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Childcare sufficiency assessment - 2023 - 2024

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Overall childcare sufficiency assessment and summary

Blackpool Council is required by law to "report annually to elected members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare, and make this report available and accessible to parents." We have published this latest assessment dated April 2023, in order to meet this duty.

In this report, we have made an assessment of sufficiency using data about the need for childcare and the amount of childcare available. We have also included feedback from local parents about how easy or difficult it has been for them to find suitable childcare.

We use this information about childcare sufficiency to plan our work supporting the local childcare economy.

Number of places

- Our data shows that Blackpool has sufficient places for funded two, three and four year olds. Data was collected during February - March 2023.

Quality of provision

- All settings were rated good or outstanding by OFSTED or had not been inspected.

Views of Parents and Carers

- A survey of parents was undertaken during November 2022, and the overall findings were favourable.

Financial sustainability

- Some providers have expressed concerns that the funded hourly rate is insufficient. Funding is decided by the Department for Education. The Department for Education has announced increases in funding for the financial year 2023/24. A further rate increase is also planned for September 2023. Blackpool Council is also reducing its central expenditure thereby allowing further funding to be passed through to providers.

- Blackpool Council’s Business Development team also provides advice on marketing and business planning to providers and has a range of training available.
- Blackpool Council’s Early Years team will also provide advice and assistance where necessary.

The overall childcare market

- The provider market has remained reasonably static over the previous year. A small number of childminders have left the market but these have been replaced by new entrants.

Identified gaps

- There are limited choices available for atypical hours of childcare (outside 8am to 6pm on weekdays). The Early Years funding team provide brokerage support to parents who might encounter difficulty in finding a suitable place.

Our Plans and Actions for 2023 - 2024

To ensure that there are Sufficient Childcare Places

We want...	Why...	How...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure that there are sufficient easily accessible childcare places available across Blackpool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help children develop social and everyday skills and benefit from early education • To enable parents to take up employment opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain termly vacancy data from providers and monitor fluctuations and any problem areas • Assist parents having difficulty finding suitable provision through telephone support and the FYI directory website
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To maintain and develop our relationships with our local childcare and early education pProviders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So that we can support and maintain a professional and well trained Early Years workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By providing support visits to providers to ensure that funding is being used and allocated appropriately • By providing provider information events • Provider email information bulletins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure that there are sufficient places to meet the demand for extended childcare as outlined in the Government's spring budget 2023 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To enable more parents to take up employment opportunities as outlined by the Government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To work with the local market to establish requirements for additional demand • Establish capacity requirements and put in place suitable action plans

To ensure that Childcare provided is good quality

We want...	Why...	How...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure that the views of parents and carers are considered and that there is a mechanism in place to provided ongoing feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So that childcare provides positive outcomes and impacts on the lives of children and their families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertaking an annual parental survey and sharing the results with the local provider market so that potential problem areas can be identified and areas of good practice shared
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure that there is access for children with additional needs in all settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So that parents have local access to fully inclusive childcare where practical to do so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that providers are available of the support available through the SEND Inclusion Fund and the Disability Access Fund • The Inclusion Team will continue to provide support and guidance to providers

To ensure that Childcare funding is accurate and timely

We want...	Why...	How...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure that funding is accurate and timely To ensure as reasonably possible that the local childcare market is financially secure and viable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> So that there is a sufficient range of Early Years providers offering a range of choices to parents So that we have accurate business data and intelligence to inform our future plans To meet our statutory obligations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing our internal processes and systems to ensure we make the best use of technology To continue to monitor our central expenditure and achieve savings where possible To continue to work with the Early Years Provider Strategic Group to ensure that there is a collaborative and partnership approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure that there is adequate information to providers about the range of grant funding, supplements and support available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> So that providers can make the best and most appropriate use of funding to ensure sustainability and provide a quality service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving the quality of advice and information available to providers online Providing easily accessible policies and documentation

To ensure that parents are accessing childcare

We want...	Why...	How...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure that parents take up their funded entitlement to childcare and early education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> So that childcare provides positive outcomes and impact on the lives of children and their families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notifying parents of two year old children of their potential eligibility to funded childcare Provide support to help parents find a suitable childcare place Provide publicity and marketing of childcare to parents by attending events and providing printed information at key locations, libraries, GP surgeries etc Continuing to promote the FYI directory website and the Blackpool Local Offer online directories Improve the overall navigation and functionality on the FYI directory website

Demand for childcare

Population of children

In total there are 7995 children under the age of five living in Blackpool. This compares with 8262 at our previous assessment. These children may require early years childcare and education. Assuming approximately 50% of two year olds require childcare and all three and four year olds require childcare this would mean approximately 4000 early years children need childcare. Data supplied as at September 2021.

