



Reading Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

Early Education and Childcare

Summary

Reading local authority is committed to providing high quality early years education in line with the Best start in life strategy. This report is produced in line with Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006, which places a duty on local authorities to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of families in their area. It also reflects duties under the Childcare Act 2016 and the Early Education and Childcare statutory guidance in relation to funded early education and childcare entitlements. The availability of childcare must be reviewed on an annual basis and the findings published.

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Introduction

What is a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment?

Local authorities in England must make sure there are enough childcare places for families. This includes Early Years Education and Primary Age Childcare.

The Childcare Act [2006](#) and the [Early Education and Childcare](#) statutory guidance sets out what local authorities must do:

- Secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably possible, 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 government funded early years provision for all 3- and 4-year-olds and eligible targeted 2- year-olds.
- Secure government funded early years provision for children from 9 months to school age where parents are eligible to the Working Entitlement.
- Provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents on childcare provision in their area.
- Provide information, advice and training to childcare providers.

The responsibility for market management and annual sufficiency reporting for Reading Borough Council is delegated to the Early Years and Childcare Team.

Who is the assessment for?

This assessment is to help parents and carers, childcare providers, business and community partners, and local authority teams understand childcare in the area.

- **Parents and carers** can use the assessment to understand the childcare choices available for their family.
- **Childcare providers** and businesses can look at the information to understand the local childcare market and use it to support decisions, such as expanding services.
- **Local authority teams** use the assessment to plan, coordinate and carry out their duties to manage the childcare market.

What does the assessment involve?

This report is based on childcare sufficiency data for Reading Borough Council (RBC), along with parent/carer and provider surveys collected during 2025–26. The numbers and findings



can change over time, so the report offers a snapshot of the childcare market when the information was gathered. The assessment provides a good indication of trends in demand, supply and uptake, also areas that may need further investigation and action to strengthen the childcare market.

It is recommended that this assessment is read together with information from the [Reading Family Information Service](#). They provide parents, carers and others with up to date childcare information and guidance.

How has the early years and childcare market changed nationally?

The government has committed to a major expansion of early years and childcare to improve accessibility for more families and outcomes for children including recent developments:

- The [Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy](#), which sets out plans to improve access to early education and recognises the early years (0–5) as a crucial stage in children’s development.
- Introduction of a [Childcare Lead role](#) in all local authorities to provide dedicated leadership and coordinate all types of school age childcare. This role will help secure sufficient, high-quality wraparound, breakfast and holiday provision, improving access and opportunities for families.
- Revised [statutory guidance](#) to require greater transparency for parents by ensuring providers clearly publish their charges and break down invoices so families can more easily understand the costs associated with funded and additional childcare hours.

These new commitments build on existing programmes already in rollout stages, including:

- [Early years entitlement funding expansion](#) which includes children from 9 months to school age where families meet working eligibility criteria.
- [Increased availability of wraparound childcare](#) with daily provision from 8am to 6pm for all primary age children.
- [Expansion of school based nurseries](#) to create or expand existing nursery provision in schools.
- [Free breakfast club trials](#) in selected schools to inform future learning and decisions.
- [Increased childcare support for parents receiving universal credit](#) to support with childcare costs and access to advance funds to remove barriers to starting work.
- Expansion of [Early Years Pupil Premium](#) to include extra support for eligible children from 9 months to 4 years.

There have been no wider changes to the existing targeted entitlement for 2-year-olds, the 30 hour entitlement and Universal entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds, other than updated



naming to provide greater clarity, and families can also continue to use [Tax Free Childcare](#) where the government contributes towards the cost of childcare.

How is early years and childcare expansion progressing in Reading?

The rollout of the new working entitlements is now fully complete in Reading. There is strong participation across all provider types, supported by consistent demand from parents and steady take up.

RBC received Department for Education (DfE) grant allocations to support the creation and expansion of early years and childcare places, increasing the overall availability of provision in the borough. In total, seven bidding rounds are complete for early years and wraparound expansion:

- The number of new **early years places** already operating, expanding, or due to open by September 2026 meets the DfE supply target for Reading.
- **Wraparound provision** is available in all mainstream primary schools, delivered either directly on site or by an independent off-site provider.

School based nursery expansion is currently being managed directly by the DfE, alongside the rollout of the Breakfast club programme. At this time, the local authority's role is to provide support and guidance throughout the process and to highlight any potential risks, strengths and opportunities.

- One round of **school-based nursery expansion** is complete with a final decision expected by the DfE Spring 2026.
- Two Reading primary schools are also participating in the **Breakfast Club pilot** with a further five identified.



Headlines

- National changes to early years and childcare are driving local expansion, giving families better access to childcare.
- Reading benefits from a diverse and high-quality early years and childcare provider base, with Ofsted outcomes exceeding national averages.
- A strong indication of sufficient early years and childcare places across the borough overall.
- Reading has successfully rolled out funded childcare for working parents, with strong provider involvement and steady growth in take up.
- Targeted capital funding and provider led expansion are increasing early years places, with more growth expected by September 2026.
- School based nursery expansion is helping to increase capacity and widen access to high quality early years provision.
- Childcare availability is strongest for three and four-year-olds, more balanced for two-year-olds, and under increasing pressure for children under two.
- Expanded entitlements have improved access for many families, but those eligible for fewer funded hours may be disadvantaged.
- The early years childcare market remains fragile, with staffing shortages, provider closures and limited physical space affecting capacity opportunities.
- Wraparound childcare is now available at all mainstream primary schools, with growing use and most demand being met.
- The Holiday Activities and Food programme continues to support children's wellbeing and reduce inequalities, with funding secured until 2029.
- Changes in demand, falling birth rates and housing growth in some areas will continue to shape future childcare needs.

Reading Profile

[Reading](#) is a major retail and leisure destination, with many international companies based locally. The town has good transport links and is home to the University of Reading and Reading College, with a large percentage of the local working population highly skilled. Reading demonstrates success and wealth, however, also contains areas which are amongst some of the most deprived in the country.

Population

The census takes place every 10 years and provides a picture of all the people and households in England and Wales. The [Office of National Statistics](#) report mid-year population estimates for 2024 which show Readings' population was 182,907.

Berkshire Observatory [population estimates](#) indicate the number of children by age group as follows:

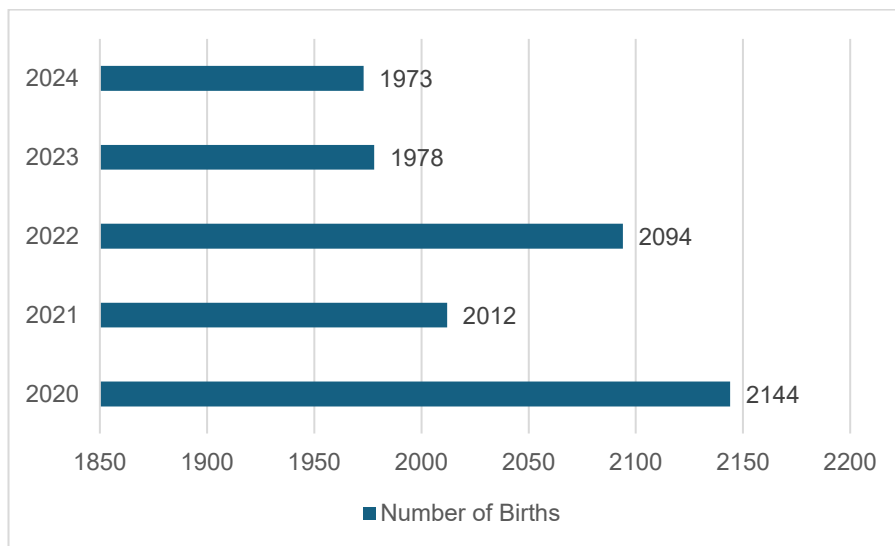


- Under 4 years: 9,714
- 5-9 years: 10,347
- 10-14 years: 10,213
- 15-19 years: 12,362

By 2030 the number of children residing in Reading is predicted to significantly decrease.

