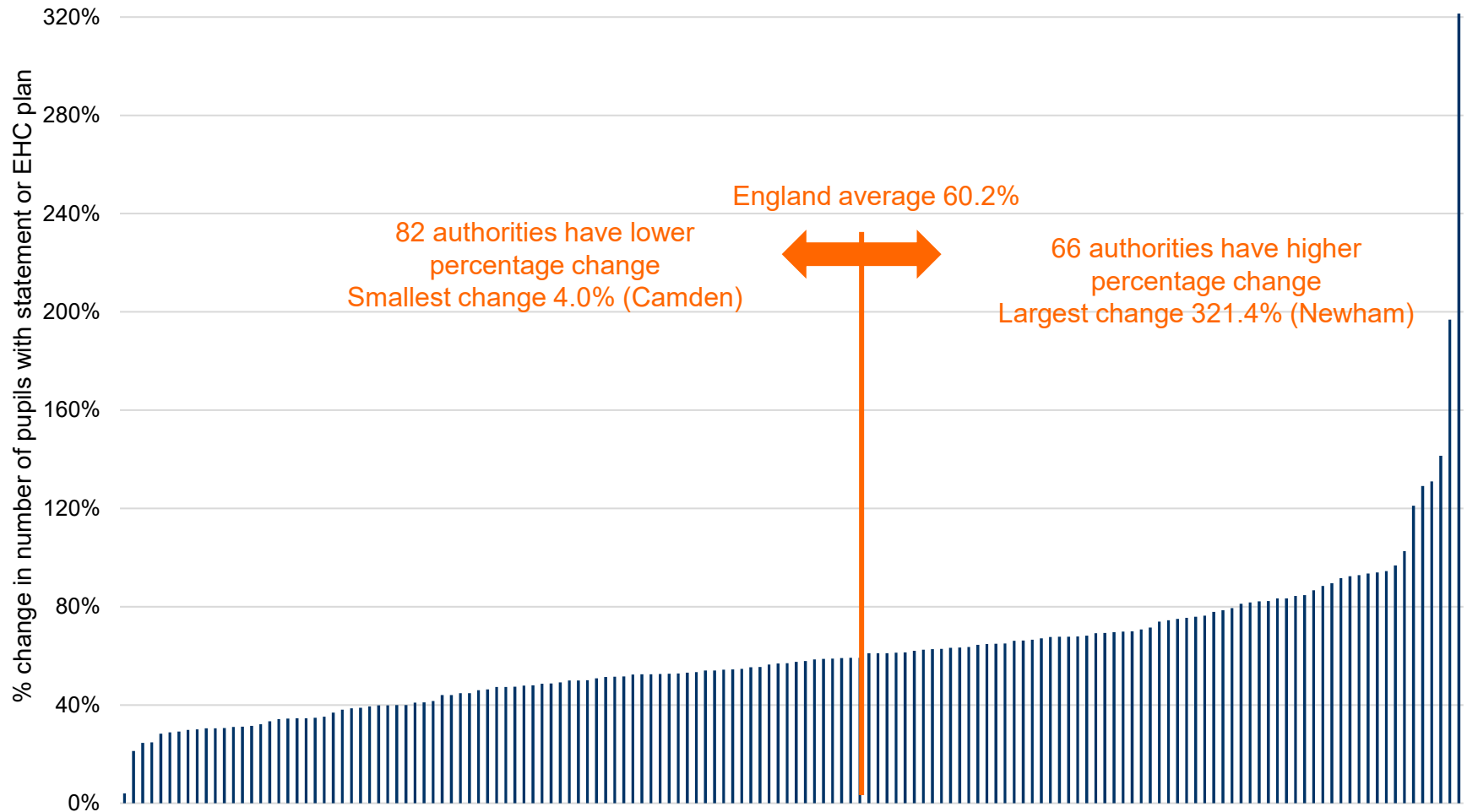
Percentage of total school budget spent on Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (planned budget 2023-2024)

To note, for indicator 3 and 4 Hackney and Peterborough have not collected data so are excluded from these indicators.

