



Reading Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023-24

SUMMARY

Under Section 6 of the Childcare Act there is a requirement on local authorities to produce an annual sufficiency report on the availability and sufficiency of childcare in their area.

OWNER

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VERSION

V 1.0

DATE

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Contents

Introduction	3
Purpose of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA)	4
Main Findings	5
Reading demographic information	6
Number of live births recorded in Reading 2019 to 2022	6
Live Births By Ward	7
Childcare Providers in Reading	8
Map of Early Years Childcare providers in Reading (not including Childminders)	8
Childcare places available in Reading	10
Number of Childcare Providers by Type and Ward – March 2023	11
Early Years Childcare Providers Opening Times.....	12
Early Years Childcare Costs	13
Average Costs of Childcare in Reading by Provider Costs (March 23 snapshot from Providers).....	13
Childcare Quality	14
Ofsted Ratings of Childcare Providers in Reading	14
Early Years Entitlements	15
Targeted two-year-old funding	15
Universal Funding.....	16
Universal Funding– Spring 2023.....	16
30 hours Extended Entitlement Funding	16
Childcare for School Aged Children	18
Take-Up of Childcare Provision	19
Action Plan Progress 2023	20
Summary	21
Action Plan 2024	22
Appendix 1 - Provider Survey.....	23
Early Years Childcare	24
Government Funded Schemes.....	24
Vacancies.....	24
Waiting List.....	25
Business.....	25
Sustainability	25
Wrap Around School Provision	26
Appendix 2 - Parent Survey.....	27
Appendix 3 - Housing data	29
Appendix 4 - Eligibility Criteria for Funded Early Entitlement for two, three and four-year-old children	30

Introduction

The Childcare Act 2006 places a legal duty on all local authorities to ensure that there is sufficient childcare in their area. In particular, the local authority has a duty to:

- Secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 – 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children).
- Secure early years funded provision for all three- and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds.
- Secure 30 hours funded childcare for working parents.
- Provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents on childcare provision in their area.

The duties in the Act (section 6) require local authorities to shape and support the development of childcare in their area in order to make it flexible, sustainable and responsive to the needs of the community. This role is described as the “market management” function, supporting the sector to meet the needs of parents, children and young people, parents and stakeholders.

Under Section 6 of the Act there is a requirement on local authorities to produce an annual sufficiency report on the availability and sufficiency of childcare in their area. The responsibility to complete the annual sufficiency assessment is delegated by the local authority to Brighter Futures for Children.

Section 7 requires local authorities to secure prescribed early years provision free of charge. This provision is for eligible children aged two, three and four-years-old. All three and four-year-olds are eligible for some funded early years provision.

Nationally approximately 92,000 two-year-old children currently benefit from Targeted Early Years Funding. The Government’s original target suggested that 40% of the most disadvantaged children would be eligible for targeted funding based on national criteria (see appendix 4). Reading is currently offering targeted two-year-old places to 65% of the children believed to be eligible, based on data supplied by the Department for Work and Pensions.

The Childcare Act (2016) extended the Childcare Act (2006) and the duty to provide universal entitlement for three and four-year-olds. Since September 2017 eligible families have been entitled to 30 hours funded childcare for three- and four-year-olds, extending the previous provision of up to 15 hours a week (570 hours a year) universal early learning for this age range.

Section 12 places a duty on local authorities to provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents relating to the provision of childcare and services or facilities that may be of benefit to parents and prospective parents, children and young people. It is advised this childcare sufficiency assessment is viewed alongside the information available on the [Reading Family Information Service \(FIS\)](#).

Reading is committed to ensuring that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have access to a wide range of high quality childcare. In addition to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory requirements and the Equality Act 2010, all publicly funded Early Years providers in the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sectors, are required to have regard to the SEND Code of Practice: 0-25 years. The Code of Practice states that Early Years settings

should adopt a graduated approach to identifying and meeting the needs of all children and young people. At each stage of assessment and planning, settings should engage with parents and carers, making reasonable adjustments, wherever is practicable, to support the needs of the child.

To support Early Years providers to meet the needs of children and young people Brighter Futures for Children provides:

- Access to training, networks and resources which support inclusion
- In setting advisory support and professional surgeries
- SEND Inclusion and Disability Access (DAF) Funding to support access to Early Years provision
- The [Local Offer](#) which provides information on services and provision available to families, young people and children with special education needs and/or disabilities.

Significant changes to childcare were announced in the Spring Budget 2023 in a bid to increase the quantity of childcare and to help more parents return to work. Changes include extended early years entitlements, wraparound care, greater financial support for parents and start up grants for childminders.

Purpose of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA)

This assessment provides a summary of childcare provision in Reading with the aim to support:

- Parents to gain an understanding of the types of childcare on offer in Reading and help to inform decisions about childcare options for their family.
- Childcare providers to understand the local childcare market and to help them make informed choices to better meet the childcare needs of families in Reading.
- Brighter Futures for Children staff by providing a structured picture of the current childcare offer in Reading. This informs potential actions for market management to meet demand and the forward strategic planning for primary school places.

While complying with the duties above local authorities must have regard to [Early Years Education and Childcare](#), statutory guidance provided by the Department for Education. This ensures that early years funding is offered consistently and fairly.

The publishing of this annual childcare sufficiency assessment is part of the local authority's legal duty in managing the childcare market to ensure there is sufficient childcare. It must be recognised that the statistics and data are dynamic and constantly changing. This document only provides a snapshot of the position of the childcare market at any given time. This assessment provides a good indication of trends or areas for further investigation and action, and the tools used in its production enable ongoing analysis and monitoring of the childcare data for future planning.

The childcare sufficiency assessment will be of interest to parents, providing them with an overview of the childcare offered across the town and in their locality. It will be useful to existing and potential childcare providers when considering a change to delivery model, expanding provision, or starting up

in new areas. The childcare market is particularly dynamic, with many factors affecting demand and supply, especially parental choice.

The findings of this report are indicative only and further detailed analysis of local areas should be undertaken by childcare providers to fully understand the local market. This report is to be shared with the public, local authority officers, elected members and the childcare market.

This childcare sufficiency assessment is for the year 2023-2024. The data included within is drawn from January 2023 early years census data, March 2023 childcare FIS (Family Information Service) snapshot data and Office of National Statistics data relating to 2022. Therefore, it may not reflect any impactful changes experienced in the months leading up to its publication.

