

Best Start Local Plan Needs Assessment

The findings in this needs analysis – from [Nesta's Best Start in Life](#) data - highlight current strengths while also identifying clear areas where targeted action is required to achieve the 2028 Good Level of Development (GLD) ambitions and reduce inequalities.

Key Areas of Need

1. GLD attainment gap -

- Children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) have significantly lower GLD outcomes compared with the overall rate.
- Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), particularly those with Speech, Language and Communication Needs, the most common primary need locally.
- Children with English as an additional language, who may face additional language development barriers.
- Boys, who consistently underperform compared with girls at GLD level.
- Summer-born children, who are developmentally younger at assessment and therefore less likely to achieve GLD.

2. Impact of poverty and deprivation - Rotherham has high levels of deprivation, with 45,401 FSM-eligible children across primary and secondary schools.

3. Increasing need for support through Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) - The number of EHC requests in Rotherham has risen sharply over the past five years, increasing from around 471 in 2019 to almost 959 in 2024.

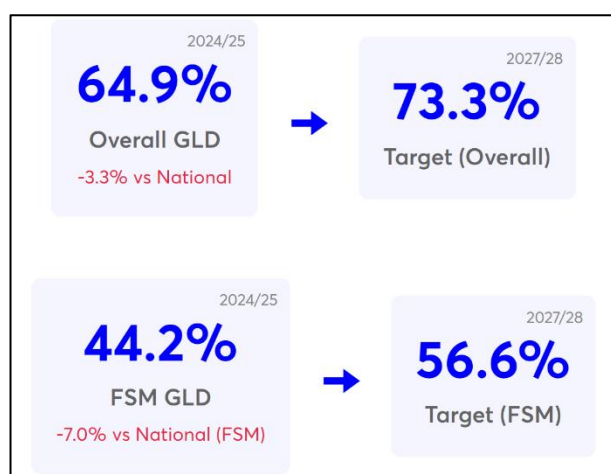
Strengths

- 1. Strong early child development at 2-2.5 years** - 88.9% of children meet ASQ-3 expected levels, 7.5 percentage points above the national average.
- 2. Good take-up of ECEC entitlements** - Good levels of participation in early education for 3 and 4-year-olds.

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3. **Clear existing infrastructure for family support** - Rotherham has 3 Family Hubs, 16 Family Hub Network sites, and 15 libraries.
4. **Strong demographic insights** - Population and deprivation mapping enables identification of priority areas and groups.

Rotherham's GLD Targets



In 2024/25, overall GLD is 64.9% (1,942), which is 3.3 percentage points below the national figure, with a target of 73.3% by 2027/28.

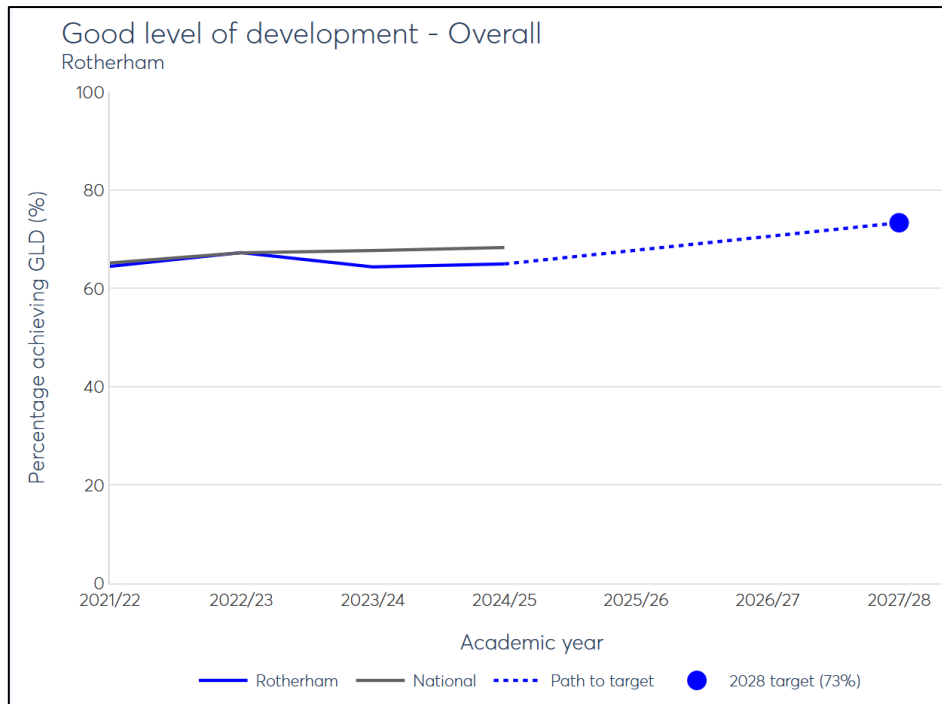
Outcomes for children eligible for Free School Meals are lower, with FSM GLD at 44.2% (242), 7 points below national, and a target of 56.6% by 2027/28.

To achieve these ambitions, Rotherham will need 250 additional children to reach GLD overall and 67 additional FSM children to meet the FSM-specific target.

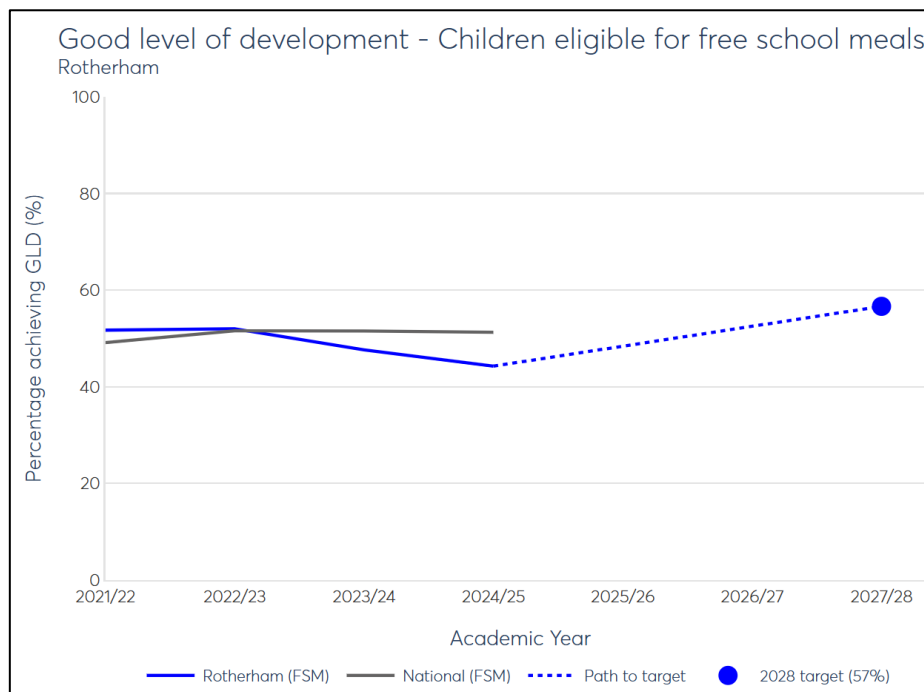
GLD Over Time and Targets

Overall, GLD outcomes in Rotherham have remained broadly stable over recent years, sitting just below the national average. After a small drop in 2023/24, Rotherham's GLD rate is at around 65% in 2024/25, compared with a slightly higher national rate.

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GLD outcomes for children eligible for Free School Meals in Rotherham have declined from 2021/22 to 2024/25, falling from just above the national figure to 44% in 2024/25. Over the same period, the national FSM rate has remained broadly stable.



