



Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA)

London Borough of Lewisham January 2020

Overall sufficiency in our area

Based on data analysis, surveys of parents and childcare providers, and focus groups with parents in Lewisham, we have investigated whether there is enough childcare for all the families who want to use it. We have found that while the vast majority of parents are happy with the childcare on offer, some have faced issues in finding out about, accessing and affording childcare. real progress has been made across the borough to support delivery of 30 hours childcare (*introduced in 2017*), increase take-up of early years entitlements for children with SEND, and re-launching the Families Information Service (*March 2019*). A number of key actions are identified.

These include continuing to build upon work to increase take-up of early year's entitlements for children with SEND, continuing to encourage flexible provision, and building high quality childcare during school holidays. There is also an ambition to support early years providers to offer a good value high quality early years' experience for children, whilst remaining sustainable. Priorities also need to focus on encouraging schools to open and maintain out of school provision, and continuing to raise awareness of all early years' entitlements.

Barriers to accessing childcare

Just over half of parents would like to use more childcare than they do currently; this is highest among parents who are using both early years and school age childcare (62% would like to use more). The most common reasons that parents give for not using as much childcare as they would like to include affordability and the times at which sessions are available. This is supported by qualitative feedback from parents which suggests that there are often childcare places available, but that it can be difficult to find one which is at the right time, in the right location, of the right quality and of an affordable price for families. The reasons that parents use childcare varied by the age of their child. The most common reason for using childcare was so that parents could work (87% of parents). Parents of children below school age were more likely than parents of school age children to say that they used childcare because it benefits their children, such as via their educational development

Some common reasons that parents gave for not using childcare include that they do not need childcare (39%), and that their children do not want to attend (13%). However, the most common reason was that it is too expensive (48%), and 10% of parents said that they were not happy with the quality available. These reasons were especially prominent among parents of children below school age. The availability of childcare places does not appear to be a prominent reason for parents in Lewisham to not use childcare.

Information about childcare

Some parents disagree that it is easy to find out about the quality of childcare in their area or about the childcare available locally. Some surveyed had heard about services provided by the Family Information Service such as the Parent Portal (14%) and their telephone line (12%). There has been new investment in these services recently so these figures are likely to change in future – many of the parents who responded to the survey will have been trying to find out about local childcare some time ago.

The majority of parents (67%) find out about childcare via word of mouth, making this by far the most common means of getting information. Other sources of information about childcare include school (37%) and Facebook and other social media (27% and 25% respectively).

This suggests that there is further room for the council's services to plug the gaps in information currently experienced by parents. In discussions with parents in focus groups we learned that many felt the council's website which is aimed at helping parents to find suitable childcare providers could offer a broader range of information.

Parents suggested ways that the website could be improved to make it more useful, such as by updating vacancy numbers more regularly and including information such as the length of waiting lists, the activities that are offered and the qualifications of staff members.

Access to free childcare

While 89% of parents who use free childcare are happy with the free childcare session times they have been offered, this falls to 59% of parents who say they have a choice of providers to access free childcare from. Several of the parents we spoke to described having difficulty finding a childminder who offered free childcare for two, three and four year olds, which in some cases led to parents not taking up the free entitlements. Our survey of providers shows that 18% of eligible childminders offer none of the free entitlements, compared to just 4% of private, voluntary and independent nurseries.

Across all types eligible of childcare provider, 89% offered at least one of the free entitlements. The universal offer of 15 hours for three and four year olds was the most widely offered, with 84% of all providers and 96% of private, voluntary and independent providers offering it.

Awareness of the free entitlements is generally quite high. While 91% of parents said they were aware of the two year old free entitlement and the extended entitlement for three and four year olds, 95% of parents said they were aware of the universal entitlement for three and four year olds. However, only 2% of parents had not heard of any of the free entitlements.

There is some confusion among parents about the eligibility requirements of the free entitlements, with 11% of parents unsure whether they are eligible for the three and four year old universal and extended offers. The figure is slightly lower (6%) for the targeted two year old offer.

Quality of childcare

Quality in early year's settings in Lewisham – 2016 to 2020

Year	Percentage of early years settings achieving:			
	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
2020	12%	81%	6%	1%
2019	14%	75%	9%	3%
2018	14%	75%	10%	2%
2017	14%	72%	13%	2%
2016	11%	69%	17%	2%

Parents agree that staff at childcare settings provide a friendly and welcoming atmosphere (88%), and that their childcare provider is able to meet the needs of their child (83%).

However, nearly a quarter (24%) of parents disagree that there is enough space available in their childcare setting, while a fifth (19%) are not happy with the range of activities and resources on offer.

Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)

One group of families who can find it difficult to access suitable childcare is those with a child with SEND. According to responses to our survey, parents with a child with SEND find it about 10% more difficult to find and afford childcare than other parents.

