

# Manchester Childcare Sufficiency Report

September 2025

**Introduction:** Local authorities (LAs) have a legal duty to complete an annual Childcare Sufficiency Report (Childcare Act 2006 and the 'Early Education and Childcare' Statutory Guidance 2018) evaluating current formal childcare provision in the city, assessing what upcoming demand might look like as well as considering the future needs of the sector.

LAs are required by legislation to secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment and for children aged 0-14 (or up to 18 for disabled children). The duties of the Childcare Act (Section 6) also require local authorities to shape and support the development of childcare to make it flexible, sustainable and responsive to the needs of the community. Section 12 (Childcare Act 2006) extends upon LA's existing duty to provide Information, Advice and Guidance to parents/carers relating to childcare.

Manchester's Education Strategy 2024-34 aims for all children to be Safe, Happy, Healthy and Successful, and requires commitment from all Council services and partner organisations. The Best Start in Life Strategy highlights how high quality childcare and services for young children are vital for children's future development and supports Manchester ambition to ensure at least 70% of children achieve a Good Level of Development.

Manchester enjoys a dynamic and growing economy which is generating the skills and employment opportunities, fundamental to increasing incomes and reducing poverty. The Making Manchester Fairer; Anti-Poverty Strategy 2023-27 seeks to ensure that all residents benefit from and enjoy the economic growth taking place in the city.

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## 1. Executive Summary

The national expansion of childcare for working families with children aged between 9 months and 2 years and for those with children in primary schools continued into its third phase in 2025. Through a range of strategies, new childcare places have been developed in the parts of the city where they are most needed, and levels of quality have remained consistent.

In the past 12 months the sector has seen rapid expansion in government funded childcare for children aged 9 months to 2 years and investment to expand wraparound childcare for 5-11 year olds, revised statutory guidance placing greater emphasis on transparency of charging and the launch of a new Ofsted inspection framework coming into effect in Autumn 2025.

Manchester has sufficient childcare for preschool aged children on a citywide basis although some wards are undersupplied meaning that families may have to travel to access childcare in neighbouring wards. 255 new early years childcare places have been developed in Manchester through capital awards, with plans to create up to 500 more by Summer 2026. In addition, 3 primary schools secured capital funding to develop School Based Nursery Provision in the 2025/26 Academic Year.

By September almost 1,700 Wraparound Childcare places for primary aged children have been developed, providing childcare for working parents. Manchester is on track to achieve its target of 1880 places by March 2026.

Quality remains consistent with 96% of childcare settings judged by Ofsted to be Good or Outstanding. However, the sector continues to experience challenges in relation to the recruitment and retention of high-quality staff and providing for the increasing numbers of younger children presenting with emerging needs.

While childcare provision is mostly considered to be inclusive and accessible, children with special educational needs are disproportionately represented in reports of unmet childcare demand. In addition, families requiring childcare for non-standard working hours are likely to find it more difficult to access childcare. This includes childcare over weekends, twilight and overnight childcare as well as childcare to meet shift patterns. Daycare providers are not routinely offering this level of flexibility, citing a lack of sufficient regular demand to make it financially viable.

Affordability continues to be a contentious issue. Research shows that after school and holidaycare costs are below the national average but use of Tax Free Childcare continues to be patchy. 30 hour funding for children aged 9 months to 3 years in working families should reduce full time (50 hour) childcare costs by half but as this has only recently launched, it will be 12 months before a full assessment of affordability can be made.

## 2. What is childcare and why is it important?

Childcare refers to provision that cares for children while their parents are at work and is often delivered within the first few months of a child's life up to the child being in full time education when it may require before and after the school day and in the school holidays. Government funding is available for children aged between 2 and 4 years of non-working and low-income families to access early childhood education and care. Since September 2025, children from 9 months to 2 years of age in working families are entitled to 30 hours of government funding to pay towards the cost of childcare. **See Appendix A for a Glossary of childcare terms.**

Access to high quality and affordable childcare enables parents/carers to work and equips children with the skills required for early learning, laying the foundations needed to start primary school. Studies show direct links between poverty and lifelong health inequalities. When almost half of Manchester children are living in poverty (household income is below 60% of the average income), access to high quality childcare and early learning is vital. Supporting parents/carers to access employment, it also provides the best start in life for young children.

In addition to the health, social and economic benefits of childcare, families have access to early childhood development experts or childcare practitioners, who can provide guidance and connection to the wider early

years support network. Settings adhere to a rigorous Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and are subject to Ofsted registration and inspection like schools.

## 2.1 What is the quality of childcare and early education in Manchester?

96% of childcare and early education settings in Manchester are judged to be Good or Outstanding by Ofsted (Summer 2025), a position which has remained consistent despite financial instability in the sector. Manchester's Early Years Quality Assurance team provide valuable support and guidance to new and established childcare settings. Ofsted is the ultimate arbiter of quality and from September 2025, education settings will receive a report card following inspection, in a move away from the one-word inspection outcome.

In February 2025, around 100 settings, schools and childminders received awards at Manchester's second Early Years Celebration Event. Awards recognised consistent high quality, inclusive and accessible early education and childcare and the commitment of professionals in this sector.

