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### DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1108/TLDR-07-2017-0028>

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<https://doi.org/10.1108/TLDR-07-2017-0028>

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<http://kar.kent.ac.uk/62409/>

### Document Version

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**Article Title:** Trends in the provision of residential educational placements available for young people with learning disabilities / autism in England

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### **Acknowledgements**

This article reports on independent research funded by the NIHR School for Social Care Research. The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR SSCR, NHS, the National Institute for Health Research or the Department of Health.

# **Trends in the provision of residential educational placements available for young people with learning disabilities / autism in England**

## **Introduction**

In recent years, there has been a renewed focus on education for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and an emphasis on inclusive schooling. The Children's and Families' Act (2014) and associated SEN Code of Practice (2015) reiterated the legislative assumption that children with SEN should ordinarily be educated in mainstream schools, and recent estimates suggest that a large percentage of young people with moderate learning disabilities (LD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) do indeed attend a mainstream setting (Pinney, 2014). However, significant proportions of children and young people with SEN are educated in special schools, particularly as severity of disability and needs increase, with some placed in residential special schools on a full or part time basis (see Pinney, 2014). This goes against governmental policy and guidance focusing on inclusive education for children with SEN and disrupts their right to be cared for within the family home. Residential schools are often the most expensive placements, costing up to £167,268 per year (Clifford & Theobald, 2012), and they may be a considerable distance from the child's home area (McGill et al., 2006) therefore potentially damaging the child's relationships with their family and community.

Despite this, information relating to the use and characteristics of the residential education sector is limited in a range of ways. Firstly, the number of children with LD or ASD placed in any type of residential school is unknown. Existing estimates (see Pinney, 2014) relate only to maintained (i.e. controlled by the Local Authority) residential schools, suggesting that 660 children with moderate to profound LD and 700 children with ASD are placed in such settings. Given that this figure omits independent and non-maintained residential schools, where almost 2000 children and young people with LD/Autism were placed in 2007 (Regional Partnerships, 2007, McGill, 2008), it is likely to be a considerable underestimate. Furthermore, numbers of young people attending residential colleges (which form a significant part of the residential education sector) are not known. The extent to which residential educational placements, rather than mainstream inclusive settings, are utilised for children and young people with LD or ASD is therefore unknown.

Secondly, there is a notable lack of information about residential educational settings themselves, representing a gap in knowledge about national provision. Information about residential schools and colleges is contained in a range of centralised or specific lists which may also include mainstream or non-residential schools, and are often out of date or incomplete. Furthermore, independent settings are neither subject to the same reporting requirements as their state funded counterparts (Pinney, 2014) nor subject to following the national curriculum (IPSEA, 2016) resulting in additional gaps in information about the sector. As a result, little is known about the characteristics of the residential education sector as a whole (including post 16 institutions). More information is needed in order to identify any significant gaps in provision and ensure that placements are made in appropriate settings as close to the young person's home area as possible.

In order to provide information about the national residential educational provision for young people with LD or ASD, the current paper reports on the process of identifying residential educational settings in England as part of a larger project. Information is provided about the search strategy and sources used along with an overview of available information about the characteristics of the sector and any gaps or areas where further information is needed. Implications are briefly discussed.

## Methodology

The process of identifying residential educational placements for young people LD / ASD was undertaken as part of a larger project relating to transition from such placements to adult social care in England. As a result, residential educational placements were defined within this context as those that provided residential placements for young people (over the age of 16) with LD / ASD, for at least 4 nights per week and 30 weeks per year. Placements could be provided as part of the school / college itself, or within an associated residential children's / care home run by the same organisation as the educational setting.

A threefold search strategy was utilised to identify relevant settings. Firstly, settings known to the authors as part of previous research and clinical work were checked to confirm that they were still operational and had not changed remit. Following this, a range of databases collating information about residential educational settings for young people with LD / ASD were searched (see Table 1 below for breakdown of databases searched and number of settings identified). Finally, the governing organisation of each identified setting was examined to identify whether they operate other relevant settings. When a potentially relevant setting was identified from one of these sources, further information was sought (from the setting website, documents about the setting including Ofsted reports, Edubase records, and where possible talking directly to staff at the setting) to identify whether they met criteria for inclusion and to record key characteristics (raw data can be obtained from the first author). Given the remit of the exercise, only settings that provided placements for young people with LD/ASD were included. Settings which were provided **only** for children with other SEN such as specific learning difficulties were excluded.

