



Childcare Sufficiency Report for London Borough of Lewisham

Spring 2025



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1 Summary and plans

The Childcare Act (2006) mandates local authorities in England to ensure sufficient childcare for working parents, parents studying or training, and disabled children. This duty covers registered childcare for children aged 0-14 years and up to 18 years for disabled children. Local authorities must produce an annual sufficiency report on childcare availability and sufficiency.

The Spring 2023 budget announcement initiated the expansion of government-funded early education and childcare for working families. The aim was to support working households with childcare costs and reduce barriers for parents returning to work.

Key stages of the early education childcare expansion have been as follows:



- A **NEW** offer of 15 hours available to eligible working parents with a child between 24 and 36 months old
- Requires a code that must be given to EY provider, available from Childcare Choices
- Effective from the start of the term following the child turning 2 years old.
- *Will be extended to 30 hours offer by September 2025*



- A **NEW** offer of **15 hours** available to eligible working parents with a child between 9 and 23 months old
- Requires a code to be given to EY provider, available from Childcare Choices
- Effective from the start of the term following the child turning 9 months.
- *Will be extended to 30 hours offer by September 2025*

Funded weekly hours as noted above is for extended early entitlement (EEE) and Childcare accessed during term-time (38 weeks per year). Some providers may offer funded hours outside of these weeks, often referred to as a 'stretched offer' over more weeks per year. When hours are accessed for more than 38 weeks per year (term-time), this means the child accesses funded hours for less than 15 hours per week. The principle also applies if accessing the extended 30 hours per week.

A staggered approach to the expansion of funded early years education and childcare aims to give settings time to prepare for the changes, ensuring there are enough providers available to meet demand.



In addition to the expansion of the early entitlements it was also announced that there would be investment in developing before and after school provision across England this is known as the National Wraparound Programme. Its aim is to expand childcare places for primary school-aged children. Lewisham began implementing this initiative in **April 2024**, with two dedicated posts established to oversee the programme until **September 2026**.

Key Features

1. Extended Hours:

- Wraparound childcare is designed to cover the hours before and after school, typically 8am to 6pm during term-time.

2. Range of Providers:

- Childcare can be provided on school premises, at local community sites, by:
 - Schools
 - Private Voluntary Independent (PVI) providers
 - Childminders

3. Payment Structure:

- Families pay providers directly for wraparound childcare services.

4. Financial Support Options:

- Assistance is available through:
 - Tax-Free Childcare schemes
 - Universal Credit Childcare, which can cover up to 85% of costs for eligible families.
- Support for upfront costs (e.g., deposits) is also accessible via Job Centres or Universal Credit offices.

5. Flexibility in Access:

- Provision is intended to be accessible to families at convenient locations, either near schools or within communities.

6. Focus on Accessibility:

- The programme emphasises improving access to childcare for families, helping parents balance work and family responsibilities.



Support for Families

Lewisham acknowledges the challenges families face navigating these changes and remains committed to assisting parents/carers:

- **Lewisham Family Information Service (FIS):**
 - Provides guidance through online and in-person childcare information sessions.
 - Continues to signpost parents to relevant resources about entitlements and childcare options.
 - Added a FIS team member to help with communication and engage Parent Champion volunteers.

Lewisham Council's Commitment

Lewisham Council strives to ensure all local families can access the childcare and early education they need, enabling parents to make informed choices about work and care. The council emphasises the social and educational benefits of **high-quality early years education** for children.

Many families in Lewisham are already accessing early years education and childcare which works for them. There are some families who are not yet accessing formal childcare due to choice, costs or perception that a setting is not able to meet the needs of their child. Parents who are accessing formal childcare are in general happy with the provision.

How We Deliver Our Statutory Duties

Early Years Quality and Sufficiency Service (EYQSS) is responsible for the statutory duties related to Early Education and Childcare. The service consists of four teams:

1. **Quality and Inclusion Team:** Focuses on high-quality, inclusive early years education.
2. **Family Information Service (FIS):** Provides guidance and resources for families seeking childcare and education.
3. **Early Entitlement Team:** Manages government-funded early education places for eligible children.
4. **Early Years Online and Business Support Team:** Maintains the early years online platform and offers technical and operational support for providers.

Core Purpose

To ensure inclusive, high-quality, accessible early years education and childcare for all families in Lewisham.



Strategic Goals Aligned to Lewisham Education Strategy

Priority 1: A place in a good school/setting for all children

Goals:

- Ensure sufficient early years places through strategic planning and quality improvement.

Measure of Success:

- Increased percentage of Ofsted-rated Good or Outstanding settings.
-

Priority 2: Supporting all children to reach their potential

Goals:

- Drive high take-up of Early Years funded places for eligible 9 months, 2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds.
- Build Early Years partnerships to support home learning and development.
- Strengthen transitions from Early Years settings into primary schools.

