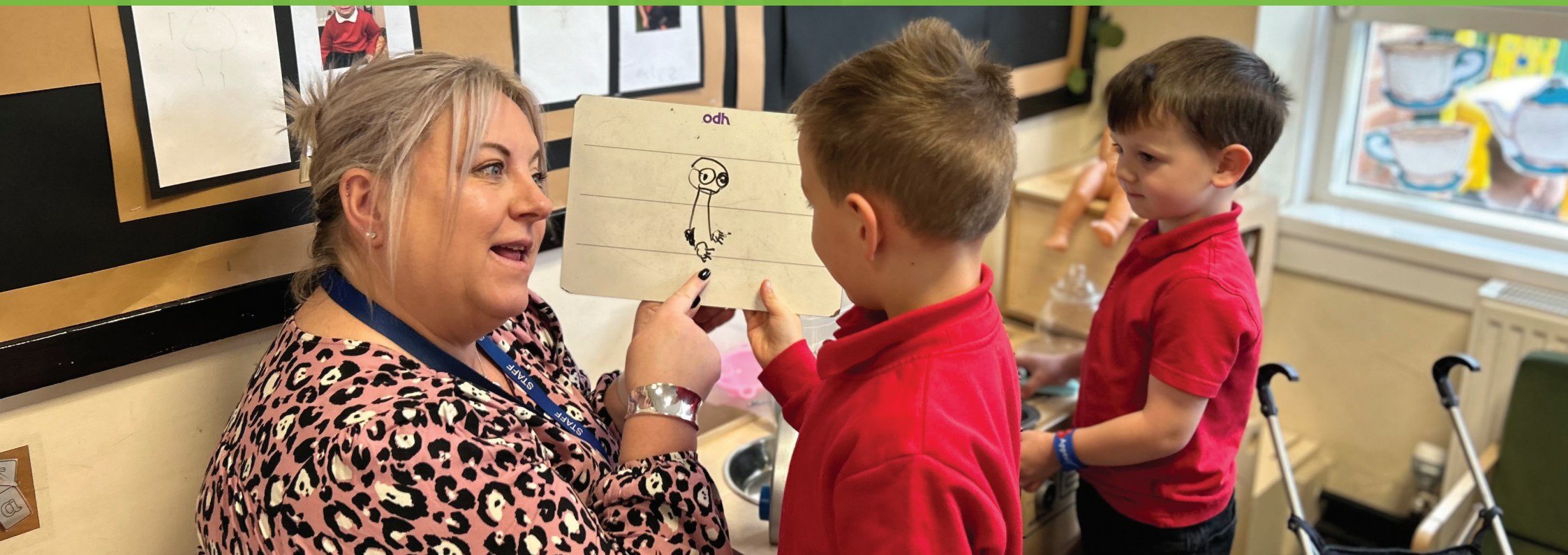


ROTHERHAM EARLY YEARS EDUCATION & CHILDCARE STRATEGY 2024-2027

Supporting all Rotherham children to develop and thrive



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ABOUT THIS STRATEGY

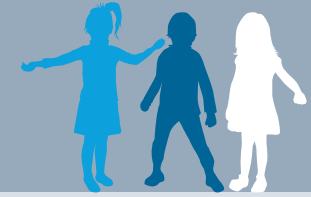


This strategy sets out a high level overview of the different things we intend to do to achieve our intentions. This overview will be translated into a detailed delivery plan which will prioritise the actions we intend to take, outline what we are planning to do and when we are planning to do it.

The plan will be delivered by the Rotherham Early Years and Childcare Service working in partnership with other parts of Rotherham Council and our partner agencies. There are many other strategies, plans and programmes of work which we will take into account and align to when implementing this strategy including the Council Plan, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Early Help Strategy, the Family Hubs programme, Best Start and Beyond framework, SEND Sufficiency Strategy, Children's Capital of Culture, Rotherham Loves Reading programme.



FOREWORDS



Councillor Cusworth

Rotherham Council is committed to ensuring all children and young people get the best start for life. As Cabinet Member for Children and Young Peoples Services I have a specific remit for leading targeted and coordinated action across the early years and childcare system to improve outcomes for children. This ensures that Rotherham Council has a strong Early Years function, and that the Council provides strong leadership and coordination to the whole Early Years System, supporting all agencies who have a role to play in early years to work in partnership to achieve a joint vision.