Childcare providers must register with Ofsted to provide childcare places across all age groups. Provision is subject to Ofsted regulations allowing childcare to be flexible to meet the needs of families. Daycare providers may choose to reprofile their daycare offer based upon their staffing and demand for places. For example, increasing the number of 2-year-old places where they have increased demand for this age group and offsetting this with a reduced offer to other age groups. This sufficiency assessment uses registered numbers to determine sufficiency, but place numbers may vary depending upon operational demands.

## 2.2 What Early Education and Childcare do we have in Manchester?

Table showing childcare provision available by age range and type.

Provision type	Age range	Number of providers
<b>Private, independent and voluntary daycare</b>	0-4 years	<b>109</b>
<b>Childminders</b>	0-11 years	<b>306</b>
<b>New Childminders on domestic and non-domestic premises</b>	0-11 years	<b>4</b>
<b>Maintained Nurseries</b>	0-5 years	<b>2</b>
<b>Out of School (OoS) and Holiday care of which*;</b>	3 - 11 years	<b>77</b>
Out of School on the Early Years register		33
including with daycare who also offer OoS		46
Compulsory and Voluntary Register	3-11 years	19
Voluntary Register	8 years plus	39
Childcare Register	5-7 years	1
<b>Schools with Nursery Classes</b>	3-5 years	<b>131</b>

\*It is possible to be registered on more than one childcare register at the same time.

## 3. Does Manchester have sufficient childcare?

The City continues to have sufficient early education and childcare provision for pre-school aged children when settings are operating to their maximum registered places. However, market pressures such as the recruitment and retention of staff, the cost-of-living crisis and higher numbers of children presenting with emerging needs in the early years, is impacting upon the ability of settings to operate beyond 80% place capacity. When measured at 80% capacity, some wards are revealed to have insufficient childcare provision.

While the new childcare offer for working parents provides 30 hours of funded childcare, research suggests that families are accessing an average of 43 hours per week. Place sufficiency has therefore been calculated based on 45 hours per week as this accounts for at least one 30 hour funded place, while allowing for the additional 13 hours many parents/carers are choosing to purchase. A 45 hour place can also accommodate three 15-hour places suitable for 2-, 3- & 4-year-old children entitled to 15 hours of funding on the Families Receiving Additional Support (FRAS) entitlement, previously referred to as Free Early Education Entitlements (FEEE).

Following three successful phases of childcare funding expansion in 2025, 255 new places have been created and there are plans in place to develop more throughout 2025/26 to meet anticipated demand. There have been very few examples of families not being able to find childcare to meet their needs, but this is more prevalent where the child has special educational needs or disabilities or if the family requires childcare outside of normal operating hours.

The table at **Appendix B** shows a ward level summary of 45-hour childcare place sufficiency. The negative numbers highlight wards assessed to have insufficient places to meet potential demand.

### 3.1 Ward based sufficiency summary

Five wards are currently forecast to have insufficient childcare across all age groups. **Brooklands, Deansgate, Northenden, Old Moat, and Sharston** are unlikely to be able to meet demand across all age groups. However, wards neighbouring both Deansgate and Northenden show varying degrees of sufficiency which will ease the pressure. Northenden's sufficiency pressures could potentially be absorbed by Didsbury East, Didsbury West, and Chorlton Park, provided families are willing to travel to access childcare. Similarly, Deansgate's shortfalls could be mitigated by oversupply in nearby Piccadilly and Hulme.

It is worth noting that Brooklands, Northenden, and Sharston border Trafford and Stockport and that non-Manchester resident children may be contributing to the strain on places. Around 20% of children accessing funded places each term are resident in neighbouring local authorities. However, it is also common for Manchester families to choose to access provision in neighbouring Local Authorities. Ward level plans will be developed to address the shortfalls.

Three further wards, **Chorlton, Moston, and Withington**, are currently showing insufficient childcare places for Under 3s which would have the greatest impact on working families and families of children aged 2 years and in receipt of Additional Support.

For Chorlton, the pressure on 2-Year-Old places is expected to ease with the opening of childcare provision at Oswald Road Primary School in January 2026, when 45 new 2-year-old places will become available. Additionally, neighbouring wards such as Chorlton Park and Whalley Range, which are showing an oversupply, could absorb some demand, particularly for Under 2s.

Moston's place insufficiency could also be mitigated by oversupply in adjacent wards including Charlestown, Harpurhey, and Miles Platting and Newton Heath, all of which show surplus capacity.

Withington, however, remains a concern even with access to surplus places in neighbouring wards such as Didsbury West, Fallowfield, and Burnage. Capital funding has been used to create some new places at Withington's only nursery, but this will not fully address the shortfall and further targeted action in and around Withington is required to address the persistent gap in provision. This is of particular concern given Withington's proximity to Old Moat ward, which is listed above, and strategies will be considered to improve access to childcare for residents of both wards.

## 4. Summary of the expansion of childcare for working parents with children 9 months to 2 years

The take-up of early years funding for **Under 2s** in working families has remained broadly stable over the past academic year. 1,600 children accessed the new funding in Autumn 2024 and 1,636 in Autumn 2025, demonstrating consistent engagement. In Autumn 2025 the offer increased from 15 hours to a 30-hour entitlement for children aged two and under. As this is the first term of the expansion, it is too early to assess the

full impact of the change and further monitoring will be needed to understand whether any future increases are driven by demand, sector capacity, or other emerging factors.