Measure of Success:

- Increased take-up of funded entitlements.
-

Priority 3: Embedding inclusion and equity

Goals:

- Work with schools and settings to reduce attainment gaps for identified groups of children.

Measure of Success:

- Reduction in attainment gaps between identified groups and their peers.
-

Priority 4: Collaborative improvement to raise standards

Goals:

- Focus on improving teaching, learning, inclusion, and narrowing attainment gaps.

Measure of Success:

- Percentage of schools and settings rated Good or Outstanding above London and England averages.



Our Plans for Childcare

Key Points from the Spring 2023 Childcare Sufficiency Report:

1. Ongoing monitoring of parents accessing childcare, including out-of-school provision.
2. Improving understanding of how providers deliver funded places.
3. Addressing staffing challenges faced by some providers and identifying support measures through EYSS.
4. Ensuring better access to childcare for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Progress Against Key Points

1. Parent/Carer Accessing Childcare:

- The Family Information Service (FIS) gathers feedback through weekly drop-in sessions and outreach events.
- Information on accessing childcare and available provisions is shared via monthly information sessions held alternately online and in person.

2. Accessing Funded Placements:

- The Early Entitlement Team conducts monitoring visits to ensure providers comply with registration conditions for funded placements.
- These visits assess how funded places are delivered and their alignment with parent/carers needs.

3. Childcare Sector Staffing:

- The Head of Service for EYQSS collaborates with local colleges and council apprenticeship teams to encourage childcare careers.
- FIS promotes early education entitlements and childcare sector opportunities at local Job Centres, targeting job seekers.

4. Children with Additional Needs (SEND):

- Providers are supported to ensure all children can access childcare and early education entitlements.
- In-house Early Years Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) qualification training raises skill levels and awareness and equips providers to be more inclusive.
- Early Years Inclusion Funding is available to providers to support children with SEND participate fully in early years education alongside their peers.
- Ordinary Available Provision (OAP) sets out the expectations of providers around the necessary resources and support for all children.



Getting information to families

FIS maintains the [Lewisham Childcare Directory](#) that lists Ofsted registered childcare providers in the borough. There is also a FIS directory of other services that support children and their families, for example, youth clubs and support groups.

FIS continue to promote services for families at community events and local services including Libraries, Family Hubs and the local Job Centre Plus. Drop-in sessions are being established throughout the week to support families with accessing the free early education entitlements for 9 months, 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds.

The Lewisham Parent Champion Programme is a key element of FIS that supports with engaging parents within the community, to raise awareness of available childcare and the early education entitlements. Parent Champions are parents/carers residing in the borough who volunteer their time to signpost other parents/carers to services that may benefit children and their families. Peer-to-peer support through Parent Champion community engagement have been received positively by other parents/carers.

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 most parents are happy with the childcare on offer, some have faced issues in finding out about, accessing and affording childcare.

Most parents/carers who responded to our survey (84%) do use childcare, with the majority accessing childcare at a day nursery or pre-school. Childcare is being accessed 2-5 days per week for majority of parents which aligns with the response that 65% of parents are in full-time work.

There was a total of 197 responses to the parent survey.

There were 81 responses to the provider survey with 74% indicating they currently have vacancies and 79% open all year round.

Of the parents accessing funded childcare places, 44% pay for additional hours.

Many childcare providers currently have vacancies, indicating there is no immediate concern for sufficiency in the borough. It is noted type of childcare available may not be the preferred choice for parents. There is ongoing work to raise awareness of places available at a childminder setting. Capacity is available, considering the number of registered childminders and the number of funded places being accessed at their setting.



Information about Childcare

Access to Information:

- 31% of parents find it easy to access childcare information, with 53% agreeing providers are available in their preferred area.
- 66% of parents using childcare agree the provider meets their child's needs.

Promoting Expanded Childcare Support:

- FIS promotes childcare support through outreach events and online sessions.
- 70% of parents are aware that working families can receive help with childcare costs.

Engagement Strategies:

- Communication methods include face-to-face drop-ins, leaflets, emails, texts, and council social media platforms.

Support for Families with Low Incomes:

- Families with household incomes below the threshold can access funded places for 2-year-olds.
- Eligibility criteria and application details are shared via postcards using the Department for Education (DfE) list, sent twice per term.
- Emails confirm application outcomes, and letters of eligibility are sent to families for access to funded places.

Parent Feedback:

- Survey results show 31% of parents find childcare easily, while 24% experience some difficulty.

Ongoing Efforts:

- FIS continues to provide information to parents on accessing childcare, including funded early education entitlement places.