By working effectively together the Rotherham Early Years System can do better for all, but there are also important contributions that we need national agencies and Government to make, so I am committed to raising awareness of the need for improved support and recognition for children, families, and the early years at a national level. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this Strategy.

Councillor Victoria Cusworth, Cabinet Member for Children and Young Peoples Services, Rotherham Council.



Nicola Curley

My vision for Education in Rotherham is to ignite in children and families a passion for lifelong learning enabling all children and young people to achieve their potential and to eradicate inequalities in outcomes. I strongly believe that doing this has to start during the earliest stages of life when we have the maximum potential to encourage children to be curious and inquisitive learners and to embed a lifelong love of reading and knowledge acquisition. I welcome the focus of this Strategy on supporting the early years sector in Rotherham to ensure that our children get the best start in their education journey.

I am very proud of the outcomes that Rotherham achieves for young children, supported by a committed early years sector. Currently (Summer 2023) 86 % of eligible two year olds are accessing their early education entitlement, enabling them to benefit from a high quality early years foundation stage offer. The sector continues to proactively develop to meet needs with high take-up of both the locally developed Tiny Talkers speech language and communication programme as well as the government's package of workforce training for the early years sector to support staff and settings address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the youngest and most disadvantaged children.

I will ensure that under this Strategy we continue to build on progress and enable even more children to do well.

Nicola Curley, Director of Children and Young Peoples Services, Rotherham Council.



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EARLY YEARS



Conception to age five is a vitally important time in a child's life. Providing the best opportunities at this time can have a positive effect on children's educational, cognitive, behavioural and social outcomes in the short and long term:

- During early childhood, from pregnancy to the age of five, our brains develop at an amazing rate – faster than at any other time in our lives.
- Our experiences, relationship and surroundings at that very young age, shape the rest of our lives.
- This is when we start to understand the world in which we live. How to manage our emotions, build relationships with the people around us, believe in ourselves, develop resilience against diversity and have trust in others.

There are many different people and services who come into the lives of families with young children, all of whom have many important contributions to make. These people and services need to work together effectively, in partnership with parents/carers, to enable all children in Rotherham to get the best start.

The Best Start and Beyond framework and the Family Hubs programme detail the support that is in place for children and families through the first years of their lives. This Early Years and Childcare Strategy sets out the actions that will be taken to support children and families through their childcare and educational journey.

Most children in Rotherham have positive experiences in their early years and are well prepared for starting school, however we know nationally there are large differences in outcomes between children from different backgrounds and these differences generally continue in later life. We want all Rotherham residents to be given equal opportunities to have positive and fulfilling lives and are committed to ensuring a consistent, high quality early education and childcare offer is available to all families.

During the early years the support that children get from their parents/carers is the most important thing and we are therefore committed to enabling all parents/carers to provide good quality 'home learning environments' for their children through the support of the Family Hub Programme and Best Start and Beyond framework, working with colleagues in health services who support parents in the prenatal and antenatal period.

We know that continuing this good base of learning through access to high quality early education and childcare can have significant positive benefits for children and we will ensure that there is a range of sustainable, high quality early education and childcare provision to meet needs. This work will contribute to the Council Plan aim that every child is able to fulfil their potential.

VISION



In Rotherham there will be no barriers to children achieving the best they can and realising their full potential.

To achieve this vision we will ensure that:

All families

- Have access to affordable, high quality childcare and early education that meets their needs
- Are aware of the benefits of taking up an early education place and are excited about the opportunities for their children
- Know where to find out more about the range of childcare and early education available
- Take up their entitlement at the earliest opportunity

All early years and childcare providers/schools

- Are able to deliver sustainable, high quality provision
- Are flexible to meet parents/carers needs
- Continuously develop to maintain a high quality of delivery
- Support all children including our most vulnerable children and ensure that they are safe, and their needs are met to enable them to develop and thrive.
- Are able to expand to meet demand
- Are supported to meet the needs of children with special



OUR STRATEGY AIMS



- Parents/carers can access affordable, sufficient, high quality and fully inclusive childcare places that support early learning and working parents/carers
- Children's early learning and development is expertly supported by a strong, skilled, and knowledgeable early years and childcare workforce
- Children who may be at risk of poor outcomes are prioritised for high quality targeted support
- All children have a positive journey through their early years and are well supported to transition to Foundation 2 (Reception)



THE NATIONAL CONTEXT & LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK



National investment in early years has continued for over 20 years where a series of expansions and reforms have been seen, including Sure Start programmes, Children's Centres, the expansion of the early education entitlements (to include our least advantaged 2-year-olds and working families), a focus on speech, language and communication, investment in training for the sector and most recently an expansion to the early education entitlement.

