



Reading Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024-25

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

Brighter Futures for Children

Early Years & Childcare Team

VERSION

V1

DATE

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Brighter Futures for Children
Civic Offices, Bridge Street,

Contents

Introduction	3
What is a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment?	3
Who is the assessment for?	4
What does the assessment involve?	4
How has the early years and childcare market changed nationally?	4
How is the childcare expansion progressing in Reading?	5
Childcare Sufficiency headlines	5
Reading Profile	6
Population	6
Housing	7
Early Years	7
Provision	7
Provider Geography	8
Places	9
Early Years Entitlements	11
Working Entitlement: 9 months to 23 months	11
Working Parent Entitlement: 2-year-olds	11
Targeted 2-year-old funding	12
Table 11: Take up of targeted 2-year-old funding	13
Universal Funding	13
30 Hours Extended Entitlement Funding	14
Attendance overview	15
Early Years Pupil Premium	16
Disability Access Fund	16
Early Years Childcare Costs	16
Early Years Inspection Outcome	17
Early Years Workforce	18
Childcare for School Aged Children	18
Wraparound providers	19
Wraparound places	19
Breakfast clubs	20
Holiday provision	20
Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF)	20
Conclusion	20
Action Plan Progress 2024-26	21

Progress to date	21
Next Steps 2025-26:	22
1. Workforce sustainability and growth	22
2. Expansion of early years entitlements	22
3. Expansion of wraparound childcare	23
Appendix 1: What are the views of local early years and childcare providers?	23
Early Years	23
Wraparound	24
Recruitment	24
Appendix 2: What are the views of parents and carers?	24
Early Years	25
Wraparound Childcare	26
Appendix 3 Map of Early Years Childcare of Reading Group Provision January 2025	28

Introduction

What is a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment?

Local authorities across England have a duty of sufficiency to make sure there are enough childcare places including early years and wraparound to meet demand for families in their area.

The Childcare Act [2006](#) and [2016](#) and the associated statutory guidance [Early Education and Childcare](#) sets out local authority duties which includes:

- 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 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 is delegated by the local authority to Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC).

Who is the assessment for?

This assessment is published to inform parents and carers, stakeholders, business interests, providers and local authority teams.

- Parents and carers can gain an understanding of the childcare options available for their family.
- Childcare providers and interests can analyse the local childcare market to aid decision making.
- Local authority teams can coordinate and action their responsibility for market management.

What does the assessment involve?

This report draws conclusions from Reading childcare sufficiency data, parent/carers and provider surveys collated between 2024-25. Statistics are dynamic and provide a snapshot of the childcare market at any given time. The assessment provides a good indication of trends, areas for further investigation and action with a template for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. It is advised that this assessment is viewed alongside the information available from the [Reading Family Information Service](#) who are contracted to deliver childcare information and guidance directly to parents and others on behalf of BFFC.

How has the early years and childcare market changed nationally?

The government has committed to significant childcare expansion to improve accessibility to more families, this includes the roll out of:

- [Early years entitlement funding expansion](#) to include children from 9 months to school age if families meet working eligibility criteria.
- [Increased availability of wraparound childcare](#) daily, 8am to 6pm for all primary aged children.
- [Expansion of school based nurseries](#) to create or expand existing nursery provision.
- [Childminder start up grant](#) to support those entering the workforce.
- [Free breakfast club trial](#) available in some schools to inform future learning and government action.
- [Increase in funding for parents receiving universal credit](#) to support with childcare costs and access to advance funds to reduce barriers to starting employment.

The expansion of the early years entitlements builds on existing funding for all 3 and 4 year olds, funding for [targeted 2 year olds](#) and the [working entitlements](#) for eligible families of 3 and 4 year olds. By September 2025 many working parents will be able to access 30 hours funded childcare, 38 weeks of the year for children 9 months to school age. The targeted entitlements for eligible 2-year-olds and universal entitlement for all 3 and 4 year olds will continue, 15 hours funded childcare, 38 weeks of the year.

Families can continue to access [Tax-Free Childcare](#) for an approved provider where every £8 they pay, the government will contribute £2 up to £2000 a year for each child, £4000 if a child is disabled. Children stop being eligible on 1 September after their 11th birthday or until 1 September after their 16th birthday if child is disabled.

How is the childcare expansion progressing in Reading?

The local authority has received grant allocations from the Department for Education (DfE) to pass through to new and existing early years and childcare providers to expand the availability of spaces in Reading. Two bidding rounds are complete for both the early years and wraparound place creation.

- The number of new early years places in operation, expanding or opening by September 2025 meets the supply target set by the DfE.
- The wraparound expansion is on target to ensure access to wraparound provision within all mainstream primary schools either directly or provided offsite by an independent provider by 2026.
- Locally there is interest in expanding existing school based nurseries, however Reading is not involved with the initial pilot led by the DfE.
- The number of early years childminders has remained stable, however there has been an increase of 65% offering spaces for families in receipt of the EY entitlements.
- Two Reading primary schools are participating in the test and learn phase of the free breakfast entitlement for all children.

Childcare Sufficiency Headlines

- Reading's population is increasing overall, however, with a decline in children under 4 years and a pattern of lower birth rates developing.
- Housing development could increase the challenges in maintaining sufficiency of early years and childcare places in the future particularly within Abbey and Thames ward.
- The number of early years providers and places for children is expanding and on track to meet the supply target set by the DfE for September 2025.
- The childminding supply has remained stable with 65% more of this group now providing places for families in receipt of the early years entitlements when compared to last year.
- Early years providers report vacancies which are increasing, however these do not all meet parental preference with pockets of high demand and low supply across the town.
- Parents and carers report that the expansion of early years entitlements is helping with costs, enabling them to work more hours and return to work earlier, however, requires greater cost transparency to access.
- Early years providers report that the majority of children eligible for the expanded entitlement are existing users, therefore new uptake is expected to be low.
- The number of families accessing targeted 2 year old funding and the universal entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds has declined this year.
- The percentage of families accessing the extended 30 hour entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds continues to increase.
- The number of 'good' and 'outstanding' early years providers can fluctuate, however continues to remain in line and above the national average reported by Ofsted.
- The annual staff census for early years shows an increase in workforce, however recruitment challenges remain.
- The expansion of wraparound childcare is on target to ensure access to provision linked to all mainstream schools by 2026.

- The majority of schools are offering complete full wraparound provision either directly or signposting to another provider with interest to expand further.
- Parents and carers consistently report that wraparound services are meeting their requirements and the majority are accessing financial support for charges.

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 wards which are amongst some of the most deprived in the country.

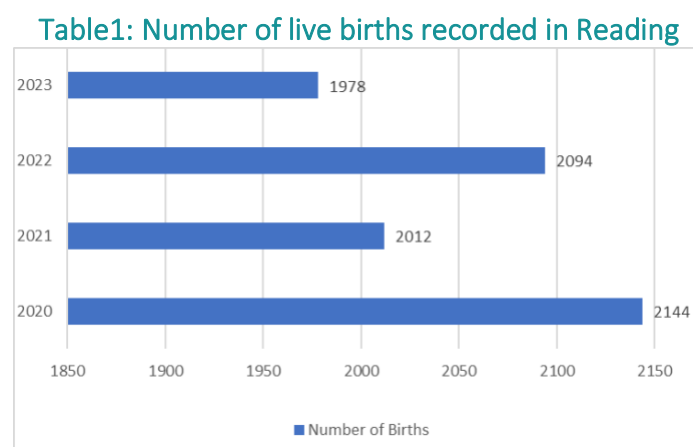
Population

The [census](#) takes place every 10 years. It provides a picture of all the people and households in England and Wales. In 2021, the [Office of National Statistics](#) reported that the Reading population was 174,200, an increase of 11.9% since 2011.

