

Children's Strategic Commissioning

**Children's Services
Independent Placements**

Market Position Statement 2025-26

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lincolnshire County Council's (LCC) **Market Position Statement (MPS) 2025-26** provides information about residential placement demand for Lincolnshire Children in Care (CiC), care leavers, and children and young people requiring independent (special) school placements, setting out the current requirements for our children and young people, our vision for the support we would like them to receive and how we plan to work collaboratively with the market to meet those needs.

Key messages to the independent placement market 2025-26

We want to work with independent placement providers to:

- prioritise Lincolnshire placements for Lincolnshire children that are stable and where children feel safe and cared for, and where they are supported to achieve
- identify the right placement for the right child in the right location that meets their emotional, educational and support needs, reducing the numbers of placement breakdowns
- develop effective options for the delivery of Supported Accommodation from April 2027 that maximises impact and ensures young people are prepared for adulthood and independence
- develop strong relationships and work collaboratively with independent foster care agencies (IFAs) and independent children's homes to maximise in-county capacity.



Snap shot of Lincolnshire children and young people at the end of March 2025:

452 children and young people with a 'Child Protection Plan' (CPP)

806 Children in Care (CiC)

8,673 children and young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

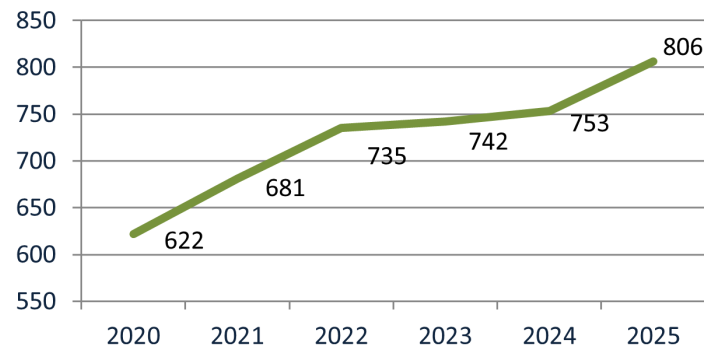
993 care leavers aged 16-25

Key priorities for 2025-26

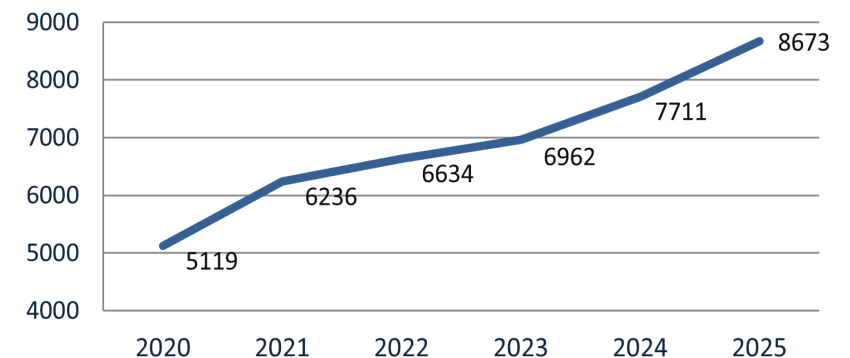
- **In-house regulated placements;** recruitment and training of foster carers to increase capacity; efficient use of new data to inform future planning across the cohort, consider ways to increase placement capacity
- **Independent regulated placements (CiC & SEND);** re-open the Open Select List (OSL) procurement process in September 2025, continue to strengthen relationships with Independent Providers to maximise in-county capacity; efficient use of new data to inform commissioning strategies and placement activity , embed CareCubed to support fair costing of independent placements
- **Supported accommodation, Care Leavers and UASC;** undertake Youth Housing service review for new service to start April 2027, embed new Leaving Care Service following insourcing, develop Supported Lodgings offer, source additional move-on options in-county for care leavers aged 18+ years old.
- **Transformation Programmes;** continue transformation work around CiC and SEND to support Lincolnshire children and young people to receive the right care and education, in the right place and at the right time; maximising use of in-county provision to allow access to other high quality support and services that are already in place in Lincolnshire, ensuring that our children achieve their full potential.