The Childcare Act 2006 (updated in 2016 and 2018) was the first act to be exclusively concerned with Early Years and Childcare and early childhood services. The three key drivers in this Act are to reduce child poverty; reduce inequalities between children and to improve well-being for young children.

The Childcare Act enables a framework for delivery under three key areas:

- The **early years outcomes** duties require the provision of early childhood services and joint working between agencies to reduce inequalities, improve outcomes and narrow the gap.
- The **sufficiency duties** require Local Authorities to ensure sufficient early education and childcare including early education for 2, 3 and 4 year olds as well as childcare for children aged 0-14, (or 18 for children with a disability) with the aim of enabling parents to take part in employment and employment-related activities.

- The **information duties** require Local Authorities to ensure information for both childcare providers and families, in order to meet their other childcare duties.

The role of the Local Authority is to:

- Assess the market, need, supply and demand
- Develop a mixed market of diverse provision
- Attract new providers
- Support high quality sustainable start ups
- **Support training, development and quality**
- Ensure demand-led change
- Commission delivery of publicly funded entitlements
- Deliver services (as a last resort)
- **Multi-agency management as a requirement**

The Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on children in their early years and the early years and childcare sector.

Early education take-up was disrupted during the pandemic and research shows the impact of this disruption on children. Speech and language delays were reported across all age groups as children had fewer opportunities to develop their communication skills at home. Children struggled to adapt to new situations

and missed out on opportunities to socialise and develop self-regulation skills. And, as the children spent less time outdoors and more time in sedentary activities, their physical development, including their motor skills, were negatively affected. Increased support required in settings to meet needs, coupled with significantly increased delivery costs and challenges recruiting staff has impacted on the ongoing sustainability of the sector.

The current position and forthcoming changes:

Currently eligible families (see Appendix 1 for eligibility criteria) are entitled to 15 hours of early education, 38 weeks of the year for 2 year olds from the term after their 2nd birthday. All three and four year olds are entitled to the same offer from the term after the third birthday. Working families are entitled to 30 hours of early education from the term after the third birthday.

The government is providing a package of up to £180 million for workforce training, qualifications and support and guidance for the early years sector to help address the impact of the pandemic on the youngest and most disadvantaged children.

The programmes are designed for early years: practitioners, leaders, settings, including private, voluntary and independent organisations; childminders; school-based nurseries; and maintained nursery schools. Designed to support all areas of the early years sector, the package offers training in:

- Early years child development training
- Professional development programme focusing on communication and language, early mathematics, and personal, social and emotional development
- Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI)

- New national professional qualification in early years leadership (NPQEYL)
- Home learning environment
- Regional stronger practice hubs
- Support to settings through expert coaches and mentors

Additional funding for qualifications:

- Graduate-level specialist training leading to early years teacher status
- Accredited level 3 early years special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) qualification
- A review of the level 3 qualification and criteria
- In March 2023 the Government announced the following policy changes:



- June 2023** Universal Credit’s maximum childcare payments rose nearly 50% – up to £1,630 per month
- September 2023** the early education funding rates were increased for 2, 3 and 4 year olds
- September 2023** a change to 2 year old Ratios to 1:5 (from 1:4)
- September 2023** childminder promotion of £600 for those registering through Ofsted and £1200 for registering via an agency.
- Autumn 2023** Local authorities and schools were given more funding to set up ‘wraparound care’ outside of normal school hours so that parents of school age children can access childcare in their local area from 8am – 6pm. The expectation is that by September 2026, most primary schools will be able to provide their own before and after school care
- April 2024** working parents of two-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of free childcare
- September 2024** 15 hours of free childcare will be extended to all children from the age of nine months
- September 2025** working parents of children from 9 months to under the age of five will be entitled to 30 hours free childcare per week