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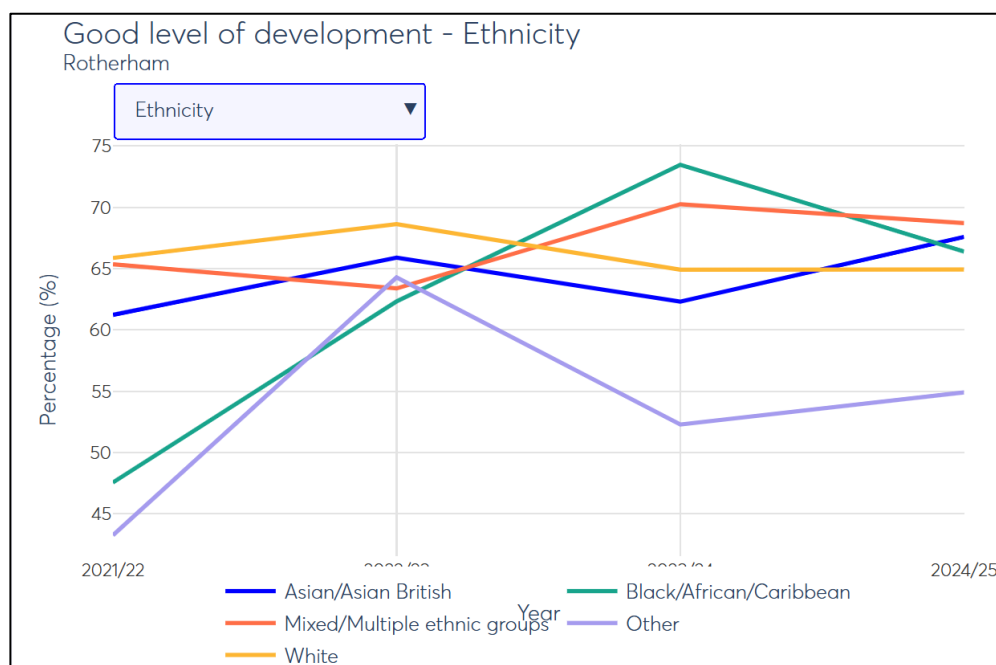
The attainment gap between the overall cohort and children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) is wider in Rotherham than it is nationally, highlighting a greater level of inequality locally.

Ethnicity

Since 2021/22, there has been a narrowing of the outcome inequalities seen in minority ethnic groups, with Black/African/Caribbean figure rising from 47.5% to 66.4%. Similar, but more subtle trends can be seen in the Asian/British Asian and the mixed/multiple ethnic cohorts.

Although several minority ethnic groups have improved their GLD outcomes, White children have not followed this upward trend. As a result, the narrowing of inequalities may reflect both rising attainment in minority groups and a lack of comparable progress within the White cohort.

Note that because minority ethnic cohorts are smaller, their GLD percentages are more sensitive to year-on-year changes. Small movements in the absolute number of children can produce relatively large percentage shifts, which should be considered when interpreting trends in outcomes.



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Gender

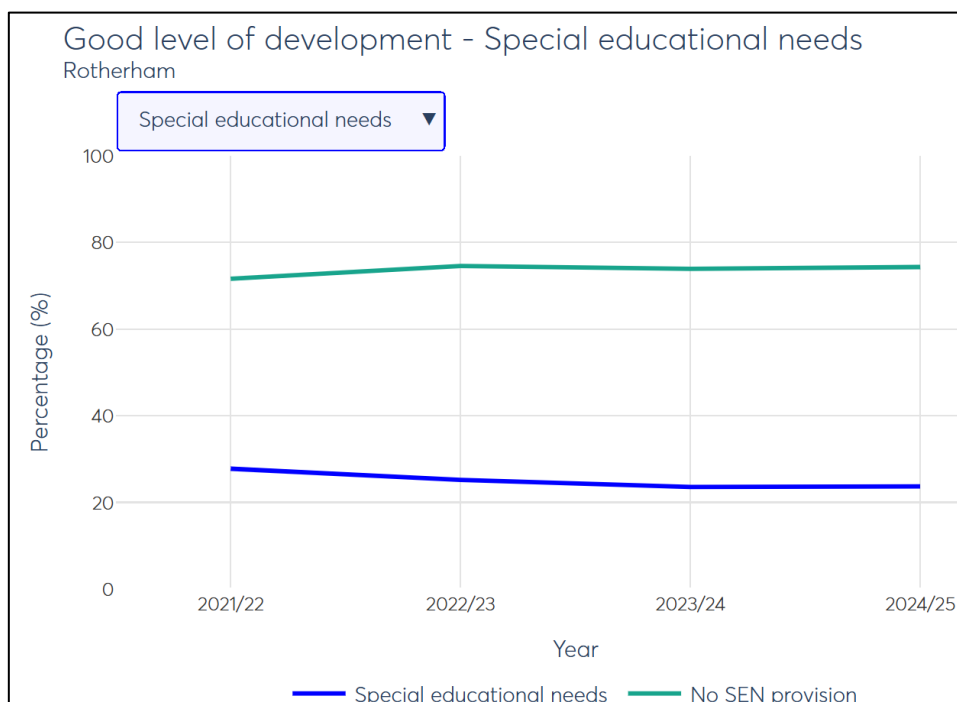
There is a persistent and significant gap in GLD achievement between boys and girls, and this has remained unchanged since 2021/22. Boys continue to be less likely to achieve a GLD than girls, with a 14.4 percentage point difference in 2024/25. This ongoing disparity indicates that boys may require more targeted support in the early years.



Special Educational Needs (SEN)

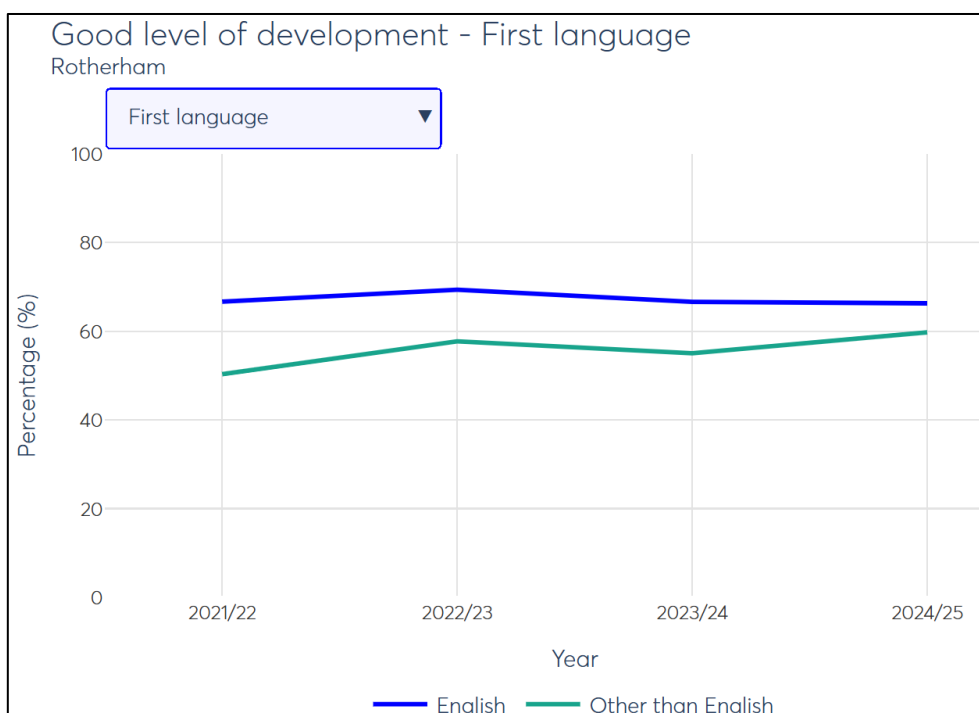
A group which needs targeted support and intervention are children with SEN. There is a substantial achievement gap between those with SEN and those without (23.7% compared to 74.3% in 2024/25). The achievement gap between these two groups is also increasing with the difference in 2021/22 being 43.8 percentage points compared to 50.6 in 2024/25.