ONS mid-year estimates for 2023 indicate that the number of children:

- Under 4 years has reduced by 1.8%
- 5-9 years has increased by 0.5%
- 10-18 years has increased by 0.9%

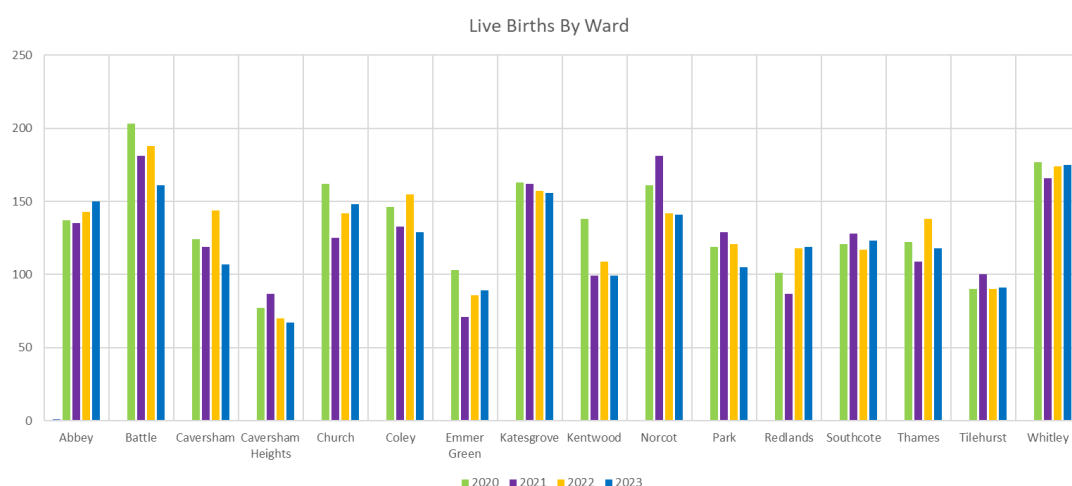
[Table 1](#) sets out the number of live births recorded each year. The reported numbers of children born 2023-24 is almost 6% lower than the previous year, and 8% lower than 2020.



Reading reflects the [ONS](#) reported decline in live births in England and Wales in 2023, a reduction of almost 2.5% when compared with the previous year. 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. This year the rise in birth rates during 2022-23 may result in increased demand for 2 year old provision.

[Table 2](#) shows how the wards are affected by the change in child population. Whilst 7 have seen an increase in birth rates since 2023, 9 have seen a decline when compared with the previous year.

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](#) sets out planning policies for development in Reading up to 2036 and is the main consideration in deciding planning applications. Analysis of planning applications received by Reading Borough Council indicate there are 920 new dwellings, flats or residential units planned to be created between April 2024 and January 2025.

Abbey and Thames ward are currently developing new housing at a much higher rate than other wards and have a lower number of registered childcare providers. Additionally, Abbey ward experienced a rise in birth rates in 2023, which could increase demand for early years provision. Abbey ward has the highest number of daycare providers registered, with one new setting just opened, however the choice of other provider types is limited which may impact choice.

Housing development could increase the challenges of maintaining early years and childcare sufficiency for the future and will be closely observed to ensure growing demand is met by supply.

Early Years

Since April 2024, 2-year-olds in eligible working households were entitled to 15 hours per week of funded childcare. From September 2024, children from nine months to school age in eligible working households were entitled to 15 hours a week of funded childcare and, from September 2025, they will be entitled to a total of 30 funded hours from nine months until the start of school. Local authorities have received capital grant funding from the DfE to pass through to providers to support the growth and accessibility of expanded early years entitlements.

Provision

It is important that families have a choice of provider types so they can decide on a provision that best suits the needs of their child and their own commitments.

Reading maintains a consistent variation of early years provider types including day nurseries, childminders, pre-schools, maintained and independent nursery schools and classes as shown in [table 3](#) and [appendix 3](#).

Table 3 Type of Provision

Type of Provision	Jan-21	Jan-22	Jan-23	Jan-24	Jan-25	5 year movement
Pre-School	18 ↓	17 ↓	16 ↓	12 ↓	11 ↓	-7
Full Day Care	32 ↓	32 →	30 ↓	33 ↑	36 ↑	+4
Independent Nursery	6 →	6 →	6 →	6 →	6 →	0
Childminder (EY funding provider)	32 ↓	34 ↑	41 ↑	41 ↑	68 ↑	+36
Maintained Nursery School	5 →	5 →	5 →	5 →	5 →	0
Maintained Nursery Class	22 →	22 →	22 →	22 →	22 →	0
Total	115	116	120	119	148	+33

The number of providers overall remained largely stable in 2024, which was important after a significant loss of pre-schools the previous year. Reading saw an increase in 4 full day care settings opening and 6 expanding which reinstated places lost and created additional spaces. However, pre-schools play a vital role in delivering sessional provision which is usually school hours, term time only and meets the needs of many parents and children with a loss to their communities.

[Ofsted](#) continues to report that the number of childminders is declining nationally, however in Reading the workforce has remained stable since 2021. There are currently 73 childminders providing early years provision in total. Of these childminders 68 are providing access to the EY entitlements funding, an increase of 65% when compared to 2023 when the government had just announced their expansion plans. This success can be partly attributed to recruitment campaigns, a DfE startup grant and the BfFC [Childminder Partnership](#) which helps providers to meet requirements and operate a sustainable business.

The [Reading Local Area - Ordinarily Available Provision & Graduated Response](#) sets out what should be available for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) in schools and educational settings. BfFC continue to review the [early years specialist provision](#) required to meet the needs of children with SEND. There are 4 specialist early years settings and 2 mainstream resources bases for children in Reading. The assessment of demand and focus on building supply to meet the needs of all families is an ongoing priority.

Provider Geography

Overall, Reading has a good balance of childcare by type in each ward including childminders, day care and sessional provision. However, analysis of early years funding take up in autumn 2024 showed that just 41% of children attended a provider within the ward they lived so a Reading wide view must be taken to ensure sufficient places.

[Table 4](#) shows that Tilehurst ward has the highest number of individual childcare providers, followed by Emmer Green, Caversham and Battle. Childminders ensure a key contribution to early years places in all wards.

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	5			1		8
Battle	5	4	1		1		13
Caversham	5	3	1		1	2	13
Caversham Heights	4	1		1			10
Church	2	1			2	1	7
Coley	4	1			2		8
Emmer Green	9	3		2			14
Katesgrove	1	2			2		6
Kentwood	5	2		1		1	9
Norcot	7	1			2		11
Park	4	3		2	2		12
Redlands	2	3	4		1		11
Southcote	3	2		2	1		9
Thames	2	2		1	2		7
Tilehurst	8	1		2	3	1	15
Whitley	5	2			2		9
Total	68	36	6	11	22	5	162

New providers have opened in both Abbey and Thames ward since 2023 creating new places for children under 5 years which should help alleviate the impact of an increase in [dwellings](#) within these areas. Supply has also increased in Emmer Green, Redlands and Whitley wards with the opening of new provision and further expansion of an existing provider expected in Church this year which should support the potential for changing demand as [births](#) increase slightly in these areas.