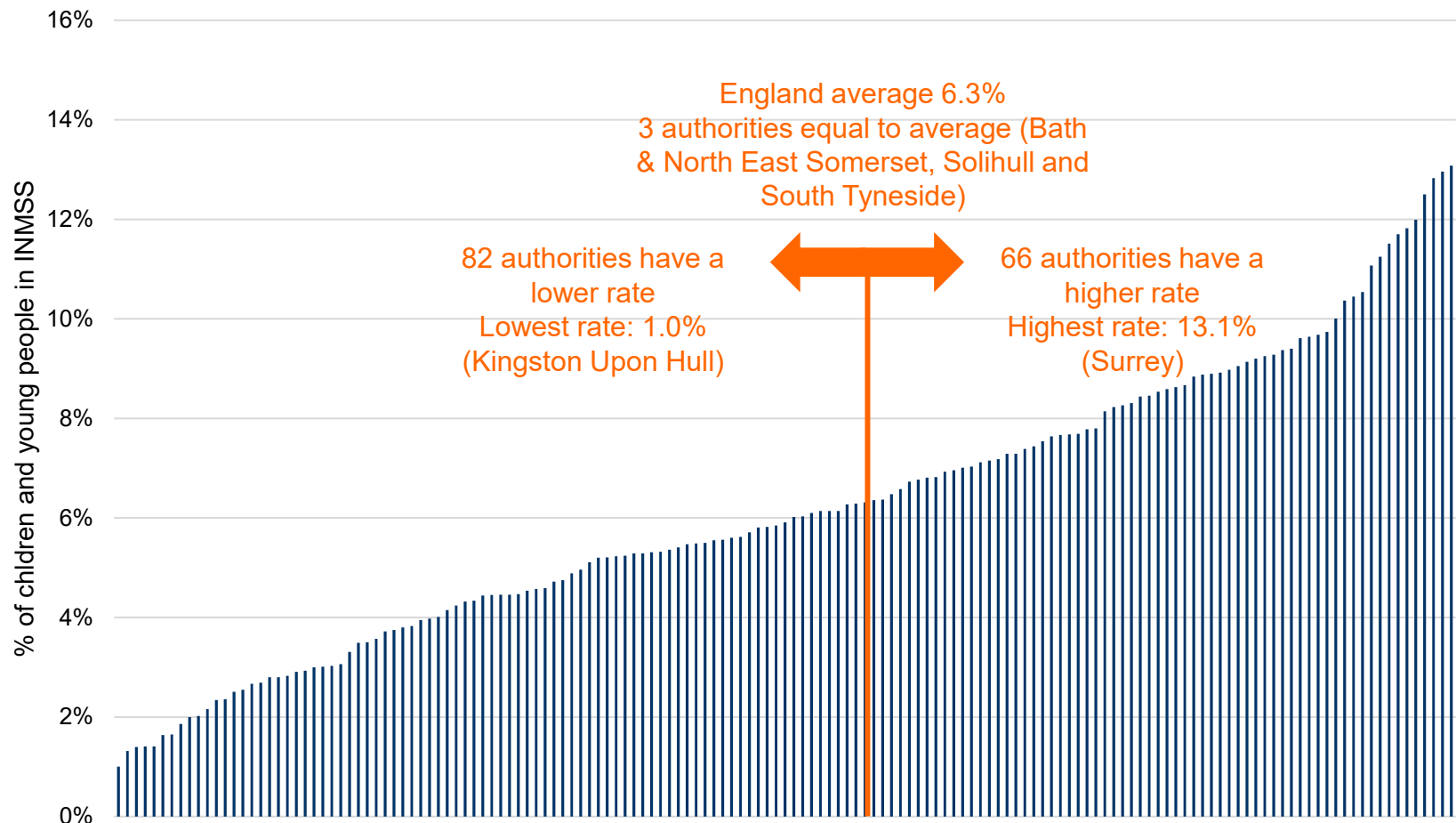
1. Percentage of pupils with an EHC plan or statement (2024)