Table 1

*Database, search details, and number of residential educational settings identified.*

| Database  | List & search details  | No. of settings  |
|---|--|--|
| The Challenging Behaviour Foundation list                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes 52 week residential schools in the UK for children with severe learning disabilities and challenging behaviour</li> </ul>  | 31   |
| National association of independent and non-maintained special schools (NASS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member organisation for independent and non-maintained special schools (day and residential) in England and Wales</li> </ul>  | 261  |
| Isbi.com  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes independent schools in the UK (day and residential).</li> <li>Not specific to SEN therefore list searched by primary SEN categories as listed on database</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aspergers – 207</li> <li>Autistic Spectrum of Difficulties – 273</li> <li>Delicate medical conditions – 102</li> <li>Dual / Multi-sensory impairment – 55</li> <li>Epilepsy – 120</li> <li>Hearing impairment – 94</li> <li>Language and communication disorders – 198</li> <li>Moderate learning difficulties – 253</li> <li>Profound and multiple learning difficulties – 86</li> <li>Social emotional and behavioural difficulties – 260</li> <li>Severe learning disabilities – 131</li> <li>Visual impairment – 76</li> </ul> <p>This included duplicates across categories.</p> |
| Edubase (Department for Education)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All educational establishments (day and residential) registered in England and Wales</li> <li>Searched special schools only</li> </ul>  | 1497   |
| Specialneedsuk.org  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special schools (day and residential) in the UK</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate learning difficulties – 55</li> </ul>  |

- Searched by primary SEN category as listed on database
  - Profound and multiple learning difficulties – 12
  - Severe learning difficulties – 55
  - Artificial breathing / tracheotomy – 4
  - Autism / Asperger’s syndrome – 126
  - Social emotional and behavioural difficulties – 88
  - Cerebral palsy – 9
  - Complex health needs – 11
  - Down syndrome / Williams syndrome / Fragile X syndrome – 11
  - Epilepsy – 10
  - Hearing impairment – 24
  - Neurology dysfunction and disorder / brain injury – 30
  - Rett syndrome – 7
  - Speech / language / communication difficulties – 72
  - Visual impairment – 22

This includes duplicates across categories

Specialneedsguide.co.uk

- Non-maintained special schools (day and residential) in the UK
- Searched schools listed as providing residential accommodation

266

Ofsted

- All educational establishments inspected by Ofsted in England
- Searched for special schools, independent schools, other schools, independent specialist colleges, residential special schools

- Special schools – 1004
- Independent schools – 1212
- Other schools – 134
- Independent specialist colleges – 95
- Residential special schools - 156

This includes duplicates across categories.

The association of national specialist colleges (NATSPEC)

- Member organisation for specialist colleges (day and residential) in the UK

74

Department for Education lists

- Independent schools and colleges (day and residential) in England and Wales approved under Section 41 of the Children's and Families Act (2014)
  - Special schools (day and residential, excluding section 41 approved) in England and Wales list
- Section 41 list – 223
  - Special schools – 398

Ofsted children's social care inspection data for England 2016: Provider level data

- Inspection data for children's social care providers in England – includes those incorporated within a school / college, associated with a school / college, or not related to school / college provision.
  - Not specific to SEN.
  - Also provide information about children's homes and residential special schools registered as a children's home but this information is redacted so could not be used.
- Boarding schools – 73
  - Residential further education colleges – 38
  - Residential special school – 165
-



## Results

Three hundred and forty-two residential educational settings were identified with 57 of these offering post 16 provision only. In total, there were at least 8740 residential placements available for young people with LD or ASD in England (it was not possible to determine placement numbers for 27 settings). However, it should be noted that many settings also offered residential placements for young people with other primary needs (e.g. social emotional and mental health needs), meaning that data presented here refer to potential placements of which not all will be filled by young people with LD / ASD. Settings offered placements for up to 52 weeks a year and full time (i.e. 7 nights per week; n=199, 58.2%), or term time only and full time (n=38, 11.1%) or part time (n=75, 21.9%). However, it was not possible to identify placement type for nine settings, placement duration for six settings, or both placement type and duration for fifteen settings. Across both school and post 16 institution settings, the most common type of placement offered was for 52 weeks and full time, however school placements were more likely than placements in post 16 institutions to be offered on a term time only and part time basis.

