

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA)

2024 to 2025

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1. Overall assessment and headlines summary

This document outlines the local authority's work in meeting its childcare sufficiency duty.¹

It outlines the work that is being undertaken to promote high quality early years provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities from 9 months to four years of age eligible for free childcare places.

Local authorities are required by legislation to secure sufficient childcare for children aged 0 to 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children) whose parents are either working, in receipt of eligible benefit support or parents who are studying or training for employment, this means that parents are able to work because childcare places are available, accessible and affordable and are delivered flexibly at a range of high-quality settings.

An early years education is critical to children becoming ready for school and to support their early social interactions and to form relationships with their peers.

This document will provide information about the current and projected supply and demand of childcare for particular age ranges of children, including the affordability, accessibility and quality of provision and details how gaps in childcare provision will be addressed.

Medway Council and early years providers have continued to work together in partnership, to support the needs and preferences of parents and providers for delivery and use of childcare.

The arrangements of childcare demand and staffing within provision, will continue to change and these new challenges will be supported through the childcare assessment as an informative document.

Headlines summary

Medway Council have met their Childcare Sufficiency duty during 2023 to 2024 by:

- Ensuring there is enough accessible early years and childcare provision across Medway and addressing any gaps in provision.
- Ensuring high quality early years and childcare provision for children aged nine months, two, three and four years of age, taking up the free early years education and childcare entitlements.

¹ Sufficiency is defined as meeting the needs of local parents who require childcare in order to enable them to take up or remain in work or undertake training or education that will lead to work.

- Continuing to support providers in offering the extended childcare entitlements that came into effect from April 2024 and September 2024 for eligible families.
- Ensuring there is sufficient early years childcare provision for children and families using the childcare element of working tax credits.

Sufficiency

Statutory duties of Local Authorities - Childcare Act 2006

- Section 6 - which places a duty on English local authorities, so far as reasonably practicable, to secure sufficient childcare in their area for working parents.
- Section 7- which places a duty on English local authorities to secure early years provision free of charge. Regulations made under section 7 set out the type and amount of free provision and the children who benefit from free provision.

Medway has been providing free/funded childcare spaces for disadvantaged two-year-olds since 2013. This offer was extended to over 44% of two-year-olds and in the current data, now includes the extended entitlement for 2-year-olds from working families.

Medway is committed to supporting as many families as possible to take up the offer of free or funded places for an eligible two-year-old. Currently, there are sufficient registered places to accept all of the potentially eligible two-year-olds in Medway.

In the summer term 2024, there were vacancies for children within the Medway childcare sector for children aged from nine months to four years of age.

There have been 30 new providers who have registered with Medway as a funded childcare setting from January 2024, this is an increase of 17 settings compared to the 2023 data.

The highest increase of new provider type has been childminders.

Since September 2017, Medway has provided funding for eligible families to access the 30 Hour entitlement. The Department for Education (DfE) estimated that there would be 2100 eligible families in Medway.

With an average take up of 80%, this would equate to approximately 1,680 children taking up a place across the year.

The Early Years Sufficiency Team have supported settings in sustainable quality provision through working in conjunction with the commissioned service of Medway Early Years Limited (MEY).

Families have been supported in seeking childcare places through the Family Information Service at Medway Council and the Local Offer.