The **2-Year-Olds** in Working Families cohort has shown a clear upward trend since Summer 2024 when 1,248 children accessed the offer. By Autumn 2025, this had increased to 1,694, a 36% rise over five terms, suggesting increased awareness and engagement by families. This is likely to be the result of widespread promotion of the funding, provider engagement and broader economic conditions encouraging parents to return to work.

From Autumn term 2025, some 2-year-old children are entitled to childcare funding on both the working parent scheme and the 2-year-old Additional Support scheme. The former provides 30 hours of childcare funding and the latter just 15 hours per week. While 284 children appear to be eligible for both, only fifty children were recorded as accessing their childcare funding, representing just 17.6% of the children eligible on either scheme. Families eligible to both schemes can only claim a maximum of 30 hours per week, either 30 hours on the working parent scheme or 15 hours on this scheme and 15 hours on the Additional Support scheme.

Between Autumn 2024 and Summer 2025, the highest take-up of Under 2s (U2) and Two-Year-Old Working Parent (2WP) entitlements was consistently recorded by providers in the wards of Didsbury West, Whalley Range, Higher Blackley, Burnage, and Ardwick, with each maintaining a stable share of the city's overall working parent take-up throughout the year.

However, the wards with the highest numbers of residents using childcare codes in Manchester settings are Didsbury East, Chorlton Park, Northenden, Levenshulme and Out of Area, the latter representing 20% of all working parent codes used for each term.

This shows that while some wards may show higher levels of families claiming childcare funding, this does not necessarily correlate with where families choose to take up their childcare. In addition, Manchester childcare can be accessed by families living in other LAs and vice versa, meaning that sufficiency assessment can only estimate levels of potential demand based on current and projected trends.

## **5. Take up of Free Entitlement to Early learning and Childcare places**

In the past 12 months, take up of **2-year-old funding for FRAS (Families in Receipt of Additional Support, formerly FEEE)** has averaged 69.2% which is 5.6% lower than the previous year but higher than the national average. At the time of January Census 2025, take up was 65% which was equal to the national average. Nationally, the number of children eligible has fallen by 38.5% since 2022. It is significant that the income thresholds for eligibility have remained static for several years at annual earnings of £16,190, while the national minimum wage has increased. This is likely to have resulted in fewer families meeting the income criteria, as thresholds have not been reassessed in line with wage growth. Some families will now be entitled to 30 hours on the working parent scheme, and as described previously, some may find themselves eligible on both schemes.

**3 & 4-year-old Free Entitlement to Early Education** - Most 3- & 4-year-olds access this in a school nursery class rather than in a PVI setting. For example, in Summer 2025, 38% of children accessed early education in a PVI setting while 62% accessed it in a school nursery class, a 1% increase in PVI take up compared to Summer 24 and up 2% since Summer 2023.

**30 hours free childcare for 3- & 4-year-olds in Working Families** - In Summer term 2025, 57% of children accessing 30-hour childcare did so in a PVI setting, an increase of 2% from Summer 2024 and consistent with levels seen in Summer 2023. This reflects a slight seasonal shift toward PVI settings during the summer period. However, analysis shows that school settings typically see higher take-up in the Autumn term, with 59% of children accessing their entitlement in a school in Autumn 2024, in line with established seasonal patterns. While PVI settings had marginally higher take-up in Spring and Summer terms (Spring 2025: 51% PVI vs. 49% schools; Summer 2025: 57% PVI vs. 43% schools), the overall distribution remains broadly balanced across both types of provision throughout the academic year.

**Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)**- EYPP claims have gradually increased over the reporting period, following the phased expansion of eligibility to younger children from working families. Between Summer and Autumn

2024, claims rose from 1,156 to 1,196, with a 13% increase in the number of providers claiming. Autumn marked the first term of under-2 eligibility, with 58 new claims recorded, rising to 89 by Summer 2025, a 53% increase over two terms. Claims for two-year-olds from working families also grew significantly, from 24 to 57 over the same period, indicating strong uptake and growing provider engagement.

On average 5.4% of the 30 hour 3- & 4-year-old cohort accessed EYPP compared to 3.6% of the 2 years and under cohort. This suggests that EYPP claims for younger children are currently below expected levels and may increase as awareness of eligibility and claims processes become more embedded. Strategies will be developed to increase claims for younger eligible children.

Providers have reported using EYPP funding to enhance children's experiences and learning environments. Examples of this include funding outings, purchasing targeted resources and storybooks, creating small gardens to promote healthy eating, developing forest school provision, and investing in staff training. These activities reflect the positive impact of EYPP on early years settings and outcomes for disadvantaged children.

**Disability Access Funding (DAF)** – Disability Access Funding (DAF) supports early years settings caring for children in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Since the last CSA (Autumn 2023 to Summer 2024), DAF claims have increased by 31.4%, rising from 51 to 67 claims across the current period (Autumn 2024 to Summer 2025).

This growth reflects the impact of expanded eligibility, first to eligible 2-year-olds in April 2024, and then to under-2s in September 2024, as well as the simplification of the application process via the Early Years funding portal. Term-by-term figures show Autumn 2024: 23 claims, Spring 2025: 17 claims, Summer 2025: 27 claims. DAF is paid directly to the early years setting to invest in equipment, resources or training to benefit the child/ren for whom it was claimed.