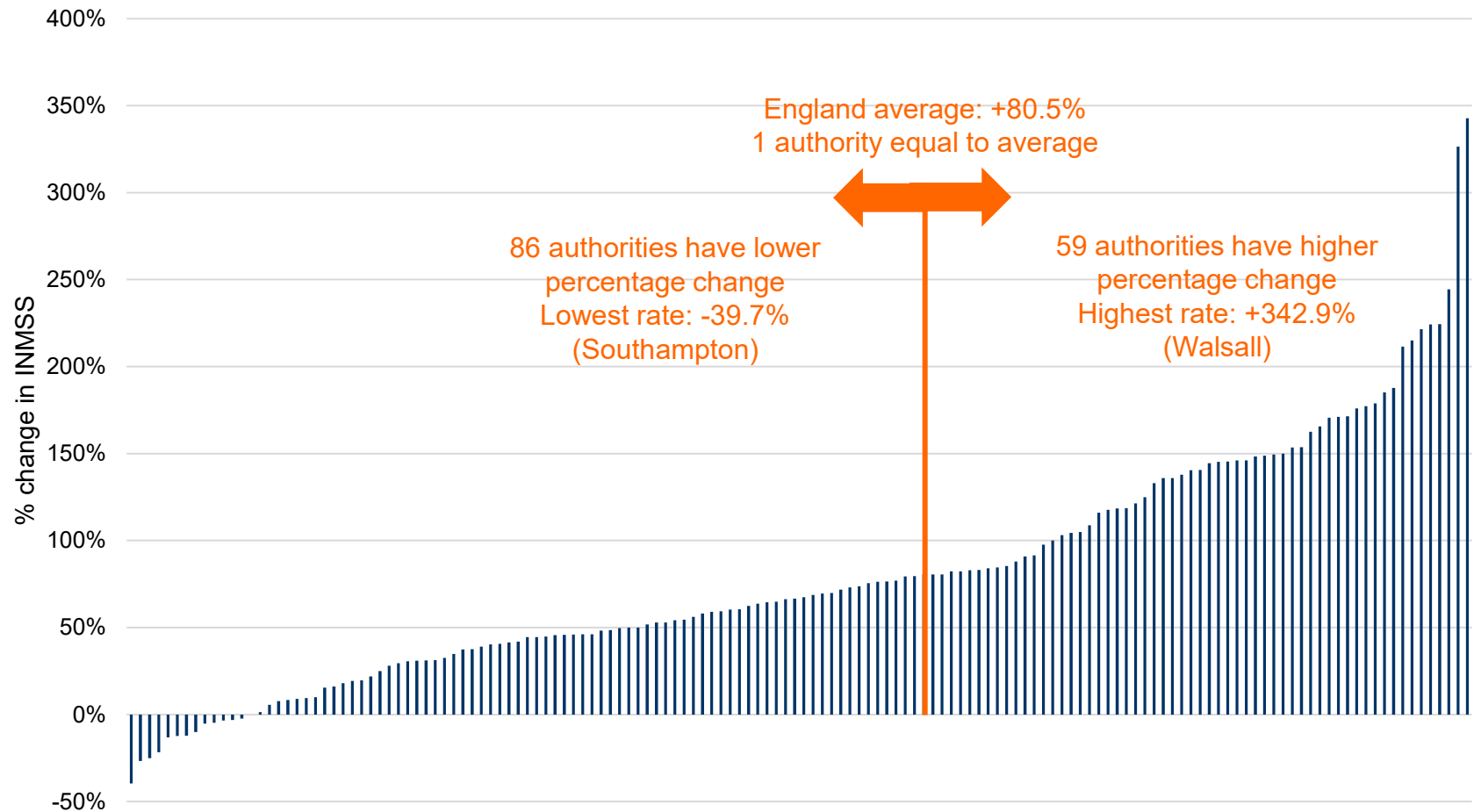
2. Percentage change in the number of pupils with an EHC plan or statement (2019-2024)