2. Demand for childcare

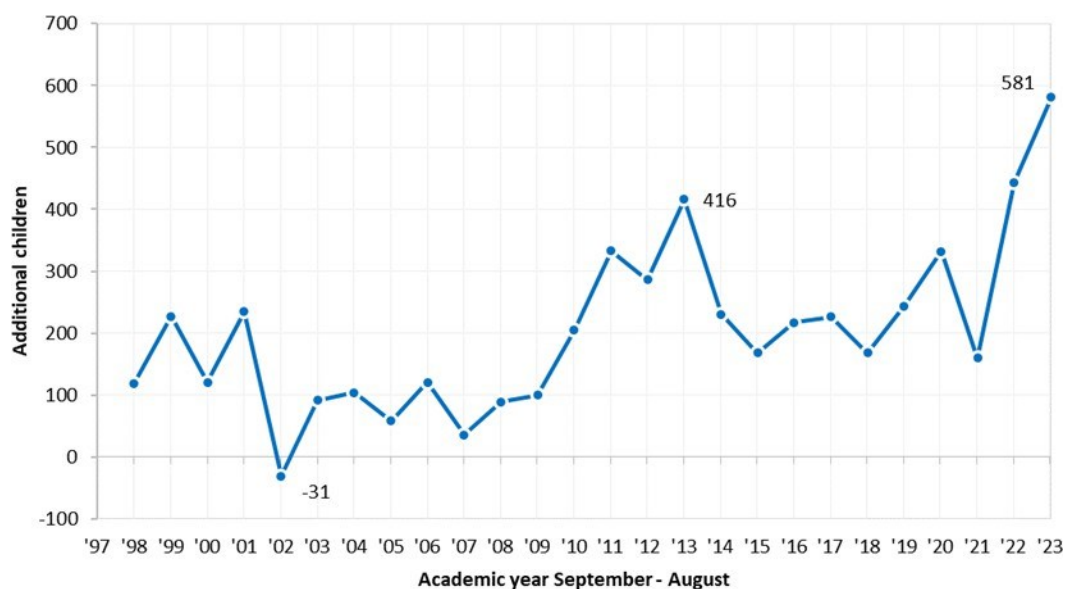
Population of early years children

Numbers by age (**birth data, inward migration data -school services forecast**)

In total, there are **17,760** children under the age of 5 years living in Medway Local Authority with births falling year on year.

Age	Number of children- Birth Data - October 2024
Age 0	3,149
Age 1	3,344
Age 2	3,505
Age 3	3,467
Age 4	3,782
Total	17,247

Inward Migration Data



The inward migration graph above shows the net increase in pre-school age children (age 0-5 years) for the academic year, based on GP registration data which is in contrast to births. The 2023 total, 581, is the highest since Medway became a unitary authority. The migration is likely in part, due to new house building and lower costing property in Medway in comparison to London. The recruitment drive at Medway Maritime Hospital could have impacted on increased migration to the area particularly families moving into Chatham and Gillingham.

Housing developments

Large developments of housing have taken place across Medway and there are further proposed widespread developments. In some areas across Medway, new schools will be built to accommodate the population of children within new housing. If a new school is built, it will be accompanied by a new build early years nursery.

Childcare places

The total number of full-time (**FTE**) registered childcare places across Medway is 7,013.

There are approximately 14,461 children aged 1, 2, 3 and 4 years of age in Medway. This is broken down as 3,421 children aged 1 year, 3,629 children aged 2 years, and 7,411 children aged 3 and 4 years.

9 to 23 months- Data set

The government extended entitlement of 15 hours of free childcare for children aged 9 to 23 months came into effect from September 2024. The government expected take-up rate is 60% and equates to **1,026 FTE** places potentially required.

2 Years of Age- Data set

The government extended entitlement of 15 hours of free childcare for children aged 2 years from working families, came into effect in April 2024 and this is in addition to the existing entitlement for 2 years olds from families who are in receipt of some form of government support.

The government expected take-up rate of 75% of 2-year-olds from working families equates to **1,360 FTE** and added to those families receiving additional forms of government support totals **1,814 FTE** places potentially required.

3 & 4 Years of Age

The government informs Medway Council that of the 7,411 children aged 3 and 4 years, approximately 2,100 of these children will potentially be eligible for a funded 30-hour childcare place of which the Government expect an 80% take up which equates to **1,680** full-time places.

The remaining 5,731 children aged 3 and 4 years of age, are all eligible for a funded universal 15 hour part-time childcare place, this equates to **2,866 FTE** places.

Maximum required full-time equivalent places for children aged 9 to 23 months.	Maximum required full-time equivalent places for children aged 2 years	Maximum required 30-hour places for children aged 3 and 4 years	Maximum required full-time equivalent universal offer places for children aged 3 and 4 years	Total
1,026	1,814	1,680	2,866	7,386

The current number of full-time registered childcare places offered across Medway is 7013. The maximum number of full-time equivalent places required is 7,386 meaning that if there was a 100% take up rate, there would be a potential short fall of 368 full-time childcare places, however we are aware that not all parents/carers choose to use formal childcare.