### Setting Size & Location

The size of settings varied with some offering as little as two residential placements, whilst others offered as many as 252 residential placements (mean = 27.8). Table 2 displays the number of schools and post 16 institutions located in each region in England and the percentage of available placements in each area. Settings were located in every region but concentrated in the South East, North West and South West. In order to identify whether available placements in each area matched likely need, the percentage of the total population<sup>1</sup> living in each region (Office for National Statistics, 2016) is also presented in Table 2. In some areas (i.e. the South East, West Midlands, South West), residential educational placement numbers were much higher proportionately than the population, whereas in others (e.g. London, East) placement numbers were lower proportionately than would be expected, with significant variation between school settings and post 16 institutions.

Table 2

*Number and percentage of settings identified in each region of England.*

| Region (% of total population) | No. of Settings (% of placements) |                      |           |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|
|                                | Schools                           | Post 16 Institutions | Total     |
| East (11.1)                    | 37 (9.3)                          | 2 (1.8)              | 39 (7.4)  |
| East Midlands (8.6)            | 28 (7.2)                          | 3 (8.9)              | 31 (7.7)  |
| Greater London (15.9)          | 6 (1.7)                           | 0 (0.0)              | 6 (1.3)   |
| North East (4.8)               | 13 (2.6)                          | 4 (3.9)              | 17 (2.9)  |
| North West (13.1)              | 50 (12.3)                         | 8 (13.3)             | 58 (12.5) |
| South East (16.3)              | 73 (37.0)                         | 9 (14.6)             | 82 (31.4) |

<sup>1</sup> Total population figures were used as opposed to school age (i.e. 0-18) or college age (i.e. 19-25) as settings often overlapped in age ranges supported (see below), therefore making direct comparisons to a specific age group difficult. Furthermore, population estimates varied by less than 1% in each area when examining set age ranges, meaning that total population estimates are also a good indicator of population estimates for young people.

|                              |           |           |           |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| South West (10.0)            | 32 (12.1) | 17 (26.0) | 49 (15.6) |
| West Midlands (10.5)         | 28 (10.6) | 7 (25.9)  | 35 (14.5) |
| Yorkshire & the Humber (9.8) | 18 (7.1)  | 7 (5.5)   | 25 (6.7)  |

### Setting Type & Governance

In England, schools are categorised depending on their governing and funding arrangements. State funded schools are categorised as community / foundation schools (maintained by a Local Authority and usually following the national curriculum), or free schools / academies (maintained by the Secretary of State but run by an external organisation and not bound by the national curriculum). Settings that are not governmentally funded are either independent schools that are privately run and often for-profit, or non-maintained special schools, which are usually maintained by charitable organisations and are required to be not-for-profit (IPSEA, 2016). Post 16 provision for young people with LD or ASD can be provided as part of a special school (where support is often provided up to age 19 or in some cases, 25), or in an independent specialist post 16 institution which is run privately or by a charitable organisation.

Of the 285 schools identified, the majority were independent schools run by private organisations (n=149, 52.3%) with only a small proportion being maintained by a Local Authority as a community / foundation school (n=44, 15.4%). In contrast, settings offering post 16 provision only (i.e. not those where this support was provided as part of a school setting) were most commonly run by charitable organisations (n=42, 73.7%). See Table 3 below for overall governance arrangements and full frequency and placement numbers for each type of setting.