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First Language

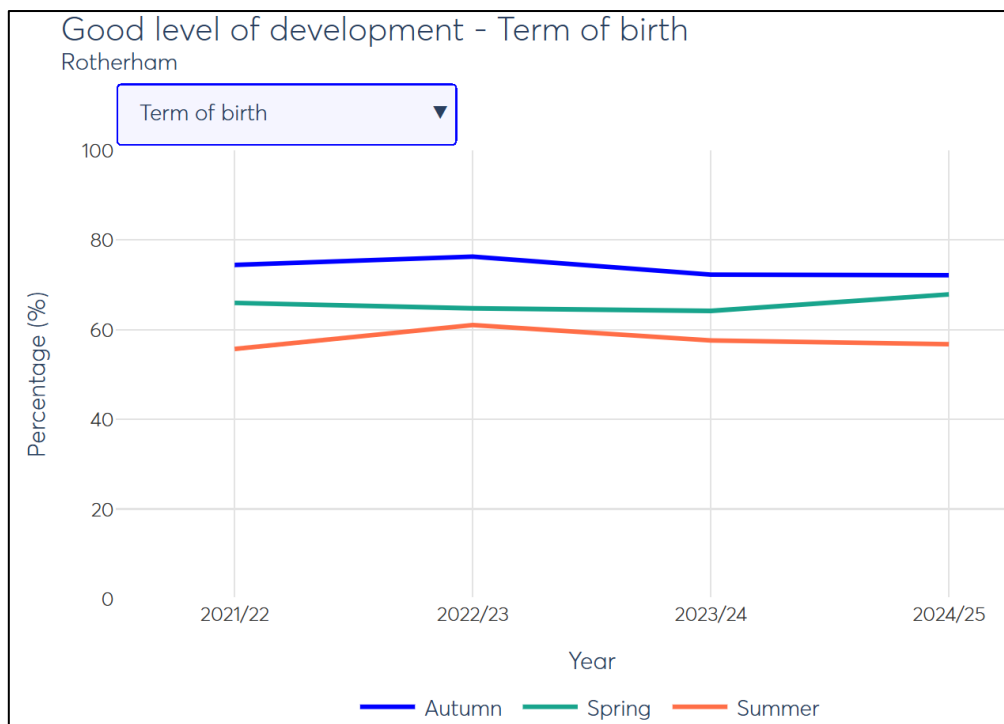
Children whose first language is English continue to achieve higher GLD results than children whose first language is not English. In 2024/25, 66.3% of children with English as their first language achieved a GLD, compared to 59.7% of children with another first language. Although the gap between these two groups still exists, it has begun to narrow.



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Term of Birth

There is a consistent pattern in GLD outcomes based on term of birth, with Autumn-born children achieving the highest results and Summer-born children achieving the lowest.



This reflects the maturity gap, where Summer-born children are almost a full year younger than some of their peers at the point of assessment and therefore have had less time to develop key early learning skills.

While the gap changes slightly year to year, the trend remains the same, highlighting the need for targeted early support for younger children within the cohort.

Achievement Across EYFSP Areas of Learning

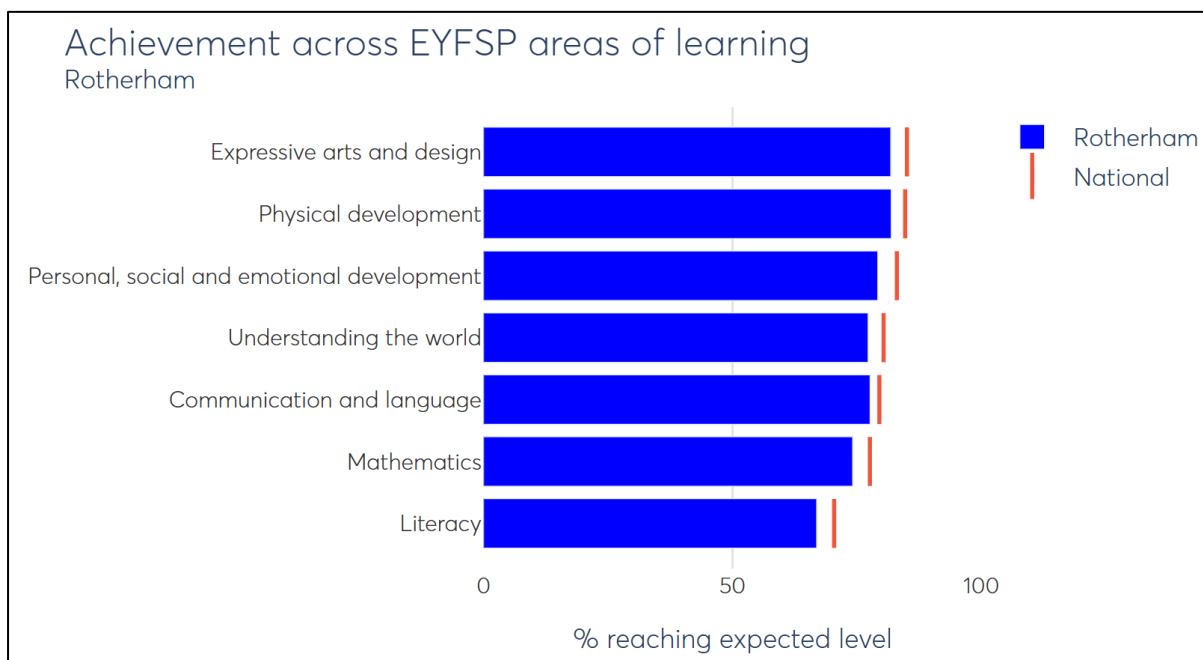
Rotherham follows national trends around which areas of learning the most children are reaching the expected level in.

The area where Rotherham's achievement is closest to the national level is in communication and language where the percentage point difference in children reaching the expected level is 1.8.

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The highest inequality in achievement is for personal, social, and emotional development. The percentage of children reaching the expected level in Rotherham is 79.2% compared to the national average of 83.1% (3.9 percentage point difference).

Other areas of learning have differences ranging from 2.8% to 3.5%.

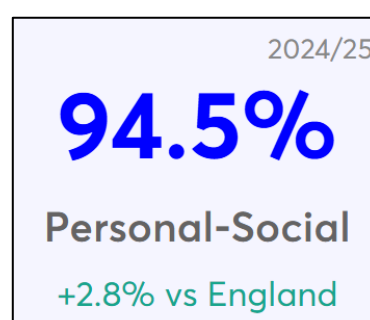
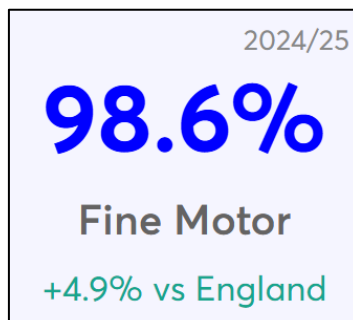
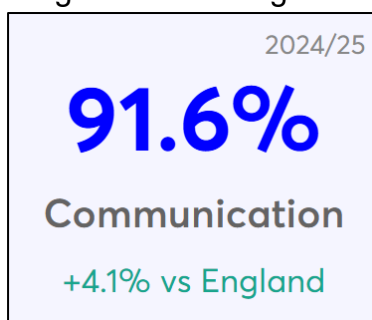


The Common Outcomes Framework

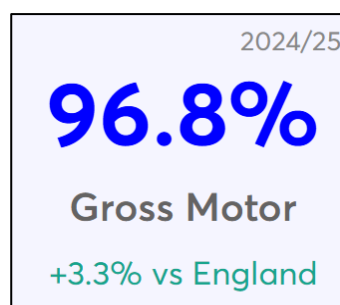
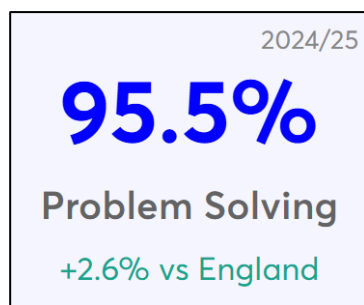
ASQ-3

At the 2 to 2.5 year health review, 88.9% of children in Rotherham were at or above the expected level in all five areas of development (communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving, and personal-social skills). This is 7.5% above the national average of 81.4%.