The national average take-up rate of childcare places is 72% and therefore we would anticipate 5,317 places being used in Medway which would mean a surplus of places.

The DfE predictions for expected take up of childcare places, are based on the trends of current usage of entitlement hours. Not all children will attend their full allocation of 30 hrs and may only attend for e.g. 18 or 24 hours as some parents only use the hours they need to cover the childcare while they are at work.

The Sufficiency assessment for Medway, is calculated as the maximum possible take up, to ensure that we are fully informed and prepared.

Medway vacancy rates are a snapshot and often change rapidly. In some cases, providers may have a vacancy which is only available for a specific age group, or for a particular part-time arrangement. In general, vacancy rates are higher in the autumn, when children move to school.

Medway Council Early Years Sufficiency team have currently received no communications from parents/carers stating they are unable to find a universal or extended funded childcare place for their child however, Medway Council are aware that in some cases, parents/carers may not receive their first choice of setting which is in line with the national picture.

Additional entitlements September 2025 -

From September 2025, eligible working families with children aged between 9 months and 4 years of age, will be entitled to 30 hours of childcare support.

September 2025 additional entitlements for funded childcare projections.
(Please note, the figures in the table below are approximate)

Maximum required full-time 30-hour places for children aged 9 to 23 months from working families	Maximum required full-time 30-hour places for children aged 2 years from working families	Maximum required full-time equivalent places for children aged 2 years from families in receipt of additional forms of government support	Maximum required full-time 30-hour places for children aged 3 and 4 years	Maximum required full-time equivalent universal offer places for children aged 3 and 4 years	Total
2,052	2,721	454	1,680	2,866	9,773

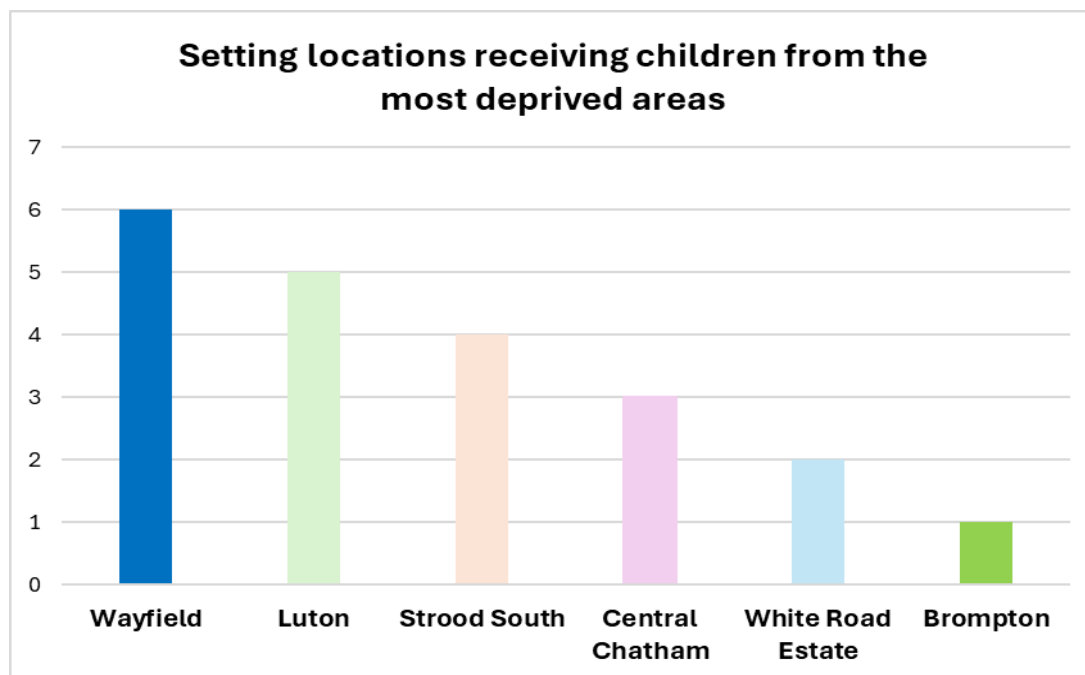
The projected figure of full-time registered childcare places offered across Medway will be 7,013. The potential short fall of full-time childcare places in September 2025 if 100% of children under 5 in Medway were in a childcare placement would be 2,760.