## **6. Wraparound Childcare (WAC) Overview May 24 – March 26**

Since the launch of the project to develop 1880 new Wraparound Childcare places for primary school children in working families, there has been a huge amount of activity. Following extensive initial engagement with schools, providers and other stakeholders including the launch of an open grant application scheme in September 2024, the first tranche of 105 WAC places was created from January 2025 at 4 settings (2 schools and 2 Out of School (OOS) clubs), serving 4 MCC maintained primary schools across 3 wards (Chorlton, Burnage & Fallowfield). Two further grant rounds were launched, funding additional places to be delivered across the Spring and Summer terms. Engagement with the sector continued through attendance at School Business manager conferences, childminder forums, Primary Headteachers' briefing event and district headteacher meetings to promote the WAC programme and encourage schools and providers to develop new WAC places. Manchester's first WAC Conference in June was attended by representatives from across the sector who benefitted from a series of workshops, the opportunity to meet with Ofsted and the DfE and a chance to network with each other. The conference was very well received and helped to develop a sense of professional collaboration across the sector.

In the 2024/25 academic year, a total of 674 new WAC places were delivered by 24 providers (13 schools (9 MCC and 4 Academies), 7 OOS clubs and 4 daycare settings). Providers reported during summer term that 356 (53%) of the new WAC places had been taken up by families, and 34 of these places were being accessed by children with SEND.

Parents tell us that wraparound childcare is a "lifesaver" as it enables them to work more hours in higher paid roles and supports their family routines. Wraparound Childcare also benefits children by providing nutritious food and opportunities to play, with many parents seeing a difference in their child's happiness and confidence as they interact with different children of all age groups.

From September 25, a further 951 WAC places were made available at 26 providers (13 schools - 6 MCC and 7 Academies), 7 OoS Clubs, 4 daycare settings and 2 childminders, bringing the total number of new WAC places delivered under the programme to 1625. These serve families at 64 primary schools (36 providing WAC

provision for the first time) and in 26 wards across the City (8 North, 9 Central and 9 South). A further 150 new WAC places are expected to be delivered later in the Autumn term, serving 5 more primary schools. Manchester is on track to meet its target of 1880 new WAC places by the end of March 2026. **See Appendix C**

MCC is also investing in the wraparound childcare sector by providing training support for staff in play work, understanding neurodiversity and applying children's rights in practice which will contribute to enhancing the quality of provision that Manchester children access.

In February 2025, DfE announced an update to what could be identified as a wraparound childcare place and introduced flexibilities around timings to count places finishing at 5:30 and after (but not up to 6pm) as 'partial' or 'equivalent' places. There are 512 equivalent WAC places available at 15 providers across 14 wards including Ancoats & Beswick, Deansgate, and Old Moat where full WAC places have not yet been delivered by the programme.

**WAC Sufficiency / parents survey results** - In the 2025-26 survey for parents of children over 5, 73% of 445 respondents said that the childcare information in their local area is 'very good', 'good', or 'fair'. 181 respondents (41%) are currently using childcare and 63% of them use before and after-school (wraparound) childcare. Of the 264 not using childcare, 46% said they do not need it. 25% said that current wraparound childcare options do not meet their needs, either due to location or opening hours. When asked what would make them consider using childcare, 59% of respondents answered 'if it met my requirements'.

This was most clear in the wards of Charlestown, Levenshulme, Longsight and Miles Platting & Newton Heath. Since September, 25 additional wraparound childcare places have become available in Charlestown, serving 3 primary schools. In Levenshulme, two schools have expanded to offer 91 places while a childminder will offer 7 more places from October. In Miles Platting & Newton Heath, an additional 25 places were made available from September, serving 2 primary schools in the ward, and 60 additional places serving 2 more primary schools will be available later in the Autumn term. Collaborative work is ongoing with schools and providers in Longsight to establish a wraparound childcare provision that meets the needs of families in the community.

The issue of affordability of childcare was also raised and 28% of the 264 parents who are not using childcare said that they cannot afford it and 157 said they would consider using childcare if they became employed or it was more affordable. 167 (38%) of all 445 respondents said they are not aware of tax-free childcare which discounts the cost of childcare for working parents. Of the 181 using childcare, 31% said that it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to meet their childcare costs. Furthermore, 127 said they were not accessing financial support for childcare costs and only 75 said their childcare provider allows tax-free childcare as a payment method. MCC is working with wraparound childcare providers to ensure their charges are affordable and that they can accept payment via Tax-free childcare and Universal Credit, whilst ensuring their provision is viable.

**Wraparound Childcare and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)** - Evidence from the 2025-26 survey for parents of children over 5 showed that 144 out of 455 respondents (32%) have at least 1 child with special education needs or disabilities (SEND). Of these 144 parents, 48 (33%) said the childcare information available in their local area is poor or very poor. Only 57 (40%) said they are using childcare. The remaining 87 (60%) are not using childcare and 17 said that current options do not meet their needs. A further 12 said that they have safety concerns about their child accessing childcare. 30 parents said they would use childcare if they were satisfied that it met their child's needs. The main needs that parents reported were ADHD, ADD and Autism, in addition to health care needs and physical disabilities.