3. Percentage of children and young people with an EHC plan or statement in INMSS (2024)



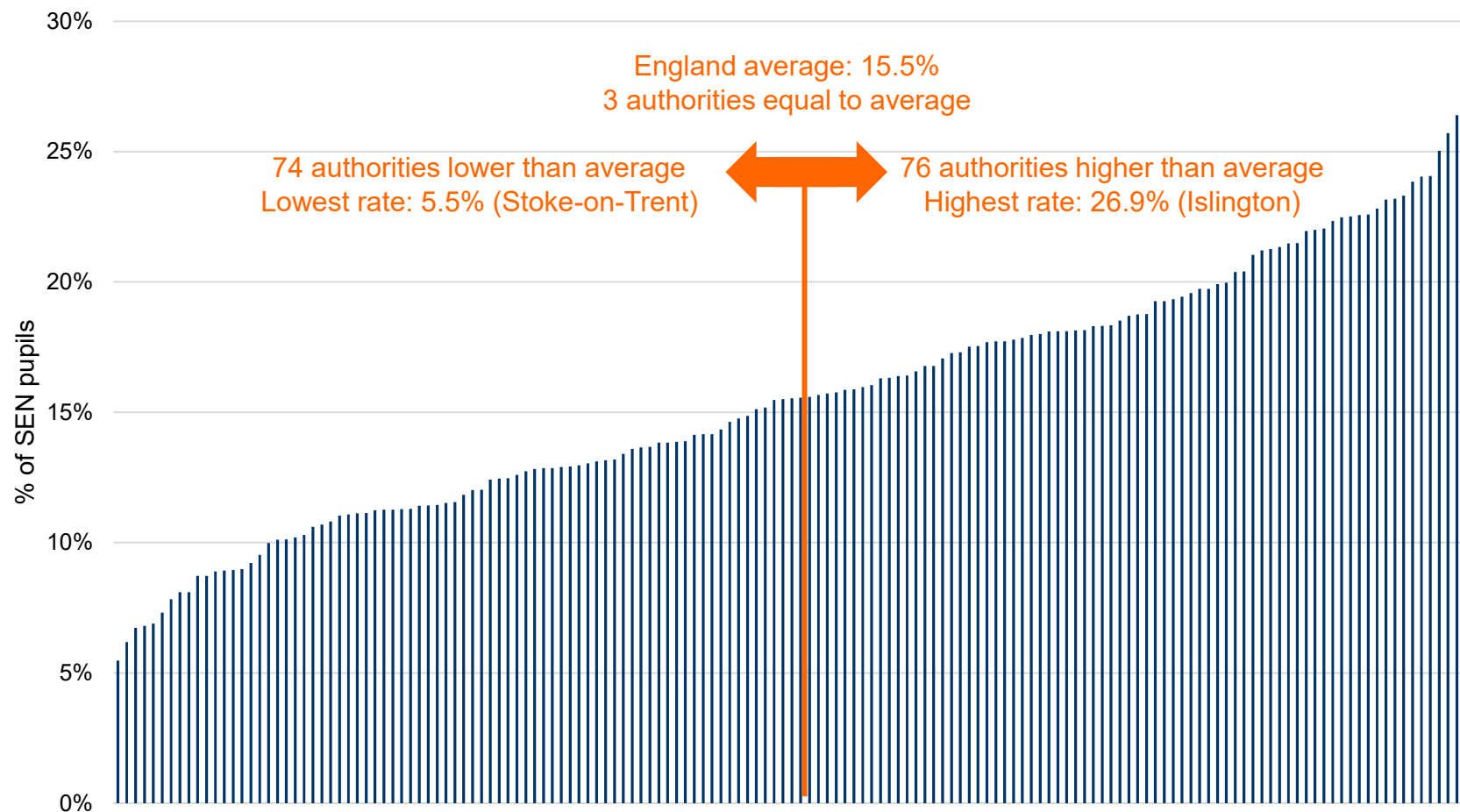
4. Percentage change in the number of children and young people with an EHC plan or statement in INMSS (2019-2024)