Key statistics

CiC numbers as of 31st March



ECHP numbers as of 31st March



Commissioning Independent Placements

In Lincolnshire, the Council's Children's Strategic Commissioning Team supports Children's social care and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) teams to broker placements in independent accommodation for Lincolnshire Children in Care (CiC) and care leavers and independent education for children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

Placements are made when in-house provision cannot meet the specific needs of a child, including where there may not be capacity.

Lincolnshire County Council Children's Commissioning operate an Open Select List (OSL) procurement process to commission placements with independent providers and new providers can join the list annually. Providers are asked to submit business-level information such as accounts and/or evidence of financial standing, along with a self-declaration application form. Subject to approval, the provider will then be added to the relevant strand of the OSL. Other providers can be approached if a suitable placement cannot be made.

Once independent placements are made, a Commissioning Officer will work alongside the relevant practitioners within the Council to maintain oversight of the placement, ensuring providers remain compliant and continue to deliver a high quality and cost effective service to our children and young people.

Current Placement Strands

- Independent fostering agencies (IFAs)
- Independent residential children's homes
- Independent Supported Accommodation
- Independent and/or non-maintained (special) schools (INMS)
- Domiciliary Care
- Children with Disabilities (CWD) Short Breaks
- Alternative Provision to support Interim Home Tuition
- Regulated Alternative Provision
- Tutor-led Alternative Provision

Useful information for providers

LCC Children's Strategic Commissioning have published a number of documents online to support independent placement providers understand our requirements:

- The CiC Sufficiency Strategy 2023-27
- Market Position Strategy 2023-24 *and* Market Position Strategy 2024-25
- Provider Guide to the Open Select List process for children's independent placement referrals and contract award
- Children's independent placement contracts - *standard templates for each placement type*

<https://professionals.lincolnshire.gov.uk/children's-commissioning>

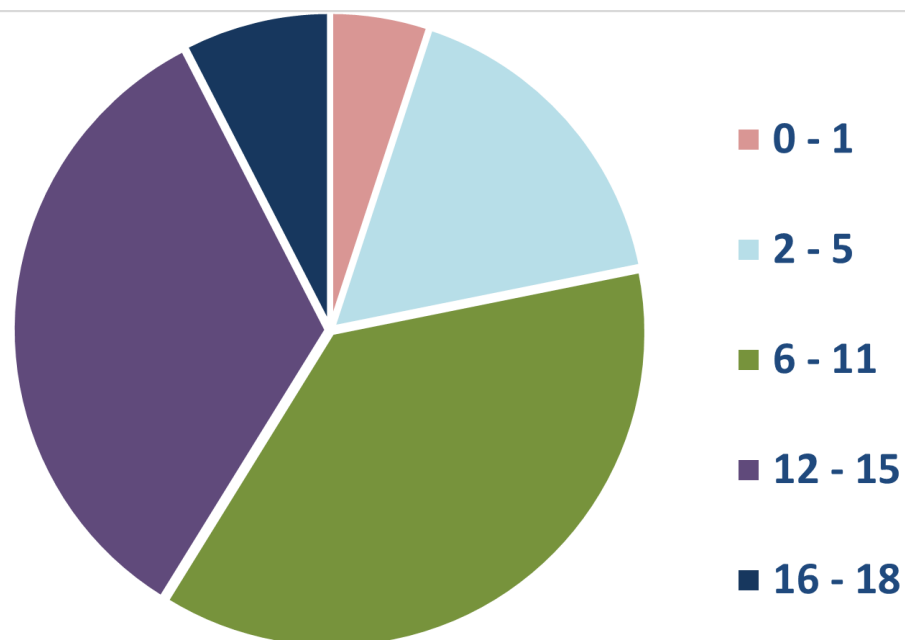
Independent Foster Care Placements

Lincolnshire's aims

The Council want an increased choice of foster care placements based within Lincolnshire to be able to support children with complex needs, reducing the number of independent placements outside Lincolnshire made through necessity rather than choice.