Access to funded childcare

Across the sector 91% of eligible childcare providers offer at least one of the funded early education entitlements. The universal offer of 15 hours for three- and four-year-olds is the most widely offered, with 100% of all providers and 100% of private, voluntary and independent providers offering it.



Quality of childcare

48% of parents are happy with the quality of childcare available but 13% would like to see improvement.

Lewisham Quality and Inclusion team provides ongoing support and training to childcare providers to ensure they meet the Ofsted requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the need of every child is met.

81% of parents are aware of the Ofsted website where information on the recent Ofsted inspection outcome for registered settings can be found.

Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)

One group of families who can find it difficult to access suitable childcare than others is those with a child with SEND.

Qualitative feedback from parents suggests that finding childcare for children with SEND is at times difficult.

During parent focus groups challenge with finding suitable childcare for children with additional needs was highlighted along with the following points;

- A suitable childcare place is not always available
- Parents would like to be more included in the support offered to their child within a setting

Our SEND Partnership Strategy 2020 – 2023 states that to deliver the 3 key priorities cited we need to recognize that 'It's everyone's business to be inclusive', to truly make a difference to our children and young people with SEND we need a whole-community approach. A key aspect of this is that all education settings are high quality, inclusive and have the knowledge, understanding and skills to identify and meet the needs of CYP with SEND and how to access support.

Holiday childcare

Several parents of school age children (35%) who responded currently access childcare outside of school hours. This includes breakfast and after school clubs.

The majority of out of school providers (55%) are currently listed on the council's online childcare directory.

Parental demand for out of school childcare is greater during the school summer (61%) and half-term (62%) breaks. The least demand for out of school childcare is during the Christmas (35%) break.



Section 2: Demand for childcare

Population of early years children

In total, there are 17,959 children under the age of five living in our local authority. These children may require early years childcare.

Numbers by age

Age	Number of children
Age 0	3602
Age 1	3705
Age 2	3491
Age 3	3631
Age 4*	3530

** Some four-year-olds will have started reception*

Population of school age children

In total there are 23,864 children aged 5-11, and 10,268 children aged 12-14 living in our local authority. These children may require childcare before and after school, and/or during the school holidays.

Numbers by age

Age	Number of children
Age 5	3393
Age 6	3400
Age 7	3545
Age 8	3419
Age 9	3400
Age 10	3384
Age 11	3323
Age 12	3476
Age 13	3371
Age 14	3421

** Child population data based on ONS mid-year population estimates 2023*



Number of children with special educational needs and disabilities

Children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) are entitled to support with paying for childcare via tax free childcare up to the age of 16 (*age 11 for children who do not have a special need or disability*). The number of children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan in our local authority is 3,113 in total.

Age	Number of children
Birth to school age	18
Primary school (reception to year six)	1296
Secondary school (year seven to thirteen)	1799

Data in table correct at: October 2024

Children's needs change over time and are identified at different ages. Among the youngest children, SEND may only be identified when they start in childcare or school, and it can take some time from problems being identified to an EHC plan being issued. It is therefore possible that the number of children with SEND aged 0-4 is an underestimate. Some children have SEN but do not have an EHC plan.

Section 3: Supply of childcare

Number of early years providers and places

In total, there are 482 childcare providers in our local authority, offering a maximum of 9,669 early years childcare places. For reference, there are 17,959 children aged under five living in Lewisham (*see section 2 Demand for childcare*).

Type of provision	Number of providers	Number of registered places
Childminders*	294	1773
Maintained classes in schools	52	1534
Maintained nursery schools	2	244
Private, Voluntary and Independent Nurseries	134	6233

The data in this table was correct at: October 2024.

* Some childminder places may also be available for older children.



For private, voluntary and independent settings (PVIs) nurseries and childminders, the number of registered places represents the maximum number of children who can be on the premises at any given time. In practice, many providers choose to operate below their number of registered places.

Children may attend childcare full time or part time. The table records places for children who are attending full time, or for as many hours as the setting is open. In some cases, two or more children attending part time may use one full time equivalent place. For example, one child may attend in the morning and one child may attend in the afternoon.

Early years vacancies

The following table shows the results from a survey we conducted of childcare providers in Lewisham.

<i>Type of provision</i>	<i>Number of providers who responded to survey</i>	<i>Total number of vacancies</i>
Childminders*	12	22
Nursery classes in schools	7	50
Maintained nursery schools	2	0
Private, voluntary and independent nurseries	81	374

Vacancy rates are a snapshot and often change rapidly. In some cases, providers may have a vacancy which is only available for a specific age group, or for a particular part time arrangement. We ask providers to report vacancies to us so we can help with promoting them. Not all choose to do this. In general, vacancy rates are higher in the autumn when children move on to school.

Number of school age providers and places

There are currently 75 Ofsted registered out of school childcare providers. Holiday clubs is provision that operates outside of the school term, those providers may also operate school wraparound provision during the school term time.