Places

Childcare capacity for early years children fluctuates throughout the year. Places come under increasing pressure in the summer term ahead of children starting reception in September.

The most recent expansion data released by the DfE in autumn 2024 indicates that an additional 212 places must be created to be ready for the full roll out of EY entitlements in September 2025.

- 31% of these spaces have been created
- 76% are on track to be created by September 2025 (+7%)

The majority of children newly eligible for the expanded entitlement in 2024 were reported by the DfE to be existing users with only a small impact on new demand. This was confirmed by the data shared by local EY providers in 2024. Although it is expected that demand will increase from September 2025 when the working entitlement increases from 15 to 30 hours term time only.

[Table 5](#) sets out the wards in order of reported place capacity in January 2025:

Table 5: Early Years Place Capacity

Ward	Highest to lowest
Park	1
Caversham	2
Abbey	3
Church	4
Tilehurst	5
Redlands	6
Kentwood	7
Whitley	8
Battle	9
Emmer green	10
Southcote	11
Coley	12
Katesgrove	13
Thames	14
Norcot	15
Caversham Heights	16

Currently Park ward reports the highest number of Ofsted registered childcare places and providers are currently reporting vacancies. Caversham Heights reports the lowest number of Ofsted registered places, however, also has current vacancies.

FIS records show very few early years vacant places in Church, Coley and Kentwood ward currently. There are successful EY capital bids to expand existing providers in Church and Kentwood wards and a new provider has committed to opening in Coley ward by September 2025 which will help build supply in these areas.

There was a 78% increase in vacancies reported by [providers](#) between January to December 2024. However, during this period providers also consistently reported that demand was not being met for children in early years, particularly for those aged 2-4 years. The majority of parents said that they were able to access the provision they required, however not always the sessions they needed. There were both waiting lists and vacancies across all provider types which suggests that parents may be waiting for a place with their preferred provider. Some children were at risk of not being able to access the family's preferred provider before starting school, however without a central early years admissions process it is not known if children were listed as waiting with more than one setting.

The majority of early years providers commit to keeping their provision records up to date on FIS which supports ongoing monitoring of supply across Reading.

Early Years Entitlements

Working Entitlement: 9 months to 23 months

From September 2024, [eligible](#) working parents of children over the age of 9 months old were able to access up to 15 hours of early years funding for 38 weeks of the year (570 hours per year). The offer can be stretched across the year by claiming less than 15 hours a week.

[Table 6](#) shows that there has been significant take up of the entitlement already, with most families thought to have swapped their existing self-funded arrangement for a government funded place.

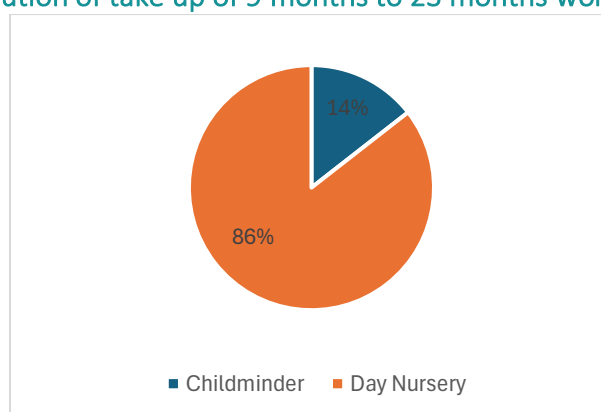
When comparing take up to a 4 year live birth average it is approximately 23% of children between 9 months and 23 months accessing currently.

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

	Autumn 2024	Spring 2025
Number of children accessing a place	567	591
Childminder	14%	16%
Day Care Nursery	86%	84%

Most of the new entitlement is being taken up in a day care group setting currently as set out in [table 7](#).

Table 7: Distribution of take up of 9 months to 23 months working entitlement



Working Parent Entitlement: 2-year-olds

From April 2024, eligible working parents of children over the age of 2 years olds were able to access up to 15 hours of early years funding for 38 weeks of the year (570 hours per year). This offer can be stretched across the year by claiming less than 15 hours a week.

[Table 8](#) shows that there has been significant take up of the entitlement already, with most families thought to have swapped their existing self-funded arrangement for a government funded place.

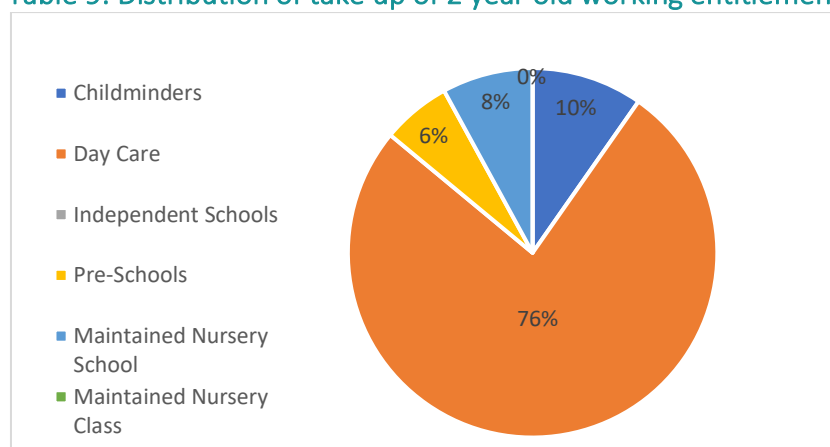
When comparing take up to a 4 year live birth average it is approximately 33% of children aged 2 years accessing currently.

Table 8: Funding take up for 2-year-old working entitlement

Working Parent Entitlement 2 Year Old Funding		
	Summer 2024	Autumn 2024
Number of children accessing a place	561	679

Most of the new entitlement is being taken up in a day care group setting currently, the full distribution is shown in [table 9](#).

Table 9: Distribution of take up of 2 year old working entitlement:

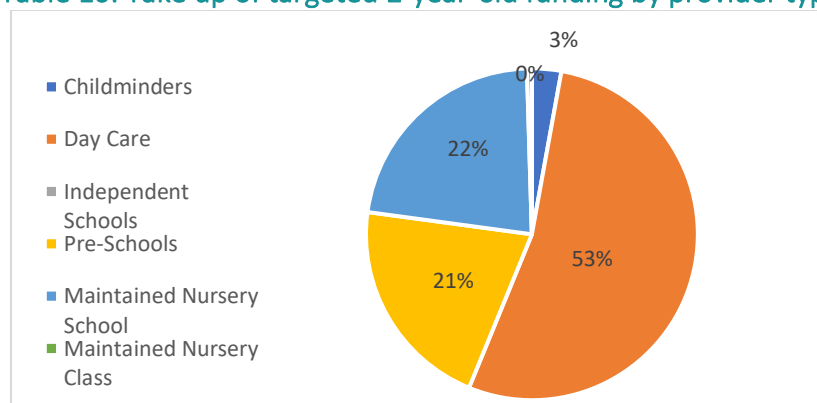


Targeted 2-Year-Old Funding

The government funds places for children who may have less advantages to enable them to access early education from the term after their 2nd birthday. [Eligible](#) targeted 2-year-old children can then claim a funded early years place, 15 hours a week for 38 weeks (term time only) or the equivalent of 570 hours if they stretch it over a year.