LOCAL CONTEXT

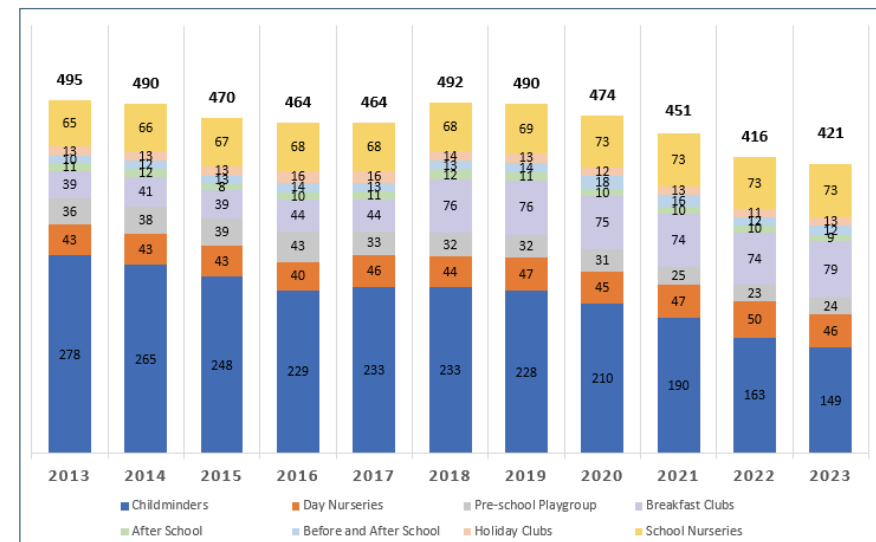


Early Education and childcare provision for children before they reach statutory school age is delivered by a number of providers include self-employed childminders operating from home, preschool play groups, day nurseries and school based provision. Childcare which supports school-age children (often known as ‘out of school’ or ‘wraparound’ childcare), is offered by childminders, voluntary or private groups, and schools.

All providers who deliver early education and childcare to 0 – 5 year olds are registered and inspected by Ofsted and must follow the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework.

The delivery of early education and childcare is dependent on a market facilitation approach and the sector is shaped by market forces. Parental engagement and choice is critical to service design and implementation. None of the services offered within the early years and childcare framework place any obligation or legal requirement on parents to take them up: engagement in services is entirely voluntary and therefore demand led.

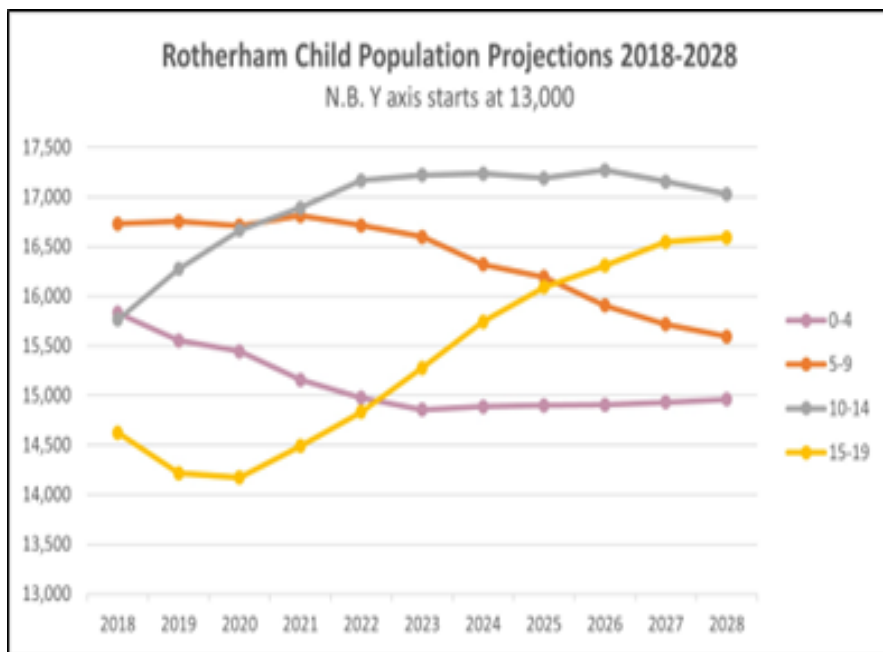
The childcare sector in Rotherham has changed significantly over 10 years as detailed below:



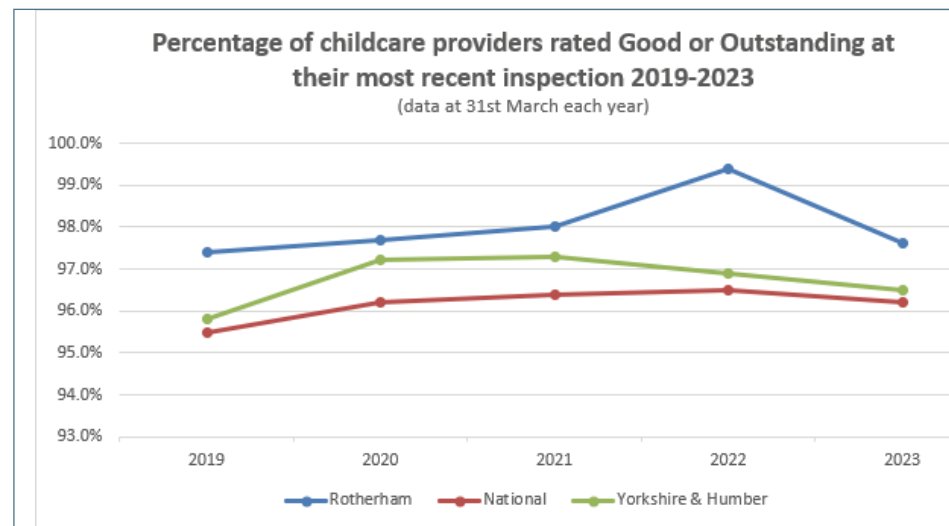
These changes have been shaped by a number of factors, including expansion of the early education entitlement, population changes, changes in working patterns, changes in the registration and inspection framework. The Early Years and Childcare Service carry out an annual childcare sufficiency assessment and findings indicate that the supply continues to meet demand.

The graph below details the reduction in the early years population between 2018 and 2023. In addition, the number of two year olds eligible for a free early education place has reduced (locally

and nationally). This is because the fall in parents of 2-year-olds receiving legacy benefits which Universal Credit has replaced hasn't been offset by the rise in those receiving Universal Credit. In addition, the maximum income thresholds for the eligibility criteria have remained unchanged in recent years whilst average incomes have increased.



The quality of childcare remains high in Rotherham with 98.3% (March 2023) of early years providers achieving a Good or Outstanding grade at Ofsted inspection. The following graph details our ongoing positive position against the national and regional context.



Rotherham Council has specific legal responsibilities to do the following:

- Ensure there is sufficient childcare available in the borough
- Provide information, advice, and assistance to families (which we do through our Families Information Service)
- Secure information, advice, guidance, and training for childcare providers
- Support improvement in the quality of childcare
- Ensure that all children have access to up to six terms of high-quality early education provision, as reflected in the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework, from the term after their third birthday
- Ensure sufficient and high-quality childcare is available for all 2-year olds eligible for 'Free Early Education Entitlement funding'

- Meet the childcare needs of families with children over the age of five through out of school care and provision for children and young people up to the age of 14 (or to 25 for children with disabilities)
- Safeguard and promote the welfare of all children throughout all aspects of the work of Early Years and Childcare with specific regard to ensuring that early years and childcare providers understand their responsibilities and are accountable for their practice
- Ensure that all providers delivering funded early education places meet the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and / or Disabilities in accordance with the SEND Code of Practice 2015
- Participate in the identification and planning for the needs of children with SEND, including coordinating joint commissioning arrangements across Education, Health and Social Care and in other legal duties related to Education, Health and Care Plans and Preparing for Adulthood

The early years system is facilitated by a number of partners, including the local authority, schools, and childcare providers. We are committed to working with the sector and encouraging them to work with us and share our Vision. National Government is also part of the system. A lot of the things we may want to change in Rotherham are outside of our direct control, for example the levels of funding that are available to early years childcare providers, and the type of training early years practitioners receive. Where this is the case, we consult with the sector on the local funding formula and in direct delivery of training to meet identified local needs.

To support the sector to meet the needs of children, the Early Years and Childcare Service has developed the Tiny Talkers programme to support speech and language development. This programme includes a Facebook page to share information with parents as well as a range of training from Universal awareness training through to Enhanced Plus accredited training for early years practitioners and a Tiny Talkers Booster programme for settings to deliver to groups of children with identified speech and language needs.