5. Percentage of SEN pupils with a primary diagnosis of ASD (2024)

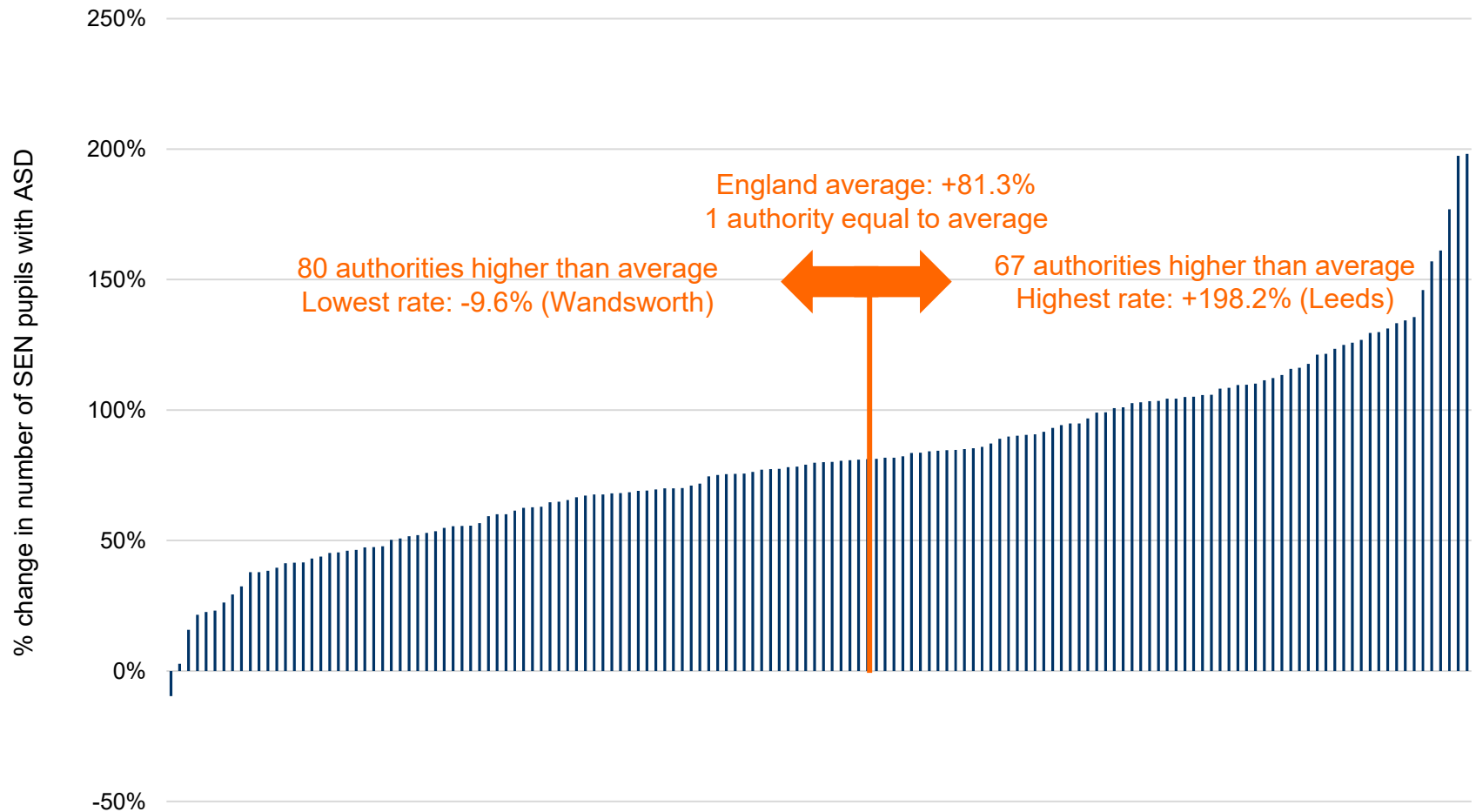


(State-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools)