The table below shows the number of childcare providers and places according to Autumn 2024 operating provisions.

<i>Type of provision</i>	<i>Number of providers</i>	<i>Number of registered places</i>
Breakfast club	53	382
After-school club	53	1173
Holiday club	75	2400

*providers include childminders and primary schools



Tracking the supply of childcare for school age children is difficult because not all this type of provision is registered with Ofsted. It is possible that we have under-counted the provision of breakfast and afterschool provision and holiday clubs. Parents may also use provision which is not considered 'childcare', for example sports or arts clubs after school or in the holidays.

Section 4: Funded early education

Childcare Entitlements Funded by the Government

General Entitlements:

- All children aged 3 and 4 are entitled to **15 hours per week** (570 hours per year) of funded childcare until they start reception class.
- Children aged 3 and 4, where both parents are working (or from lone-parent families with the parent working), are entitled to **30 hours per week** (1140 hours per year).

Entitlements for Children requiring additional support Aged 2:

- Children aged 2 are entitled to **15 hours per week** (570 hours per year) if their families receive certain benefits, including low-income families receiving in-work benefits, or meet additional non-economic criteria. In Lewisham this offer is known as the Lewisham 2's offer.
- In Lewisham, 27% of 2-year-olds are entitled to access our Lewisham 2's offer. This equates to around 951 children per year in 2024. The number of children eligible has been falling for the last few years, which may be due to the introduction of Universal Credit and the fall in birth rate.

Expanded Entitlements:

- **April 2024:** Working families of two-year-olds may access **15 hours per week** (570 hours per year).
- **September 2024:** Early education entitlement extends to working families of children aged 9 months, providing **15 hours per week** (570 hours per year).
- **September 25:** Early education entitlements will increase to 30 hours per week for working families. (1140 hours per year)

Flexible Use of Entitlements:

- Parents can choose not to use all their funded hours, split hours between different providers, or spread hours across the year. For example, instead of using 15 hours over 38 weeks, parents may opt for just under 12 hours per week across 48 weeks in agreement with their provider.



Take up of funded early education

The proportion of eligible children taking up their funded place (for at least some of the available hours) in our local authority is:

Age	% of eligible children Lewisham	% of eligible children Inner London
Lewisham 2's	57.9%	66.5%
Age 3 and 4	77.9%	75.7%

The data in this table is based on Department for Education data gathered during the early years census in January 2024. Data for under 2's and 2 yr olds expanded offer is not yet available. This will be published by DfE in July 2025

Provision of Funded Early Education

- **Funding and Payments:**

Providers delivering funded early education are paid directly by Lewisham Council based on the claims they submit. This funding comes from central government.

- **Voluntary Participation:**

Providers are not legally required to offer funded entitlements to parents. Families have the option to choose other providers if they prefer.

- **Availability of Funded Places:**

Some providers offer a limited number of funded places, meaning availability may vary.

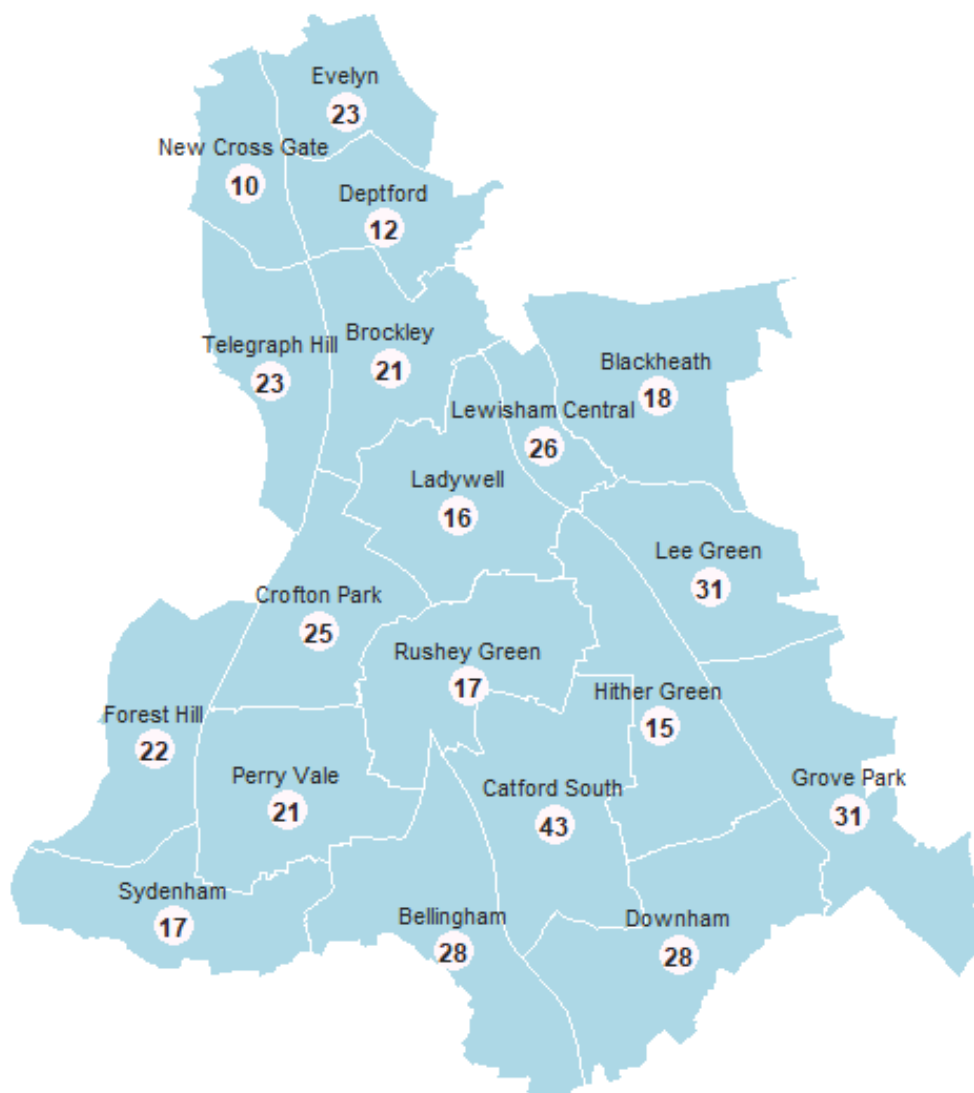
- **Proportions of Registered Providers:**