93.2% of children in Rotherham received the ASQ-3 as part of the Healthy Child Programme or integrated review.



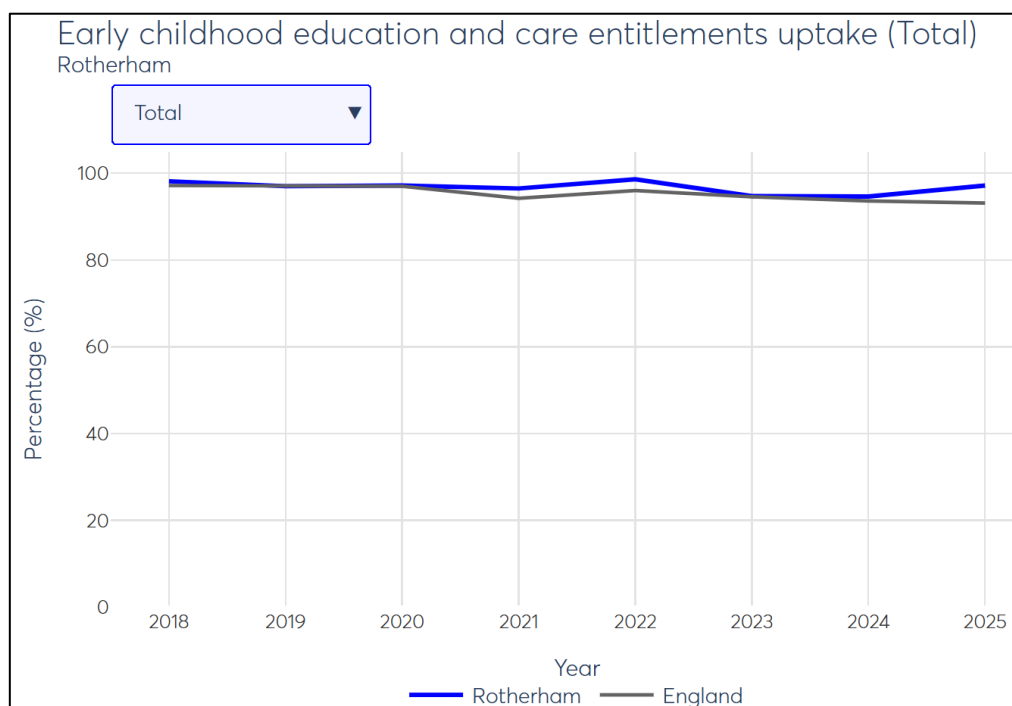
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ECEC Entitlements Data

Rotherham has consistently high uptake of early education and childcare entitlements across all age groups, performing above the national average (97.2% compared to 93.1%). Although there are fluctuations, uptake in Rotherham remains strong, with a noticeable increase again in 2025 after a dip in 2023 and 2024. In contrast, the national overall uptake shows a steady decline over the same period.

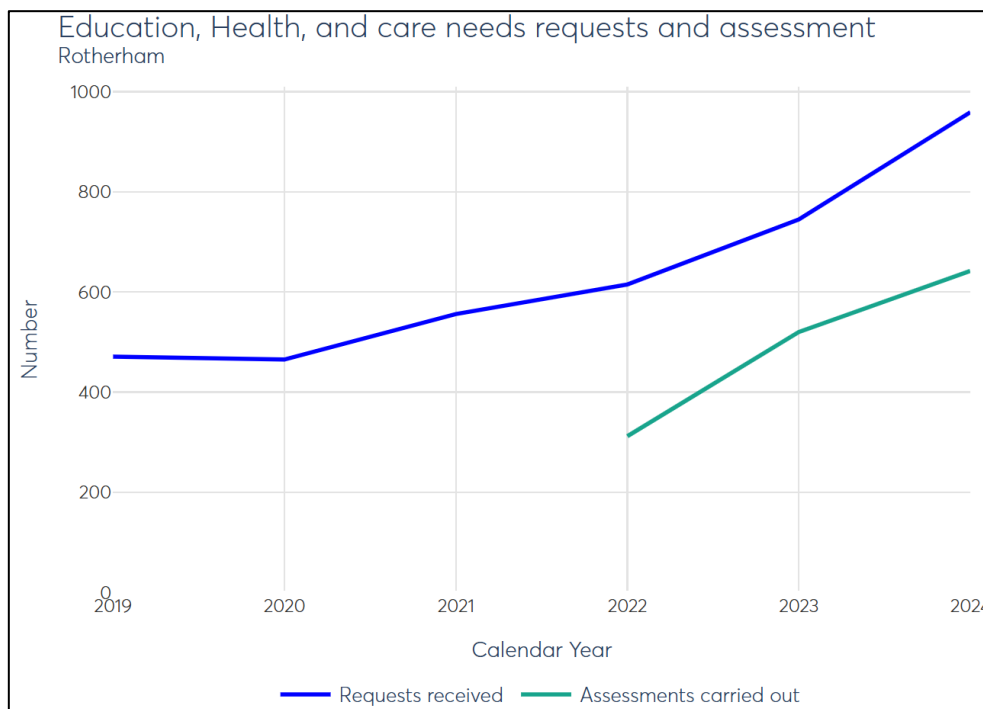
- 2-year-olds: 83.5% (813) compared to 65.2% nationally.
- 3-year-olds: 95.5% (2,805) compared to 90.6% nationally.
- 4-year-olds: 98.8% (2,923) compared to 95.6% nationally.



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Education, Health and Care Plans

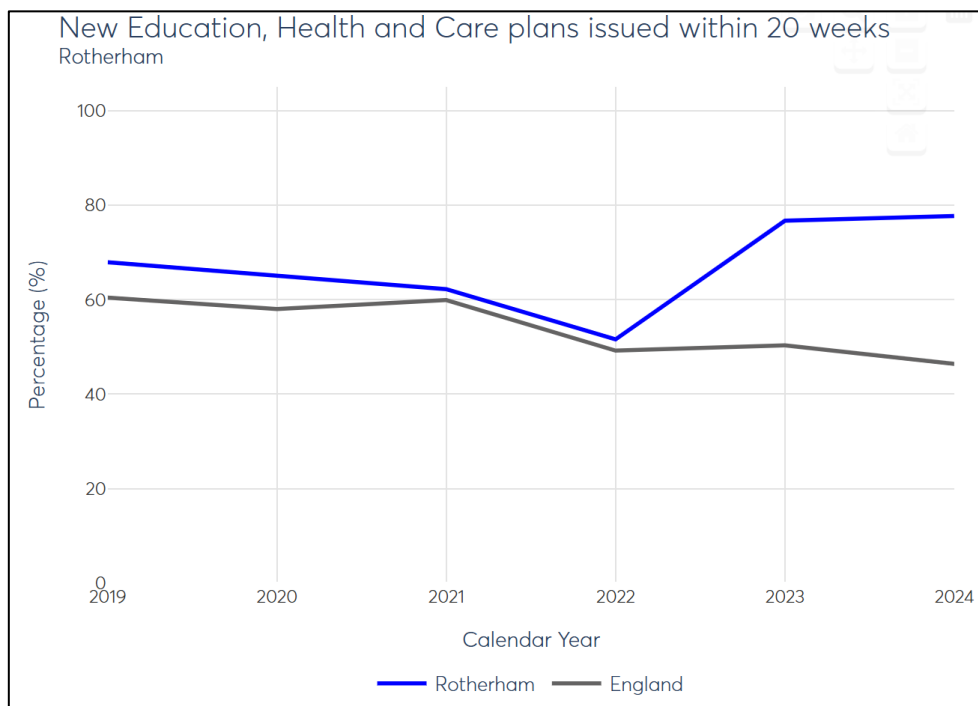
The number of EHC requests in Rotherham has risen sharply over the past five years, increasing from 471 in 2019 to 959 in 2024. Assessments carried out have also increased since 2022, but at a slower rate than requests, creating a gap between demand and capacity. This indicates growing need within the local population and increasing pressure on SEND services.