[Table 10](#) sets out the distribution of targeted 2-year funding across provider types with full day care providers currently offering the largest proportion, closely followed by sessional providers in private, voluntary, independent and maintained settings.

Table 10: Take up of targeted 2-year-old funding by provider type



[Table 11](#) shows how the take-up of targeted funding for twos is calculated as a percentage 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.

Table 11: Take up of targeted 2-year-old funding

2 Year Olds Claiming Funding				
Autumn Term	2021	2022	2023	2024
Take-Up	423	358	282	210
% of cohort	74%	73%	65%	61%

The number of children taking up the targeted entitlement has declined since 2021. This could be attributed to:

- A reduction in children aged 2 years in Reading.
- Thresholds for entitlement have not increased in line with inflation therefore fewer families eligible.
- Families switching to access the new working entitlements.
- A decline in sessional places due to pre-school closures.

Providers are actively encouraged to provide places for this targeted group at no extra cost to the parent to minimise barriers. Many targeted children are also now eligible for additional supplementary funding to support their learning and development in an educational setting.

BFFC have increased communications to families to encourage access to the entitlements including socials, leaflets, text messages, letters, post cards, emails and bespoke support from the team to complete applications. The children’s centers provide weekly ‘Time for Twos’ sessions to support families to apply for targeted funding and to access and transition into a provision.

BFFC will continue to closely monitor to access to early education for targeted 2-year-olds to ensure they are not disadvantaged by the roll out of the expanded entitlements.

Universal Funding

All 3- and 4-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.

[Table 12](#) sets out the take up of universal provision for 3- and 4-year-olds in the autumn term between 2021 and 2024. The decline in take up in 2024 may be attributed to the fall in birth rate in 2021. However, data provided by schools and EY group settings indicated that the number of children waiting for a place overall, exceeded the vacancies available 2024, although it is not known if children were on more than one waiting list and/or waiting for a place with a preferred provider. Places for children accessing universal funding will be closely monitored as the expansion of working

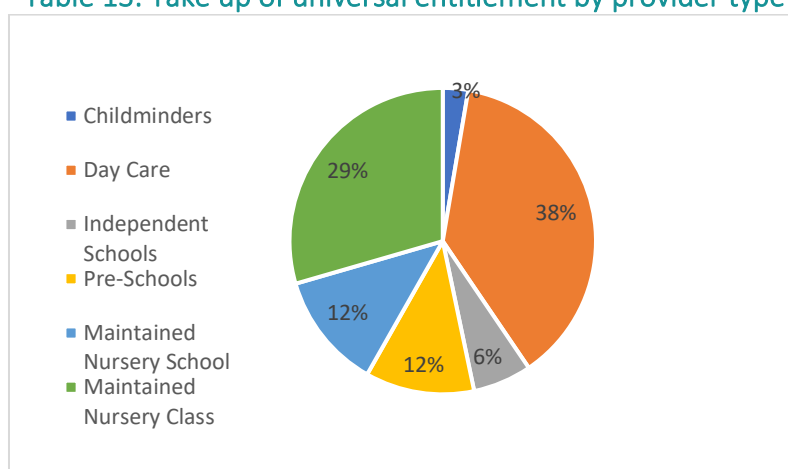
entitlements continues to ensure they are not disadvantaged because other children may have opportunity to access provision earlier.

Table 12: Take up of universal funding

3 & 4 Year Olds Claiming Universal Funding				
Autumn Term	2021	2022	2023	2024
Take-Up	1986	2013	2060	1869

Take up of universal funding is evenly balanced across the sector and reflective of registered places as shown in [table 13](#).

Table 13: Take up of universal entitlement by provider type



30 Hours Extended Entitlement Funding

The Government offers eligible working parents of 3 and 4-year-olds up to 30 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year (1,140 hours per year). This offer can be stretched across the year by claiming less than 15 hours a week.

[Table 14](#) shows that there is a steady take up of 30-hour funding, although there was a decrease in the autumn term 2024 in line with the reduced number of children accessing the universal entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds. Again, it is thought that the low birth year in 2021 attributed to this decline.

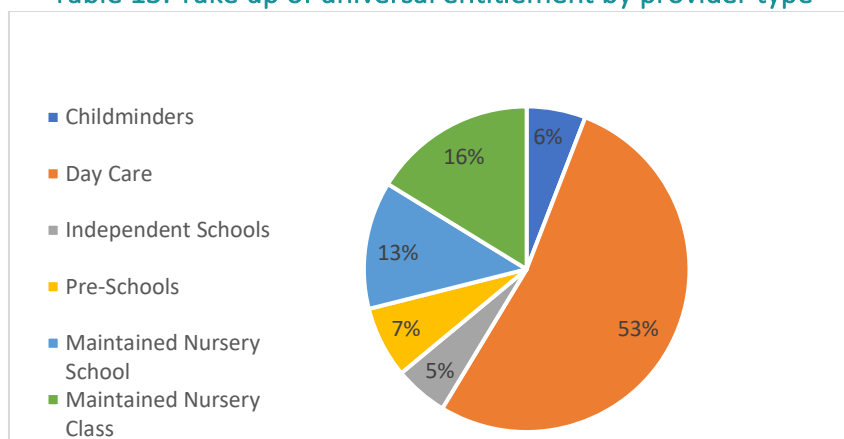
Table 14: Take up of 30 hours entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds

3 & 4 Year Olds Claiming 30 Hours Extended Entitlement				
Autumn Term	2021	2022	2023	2024
Take-Up	699	683	772	733

Currently, 39% of 3- and 4-year-olds are accessing the extended entitlement, this has increased by 4% since 2021. Further increases could be likely as the government focuses on their commitment to increase employment with greater access to funded childcare.

Typically, day care providers offer the greatest flexibility for working parents with longer opening hours and all year-round options and remain the largest group offering the extended entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds as shown in [table 15](#).