To support the needs of Rotherham’s children in care, The Virtual School has developed a core training offer including ‘Parents are Experts’ to support parents/carers to provide high quality learning experiences within the home. Virtual School advisers support and signpost young parents alongside Early Help and Social Care to regularly attend community groups and local Children’s Centres.

In addition, the Early Years Inclusion Support Grant has been re-shaped to include a two tier model to provide additional support to schools and providers to contribute to additional staffing support to meet the needs of children with identified special educational needs and disabilities.



PERFORMANCE



The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was introduced nationally in 2013. It sets out key areas for learning and development for children between birth and 5 and sets out 'goals' which children should achieve or be working towards during that time. Pupils are assessed against the EYFS at the end of the school year when they turn 5. The assessment is done by class teachers using observation rather than testing. The outcomes of these observations are used to determine how many children have achieved a 'Good Level of Development' (GLD).

We recognise this is only one way to determine outcomes for children, nevertheless nationally this is one of the key performance measures that is used.

The percentage of pupils achieving a GLD increased annually and was above the national average up to 2018. This was an established trend until 2019 when performance decreased by 2.8% to 70.3% , slightly below the national average of 71.8%.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic EYFS data was not collected in 2020 or 2021. The EYFS was significantly revised during reforms that were introduced in September 2021 and it is therefore not possible to directly compare 2021/22 assessment outcomes with earlier years.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) 2022

In 2022, the GLD in Rotherham at 64.5% is still slightly below the national average of 65.2% however the gap has been narrowed.

Rotherham LA and the National Average Trend for GLD

	2017 GLD%	2018 GLD%	2019 GLD%	2022 GLD% (New framework)
Rotherham LA	72.1	73.1	70.3	64.5
National	70.7	71.5	71.9	65.2
Roth / Nat Gap	+1.4	+1.6	-1.6	-0.7

Free School Meals (FSM)

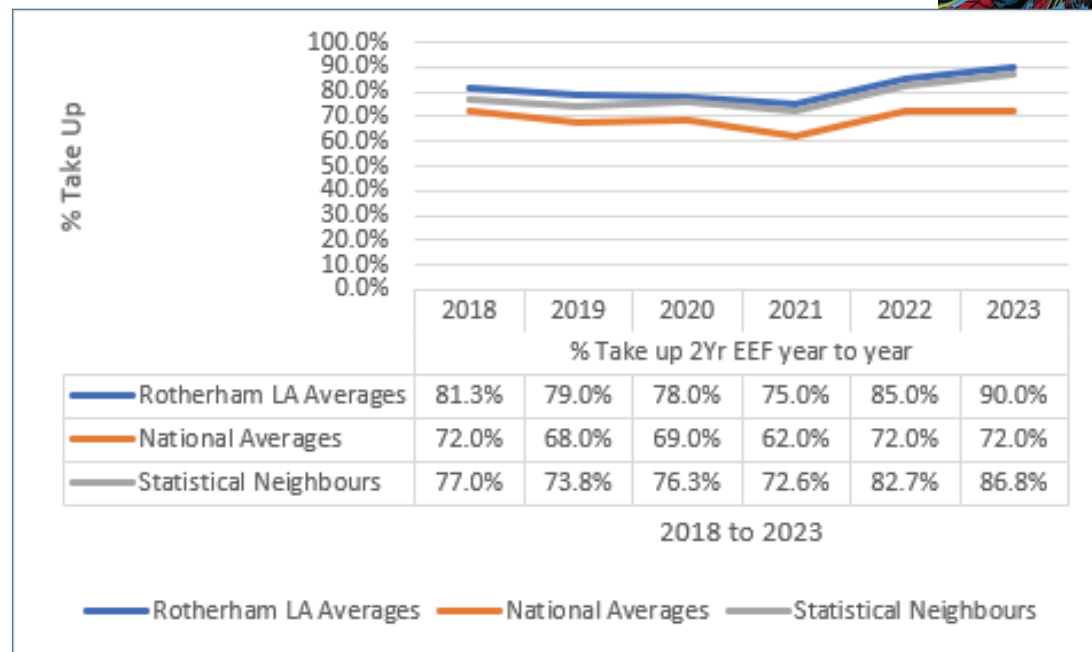
In 2022, the number of pupils eligible for FSM was 626 -19.6% of the cohort. Of this cohort, 51.3% achieve a GLD compared to 49.1% nationally.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