Table 1 sets out the number of live births recorded each year in Reading. The number of children born in 2023 and 2024 has remained stable, but births are still 8% lower than in 2020

Table1: Number of live births recorded in Reading

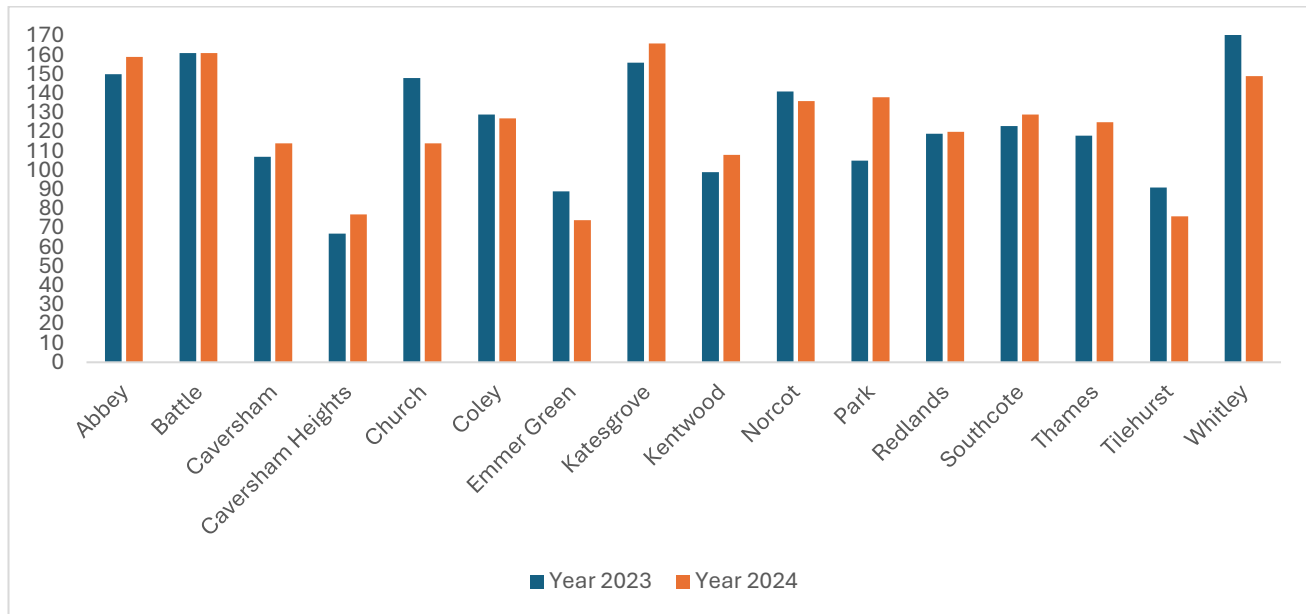


Reading reflects the **ONS** reported decline in live births in England and Wales in 2024, a reduction of almost 2.5% when compared with 2022. The decline in children under 4 years residing in Reading and the reducing birth rate may impact the demand for early years childcare locally over time and will require monitoring.

Table 2 shows actual Reading birth data by ward for the years 2023 and 2024. The birth rate has remained consistent overall across the town after the decline in population seen between 2022 and 2023. Wards such as Church, Emmer Green, Tilehurst and Whitley have seen a decrease in the number of children born between 2023 and 2024, Park has seen a significant increase.



Table 2: Live Births by Ward



Housing

Reading has a high demand for housing, resulting in higher than national average prices increasingly inaccessible to those on low incomes, due to the shortage of affordable housing. [Reading Borough Local Plan](#) details planning policies for development in Reading up to 2036 and is the main consideration in determining planning applications.

The [Residential Commitments Summary 2024-25](#) reviews housing commitments in the Borough as of March 2025. It assesses changes in the number of dwellings based on the planning process. This year's figures show continued strong levels of housing delivery, with 890 net completions, exceeding the Local Plan target of 689. The main focus of completions, new construction, and new permissions is the town centre, with South Reading acting as a secondary focus.

Thames, Abbey, and Whitley wards are currently experiencing new housing development at a much higher rate than other wards which may increase demand for early years provision. Additionally, Abbey and Thames wards experienced an increase in birth rates in 2024, which may further elevate demand. Expansions within these wards since 2023 have helped bolster early years provision, however the recent closure of a day nursery in the town centre has impacted the supply of early years places in this specific area, which will require ongoing monitoring.



Early Years Provision

Early years provision plays a vital role in giving children the best possible start in life, and although is not statutory, widely encouraged by early years services, health, schools, family hubs and children’s social care.

From September 2025, many eligible working households were entitled to 30 funded hours of early education and childcare, term time only, for children from nine months of age up to four years old. The existing 15 hours of universal funding for all 3 and 4-year-olds, as well as Funded Early Learning for two-year-olds, remained unchanged. Some parents may choose to purchase additional private hours to supplement the funded entitlement, while others may pay the full amount privately if they are not eligible for funded hours.

Some families will not qualify for the Working entitlement, including those in single earner households, families where a parent is unable to work, or parents who do not meet the minimum earnings threshold. Their children may be disadvantaged, as families who are not eligible must pay weekly childcare costs to access the same level of early education as their peers. High earning families who exceed the £100,000 income cap are also ineligible but are generally expected to be more able to self-fund private provision, lessening the impact on their access to childcare.

Provider Type

It is important that families have a choice of provider types so they can select provision that best meets the needs of their child, alongside their employment and personal commitments. Reading continues to maintain a consistent and diverse range of early years provider types, including day nurseries, childminders, pre-schools, and maintained and independent nursery schools and classes, as shown in [table 3](#) and [appendix 3](#).

Table 3: Type of Provision

	Jan-22	Jan-23	Jan-24	Jan-25	Jan-26	5 year movement
Pre-School	17 ↓	16 ↓	12 ↓	11 ↓	10 ↓	-7
Full Day Care	32 →	30 ↓	33 ↑	36 ↑	35 ↓	3
Independent Nursery	6 →	6 →	6 →	6 →	6 →	0
Childminder (EY funding provider)	34 ↑	41 ↑	41 ↑	68 ↑	68 →	34
Maintained Nursery School	5 →	5 →	5 →	5 →	5 →	0
Maintained Nursery Class	22 →	22 →	22 →	22 →	22 →	0
Total	116	120	119	148	146	



Market Stability, Expansion and Inclusion

In Reading, the number of early years places is projected to increase **9%** by September 2026, supported by Capital funding and self-funded expansion projects, following the target set by the DfE in 2024. However, there is notable fragility in the early years market this year. The sector experienced the closure of two day nurseries resulting in the loss of 110 early years places, with the town centre being the most significantly impacted. Offsetting this, two new day care providers opened in and near to the town centre, creating 169 additional places and helping to stabilise local capacity.

Other developments have included a nursery class and nursery school lowering the age range to include two-year-olds which has helped secure additional places for children eligible for Funded Early Learning. A Primary school will introduce a new nursery class in September 2026. Additionally, interest in school-based nursery expansion continues to grow with the DfE committing additional capital funding for 2027-30 for local authority led projects.

Two daycare providers are due to open this summer, offering 134 new places for children under 5 years. However, a pending pre-school closure will result in the loss of 30 places, for 3–4 year-olds which highlights the need for continued careful market oversight.

The introduction of new childminding models is beginning to expand local availability, offering a flexible source of additional places for families with early years children through to primary age.

In contrast to the [national](#) downward trend the childminding workforce in Reading has remained stable. This stability can be attributed to favourable hourly funding rates, targeted recruitment campaigns and support offered through Reading's [Childminder Partnership](#), which helps childminders meet statutory requirements and operate sustainable, high-quality businesses.

The Reading Local Area [Ordinarily Available Provision & Graduated Response](#) outlines the support that should be in place for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) across early years and school settings. Work to promote inclusion is embedded across all provider types and is supported through intensive advisory input, targeted training, networking opportunities, a local inclusion award, and access to inclusion funding to help settings meet the needs of individual children.

Reading Borough Council continues to review the level and type of early years specialist provision required to meet the needs of children with SEND. In Reading there are currently [four specialist early years settings](#), and the ongoing assessment of demand alongside a strategic focus on expansion remains a priority to ensure that all families can access appropriate and high-quality provision.



Overall, while expansion activity is encouraging, the market remains delicate, with ongoing fluctuations in capacity and provider sustainability. Continued strategic planning and close monitoring are essential to maintain stability, anticipate emerging risks, and ensure there are sufficient, high quality early years places for all families.

Provider Geography

Overall, Reading has a strong balance of childcare provision across provider types in each ward, as outlined in [Table 4](#).

Table 4: Early Years Provider by Ward

WARD	EY Funded Childminder	Day Nursery	EY Funded Independent School	Pre School	Maintained Nursery Class	Maintained Nursery School	Total
Abbey	2	4			1		7
Battle	5	4	1		1		11
Caversham	5	3	1		1	2	12
Caversham Heights	4	1		1			6
Church	2	1			2	1	6
Coley	4	2			2		8
Emmer Green	9	3		2			14
Katesgrove	1	2			2		5
Kentwood	5	2		1		1	9
Norcot	7	1			2		10
Park	4	3		1	2		10
Redlands	2	3	4		1		10
Southcote	3	2		2	1		8
Thames	2	2		1	2		7
Tilehurst	8	1		2	3	1	15
Whitley	5	2			2		9
Total	<u>68</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>147</u>



Analysis of early years funding take-up in summer 2025 showed that only 35% of children under two attended a provider within the ward in which they lived. It is also notable that 22% of all under two funded places claimed in Reading were taken up by children living outside the borough, highlighting Reading's role as a provider of early years places for neighbouring authorities.

To gain a clearer understanding of overall demand and cross boundary movement, it will be important to establish how many Reading resident children are funded out of borough through engagement with neighbouring local authorities. This insight will support more accurate sufficiency planning and help ensure that childcare provision continues to meet the needs of all local families. It highlights the importance of adopting a Reading wide view of sufficiency, rather than relying solely on ward level capacity.

Places

The projected volume of new early years places aligns with the DfE's supply target for Reading. Overall provision is estimated to increase 9% by September 2026, based on progress against the target set in 2024.

Childcare capacity for early years children typically fluctuates throughout the year, with places coming under pressure during the summer term, ahead of children transitioning into reception in September. However, Reading is currently in a strong position to meet projected growth in demand, supported by existing vacancies across the town and additional supply planned.

