

# Manchester Childcare SEND Sufficiency Assessment

## November 2024

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## **1. Introduction**

The Childcare Act 2006 (updated in 2016 and 2018), places duties on all local authorities in England to secure sufficient early years and childcare places. The early education entitlements (at the time of writing for two, three and four-year-olds) are complimented by childcare for 0 to 14-year-old (18 for children with disabilities). The aim of the sufficiency duties is to support both child and family outcomes through high quality provision for children and enabling families to work or undertake work related activity.

Assessing the market by measuring supply and demand, and considering social demographic information and informal indicators, is a critical part of securing sufficiency.

The Act specifically names children with disabilities as a key group who must be considered in the securing of sufficient provision locally. Therefore, a specific analysis of supply and demand for this group has been undertaken by Manchester City Council to ensure overall compliance, along with the council's wider objectives of improving child outcomes, narrowing the gap, and supporting employment and regeneration locally.

## **2. Context**

Families of children with SEND typically are not able to access the early years and childcare entitlements to the same extent as their peers. In some areas of the country, similar assessments have revealed that less than 50% of children with SEND access their full entitlement, compared with over 88% of the overall eligible population. This places families of children with SEND in a position of significant disadvantage when it comes to ensuring the best start for their children, improved outcomes throughout childhood and beyond, and enabling families to enter employment.

It is therefore no surprise that there are often disproportionate numbers of families of children with SEND represented in our least advantaged families group.

### **SEND needs in Manchester**

SEND needs in Manchester are increasing and particularly among younger age groups. This may be as a result of more sophisticated tools and techniques leading to early identification as well as to greater parent/carer awareness of expected age related development.

For example, Early Years now represents 4.56% of the total caseload of children with active EHCPs, an increase of 37% compared since 2023. Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) requests have doubled to more than 8,000 post the Covid-19 pandemic, creating a bottleneck in the process to assess and issue EHCPs.

There was a 7% increase in new EHCPs for children under 5 years in 2023 compared with 2022, which followed a 17% rise in new plans for Under 5s from 2021. Under 5s now represent almost 20% of all new EHCP plans.

Forecasts suggest that by 2027 there could be 535 new plans and 607 new plans in the under-5s age group, almost 80% more than in 2024. While 1.02% of all children aged 0-4 years in Manchester have diagnosed SEND and an active EHCP, there are many more whose needs are just emerging and who do not have an EHCP.

An exercise on business planning for inclusion completed in 2023, suggested that daycare settings should prepare for around 8% of places to be occupied by children with SEND.

### **Childcare in Manchester context**

Manchester has a thriving mixed economy of daycare offered through day nurseries, childminders, nursery classes in schools and pre schools. The city has several small nursery chains, and many single unit nurseries but few national nursery chains. The quality of provision is high with around 96.5% of settings judged to be Good or Outstanding by OfSTED.

Settings are supported by the Rodney House Outreach Service for Early Years (RHOSEY) and the Inclusion Pathway. RHOSEY provides advice, support and training to the sector as well as support to parents/carers of pre school aged children with SEND through a dedicated team.

Since 2023 Manchester has participated in a Comic Relief Funded pilot to improve access to free entitlement funding by children with SEND. Dingley's Promise Inclusive Practice training is available free of charge to employees within Manchester's early years workforce and to date almost 1,400 staff have registered to complete the online training. Engagement in the

training has been high and 17 settings have secured the Dingley’s Promise Mark of Achievement for high levels of training completion, the third highest in the country.

In February 2024, Manchester City Council hosted an Early Years Celebration Event to recognise excellence in the sector, with Inclusion as a central theme. The keynote speech from Catherine McLeod, Dingley’s Promise Chief Executive Officer, commended the City for its huge commitment to inclusion in the early years through collaboration and consistent approaches to implementing the training. She praised the effort to improve access to early learning for children with SEND and the commitment to enhancing the skills of the workforce to improve wellbeing and resilience.