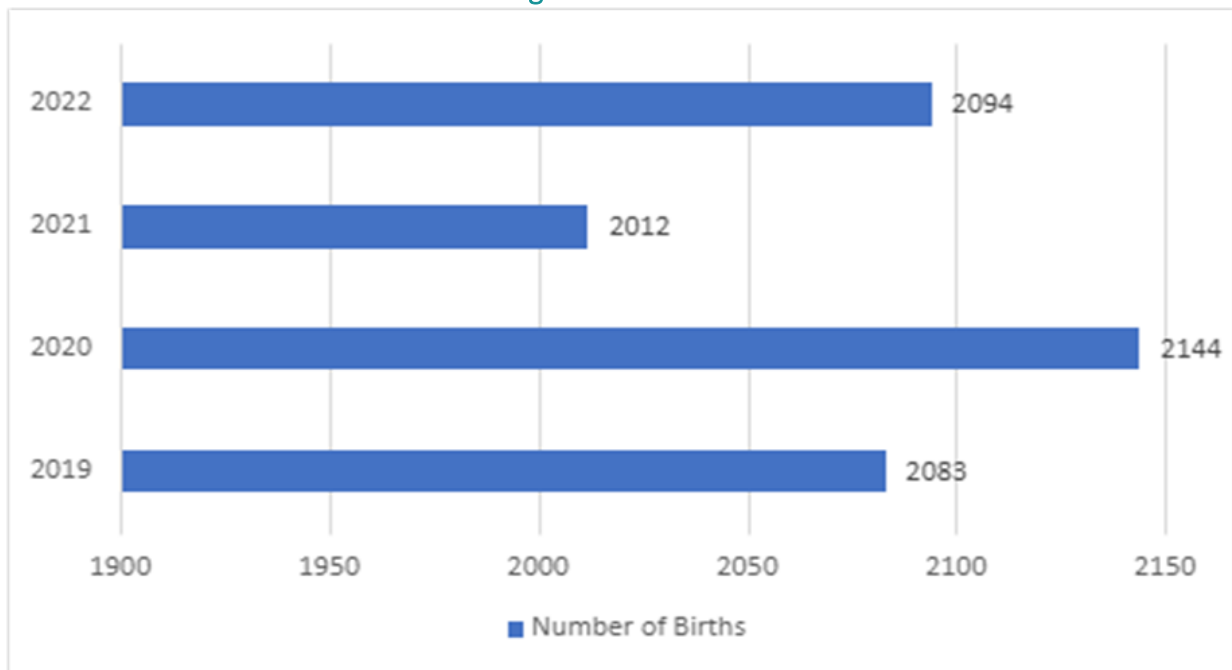
Main Findings

- There are currently sufficient childcare places for children aged 0-4 years in Reading albeit some not within the preferred area or sessions.
- 97% of providers in Reading are judged as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted or waiting for a first inspection.
- 94% of parents/carers surveyed were satisfied with their choice of childcare provision.
- The Government's commitment to expand early years entitlements funding will increase the demand for childcare from April 2024 with additional supply required.
- Compared to last year the number of children accessing universal three- and four-year-old entitlements has remained stable, 30-hour funding uptake has increased and access to the two-year-old targeted entitlement has declined.
- The majority of parents/carers surveyed were able to find the type of childcare they wanted in their local area, 87% in early years settings and 84% in wraparound provision.
- 85% of schools are providing or signposting a breakfast and afterschool club wraparound childcare offer.
- Schools reported that parental demand was the biggest barrier to providing or expanding wraparound childcare.
- Early years providers report that unmet parental demand is mostly influenced by the physical space available, followed by restricted capacity and qualified staff vacancies.
- Funding rates were identified as the greatest threat to the sustainability of early years providers followed by rising energy costs, Ofsted inspections and staff recruitment and retention.
- Rising food costs were identified as one of the greatest threats to the sustainability of childminders with 11% reporting this as an issue.
- 60% of parent/carers reported that they were satisfied with their current early years fees.
- 62% of school wraparound users responded they were satisfied with the costs
- Reading Borough Council's five-year housing plan has identified the town centre and Whitley ward as areas to monitor the future growth of families.
- The four wards with the highest percentage of Reading's under-fives population are Battle, Katesgrove, Whitley and Norcot. Further increases in childcare demand in these areas could place pressure on existing provision.

Reading demographic information

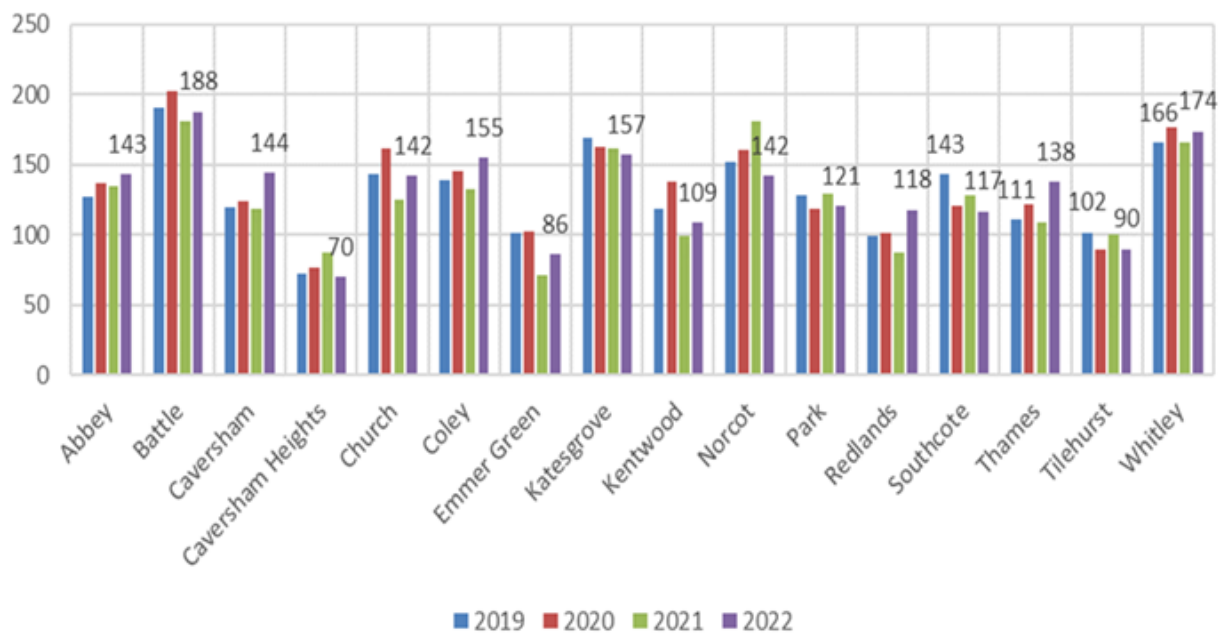
Reading is the fourth most densely populated of the South East's 64 local authority areas, with around 31 people living on each football pitch-sized area of land. We can expect this density to increase if we factor in the significant high-rise flat developments planned in the town highlighted in **Appendix 3**. In the last 10 years Reading's population has increased by 11.9%. This is significantly higher than the South East average of 7.5%.

Number of live births recorded in Reading 2019 to 2022



The chart above shows the number of live births recorded in Reading each year between 2019 to 2022. There was a significant drop in births during 2021 which can be attributed in part to the COVID-19 pandemic commencing in 2020. The drop in population in 2021 can be seen in the 2023 2-year-old cohort figures which report a decline in funded take-up of 8%.

Live Births By Ward



The reported numbers of children born in 2022 is around 4% higher than the previous year. Children born in 2022 may reach early years funding age in 2024. This is also when the Government offer of expanded childcare to two-year-old children of working parents will commence. It is important to monitor changes in cohort numbers to ensure that any increase in cohort is not impacted by providers decreasing their capacity as a reaction to declining birth rates reported in previous years.

Reading remains a vibrant town, hosting the headquarters of several multi-national companies. It also has good transport links across the South East and traditionally more favorable house prices than London. The development of housing in Reading (**Appendix 3**) shows there are currently 5464 planning permissions currently outstanding. This number is a decrease of 888 planning permissions since the previous year but is still a significant number of additional homes being added to the Reading area.

Housing development could increase the challenges in maintaining sufficiency of childcare places in the future. Wards such as Abbey and Whitley are developing new housing at a much higher rate than other wards, especially in the form of flats. Traditionally families living in flats would migrate to the larger houses within the suburbs as their family grew. The current economic environment could see more families remaining in their properties and result in an increase in demand for childcare in areas where they did not previously exist.

Since March 2023 Reading has seen the closure of a full day care provider in Whitley ward and four sessional providers, two of which were in north Reading. The day care facility in Whitley ward has since reopened under new management but we are yet to establish whether this will meet parental demand in the area. Two further day care providers are being established within or close to Abbey ward, one of which is situated directly within the flat development of Huntley Wharf. A sessional childcare provider is also planned to open within Abbey ward which will help to fulfil parental demand for sessional places in this area.

Childcare Providers in Reading

Reading maintains a consistent mix of childcare provision with delivery of places from all provider types including day nurseries, independent schools, pre-schools, primary schools, maintained nursery schools and classes and childminders. As of January 2023, there were 161 early years childcare providers in Reading. This was a decrease of 16 providers from the previous year. Most of the closed providers were childminders not providing early years entitlements for eligible children.

The number of registered pre-school providers continues to decline. At the time of writing this report a further two pre-school providers have closed. This is a concern as traditionally pre-schools offer funded only places without the added conditions of wraparound care. From April 2024 the Government will begin its roll out of expanded childcare places for two-year-old children from working families. This could have an impact on the number of funded only places available for disadvantaged or vulnerable funded two-year-olds.

The early years service is actively running a 'Choose a Childcare Career' campaign to promote the advantages of a childcare profession. Existing or newly registered childminders appear to recognise the incentives of offering early years funded places as their numbers have steadily increased over the last four-year period with 16 new childminders signing up for early years funding in the last year.

Reading has a range of out of school wraparound childcare provided by schools directly or outsourced to private childcare companies. Analysis from the provider out of school care survey suggests that parental demand is being met in most areas, with 94% of providers meeting needs in breakfast clubs and 81% meeting needs in after school provision. Currently, we do not have data to identify the number of children accessing a childminder for wraparound care. However, next year's assessment will include detailed analysis of parental demand and supply of wraparound childcare as part of the Government's childcare expansion.