Qualitative feedback from parents suggests that finding childcare for children with SEND can sometimes be very difficult.

Childcare outside typical working hours

Parents expressed difficulty finding suitable childcare at particular times outside the core Monday to Friday hours in the school term, as well as at weekends. Some 90% of childcare providers who care for preschool children only do not offer childcare before 7:30am or after 6:30pm on weekdays or on weekends.

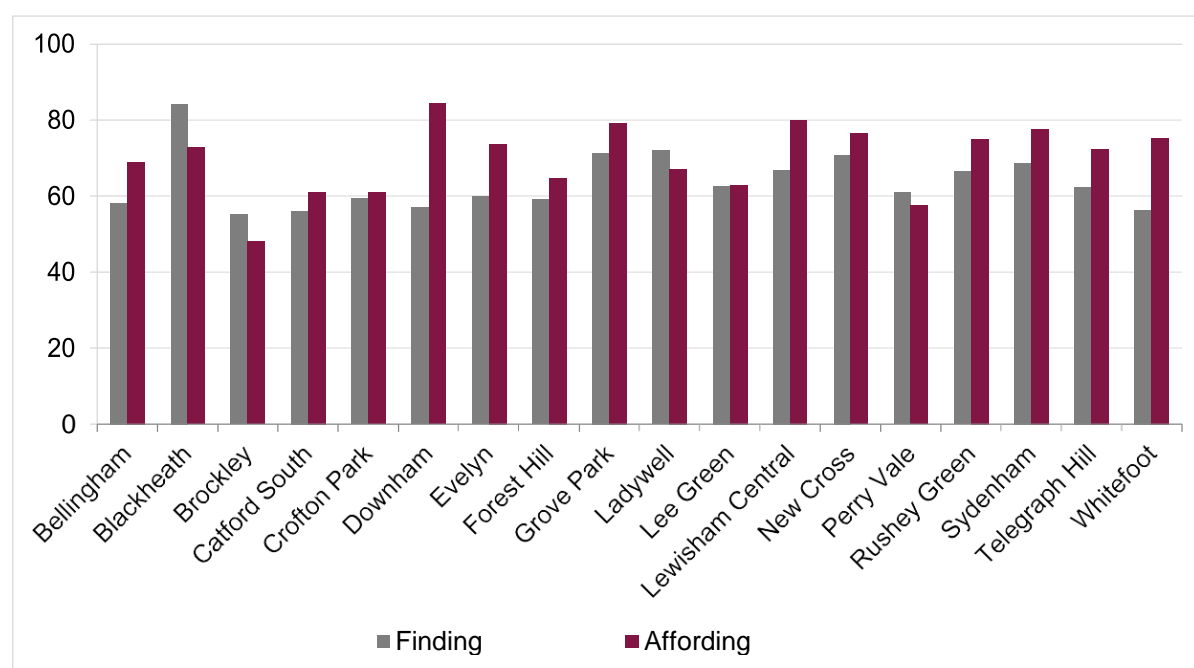
Holiday childcare

Parents reported a particular gap in available childcare places in the holidays. The key issues were a lack of sufficient places overall, an insufficient range of activities on offer, and provider's only offering care in a narrow range of times of day (typically 10am-4pm).

Differences in access across the borough

How easy or difficult parents find it to find and afford childcare varies considerably depending which ward they live in. For instance, parents in Blackheath find it about 50% more difficult to find and afford childcare than parents in Brockley. Parents find it most difficult to find and afford childcare in Blackheath, Grove Park, New Cross, Lewisham Central and Sydenham. They find it easiest to find and afford childcare in Brockley, Catford South, Perry Vale, Crofton Park, and Forest Hill.

Differences by ward: parents' experiences of finding and affording childcare (0 = easiest, 10 = most difficult)



Conclusion:

Many families in Lewisham are already accessing early years education and childcare which works for them. There are specific issues for some groups, which are set out in the full report - generally these are where the paid-for childcare market is not yet providing what some families need. These areas include, out of hours childcare for low-paid shift workers (evenings/overnight and weekends), childcare for children with SEND, and in some instances after school and holiday care. Across the borough parents report that childcare feels unaffordable: this is difficult for the council to address by itself, but they support proposed national policy changes to mitigate this, such as increases to the amount of childcare support provided under Universal Credit.

The Council have made significant changes to the information and support they offer to childcare providers and parents in the last year. There is clarity around the core purpose of the 4 teams that sit within the Early Years Quality and Sufficiency Service, which is:

To ensure the highest quality, inclusive and accessible early years education and childcare for ALL children and families in Lewisham.

There is recognition that all areas of the service interlink together to ensure that the seven areas of statutory duty relating to Early Education and Childcare are delivered, supported and maintained.