The national average take-up of childcare places is 72% and therefore we would anticipate a take-up of 7,036 children.

Medway Council have engaged 11 childcare settings in extending their provision which will create a further 140 places.

The Local Authority are aware that not all families require the use of formal early years childcare and choose to use grandparents for their childcare needs, and in addition, the Local Authority are aware of the diversity of the Medway population and that childcare is sometimes undertaken by family and extended family in addition to the use of registered providers.

Generally, uptake of early years childcare is low within deprived areas, and areas with high unemployment rates.



The bar chart above, represents the 6 early years setting locations receiving children from the most deprived areas in rank order.

Wayfield is receiving the highest number of children from a most deprived area, second ranking is Luton, third is Strood South, fourth is Central Chatham, fifth is the White Road Estate and sixth is Brompton.

Population projections - Local Authority based by year of age

Population projections and Inward Migration - 0 to 4 years of age

Age	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
0 year old	3290	3275	3262	3249	3244	3246
1 year old	3348	3336	3322	3309	3297	3292
2 year old	3391	3381	3369	3356	3343	3331
3 year old	3441	3411	3401	3389	3377	3365
4 year old	3469	3442	3413	3403	3392	3379

3. Medway CSA Action Plan 2024 to 2025

Key	Action required	Timeline
To sustain a high-quality childcare market.	Annual review of CSA	End of Term 1, 2025
	Childcare occupancy and cost reports to come directly from providers using the sufficiency report on the provider portal.	Monthly
	Ofsted inspection data for registered childcare provision to be downloaded directly through the link to the Synergy System.	Daily
	Working with existing providers to manage the market through support offered to maintain a robust business model that supports childcare places in remaining sustainable. Signpost providers to available funding streams to support sustainability with the cost of living.	Ongoing-In progress
	Quality of Childcare Provision supported and monitored by Medway Early Years Ltd.	Ongoing- In Progress
Focus on recruitment in the early years sector.	Support and promote the DfE- 'Do something big campaign'. Add Medway early years practitioner vacancies to the Family Information Service webpages.	Ongoing-In progress Add immediately when notice of vacancies are received.

<p>To map and place plan sustainable early years provision to meet demand for the upcoming 30-hour government entitlements for working families from Sept 2025.</p>	<p>Continue to work with the School Organisation team, to ensure that wards with housing developments planned, consider providing childcare provision.</p> <p>Monitor the fluctuation in the housing market within wards to ensure that changes to demographics are being supported by changes to provision where possible. Stimulate the market by signposting new potential developers/providers to ward areas that would benefit from additional childcare providers.</p> <p>Publish business support for potential new providers on the Family Information Service Directory.</p> <p>Signpost to MEY business support documents.</p>	<p>Monthly</p> <p>When required</p>
<p>9 months to 5 years childcare entitlements promoted to families for children of working families and those families in receipt of some additional forms of government support.</p>	<p>FIS Outreach and Medway Media team to continue to promote the extended entitlements of funded childcare.</p> <p>To continue to work in partnership with Medway digital team using the government toolkit to promote the extended childcare offer through social media, radio advertising and electronic media boards in town centres.</p>	<p>September 24 to 25</p>
<p>To ensure that SEN children and those with additional needs can access their childcare entitlements.</p>	<p>Make certain that providers are aware of funding they can potentially access to support and adapt to meet children's needs in order to access ordinary available provision.</p>	<p>Daily</p>

4. Disability Access Funding

In 2024, there have been 79 children qualifying for Disability Access Funding (DAF) an increase of 20 children compared to 2023 data. Children in receipt of DAF funding have accessed the funding at 46 different providers.