Type of Provision	January 2019	January 2020	January 2021	January 2022	January 2023	5 year movement
Pre-School	20 →	19 ↓	18 ↓	17 ↓	16 ↓	-4
Full Day Care	32 ↑	34 ↑	32 ↓	32 →	30 ↓	-2
Independent Nursery	6 →	6 →	6 →	6 →	6 →	0
Childminder (registered and claiming EY funding)	32 ↓	34 ↑	32 ↓	34 ↑	41 ↑	+9
Childminder (Not claiming EY funding)	87 ↑	77 ↓	65 ↓	61 ↓	41 ↓	+46
Maintained Nursery School	5 →	5 →	5 →	5 →	5 →	0
Maintained Nursery Class	22 →	22 →	22 →	22 →	22 →	0
Total Providers	204 ↑	197 ↓	180 ↓	177 ↓	161 ↓	-43

Map of Early Years Childcare providers in Reading (not including Childminders)



ID	Private_Day_Nursery
1	Abbeymore Nursery School and Day Nursery
2	Banana Moon Day Nursery
3	Berkley Gardens Day Nursery
4	Chisam Nursery
5	Co-operative Childcare
6	Dickory Docks Day Nursery
7	Emmer Green Kindergarten
8	Feddings Day Nursery
9	Fortbury Gardens Day Nursery
10	Goldlocks Day Nursery
11	Greyfriars Day Nursery
12	Kemal Day Nursery
13	Little Dragons Day Nursery
14	Littletots Nursery
15	Mary Seaside Day Nursery
16	Monkey/Moose Highdown
17	Monkey/Moose Hurlley Wharf
18	Northumberland Day Nursery
19	Orchard Day Nursery
20	Park Day Nursery
21	Pine Rivers Kindergarten Day Nursery
22	PlayDay Nursery
23	Rainbow Day Nursery
24	Reading International Busy Bees
25	Sure Start Whitley Children's Centre
26	The Bee's Knees Nursery
27	The Honey Bee Day Nursery
28	The Lodge Day Nursery
29	The Wagon Day Nursery
30	Waterloo Day Nursery
31	Western Elm Nursery School

ID	PreSchool
32	Crescent Under Fives
33	Dingley's Promise
34	Emmer Green Pre-School
35	Little Badgers Pre-School
36	Middlands Pre-School
37	Parkside Pre-School YMCA Reading
38	St Michael's Pre-school
39	St. Andrew's Pre-School
40	Stepping Stones Pre-School Group
41	Sunnyside at Sun Street
42	The Grange Pre-School
43	Victoria Road Pre-School

ID	Independent
44	Caversham Preparatory School
45	Hemdean House School
46	St Edwards Prep
47	St. Joseph's College Preparatory School
48	The Abbey School
49	The Doonway Montessori School

ID	Nursery_School
50	Blagdon Nursery
51	Blagrove Nursery School
52	Caversham Nursery School
53	New Bridge Nursery
54	Norcot Early Years Centre

ID	Private_Nursery_School_Classes
55	Alfred Sutton Primary
56	Battle Primary Academy
57	Christ the King RC Primary
58	Churchend Academy
59	Coley Primary School
60	English Martyrs RC Primary School
61	St Collier Primary School
62	Geoffrey Field Infant School
63	Katesgrove Primary School
64	Manor Primary School
65	Moorlands Primary School
66	New Town Primary Academy
67	Oxford Road Community School
68	Rankhet Primary Academy
69	Redlands Primary School
70	St Anna RC Primary School
71	St Johns CE Primary School
72	St Mary & All Saints CE Primary School
73	The Avenue Special
74	The Polver Primary Academy
75	The Ridgeway Primary School
76	Whitley Park Nursery & Primary School
77	Wilson Primary School

Title: Childcare Providers in Reading

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Working better with you

Childcare places available in Reading

The Family Information Service (FIS) is contracted to deliver childcare information on behalf of Brighter Futures for Children. The team manages and collates childcare data to provide free individually tailored information, advice and guidance directly to parents and carers. FIS advises and supports childcare providers to update both their Core and Local Offer to promote the services they provide in Reading.

In line with other parts of the UK, Reading has seen an increase in the number of childcare providers closing over the last five years. The majority of closed providers have been childminders, however, of those who remain more are now signing up to offer early years funded places.

A day care nursery has closed since the last childcare sufficiency report but their gap in the full day care market can be back filled by the new opening of two day care providers and a further three set to open this year near to the town centre.

Since the initial data was taken in January 2023 a further four pre-schools have closed. Traditionally pre-schools have offered free sessions during term-time only. The Family Information Service is seeing the effects of a decline in pre-school places in terms of increased parental enquiries and requests for brokerage to find places. The parental survey also had many comments from parents who stated that places were difficult to find.

The Government will commence the roll out of expanded childcare for many working families from April 2024 starting with two-year-olds alongside the current entitlements. Mapping is under way to predict demand and our early estimate suggests that Reading will require 252 places for these children by April 2024.

Initially we expect most newly eligible two-year-olds will already be accessing early years provision and will therefore switch from a fee paying to funded place with provider consent. Analysis of the early years provider survey found that they predict 67% of their existing two-year-old cohort will switch to a funded place from April 2024. This suggests that around 80 new childcare places will be required, subject to parental demand.

The largest number of Ofsted registered places are in the full day care sector. These places are to secure sufficient childcare for working parents to access. Provider responses indicate that parental demand is high with 92% of daycare providers holding a waiting list due to lack of physical space or insufficient staffing. Childminders offer places across the age ranges and make a significant contribution to the stock of available childcare in Reading. The number of pre-schools continues to decrease and there are early signs that the two-year-old funded demand is being impacted, especially around the town center area and west Reading.

Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) continue to review early years specialist provision required to meet the needs of children with special educational needs (SEN). In September 2023 two maintained nursery schools expanded existing provision to open new specialist Early Years resource bases. Reading now has five specialist centres available to support the needs of children with SEN. The assessment of demand and supply of places to meet the needs of children with profound, multiple learning needs and those with complex medical/physical needs is ongoing.

Childcare capacity, particularly for pre-school children, fluctuates throughout the year. Places come under increasing pressure in the summer term ahead of school intake to Reception in September. This results in a challenging environment to predict sufficiency on an annualised basis.

The majority of schools provide a breakfast and afterschool club onsite with a small number signposting to other independent providers. The majority of schools do not report any barriers to the provision of wraparound care, however a small number reported that parental demand had decreased, and that physical space and transport can be a challenge.

Number of Childcare Providers by Type and Ward – March 2023

WARD	EY Funded Childminder	Childminder	Day Nursery	EY Funded Independent	Pre School	Maintained Nursery School	Maintained Nursery Class	Total
Abbey	2		4	1			2	9
Battle	5	2	4	1			2	14
Caversham	2	4	3	1			1	11
Caversham Heights	2	8	1		2	2		15
Church	3	1	1		1	1	1	8
Coley	5	2	1		1		2	9
Emmer Green	6	5	2		2		2	17
Katesgrove			2			1		5
Kentwood	4	1	2		1		3	8
Norcot	5	3	1				2	12
Park	4	2	3		2		1	13
Redlands		2	2	1			1	6
Southcote	2	1	2		2			8
Thames	1		1	1	2		2	5
Tilehurst	4	2	1	1	3	1	3	14
Whitley	4		1					8
Total	49	33	31	6	16	5	22	162

Reading has a good balance of childcare by type in each ward. Caversham Heights and Emmer Green wards have the highest number of individual childcare providers despite offering the lowest number of registered places. The 21 childminders registered in these areas contribute to the lower capacity offered in these areas due to the limited number of places they can offer. Demand appears to be met in Caversham Heights ward, which is evidenced by the recent closure of a pre-school in this area due to lack of parental demand.

Abbey and Battle wards have the highest number of day care providers but not the highest number of registered places. Data shows that Abbey ward is already one of our most populated wards and is currently the area with the highest increase of residential development. As of March 2023, 2110

dwelling within Abbey ward are currently outstanding. A new day care provider has very recently opened in Abbey ward which will absorb some of the increase in demand for full childcare places. This area needs to be monitored for unmet needs and requests for funded only places.

