

## Sufficiency of childcare places in local authorities

Giving young children the best start in life is the foundation of the government's Opportunity Mission. Children's earliest years are crucial to their health, development and life chances. It is our ambition that all families have access to high-quality, affordable and flexible early education and care, improving opportunity for every child and work choices for every parent.

### Sufficiency duty

Under Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 Local authorities in England are responsible for ensuring that the provision of childcare is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in their area, for children aged 0 to 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children). The statutory guidance on Early Education and Childcare sets out that local authorities must report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and make this report available and accessible to parents.

However, there remain differences in the availability of childcare depending on where you live in England. The issue is historic, and in some places, it is worse than others. The latest data from the Office of National Statistics and Ofsted<sup>1</sup> show variations in the level of access to Ofsted-registered childcare places across the country with the most deprived local authorities the most likely to be areas with persistently low access to Ofsted-registered childcare. Caution should be applied when interpreting this analysis however, due to the absence of non-Ofsted registered provision, such as nurseries in schools, which may affect results.

### Expansion of entitlements

From September 2025, eligible working parents will be able to access 30 hours per week of government-funded childcare from the term after their child turns 9 months.

Analysis from the Department for Education shows around 70,000 additional places and 35,000 early years educators would still be needed to deliver the expansion to 30 hours<sup>2</sup>. These projections show that around half of local areas need to increase their capacity by between 10% and 20% to meet demand for September 2025 – with the highest uplift in some of the most disadvantaged areas.

### Government support

The Department for Education continually monitors the sufficiency of childcare in all local authorities and is in regular contact with them about their sufficiency of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-accessibility-by-neighbourhood-england-ofsted-methodology>

<sup>2</sup> [Early years places and workforce need - GOV.UK](#) (17 October 2024)

childcare and any issues they are facing. As we got closer to the rollout of the first two phases of the childcare expansion in April 2024 and September 2024, local authority confidence in delivery increased. Over 320,000 codes were validated for the 2024 autumn term<sup>3</sup> and no local authorities reported sufficiency issues.

Where local authorities report sufficiency challenges, the department discusses what action the local authority is taking to address those issues, and where needed, supports them with any specific requirements through its childcare sufficiency support contract.

The government has committed to working with the sector to embed early years within the wider education system, and to find new ways to shift the early education system to better support parents in poorer areas, or who have children with SEND. This includes our plan to utilise unused space in primary schools to create much needed places in 3,000 nurseries, working in partnership with all parts of the sector and local authorities. This programme will help deliver on our commitment to ensure families right across the country have access to high quality childcare and early education.

The first stage of the school-based nurseries programme included £15 million of capital funding for new or expanded school-based nurseries. Schools who bid for money in this first phase were asked to demonstrate how they are meeting the needs of their local area and local authorities have been consulted as part of the process. Funding will be allocated to successful schools in Spring 2025 to support delivery for the first cohort of places from September.

We are delivering programmes to better utilise the skills of the existing workforce, attract talented staff and childminders to join the sector, and make early years careers as accessible and rewarding as possible. Our key interventions include a national recruitment campaign urging the public to 'Do something BIG' and start a career working with small children, testing whether financial incentives and a Childminder Start-up Grant in early years boost recruitment, and Skills Bootcamps for the early years which lead to an accelerated apprenticeship.

Next year alone, we plan to provide over £8 billion for the early years entitlements – a more than 30% increase compared to 2024-25 - as we roll out the expansion of the entitlements. On top of this we are providing a £75 million early years expansion grant to support providers to deliver the staff and places required to meet demand for next September.

## Wraparound Childcare

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<sup>3</sup> [Expansion to early childcare entitlements: eligibility codes issued and validated, October 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

This government is building a modern childcare system that supports families from the end of parental leave, right through to the end of primary school. Through the National Wraparound Childcare programme, we are creating more before and after school childcare places, so that all parents of primary school-aged children who need it can access term-time childcare in their local area from 8am to 6pm.

Between April 2024 and January 2025, we have given local authorities more than £167 million to deliver the expansion of new before and after school childcare places, and as of September 2024, the first new places became available for parents to access.

The funding is provided to ensure that local authorities can increase the supply of wraparound places and remove the financial barriers for schools and childcare providers to set up new, or expand current, provision and oversupply (to generate additional demand where demand is not yet guaranteed). The funding aims to ensure that the substantial majority of new or expanded provision is self-sustaining from the end of the planned programme (April 2026). By this, we mean that it will be feasible for the provision to continue, funded by continued parental demand and payments, without the initial 'pump prime' funding available under this programme.