Age 0	Age 1	Age 2	Age 3	Age 4	Total
1524	1559	1602	1674	1636	7995

In total there are 16413 children aged 5-14 living in Blackpool. These children may require childcare before and after school, and/or during the school holidays.

Age 5	Age 6	Age 7	Age 8	Age 9	Age 10	Age 11	Age 12	Age 13	Age 14	Total
1698	1682	1752	1790	1588	1603	1652	1625	1509	1514	16413

Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are entitled to support with childcare up to the age of 18 (age 14 for children who do not have a special need or disability).

The Early Years Advisory team are available to support settings that require advice with supporting children with SEND.

The number of children up to 15 years with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan in Blackpool is:

Age 0 - 4	Age 5 - 10	Age 11 - 15	Total
81	391	434	906

As part of our review we asked providers to rate their confidence at providing support for children with SEND

Very confident	Fairly confident	Slightly confident	Not confident	No response
43	28	4	0	35

Changes to the population

The Early Years (0-4 years) population is reducing slightly by approximately 200 children overall per year due to a small reduction in the birth rate. This trend is predicted to continue.

Supply of childcare

In total there are 110 childcare providers in Blackpool, offering a maximum of 2991 early years childcare places:

Type of provision	Number of settings	Number of registered places	Number of free sessions	Vacancy Ratio
Childminders	37	222	225	10%
Maintained and school nursery	18	704	839	11%
Private, voluntary and independent nurseries	31	1975	3899	21%
Overall	89	2788	4963	18%

Area	Number of settings	Number of registered places	Number of free sessions	Vacancy ratio
North Blackpool	29	775	1283	16%
Central Blackpool	25	928	1746	19%
South Blackpool	35	1085	1934	18%
Overall	89	2788	4963	18%

Area	Childminders vacancy ratio	School nursery vacancy ratio	PVI vacancy ratio	Overall vacancy ratio
North Blackpool	11%	15%	19%	16%
Central Blackpool	4%	16%	21%	19%

South Blackpool	15%	5%	22%	18%
Overall	10%	11%	21%	18%

- The data provided was correct to the best of our knowledge at April 2023
- Some childminder places may also be available for older children.
- Total number of full time places available, a place may sometimes be shared by more than one child
- The vacancy ratio is the equivalent number of weekly places compared to the number of free sessions expressed as a percentage. A session is for half a day eg morning or afternoon.
- For private, voluntary and independent nurseries and childminders the number of registered places represents the maximum number of children who can be on the premises at any given time. In practice many providers choose to operate below their number of registered places.

Children may attend childcare full time or part time. This table records children that are attending full time or as many hours as the setting is open. 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 another child may attend in the afternoon. Vacancy rates are a snapshot and often change. In some cases providers may have a place that is only available for a particular age group or for a particular part time arrangement. We ask providers to report vacancies to us so that we can help promote them and help parents find a suitable place. We also ask for this information to help inform our sufficiency assessment. Most providers give us this information.

The availability of places across the town is broadly even, although there are slightly less places available in the North. Overall there are less places available than at our last assessment. The overall ratio was previously 23.4%. This is due to an increase in the overall numbers attending and some providers not offering places due to staffing difficulties.

The number of providers offering school age support has remained constant:

Breakfast clubs	After school clubs	Holiday clubs
26	34	16

Some childminders also offer support to school age children. Tracking of childcare for school age children is difficult because not all of this type of provision is registered with Ofsted. It is possible to have under counted this provision. Parents may also use provision that is not considered child care, for example sports or arts clubs after school or in the holidays.

Funded Early Education

Some children are entitled to free childcare funded by the Government. These entitlements are for 38 weeks per year.

- All children aged 3 and 4 are entitled to 15 hours per week (570 hours) until they start reception class in school
- Children aged 3 and 4 where both parents are working, or from lone parent families where that parent is working, are entitled to 30 hours per week for 38 weeks (1140 hours) until they start reception class in school
- Children aged 2 whose families receive certain benefits (including low income families in receipt of in-work benefits), or those who will meet additional non-economic criteria are entitled to 15 hours per week for 38 weeks.

Parents do not have to use all the hours of their funded entitlement. They may choose to split their hours between two providers. With the agreement of the provider parents may also spread hours across the year, for example rather than taking 15 hours for 38 weeks a year they could take 11 hours for 52 weeks a year instead (570 hours maximum).