The four wards with the highest percentage of Reading's under fives population are Battle, Katesgrove, Whitley and Norcot. Registered childcare places in Abbey ward appear to currently match population estimates, however, in Battle, Whitley, Norcot and Katesgrove there are more children than registered places. Further increases in childcare demand in these areas could place pressure on existing provision.

New childcare provisions are in development within or close to Abbey and Whitley ward. These may help meet demand within these areas where housing development is increasing. Particular focus needs to be given to Battle ward which has the highest numbers of two-year-olds but very few childcare providers who offer sessional only places. In addition, Abbey and Battle wards both include registered places available at independent schools.

Reading Borough Council's residential commitments report (**Appendix 3**) states that the number of dwellings under construction currently stands at 2110. This is significantly lower than the 4038 commitments recorded in 2022 but still reflects the ever-increasing Reading population. The highest number of current housing planning permissions continues to be in Abbey, Thames and Whitley wards. In the last three year period planning permissions for new dwellings in these three areas has reached 14,296. Increased child population within these wards and the greater Reading area could put pressure on the current availability of childcare places.

Analysis of early years funding take up in autumn 2023 showed that only 60% of children attended a provider within the ward they lived. More work needs to be carried out to ascertain how parental choice and convenient commuter routes contribute to childcare selection.

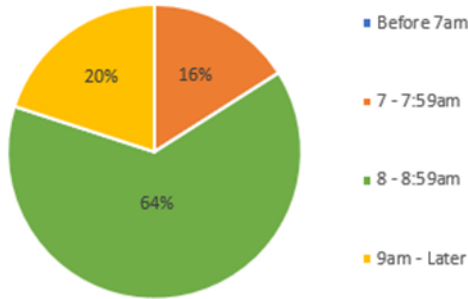
Parental choice and flexibility play a large part in determining childcare sufficiency making local demand difficult to predict. The largest percentage of registered places in Reading is in the full day care sector which generally offers more flexibility to meet the demands of working parents. Overall, Reading has a balanced childcare market, but parental choice may not be met in all circumstances. The decrease in providers traditionally offering funded only sessions will need to be monitored as this could be further impacted by the Government's new childcare offer for working parents.

Early Years Childcare Providers Opening Times

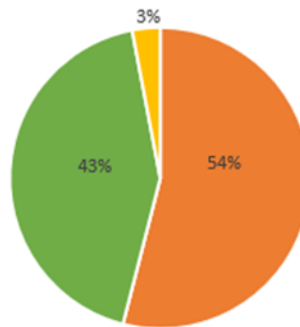
In Reading there are no early years providers which open before 7am. Most providers open between 8-9pm. Childminders appear to offer earlier start times overall. The majority of early years providers close at 6pm.

Opening Times

Nursery, Pre-School & Maintained Providers

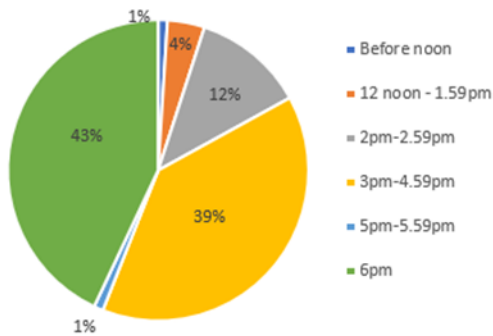


Childminders

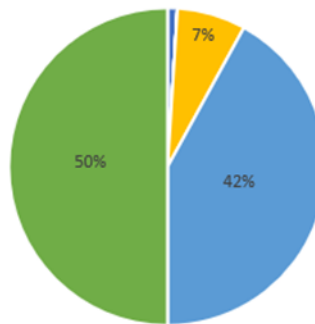


Closing Times

Nursery, Pre-Schools & Maintained Providers



Childminders



64% of childcare providers open all year and most term time only care is offered by pre- schools and maintained nursery schools and classes. Reading childcare providers do not currently offer weekend care.

Early Years Childcare Costs

Average Costs of Childcare in Reading by Provider Costs (March 23 snapshot from Providers)

Type	Per Hour	Per Session	Per Day	Per Week
Childminder	£5.68	£26.45	£60.00	-
Day Nursery	£9.18	£34.16	£58.53	£283.35
Pre-School	£6.34	£16.78	-	-
Holiday Scheme	£8.50	£33.34	£35.46	£208.28

According to the Coram Family and Childcare Survey 2023 childcare prices in the South East of England are significantly higher than the national average. The average hourly cost for a 25-hour place in a day nursery for the South East of England is £150.89. Information gathered from Reading childcare providers indicates that their hourly charges in Reading are higher than the national average with a 25-hour place potential costing £229.50 at a day care provider. Charges can vary between setting types, individual providers and the age of children care is offered to.

Early years entitlement hours, funded by the government, are currently paid at an hourly rate of £5.92 for three- and four-year-olds and £9.23 for two-year-olds. The funding rate for three and four-year-olds remains below the average childcare hourly rate charged across all providers in Reading except childminders despite an uplift in funding rates in April 2023 and September 2023.

Childcare Vouchers and Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) are schemes designed to financially support working parents by providing tax savings or topping up contributions. The majority of childcare providers are signed up to this scheme which can save parents up to £2000 a year per child on their childcare costs. 90% of early years providers, 93% of childminders and 68% of maintained schools are registered to accept Tax Free Childcare. However, only 25% of those who responded to the parent survey who pay for childcare reported that they are using the scheme. A national and local campaign is under way to encourage take-up of Tax-Free Childcare.

Results of the parent/carer survey showed that 60% of parent/carers who paid for childcare in the last 12 months were satisfied with their childcare costs. This year there was an increase in the number of providers reporting to have raised their fees to parent/carers, with only 28% of early years reporting no increase in fees.

The number of providers reporting to have a business plan has declined this year with only 17% of early years providers stating they currently have a business plan which includes provision for expansion of the childcare offer and contingency planning. 30% of the early years providers who do not have a business plan expressed an interest in receiving further advice on creating one. Business advice workshops will take place throughout the 2024 spring term, facilitated by Early Years business consultants.