Vacancy levels reported to FIS in February 2026 show a 30% decline compared to February 2025. Given the significant increase in parents newly eligible for the working parent entitlement from September 2026, this reduction in vacancies is expected and reassuring that further supply growth is underway.

Provider survey findings (2025) show that most Early Years group providers and childminders are meeting demand across all age groups and funded entitlements. However, there has been a change in childcare accessibility this year. The greatest availability is now for three- and four-year-olds, while demand has increased for younger children. This is the reverse of the pattern seen last year.

- Under 2's: more children are on waiting lists than there are current or expected vacancies reported, showing a new pressure on space and capacity.
- 2-year-olds: this pressure is lower, although providers report that supply and demand are not fully balanced.
- 3 and 4-year-olds: providers report more vacancies than children waiting, indicating surplus capacity.

With consistent vacancies across the town this may be an indication that families are waiting for a preferred provider rather than taking up an available place. Additionally, there is not a central admissions process for early years, therefore children may be registered on more than one waiting list.



Providers report that the demand for Funded Early Learning for 2-year-olds has remained stable across provider types, which is encouraging. Ongoing monitoring remains important to ensure equitable access, particularly where children eligible for working parent entitlements or accessing privately funded childcare may enter provision at a younger age.

Many providers continue to report barriers to meeting demand. For group-based providers, this is most frequently staff recruitment, followed by limitations in physical space. Childminders highlight that Ofsted ratio requirements, which support the safety and quality of provision, limit the number of children they can care for at any one time.

Parental demand for funded hours varies significantly across Reading. Families may opt for a term time model, taking between 15 and 30 funded hours per week (or fewer). Others choose to stretch the entitlement across the full year, typically taking 10 to 22 hours per week, depending on individual childcare needs and the arrangement of providers. In addition, some parents may access private hours which could range between 1-55 hours a week, depending on personal circumstances and working patterns. This diversity in how hours are used creates challenges in assessing sufficiency for families.

The Parent and Carer Survey (2025) highlighted that 86% of families were able to secure all the childcare they needed. However, many noted that they had to apply far in advance due to long waiting lists. Some commented that more flexible hours should be available to better meet families' needs and highlighted that purchasing additional wraparound hours to cover full-time care can be expensive.

Despite these variations, analysis indicates that Reading maintains a generally well-balanced supply of early years places with most wards exceeding predicted demand. [Table 5](#) shows that Redlands, Caversham and Tilehurst are in the strongest position when considering estimated children born in the area and supply. Caversham Heights, Norcot and Katesgrove may have some weaknesses in alignment between estimated demand and supply and require continued monitoring. However, strong supply of provision in Caversham also supports families residing in The Heights area, demonstrating the importance of adopting a cluster-based approach when planning expansion.

Table 5: Early Years Place Capacity Autumn 2026

(1 represents the highest likelihood of meeting demand)

Ward	Highest to lowest
Redlands	1
Caversham	2
Tilehurst	3



Park	4
Kentwood	5
Southcote	6
Emmer Green	7
Abbey	8
Church	9
Whitley	10
Thames	11
Coley	12
Battle	13
Katesgrove	14
Norcot	15
Caversham Heights	16

Early Years Entitlement

Parents of young children are entitled to a wide range of information, advice, and support about early education and childcare. Local authorities have a legal duty to ensure this information is accessible.

In Reading, the [Family Information Service \(FIS\)](#) provides comprehensive, impartial, and statutory support to help parents find, choose, and fund childcare that meets their family's needs. Parents can also access guidance on childcare options and financial support via the [Best Start in Life](#) website.

Working Entitlement: 9 months to 23 months

From September 2025, [eligible](#) working parents of children over the age of 9 months old were able to access up to 30 hours of early years funding for 38 weeks of the year (570 hours annually). This entitlement can be stretched across the year by claiming less than 30 hours a week.

[Table 6](#) shows a significant take up of the entitlement, with some pre-schools adapting provision to accommodate younger children. When take-up is compared with Reading live



birth data, approximately 31% of children aged between 9 months and 23 months accessed their working parent entitlement funding in the spring term 2026

Table 6: Funding take-up 9 months to 23 months

	Spring 2025	Spring 2026
Number of children accessing a place	591	647
Childminder	16%	16%
Pre-School	-	1%
Day Nursery	84%	83%

The majority of the new entitlement is being accessed through day nursery provision, alongside a notable contribution from childminders.

Working Entitlement: 2 Year Olds

From September 2025, eligible working parents of 2-year-old children were able to access up to 30 hours of early years funding for 38 weeks of the year (equivalent of 1,140 hours annually) from the term after their child’s second birthday. This entitlement can be stretched across the year by claiming fewer than 30 hours per week.

[Table 7](#) shows that there has already been strong uptake of the entitlement, with many families increasing their hours and moving from existing self-funded arrangements to government funded places. When compared with Reading live birth data for 2023, approximately 35% of 2-year-old children accessed their working parent entitlement in Reading based provision spring term 2026.

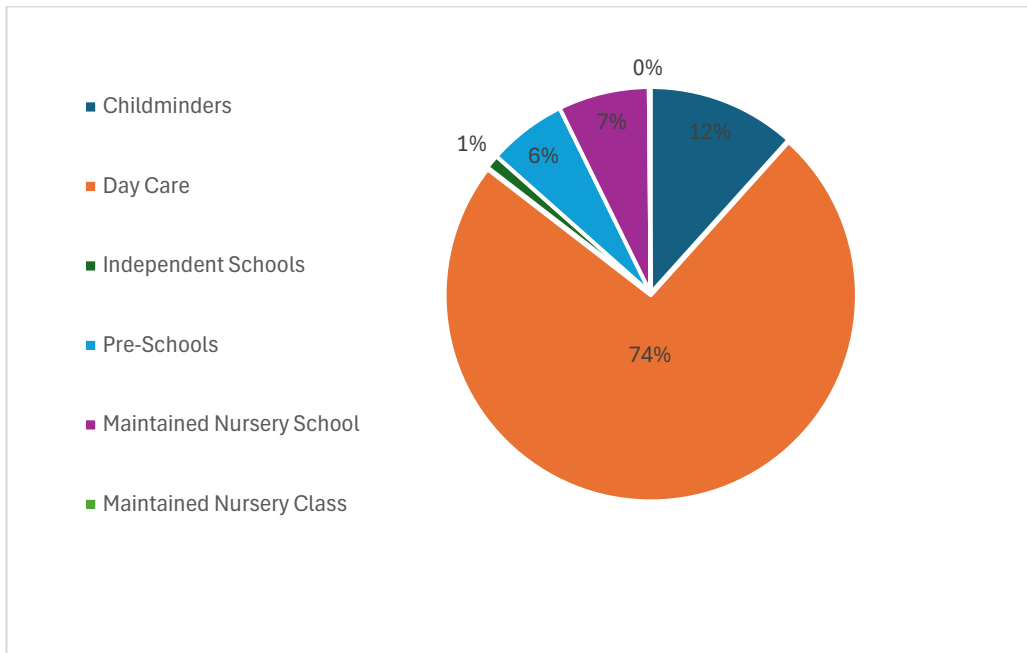
Table 7: Funding take up for 2-year-old working entitlement

Working Parent Entitlement 2 Year Old Funding		
	Autumn 2024	Autumn 2025
Number of children accessing a place	679	729

Most of the new entitlement is currently being taken up in day nurseries. The full distribution of provision types is set out in [table 8](#). Childminders continue to make a strong contribution, alongside growing provision for 2-year-olds within school based settings.



Table 8: Distribution of take up of 2-year-old working entitlement



Funded Early Learning (FEL2): 2 Year Olds

The government targets funding for early education places for children who are considered disadvantaged, enabling them to access early education from the term after their second birthday. **Eligible** FEL2 children can take up a funded early years place of 15 hours per week for 38 weeks (term time only), or the equivalent of 570 hours if the entitlement is stretched across the year.

Evidence shows that disadvantaged families are, on average, less likely to use formal childcare. The two-year-old funding entitlement is therefore designed to remove barriers to access and support eligible families to benefit from high quality early years education and childcare at a critical stage of children's development.

Table 9 sets out the distribution of targeted two-year-old funding across provider types, with full day care providers currently offering the largest proportion of places. The number of children accessing provision in maintained nursery schools increased by 6% compared to Autumn 2024. Pre-schools also make a notable contribution to the overall take-up of funding.