The table below highlights the proportion of providers by type, registered with Lewisham Council to offer funded early education places.

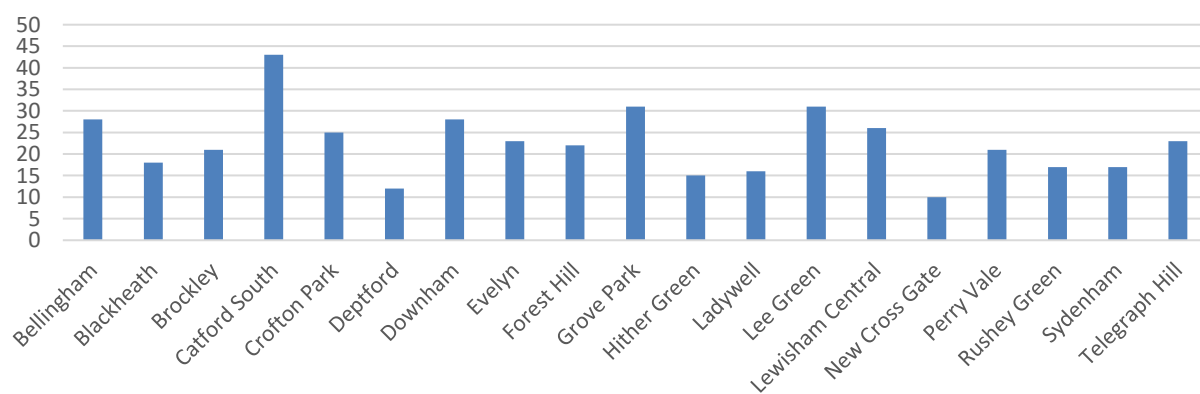
<i>Type of provision</i>	<i>Number of Registered providers</i>	<i>% providing funded places</i>
Childminders (<i>note: not all childminders registered are actively delivering places</i>)	294	65%
Nursery classes in schools	52	100%
Maintained nursery schools	2	100%
Private, voluntary and independent provision	135	100%



Total number of providers by ward, (excluding maintained Primary school nursery classes)



Number of childcare providers in each ward





Section 5: Cost

Cost of early years childcare

For early years childcare outside the funded entitlements, we convey average prices per hour, as reported to us by settings. There may be variations to prices based on the number of hours a family uses, with reductions for longer hours, or discounts for sibling groups.

There may also be additional payments for additional services, e.g. lunch and other meals which are not included in these costings.

Schools have an agreement between them that they will generally charge the same for additional hours as the current funded entitlement rate. Where there is a difference, this will have been agreed by the board of Governors.

Prices are based on responses from providers to FIS.

Price per hour	Private, voluntary and independent nurseries	School and maintained nursery schools which make charges to parents	Childminders
0- and 1-year olds	£7.58	N/A	£7.75
2-year-olds	£7.43	£10.00	£6.87
3- and 4-year-olds	£6.70	£10.00	£6.63

Cost of school age childcare

The qualitative response from out of school providers indicate an average charge of £5.41 per hour for breakfast clubs and £14 per hour for after school clubs.