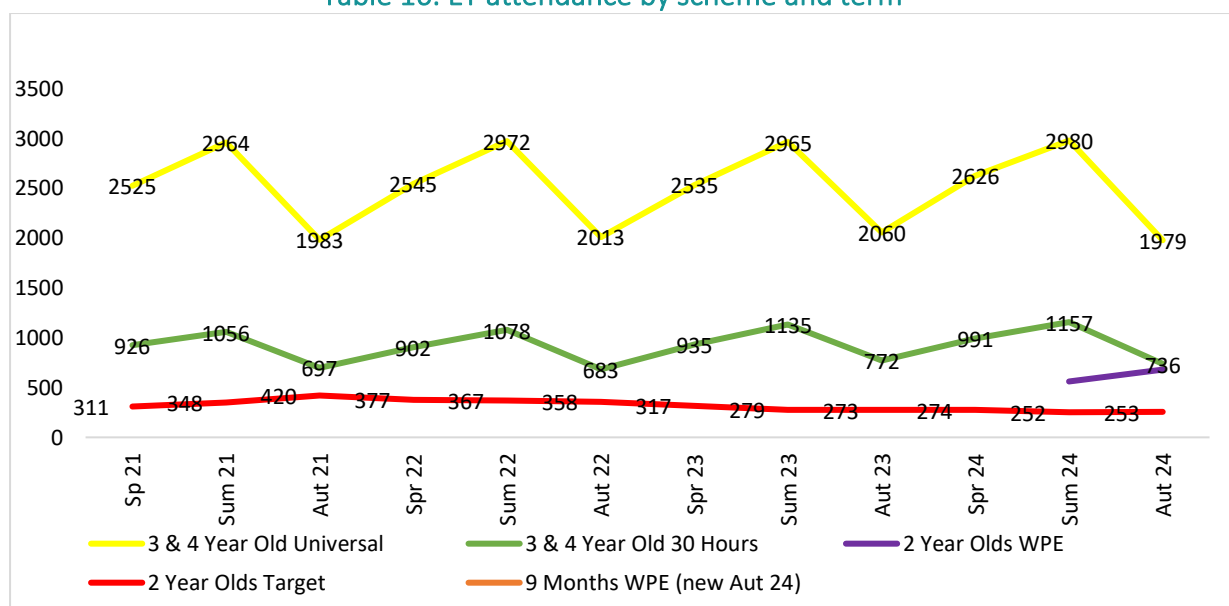
Table 15: Take up of universal entitlement by provider type



Attendance Overview

[Table 16](#) provides an overview of the number of children accessing all early years entitlements since 2021. The number of children accessing the universal entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds and targeted entitlement for 2-year-olds has declined since 2021, however reflects the decrease in early years children in Reading and lower birth rates. Encouragingly, the take up of 30 hours extended entitlement for 3 and 4 years olds and the working entitlement for 2-year-olds is steadily increasing which may indicate a rise in working families. Many [parents](#) who responded to our survey reported that they can return to work earlier because of the access to early years entitlement and with almost a quarter opting to work more hours we can expect demand for early years places to continue to grow.

Table 16: EY attendance by scheme and term

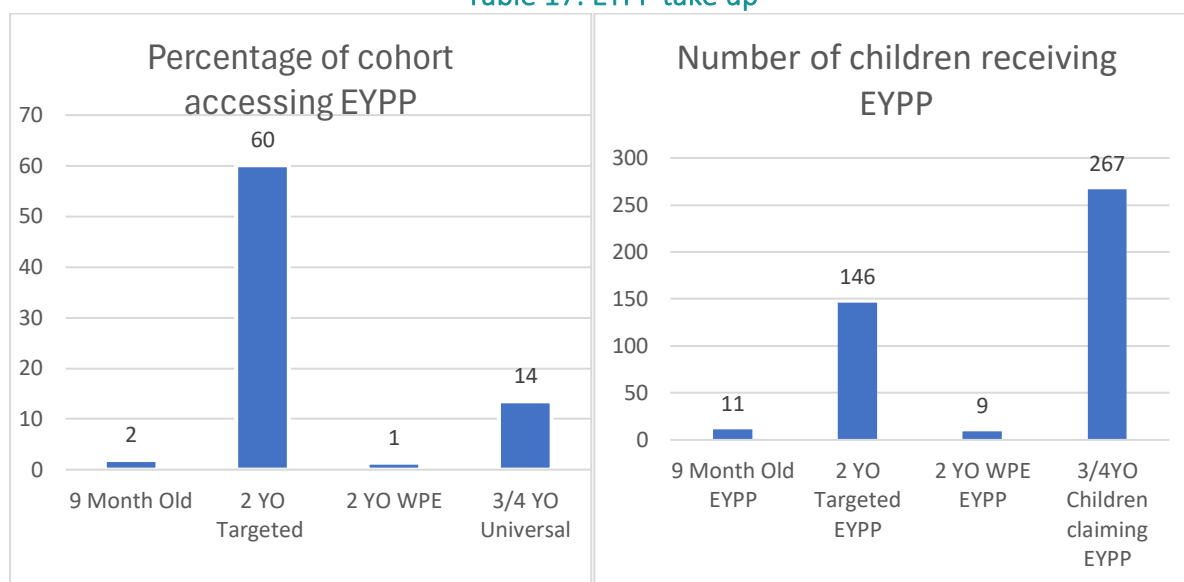


Early Years Pupil Premium

[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. EYPP funding can supplement education up to 15 hours a week term time only for children that meet the criteria. In Reading EYPP is combined with a deprivation supplement and settings can claim an additional £940.50 rising to £1,140.00 in April 2025 annually.

In Autumn 2024 a total of 433 children were funded for EYPP as set out in [table 17](#) with the majority of these attending a maintained school-based provider. In April 2024 EYPP was expanded from 3 and 4 year olds to include eligible children 0-2 years accessing early years entitlements. The highest number of claimants are accessing the targeted 2-year-old entitlement, 60% of this group is eligible, likely due to the similarities in eligibility.

Table 17: 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 to access their early years entitlement. In April 2024 this was expanded to eligible children 0-2 years. Currently each eligible DAF claim entitles providers to an additional £910 payment once a year, increasing to £938 from April 2025. In 2024 there were 65 DAF allocations in Reading, 57 of these were for children aged 3 and 4 years and 8 for children aged 2 years and under. Access to DAF for younger children will be closely monitored alongside the roll out of the expanded EY Entitlements.

Early Years Childcare Costs

The [Coram Family and Childcare Survey 2024](#) reports that the average cost of a part-time childcare place for a child under in a nursery is currently £157.68 per week, an increase of 7.4% since 2023.

Charges can vary between setting type, individual providers and the age of children care is offered to. This year, in Reading private provider costs for a 25-hour part-time place have remained at approximately £230 a week, above the national average.

Table 18: Average Costs of Childcare in Reading by Provider Costs (January 2025 snapshot from Providers)

Type	Per Hour	Per Session	Per Day	Per Week
Childminder	£6.20	£30.17	£70.00	-
Day Nursery	£9.20	£38.83	£68.76	£339.85
Pre-School	£7.28	£18.84	-	-

In Reading, government funded rates for providers were increased in April 2024 with a further uplift due in April 2025. Hourly rates are currently £6.20 for 3- and 4-year-olds, £9.40 for 2-year-olds and £13 for under twos.

The funding rate for 3 and 4 -year-olds remains below the average childcare hourly rate charged across all providers in Reading with exception of childminders. The hourly funding rate for children aged two years and under is higher than the averages reported by providers in Reading.

Childcare Vouchers and [Tax-Free Childcare](#) (TFC) are schemes designed to financially support working parents by providing tax savings or topping up contributions. In 2024, 85% of early years settings, 81% of EY childminders and 61% of school providers were registered to accept Tax Free Childcare. The majority of [parents](#) reported in our survey that they are using incentives to help pay for childcare, 69% said they claim Tax Free Childcare and 32% Universal Credits. Where parents were paying for childcare 57% felt the fees offered good value for money.