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. In a bid to ensure that services are fit for purpose and delivering the very best outcomes for children and their families, the local authority commissioned an Early Years SEND Pathway Review in Summer 2024, the findings of which will be available in December 2024.

**Does Manchester have sufficiency childcare places for children entitled to their early years education entitlement and childcare which supports access to employment?**

Provision type	Age range	Number
PVI daycare	0-4 years	118
Childminders	0-11 years	311
Maintained Nurseries	0-5 years	2
Out of School/holidaycare	3-11 years	27 Out of school providers 50 providers on Voluntary childcare register or Childcare register
Schools with a nurse class	3-5 years	131

The purpose of this assessment is to identify the gaps which will enable the City Council to take reasonable steps to make sufficient childcare available, as far as is reasonably practical.

### **3. Methodology**

In February 2023, external consultant Ann Van Dyke MBE was commissioned to coordinate the sufficiency assessment process. A task and finish group was established to complete this sufficiency assessment and representatives included, Individual leads from Performance Research and Insight, Health Visiting, Sure Start, the Local Offer and Parental Engagement, Manchester's Parent Carer Forum, RHOSEY, Early Years Quality Assurance and Access & Sufficiency. Broad representation ensured that the essential data was agreed and that existing data sets and information gathering could be utilised. This also helped to ensure links to the Council's wider performance management agenda. Those involved in the work straddled responsibilities across various services departments (as is dictated by the multi-agency nature of the Act) and input from all was gratefully received.

#### Data and intelligence collected and analysed for the purpose of this assessment.

Take up of the full early education and childcare entitlements for 2023/24.

A comparison of children with SEND against the overall eligible populations.

Performance Research and Insight data sets including 2023 Education Health and Care Plan data for children aged 0 - 5 years.

Questionnaires and consultation with the early years and childcare sector.

Questionnaires and consultation with families of children with SEND.

Local intelligence from teams and from parents/carers with Children with SEND (including but not limited to complaints).

### **4. Limitations.**

This assessment is the first of its kind undertaken in Manchester, which is pioneering the work at a national level. The process of gathering data and information has informed actions on the Action Plan which will improve the future robustness of the assessment.

As this is the first assessment of its kind it is not impossible to measure improvement and progress. This will be a feature of future assessments which are recommended to be completed annually.

A number of limitations of this assessment have been identified as follows;

- Data is not collected in the same way across the local authority and its partners. The introduction in 2021 of the Liquid Logic EYES system has streamlined some internal data sets, however, not all data is able to be reported on in a consistent way.
- Some key data sets were not available at the time of the assessment. For example, because of changes to the health teams' IT system it was not possible to secure data on emerging needs. Its collation and inclusion will be a priority for future assessments.
- Some data represents a snapshot in time which doesn't reflect the fact that children may be moving in and out of stages, settings and categories of need. This has implications for analysing the data.
- Responses to the parent/carer survey of families with a child with SEND are typically low. In 2024 there were 37 responses compared with 27 in 2023.
- The assessment focused on access to the Government funded entitlement hours by children with SEND in comparison to the wider population. However, this might not be the priority for all parents/carers when considering sufficiency of provision. Parents shared that their priorities included the consistency and experience of staff.

## 5. Findings

**Manchester children aged 0-5 years and with SEND, do not access their early education entitlements or childcare at the same rate as the general population.** This is based on analysis of Education Health and Care Plan 2023 data relating to 237 children aged 0-5 years.

47% (112\* children) of this cohort received their full universal entitlement compared to 88.2% children under 5 years nationally. 70% of children were accessing some form of early education compared to 87% of the general 0-5 population in Manchester. 30% of Under 5s with an EHCP were not accessing any form of early education compared to 13% of the general population.

It is worth noting that this data does not include children aged 4 years in reception class which may have made the gap appear worse than it is. However, in the few local authorities where this assessment has been undertaken, similar levels of access have been measured.