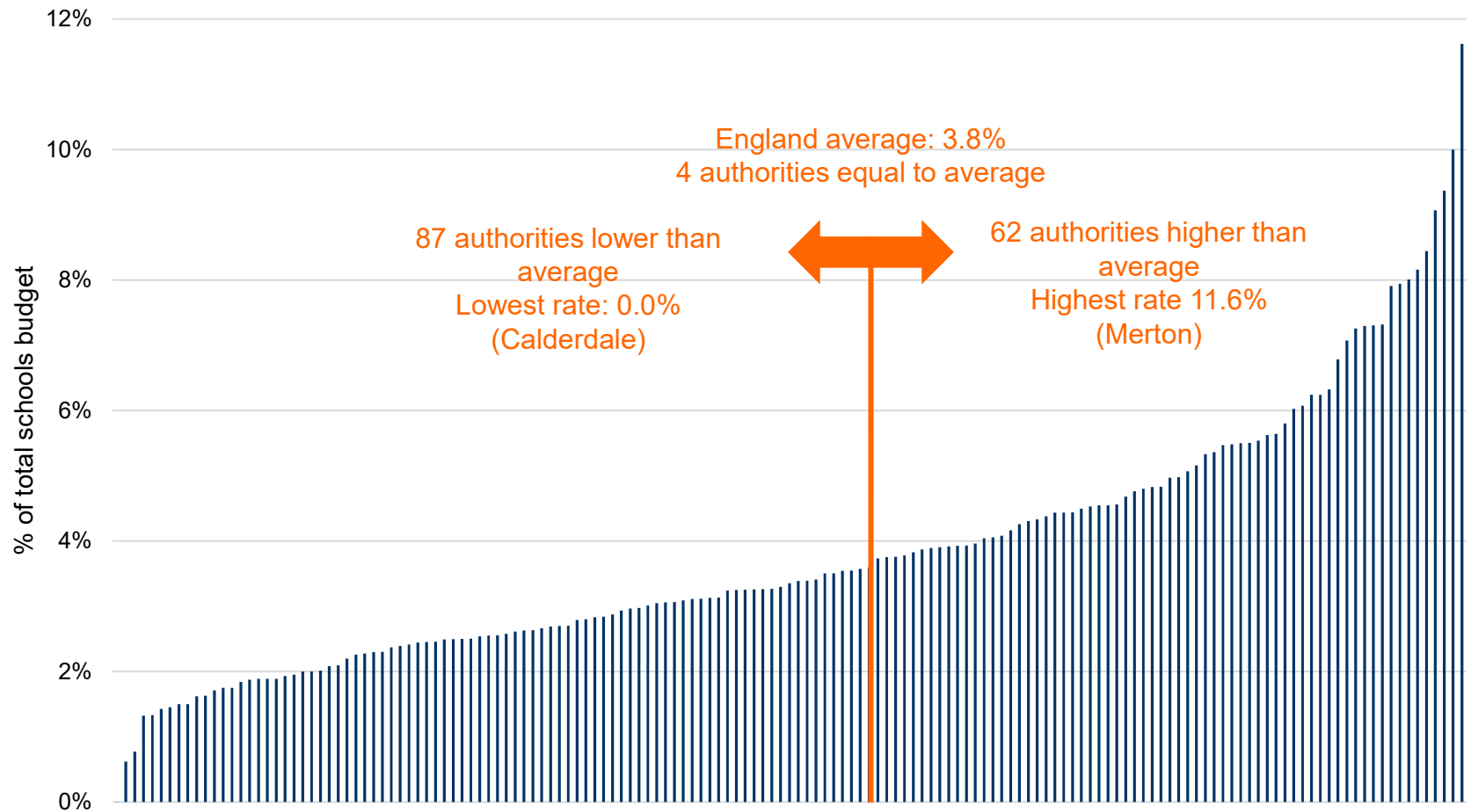


6. Percentage change in SEN pupils with a primary diagnosis of ASD (2019-2024)

(State-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools)



7. Percentage of school budget spent on INMSS (2023-2024)



The 20 “most stressed” local authorities (2024)



	EHCP/Statement		IMNSS		ASD		INMSS £ (planned)
	%	% Change	%	% Change	%	% Change	% Change
1	Tower Hamlets	Newham	Surrey	Walsall	Islington	Leeds	Merton
2	Islington	North Somerset	North East Lincolnshire	Wakefield	Sunderland	Brighton and Hove	Cheshire East
3	Knowsley	Somerset	Merton	Middlesbrough	Liverpool	Southampton	Isles of Scilly
4	Isle of Wight	Cheshire East	City of London	Cornwall	Kensington and Chelsea	Calderdale	Medway
5	Lambeth	Tameside	Cheshire East	Knowsley	Brighton and Hove	North Lincolnshire	Bracknell Forest
6	Torbay	Liverpool	West Sussex	Liverpool	Newham	Hampshire	Richmond upon Thames
7	Wirral	Bracknell Forest	Richmond upon Thames	North Tyneside	Windsor and Maidenhead	Sefton	Barnsley
8	Wandsworth	Walsall	Medway	Sandwell	Hillingdon	Luton	Surrey
9	Manchester	Sefton	Stoke-on-Trent	Cheshire East	Southwark	Knowsley	Bury
10	Oldham	Central Bedfordshire	Bracknell Forest	Devon	Kent	Rutland	Oxfordshire
11	Northumberland	Bristol, City of	Devon	Manchester	Bexley	Liverpool	Hackney
12	Liverpool	Halton	Wokingham	Sefton	West Berkshire	Derby	Devon
13	Devon	Manchester	Windsor and Maidenhead	Bristol, City of	Bracknell Forest	Gateshead	City of London
14	Halton	Wirral	East Sussex	York	Haringey	Islington	Doncaster
15	Merton	St. Helens	Wandsworth	Calderdale	Derby	Isles of Scilly	West Sussex
16	Hammersmith and Fulham	Hampshire	Staffordshire	Derbyshire	Kingston upon Thames	Southend-on-Sea	Norfolk
17	North Tyneside	Oxfordshire	Bury	Rochdale	Sutton	Kensington and Chelsea	Bromley
18	Darlington	Wokingham	Nottinghamshire	Plymouth	Hammersmith and Fulham	Enfield	Stoke on Trent
19	Enfield	Enfield	Barnsley	Hampshire	Isles of Scilly	Barking and Dagenham	Derby
20	Hampshire	Cambridgeshire	Kensington and Chelsea	Hertfordshire	Sefton	County Durham	North East Lincolnshire

Ones to watch in 2024...