The Council wants to plan foster care placements, identifying children we feel would thrive in a family environment and support both them and their carers with a well-planned transition, and work with Independent Foster Agencies (IFAs) to support resilient and effective placements that meet the needs of our children.

Independent foster care placements by age



Source: LCCPlacements data

Current picture

CiC numbers increased in 2024-25, along with children coming into care with more complex needs and an increased number of teenagers and children with additional needs who benefit from being placed with IFAs.

We are also seeing an increase in sibling groups and greater need to offer respite placements to existing foster carers.

The Council will be implementing a parallel search process in 2025-26 i.e. all foster referrals are shared with in-house carers and the external market at the same time.

The aim is to find the best match for the child which is likely to result in an initial spike of referrals to the external market.

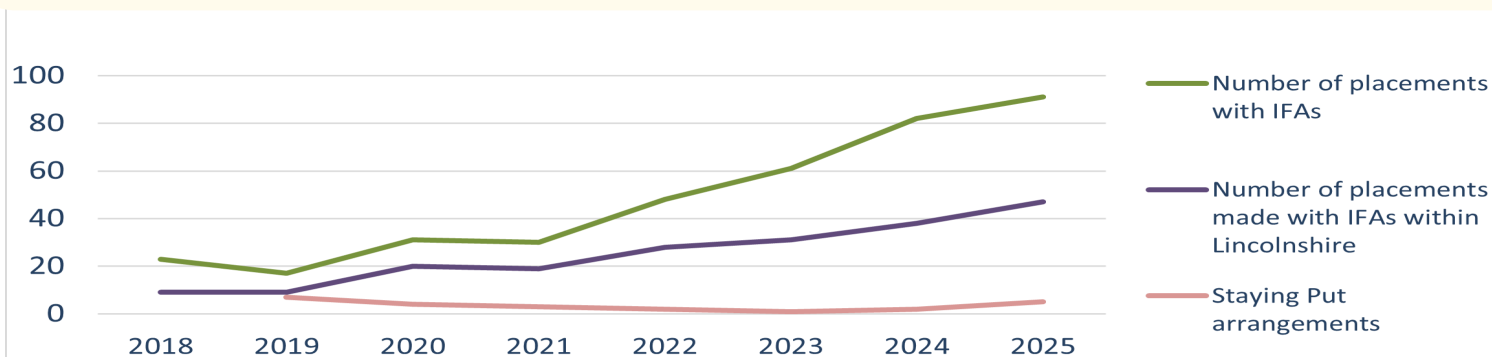
Costs of standard placements are increasing as with complex need placements increasing even further.

Independent Foster Care Placements *cont.*

What we need in 2025-26

Lincolnshire County Council believes children and young people thrive best in a family environment. We continue to need:

- Lincolnshire-based foster carers
- carers who are resilient, experienced in de-escalation techniques and who understand childhood trauma, risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) or criminal exploitation, challenging behaviours, learning disabilities and autism
- long-term, stable and planned placements for the majority of children and young people, as well as permanent foster placements
- short-term respite and emergency foster care
- foster carers able to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), including 16-17 year olds
- foster carers that facilitate family time with family and friends
- support for children on reduced timetables or excluded from school
- experienced foster carers for teenagers, sibling groups, and children moving from residential homes
- Staying Put arrangements for care leavers who wish to remain with their former foster carer.



Independent foster care placements as of 31st March

Source: LCCPlacements data

Residential Children's Homes

Lincolnshire's aims

We continue to work with independent residential providers and there have been increasing numbers of homes opening in Lincolnshire. We want to ensure placements are for Lincolnshire children wherever possible and are interested in working in partnership with providers to match and support their care offer. We are also interested in providers that will support reunification where appropriate.

We continue to explore increasing capacity in-county as this means we are better able to offer wraparound support to both CiC and the provider, as a means of stabilising placements.

In 2025-26, the CiC Transformation Programme is supporting the service area look at reunification i.e. return home to family for some CiC, as well as transition to either foster care or to independence including supported accommodation.