**Children with higher levels of need and an Education, Health and Care Plan are less likely to access funded early education suggesting disparities in access based upon specific need.**

62% (146) of those accessing early education had Speech, Language and Communication needs (and all of these were 3 years old).

- A greater number of children Under 5 years with Physical Disabilities and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties were recorded as having no funded early education.

**Very few children in this cohort were from working families that qualified for early education entitlements or childcare funding.**

Only 11% of children were from working families in receipt of their full funded childcare entitlement. Evidence suggests that it can be more difficult for parents/carers of children with SEND to maintain employment because of their specific caring commitments. This is likely to have a detrimental impact on family income, leading many to experience financial hardship and poverty. It may also lead to feelings of isolation and disempowerment where a parent/carer is no longer able to maintain employment and have a significant affect on the mental well being.

In summary, children with SEND are almost half as likely to access their early years education entitlement than the general 0-4 population and that access is less likely for children with higher levels of SEND needs. Fewer parent/carers of children with SEND are benefitting from working parent childcare funding. Limited access to early education entitlement and childcare is likely to be stifling the ability of these families to access employment.

**Daycare providers reported high levels of access to early education and childcare for children with SEND in their care.** From a survey of daycare providers claiming early years funding for children with SEND (June/July 2024). 69 daycare providers were targeted and 36 responded on behalf of 98 children aged 0-5 years with SEND;

- 86% of children were accessing between 15 and 30 hours. The majority were accessing at least their universal 15 hours, and some were accessing up to 30 hours. However, the data did not reveal whether the children were entitled to 15 hours of early education or 30 hours of childcare and what proportion they were accessing.
- 67% of children completed their gradual admission within 4 weeks which is considered to be a reasonable settling in period and the average for the general 0-4 population.
- 33% of SEND children needed longer than 4 weeks to complete gradual admission with the main reason for this given by settings as the lack of 1-1 support for the child.
- Several settings shared that they had provided full access to provision for individual children in their care since they were 9 months old and continued to offer their full

education entitlement hours as the child got older. Demonstrating that it was possible to meet children's individual needs from the outset. The evidence would suggest that planning ahead for any child and particularly for a child with SEND, is more likely to result in a better start at the setting. This is supported by the findings which show that identifying and meeting children's individual needs sooner, improves accessibility and attendance in the longer term.

- For 53% of children, inclusion funding had been secured by their early education setting. The status of the remaining 47% is not known, although they could be awaiting a decision on a current application, or an application may have been denied.
- Settings were claiming Disability Access Funding (DAF) on behalf of 24% of children. This funding helps settings to better plan to meet individual children's needs. While the process for settings to claim DAF has been simplified and automated, it remains underclaimed. More work needs to be done to support parents/carers to claim Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for their child with SEND, which in turn will help settings to draw down DAF which could be used to provide effective support.
- There was some inconsistency in the data submitted by daycare settings which has led to the development of guidance on how children with SEND are recorded on the City's EYES system. It was found that some children were recorded as having SEND at the point of concerns being identified while others were recorded once a diagnosis was in place. Greater consistency in recording data will improve the accuracy of reporting.
- For 49% of children, PVI's claimed to have identified the child's needs, compared with professionals (36%) and parents, schools or other (14%). Early education settings play a significant role in identifying children's needs in the early years. This is made possible through their specialist knowledge of early years development, access to training, high quality assessment tools and techniques as well as access to professionals. Early identification of needs provides the best chance to assist young children in achieving milestones such as the transition to primary school.

In summary, 52% of daycare providers providing early education and childcare for children with SEND responded to the survey. Many reported a high level of access to early education and childcare. Completion of gradual admission within 4 weeks was lower than what would

be expected for the general population and it was not possible to determine the proportion of children with SEND accessing their full entitlement to early education and childcare.