The Ofsted outcomes for providers that have been inspected, show that 100% of settings with children who are accessing DAF funding, have an inspection grading of Good or Outstanding.

5. Supply of childcare - number of early years providers and places

In total, there are 256 active early years childcare providers in Medway Local Authority, offering a maximum of 7,013 full-time early years childcare places:

Type of provision	Number of providers
Childminders	128
Nursery classes in schools	42
Private, voluntary, and independent Day Nurseries and Preschools	86
Total	256

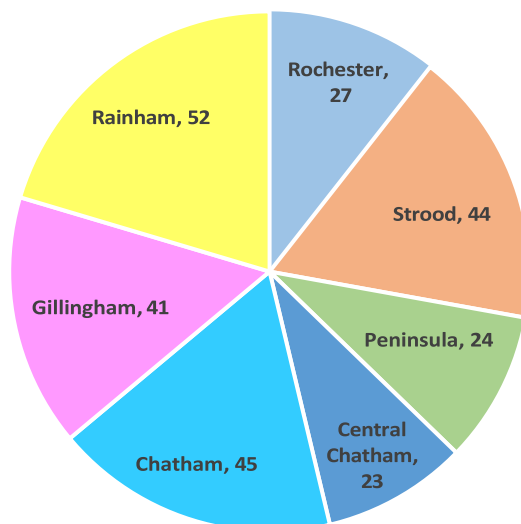
Children may attend childcare provision full-time or part-time. In some cases, two or more children attending part-time may use one full-time equivalent place. For example, one child may attend in the morning and one child may attend in the afternoon, this results in more children accessing places than is noted as the setting's maximum registered number.

Access to providers

Parents in Medway employ a variety of models for accessing childcare including provision close to home, parental preference, provision on key work routes, public transport routes and provision in relation to school locations.