Table 9: Funded Early Learning for 2 Year Olds by Provider Type

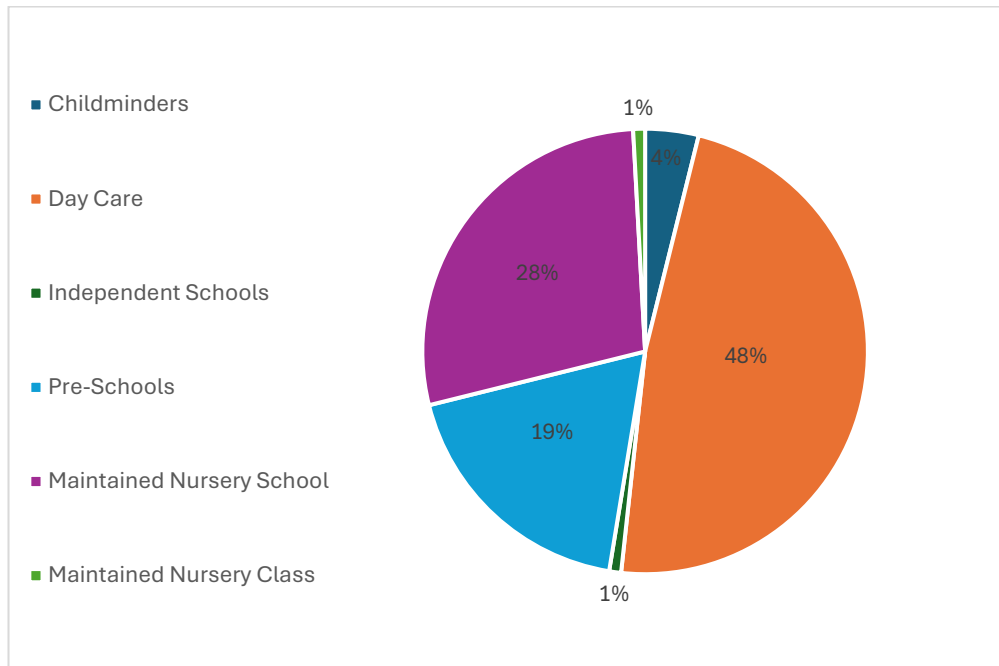


Table 10 shows how take-up of FEL2 is calculated as a percentage, using the estimated number of eligible children provided by the Government’s Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The data relates only to children who reside in Reading; however, families may choose to access early years provision in any local authority area.

Table 10: Funded Early Learning for 2 Year Olds

FEL2 Take Up					
Autumn Term	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
% of cohort	74%	73%	65%	61%	62%

The percentage of eligible children taking up the targeted entitlement has declined since 2021, although there were early signs of improvement towards the end of last year. The reasons for this trend are not fully known however, several contributing factors are likely to have influenced take-up:

- A decline in birth rates, reducing the overall eligible population.
- Eligibility thresholds have not increased in line with inflation, meaning fewer families now qualify.



- Since 2024, some eligible children have accessed funded early education from 9 months, which may have created pressures on local capacity and affected availability for targeted two-year-old places.

A range of actions have been introduced in Reading to reduce barriers to access and support improved uptake of the targeted entitlement, including:

- A strong focus on increasing the supply of provision for 2-year-olds across Reading.
- Working closely with providers to ensure places for targeted children are offered with no additional mandatory costs to parents, minimising financial barriers.
- Promoting additional funding entitlements, including Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) and the combined deprivation supplement, to support children's learning and development.
- Delivery of "Time for Twos" sessions through Children's Centres to support families with applications and transition to provision.
- Targeted emails, letters, and postcards are sent to families who may be eligible to encourage engagement.
- Proactive outreach calls to targeted families.
- Delivery of professional webinars to increase awareness of the entitlement and strengthen referral pathways.
- Manual eligibility checks for families applying for Working parent entitlements to identify dual eligibility.
- Introduction of a professionals' referral form to reduce any administrative barriers for families.
- Implementation of an Early Years Enrichment Project, providing additional funding to improve access, engagement, and outcomes in preschool settings. This resulted in an increase from 54 to 87 children attending, representing a 61% increase in take-up against initial predicted figures (2025-26).

From Summer Term 2026, further actions will be implemented to continue improving access to early education and increase the take-up of entitlements. This will include the Early Years and Childcare team having a visible presence in Reading's Best Start Family Hubs to support families to understand their eligibility and complete applications, alongside increased engagement through local events.

When comparing the number of children potentially eligible for the targeted entitlement with actual take-up, participation is lowest in Central Reading (46%) and highest in the East (80%) in Spring 2026. This will require ongoing monitoring, as it may indicate insufficient local supply and help identify where future expansion could be targeted.

Access to early education for targeted two-year-olds will continue to be closely monitored to ensure this group is not disadvantaged by the rollout of expanded entitlements. The service will also actively engage with the Department for Education's increased focus on local authority targets.



Universal Funding: 3- & 4-Year Olds

All 3 and 4-year-old children in England are entitled to 570 hours of funded childcare per year from the term after their third birthday. This is typically taken as 15 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year and is known as the Universal Entitlement. Providers may also offer this entitlement as a stretched offer across the full year. The entitlement continues until the child reaches statutory school age.

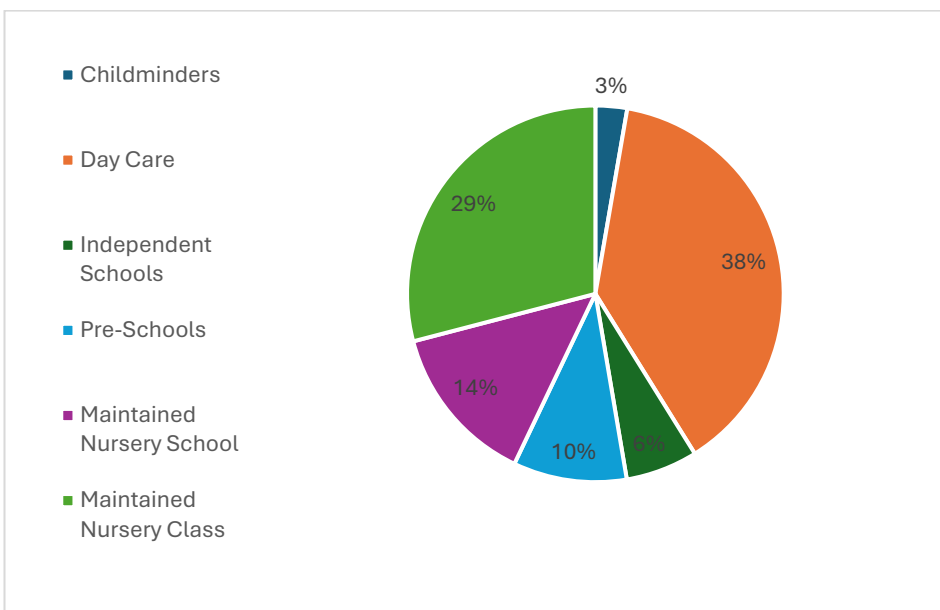
[Table 11](#) sets out the take-up of universal provision for 3- and 4-year-olds in the autumn term between 2021 and 2025. The decrease in take-up recorded in 2024 is likely attributable to lower birth rates in 2021, with evidence of recovery 2025.

Table 11: Take up of Universal Funding

3 & 4 Year Old Take Up					
Autumn Term	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Take-Up	1986	2013	2060	1869	2020

Take up of Universal funding is balanced across the sector and reflective of registered places as shown in [table 12](#).

Table 12: Take up of universal entitlement by provider type



This group must also be closely monitored to ensure they are not disadvantaged by increased demand from children who become eligible for a higher number of funded hours



from a younger age. However, it is positive that the Universal entitlement is currently offered by 100% of providers, with consistent vacancies reported.

Working Entitlement: 3 & 4 Year Olds

The Government offers eligible working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds up to 30 hours of funded childcare per week for 38 weeks of the year (equivalent to 1,140 hours annually). This entitlement can be stretched across the year by claiming fewer than 30 hours per week.

[Table 13](#) shows that take-up of the 30-hour entitlement remains strong overall, although a slight decrease was observed in Autumn Term 2024. This reduction was consistent with the lower number of children accessing the universal entitlement for 3 and 4-year-olds at that time and is likely linked to the lower birth rate in 2021. This has been followed by an increase in take up Autumn 2025. Currently, 41% of 3- and 4-year-olds accessing Universal funding also take up the Working entitlement, representing a 2% increase on the previous year. This may indicate an emerging trend, reflecting earlier access to Working entitlements and increased engagement among working families.

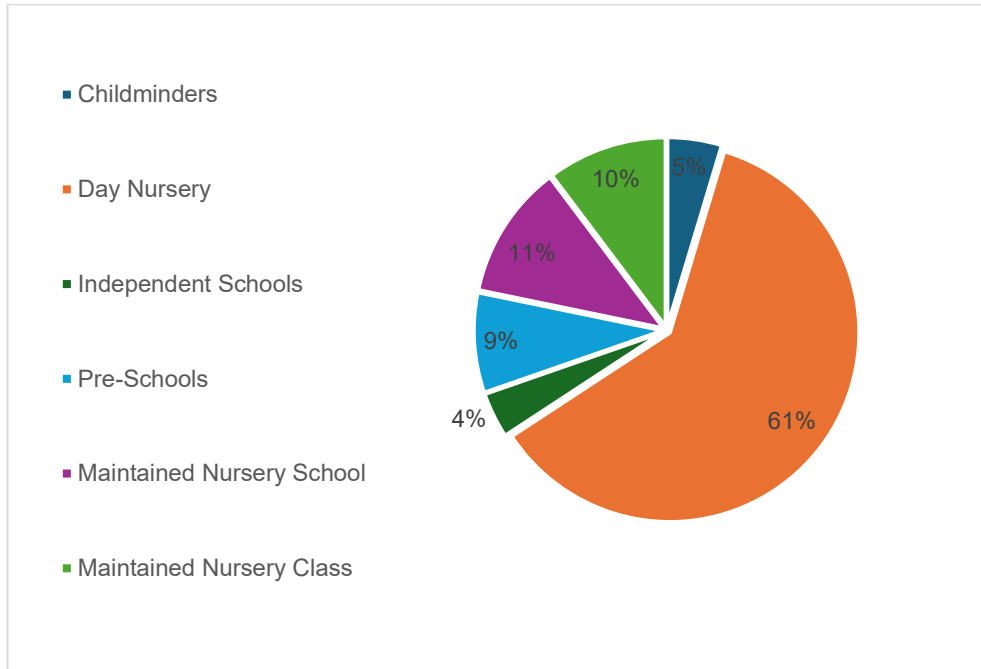
Table 13: Working entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds

3 & 4 Year Old Take Up					
Autumn Term	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Take-Up	699	683	772	733	818

Day Nurseries continue to represent the largest group offering the Working entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds as shown in [table 14](#). In Autumn 2025, they accounted for an 8% higher share of children accessing the extended entitlement compared with the previous year. This is likely to be linked with the offer of longer hours and all year opening favoured by many working families.