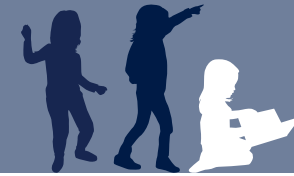
More children in Rotherham with SEND Support achieve a GLD than nationally at 30% compared to 22.9%. In Rotherham, 4.8% of children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) achieve a GLD compared to 3.7% nationally.

Children in Care

There is a significant improvement in the performance of Rotherham's early years children in care achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) within the academic year 2021/2022. Within the DfE cohort, 70% of Rotherham's children in care achieved a GLD in comparison to 40% of National and 41% of Yorkshire and Humber region's children in care.



VIEWS OF THE SECTOR



A consultation was carried out with all early years and childcare providers in July 2023 to capture their views on the current status of the sector and their support needs to inform the strategy. See full results at Appendix 1.

The number of responses is detailed below:

Type of Provider	Number of Respondents	Percentage of the Sector
School	8	11 %
Group Childcare Provider	13	23 %
Childminder	9	6 %

Providers were asked to detail the main challenges faced in continuing to deliver high quality early education/children to meet local needs.

63 % of all providers highlighted cost of delivery as a challenge, with 16 % highlighting the early education funding rate as a factor.

75 % of school respondents stated increasing numbers of children with SEND is a challenge 61.5 % of group childcare providers stated staff recruitment is a challenge 55 % of childminders stated that increases in cost of delivery is a challenge

Providers were asked if they will be able to meet the anticipated increased demand from the proposed increases to the early education entitlement:

All of the group providers expect to be able to meet the demand in April 2024, however some childminders and schools have concerns due to building capacity and ratio restrictions.

By September 2024, 85 % of group providers expect to be able to meet the demand however the number of schools and childminders who do not expect to meet demand increases.

By September 2025, 70 % of group providers and 55 % of childminders expect to be able to meet demand. The majority of schools don't current offer places for children from 9 months – 3 years therefore the majority of respondents would not be able to support the increased demand.

The childcare sufficiency assessment being carried out between June – August 2023 will capture details of the capacity across the whole sector and, taking into account potential demand, will provide details on areas of concern and inform further action.

Providers were asked in what way the local authority could support them to meet their identified challenges and a number of suggestions were provided including: Increased budget (Early Education Funding) to cover costs (27 % of respondents), extra support to meet SEND needs (20 % of respondents).

OUR STRATEGY AIMS IN DETAIL



Aim 1: Parents/carers can access sufficient, high quality and fully inclusive childcare places that support early learning and childcare needs

What we want to achieve:

There is sufficient pre-school and early education and childcare in Rotherham to meet the needs of working parents and those wanting to access funded entitlements.

All settings are inclusive and so capable of meeting the diverse needs of all children.

Childcare businesses in Rotherham are well managed, plan effectively and are financially robust reflected both in their financial security and the quality of care they provide.

We effectively support the long-term sustainability of our early years and childcare sector, including working with providers to manage the short, medium, and long-term impacts of the pandemic.

We recognise the strains on working families and seek to help them manage their childcare needs.

There is good quality information, advice, and guidance for parents on finding, accessing, and affording suitable early education and childcare.

We work with parents/carers who want to access early education and childcare to help remove barriers to them doing so.

What we need everyone to do:

We need childcare providers to work in partnership with Rotherham Council to address areas of low childcare sufficiency and to consider how provision could be made more accessible and affordable to families.

We need childcare providers to work in partnership with Rotherham Council to help develop better understanding about the challenges of delivering quality childcare within the existing financial and other restraints.

We need the whole of the system to support early education and childcare providers in considering innovative approaches that could be taken to address the problems that exist and in supporting our awareness raising on the issue at a national level.

We need schools to consider what more they could potentially do to assist with parents needs for out of school provision.

Aim 2: Children’s early learning and development is expertly supported by a strong, skilled, and knowledgeable early years and childcare system workforce

What we want to achieve:

Careers in early years in Rotherham are well respected, valued and popular; recruitment and retention rates across diverse groups are good.