Table 3  
*Number of settings and placements across each setting type for school settings and post 16 institutions.*

|         | Setting Type                           | No. of Settings (%)        | No. of Placements (%) |
|---------|--|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Schools | Foundation special school              | 8 (2.8)                    | 236 (3.6)             |
|         | Academy                                | 15 (5.3)                   | 307 (4.7)             |
|         | Independent school:                    |                            |                       |
|         | Charity / not for profit               | 24 (8.4)                   | 588 (9.0)             |
|         | Private                                | 149 (52.3)                 | 2677 (40.9)           |
|         | Community special school               | 36 (12.6)                  | 905 (13.8)            |
|         | Non-maintained special school          | 49 (17.2)                  | 1823 (27.8)           |
|         | Free school                            | 0 (0)                      | 0 (0)                 |
|         | Unknown setting type:                  |                            |                       |
|         | Charity / not for profit               | 0 (0)                      | 0 (0)                 |
|         | Private                                | 4 (1.4)                    | 11 (0.2)              |
|         |  | <b>Total charity / NFP</b> | <b>73 (25.6)</b>      |
|         | <b>Total government / state funded</b> | <b>59 (20.7)</b>           | <b>1448 (22.1)</b>    |

|                             |                                 |                   |                    |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
|                             | <b>Total private</b>            | <b>153 (53.7)</b> | <b>2688 (41.1)</b> |
|                             | <b>Overall total</b>            | <b>285</b>        | <b>6547</b>        |
|                             | Specialist post 16 institution: |                   |                    |
|                             | Charity / not for profit        | 41 (71.9)         | 1662 (75.8)        |
|                             | Private                         | 9 (15.8)          | 395 (18.0)         |
|                             | Further Education:              |                   |                    |
|                             | Charity / not for profit        | 1 (1.8)           | 23 (1.0)           |
|                             | Private                         | 0 (0)             | 0 (0)              |
|                             | Unknown setting type:           |                   |                    |
|                             | Charity / not for profit        | 3 (5.3)           | 92 (4.2)           |
|                             | Private                         | 3 (5.3)           | 21 (1.0)           |
| <b>Post 16 institutions</b> | <b>Total charity / NFP</b>      | <b>45 (78.9)</b>  | <b>416 (19.0)</b>  |
|                             | <b>Total private</b>            | <b>12 (21.1)</b>  | <b>1777 (81.0)</b> |
|                             | <b>Total</b>                    | <b>57</b>         | <b>2193</b>        |

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### Provision offered

Support was offered by settings for young people of any age (range = 0-25+ years) with most school settings offering support from 7 years and over (n=207, 72.6%) and up to age 16 (n=63, 22.1%), 18 (n=54, 18.9%) or 19 (n=153, 53.7%). Post 16 institutions most commonly offered support from age 16 (n=40, 70.2%), or 19 (n=12, 21.1%) and up to age 25 (n=41, 71.9%) with a small proportion offering support beyond the age of 25 (n=11, 19.3%).

The special educational needs categories that settings were registered to support varied considerably with 157 settings registered for more than one category (data were unavailable for 30 settings). The most common categories registered for across both setting types were Social Emotional and Mental Health difficulties (n=147, 43.0%) and ASD (n=115, 33.6%) with a large number also registered for Moderate Learning Difficulties (n=75, 21.9%) or Severe Learning Difficulties (n=73, 21.3%). In addition to this, 128 settings offered support for young people with LD or ASD but were not specifically registered for SEN categories associated with this group, instead most often being registered for Social Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties, sensory impairments, epilepsy, or specific learning difficulties.

### Ofsted rating

Whilst the data presented here are secondary data and unable to describe the quality of the settings in relation to student outcomes and support, the most recent available Ofsted education ratings (typically from 2011-2017) were examined as a proxy indicator of quality. The vast majority of settings were rated as "Outstanding" or "Good" at their last full Ofsted inspection, however 26 schools and five post 16 institutions were rated as "requiring improvement", and 16 schools and two post 16 institutions were rated as "Inadequate".

## Discussion

This paper presented data on the national provision of residential educational placements available in England for young people aged over 16 with LD or ASD. A high number of potential placements were identified with most being offered up to full time (i.e. 7 nights per week) and for up to 52 weeks a year. Placements were often concentrated in specific regions of England which appeared to be mismatched with population estimates and therefore likely need. This may suggest that young people living in certain areas of England (e.g. London or the East) are more likely to be placed out-of-area if a residential educational placement is sought due to lack of available placements within their home area. Pinney (2014) found that approximately a third of young people in maintained residential schools were placed out-of-area, and whilst the geographical concentration of available placements may provide some explanation for this, there are likely to be other factors that influence out-of-area placement practices and more research is needed to fully explain this phenomenon.