Section 6: Quality of childcare in Lewisham

Ofsted inspection grades

All childcare providers who provide places for children under the age of 8 for a period greater than 2 hours at a time must register with and be inspected by Ofsted, who give them an overall grade for the quality of their provision. Childminders and private and voluntary providers are on the Early Years Register, and schools and standalone maintained nursery schools are on the Schools register. The grades for both registers are equivalent. Schools with nurseries have an overall inspection grade for the whole school and most also have a separate early years grade.

Both schools and early years providers currently have four possible Ofsted grades: 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement', and 'inadequate'. This is currently under consultation but is likely to change from September 2025 to a report card approach, where it is expected that providers will be judged across 8 areas. Some providers are still awaiting their first full inspection. This can take up to two years. These providers are excluded from our calculation.

Nursery classes in independent schools do not generally have an Ofsted grade.

<i>Type of provision</i>	<i>Total number of providers</i>	<i>% achieving good or outstanding</i>
Childminders	294	99%
Nursery classes in schools *	52	98%
Maintained nursery schools	2	100%
Private and voluntary nurseries	134	100%
<i>Total</i>	482	98%

* early years grade if available, otherwise overall school grade

Overall effectiveness for early years registered providers in England achieving good or outstanding at their most recent Ofsted inspection as of 31st August 2024 is 97%.

Section 7: Parents' and providers' views of sufficiency in Lewisham

Parent Survey on Childcare in Lewisham

Overview

To better understand parents' experiences with accessing and finding childcare in Lewisham, we conducted a survey with responses from 195 parents. While some questions remained unanswered, varied response rates were accounted for in the overall analysis. The term 'parent' is used broadly here to include all guardians, foster carers, and relatives responsible for a child.



Key Findings

1. Use of Childcare:

- 84% of parents use childcare, with 66% agreeing that their childcare provider meets their child's needs.
- For the 16 parents reporting unmet needs, settings will be supported with appropriate training to address the issues.
- Most parents use childcare 4-5 days per week.

2. Finding Childcare:

- 39% of parents found it difficult to access childcare.
- 53% agree there is provision in their preferred area, though 18% report limited access to convenient times and sessions.
- 31% find it easy to locate information about childcare, and 70% are aware that working families can access funded childcare.

3. Support with Childcare Costs:

- 42% of parents do not receive help with childcare costs.
- 38% use Tax-Free Childcare, correlating with 65% of parents being in full-time employment.
- Parents receiving Universal Credit may also access childcare support.

4. Quality of Childcare:

- 48% of parents are satisfied with the quality of childcare.
- 13% would like to see improvements in the quality of available childcare.

5. Childcare Directory Awareness:

- Only 23% of parents are aware of the council's online childcare directory.
- Efforts by the Family Information Service (FIS) continue to promote Ofsted-registered providers and encourage updates to vacancies.

Demographics of Respondents

- 65% of parents work full-time (30 hours or more), while 18% work part-time and 5% are unemployed.
- 2% of respondents reported being on long-term sick leave or living with a disability.



Types of Provision Used

- 37% attend day nurseries or pre-schools.
- 15% use nursery schools or primary school nursery classes.
- 12% access childcare through childminders.
- For school-age children, 35% use breakfast/after-school clubs.

Parents not using childcare often cited cost or a lack of need as reasons. Some also mentioned concerns about the quality of provision or additional needs. Availability of places did not emerge as a significant factor for those not using childcare.

Awareness of Funded Childcare

- 70% of parents are aware of funded early education entitlements.
- 37% are satisfied with the childcare places available for accessing funded hours.
- Children aged 9 months to 4 years are eligible for 15 or 30 funded hours per week during term time, allowing many families to benefit from this support.

Affordability of Childcare

- 42% of parents reported not receiving childcare cost support.
- 38% use Tax-Free Childcare, while 18% access other support, such as Working Tax Credits or Universal Credit.

Quality of Childcare

- 48% of parents are happy with the childcare quality, while 13% seek improvements.



Survey of Childcare Providers in Lewisham

Overview

A survey was conducted with 81 childcare providers in Lewisham to evaluate the number of places delivered and to identify challenges they may be facing. Respondents included providers catering to preschool children, school-aged children, or both.

Key Findings

1. Staffing Challenges:

- **90% of providers** reported challenges with finding staff with appropriate qualifications and experience.
- **27% of providers** currently have staff vacancies.

2. Vacant Childcare Places:

- **73% of providers** reported having vacant childcare places.

3. Children with SEND:

- Of the children accessing childcare, **8 currently have an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plan** and **34 are identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN)**, all receiving support.

4. Impact of Early Education Entitlement Changes:

- **52% of providers** reported no impact on their business.
- **36% noted a positive impact**, while **12% reported negative effects**.