When observed alongside the rising number of EHC needs requests, the data on plans issued within 20 weeks shows how demand affected service capacity. Between 2019 and 2022, the percentage of ECHPs issues within 20 weeks in Rotherham fell from around 67.9% to 51.6%, coinciding with the large increase in requests.

However, despite continued rises in demand into 2023 and 2024, timeliness improved significantly to around 77.7%, placing Rotherham well above the national average.

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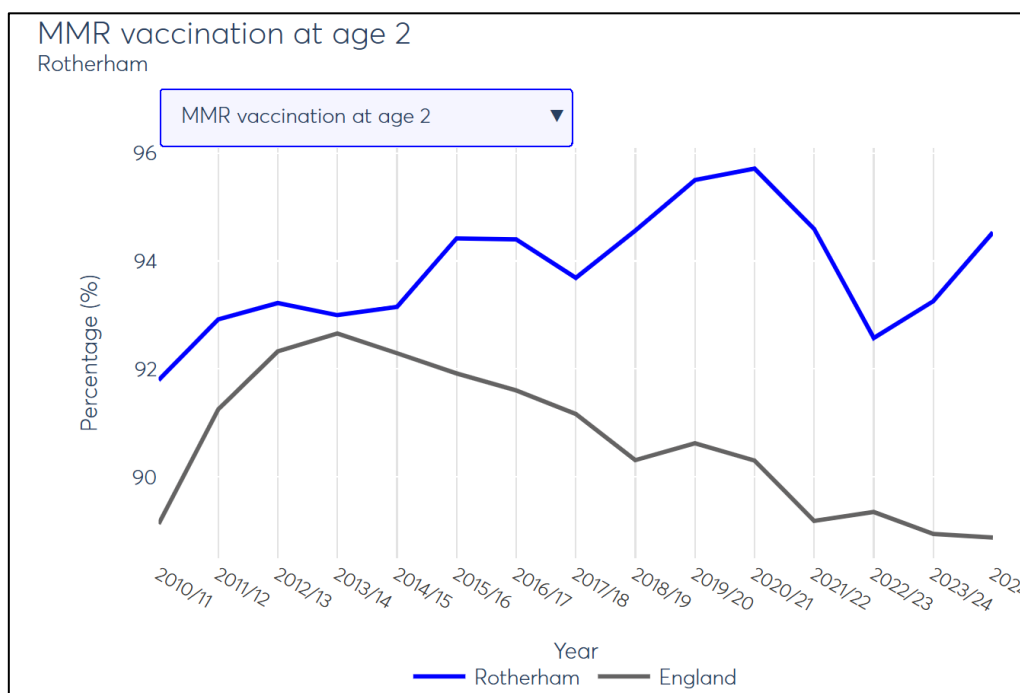
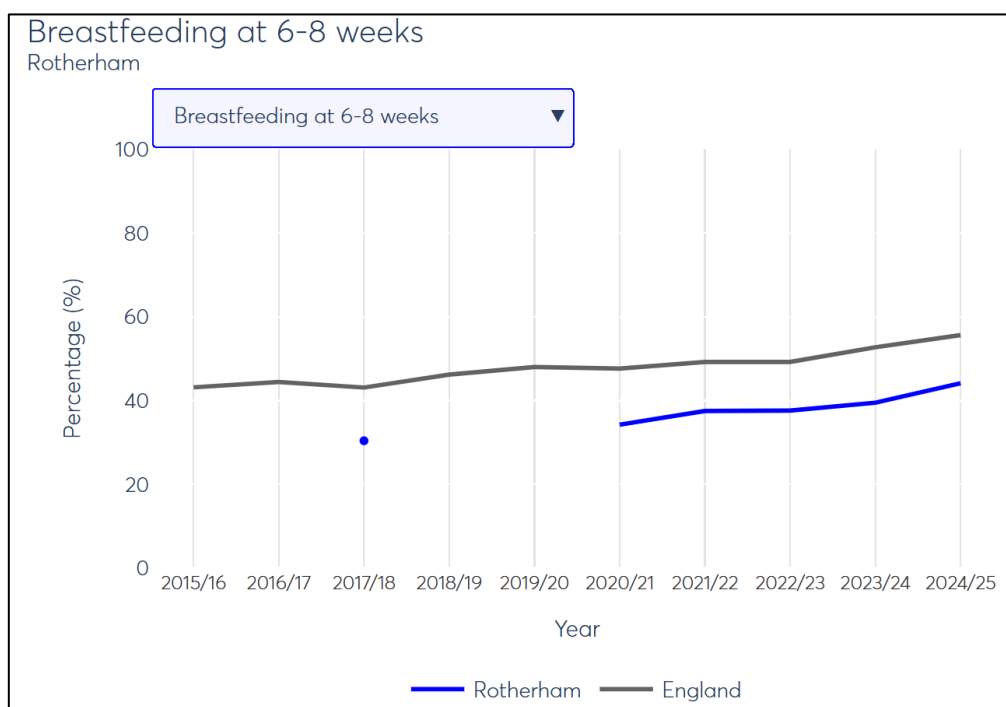
Health Outcomes

Children's early health outcomes are strong predictors of their later health and wellbeing, and data on uptake of health services can be a proxy for access to appropriate healthcare and support. Health outcomes can highlight large social inequalities, with children from more deprived backgrounds being less likely to have good health in their earliest years.

- 70.8% of Reception-aged children in Rotherham are a healthy weight, showing that most children enter school with a healthy BMI and broadly in line with national expectations.
- 23.5% of 5-year-olds have obvious dentinal decay, slightly higher than the national average of 22.4%, indicating that oral-health remains an area where further preventative work could have impact.
- MMR vaccination rates are strong, with 94.5% receiving the first dose by age 2 and 90.2% completing two doses by age 5, both above England's averages and showing good engagement with immunisation services.

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- 44.1% of infants are breastfed at 6–8 weeks, which is below the England rate but has been improving since 2020/21, suggesting positive progress though further support may still be beneficial.
- Premature birth rates are 84.7 per 1,000 births, higher than the England average of 77.0 per 1,000.



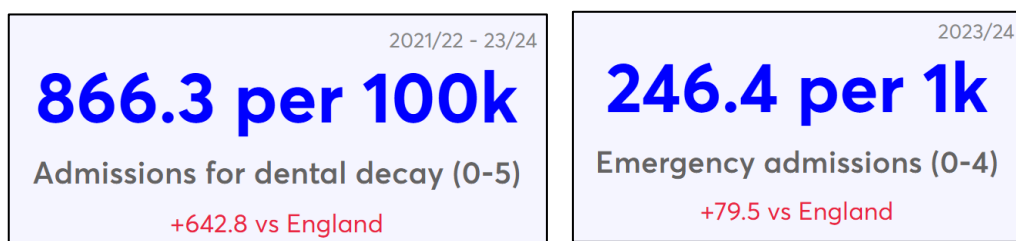
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Hospital Admissions

Hospital admission rates for young children in Rotherham are higher than the England average across various areas:

- The rate of emergency admissions for children under 1 year old is 638.0 per 1,000 - significantly higher than the England average of 387.0
- Emergency admissions for 0–4-year-olds are 246.4 per 1,000, which is 79.5 per 1,000 above the national figure.
- Injury-related admissions for the same age group are 124.2 per 10,000, exceeding England by 21.1 per 10,000.
- Admissions of infants under 14 days are also higher at 139.9 per 1,000, compared with a national rate that is 51.2 per 1,000 lower.

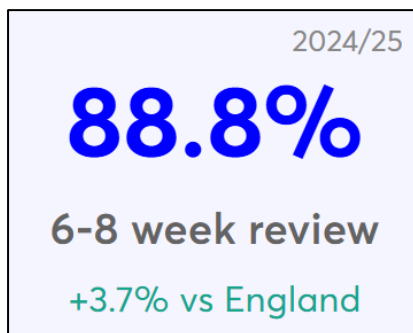
The most notable difference is in dental decay admissions for 0–5-year-olds. Rotherham's rate is 866.3 per 100,000, compared to the national average of 207.2 per 100,000 - meaning local admissions are around four times higher than the national level.