Local Authority	Number of indicators in which LA's "most stressed" (2024)
Liverpool	5
Devon	4
Bracknell Forest	4
Cheshire East	4
Hampshire	4
Sefton	4
Kensington and Chelsea	3
Islington	3
Manchester	3
Merton	3
Derby	3
Enfield	3
Knowsley	3
Isles of Scilly	3

NB: Changes to local authority boundaries mean that it was not possible to conduct change over time analysis (i.e. three of the seven indicators) for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. However, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole are also "one to watch" as they were one of the 20 'most stressed' local authorities for two out of the four indicators for which we could conduct analysis.

Most stressed in recent years...

2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Liverpool (5)	Devon (6)	Merton (4)	Merton (3)	Merton (4)
Devon (4)	Kent (5)	Kingston upon Thames (4)	North East Lincolnshire (3)	Newham (4)
Bracknell Forest (4)	Kensington and Chelsea (4)	Hammersmith and Fulham (3)	Southampton (3)	Blackpool (3)
Cheshire East (4)	Liverpool (4)	North East Lincolnshire (3)	Hammersmith and Fulham (3)	Bracknell Forest (3)
Hampshire (4)	Bracknell Forest (3)	Islington (3)	Islington (3)	Islington (3)
Sefton (4)	Hackney (3)	Southampton (3)	Newham (3)	Kingston upon Thames (3)
Kensington and Chelsea (3)	Hammersmith and Fulham (3)	Devon (6)	Devon (3)	North Tyneside (3)
Islington (3)	Islington (3)	Kensington and Chelsea (4)	Halton (3)	North East Lincolnshire (3)
Manchester (3)	Manchester (3)	Kent (4)	St. Helens (3)	Richmond upon Thames (3)
Merton (3)	Newham (3)	Liverpool (3)		Salford (3)
Derby (3)	North East Lincolnshire (3)	Derby (3)		Southampton (3)
Enfield (3)	West Berkshire (3)	Hackney (3)		
Knowsley (3)		Cheshire East (3)		
Isles of Scilly (3)				

- = on watch list in 2 of the last 5 years
- = on watch list in 3 of the last 5 years
- = on watch list in 4 of the last 5 years
- = on watch list for last 5 years

LA (n) = number of indicators in which LA "most stressed"

Least stressed in recent years...

2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Slough (4)	Kingston upon Hull, City of (4)	City of London (4)	City of London (3)	Plymouth (4)
Southend-on-Sea (4)	Plymouth (4)	Plymouth (4)	Leeds (3)	Shropshire (4)
East Riding of Yorkshire (3)	Shropshire (4)	Shropshire (4)	Middlesbrough (3)	Leeds (3)
Kirklees (3)	Barking and Dagenham (3)	Blackburn with Darwen (3)	Plymouth (3)	Cornwall (3)
Luton (3)	Birmingham (3)	East Riding of Yorkshire (3)	Shropshire (3)	Luton (3)
Newham (3)	City of London (3)	Kingston upon Hull, City of (3)		Wokingham (3)
Nottingham (3)	Isles of Scilly (3)	Luton (3)		Sheffield (3)
Plymouth (3)	Newham (3)	Newham (3)		Waltham Forest (3)
Portsmouth (3)	Portsmouth (3)	Sheffield (3)		York (3)
Redbridge (3)	Redbridge (3)			
Telford and Wrekin (3)	Richmond upon Thames (3)			
Torbay (3)	Southend-on-Sea (3)			
	Tower Hamlets (3)			
	York (3)			

	= on watch list in 2 of the last 5 years
	= on watch list in 3 of the last 5 years
	= on watch list in 4 of the last 5 years
	= on watch list for last 5 years

LA (n) = number of indicators in which LA "least stressed"
See Appendix A and Appendix B for further detail on "least stressed" areas

References I

- **Slide 4:**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063620/SEND_rev_iew_right_support_right_place_right_time_accessible.pdf
- **Slide 6-Slide 7:** <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2023-24>
- **Slide 8-Slide 10:** Number of pupils, by type of SEN provision - 2017-2024 at -<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/education-health-and-care-plans#subjectTabs-createTable>
- **Slide 11-Slide 18:**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2018>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2019>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2020>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2021>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2022>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2023>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2024>
- **Slide 19-Slide 22:**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statements-of-sen-and-ehc-plans-england-2017>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statements-of-sen-and-ehc-plans-england-2018>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statements-of-sen-and-ehc-plans-england-2019>
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/section-251-2019-to-2020>.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/section-251-2020-to-2021>.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/planned-la-and-school-expenditure-2021-to-2022-financial-year>
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/planned-la-and-school-expenditure/2023-24>