Lincolnshire want to ensure we pay fair prices for placements, with sustainable profit margins, and avoid high increases that de-stabilise relationships and our ability to maintain that cost.

What we need in 2025-26

We continue to need:

- resilient providers and carers with experience of working with childhood trauma and challenging behaviour issues, and who are skilled in de-escalation techniques with minimal physical interventions
- access to clinical therapy, mental health and behaviour support
- smaller residential children's homes in Lincolnshire that are supportive, friendly and offer stability of both staff and care
- residential children's homes that will support older young people aged 13+ and older teens aged 16-17 who may exhibit challenging behaviours
- providers that will work with us to develop the skills children and young people need for their next steps, be it foster care or independence, and will reduce support packages as behaviours stabilise
- support for children on reduced timetables or excluded from school to encourage engagement with education
- occasional specialist placements for young people at risk of self-harm or with Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) or stepdown from detention under **Section 3 of the Mental Health Act**
- same-day crisis placements that are Ofsted-registered.

Residential Children's Homes cont.

In-house provision and capacity

Lincolnshire has six in-house residential children's homes spread across the county, supporting a total of 39 children and young people aged 5 to 18 years, plus two residential respite homes for children with disabilities to support Short Breaks.

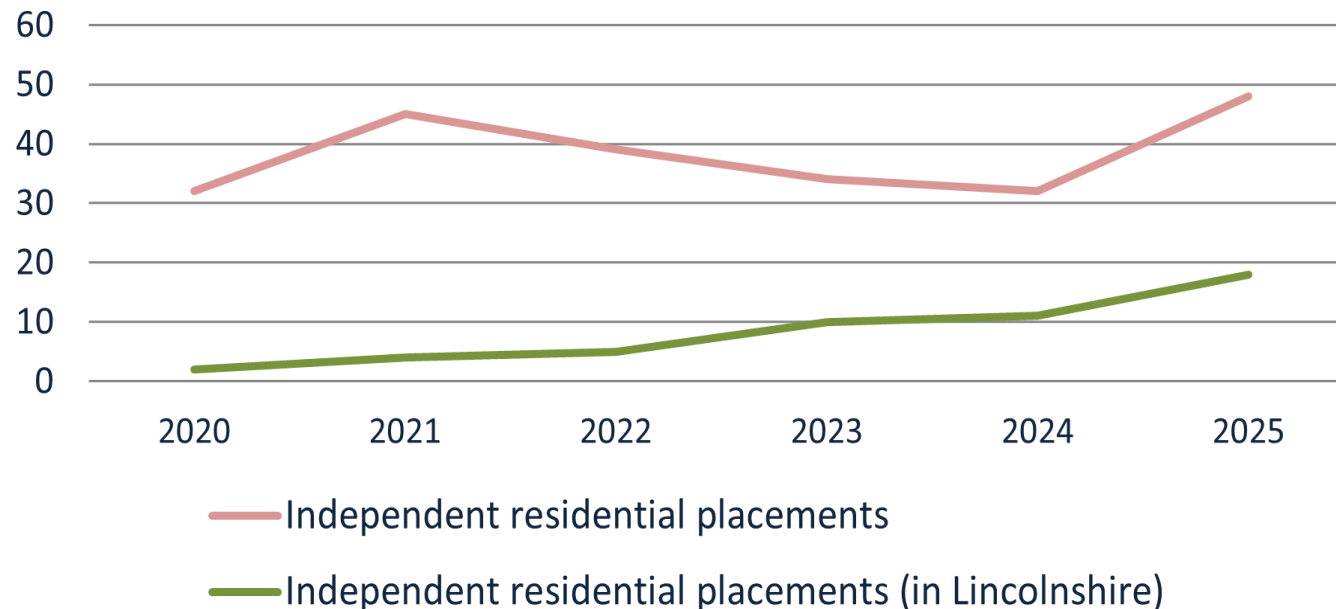
Lincolnshire has a secure children's home but has started capital work to move to a new site and increase capacity to 12 youth justice beds and 16 welfare beds; this is planned to open by October 2026.