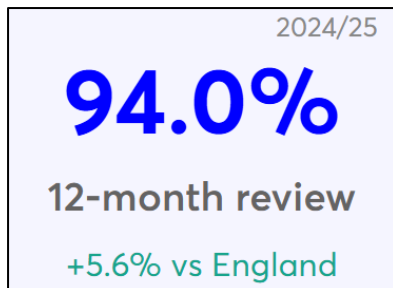
Overall, these comparisons show that while most children do not require hospital care, Rotherham experiences higher rates of avoidable admissions.

Health Services

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The health visiting indicators show a strong pattern of engagement with most statutory reviews in Rotherham. Completion of the 6–8-week review is 88.8%, which is 3.7 percentage points higher than the England average.



Uptake remains strong at later checkpoints, with the 12-month review at 94.0% (+5.6% vs England) and the 2–2.5-year review at 91.2% (+10.4% vs England), both well above national levels.

ASQ-3 completion is also high at 93.2%, sitting only 0.7 percentage points below England. The only area slightly lower than the national average is new birth visits within 14 days, at 83.2%, which is 2.0 percentage points lower than England.

Overall, Rotherham performs strongly across key early health contacts, with most reviews exceeding national rates.

Children in Need and Children Protection Plans

Safety encompasses both the physical and emotional safety of children in all their environments, including home, early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings and school, and the community.

While these children represent a relatively small proportion of your total population of children, they are likely to be some of the most vulnerable.

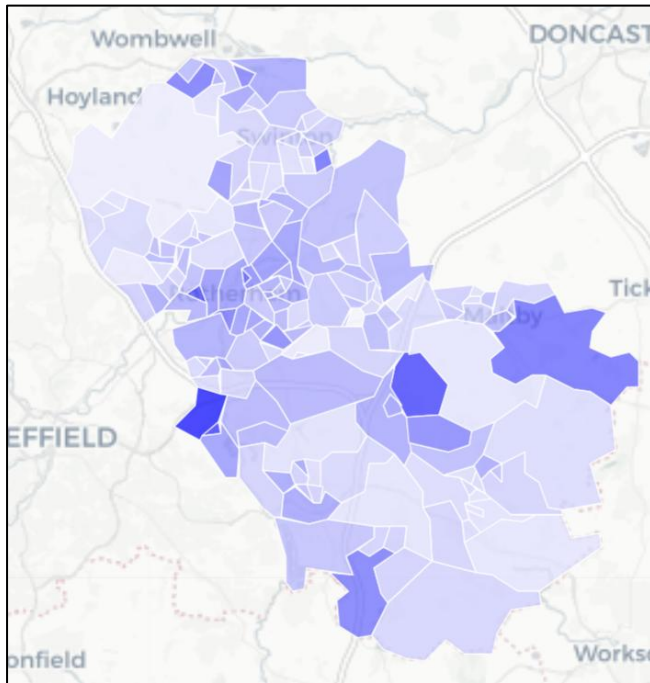
As of March 2025:

- 2,860 children in need
- 1,350 new CiN referrals started during year
- 313 child protection plans

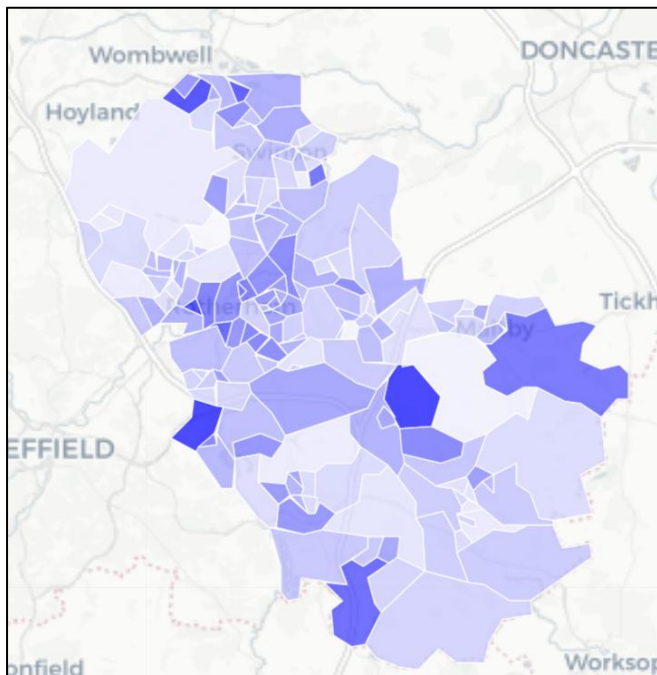
Rotherham's Population

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The 2021 Census recorded 265,791 residents in Rotherham, there are approximately 17,918 children aged 0-5, and a total of 62,646 children and young people aged 0-19.



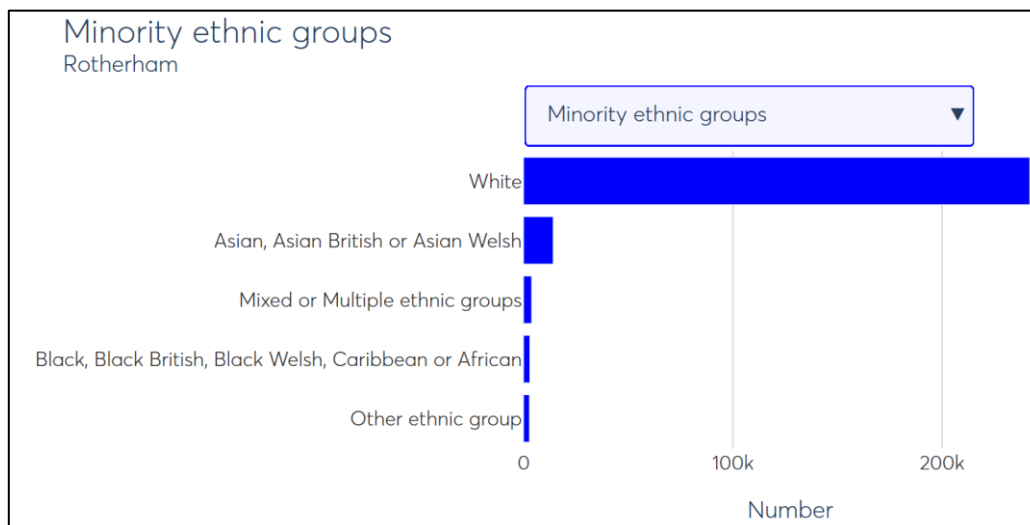
Distribution of the 0-5 age group in Rotherham



Distribution of the 0-19 age group in Rotherham

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Ethnic Groups



| Ethnic Group | Rotherham | National |
|--|-----------|----------|
| White | 91.0% | 81.7% |
| Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh | 5.3% | 9.3% |
| Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups | 1.5% | 2.9% |
| Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean, or African | 1.1% | 4.0% |
| Other ethnic groups | 1.1% | 2.1% |