In a targeted childcare survey for parents of children with SEND, 35% of the 26 respondents reported using before and after school care or holiday care. 38% said that it was either 'very easy', 'fairly straightforward' or 'possible' to find before and after school childcare and this was slightly higher (42%) for finding holiday care.

Finding suitable before and after school childcare can be more difficult for parents of children with SEND, both in mainstream and specialist schools. MCC is working with specialist schools with the intention of developing a pilot wraparound provision. Moreover, during summer term 2025, of the 674 additional before and after school places delivered through the WAC programme, 34 places were accessed by children with SEND. Several providers have reported using WAC grant funding to improve the inclusion of children with SEND by developing quiet zones, purchasing sensory resources, recruiting more staff for reduced ratios and investing in staff training. In Autumn 25, MCC has organised training sessions on Understanding Neurodiversity and Inclusive Play work to improve confidence in meeting additional needs and enrolling more children with SEND.

**Holiday care** - The findings from the Holiday Care Sufficiency Assessment and the Parent/Carer Survey 2025 highlight the challenges and opportunities in Manchester's holiday childcare landscape. While there is a growing network of providers, particularly within the PVI and childminder sectors, significant gaps remain in terms of accessibility, affordability, and sufficiency. **Appendix D shows Holidaycare provision by ward.**

Provision is unevenly distributed across the city, with South Manchester seeing the highest concentration of services. Schools are less likely to offer holiday care, and when they do, it is often for shorter durations and fewer hours than required by working families. PVI settings and childminders offer longer hours and more flexibility, but at a higher cost.

The parent/carers survey reinforces these findings, with families citing limited availability, high costs, and lack of information as key barriers. There is also a clear need for more inclusive provision that meets the needs of children with SEND and those requiring care during atypical working hours.

There are less than half the number of holidaycare places (1629) compared to Wraparound Childcare places (3322) yet many working parents will continue to require childcare that is available for 9 hours per day during school holidays. MCC will seek to expand holiday care provision by encouraging wraparound providers and schools, to provide continuity of care for their children and families during school holiday periods.

**Free Breakfast Clubs** - The government announced the launch of a universal free breakfast clubs programme for all state-funded primary schools in England to support children's learning and reduce the impact of child poverty. These clubs aim to improve attendance, behaviour, and academic outcomes, while also easing financial pressure on families.

7 primary schools in Manchester began offering free breakfast and 30 minutes of childcare from Summer Term 2025 as part of an Early Adopter pilot. This provision is free and universal for all pupils. 120 primary schools and 60+ PVIs in Manchester already offer before-school childcare, often including breakfast. Many charge as little as 50p per day and provide longer durations than the new programme. 16 primary schools do not offer any breakfast or before-school childcare, 6 of which are Specialist schools, the remaining 10 are in North/Central Manchester. Parent surveys (2025) show high demand for breakfast clubs, especially in Moston, Miles Platting and Newton Heath.

Following the early adopter phase which has seen 750 primary schools participate, the Government has announced plans to extend to a further 2,000 schools from April 2026. Working parents may need more than 30 mins and are likely to have to pay for extra provision.

## **7. Early Education and Childcare for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**



The sector has reported a significant increase in the numbers of young children presenting with SEND. This could be the result of early identification tools and techniques which are helping to identify the emerging needs of young children sooner and enabling support packages to be put into place more swiftly.

86.7% of Manchester's 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds claimed their universal entitlements in 2024. When analysing internal data for children with an EHCP aged 0-5 years, it was found that 82.2% were claiming their full 15- or 30-hours entitlement, 4.5% lower than the general Under 5 cohort. This is significantly more than the 47% reported in last year's CSA but reflects the fact that the approach has changed to take account of a larger cohort of children. A weakness of the 2024 data is that it does not reveal whether children were accessing all of the hours being claimed.

The improved capture and reporting of attendance data for early years children with SEND will be set out in the Childcare Action Plan 2025/26. It is worth noting that daycare providers reported that in 85% of cases, children with SEND were accessing their full entitlement hours which aligns with the 2024 data presented above.

Consultation on childcare for children with SEND in 2025, received 18 responses, 9 fewer than 2024. However, 78% reported accessing their first-choice early years setting and the average wait times to access childcare between 1 and 3 months, with 72% feeling that this was a reasonable timeframe. 89% reporting that they were accessing all of the childcare funded hours that their child was entitled to and 61% confirmed that they were happy with the hours they were accessing although 56% of families would like to access more childcare.

55% of parent/carers scored their happiness with their child's childcare as between 8 and 10 out of 10. 78% of parent/carers scored their child's happiness in their childcare setting as between 8 and 10 out of 10. This suggests a high degree of parent/carer and child satisfaction with the childcare being accessed and some positive examples of inclusive daycare provision. However, it is worth noting that not all families shared the same positive experiences with some families waiting far longer to access childcare than was considered reasonable and some sharing the challenges they had encountered in finding care to meet their child's needs.

Workforce instability affects the sector's capacity to work to maximum registered numbers which, in turn, impacts on the care and education of children who need additional support. Children with additional needs may not always access their early learning entitlements in a timely way. Every daycare provider has a designated SENCO, and all settings have access to specialist training and input from experts in this field such as Rodney House Outreach Service for Early Years.