The Government announced in the spring 2023 budget that there would be an increase in early education support for eligible working parents through funded childcare hours. Eligible working parents will be able to access 30 hours of funded childcare for 38 weeks of the year from when their child is 9 months old until when they start school. This will be rolled out in stages:

- From April 2024 – eligible working parents of 2 year olds can access 15 hours per week
- From September 2024 – eligible working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3 year olds can access 15 hours per week
- From September 2025 – eligible working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3 year olds can access 30 hours per week

Take up of funded early education

The take up of children attending Early Education in Blackpool is broadly similar to overall England figures. The proportion of children benefiting from Early Education compared to the population taking up their funded place (for at least some of the available hours) in Blackpool is:

Age	2021	2022
2 year olds	71% (69% England)	72% (73% England)
3 & 4 year olds	87% (93% England)	89% (92% England)

The information is based on Department for Education data. The percentage of two year old children is based on the number thought to be eligible for funding. Data is based on December 2022 counts. Data for 2021 and to a lesser extent 2022 was affected by the impact of COVID.

Prices for childcare

For Early Years childcare outside of funded entitlements we report on the average childcare prices per hour advised to us by settings. There may be variations on price based on the number of hours a family uses, with reductions for longer hours or reductions for family groups. There may also be additional charges for extra services such as lunch which are not included in the prices. Providers decide their own charges.

Prices charged in Blackpool are general lower than national averages. PVI's and schools have increased their prices since the last assessment. Some providers charge extra for meals.

Type of provision	Under 2 years	2 year olds	3 and 4 year olds
Childminders	£4.48	£4.41	£4.42
School nurseries		£4.50	£4.29
Private, voluntary and independent nurseries	£5.00	£4.95	£4.68
Overall	£4.78	£4.70	£4.52

Childcare for school age children tends to be more expensive than early years children because this takes place during the evenings or weekends.

Quality of Childcare

All childcare providers must register with and be inspected by Ofsted, who give them an overall grade for the quality of their provision. Childminders and private and voluntary providers are on the Early Years Register, and schools and standalone maintained nursery schools are on the Schools register.

The grades for both registers are equivalent. Schools with nurseries have an overall inspection grade for the whole school and some have a separate early years grade.

At the time of this assessment 67 out of 82 settings have been inspected and are rated Good or Outstanding.

Parents views

A parent/carer survey was undertaken during November 2022, the overall findings were favourable.

Parents were asked to rate the quality of the childcare they received:

Age group	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very poor	Total responses
Below school age	49 (57%)	28 (33%)	6 (7%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	85
School age	0	11 (78%)	3 (22%)	0	0	14
Overall	49 (49%)	39 (39%)	9 (9%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	99

Parents were asked to rate the value for money for the fees they paid for non funded childcare they received. For below school age children 58 respondents (70%) told us they did not purchase additional hours.

Age group	Good value	Satisfactory value	Poor value	Total responses
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Below school age	45 (55%)	31 (38%)	6 (7%)	82
School age	3 (23%)	9 (69%)	1 (7%)	13
Overall	48 (50%)	40 (42%)	7 (8%)	95

Parents were asked how easy it had been to find suitable childcare:

Age group	Very easy	Easy	Neither easy or difficult	Difficult	Very difficult	Total responses
Below school age	72 (32%)	30 (35%)	20 (24%)	5 (6%)	2 (2%)	84

Parents were asked how they felt providers had handled issues associated with the cost of living:

Handled issues well	Handled issues satisfactorily	Handled issues poorly	Total responses
35 (43%)	40 (49%)	7 (6%)	81

Parents were asked how they choose their childcare:

Type	Total responses
Searched online	28 (33%)
Saw advertising	1 (1%)
Recommendation	22 (22%)
Nearby location	24 (24%)
Other reasons	10 (10%)

Market sustainability

As part of our assessment we asked Providers for their views on their financial sustainability. Individual discussions have taken place with providers where appropriate.

How do you regard your current financial sustainability	Total responses
Good	5 (11%)
Satisfactory	23 (52%)
Concerning	10 (22%)
Critical	0
Prefer not to say	6 (13%)

Methodology

We have used the following data to compile this assessment:

Data has been obtained from the following sources to compile this report:

- Number of children based on Nomis Labour Market datasets

- Children with EHC plans based on SEN2 Local Authority Tables
- Supply of childcare: based on data provided by Ofsted, who regulate early years provision in schools and childcare provision. This has been supplemented with local knowledge.
- Vacancy rates: Based on provider surveys undertaken during March 2023
- Funded early education: data on take up of funded early education entitlements is based on the Early Years and Schools Censuses, which are taken every January and published by the Department of Education in the statistical collection. 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 information collected from provider surveys undertaken during March 2023
- Quality of childcare: data on childcare quality is provided by Ofsted Data

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Further information

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