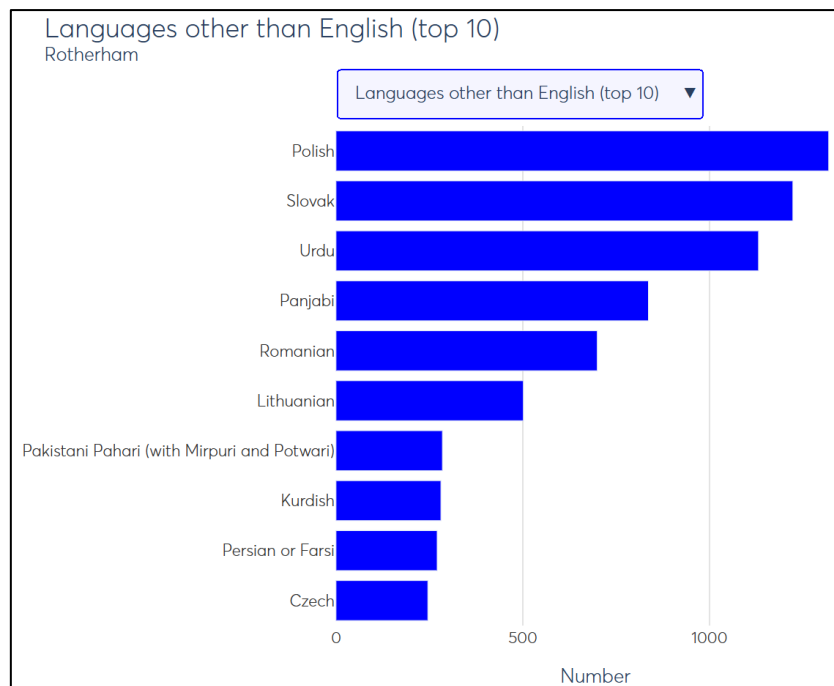
Rotherham has a much less diverse population than the national average, with 91.0% of residents identifying as White compared with 81.7% nationally. The largest minority group locally is Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh (5.3%), though this remains lower than the UK figure of 9.3%. All other minority ethnic each make up around 1-1.5% of Rotherham's population, significantly below national levels.

Languages

4.1% of residents in Rotherham speak a language other than English as their main language at home. This is lower than at the national level where 8.9% of people have a main language which isn't English.

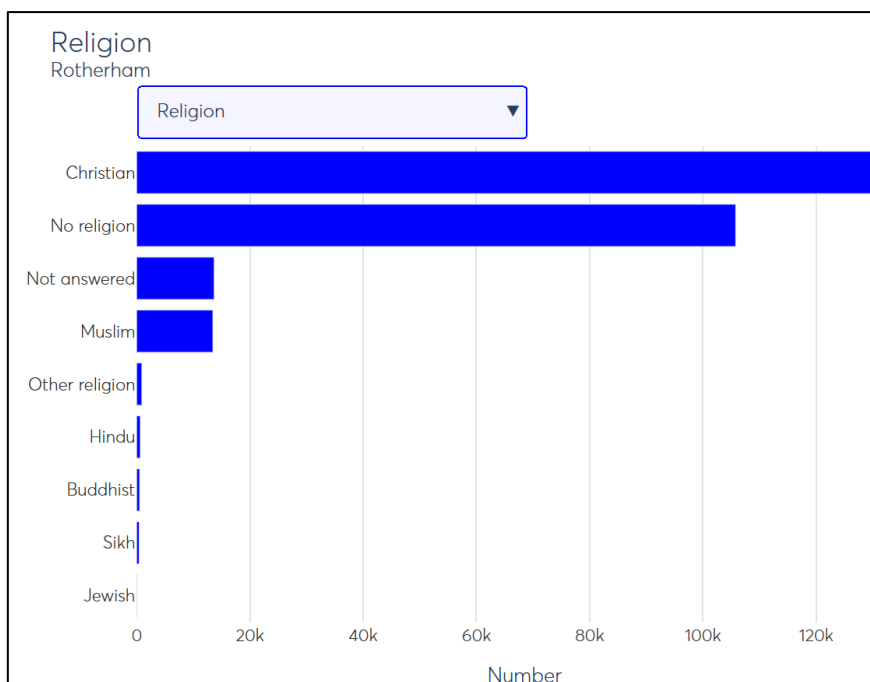
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The most common language spoken in Rotherham, other than English, is Polish which is spoken by 0.5% (1,320) of the population. This matches the national picture where 1.1% of the population speak Polish as a main language.



Religion

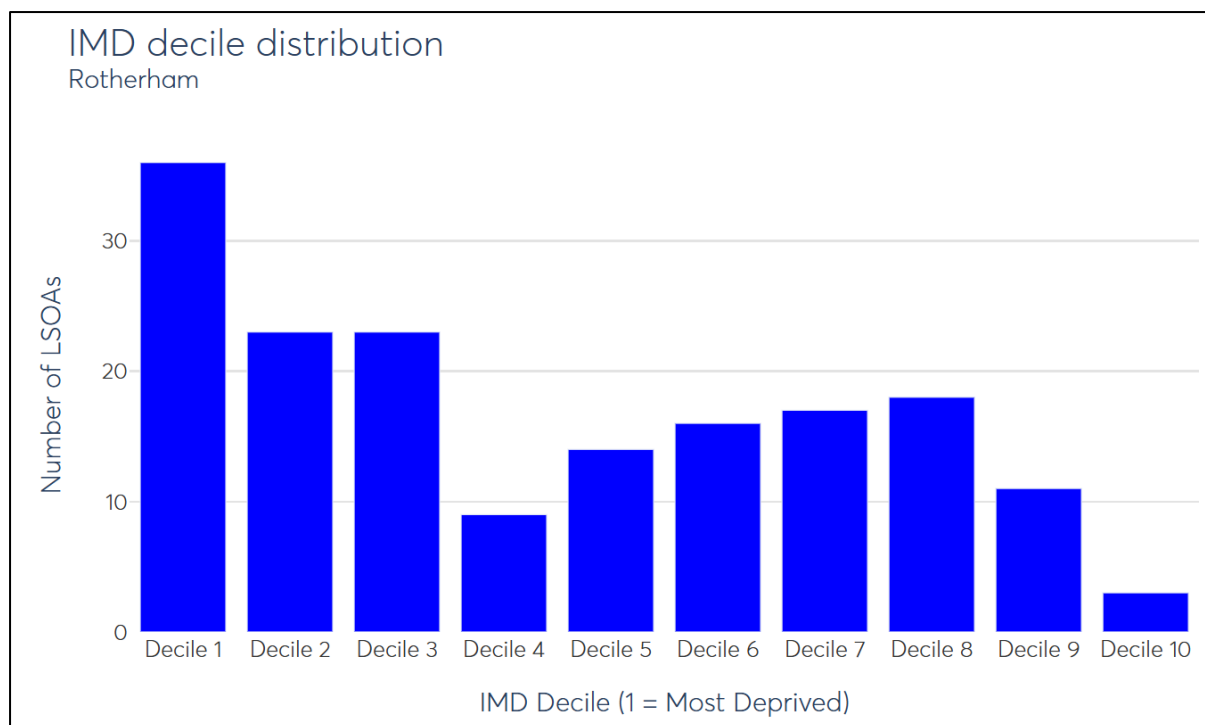
Christianity is the most common religion in Rotherham, with 49.0% of residents (130,136 people) identifying as Christian, which is slightly higher than the national average of 46.2%. The second largest group locally is residents reporting no religion, accounting for 39.8% (105,800 people), which is also above the England figure of 37.2%.



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Poverty and Deprivation

In 2024/25, there were 45,401 children eligible for free school meals in Rotherham across all state-funded primary and secondary schools. Additionally, in 2025, 20.5% (172) of homeless households had dependent children, including 122 single-parent households.

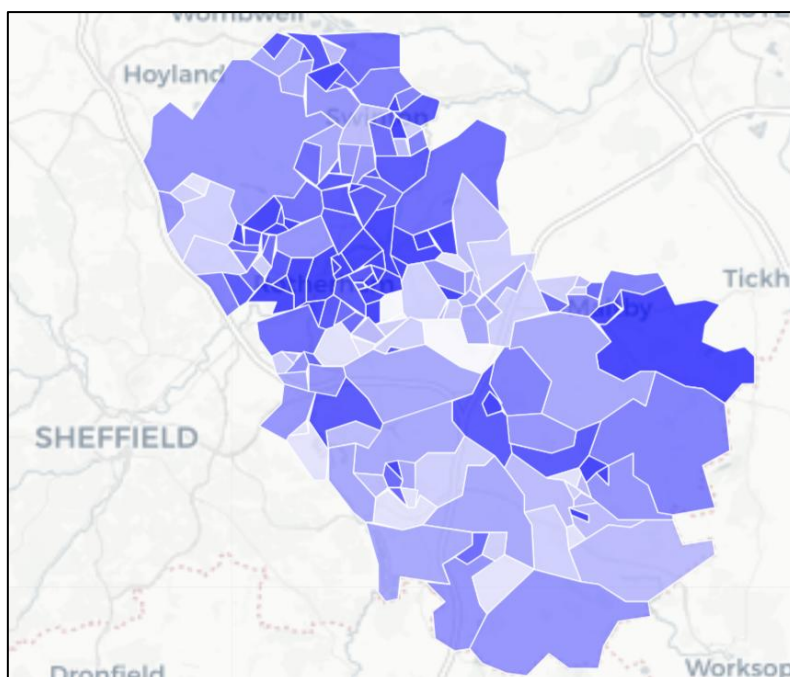


Rotherham's deprivation profile shows that the borough experiences high and widespread levels of disadvantage compared with the rest of England. In 2025, Rotherham is ranked as the 43rd most deprived district nationally, indicating that deprivation is a significant factor influencing local outcomes.