Regulation & inspection

In line with our high aspirations for our children and young people, Lincolnshire County Council seeks to place with residential providers who are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted.

Residential providers are required to be registered in line with **Care Standards Act 2000** and operate in accordance with the **Children's Home (England Regulations 2015** and the nine **Quality Standards**.

Lincolnshire independent residential children's home placements by year to end 31st March



Supported accommodation for 16+ year olds

Lincolnshire's aims

Lincolnshire County Council are undertaking a service review of Supported Accommodation, including in-house and commissioned services, to ensure the whole system has flexibility to meet the changing needs of our 16-17 year old CiC, homeless 16-17 year olds and care leavers.

Subject to decision making, the new services will be in place by 1st April 2027.



What we need in 2025-26

While the Supported Accommodation review considers future need, Lincolnshire County Council will continue to use both in-house and block commissioned supported accommodation, there is still the occasional need to place young people aged 16-17 years old in independent supported accommodation when other placement options aren't suitable or there is insufficient capacity.

We need:

- access to affordable accommodation offering flexible and appropriate support hours that develop a young person's independence and confidence, avoiding high levels of staffing or inappropriate 24/7 support
- accommodation providers that are proactive and encourage engagement in education, employment and training (EET) and assist young people to establish appropriate support networks
- clear, positive exit plans so young people can move on in a planned way to independent living, and have the skills to maintain a future tenancy of their own
- flexible supported accommodation providers who will work with us to identify young people in need of additional appropriate support around their social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.

Supported accommodation for 16+ year olds *cont.*



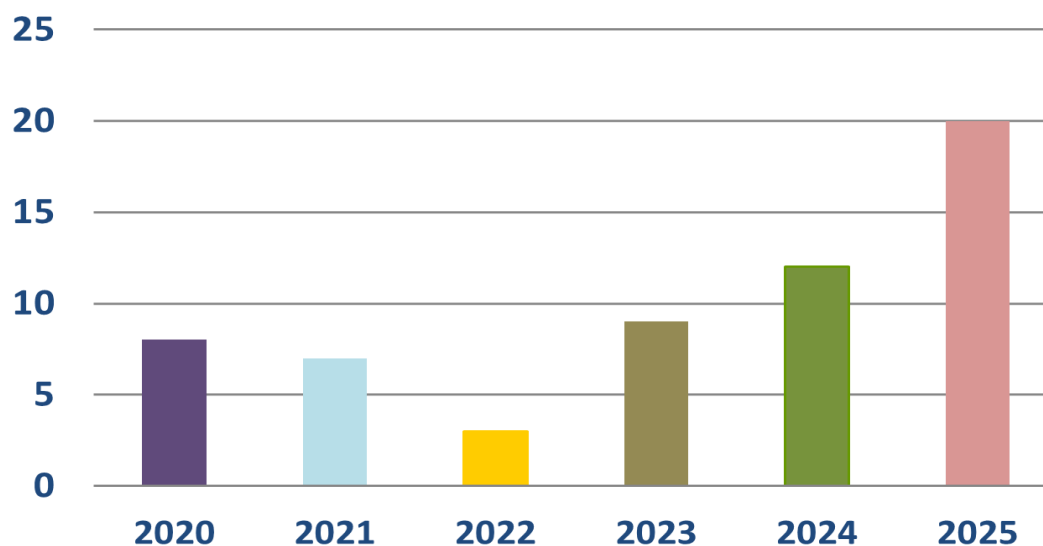
Impact of Ofsted

As of October 2023 to meet the **Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023** all supported accommodation provision for 16-17 year old Children in Care (CiC) must be registered with Ofsted.

The Council will not place young people with providers unless there is evidence that they are listed on the monthly Ofsted Children's Home list as an 'active' or 'proposed' supported accommodation provider **or** have received their Ofsted certificate following an interview and visit.

The regulation of Supported Accommodation has been positive in ensuring effective oversight and quality framework for providers, and in September 2023⁴ Ofsted started inspections.