5. Apprenticeships:

- **37% of providers** currently employ Apprentices.
- **41%** would consider offering Apprenticeship roles in the future.

6. Expansion of Funded Hours (September 2025):

- **51% of providers** expressed confidence in implementing the expansion from 15 funded hours to 30 hours.
- **14%** are not yet confident, and **36%** have not yet considered the change.



Recruitment Challenges

The childcare sector is facing significant recruitment difficulties. Providers identified the following issues:

- **Levels of qualification: 10%.**
- **Quality and experience of staff: 26%.**
- **Levels of pay: 11%.**
- **Other reasons: 53%, including:**
 - Competitive pay offered by larger chains.
 - Staff preference for year-round roles rather than term-time-only positions.

Section 8: Focus group with parents

Overview

A small focus group was held at the local Job Centre, engaging parents—most of whom care for children aged 3 years or younger—in an open discussion about childcare. The session aimed to better understand their experiences and challenges.

Key Discussion Points

1. **Cost of Childcare:**

- Cost remains the primary consideration for parents deciding whether to use formal childcare.

2. **Availability for Children with Additional Needs:**

- Concerns were raised about the limited availability of suitable childcare places for children with additional needs.

3. **Awareness of Funded Early Education Entitlements:**

- While most parents are aware of the funded early education entitlements, there is some confusion about eligibility criteria and application processes.



4. Expanded Offer for Two-Year-Olds:

- The expanded childcare offer for two-year-olds has caused confusion due to separate application processes:
 - **Working entitlement offers** are applied for via the Childcare Choices website.
 - **Original 15-hour offers** are applied for via the local council website.

5. Guidance on Choosing Childcare:

- Parents expressed a lack of information on how to choose the right type of childcare, such as key factors to consider and questions to ask providers.

Focus Group Outcomes

Overview

Parents who attended the focus group at the local Job Centre found the session valuable, particularly the information shared on finding childcare, understanding different types available, and hearing firsthand experiences from other parents. It also provided an opportunity for them to reflect on childcare options, including decisions about returning to work either full-time or part-time.

Key Feedback

1. Funded Early Education Entitlements:

- While most parents were aware of the entitlements, many lacked clarity on the eligibility criteria and application processes.
- Confusion arose over the expanded childcare offer for two-year-olds, with applications for working entitlement hours done via the Childcare Choices website, and original 15-hour offers submitted through the local council website.

2. Understanding Quality and Regulation:

- Some parents were unaware of the Ofsted website and how childcare quality is assessed.
- The Ofsted ratings—Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement, and Inadequate—were explained during the session.
- Funding guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) was discussed, noting that local authorities do not fund places in settings judged Inadequate.



3. Financial Support for Childcare Costs:

- Detailed information on funded early education entitlements for children aged 9 months to 4 years was provided.
- Deposits, retainer fees, and other charges were discussed, as well as reminders that consumables, such as food, are not included in funded places and may incur additional fees.

4. Invoice Clarity:

- Parents were reminded that invoices must transparently show all charges and that funded childcare places must be free at the point of delivery. For example, any additional hours beyond the universal 15 funded hours should be calculated after deducting the funded hours.

Section 9: Methodology and lessons learned

Lewisham Family Information Service (FIS) collated data already held by the service along with feedback from parents/carers and childcare providers through surveys and ongoing communication.

The data held and updated directly via the daily Ofsted data feed, that comes by arrangement into the Lewisham early years management system means certain questions did not need to be included in the survey of childcare providers. Ofsted registered places and the ward in which the setting is located are included in data held by the service.

Survey of parents

We used a survey of parents to gain insight into local demand for childcare, including awareness the free early education entitlements.

Designing a questionnaire

We designed a questionnaire which had the following key parts:

- Employment status of parent/carers
- What, if any, childcare the respondent uses
- Why the respondent does, or does not, use childcare
- Respondents' use of childcare including type childcare used
- Respondents' views on the quality of childcare
- Respondents' views on access to childcare



The online survey was conducted using the council's Citizen Space along with in person feedback at outreach events and parent focus groups.

Collecting responses

Communication of the survey was shared via the council's social media platforms and e-newsletter. Childcare providers were asked to share the link with parents/carers for completion.

Outcome

We reached 195 parents, in addition to three parents at the focus group.

Lessons learned

- Having the survey available online for a longer period may help to achieve a higher response rate.
- Facilitating multiple dates and venues for focus groups may provide deeper insight into parents' use of funded and non-funded childcare.

Survey of childcare providers

We asked all Lewisham Ofsted registered childcare providers to complete a survey. Our aim was to understand where childcare places and vacancies are spread across the borough and settings who offer funded early education entitlements.