For primary school aged children, the absence of support funding which is available during the core school day is cited as a barrier to accessing before and after school and holidaycare. While this is not always necessary, and some children are accommodated very successfully without additional support funding, feedback from schools and the private sector suggests that the lack of funding can present a barrier to access.

## **7.1 What is being done to make early education and childcare more accessible to children with SEND in Manchester?**

The city benefits from a range of services and tools designed to make childcare and early education more accessible to children with SEND in Manchester. The following lists some of the tools and services available to support inclusive access to early learning and childcare.

**Rodney House Outreach Service for Early Years (RHOSY)** - Rodney House provides outreach services to families and settings of children with SEND aged 0-5 across the city. Following the Early Years SEND Pathway Review in 2024, the Rodney House Outreach Service for Early Years team have relocated into Family Hubs and are working with the Flying Start initiative, the Early Years Quality Assurance Team, One Education, Speech and Language service and many more to support inclusion.

RHOSY Outreach for Families provide support directly to children through individual and group work. The Outreach for Families teamwork with families who have a child aged between 0-5 years old not in a setting who meet referral criteria.

RHOSEY Outreach for Settings role is to work with practitioners from Early Years settings throughout Manchester in an outreach capacity, offering advice and support in their work with children who have been identified as having additional needs.

EY SEND Inclusion funding is available to Manchester settings for children with emerging and identified SEND needs and some children will go on to meet criteria for an EHCP. From September 2024 to the end of September 2025, 220 applications have been made for children in Early Years settings and 260 for children in school nursery classes. As part of a review of EYs SEND Inclusion funding, Transition Funding is being piloted to extend levels of EY SEND Inclusion Funding into the first term of a child's reception year to provide continued support in this transition period.

RHOSEY deliver the accredited level 3 SENCO AWARD and 18 practitioners from our EY Settings have successfully completed the 12 sessions and passed the accreditation, bringing the number to around 90 Early Years practitioners overall, with a further 17 people enrolled for Autumn 25.

**Dingley's Promise Inclusive Practice Training** - More than 2111 people employed in the early years sector have registered to complete one or more of the training modules available. There are currently 9 modules available, including the most recent, Inclusive Approach to Curriculum and Assessment and Supporting Communication Development for Early Years Children with SEND.

60 settings have achieved the Dingley's Promise Mark of Achievement for high levels of training completion, the highest of all participating LAs. 98% of learners report having more confidence in their practice because of completing the training and 99% of learners would recommend it to others. Childminders, schools and daycare providers are among the main beneficiaries of the training but local authority teams, RHOSEY, Health and Sure Start teams and Parent/Carers have also signed up to complete individual training modules.

**Special Education Needs and Disability Information, Advice, Support Service (SENDIASS)** – A statutory service providing support to children, young people and their families on such things as the law in this area, local policy and practice, EHC Plans, mediation and dispute resolution. [About SENDIASS Manchester](#)

**The Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP)** document 2020/21 continues to be a key resource for families and the sector alike. It explains the services available to families of children with additional needs; those which are specialised and those which are available to all. The OAP is regularly updated and helps families to navigate the services that may benefit their child. [The Manchester Ordinarily Available Provision for Early Years Document | Help & Support Manchester](#)

**Manchester's Local Offer** - The Local Offer is a single point of information for children and young people with SEND from 0-25 years, their parents and carers and for practitioners and professionals. It is published as part of the SEND reforms included in the Government's Children and Families Bill (2013). It helps to identify appropriate services, advises on eligibility and how to access services. Users can also provide feedback about what is needed, raise concerns or make a complaint. The local offer;

- provides information about education, health and care services
- provides information about leisure activities and support groups
- aims to be clear, comprehensive and accessible
- aims to make service provision more responsive to local need

**Short Breaks** - The Short-Breaks programme is for any disabled child or young person aged up to 18 and there are various levels of breaks available for families and children with different levels of need. Increasingly families are likely to have their needs met through local mainstream youth play and leisure provision, rather than through an individualised targeted offer. A concerted effort has been made to make universal services more accessible to young people with SEND and the Community Offer can be used as a 'bridge' to mainstream services to scaffold support. The Community Offer has served to build the confidence of the families using universal services as well as providers involved.

For children who need a lot of support, their families and carers, highly specialised or bespoke services are available. Some families choose to use a Direct Payment to buy their own services, as agreed in a support plan. The increase in the Universal/Community offer has resulted in a reduction in the requirement for Targeted and

Specialist provision. It is worth noting that particularly for the Universal/Community offer, parents/carers would often remain in attendance, meaning that short breaks are unlikely to serve as a childcare solution for parents/carers wanting to work or study.

The table shows the numbers of children and young people accessing targeted, specialist and universal short breaks between 2020/21 and 2024/25.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Targeted	964	1025	1066	706	431
Specialist	248	260	273	224	186
Universal/Community Offer	1883	2954	3300	5389	6708

## 8. Securing high quality early years provision in Manchester

Currently, 96% of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings in Manchester are judged to be Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. This has been maintained from 2024 and highlights the effectiveness of a wide range of strategies, summarised in the four strands below.