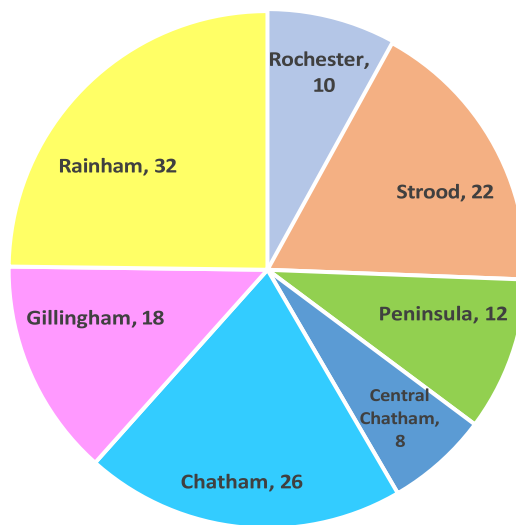
Location of childcare across Medway

Registered Childcare Providers by Area

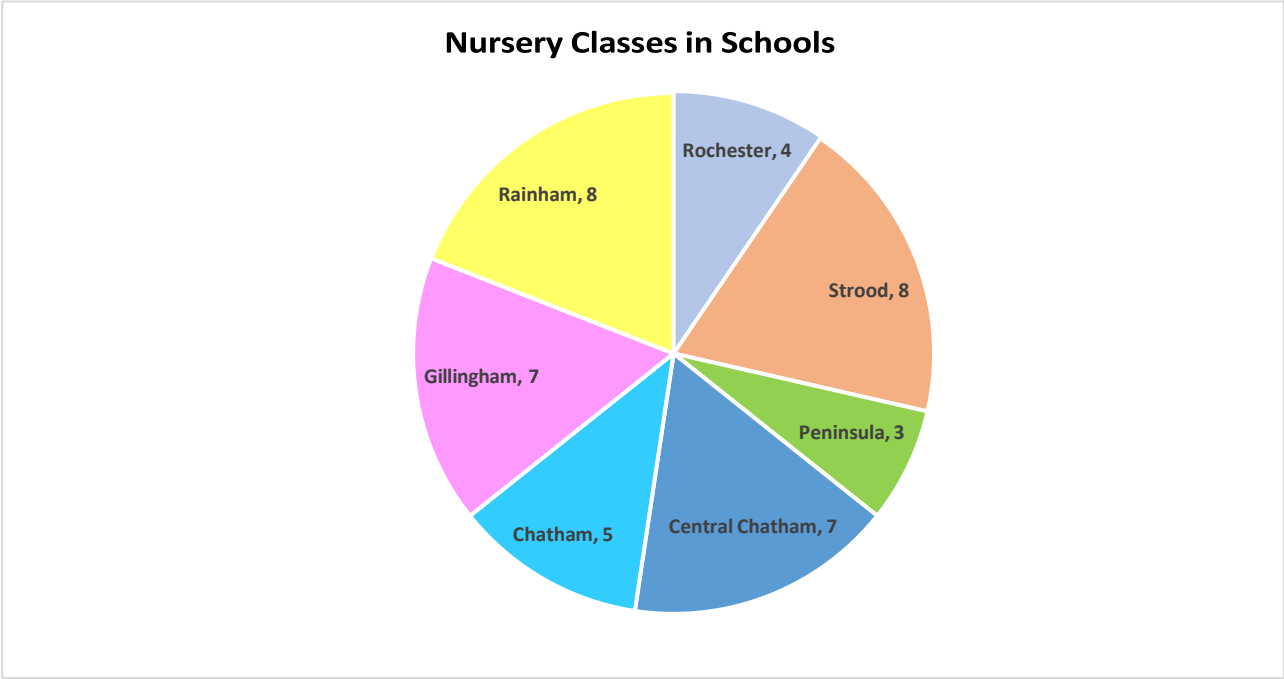


Registered Childcare Providers by area	Total
Rochester	27
Strood	44
Peninsula	24
Central Chatham	23
Chatham	45
Gillingham	41
Rainham	52
Total childcare providers	256

Childminders by Area

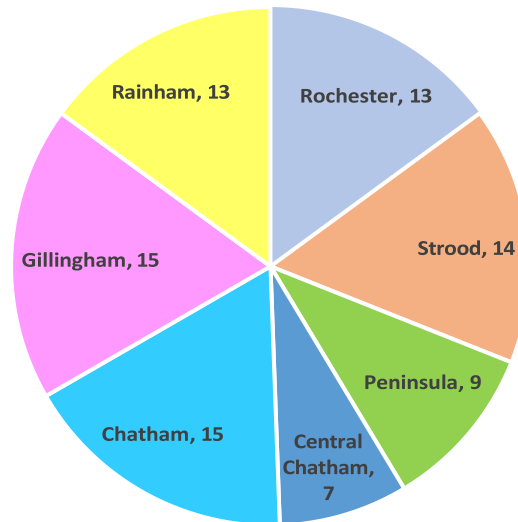


Registered Childminders by area	Total
Rochester	10
Strood	22
Peninsula	12
Central Chatham	8
Chatham	26
Gillingham	18
Rainham	32
Total childminders	128



Nursery classes in Schools via area	Total
Rochester	4
Strood	8
Peninsula	3
Central Chatham	7
Chatham	5
Gillingham	7
Rainham	8
Total nursery classes	42

Private, Voluntary, Independent Nurseries and Preschools



Private, Voluntary, Independent Nurseries and Preschools by area	Total
Rochester	13
Strood	14
Peninsula	9
Central Chatham	7
Chatham	15
Gillingham	15
Rainham	13
Total PVIs	86

6. Funded early education entitlements

Some children are entitled to free childcare, funded by the government, these entitlements are for 38 weeks per year.

From April 2024, childcare support was expanded in phases and by September 2025, most working families with children under the age of 5 will be entitled to 30 hours of childcare support.

The changes have been introduced gradually to make sure that providers can meet the needs of more families.

From **April 2024**, eligible working parents of 2-year-olds were able to access 15 hours childcare support.

From **September 2024**, 15 hours childcare support was extended to eligible working parents of children from the age of 9 months to 23 months.