Table 14: 3- & 4-Year-Old Working Entitlement by Provider Type

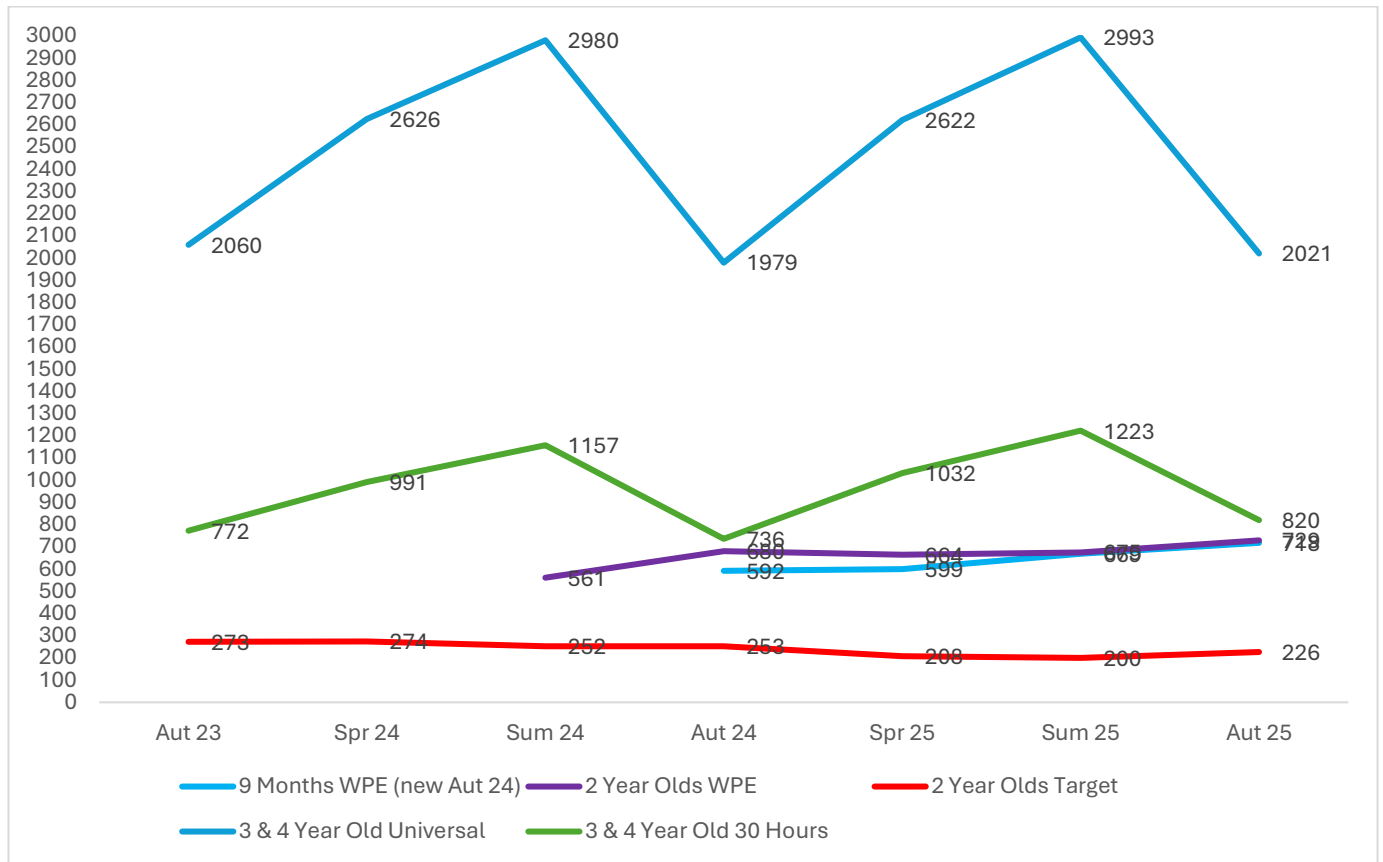


Attendance Overview

Table 15 provides an overview of the number of children accessing early years entitlements since Autumn 2023. The number of children accessing the Universal entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds and targeted Funded early learning for 2-year-olds has declined over the past two years, this is likely to reflect a reduction in the overall early years population in Reading, alongside lower birth rates. Uptake of working parent entitlements for children aged 9 months to school age continues to increase steadily, which indicates a rise in the number of working families. This trend will require ongoing monitoring to ensure that children eligible for fewer funded hours and those entering provision at a later age are not disadvantaged.



Table 15: EY attendance by scheme and term



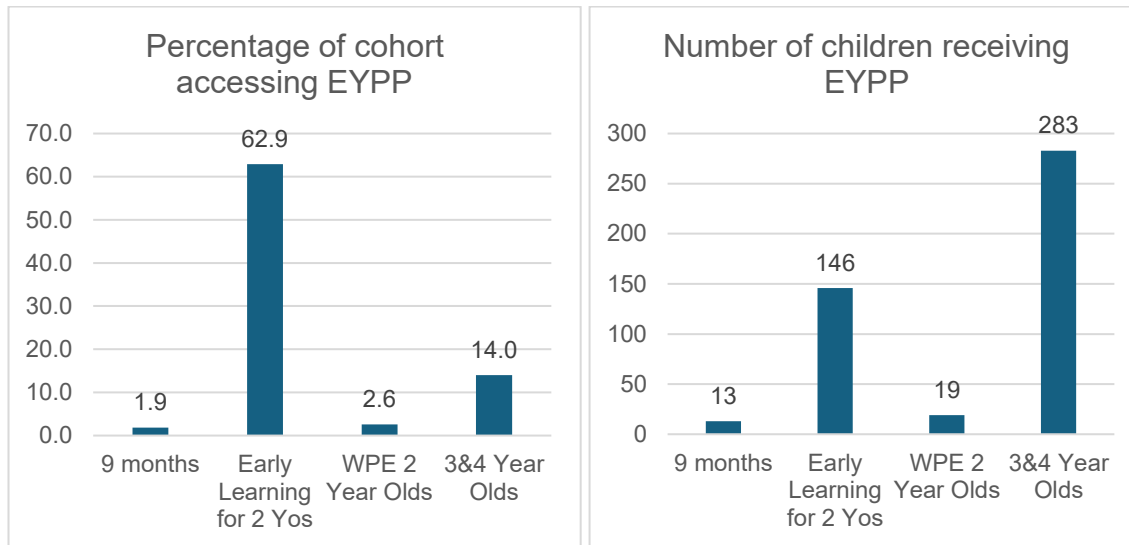
Early Years Pupil Premium

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) is additional funding paid directly to early years settings to help enhance the education they provide for eligible children to deliver interventions that improve outcomes for disadvantaged children. In April 2024, eligibility was expanded to include children aged 0–2 years. EYPP funding can supplement the first 15 hours of early education taken up for children that meet the criteria. In Reading EYPP is combined with a deprivation supplement and settings can claim up to an additional £1,225.50 annually per eligible child from April 2026.

In Autumn 2025 a total of 461 children were funded for EYPP as set out in [table 16](#). The highest proportion of claimants were children accessing the targeted two-year-old entitlement, with 63% of this group eligible, likely reflecting the close alignment of entitlement criteria.



Table 16: EYPP take up



Disability Access Fund

The [Disability Access Fund \(DAF\)](#) was introduced by the Government in April 2017 to support 3 and 4-year-old children in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to access their early years entitlement. In April 2024, eligibility was expanded to include children aged 0–2 years.

To date, 47 children have been awarded DAF in the 2025/26 financial year. Of these, 11 children were aged two and one child was under the age of two. As DAF eligibility requires evidence that a child is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, uptake among younger age groups is likely to be influenced by DLA application and decision timeframes.

From April 2026, each eligible DAF claim gives providers an additional annual payment of £975.

Early Years Childcare Costs

The [Coram Childcare Survey 2026](#) provides a national analysis of childcare costs, availability, and affordability across England, Scotland, and Wales, examining long-term trends and the impact of expanded funded childcare entitlements on families' access to early years provision.