Early Years Inspection Outcome

All children should be able to take up their free hours in a high-quality setting. Evidence shows that higher quality provision has greater developmental benefits for children, particularly for the most disadvantaged children, leading to better outcomes. This government's intention is that, as far as possible, free places are delivered by providers who have achieved an overall rating of outstanding or good in their most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Childcare standards are regulated by Ofsted who 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).

The number of early years providers graded 'met', 'good' or 'outstanding' in early years group and childminding settings fluctuates throughout the year. In Reading, for 2024-25 judgements have been in line with and above the averages reported nationally by Ofsted (97% group providers and 98% childminders). Many [parents](#) that responded to the CSA survey commented on the high quality of their provider.

In March 2025, providers judged by Ofsted as 'good' or 'outstanding' in Reading with published reports:

- 100% of early years childminders

- 98% of group early years providers

Schools no longer receive an overall effectiveness grade. Ofsted is [consulting](#) on a new approach to inspecting schools and other settings where children and adults learn.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is appointed by the Department of Education (DfE) to inspect independent schools in England. The ISI inspectorates must have regard for the EYFS and also report to the DfE on the extent to which the Statutory Independent School Standards (SISS) are met. In March 2025 all six independent schools with nursery provision in Reading had met the required standards.

Early Years Workforce

A stable workforce is key to driving quality, ensuring inclusion and sufficient places for children in early years. Recruitment and retention challenges remain consistent across all EY provider types on a [national](#) scale.

In 2022, 75% of Reading EY settings described recruitment as ‘challenging’, this reduced to 59% in 2024 as shown in [table 19](#) and remains a key priority locally and nationally.

Table 19: Provider views on recruitment

	Not recruiting	Improving	Good	Challenging
EY group settings	14%	16%	11%	59%
Independent schools	60%	0%	0%	40%
EY childminders	91%	1%	1%	7%

Recruitment challenges continue to impact the number of places offered to early years children in Reading. In 2024, 34% of settings reported that staff vacancies were limiting the places they offered, this has improved from 57% last year and 77% in 2022, however presents a challenge to fulfilling demand.

EY [providers](#) reported how they have modified their approach to recruitment, describing flexible working options, investing in home grown staff, pay above the market rate, accurate advertising and personal recommendations as factors in their success. There has also been both a national and local commitment to growing the workforce.

The early years census provides an overview of staff working in day nurseries, pre-schools and childminding settings in Reading and is a consistent, annual measure of the PVI workforce. The 2024 data highlights a 10% increase in workforce since 2021, which is a positive sign with further growth required in order to staff the new supply being created by providers. Workforce recruitment remains a key priority for providers and BfC.

Childcare for School Aged Children

In 2023 the government announced 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, so that parents can access employment and improve labour market participation. The vision is that the [wraparound childcare offer](#) is school centred and delivered in partnership with childminders and

independent wraparound providers to ensure flexibility and choice for parents. Local authorities have received capital and programme funding from the DfE to pass through to providers to ensure expansion and to support an achievable, sustainable wraparound childcare model.

Wraparound Providers

In Reading, wraparound childcare is delivered through mixed models which include delivery directly by schools onsite, schools outsourcing to private childcare providers onsite, private providers offsite in group and childminding settings. [Table 20](#) sets out how the number of school led and private provider led provision is similar and the offer in Reading is strengthened by private offsite providers. Currently, 9 childminders are registered with Ofsted to provide dedicated provision to older children. Additionally, there are 73 childminders registered for early years children who also contribute to the wraparound childcare market for school aged children.

Table 20: Provider type March 2025

Provider Type	No. On School site	No. Off school site
School led provision	22	0
PVI led provision	17	3
Childminders (WAC, childcare register)	0	9
Total WAC provision in Reading = 51		

[Table 21](#) sets out the current position for wraparound childcare in Reading in March 2025. At present 65% of schools meet the DfE's definition of wraparound childcare 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday. Although 75% of mainstream schools provide WAC there are variations in finishing times and Friday closures which will be explored directly with providers during the next bidding round of the local expansion to establish if demand is present.

Table 21: Wraparound provision in Reading schools

Provider Type	Total No.	No. BSC provisions	No. ASC provisions	No. Full WAC provisions (8am-6pm, Mon-Fri)
Mainstream School	40 (100%)	35 (88%)	33 (83%)	26 (65%)

BfFC has just committed DfE grant funding to a total of 15 schools, private providers and a childminder to increase wraparound provision in Reading by September 2025 which include:

- 3 before school club creations
- 6 before school club expansions
- 2 after school club creations
- 10 after school club expansions

Wraparound places

In March 2024, wraparound providers reported that 648 full wraparound places were available for children in Reading mainstream primary schools. This has since risen by 28% to 895 and is predicted to increase again by a further 28% in September 2025 after DfE funding is utilised. There is also an opportunity for further increases following an additional local funding round ending in May 2025.

Just under half of [parents](#) that contributed to the BfFC survey said they use wraparound services for their child, 85% of these said the availability of the offer met their requirements with almost all choosing an offer on the school site. Providers reported that there is higher demand for after school provision than before school and they are not always able to meet all parents' requirements. Providers shared a commitment to ensure access for all and inclusive practices and recognised that they require training to help strengthen their approach which BfFC has invested in.

Breakfast Clubs

In 2024, the government announced a [commitment](#) to offering a free breakfast club in every state funded school for primary aged pupils in England. The clubs are designed to provide opportunity and respond to the impact of child poverty whilst providing children with a supportive start to the day. The DfE will work with 750 early adopter schools this year to test and learn how best to implement the new offer ahead of national roll out. In Reading, 2 schools have agreed to work with the DfE to pilot the program which will run alongside the national wraparound programme. Early adopter schools will have access to additional government funding to support success and to implement in a way that works for their school.

Holiday Provision

In autumn 2024, there were 14 holiday clubs registered with Ofsted to provide care for school aged children in Reading. Providers were either awaiting an Ofsted inspection or were judged to have met the required standards expected by Ofsted. Not all holiday schemes are required to register with Ofsted due to [exemption](#).

Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF)

The government launched the HAF programme in 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 parents and carers with a focus on healthy life choices and signposting to support. BfFC commissions 21 providers to deliver HAF provision to local children attending Reading schools. There is a range of providers to respond to the children's interests, special educational needs and/or disabilities. The government have confirmed funding for 2025-26 and the programme will continue in Reading.

Conclusion

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, carers and providers is an indication of trends, strengths and areas for further investigation and action.

There are vacancies for early years and older children which have increased throughout 2024 and suggest good supply levels. However, there are also consistent reports of waiting lists across all

provider types with places for children aged 2-4 years and after school provision for primary aged children in greatest demand.

The number of families accessing targeted two year old funding and the universal entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds this year has declined, this could be attributed to a fall in birth rates, however take up could also be impacted by the expansion of working entitlements with increased supply essential to ensure that no child is disadvantaged.

The expansion of early years and wraparound places is on track with local targets with committed growth for September 2025, however new demand will need to be closely monitored. There has been a consistent increase of working families accessing their entitlement to childcare in Reading earlier. Parents also report that they are working more hours because childcare is growing in affordability. It is likely that working families will continue employment when their child is school age, therefore the demand for wraparound provision in primary could increase.

Places for children with SEND are growing in early years and wraparound childcare provision however this is not consistent across all provider types. It is essential that BFFC continues to invest in training and support to all providers to ensure high quality universal provision, access and inclusion for all children.