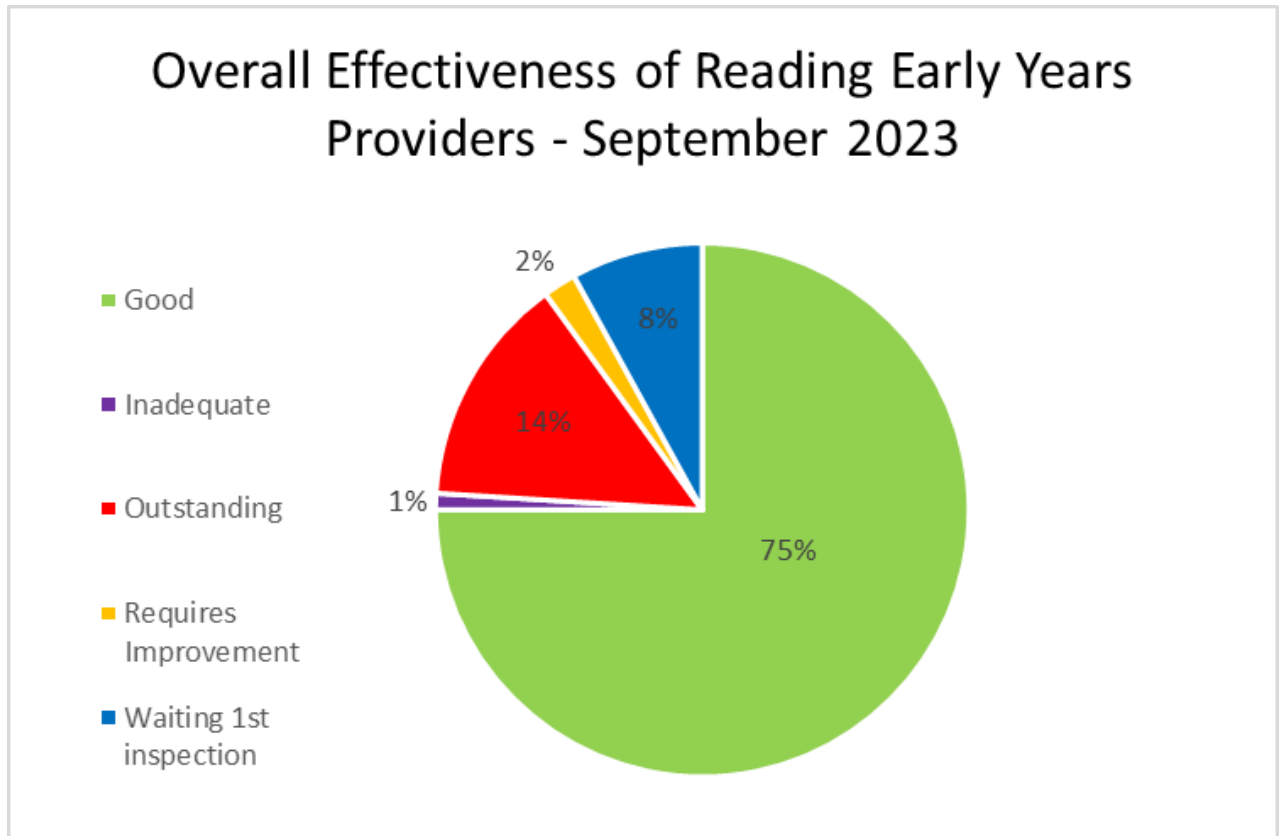
Childcare Quality

Childcare standards are regulated by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Ofsted report directly to Parliament, parents, carers and commissioners. Most childcare providers looking after children under the age of 8 must register with Ofsted (or a childminder agency).

Ofsted Ratings of Childcare Providers in Reading

Ofsted aims to inspect all new childcare providers within 30 months of registration where possible. All early years providers are inspected within a six-year window from the date of their last inspection. Childcare providers judged to require improvement are reinspected within a year and inadequate childcare provision is reinspected within six months.

As of September 2023, the majority of Reading childcare providers were rated 'good' or 'outstanding'. The providers rated Requires Improvement and Inadequate were being supported by the Early Years team to make the required progress.

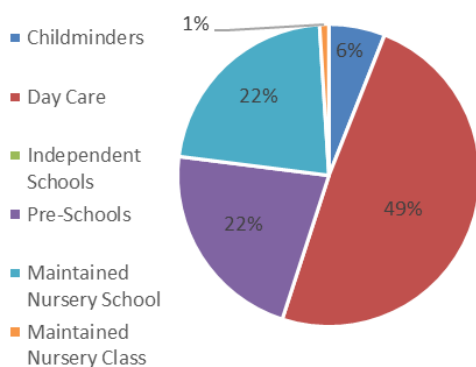


Early Years Entitlements

Targeted two-year-old funding

Targeted two-year-old children (as defined in **Appendix 4**) are eligible to claim a free early years place of 15 hours a week for 38 weeks (term time only) or the equivalent of 570 hours if they stretch it over a year.

Two-year-old funding – spring 23



2 Year Olds Claiming Funding					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Take-Up	410	371	311	377	317
% of cohort	65%	63%	55%	73%	65%

The take-up percentage is calculated using estimated numbers supplied by the Government’s Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The DWP numbers relate only to children who reside in Reading; however, families can choose to attend a setting in any local authority area.

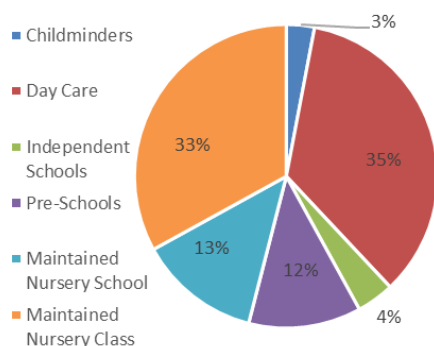
The majority of funded two-year-old children attend a provider offering full day care. This benefits parents returning to work as the child can remain in the same setting at three years old and ensures consistency for the child.

The 65% take-up in spring 2023 is significantly lower than the previous spring term. In part this decline could be attributed to a drop in the two-year-old population, but universal credit thresholds have remained static and may also be influencing eligibility. Another consideration is that parents have reported difficulties finding two-year-old funded places that meet their preference.

Universal Funding

All three and four-year-old children in England are eligible for 570 hours of funded childcare per year from the term after their third birthday. This is usually taken as 15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year known as “universal entitlement”. Providers can also offer this entitlement as a stretched offer across the whole year. This entitlement continues until the child is statutory school age.

Universal Funding– Spring 2023



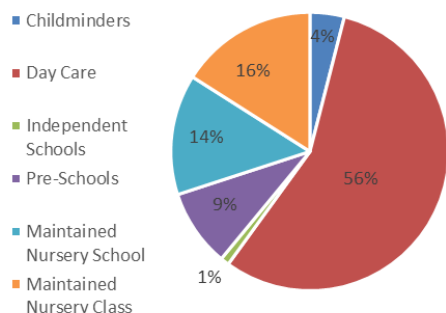
3 & 4 Year Olds Claiming Universal Funding					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Take-Up	2888	3012	2525	2545	2535
% of cohort	60%	65%	55%	54%	60%

There is an even balance of universal 15 hours funding being offered between the private and the maintained sector. The numbers attending in spring 2023 remains consistent with the previous two years.

30 hours Extended Entitlement Funding

The Government offers eligible working parents of three and four-year-olds up to 30 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year (1,140 hours per year). This is known as the “extended entitlement”. National criteria for the extended entitlement can be found in **Appendix 4**.

30 Hours Extended Entitlement Funding – Spring 2023



3 & 4 Year Olds Claiming 30 Hours Extended Entitlement					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Take-Up	977	983	926	902	935
% of cohort	34%	34%	32%	31%	37%

The number of families claiming 30 hours extended entitlement funding has increased since last year which indicates a higher number of working families. The percentage of children claiming 30 hours funding remains fairly consistent across the sector however, the uptake of 30 hours funded within maintained nursery classes has increased by 5%. Traditionally, daycare providers have offered the greatest flexibility when funded hours can be offered, therefore they remain the largest group offering 30 hours funding.

Early Years Pupil Premium

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) is additional funding paid directly to early years settings to improve the education they provide for eligible disadvantaged three and four-year-olds. Children from households on low incomes and receiving Universal Credit are entitled to EYPP. There were 384 three and four-year-olds funded for EYPP in January 2023 in Reading, 15% of the total cohort. This was a drop of 3% from the previous year which may be attributed to the changes in universal credit thresholds and an increase in working families. From April 2024 EYPP funding will be extended to all eligible children accessing early years entitlements including children from nine months to statutory school age.

Disability Access Fund

The Equalities Act 2010 requires local authorities and settings not to discriminate, harass or victimise children with disabilities, which may include making reasonable adjustments to accommodate children's needs. Local authorities must comply with the provisions of the Act in finding suitable provision for eligible children with disabilities.

The Disability Access Fund (DAF) was introduced by the Government in April 2017 to support three- and four-year-old children with disabilities to access their early years entitlement. In April 2023 the amount per child, per year was increased to £881. Claimants need to provide evidence of the child's Disability Living Allowance certificate and be claiming universal early years entitlement. Payments are made directly to the setting to accommodate for the child's needs. Since 2017 Reading has funded 185 children. From April 2024 DAF funding will be extended to all eligible children accessing early years entitlements including children from nine months to statutory school age.

Childcare for School Aged Children

Estimated population of School aged children living in Reading by Ward			
Ward data as of March 2020	5 – 7 Year Olds	8 – 10 Year Olds	11 – 14 Year Olds
Abbey	570	480	480
Battle	545	494	593
Caversham	388	375	438
Church	375	358	504
Katesgrove	422	358	438
Kentwood	419	402	517
Mapledurham	103	130	189
Minster	481	423	487
Norcot	590	483	600
Park	431	361	488
Peppard	357	402	512
Redlands	259	259	423
Southcote	373	421	462
Thames	410	481	630
Tilehurst	395	398	494
Whitley	611	597	762
Total	6729	6422	8017

Data Source – ONS Mid-year 2020 (latest available)

There were 35 Out of School care and 21 Holiday Schemes registered with Ofsted to offer care for school aged children in March 2023. The number of holiday schemes has remained consistent with data compared to the previous year, however the number of out of school places has decreased. Childminders play an important role for older children although their registered places have not been included in the provision table. The Ofsted registered number of places incorporates provision for different age groups so may not represent a true reflection of availability, therefore registered numbers have not been provided in this report. It is at the discretion of the childcare provider how they allocate their places. Out of school provision may also be available in the form of clubs, activities, and groups that are provided by the school, for pupils attending and for less than two hours. It is not required to be registered as childcare and is not always advertised with the Reading Family Information Service.