**High levels of satisfaction were reported by families whose children under 5 years of age were accessing early education entitlements and childcare.** A survey of parents/carers with a child aged Under 5 years and with SEND (June/July 2024) resulted in 37 responses, 10 more than in 2023. The findings revealed that;

- 75% of respondents had one child with SEND with the remainder having between 2 and 5 children with SEND. This is an important reminder that families may be dealing with multiple agencies and have different key contacts for each of their children with SEND. Parent carers may face challenges with routine tasks such as picking up children from different settings and/or meeting another child off a school bus. It is therefore important that agencies recognise each family's individual circumstances.
- 60% said their child was accessing a PVI nursery with 19% accessing either a childminder, specialist provision or school nursery for their child. The remainder declined to answer the question or were not accessing any provision. It is concerning that some children were not accessing any provision however, this may be because the child is under 2 years of age and less likely to be in early education or childcare.
- 78% claimed to have accessed their first choice of childcare and the same percentage waited between 1 and 3 months to start childcare, 32% waited over 3 months, with 4 waiting for 1 year or longer.
- 70% felt that their waiting period had been reasonable with the majority believing a wait of between 1 and 3 months was reasonable.
- 68% were accessing all of the funded early education entitlement (FEEE) hours they wanted, 57% were happy with the number of hours their child was accessing but 43% would like to have accessed more.
- 81% can access all of the FEEE hours their child is entitled to, suggesting that some families opted not to take up all of the FEEE hours their child was entitled to even though they were available to them at their setting.

- 65% of parents/carers scored their happiness with childcare provision at between 8 and 10 out of 10. The scores were mostly positive and comments about individual settings were complimentary. However, there were also low scores and comments that reflected poor experiences for some children and their families. Experiences vary widely but in the main, for those completing the survey, there was a high degree of satisfaction with the provision available to their child.
- The satisfaction rating for children's happiness in early education was high. 81% rated their child's happiness in their setting as between 8 and 10 out of 10. Many positive comments were provided sharing examples of their child's experiences in early education and with early education professionals. However, this was not the case for every child. Some had poorer experiences and parents/carers shared that they had chosen to remove their children from some early education and care settings. A small proportion of those responding to the survey had not been able to access early education and childcare and felt excluded.

In summary, the majority of respondents had one child aged under 5 years with SEND and were accessing some form of funded early education, with the majority accessing their first choice provision which they had secured after waiting for between 1 and 3 months. The majority felt up to 3 months was a reasonable wait. A small number reported less than positive experiences accessing early education for their child under 5 with SEND and some families would like to access more of their funded hours.

**Rodney House Outreach Service for Early Years (RHOSEY) conducted direct consultation with 7 parent/carers with a child on the RHOSEY caseload and not currently in early education (August 24) and found that;**

- 4 out of 7 had decided not to access Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) at that time.
- 2 out of 7 children had previously attended a nursery or childminder for a short period.
- 7 out of 7 knew about their child's entitlement to FEEE and 6 out of 7 had searched for childcare, with 2 reporting that their child was on a waiting list. 4 out of 7 planned to access FEEE in the future.

- Parents/carers were looking for settings with the experience and knowledge to support them and their child. They wanted a setting that would manage both their child's health needs and other special educational needs. Parents/carers also expressed that it was very important that the staff caring for their children were trustworthy and consistent.

### **What does it tell us?**

- Significantly fewer children within the SEND cohort analysed (open EHCPs in 2023) were accessing their full entitlement compared to the general 0-5 population. 47% compared to 88.2%.
- Children under 5 with SEND are accessing a proportion of their FEEE hours but this is significantly less than the general population.
- The gradual admission of children with SEND can take longer than for children without SEND and around a third of children with SEND do not access their full entitlement upon completing gradual admission.
- In almost half of cases, a child with SEND's needs were identified in an early years setting, suggesting that early years provision plays a key role in the early identification of needs and the development of a package of support.
- The majority of children with an EHCP accessing early years provision are benefiting from access to additional sources of funding such as inclusion funding and DAF.
- Most settings are primed to care for children with special educational needs and are instrumental in identifying needs and developing packages of support.
- Families reported positive experiences of accessing childcare and early education for their young child with SEND but this was not the case for all.
- While the numbers of children with identified needs have increased, the success of early identification methods is likely to have played a part.