Agencies, settings and practitioners work together across barriers and boundaries to share good practice, insight and training and development opportunities aimed at developing mutual understanding of each other's roles and strengthening the sector as a whole.

There is a desirable mix and breadth of different skill levels across the sector including strong leadership and an increased number of practitioners holding higher level qualification at level 3 and above.

The early years workforce is enabled to access a training and development offer which meets its needs and contributes to continued and sustained professional development.

The training and development offer to the early years workforce is joined up and coordinated between the different agencies; it is clear for the workforce to see what is available and how and where they can access this.

Training accessed translates into a positive impact, demonstrated through both the outcomes achieved by children, the quality of settings and changes in practice.

There is good promotion of informal networks and opportunities that can be accessed by those working in early years to improve knowledge and get support from other agencies – for example networking meetings

What we need everyone to do:

We need everyone working in the early years system to actively commit to continually developing their skills and knowledge and to take an open-minded approach in how they do this.

We need all providers of early education and childcare to actively commit to delivering and enabling their staff to attend more opportunities to learn

We need Government and other national agencies involved in the delivery and funding of training and development for the early years and childcare sector to recognise and respond to the challenges being faced in respect of funding and accessing quality support.

We need training providers to proactively ensure that training is providing workers with the skills and competencies necessary to optimally support young children.

Aim 3: Children who may be at risk of poor outcomes are prioritised for high quality targeted support

What we want to achieve:

The system understands which children are less likely than others to achieve against standard measurements (such as GLD) and has an embedded understanding of how to support these children to achieve their individual potential.

There are strong and effective systems which identify children who need additional support at an early stage and once identified practitioners use a range of targeted early interventions to provide effective early support.

All children are supported to access high quality early years provision and are supported by skilled and knowledgeable early years practitioners.

There is a high level of take up of our early help opportunities, including Free Early Education Entitlement. All early years services and provisions adhere to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

We understand our local communities and, in partnership with others, work towards removing disadvantage and inequality.

We are committed to learning more about and from disadvantaged groups and to taking innovative approaches which we will learn from to inform our longer-term strategies

What we need everyone to do:

We need everyone who works in early years to agree to prioritise support and activity around the needs of certain identified children and families who need additional support.

We need this prioritisation of certain children and families to be reflected in strategic and on the ground, decision making around where and how resource is targeted.

We need everyone who provides services accessed by families to consider what more they can do to make their provision accessible to children with differing needs.

We need everyone to commit to a shared high aspiring vision for what 'good' looks like for children with specific needs.

Aim 4: All children have a positive journey through their early years and are well supported to transition to Foundation 2 (Reception)

What we want to achieve:

All children are well supported by their families and the agencies they work with and as a result receive lifelong benefits from having a great start in their early years through to becoming responsible adults.

Everyone has a good understanding of the groups of children who may be less likely than others to have good outcomes and targeted

support is provided at an early stage to enable these children to reach their potential.

All children who would benefit from accessing quality early education provision are encouraged and enabled to do so.

There is an agreed system-wide approach to, and acknowledgement of, the importance of early language and communication, and relationships and attachment to children's development.

The Sector demonstrates an understanding of the latest research and insight about how to best support children in early years.

What we need everyone to do:

We need everyone who works with children under five and their parents and carers to understand the importance of this early period, the benefits of taking up their early education place and to enable children to be well prepared to start Foundation 2 class at school.

We need health agencies who provide support at an early stage to expectant and new parents to provide access to good quality information and support, highlighting the importance of speech, language and communication development from birth and the benefits of accessing early education.

We need early years settings and schools to work effectively together to support children moving into school and schools to commit to providing a positive and inclusive early years' experience, which can meet the needs of all children.

We need everyone who works with children under five to be alert to children who may need extra support and to ensure that those children are able to access the extra support that is available.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND MEASURING SUCCESS



The Early Years Education and Childcare Strategy Action Plan will include actions to achieve each of the four Aims.

The oversight of the Rotherham Early Years Education and Childcare Strategy is the responsibility of the Best Start and Beyond Steering Group. The Best Start and Beyond Steering Group reports to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

A summary of progress on the action plan will be reported termly to the Best Start in Life Steering Group and also to the Improving Lives Select Commission.