The Council continues to work with supported accommodation providers to ensure young people receive high quality support that is appropriate for their individual needs and offers a clear pathway to independence.



Number of young people in independent supported accommodation placements as at 31st March

Source: LCCPlacements data

Independent Non-Maintained (Special) Schools

Lincolnshire's aims

We are committed to ensuring that all children and young people with identified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have access to high-quality, supportive, and appropriate school placements that meet their individual learning needs.

While the county benefits from a broad network of maintained and academy special schools, the high level of demand means that placements are also made within the independent sector to ensure every child receives the education they require.

All providers will need to comply, where appropriate, with the **SEND Code of Practice, Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015** and the **Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014**.

What we need in 2024-25

Lincolnshire County Council aims to further strengthen and diversify our specialist education provision for children and young people with SEND.

Our focus will be on:

- Expanding local capacity to reduce reliance on independent and out-of-county placements, ensuring more children can be supported closer to home.
- Seeking integrated and flexible provisions to support autistic children and children with SEMH and complex needs, including those who require therapeutic or trauma-informed approaches.
- Improving access to pathways into and through education, especially for those with disrupted learning journeys, including children with persistent absence or school avoidance.
- Enhancing our commissioning models by developing our block purchasing processes or co-designed provision, to secure sustainable, high-quality placements that meet emerging needs.

Current Independent Placements

As of 31st March 2025, Lincolnshire County Council has **539** children and young people with an EHCP placed in Independent day and residential (special) schools throughout the UK:

Placement type			
52 weeks <i>Education & Residential</i>	38 week 'weekly' <i>Education & Residential</i>	38 week 'termly' <i>Education & Residential</i>	Day placement <i>Education only</i>
15	10	6	508

Source: LCCPlacements data

Independent Non-Maintained (Special) Schools cont.

Lincolnshire Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

Lincolnshire children and young people with an EHCP, by age group and % of population:

SEN2 Return Year	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Total	% of population	Total	% of population	Total	% of population	Total	% of population
Under age 5	191	3%	187	3%	236	3%	402	5%
Aged 5 to 10	2318	35%	2440	35%	2660	34%	3040	36%
Aged 11 to 15	2430	37%	2712	39%	2984	39%	3293	39%
Aged 16 to 19	1394	21%	1380	20%	1529	20%	1484	18%
Aged 20 to 25	301	5%	249	4%	302	4%	201	2%
Total	6634		6968		7711		8673	

Source:
LCC SEN2 SFR
data

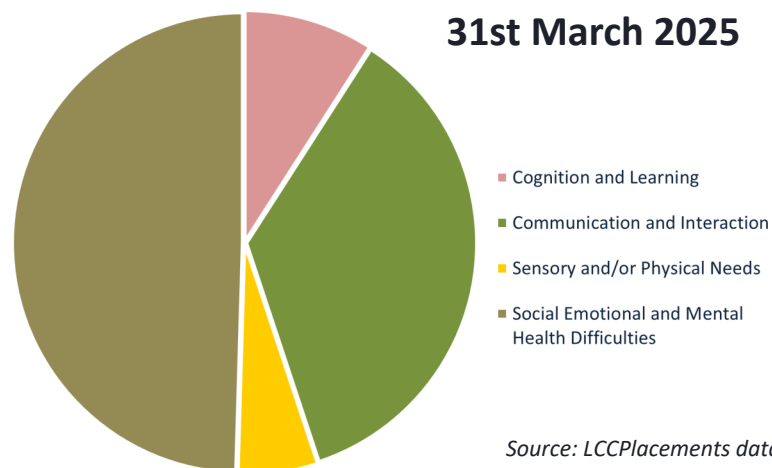
Lincolnshire children and young people with an EHCP, by age group and locality at end March 2025:

SEND Locality Team	Under Age 5	Aged 5 to 10	Aged 11 to 15	Aged 16 to 19	Aged 20 to 25	Total
Boston/South Holland	66	715	702	399	50	1932
East Lindsey	46	509	617	331	40	1543
Lincoln/West Lindsey	65	806	887	467	66	2291
North/South Kesteven	72	1027	1102	516	92	2809
Total	249	3077	3328	1726	255	8635

Source:
LCC Mosaic
data

Lincolnshire independent (special) school placements by broad area of need at

31st March 2025



Source: LCCPlacements data



SEND/CWD services

Post-16 education placements

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) provide core funding (Element 1) and additional needs funding (Element 2) for High Needs learners aged 16 years and above with special educational needs and/or a disability (SEND) who are attending a Further Education establishment, more commonly referred to internally as Post-16.