Recruitment challenges are consistent but not limited to early years group providers, however not all providers are recruiting currently, and some describe an improving picture. Staff vacancies are impacting the number of places offered to early years children in Reading which risks sufficiency with workforce sustainability a priority.

The expansion of early years entitlements, wraparound provision and financial support provides opportunity for more families to access affordable childcare, work and increase household income in Reading. However, the childcare market must be closely supported to respond and remain sustainable within a changing market.

Action Plan Progress 2024-26

In Reading the strategic approach to sufficiency is focused on 3 main strands:

- 1. Workforce sustainability and growth**
- 2. Expansion of early years entitlements**
- 3. Expansion of wraparound childcare**

Progress to Date

The EY and Childcare, EY SEND teams, Family Information Service and Service Leads meet twice a term to take an active role in implementing and monitoring the impact of the Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan 2024-26.

- The BFfC and DfE recruitment campaign are running simultaneously to ignite interest in working in the early years and childcare sector. The campaigns are strengthened with case studies, details of possible roles and qualification information.
- The EY and Childcare team have strengthened partnerships with local training providers, Elevate, Job Centre Plus and Reading University. This has opened opportunities to work in partnership to engage the public and to bring students and employers together.
- The training, network and specialist advisory offer to Reading providers grows year on year in recognition that opportunities to develop professionally are key to ensuring consistent high-quality experiences for children and to retain the workforce.
- All provider types are offered regular support visits responsive to their priorities, with enhanced support led by need. The early years sector engages fully with the local offer and collaboration is growing with out of school providers as BFfC extends services.
- BFfC and RBC teams worked together to develop a local grant process which prioritised the DfE's criteria, local supply and demand. The supply of EY and wraparound childcare places is on track to meet the targets set by the DfE and systems for monitoring are being finalised.
- A communications plan is in place to ensure families and professionals are well informed and have the information they need to access EY entitlements, out of school childcare and to check eligibility for financial support. There is good evidence that families are accessing the new entitlements and providers are enabling the switch from private to government funded places.

Next Steps 2025-26:

1. Workforce sustainability and growth

- Simultaneously promote the BFfC and DfE childcare recruitment campaign, strengthen local communications and signpost to resources and advertising opportunities.
- Work in partnership with local training and qualifications providers to respond to the needs of the childcare sector and strengthen knowledge of availability.
- Work in partnership with the early years and childcare sector to strengthen leadership skills, support structures and to prioritise mental health and wellbeing.

2. Expansion of early years entitlements

- Ensure prompt and clear information to providers to inform business planning and expansion.
- Promote grant funding opportunities 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.
- Provide training, guidance and information to enhance quality and teaching across the early years sector to support access, inclusion and achievement for all.
- Effectively communicate with parents to ensure they have the information they need to access entitlements including financial support.

3. Expansion of wraparound childcare

- Effectively communicate with parents and providers to ensure they understand the commitment to expanding wraparound childcare and the opportunities available including financial support.
- Promote grant funding opportunities which responds to demand with quick decision making, timely payment and monitoring to ensure set up and sustainability.
- Provide training, guidance and information to enhance quality and support access and inclusion.
- 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.

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 the summer term 2024 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. Questions related to provision for children under 5 with a focus on the expanded entitlements, primary aged wraparound childcare and the recruitment of early years and childcare staff.

There was a good response to the survey overall:

Early Years

- Day Nurseries & Pre-Schools - 100% (44)
- Independent Schools - 100% (5)
- Nursery Schools & Classes - 90% (26)
- Early Years Childminders - 79% (55)

Wraparound

- Schools - 100% (41)
- Childminders (Childcare Register) - 50% (5)
- Onsite Independent Wraparound Childcare Provider - 84% (16)
- Offsite Independent Wraparound Childcare Provider - 100% (3)

An overview of the responses received directly from providers:

Early Years

- In total 97% of children under two currently accessing early years provision were expected to be eligible for the expanded entitlements from September 2024, therefore initially new demand for places was estimated to be low.

- 86% of children aged two were already accessing their early years entitlement for either working or targeted families which identified a group attending who may not be eligible for either entitlement.
- Providers demonstrated confidence in relation to new vacancies opening in September 2024, but with a shared uncertainty for September 2025 when the expanded entitlements roll out in full.
- Demand was not being fully met across Reading for EY places but there were vacancies reported not being utilised by parents potentially due to preference or location requirements.
- Almost half of EY providers reported no barriers to expansion, where present the most common theme for childminders was the ratio requirements set by Ofsted and limited physical space in group settings.
- Places for children aged 2 to 4 years are in highest demand with more children waiting overall than vacancies available.
- There were 3 and 4-year-old children waiting for placement in early years provision who were not likely to be offered a place in their preferred setting, or at all prior to reaching school starting age.

Wraparound

- Full wraparound childcare (8am to 6pm, Mon to Fri) was available in 68% of schools for primary aged children.
- No availability of wraparound childcare within SEND specialist schools.
- Staff training to support children with SEND and enhanced ratios were the most consistent barrier to inclusion within independent wraparound settings
- Unmet demand for after school childcare is greater than before school.
- Most consistently no barriers to providing wraparound provision were reported, however where present physical space was a common theme for all providers, recruitment for group settings and affordability for parents within independent wraparound settings.
- There was a significant interest in expansion of wraparound childcare provision.

Recruitment

- Recruitment challenges are consistent and more evident but not limited to early years group providers.
- Recruitment challenges are impacting the number of places which can be offered to early years children currently.
- Early years providers have modified their approach to recruitment and described flexible working options, investing in home grown staff, pay above the market rate, accurate advertising and encouraging personal recommendations from the existing workforce.

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

The opinions of parents and carers were sought regarding childcare provision in Reading between September and November 2024 via a Microsoft form questionnaire. The survey was publicised via early years and childcare providers, the Family Information Service, Facebook and socials.

Early Years

The early years survey was completed by 176 respondents:

- 13 with a child under 1 year
- 79 with child 1-2 years
- 112 with child 3-5 years

16% of families who responded stated they had a child with SEND or were waiting for a diagnosis of SEND.

Response overview:

- 129 (73%) said they had used informal or formal childcare in the last 12 months. Of those 49% were cared for within a Day Nursery or Maintained nursery school or class (33%). Around 8% were cared for by a Childminder or within a Pre-School.
- 59 parents questioned in our parent survey said they were accessing the Government Working Parent Entitlement offer of 15 hours of childcare for children over the age of 9 months. 19 were claiming the Universal Entitlement for 3- or 4-year-olds and 42 accessed the 30 hours Extended childcare. Only 1 respondent stated they claimed Targeted two-year-old funding.
- 83% of respondents said they used all the early years entitlement hours they were entitled to claim.
- 61 (47%) of parents said they used between 15 to 30 hours of childcare a week, 13% said they used less than 15 hours and 40% said they used more than 30 hours.
- 5% stated they were not able to access all their full early years entitlement hours.
- 104 (81%) parents/carers stated they were able to access the childcare they needed.
- 57% of parents felt their childcare costs were value for money.
- 69% of parents said they were using Tax Free Childcare to help pay for their childcare place.
- Of the 47 respondents to the survey who did not access childcare 11% stated they didn't find it affordable, 11% said they were unable to find local childcare and 38% were not eligible for Government funding.
- 62% of respondents to the survey said they picked their childcare provider as it was close to their home or workplace. 64% chose their provider on a recommendation from another parent.
- 91 (71%) parents/carers said help with childcare costs was the greatest benefit to claiming early years funding. 58 parents/carers stated claiming early years funding aided their child's development.
- 23% of parents said that claiming early years funding meant they could work more hours. 34% said it allowed them to return to work.
- Comment themes:
 - High cost and limited funded hours
 - High quality provision
 - Clearer process required for claiming entitlement
 - Not always enough childcare availability to meet their needs
 - Lack of places for children with SEND

Wraparound Childcare

The wraparound survey for primary aged children was completed by 535 respondents in Reading. From the 535 responses, the number of primary-school aged children within their household were:

- 1 Child = 362 (68%)
- 2 Children = 150 (28%)
- 3 Children = 21 (4%)
- 4 Children = 2 (0.4%)

16% (83) of families who responded stated they had a child with SEND or were waiting for a diagnosis of SEND.