Demand for after school club and holiday provision can be challenging to predict due to the wide age range and variety of care available. After school activities provided by schools may be available for limited hours (e.g. 45 minutes to an hour and therefore be too short for formal registration) and subject to short term cancellation.

Place data based on Ofsted registered provision may over-estimate supply for younger children (aged 4-7 years old). Providers may choose to operate with a lower number of children than they are registered for and may also have additional capacity to develop to meet demand.

Number of childcare providers by Type & Ward – March 23

	Number of After School Clubs or Breakfast Clubs	Number of Holiday Clubs
Abbey	2	1
Battle	2	2
Caversham	2	2
Caversham Heights	1	
Church	3	3
Coley	1	
Emmer Green	7	2
Katesgrove	3	3
Norcot	2	1
Park	3	1
Redlands		3
Southcote	1	1
Thames	3	1
Whitley	3	1
Total	35	21

Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF)

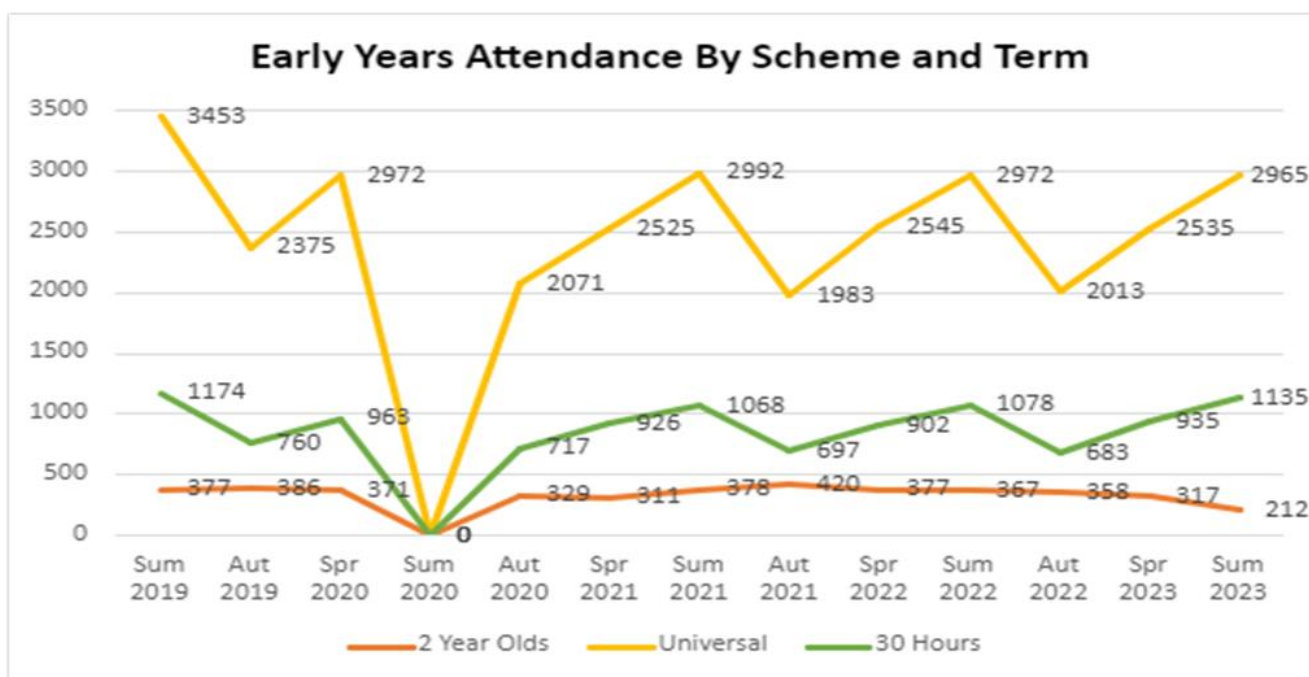
The government launched the HAF programme early 2021 to support disadvantaged children to access provision over the three main holiday periods: Easter, Summer and Christmas. The programme is available for all children 5-16 who are eligible for free school meals or locally identified as vulnerable. The offer extends learning to the parents/carers around healthy life choices and signposting opportunities such as housing or economic disadvantage support.

Reading has commissioned 21 providers to deliver the provision to local children attending Reading schools. There is a range of provision to suit all children including a SEND offer.

Overall, the programme has expanded the childcare market considerably and is supporting financial sustainability to individual local holiday club providers such as Grassroots as well as larger of holiday club providers such as Reading Football Club. The programme funding has been agreed until March 2025 beyond this we are uncertain of the outcome for the HAF programme.

Take-Up of Childcare Provision

Nationally there has been a decrease in child population of 1.7%, therefore we would expect to see a fall in the number of children attending childcare, however, the increase in new residential dwellings may counteract this prediction within Reading. Growth of existing early years childcare and new provision will be essential to ensuring supply ahead of the expanded early years entitlements starting in April 2024.



The chart above shows the number of children claiming early years funding over time. In March 2020 childcare providers were advised to only remain open for vulnerable children or children of keyworkers, attendance was not recorded for this period. The Government eased restrictions in June 2020 and allowed all pre-school age children to return to childcare settings with further national lockdowns in November 2020 and January 2021.

The number of children claiming the three- and four-year-old universal entitlement has remained consistent over the last two years. Encouragingly, the take up of 30 hours extended entitlement appears to be steadily increasing. However targeted two-year-old funding take up has declined in comparison. This may be due to a decrease in population and universal credit thresholds. The decline in sessional place uptake has attributed to the recent closure of a two-year old pre-school whose sustainability relied on funded placements.

The results of the early years providers childcare surveys indicate that the majority of providers who have not been able to offer a place or added children to a waiting list have done so because of limits to the physical space and difficulties to recruit early years staff. Early years providers also report that funding rates and rising energy costs are the greatest concern to their future sustainability.

The school wraparound childcare survey suggests that 91% of schools are delivering or signposting to a wraparound offer which meets parental demand, with an interest to expand to meet the need. However, there was indication of a lack of parental demand which requires further exploration.

There are local authority plans to work with schools, childminders private, voluntary and independent providers to increase childcare provision which is inclusive, high quality and ensures greater flexibility and choice for parents.

Action Plan Progress 2023

The strategic approach to sufficiency this year focused on 4 main strands:

1. Childminder recruitment and retention
2. Early years recruitment and retention
3. Business
4. Childcare costs

The Early Years and Communications teams have worked together to develop a 'Choose a Childcare Career' campaign. This includes the launch of a new childcare careers section on the BFFC website and a social media campaign targeted at recruiting childminders, early years and childcare staff. The focus is on professionalism, opportunities to train, career progression and improving outcomes for children.

The website includes details of placement opportunities and local training providers with advice for potential apprentices, career changers and those seeking to progress their career further. The Early Years Newsletter continues to highlight the achievements of the sector to boost morale and raise the profile of early years careers.

The Early Years and SEND teams have sustained and expanded an extensive offer of support, training and networking opportunities for the early years sector to contribute towards a skilled workforce and to support retention. All new managers and childminders are provided with termly in setting advice and guidance as they prepare for their first Ofsted inspection to ensure they feel supported and prepared.

Recruitment and retention and business workshops have been delivered and mental health awareness sessions for childminders and managers have been well received. Business advice is provided on request from EY business trained consultants. Additionally, the Early Years team has actively signposted to DfE programmes including Experts and Mentors in setting support, Thames Valley Stronger Practice Hub and a virtual professional development offer.

The CSA early years provider survey shows that 34% remain concerned about the impact of recruitment and retention, while this remains a high priority it also indicates no further increase from 35% in 2022.

The local campaign to increase the take-up of tax-free entitlement for parents to reduce the cost of childcare has continued. The CSA provider and parent survey indicates that for a second year the number of settings registered for Tax Free Childcare has increased to 90%. However, this is not represented in the number of parents reporting to use the initiative which was 25% with further development required.

The EY and SEND teams and the Family Information Service meet regularly to monitor supply and demand of childcare in Reading and to encourage growth.