### **What else do we need to know?**

Following the completion of Manchester's first childcare sufficiency assessment for children aged 0-5 years with SEND, it is possible to list information that would enhance and improve the next sufficiency assessment of this type. This would include;

- Improved data on whether children with SEND are entitled to 15 or 30 hours of childcare when assessing access to funded hours.
- Health data on children aged 0-5's emerging needs at a ward or locality level.
- More detailed information on why some children do not access their FEEE to understand whether this is a long standing or short-term situation.
- Examples of how Disability Access Funding is being used to inform case studies and solutions to share across the sector.
- More detailed analysis of the impact of Dingley's Promise Inclusive Practice Training
- More consistent recording of children with SEND by daycare providers to enable better reporting from the EYES system.

**6. Taking reasonable steps towards securing sufficiency for children with SEND in the early years.**

Local authorities are limited in their approach to securing sufficient provision by the resources they are allocated from central government. The Act requires them to deliver provision directly, only as a last resort, requiring a market management role with providers who are predominantly in the private, voluntary and independence sector.

Market forces can be impacted by a number of issues external to council control hence the requirement to secure places as far as is reasonably practical. However, local authorities must be able to demonstrate reasonable steps have been taken to secure provision.

The learning from this assessment will be used to inform and improve future childcare sufficiency assessments for children with SEND in the early years. The following themes will continue to be a focus for the Childcare Action Plan for 2025.

<b>Observations</b>	<b>Gaps identified</b>	<b>Action</b>
High quality, experienced and well trained staff	Manchester is a leading LA in the implementation of the Dingley's Promise Inclusive	Increase the numbers within the Early Years workforce

members are very important to families	<p>Practice Training and has higher than average rates of workforce registration for the training.</p> <p>Support to the early years sector to improve staff recruitment and retention.</p>	<p>completing training modules.</p> <p>Increase EYs settings and organisations achieving the Mark of Achievement.</p> <p>Engagement in workforce strategies at a City, Regional and National level.</p>
Improved alignment of data sets	<p>The 2021 launch of the EYES system brought LA data sets together but this needs to be improved further.</p> <p>Better alignment and sharing of data across partners.</p>	<p>Establish a childcare sufficiency working group to continue the work of the task and finish group and commit to improving the data sets available.</p>
Address gaps in assessments completed in 2024	<p>New reports and surveys were produced but these could be improved and refined.</p> <p>Address the gaps identified in the section above 'what else do we need to know?'</p>	<p>Surveys more frequently and build into established consultation.</p> <p>Use other methods to capture the information.</p> <p>Action for the childcare sufficiency working group.</p>

## 7. Conclusions

Children under 5 years with SEND are not accessing their full early education entitlements at the same rate as the general population. Children's experiences of accessing their entitlement can vary widely but there are examples of good practice to build upon.

Steps have been taken to equip the workforce with the skills and knowledge to do this, as well as providing access to experts and access to high quality training. The review of the Early Years SEND Pathway will likely lead to further improvements to the range of support available to practitioners working in this field.

Continuing to share information and data across teams, services and partner agencies with the specific aim of increasing access to the full early education entitlement is likely to bring about further improvements.

The Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan 2025 will take account of the findings of this EYs SEND childcare sufficiency assessment and will focus on three core areas;

1. Improving the data to respond to demand for early years childcare for children with SEND.
2. Development of a communication plan to support families to make informed choices about accessing high quality childcare in the City.
3. Stronger engagement with key stakeholders to ensure a deeper understanding of demand and to promote and share widely, positive examples of inclusive childcare.