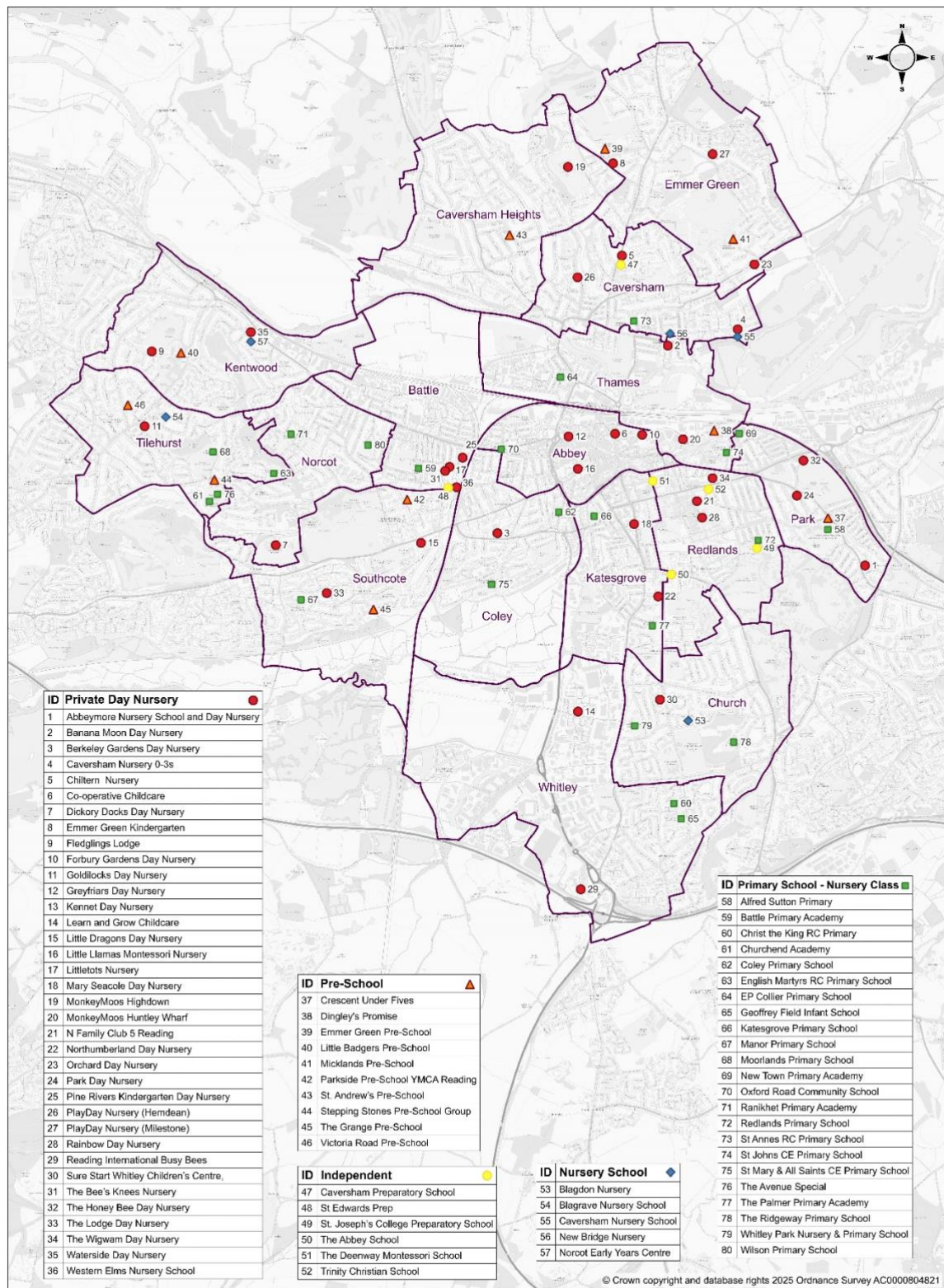
Response overview:

- From the 535 responses, 237 (44%) said 'Yes' they use a wraparound childcare service, and 298 (56%) said 'No' they do not use a wraparound childcare service.
- From the 237 families who use a Wraparound Childcare service, 202 (85%) felt the hours available are sufficient to their needs.
- From the 237 families who use a Wraparound Childcare service, 224 (95%) said a deciding factor for their choice to use a certain wraparound provision was that their child/children attends the school with an on-site provision.
- From the 237 families who use a Wraparound Childcare service, 89 (38%) use both a Breakfast Club and After School Club on-site at their school. 123 (52%) normally only use the After School Club available on-site at their school with 53 (22%) normally only choosing to use a Breakfast club offer at their school.
- There is a greater take-up from parents using Wraparound childcare services between Tuesday – Thursday, with the least popular days tending to be Mondays & Fridays.
 - Monday 19%
 - Tuesday 22%
 - Wednesday 22%
 - Thursday 22%
 - Friday 14%
- From the 237 families, 48% of them said they were 'satisfied' and 43% said they were 'very satisfied' with their Wraparound Childcare arrangements. 5% are 'dissatisfied' and 5% are 'very dissatisfied'
- From the 22 families who are 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' with their Wraparound Childcare arrangements, 12 of them sated it was difficult to find the Wraparound Childcare arrangements they required.
- From the 237 families who use a Wraparound Childcare service, 79% of them said it was easy to find the type of Wraparound Childcare they wanted in their local area.
- From the 298 of families who do not use a Wraparound Childcare service, 141 (47%) of them said it was not required, 84 (28%) said they don't use it due to affordability, 51 (17%) said it was not needed as their child/ren are cared for by a family member and/or friends.
- From the 154 families who are accessing financial support 83 (54%) are receiving Tax-Free Childcare and 48 (31%) are accessing Universal Credit Childcare.

Comment themes:

- High cost of wraparound childcare
- High quality provider
- Lack of flexibility to book a place
- Earlier start to breakfast club
- Improvement to food required
- Difficult to access wraparound childcare for children with SEND

Appendix 3 Map of Early Years Childcare of Reading Group Provision January 2025



Title: Childcare Providers in Reading

Date: 18/03/2025

Scale at A3: 1:35,000

Produced by Data and GIS Team

Ref: 0010/01