The most recent report highlights that childcare costs vary significantly depending on families' access to early years entitlements. [Table 17](#) sourced from Coram shows that there are significant cost savings for working families with children aged two years and under in 2026. However, there is a risk that parents who choose for their child to benefit from early



education could be priced out if they do not meet the eligibility criteria for the Working parent entitlement.

Table 17: Cost Change 2025

Coram sets out cost changes since 2025 for 50 hours nursery for children under 5 years in England, **including the 30 hour Working entitlement** for all age groups:

	Children under two			Children age two			Children age three & four		
	2026	2025	Price change	2026	2025	Price change	2026	2025	Price change
England	£148.82	£238.95	-38.90%	£140.72	£225.72	-38.60%	£132.72	£126.94	5.90%

For children in England who are not eligible for the Working entitlement, Coram reports that families pay an average of £188.75 per week for 25 hours in a nursery and £155.28 per week for 25 hours with a childminder. While direct cost comparisons with Reading are not possible due to variations in provider hours and delivery models, indicative estimates suggest that costs are broadly in line with these national averages as set out in [table 18](#).

Table 18: Average Costs of Childcare in Reading by Provider Costs

(Reported by Reading Providers Jan 2026)

Type	Per Hour	Per Session (approx. 3-5 hours)	Per Day (approx. 6-10 hours)
Childminder	£6.00	£31.05	£65.00
Day Nursery	£10.00	£43.58	£75.04
Pre-School	£8.20	£19.51	-

In Reading, government funded rates for early years providers continue to increase at the start of each financial year. From April 2026, funding rates will be £6.88 for 3 and 4-year-olds, £9.68 for 2-year-olds, and £13.58 for children under two. The funding rate for 3 and 4-year-olds remains below the average hourly childcare rate charged by day care providers in Reading, while the hourly funding rate for children under two is higher than the average rates reported by providers locally.

In April 2025 and 2026 new [statutory guidance](#) was introduced to improve transparency in childcare costs and prevent hidden fees. Providers are required to clearly itemise charges for funded and private hours, consumables, food, and activities, and to publish charges relating to funded hours via their website or the local authority Family Information Service.



Providers should ensure that children are able to access their funded early years entitlement without being required to pay for mandatory extras.

Childcare Vouchers and [Tax Free Childcare \(TFC\)](#) are schemes designed to financially support working parents through tax savings and government topped up childcare contributions. Survey (2025) findings show high provider participation in Reading, with 98% of early years group settings and 83% of early years childminders registered to accept Tax-free Childcare.

Early Years Inspection Outcome

Early Years group settings and childminders are inspected and regulated by Ofsted, which reports directly to Parliament, parents, carers, and commissioners. In 2025, providers that received a full Early Years Register (EYR) inspection by Ofsted showed strong outcomes nationally, with 98% judged to be good or outstanding. This reflects the national average performance across nurseries, pre-schools, and childminders.

Performance in Reading exceeded this national average. In September 2025, 99% of published Ofsted inspection reports for EY group providers and childminders in Reading were graded as good or outstanding, demonstrating consistent high-quality early years provision across the borough.

Ofsted inspection reforms, which took effect from November 2025, have changed how early years settings are evaluated and how parents access information about childcare quality. The previous single-word overall judgement has been replaced by a more detailed inspection report card, which rates providers across six key areas using a five-point scale. Safeguarding is assessed separately and is clearly identified as either 'met' or 'not met'.

For providers, this new approach is intended to offer a more nuanced view of strengths and areas for development. For parents and carers, the revised inspection format aims to make outcomes clearer and more accessible, supporting informed decision-making based on both the quality and safety of provision.

Early Years Workforce

A stable early years workforce is central to delivering quality, inclusive provision and maintaining sufficient childcare places, as recognised in the Best Start in Life Strategy. While recruitment and retention challenges remain [nationally](#), there are positive signs of improving workforce stability in Reading.

A Provider Survey (2025) showed that 46% of providers were currently recruiting, with 85% reporting recruitment as challenging. Recruitment remains a priority, however there has



been a consistent reduction in the number of providers actively recruiting over recent years, suggesting an increase in workforce stability. Leadership retention has also improved, with 82% of EY group setting leaders, 73% of EY school leaders, and 93% of childminders remaining in post for two years or more, an indication of growing continuity.

Recruitment pressures continue to affect place capacity for children, with 17% of settings reporting reduced spaces due to vacancies. This is an improvement from 77% in 2022, 57% in 2023, and 34% in 2024.

Providers report adapting recruitment approaches, with a focus on apprenticeship pathways, offers of professional development, competitive pay, and positive Ofsted outcomes as key attraction and retention factors.

The EY and Childcare team continues to lead local workforce promotion through the “Choose a Childcare Career” campaign, with an online hub, social media presence, and communications to highlight local opportunities. Partnerships, particularly with Jobcentre Plus, have expanded to connect candidates with providers, alongside participation in recruitment events and delivery of a practitioner marketplace to support professional development. Through access to training, networks, and resources, the team continues to work with the sector to build a more resilient and skilled workforce. This local activity aligns with the Department for Education’s “Do Something Big” national campaign, which promotes early years careers and directs jobseekers to a national childcare jobs platform.

While workforce challenges persist, the evidence points to improving stability and resilience across Reading’s early years sector. Strengthening leadership retention, reducing recruitment pressures, and increasing workforce capacity are contributing to improvements in the availability of provision. Continued collaboration between providers, the EY and Childcare team, and national partners will be essential to building on this progress.

School Age Childcare

In 2023 the government announced a plan to ensure that by 2026 all parents and carers of primary school aged children who need it can access term time wraparound childcare from 8am to 6pm in their local area. The aim to support parents into work and improve labour market participation through a school centred childcare offer delivered in partnership with childminders and independent providers, giving families flexibility and choice. To support this, the Department for Education provided capital and programme funding to local authorities to pass on to providers, enabling expansion and the development of sustainable wraparound childcare models.



Wraparound Providers

In Reading, wraparound childcare is delivered through a range of mixed models, including provision run directly by schools on site, services outsourced by schools to private childcare providers on site, and provision delivered off site by private providers in group settings and by childminders.

Currently, every mainstream school in Reading has access to wraparound childcare, either on the school site or through an alternative provider. As of March 2026, 93% of schools offer an onsite breakfast club and 88% provide an onsite afterschool club, with the remaining provision delivered through outsourced arrangements. The majority meet the Department for Education’s full operating hours, although a small number of providers offer reduced hours where they have assessed as financially sustainable based on local demand.

Table 19 demonstrates the significant contribution that off-site provision delivered by childminders and private providers makes to the wraparound childcare offer in Reading, supporting schools to ensure sufficient and flexible provision for families.

Table 19: Provision of Wraparound Childcare in Reading

Provider Type	No. On School site	No. Off School site
School led provision	21	0
PVI led provision	19	4
Childminders (WAC, childcare register)	0	28
Total WAC provision in Reading = 72		

Through a combination of DfE funded expansion projects and self-funded provider models, Reading has seen a substantial increase in the volume of available wraparound childcare places. Total full day wraparound places rose 53% between March 2024 and March 2026. The majority of these places directly attributed to growth delivered through DfE wraparound expansion funding to respond to identified local demand.

Expansion of provision has helped meet family needs, with 84% of parents surveyed in 2025 reporting that current wraparound childcare availability meets their requirements. A significant proportion of parents surveyed (45%) accessed wraparound services for the first time this year, suggesting changing patterns of demand, likely influenced by increased availability and children accessing 30 hours of childcare, which can create greater childcare needs when they transition into school. Despite this, cost and limited flexibility to accommodate changing work patterns remain barriers for some families. In 2025, all providers reported meeting demand for before school provision, and almost all met demand for afterschool care, where demand continues to be higher.



Breakfast Clubs

In 2024, the government announced a commitment to offering a free breakfast club in every state funded primary school in England. The initiative aims to expand opportunity, mitigate the impacts of child poverty, and ensure children have a positive and supportive start to the school day.

Two Reading primary schools are currently participating as early adopter sites, providing valuable insight and data to inform the future national rollout. The programme has since expanded to reach 1,250 schools nationally. This expansion includes a small number of additional Reading schools that are being supported to secure access to this opportunity, including additional government funding to support successful implementation in a way that works effectively for their individual school communities.

Holiday Provision

There was fluctuation in holiday childcare provision throughout 2025. During this period, 19 holiday clubs were registered with Ofsted to provide care for school aged children in Reading. Providers were either awaiting an Ofsted inspection or had been judged to meet the required standards. Not all holiday schemes are required to register with Ofsted, as some operate under [exemption arrangements](#).

Findings from the parent survey (2025) highlighted that cost was the biggest barrier to accessing holiday childcare. As private providers set their own fees, affordability varies across the sector. There is an opportunity to strengthen promotion of financial support available to families, including Tax Free Childcare and Universal Credit childcare support, to help improve access and take-up.

Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF)

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme was launched in 2021 to support disadvantaged children aged 5–16, including those eligible for free school meals or identified as vulnerable, to access provision during the Easter, summer, and Christmas holidays. The programme helps address food insecurity, social isolation, and educational inequalities, reaching thousands of children each year and strengthening local partnerships across schools, voluntary, and community sectors.