Summary

This assessment provides a snapshot of childcare for parents, providers, and the local authority to support understanding of the current market and aid decision making. The data and views of parents and providers is an indication of trends, strengths and areas for further investigation and action to assist future planning.

Overall, there is currently sufficient childcare places for children four years and under to access government funded and paid for childcare, however not always within the preferred area or chosen sessions. The majority of early years childcare providers hold a waiting list and demand must be

closely monitored with further expansion of the early years entitlements. In addition, housing growth will increase demand for childcare in Reading. Battle, Katesgrove, Whitley and Norcot wards have the highest population of children under five which could place pressure on supply in these areas. Nurseries have closed this year, however supply remains balanced with new providers opening, although it is recognised that some sessional providers require more support to ensure sustainability of this offer and greater choice for parents. There has been growth in the number of specialist resource bases for children with special educational needs and demand is consistently being monitored with recognition that full daycare is required for working families.

In Reading birth rates declined in 2021, however in 2022 live births increased by 4%. It is important to monitor the 2022 cohort of children because they will be the first to receive the Government's expanded childcare offer in April 2024 and providers may have reduced early years capacity in response to the earlier decline in birth rate. Early analysis suggests that 252 new working families will be eligible for the two-year-old entitlement in April 2024 and that around 67% will already be accessing childcare with new demand estimated to be 80 families initially in Reading. A key priority is the expansion of early years places in areas with low supply and high demand with a focus on quality, inclusion and securing places for targeted two-year-olds.

There has been a decline in eligibility for EYPP and targeted two-year old funding and an increase in eligibility for working family entitlements. Changes to family circumstances must be planned for as children transition from early years childcare to school and families may require continuity of a wraparound childcare offer to maintain employment. This aligns with the Government's commitment to expand wraparound childcare with start-up funding available for providers to ensure accessibility for every family that needs a place. In Reading over 90% of schools already provide or signpost to wraparound provision, however further growth is required.

The vast majority of parents who responded to the survey are satisfied with their childcare arrangements and the number of Ofsted 'good' and 'outstanding' settings aligns with the national average. However, just over half of parents are satisfied with their early years and wraparound childcare provider fees. Further subsidy of early years entitlements and enhanced promotion of the Tax Free Childcare may help alleviate some of these costs for parents.

The expansion of early years entitlements, wraparound childcare, financial support for childminders and parents provides opportunity for growth and higher employment in Reading. Access to high quality provision also has greater developmental benefits for children, particularly the most disadvantaged, leading to better outcomes. However, the early years and childcare market remains fragile due to changes in demand, increased costs and a national and local recruitment crisis which directly impacts the number of places which can be provided often with very little notice.

Action Plan 2024

The strategic approach to sufficiency will focus on 3 main strands:

1. Workforce sustainability and growth

-Support the launch of the DfE childcare recruitment campaign, strengthen local communications and signpost to resources and advertising opportunities.

- Work in partnership with local training providers to respond to the needs of the childcare sector and strengthen knowledge of availability.

2. Expansion of early years entitlements

-Ensure prompt and clear information to providers to set out the government funding opportunities and local rates to inform business planning and expansion.

-Promote capital funding opportunities, set local criteria which responds to demand with quick decision making, timely payment and monitoring to ensure sustainability.

-Support growth of childcare providers in Reading with a focus on areas where supply is at risk of not meeting demand.

-Effectively communicate with parents to ensure they have the information they need to access entitlements which they are eligible for including Tax Free Childcare.

3. Expansion of wraparound childcare

-Ensure prompt and clear information to schools and independent providers which sets out the commitment for all families to have access to wraparound care and opportunity for expansion.

-Promote capital and programme funding opportunities, set local criteria which responds to demand with quick decision making, timely payment and monitoring to ensure set up and sustainability.

-Encourage creative approaches and growth of wraparound childcare with opportunity for schools, childminders and independent providers to collaborate to meet demand and deliver on the commitment.

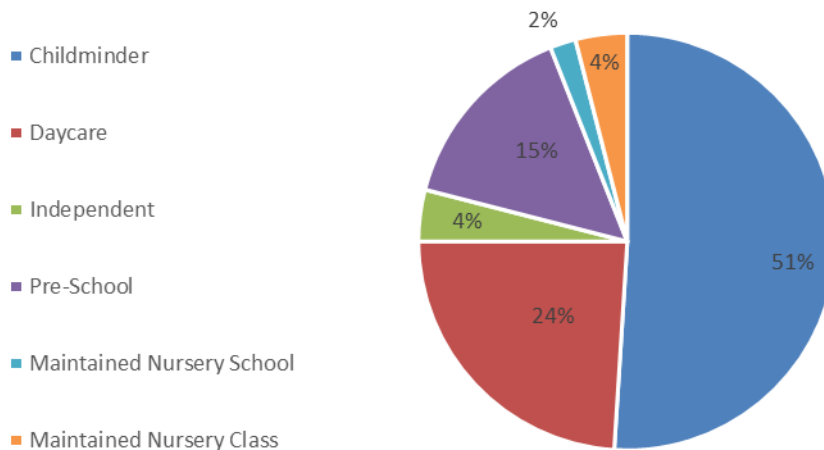
-Effectively communicate with parents to ensure they understand the commitment to expanding wraparound childcare and the opportunities available including Tax Free Childcare.

Appendix 1 - Provider Survey

The opinions of childcare providers in Reading were sought between August and November 2023 using three Microsoft questionnaires. One was issued to Early years Providers, one to independent out of school provision and another to out of school provision run directly by schools.

The early years providers survey was completed by 53 respondents with representation across the sector as set out below. 4 responded to the independent out of school provision survey and three responded to the school run out of school provision.

Early Years Provider Survey Responses



Responses have been analysed and will be reported in two sections: early years childcare and out-of-school provision.

Early Years Childcare

The views of all early years providers were requested, and 53 responses were received. Although all sectors are represented the return rate of 51% from childminders over represents the category as only 3% of children claimed their universal entitlement from a childminder in January 2023. Representation was received from a range of providers who covered all early years funding schemes.

Government Funded Schemes

Early years providers were asked to report on how they offer the two-year funding and three and four-year-old universal and extended funding to understand any restrictions or additional charges to parents. Of this group 40% provide a standalone funded offer with no additional cost to the family. Of those 21 providers six stated they restricted the number of children who could access it. 70% of providers who responded to the survey stated they had turned away parents due to lack of limited space and capacity. Some providers reported issues with staffing levels.

[Tax Free Childcare](#) is an incentive for parents and 90% of the respondents confirmed that they are registered to accept the offer.

Vacancies

26 of the 53 providers who returned the providers survey stated they had immediate vacancies. However, they also stated that most of the 238 places reported would soon be filled by children moving up an age bracket or were only available on restricted days or times.

Waiting List

70% of providers reported having to turn children away due to lack of physical space or adequate staffing levels

Business

Respondents were asked if they have a current business plan to which only 17% selected yes and 83% no, of those that answered, 13 requested further advice. In addition, 72% of providers reported having increased their fees in the past financial year.

Sustainability

Early years providers were asked to identify any concern(s) that relate to their sustainability as presented in the table below: Providers were permitted to pick multiple reasons.

Rank	Reason	Number of responses
1	Funding rates	26
2	Rising energy costs	22
3	Ofsted Requirements and Inspections	18
3	Staff Retention	18
	Staff Recruitment	18
4	Rising Food Costs	16
5	Business Rates	9
	Parental Demand	9

The most common concerns related to funding and increasing costs, followed by Ofsted requirements and early years recruitment.

Additional Comments

Early years providers were asked to share any other comments in relation to the childcare market in Reading with the following themed responses:

- Underfunded by the Government
- Impact of early years recruitment on sustainability of the sector
- Limited available childcare spaces for parents working full time
- Unpredictable rent increases
- Increase of childminders leaving the sector since the Covid pandemic
- Families experiencing rising costs which is impacting on their ability to pay for childcare
- Increased pressure on practitioners to meet the needs of children attending.

Wrap Around School Provision

The government's ambition is that by 2026, all parents and carers of primary school-aged children who need it will be able to access term time childcare in their local area from 8am-6pm. The childcare offer will be school centred with the majority offered on site. Schools and local authorities should also work with childminders and private, voluntary and independent providers to ensure greater flexibility and choice for parents.