References II

- **Slide 25-26:**
Age and gender by SEN provision, type of need and school type: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2023> (Sen_phase)
- **Slide 27-28:**
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/education-health-and-care-plans#subjectTabs-createTable> (Filtered to include all local authorities and Mainstream – Independent, Special – Independent and Special - Non-maintained)
- **Slide 29-30:**
Age and gender (2023) – by SEN provision, type of need, and school type (Filtered to include: Non-maintained special school, state funded primary, state funded secondary, state funded special school and those with: SEN- no statement; or EHCP and Statement or EHCP): <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-England>
- **Slide 31:**
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/planned-la-and-school-expenditure/2023-24>
Filtered to include total gross planned expenditure for 1.2.3 Top-up and other funding – non-maintained and independent providers and 1.8.1 TOTAL SCHOOLS BUDGET (before Academy recoupment)

Appendix A: The 20 'least stressed' local authorities (2024)

	Statement/EHCP		IMNSS		ASD		IMNSS £ planned
	%	% change	%	% change	%	% change	%
1	City of London	Camden	Kingston Upon Hull, City of	Southampton	Stoke-on-Trent	North East Lincolnshire	Calderdale
2	Nottinghamshire	Torbay	Southend-on-Sea	Redbridge	North East Lincolnshire	Lewisham	Nottingham
3	Nottingham	Birmingham	Luton	Southwark	Kirklees	Plymouth	Kingston upon Hull, City of
4	Leeds	Redcar and Cleveland	Swindon	Swindon	Gloucestershire	Dudley	Redbridge
5	Richmond upon Thames	Telford and Wrekin	York	Portsmouth	Shropshire	Rochdale	East Riding of Yorkshire
6	Newham	Plymouth	Southampton	Blackpool	Dudley	Doncaster	Middlesbrough
7	Cornwall	Barnsley	Portsmouth	Northumberland	Wolverhampton	Solihull	Havering
8	Coventry	South Tyneside	Central Bedfordshire	Lambeth	Sandwell	Dorset	Newham
9	Doncaster	Southend-on-Sea	Newham	Luton	Herefordshire, County of	Medway	Bedford
10	Slough	Slough	Thurrock	County Durham	Blackburn with Darwen	Bromley	Luton
11	Hertfordshire	East Sussex	Barking and Dagenham	Darlington	Walsall	Walsall	Southend-on-Sea
12	Birmingham	Richmond upon Thames	Waltham Forest	Kingston upon Thames	East Riding of Yorkshire	Halton	Sheffield
13	Reading	Wandsworth	Bedford	Torbay	Blackpool	Isle of Wight	Kirklees
14	Blackburn with Darwen	Essex	Sheffield	Isles of Scilly	Tameside	West Berkshire	Slough
15	Redbridge	Croydon	Slough	Gateshead	Telford and Wrekin	Staffordshire	Thurrock
16	Camden	Warrington	Torbay	Bexley	Halton	Reading	Lambeth
17	York	Isles of Scilly	County Durham	Rutland	Bromley	Oldham	Oldham
18	Milton Keynes	Portsmouth	East Riding of Yorkshire	South Gloucestershire	Isle of Wight	Ealing	Barking and Dagenham
19	Hartlepool	Hillingdon	Islington	Solihull	Havering	Nottingham	Waltham Forest
20	Kirklees	Medway	Havering	Southend-on-Sea	Middlesbrough	Telford and Wrekin	Plymouth

Appendix B: Outside the watchlist in 2024...

Local Authority	Number of indicators in which LA's "least stressed"
Slough	4
Southend-on-Sea	4
Kirklees	3
Luton	3
Newham	3
Nottingham	3
Plymouth	3
Portsmouth	3
Redbridge	3
Telford and Wrekin	3
Torbay	3

N.B Changes to local authority boundaries mean that it was not possible to conduct change over time analysis (i.e. three of the seven indicators) for Westmoreland and Furness and North Northamptonshire. However, these areas were in the 20 'least stressed' local authorities for one out of the four indicators for which we could conduct analysis.



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