Currently, Reading commissions 21 providers to deliver a range of inclusive activities and healthy meals, tailored to children's interests and special educational needs and/or disabilities, while also supporting parents through learning and signposting. Further DfE



funding has been secured to continue delivery of the programme from April 2026 to March 2029.

Strengthening School age Childcare

Reading is working to unify the oversight of school age childcare, bringing together term time wraparound childcare, the national rollout of Free Breakfast Clubs, Holiday Clubs and the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme to create a more joined up and sustainable system. This approach will provide single, consistent points of contact, clearer and more streamlined communication, and coordinated planning across term time and school holidays, enabling stronger alignment in support for children, families, and childcare settings. The overall aim is to reduce duplication, strengthen long-term sustainability, and ensure a seamless childcare offer throughout the year for families with a strong focus on inclusion and support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

While 92% of surveyed parents of primary school-aged children report satisfaction with their current childcare arrangements, families of children with SEND continue to experience challenges in accessing suitable provision. Reading invested in SEND training and therapeutic approaches for school age childcare providers in direct response to feedback from providers last year. There is a notable increase in provider confidence, with 93% reporting confidence in meeting children's needs, indicating progress. The offer will be strengthened further through the expansion of dedicated inclusion advisory support, working directly with providers to upskill staff, address gaps in SEND provision, and support the identification and scaling of effective inclusive practice across the sector during the year.

Conclusion

Nationally, the early years and childcare sector is undergoing a period of significant reform and expansion. Government investment and policy commitments are focused on improving access to high-quality early education and childcare and securing better outcomes for all children. These reforms present substantial opportunities for families but also bring increased demand pressures and operational challenges for providers and local authorities.

The expansion of early years and school age childcare is progressing well in Reading. The rollout of the working parent funded entitlements is now complete, with strong participation across provider types and steady take-up. Targeted capital investment, alongside self-funded provider projects, has supported the borough to meet its supply targets, with early years places projected to increase by 9% by September 2026. Alongside this, the expansion of school-based nurseries will enhance the local early years offer by increasing capacity and widening access to high quality provision.

Reading benefits from a diverse and high-quality early years and childcare provider base, with Ofsted outcomes exceeding national averages and strong inclusion arrangements in place to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). While

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most wards demonstrate a broadly healthy balance between supply and demand, patterns of movement within the early years market and variation in take-up reinforce the importance of maintaining a boroughwide perspective on sufficiency, rather than relying solely on ward level analysis.

Overall, Reading has sufficient childcare places available across the early years, with the strongest availability for 3- and 4-year-olds, a more balanced position for 2-year-olds, and a new pressure on places for children under two. While the childcare market is broadly meeting demand, careful monitoring will be needed as patterns of demand continue to change. Attention must be given to ensuring that children eligible for fewer funded hours are not disadvantaged in accessing a childcare place.

The early years market remains fragile in Reading. Provider closures, workforce recruitment pressures, physical space constraints and changing patterns of demand highlight the need for continued proactive market development and support. Although declining birth rates and fluctuating population trends may moderate demand long term, current pressures associated with the expansion of funded entitlements require ongoing monitoring.

Wraparound childcare is now available to all mainstream primary schools, underpinned by a mix of on-site, outsourced and off-site provision, with further growth anticipated through the phased introduction of free breakfast clubs. The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme continues to play a vital role in supporting children's wellbeing, reducing inequalities and addressing food insecurity during school holidays, with funding secured through to 2029.

Looking ahead, Reading's ambition to strengthen coordination across all strands of school age childcare represents an important step towards a more joined up and sustainable system. Aligning wraparound childcare, free breakfast clubs, holiday provision and the HAF programme will help reduce duplication, improve communication and support a seamless, year round offer for families. Continued investment in workforce development, inclusion training and targeted advisory support will be essential to improving access and inclusion.

Overall, Reading is well positioned to meet current and emerging needs for early years education and childcare. The aims of the [Best Start in Life](#) strategy will be supported through early years expansion, with a strong focus on quality, equitable access and engaging families at an earlier stage. Maintaining market stability, anticipating risks, and responding flexibly to changing patterns of demand will be critical to delivering sufficient, high quality early years and childcare provision to support improving outcomes for children and families across the borough.



Delivering Priorities 2026 to 2029

Increase availability of early years places where need is greatest

- Use local supply and demand data, birth trends and housing growth to identify priority areas for expansion.
- Deliver school-based nursery expansion and targeted DfE Early Years capital investment to increase places for children aged 0–2, disadvantaged families and children with SEND, while maintaining sufficient universal places for three and four-year-olds.

Deliver a sufficient and sustainable school age childcare system

- Strengthen links between wraparound, breakfast, holiday and HAF offers to ensure families can access childcare when they need it, and that provision is sustainable over the long term.
- Develop an integrated support system for school age childcare providers, improving coordination, communication and access to consistent advice, training and networks.
- Support the DfE's introduction and rollout of breakfast clubs, working with schools and providers to increase access for families and ensure delivery is sustainable and aligned with the wider school age childcare offer.

Improve access and support for families

- Provide clear, accessible public information on childcare options, funded entitlements and cost saving support through the Family Information Service and digital channels.
- Maintain a visible early years presence within Reading's Best Start Family Hubs to support early engagement, eligibility checks, applications and transitions into early years.
- Target outreach to families least likely to access early education to improve take-up and reduce inequalities.
- Work with providers to fulfil their statutory responsibilities to families when delivering early years entitlement funded places.

Strengthen inclusion and early intervention

- Promote strong Ordinarily Available Provision across early years and school age settings to support inclusive practice and access to provision.
- Continue effective use of early years SEND inclusion funding streams to support the needs of individual children.
- Ensure SEND inclusion is embedded across school age childcare through a robust offer of core training and targeted support.



Support quality and workforce sustainability

- Strengthen recruitment, retention and leadership stability across early years and school age childcare by supporting national and local recruitment campaigns and prioritising staff wellbeing and retention.
- Provide targeted training, guidance, professional networks and business advisory support to help providers respond to statutory guidance, expansion, changes in demand and sustainability pressures.
- Ensure high quality provision is embedded across early years and school age childcare through a robust offer of core training, targeted support and networks.
- Support clear career pathways through partnerships with Jobcentre Plus, Reading University, education and training providers.



Appendix 1: What are the views of local early years and childcare providers?

It is important that provider views are represented to gain a complete picture of the local childcare market. In 2025, the Early Years and Childcare team invited all Childminders, Day Nurseries and Pre-school Providers, Nursery Schools and Classes, Independent Schools and Independent Wraparound Providers to respond to a survey to understand supply, demand, barriers and opportunities for early years and childcare places in Reading.

Early Years Provision

Survey Response Overview:

- Day Nurseries & Pre-Schools: 38 (84%)
- Independent Schools: 2 (33%)
- Nursery Schools & Classes: 20 (74%)
- Early Years Childminders: 60 (88%)

EY Group Provider: Under 2s Provision

- 82% of children attending predicted to increase to 30 hours (Sept 2025)
- 67% of providers report to meet demand
- Main barriers to meeting demand were Recruitment and Physical space.
- 56% of providers hold a waiting list
- 298 children without an agreed start date, 90 current vacancies and 141 projected vacancies for 2025–26

EY Group Provider: 2-Year-Old Provision

- 76% of children attending predicted to increase to 30 hours (Sept 2025)
- 75% meeting demand for Working Entitlements
- 85% meeting demand for Targeted children
- Change in demand for 2-Year-Old Targeted places (FEL2) since the expansion of Working Entitlements: Remained the same: 70%; Increased: 11%; Decreased: 19%
- Main barriers to meeting demand were staff recruitment and physical space: 14
- 58% report a waiting list, 235 children without an agreed start date, 141 current vacancies and 211 projected vacancies for 2025–26

EY Group Provider: 3 & 4-Year-Old Provision

- 73% meeting current demand
- Where there were barriers to meeting demand, these included physical space: 20 and recruitment.



- 48% report a waiting list
- 294 children without an agreed start date, 307 current vacancies and 581 projected vacancies for 2025–26

Childminder: Under 2s Provision

- 98% offer Under 2s places
- 89% of children attending predicted to increase to 30 hours (Sept 2025)
- 73% of childminders meeting current demand
- Main barriers to meeting demand included physical space and ratio requirements set by Ofsted.
- 25% hold a waiting list
- 29 children without an agreed start date

Childminder: 2-Year-Old Provision

- 100% offer 2-year-old places
- 91% of children attending predicted to increase to 30 hours (Sept 2025)
- 29 children accessing Targeted funding
- 71% meeting current demand
- Change in demand for 2 Year Targeted places (FEL2) since the expansion of Working Entitlements: Consistent: 51%; Increased: 19%; Decreased: 5%; Not applicable: 25%
- Main barriers to meeting demand included physical space and ratio requirements set by Ofsted.
- 10% hold a waiting list
- 16 children without an agreed start date

Childminder: 3 & 4-Year-Old Provision

- 100% offer places
- 81% meeting current demand
- Main barriers to meeting demand included physical space and ration requirements.
- 3% hold a waiting list
- 6 children without an agreed start date
- 20% have current vacancies (totalling 27 places)
- 60 places predicted to be available from September 2025

Tax-Free Childcare

- 98% of childminders reported that they are registered
- 83% of EY group providers reported that they are registered
- Non-registration was explained as settings not requesting private payment



School Age Childcare

Survey Response Overview:

- Onsite School-led provision: 100% (21)
 - Childminders (Childcare Register): 36% (4)
 - Onsite Independent Wraparound Childcare Provider: 100% (19)
 - Offsite Independent Wraparound Childcare Provider: 75% (3)
-
- 100% of mainstream schools & providers report meeting demand for breakfast club.
 - 95% of mainstream schools & providers report meeting demand for afterschool club.
 - Providers report a higher demand for after-school than before-school childcare.
 - Main barriers to meeting demand include lack of parental demand and staff recruitment.
 - 88% of schools and providers report meeting existing demand for holiday childcare
 - No SEND specialist schools currently offer wraparound provision.
 - 60% of schools and providers state they are confident in offering inclusive wraparound care for children with additional needs, with a further 33% stating they are highly confident.
 - Confidence is strengthened by ongoing professional development, including regular training, internal equality and inclusion sessions, and specialist courses such as therapeutic thinking.
 - Some settings identify emerging challenges, including limited staffing capacity and difficulties releasing staff for training.
 - While overall confidence remains high, providers highlight the value of continued access to local authority guidance, additional training opportunities and stronger support networks to further build staff capability and ensure inclusive practice school age childcare.