Designing a questionnaire

We designed a questionnaire which had the following key parts:

- What type of childcare provider respondents are
- How many places and vacancies respondents had
- Open-ended question about the issues respondents face

The provider survey was emailed directly to providers omitting questions of information already held by the service. Although the survey was much shorter in comparison to that of parents/carers response was still low. A total of 81 responses were received.



Collecting responses

Using the database of childcare providers held by the service, we emailed the survey to all childcare providers asking them to complete it. A follow up email was sent to encourage completion and highlighting the importance of provider feedback in helping the service to determine level of support required for the sector. Explanation was also provided, that feedback would contribute to the annual childcare sufficiency report.

Outcome

A total of 81 providers responded to our survey therefore representing a limited proportion of the childcare sector in the borough.

Lessons learned

- Childcare providers were less responsive to complete the survey than we had expected.
- Many providers alluded to their busy schedules and capacity as a barrier.
- Incentive to complete survey may have encouraged more providers to provide feedback.

Forward Planning

Termly surveys of childcare providers will be conducted and contribute to the annual childcare sufficiency report.

Feedback from ongoing outreach events within the community will be maximized to give better understanding of the demand for childcare across the borough and contribute to offered support for providers and parents.

Developing our understanding of the local childcare sector including demand, availability of places, take up of Funded Early Education Entitlements and overall effectiveness of provisions are all continued priorities of the service.

Parent survey will be conducted online for a longer period to get a higher response rate.

FIS outreach events in the community will be fully utilised to inform parents of the Funded Early Education Entitlements and provide support with accessing placements.

Overall effectiveness of childcare settings and take up of Funded Early Education Entitlements is incorporated into the Lewisham Education Strategy and that of Early Years Quality and Sufficiency Service. Ongoing monitoring of such data helps with any targeted support that may be required for parents and providers.

April 2024 saw the expansion of funded early education entitlement to 2-year-olds of working families. Parents access placement by applying for an eligibility code via the



[Childcare Choices Website](#). From September 2024 funded early education entitlement was extended further to 9 months old. Once eligibility codes are received this must be validated by the chosen childcare provider. Validation rates across each age group is over 80% indicating a high take up of the expanded funded hours.

Take up of funded places for 2-year-olds of low income and non-working families is not at a high enough rate to demonstrate that majority or eligible children are accessing their place. Priority remains to engage with eligible families and support providers to offer placements ensuring there are no barriers to accessing a funded place.

Section 10: Conclusion

The expansion of funded early education entitlements has introduced notable challenges and opportunities within Lewisham's childcare landscape. Through ongoing communication with parents and childcare providers, several key areas have been identified and addressed:

1. **Staffing Challenges:**

A lack of qualified staff continues to impact providers, exacerbated by low wages deterring higher-qualified candidates. This issue is widespread across the sector, not limited to Lewisham.

2. **Limiting Places:**

Recruitment difficulties have led many providers to reduce the number of childcare places available, highlighting the need for sustained support to maintain sufficiency.

3. **Parental Demand Shifts:**

Changing working patterns, including hybrid models and flexible hours, have shifted childcare needs in Lewisham. As one of the borough's largest employers, Lewisham Council's revised working model is expected to further influence demand.

4. **Support and Adaptation:**

The Early Years Quality and Sufficiency Service (EYQSS) has actively engaged with providers, offering toolkits and tailored support to ensure sustainability and flexibility in service delivery.

5. **Community Engagement:**

The Family Information Service (FIS) has ramped up outreach to better understand parents' needs, delivering guidance on accessing childcare, financial assistance, and funded entitlements for children aged 9 months to 4 years.



6. Sufficiency Status:

Despite minimal closures of childcare providers, sufficiency is closely monitored to anticipate and mitigate potential issues.

Lewisham Council remains committed to ensuring all families can access quality childcare and early education that meets their needs. Through proactive measures and collaborative efforts, the borough continues to address challenges while empowering parents and providers alike to navigate an evolving childcare environment. This ensures that children receive the social and educational benefits of high-quality early years education.

Section 11: Data sources

The data sources for this report are:

- Child population: based on ONS mid-year population estimates 2023
- Number of children in receipt of EHC plans: based on data held by the local authority
- Supply of childcare: based on data provided to us by Ofsted, who regulate early years provision in schools and childcare provision. This has been supplemented with local intelligence from the survey of providers.
- Vacancy rates: from survey of providers
- Funded early education: data on take up of funded early education entitlements is based on the Early Years and Schools Censuses, which are taken every January and published by the Department for Education in the statistical collection *Education provision: children under five years of age*. Data on entitlement to a funded early education place for 2-year-olds is provided by the Department for Work and Pensions.
- The price of childcare: from survey of providers
- The quality of childcare: data on childcare quality is provided by Ofsted.