All primary schools were asked to complete a survey to understand their existing wraparound childcare offer, 38 of 40 schools responded. Where the 2 schools did not respond data was accessed from the DfE to understand the full local supply.

Breakfast Clubs

- 87% of schools offer a breakfast club, 94% of these onsite, 6% offsite by an independent provider.
- 91% of schools offering a breakfast club reported that they were meeting parental demand.
- 13% of schools do not currently provide or signpost to a breakfast club.
- 7% of schools expressed an interest in expanding their provision.

Schools were asked to report any barriers to introducing and expanding breakfast club with the following results:

- 84% None
- 5% Transport
- 11% Lack of parental demand

After School Clubs

- 87% of schools offer an afterschool club, 91% of these onsite, 9% offsite by an independent provider
- 91% of schools offering an afterschool club reported that they were meeting parental demand
- 13% of schools do not currently provide or signpost to a breakfast club
- 5% of schools expressed an interest to expand.

Schools were asked to report any barriers to introducing and expanding afterschool club with the following results:

- 82% None
- 8% Lack of parental demand
- 2% recruitment and retention
- 8% physical spaces

Inclusion and SEND

In addition, schools were asked if there are any barriers to ensuring inclusivity and places for SEND children within wraparound provision, 73% reported 'no' and 27% 'yes'.

Where schools reported barriers to inclusivity the main themes included:

- Recruitment and retention
- Staff expertise and skills
- Transport arrangements
- Lack of funding
- Children unable to manage the session.

Schools were asked for general comments in relation to the wraparound childcare market in Reading and the main themes included:

- Cost to parent/carers as a barrier to uptake
- Uncertain how suitable long days are for the youngest children.
- Recruitment challenges
- Unpredictable demand.

Appendix 2 - Parent Survey

The opinions of parents and carers were sought regarding childcare provision in Reading between September and November 2023 via a Microsoft form questionnaire. The survey was completed by 664 respondents. The survey was publicised via childcare settings, the Family Information Service contacts and BFFC's Facebook social media pages.

Analysis of the responses suggests there was a good level of representation from the population, covering age range of children and social economic backgrounds. 60% of the respondents stated they had children under the age of five.

358 (94% of those surveyed in our parent questionnaire) stated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of their childcare provision.

Other responses are as follows; Access to childcare

- 418 (63%) said they had used informal or formal childcare in the last 12 months. The majority of children aged 0 to four years old were cared for within a Day

Nursery or Childminding setting. Children aged five to ten -year-olds were generally cared for by a Childminder, an Out of School Care provision or by a Family Member. Children over 10 years old stayed with friends or used after school activities.

- 185 (44%) of parents said they used between 15 to 30 hours of childcare a week, 30% said they used less than 15 hours and 25% said they used more than 30 hours.
- 347 (83%) parents/carers stated they were able to find the type of childcare they wanted in their local area. Parents who couldn't find the care they needed stated it was due to the cost, lack of available spaces or costs being too high.
- 60% of parents were satisfied with their childcare costs.
- Of the respondents to the survey who did not access childcare 191 did not access childcare as their children were cared for by themselves or their partner. 23 of respondents stated cost was a barrier.
- 319 (76%) parents/carers said they accessed childcare as it allowed them to work. 16% said it aided their child's development.
- 94% of parents/carers said they were satisfied with the quality of their childcare arrangements with 82% saying they found it easy to find in the local area. 83% of respondents said they were able to access all the childcare they needed.
- 84% of parents/carers stated they were able to access the out of school care they needed. 55% of users were satisfied with the cost of their wrap around school care.

Early Years Funded Childcare

- 104 parents questioned in our parent survey said they were or had accessed the Government offered targeted two-year-old funding. 177 were accessing the universal funding and 60 accessed the extended entitlement.
- A large proportion of those questioned were aware of the Governments funding offers.
- Of the parents who reported using any of the funding schemes, 53% claimed it during term- time only and 47% spread it across the year.
- Of those parents who used it term time 53% purchases additional hours or weeks.
- 35% of parents who purchased hours paid for an additional 6-10 hours each week. 32% paid for 1-5 additional hours and 33% paid for over 10 additional hours.
- 70% of parents accessing early years entitlement the offer encouraged them to purchase additional hours.

Extended 30 Hours Funding

- 90% of the 120 parents who claimed 30 hours funding did so at the same provider as their universal funding.
- 12% of parents do not access the full 30 hours of funding.

Childcare costs

- The majority of the open comments received as part of our parent survey were regarding the high cost of childcare and the impact this had on a family's finances.
- 24% of respondents stated that they had a combined household income of over £66,000.
- 32% of respondents said they paid for additional hours or weeks on top of their free childcare. The highest indication of the number of hours purchased was between 6-10 hours but this was very closely followed by over ten additional hours being purchased each week.
- 206 (49%) of the parents paying for childcare stated that roughly 0-25% of their income was spent on childcare. 72 (41%) stated that 26-50% of their income was spent on childcare.
- The most popular method of paying for childcare is using direct payment such as bank transfer (46%). Only 25% of parents stated they paid using Tax Free Childcare. 25% stated they used childcare vouchers for salary sacrifice.

Appendix 3 - Housing data

Planning Permissions (Hard Commitments) outstanding as at March 2023			
	2021	2022	2023
Abbey	2836	4038	2110
Battle	207	101	33
Caversham	73	74	51
Caversham Heights	28	249	26
Church	11	4	5
Coley	83	107	49
Emmer Green	1	4	240
Katesgrove	165	137	68
Kentwood	35	37	15
Norcot	125	120	226
Park	79	56	26
Redlands	52	26	17

Southcote	13	10	14
Thames	17	19	1463
Tilehurst	8	11	14
Whitley	1347	1359	1107
Total	5080	6352	5464

Appendix 4 - Eligibility Criteria for Funded Early Entitlement for two, three and four-year-old children

Two-Year-Old national criteria

Economic criteria:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credits or Working Tax Credits and they have a gross annual income (before tax) of no more than £16,190
- Working Tax Credit run-on, which is paid for 4 weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if you and your partner have a combined income from work of £15,400 or less per year after tax.

Non-economic criteria:

- the child has been in Local Authority care for 1 day or more
- the child has left Local Authority care under a special guardianship order, a child arrangement order or an adoption order
- the child has a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or an education, health and care plan (EHC)
- the child receives Disability Living Allowance

Non- UK citizen who cannot claim benefits

If immigration status says 'no recourse to public funds' applicant must live in England and household income must be no more than:

- £26,500 for families with one child
- £30,600 for families with two or more children
- No more than £16,000 in savings or investments.
- NRPf groups include, but may not be limited to, children of:

- Zambrano carers
- families who have no recourse to public funds with a right to remain in the UK on grounds of private and family life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights
- families receiving support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 who are also subject to a no recourse to public funds restriction
- those who have [claimed asylum](#) in the UK and are waiting for a decision (known as 'part 6')
- a subset of failed asylum seekers supported under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Chen carers
- families holding a [BN\(O\) passport](#)
- spousal visa holders
- work visa holders
- student visa holders
- those with no immigration status
- those with a UK Ancestry Visa
- those with temporary protection status under Section 12 of the Immigration and Nationality Act
- those with pre-settled status who do not meet the qualifying right to reside test

In Reading all eligible two-year-olds can access a funded early education place from the term after their second birthday. Each eligible child is entitled to up to 570 hours per year of funded early education from the term after their second birthday for a maximum of three terms.

30 hours extended entitlement

The following national criteria determine which children are eligible:

Both parents are working (or sole parent in a lone parent family) and over the next 3 months each parent/carer expects to earn:

- At least a weekly minimum salary equivalent to 16 hours at national minimum wage (for under 25-year-olds) or national living wage (if over 25 years old), and
- No more than £100,000 per year

Or

Both parents are employed but one or both parents is temporarily away from the workplace on parental, maternity, paternity or adoption leave or statutory sick pay.

Or

One parent is employed, and one parent is in receipt of either Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Carer's Allowance or contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance disabled or incapacitated based on receipt of specific benefits.

Immigration status

A parent will not be eligible if they are from outside the EEA and their UK residence card states they cannot access public funds.

However, their partner can apply instead if they're from:

- the UK or EEA
- outside the EEA and their UK residence card says they can access public funds