Lincolnshire County Council provides additional 'top up' funding to learners (known as Element 3) where the costs to support the learner's needs are higher than the amount provided by the ESFA. The choice of Further Education establishment is determined by the learner.

Open Select List for SEND/CWD support services

Lincolnshire County Council commissions the following SEND support services:

- **Domiciliary Care:** supporting children and young people with disabilities, most usually in their own homes, with personal and intimate care, leisure and community activities, life skills, transition support, social and communication skills, and low-level nursing not requiring a qualification.

Providers of Domiciliary Care must be **CQC-registered**. Independent domiciliary care services will be sought through the OSL to deliver domiciliary care to 0-18 year olds living in Lincolnshire with profound and significant learning and/or physical disabilities or life-threatening illnesses.

- **Short Breaks:** offering children and young people with disabilities an enjoyable experience away from their primary carers to enhance their personal and social development, whilst parents and families are provided either with a valuable break from their caring responsibilities or with help accessing the community and social activities with the young person. Short breaks can occur at different times – during the day or evening, or on weekends, and can span a few hours or a number of days.

What we need in 2025-26

We need:

- **Domiciliary Care** providers to join our OSL when it re-opens in summer 2025. We have seen an increase in referrals for children and young people who require personal care within the home, as well as ongoing referrals around social inclusion within the community; suppliers need to be flexible and understand the local area.
- **Short Breaks** and respite for children with disabilities is highly valued by parents and carers; children and young people benefit from accessing their local community increasing their independence. We want to hear from Short Breaks providers offering a range of activities and social inclusion opportunities to meet a wide range of needs.

Alternative Provision

Lincolnshire's aims

Alternative Provision is education to support pupils who have been excluded from mainstream school, either permanently or temporarily, or are awaiting a special school placement, having been placed on Interim Home Tuition. It is required across the broad spectrum of ages, from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4.

The aim is to engage pupils who may be disengaged from education through a broad and flexible curriculum offer, and support a return to mainstream education if appropriate. This includes *Regulated Alternative Provision* and *Tutor-led Learning Alternative Provision* for Permanent Exclusions (PEX) alongside *Alternative Provision for SEND./EOTAS*.

Current picture

Between 2021 and 2024, demand for Alternative Provision (AP) rose as a direct consequence of the high volume of permanent exclusions (PEX) issued by Lincolnshire schools.

2024-25 data showed a slight reduction in PEX rates; however, overall this remains significantly higher than the pre-2021-22 level, meaning on-going volatility in AP PEX demand planning.

Additionally, the need for interim AP placements for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) such as those awaiting special school provision or as part of Education Other Than At School (EOTAS), shows little sign of easing, further intensifying AP system pressures.

What we need in 2025-26

Lincolnshire County Council recognise that some children and young people benefit from being in high quality Alternative Provision to support their education.

Disengagement from mainstream school may be due to, for example, challenging behaviours, exclusion, SEMH, and illness etc.

Some children and young people require smaller, bespoke settings to meet their educational needs. This may include some online provision to support young people to physically attend school in the future.

We need:

- to work with innovative AP providers to develop effective education pathways for Lincolnshire children
- to identify more Ofsted-regulated building-based AP providers, in Lincolnshire and/or bordering Lincolnshire, with capacity
- to identify more online education providers that meet the high standards of education and safeguarding as set out by Online Education Standards and DfE accredited (OEAS)
- to engage with AP providers to support children and young people to re-engage with formal education.

Contact us:

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