Support, challenge and training: The Quality Assurance team offers various forms of support, including pre-registration briefings, visits, courses, forums, workshops, training, mentoring, and coaching to our private, voluntary and independent early years education and childcare providers. They also provide intensive support for settings that need improvement and facilitate peer support visits.

The Manchester Quality Assurance Framework (QAF): This framework helps settings, and the Local Authority maintain a shared vision for quality. It covers six areas: Leadership and management, Care and welfare, Learning and development, Inclusion, Partnerships, and Communication and language. Settings are assessed and categorized as Emerging, Enabling, or Enhancing, with Gold and Silver awards given for high quality practice.

Inspection Readiness: The team prioritises support visits based on Ofsted judgments, ensuring that settings receive the necessary guidance to meet Early Years Foundations Stage requirements. This includes safeguarding audits and participation in Department of Education and local area education projects.

Continuous Improvement: Collaboration with the Northwest Early Years Stronger Practice Hub and Greater Manchester Combined Authority ensures that early years' professionals have access to high quality continuing professional development opportunities.

From November 2025, Ofsted will implement a major overhaul of how early years settings and childminders are inspected in England. One of the most significant changes is the removal of the single-word overall effectiveness grade, such as "Outstanding" or "Inadequate" which will be replaced by a more nuanced "report card" system providing individual grades across six key areas of provision.

The new Early Years Inspection Toolkits will guide both inspectors and providers through the process, aiming to reduce unnecessary workload and promote transparency. These changes reflect Ofsted's commitment to a more supportive and developmental inspection culture, with a stronger emphasis on inclusion, well-being, and the lived experiences of children in early years settings

## 9. Affordability of childcare

Coram's 2025 Childcare Survey found that working parents of children aged under three in England are paying less than half of the previous year's cost for a part-time nursery place, and more than 20% less for a full-time place, a very welcome step towards making childcare affordable for working families and easing the difficult choices between work and care that parents have been faced with for many years. However, this is only of benefit to families who are in work and claiming government funding for childcare. Assessments are ongoing to determine the average charges for paid for childcare in the City and these will be reported on in coming months.

The majority of childcare for children aged 9 months to 4 years is now government funded but daycare providers can charge for additional hours of childcare and services accessed. These must be clearly advertised and families entitled to Government funded childcare must have the option to access childcare without any additional charges applying. From January 2026, daycare providers must ensure that their fees and charges are clearly available on their website and where they do not have a website, are clearly listed on a City Council website. In addition, stricter guidance has been issued to the sector on the information which must be presented on childcare invoices to ensure that families are clear on what they are paying for.

Daycare providers must follow all Early Years Statutory Guidance including that on charging and fees and the local authority will support providers to deliver services and charge fairly and transparently.

The expansion of childcare funding to children aged 9 months to 3 years and the increase from 15 to 30 hours of provision is a bonus for working families. For daycare providers to maintain high quality, inclusive provision, they must continue to invest while meeting rising overheads. This might result in additional charges.

Despite new and enhanced funding rates and the availability of expansion funding, many providers do not feel that enough is being done to support the sustainability of the childcare sector. The increased numbers of children with emerging needs identified in the early years is also impacting upon sustainability with some nurseries reluctantly applying limits to admission numbers to ensure they can operate safely and within ratio.

Research suggests that the 2025 average cost for a week of holidaycare in Manchester costs £162 compared to the national average of £179. This considers provision across both the Private, Voluntary and Independent sector and in schools.

In addition, the average cost of an after school place is also below the national average at £63.82 compared to £70. This will continue to be analysed as the roll out of new and extended provision progresses into 2026.

### **Support with the cost of childcare**

In addition to the 30 hours funded childcare available to working families with a child aged 9 months to 4 years, there are other sources of funding to help children access childcare and parents/carers access work. Parents/carers are encouraged to visit the Government's Best Start in Life website [Homepage | Best Start in Life](#) for information on support with the cost of childcare. Most daycare settings accept Tax Free Childcare or Universal Credit as a method of payment towards childcare fees, and this can be used to reduce any additional childcare costs families face. For more information on this and other support with childcare costs visit Best Start in Life (link above).

For help with childcare costs where parents/carers are studying please visit the Government websites; [Help paying for childcare: Help with childcare while you study - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

## **10. Appendices**

### **Appendix A – Glossary of Childcare Terms**

**Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC)** is available to families with young children until they start their statutory education which, in England, is the September term after their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. This can be delivered by a range of different types of childcare provision as follows:

A **childminder** is an individual who provides Ofsted registered early childhood education and care on domestic premises which is not the home of any of the children being cared for (Guide to registration 2012).

**Nursery/Daycare settings** are Ofsted registered providers of early childhood education and care on premises that are not someone's home. These premises can range from converted houses to purpose-built nurseries and are usually known as day nurseries, private nursery schools, pre-schools (Guide to registration 2012). This provision is often delivered by the Private, Voluntary and Independent sectors (hereafter PVI), but increasingly is also delivered by primary schools for children aged from 2 years old.

**Wraparound Childcare Provision** is usually targeted at primary school aged children from 3 years upwards and often referred to as 'before and after school care'. It provides learning and leisure activities after the school day finishes, also enabling parents to take up employment or training opportunities. After school clubs must be registered with Ofsted to meet the National Standards and are not open access, meaning that children must be registered with the group and be collected by parents/carers. This type of provision is delivered by the PVI sector, including childminders, and schools. There are many open access Out of School clubs (e.g. Madrasas, supplementary schools) but these are beyond the scope of this assessment.