Workforce

Early Years Group Providers

- Early years group settings: 46% recruiting, of these, 85% describe recruitment as 'challenging', 11% describe as 'good' and 3% 'improving'.
- 17% of Early years group settings report staff shortages are limiting places with an estimated 119 reduction.
- An increase in leaders remaining in post for 2 years or more:
 - EY group settings: 82%
 - Schools: 73%
 - Childminders: 93%
 - Out-of-school providers: 80%



Appendix 2: What are the views of parents and carers?

The views of parents and carers on early years and childcare provision in Reading were gathered during the autumn term 2025 through a Microsoft Forms questionnaire. The survey was widely promoted to encourage broad participation, with promotion undertaken via early years and childcare providers, the Family Information Service, and social media channels including Facebook.

Early Years Provision

The Parent and Carer survey for early years children was completed by 161 respondents representing a broad cross section of families across Reading.

- Of those who responded, 17% reported that they had a child with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or a child who was awaiting an official diagnosis.
- 82% of families reported they used all childcare entitlement hours available to them. Those who didn't access all the entitlement hours stated they didn't need the hours or that the hours they wanted couldn't be offered at their chosen provider.
- 42% of families said they found it very easy to access information on childcare entitlement and eligibility with a further 50% stating they found it easy but a complicated process.
- Most families chose their childcare provider due to being close to their home or work, followed closely by decisions based on Ofsted ratings or recommendations by parents.
- Most families stated the main advantage of accessing funded entitlement was that it enabled them to return to work and helped towards childcare costs.
- Comments included high costs, not all childcare weeks covered by funding, long waiting lists, and not enough flexibility.
- Some families felt disadvantaged by not being able to access working parent entitlement due to their family circumstances.

School Age Childcare: Wraparound Provision

The School Age survey for primary aged children was completed by 179 respondents representing a broad cross-section of families across Reading.

- 16% of families who responded stated they had a child with SEND or were waiting for a diagnosis of SEND.
- 103 (58%) said 'Yes' they use a wraparound childcare service, and 76 (42%) said 'No' they do not use a wraparound childcare service.

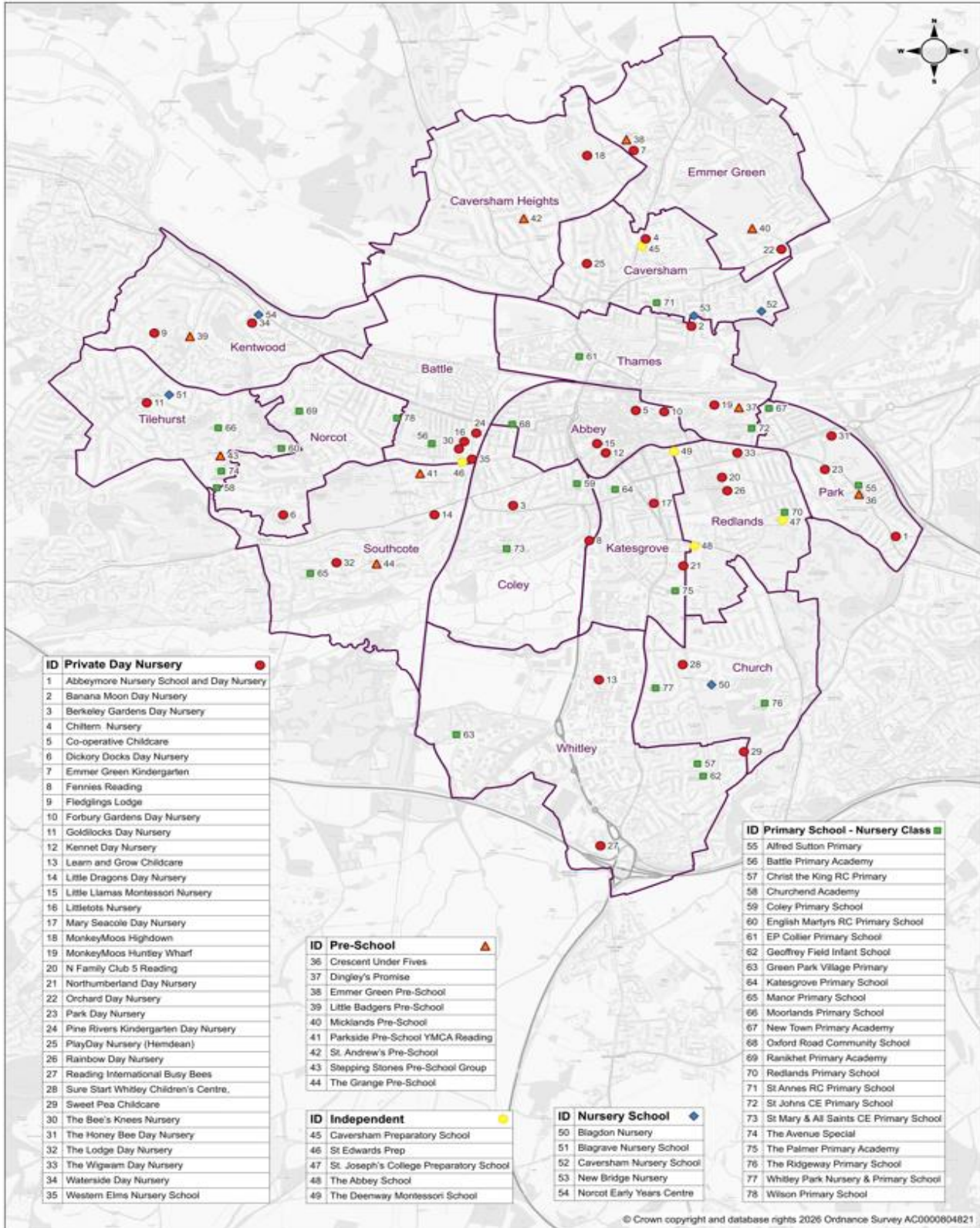


Current users (103) reported:

- 84% hours available are sufficient to their needs.
- 94% reported a deciding factor for their choice to use a certain wraparound provision was that their child attends the school with an on-site provision.
- 30% use both a Breakfast Club and After School Club on-site at their school.
- 41% use the After School Club and 21% the Breakfast club offer at their school.
- There is a slightly greater take-up from parents using Wraparound childcare services Tuesday to Thursday, with the least popular days Mondays & Fridays.
- 60% said they were 'satisfied' and 32% said they were 'very satisfied' with their Wraparound Childcare arrangements. 4% are 'dissatisfied', with another 4% stating they are 'very dissatisfied'.
- Most parents praise the quality of their school's provision, citing supportive environments, happy children, and helpful staff.
- Others report variable quality including limited food choices, concerns about nutritional value, too much screen time, or activities perceived as basic or unengaging.
- There has been a significant increase in families beginning to use Wraparound Childcare, with 45% stating they have started using these services within the last 12 months.
- The main reason families have begun using wraparound childcare in the last 12 months is that their child has reached school age and started school, alongside changes to parents' working hours or patterns and the need for additional support with childcare.
- 80% reported that it was easy to find the type of Wraparound Childcare they wanted in their local area.
- 72 families stated they are accessing childcare financial support: 65% Tax-Free Childcare, 28% Universal Credit Childcare and 6% Childcare vouchers and/or other employer schemes.
- 76 of families who do not use a Wraparound Childcare service reported reasons: 38% not required; 24% unaffordable; 14% unable to find the type of wraparound childcare they require; 13% not needed as their child(ren) are cared for by a family member and/or friends.
- Families report the following barriers to finding suitable wraparound childcare: affordability, flexibility, shortage of childminders, provision not meeting child's specific needs and competitive demand.
- Families of children with SEND report ongoing challenges: suitable provision, limited spaces, and a lack of tailored support in some settings.



Appendix 3: Early Years Group Provision



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Title: Childcare Providers in Reading 2026

Date: 08/04/2026

Scale at A3: 1:35,000

Produced by Data and GIS Team

Ref: 0010/02