The majority of available placements were offered within independent or non-maintained schools; however, because such settings are not subject to the same data reporting requirements as their state funded counterparts, available information on them is lacking. Given that these placements make up more than half of the residential school provision in England and evidence suggests that numbers of young people with LD/ASD placed in such settings is increasing (Pinney, 2014), this lack of information is important and represents a significant gap in knowledge about the sector. Pinney (2014) called for independent schools to be included in all mandatory data returns, and the findings presented here strengthen the importance of this. In addition, independent settings are not maintained by government or subject to the National Curriculum, meaning the ethos and support they provide is likely to vary considerably. Whilst Gore et al. (2015) found some evidence of positive outcomes and experiences of the support provided by residential schools for young people and their families, outcomes were often mixed, and more high-quality research representative of the entire residential sector is warranted.

Finally, a number of settings reported that they provided support for young people with LD / ASD but were not registered for SEN categories associated with these needs. Whilst this may be due to complexity of needs and comorbidities, it is a significant in that it suggests that young people may be placed in settings not best suited to their needs or where expertise in the full range of their needs is lacking. Further research to examine this in more detail would be useful to identify how many young people with LD/ASD are placed in settings not registered to support these needs, and any implications of this for the care and support provided to them. However, the vast majority of settings were rated as "Outstanding" or "Good" in their most recent full Ofsted inspection, suggesting that the support they provide (within the indicators examined by Ofsted) is of high quality.

To our knowledge this paper is unique in its inclusion of residential post 16 institutions and provides information on these settings alongside residential school provision. The extent to which support is provided post 16/19 is increasingly important following legislative reforms to extend the right to educational support for young people with SEN to the age of 25 (Children & Families Act, 2014). As a result, residential post 16 institutions may act as an extension of residential schooling and we argue that they should therefore be considered alongside residential schooling where possible. Whilst available information on these settings is variable due to their typical governance being outside of Local Authority/Secretary of State control, this paper has provided some initial findings on the number, location, and remit of such settings. Further research could usefully explore the reasons cited by young people, families, and local authorities for seeking a residential post 16 placement, outcomes for the young person whilst in the placement, and outcomes following transition.

Whilst this paper has provided insight into national provision of available residential educational placements for young people with LD/ASD, there are some limitations which must be considered when drawing conclusions. Firstly, data presented here can only indicate the number of available placements across England and not the extent to which such placements are utilised by young people with LD / ASD. It is likely that at least some of these placements are filled by children and young people who do not have LD/ASD. The data presented here is also largely secondary in nature and taken from publicly available sources such as centralised / specific lists and databases, information provided by the setting on their website or in documents, and Ofsted reports. As a result, the reliability of the data is unknown as such secondary data sources may be out of date, inaccurate, or incomplete. It was beyond the scope of the paper to collect primary data from every setting, and further research involving residential educational settings directly would be useful. Finally, as noted above there is significant variability within the residential educational sector with provision and placement practices likely to vary over time. Taken in combination with recent educational reforms that may influence practice over the long term, the longevity of the findings presented here is challenged.

Nevertheless, information presented here is able to describe the current national provision of residential educational placements for young people with LD / ASD over the age of 16, and is therefore likely to be useful to a range of stakeholders within the sector when considering placement practices. The larger research project from which these data are drawn is likely to provide additional information about transition practices, outcomes, and ways to improve the transition process for young people leaving residential educational settings, therefore strengthening available information about practice within the residential educational sector. However, a key implication of the data presented here is the need for published information about the sector to be improved (either by settings themselves or Local Authorities via mandatory data collection) in order for practitioners, family carers, and young people with LD/ASD to access comprehensive information at the point of considering a residential educational placement. Despite the Children's & Families Act (2014) requiring publication of a Local Offer in each area, these data highlight that there are still key gaps in available information which is likely to make identifying appropriate settings at an early stage difficult. In addition, the increased likelihood in some areas of needing to seek an out-of-area placement may have particular implications for policy initiatives aiming to reduce out-of-area placement for adults with LD/ASD, given recent suggestions that placement in an out-of-area residential school may be linked to placement out-of-area as an adult (see Gore et al., 2015). Whilst this link requires further examination, these data in combination with conclusions from Pinney (2014) suggest that out-of-area placement for people with LD/ASD may begin before the age of 18, and may have implications for support provided in adulthood.

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