Around 21.2% of the borough's LSOAs fall within the most deprived 10% of areas in England, and almost half (48.2%) are within the 30% most deprived, demonstrating that deprivation is not limited to a small number of neighbourhoods but affects communities across the borough.

In total, around 21.4% of residents live in the most deprived 10% of areas.

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IMD Deciles by LSOA – darker areas are more deprived

The top 5 most deprived LSOAs in Rotherham are:

- Eastwood Village
- Ferham
- Town Centre
- East Herringthorpe North
- Aston Northwest

SEND

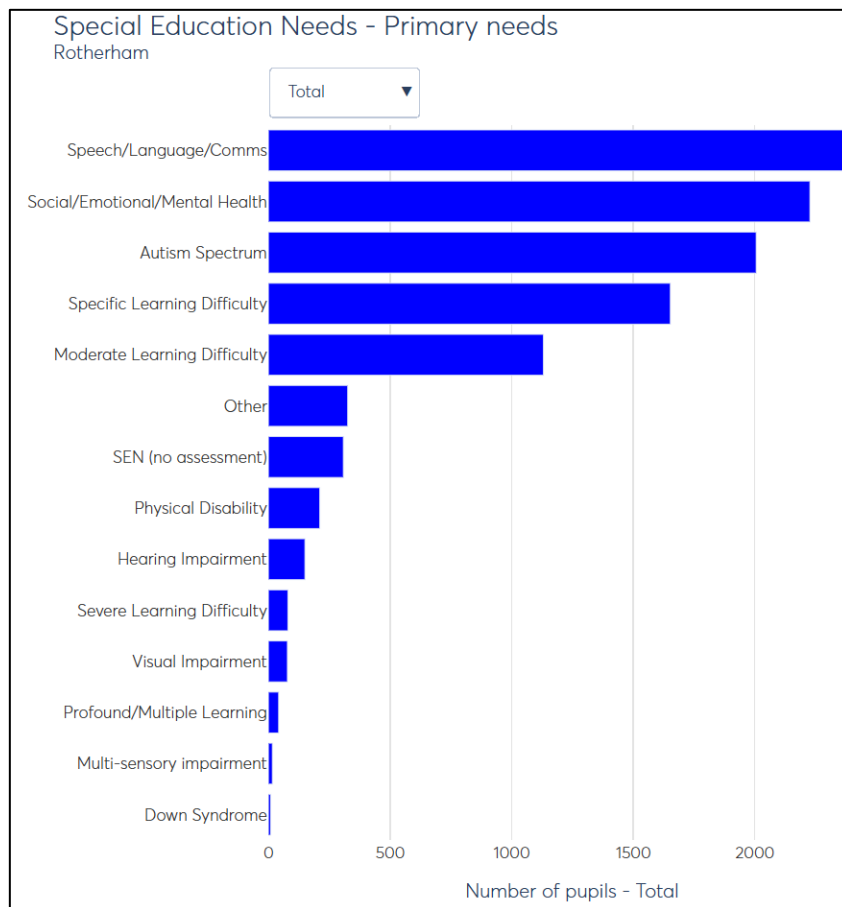
In the 2024/25 academic year, 10,608 pupils in Rotherham were identified as having Special Educational Needs. Of these, Speech, Language and Communications needs is the most common primary need (2,371 pupils). Speech, Language and Communications was the most common primary need for all education levels apart from post-16 where Autism Spectrum was the most common (102).

The top three most common primary needs were the same for Early Years, Reception, Key Stage 1, and Key Stage 3:

- Speech, Language and Communications

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- Social, Emotional, Mental Health
- Autism Spectrum



Rotherham's Current Service Offer

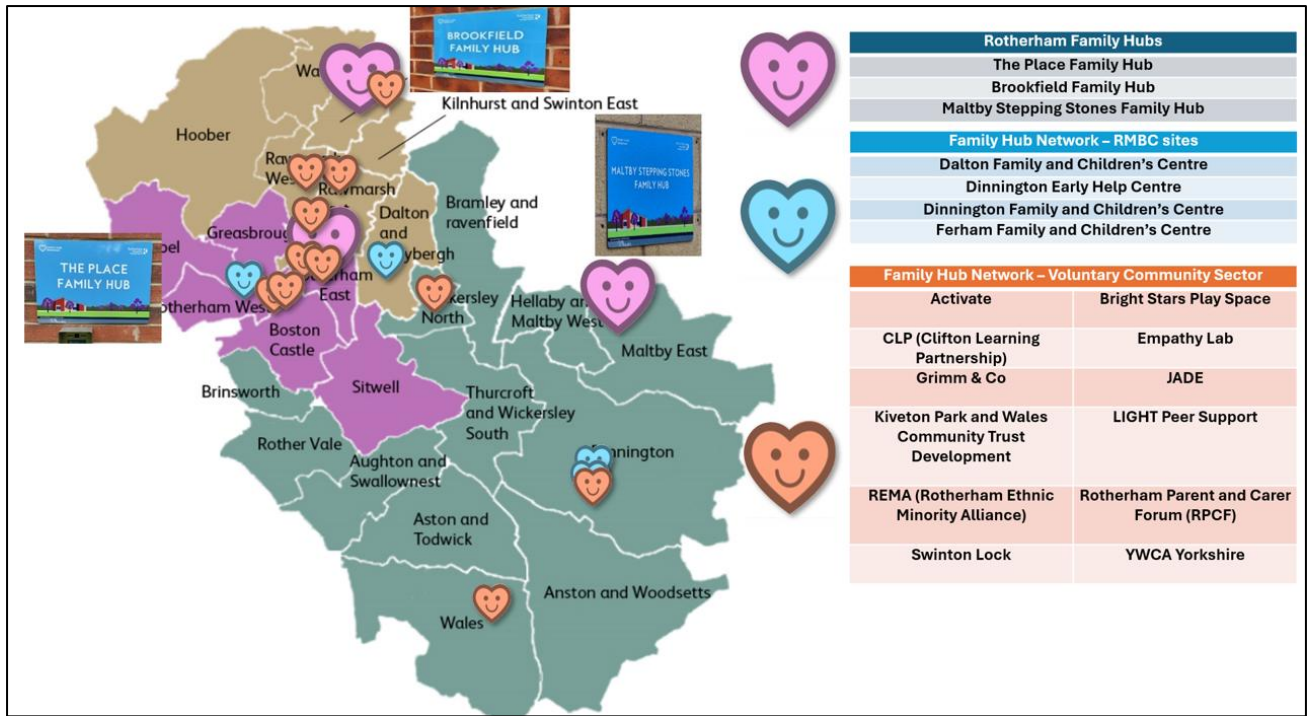
There are three main family hub sites in Rotherham:

- The Place Family Hub
- Brookfield Family Hub
- Maltby Stepping Stones Family Hub

In addition, there is a broader Family Hub Network made up of 4 RMBC sites and 12 voluntary organisations which also deliver services for families in various locations across the borough. Rotherham also has 15 libraries.

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Rotherham's Family Hub Network



Libraries in Rotherham