**Holiday care** is offered during the school holidays to families with children aged three upwards. Some holiday clubs are registered with Ofsted and meet national standards. They are mainly delivered by the PVI sectors, including childminders, who also provide ECEC. However, most holiday care is open access, and beyond the scope of this assessment.

**Out of School provision** is sessional care for children aged three years and upwards - usually before and after school hours. Providers often offer holiday care too. The clubs are not open access so the children must be registered with the group and be collected by parents/carers. Out of school clubs are required to register with Ofsted to meet the National Standards. This type of provision is delivered by the PVI, including childminders, and schools. There are many open access Out of School clubs (eg Madrasas, supplementary schools etc) but these are beyond the scope of this assessment.

**The Childcare Register** has two parts:

**Compulsory** – for providers who care for children from the first September after the child's fifth birthday up until their eighth birthday.

**Voluntary** – for providers looking to deliver childcare to children aged 8 years and over. Also, where some providers such as nannies can register voluntarily.

## Appendix B

Ward level sufficiency of 45-hour places			
Ward	U2 Places	Total 2YO Places	Total 3&4 Places
Ancoats and Beswick	28	43	81
Ardwick	56	77	134
Baguley	-1	7	8
Brooklands	-7	-48	-51

Burnage	-9	5	-22
Charlestown	30	19	48
Cheetham	-15	69	-43
Chorlton	-32	-24	45
Chorlton Park	-11	5	-35
Clayton and Openshaw	10	29	44
Crumpsall	-23	4	19
Deansgate	-9	0	-1
Didsbury East	-6	2	58
Didsbury West	35	22	56
Fallowfield	24	-8	18
Gorton and Abbey Hey	9	-2	-60
Harpurhey	25	10	110
Higher Blackley	124	93	106
Hulme	16	4	60
Levenshulme	16	8	52
Longsight	5	21	-105
Miles Platting and Newton Heath	9	35	69
Moss Side	52	67	22
Moston	-19	-34	17
Northenden	-10	-24	-9
Old Moat	-27	-31	-106
Piccadilly	3	18	25
Rusholme	4	9	-31
Sharston	-30	-49	-10
Whalley Range	59	74	88
Withington	-36	-32	39
Woodhouse Park	-14	10	-8

\*a 45-hour place can be used to meet demand from working parents qualifying for 30 hour childcare and purchasing an average of 13 hours per week extra. It also accommodates multiple 15 hour places for children in receipt of the 2 year old additional support and 3 & 4 year olds accessing early education. Negative numbers denote the forecasted shortfall.

Ward	Number of providers of full WAC (delivered additional places)	Number of full WAC places pre-24-25	Number of additional WAC places delivered 24-25	Total WAC places
Ancoats and Beswick	3 (0)	137	0	137
Ardwick	4 (1)	58	30	88
Baguley	4 (2)	45	57	102
Brooklands	2 (2)	7	43	50
Burnage	4 (2)	26	47	73
Charlestown	1 (1)	32	40	72
Cheetham	4 (3)	7	78	85
Chorlton	5 (5)	141	195	336
Chorlton Park	1 (1)	100	20	120
Clayton and Openshaw	4 (3)	60	59	119
Crumpsall	3 (2)	50	30	80
Deansgate	0 (0)	0	0	0
Didsbury East	4 (1)	286	20	306
Didsbury West	1 (0)	90	0	90
Fallowfield	2 (2)	30	50	80
Gorton and Abbey Hey	3 (1)	90	33	123
Harpurhey	6 (3)	97	70	167
Higher Blackley	5 (2)	57	90	147
Hulme	2 (2)	0	36	36
Levenshulme	8 (2)	78	91	169
Longsight	1 (0)	2	0	2
Miles Platting and Newton Heath	2 (1)	36	25	61
Moss Side	3 (1)	13	42	55
Moston	3 (2)	25	60	85
Northenden	4 (3)	3	152	155
Old Moat	1 (0)	60	0	60
Piccadilly	0 (0)	0	0	0
Rusholme	1 (1)	0	20	20
Sharston	4 (2)	88	20	108
Whalley Range	4 (3)	3	244	247
Withington	2 (1)	10	43	53
Woodhouse Park	3 (1)	66	30	96
<b>Total</b>	<b>94 (50)</b>	<b>1697</b>	<b>1625</b>	<b>3322</b>

**Appendix D – Ward overview of Holidaycare provision**

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Number of Providers</b>	<b>Total number of Places</b>
Ancoats & Beswick	1	63
Baguley	3	85
Brooklands	1	40
Burnage	7	140
Charlestown	3	30
Cheetham	2	60
Chorlton Park	3	46
Clayton & Openshaw	2	29
Crumpsall	1	60
Didsbury East	1	25
Didsbury West	1	70
Gorton & Abbey Hey	3	40
Harpurhey	3	5
Higher Blackley	2	70
Hulme	1	64
Levenshulme	3	70
Longsight	2	130
Miles Platting & Newton Heath	3	40
Moston	2	10
Northenden	3	95
Sharston	4	20
Whalley Range	6	264
Withington	1	50
Woodhouse Park	3	123