From **September 2025**, eligible working parents of children under the age of 5 will be entitled to 30 hours of childcare a week.

Parents do not have to use all of the hours of their funded entitlement. They may choose to split the hours between providers.

With the agreement of their provider, parents may also spread hours across the year for e.g. rather than taking 15 hours for 38 weeks a year they could take just under 12 hours for 48 weeks a year.

Take up of funded early education

The table below shows the number of individual children attending an Early Years setting at any time between January 2024 and November 2024

Age	Medway
9 to 23 months	1,193
Age 2 – Supported Families	1,176
Age 2 – Working Families	1,922
Age 3- and 4-year-olds – Universal Offer	2,645
Age 3- and 4-year-olds – Working Families 30 hours	3,192
Total	10,128

The maximum number of children attending an Early Years setting at any time in the largest term (Summer 2024)

Age	Medway
Age 2	1,835
Age 3- and 4-year-olds – Universal Offer	5,121
Age 3- and 4-year-olds – Working Families 30 hours	2,465

Providers offering 2-year-old funded early education places

Type of provision	Number of providers in Medway	Number of Providers offering two-year-old places	Percentage of Providers offering two-year-old places
Childminders	128	128	100%
Nursery classes in schools/Academies	42	11	26%
Private, voluntary and independent nurseries	86	85	99%

3- and 4-year-old funded entitlement applications

Parents can access the online government childcare support website to assess if they are eligible for a working family 30-hour extended funded childcare place.

The same website is used to apply for tax free childcare and parents can apply for either or both.

If a parent is eligible, the system creates a code which they can use with their chosen childcare provider. If they are ineligible, they will still be entitled to the universal 15 hours of early education and childcare.

Providers offering funded early education places

Providers are paid using government funds for delivering funded early education. Providers are not required to offer the government funded hours to parents, however, parents may choose to use a different provider if they do not.

The grid below represents the total percentage of providers offering funded places for specified ages.

Type of provision	Number of providers	Age 9 to 23 months	Age 2	Age 3 and 4
Childminders	128	100%	100%	100%
Nursery classes in schools	42	0%	26%	100%
Private, voluntary, and independent nurseries	86	65%	99%	99%

7. Cost of Early Years Childcare

Early years childcare costs outside of the funded entitlements are reported on as average prices per hour.

There may be variations to prices based on the number of hours a family uses, with reductions for longer hours, or discounts for sibling groups.

Price per hour	Private, voluntary and independent nurseries	Childminders
9 to 23 months	£6.72	£4.96
2-year-olds	£6.72	£4.96
3- and 4-year-olds	£6.04	£4.96

8. Quality of childcare in Medway

All childcare providers must register with and be inspected by Ofsted, who give an overall grade for the quality of provision.

Childminders and private, voluntary and independent providers are on the early years register.

Currently, early years providers have four possible Ofsted grades: 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Requires Improvement', and 'Inadequate'.

Some providers are still awaiting their first full inspection, therefore these providers are excluded from the calculation below.

Type of provision	Total number of providers inspected	% achieving good or outstanding
Childminders	106	89%
Nursery classes in schools	41	100%
Private and voluntary settings	82	98%

Total number of providers achieving a good or outstanding Ofsted grade is 99%

9. Methodology

- Unless otherwise stated, the data used in the Sufficiency Assessment is from the Summer Term 2024 and is generated from the data provided in the May Headcount and data held in the Medway Family Information Service Directory.
- Number of children: based on Medway population projections and the ONS.
- Supply of childcare: based on data provided by Ofsted.
- Vacancy rates: based on the number of registered places against actual places filled by children across Medway in childcare provision.
- Funded early education: Data on take up of funded early education entitlements is based on the Early Years and Schools Census every January and published by the Department for Education in the statistical collection *Education provision: children under five years of age*. Data on entitlement to a funded early education place for 2-year-olds is provided by the Department for Work and Pensions.
- Price of childcare: based on the data held in the Medway Family Information Service Directory.
- Quality of childcare: data on childcare quality is provided by Ofsted and collated in the Synergy data base.

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