

East Sussex County Council

Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2025



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Introduction

The Childcare Sufficiency Duty report is a legal requirement. It outlines how East Sussex County Council (the Council) plans to secure enough childcare places as far as is reasonably practicable, for parents and carers who are working, studying, or training for employment. The report covers childcare for children from birth to 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children). The publication of this sufficiency document meets the Council's duty under sections 6 and 7 of the [Childcare Act 2006 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/10/section/6). It is also in line with statutory guidance: [Early education and childcare - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-and-childcare).

The report focuses on two key areas of the childcare market in East Sussex:

- Measuring the demand for, and supply of, childcare within the five districts of East Sussex, identifying gaps in the market.
- Planning how to support the childcare market within East Sussex to address any shortfall.

It is placed within the context of the introduction of new early years funding streams for children aged from 9 months old from September 2024.

To assess the supply and demand for childcare places, the Council compares current known capacity with predicted demand. This takes account of factors such as births, housing growth and patterns of inward and outward migration.

The Childcare Act 2006 gives councils a role in shaping the childcare market. The Council is committed to working with providers from the private, voluntary, and independent sectors (PVI) and the school run sector to create a strong, sustainable, and diverse childcare market that meets the needs of families and supports children's learning through the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

The Council is required to report annually to elected members and publish information for families to show how it is meeting its sufficiency duty. This includes providing specific information about:

- The supply and demand for early education and childcare places.

- Affordability, accessibility and quality of early education and childcare places.
- Details of how any gaps in provision will be addressed.

Whilst councils are required by law to ensure there are sufficient childcare places, attendance by children from birth to age five at any early education or childcare setting is voluntary. It is not compulsory for a child to attend education provision until the term after their fifth birthday.

The Childcare Act 2006 requires the following actions and measures which identify the strategic roles councils play. Councils should support (though not directly provide) the following:

- Childcare places for children aged 9 months+ supporting eligibility, flexibility, and quality of provision.
- Distributing government funding that supports childcare and early education places.
- Securing sufficient childcare so far as is reasonably practicable in a free market.
- Providing information to parents and carers.
- Providing information, support and training to early education and childcare providers.

Childcare places are funded either by government entitlements or by parents. Councils are required to secure fully funded places offering 570 hours a year over no fewer than 38 weeks, and up to 52 weeks for every eligible child in their area.

Eligibility depends on a child's age and whether they meet certain funding criteria:

Figure 1: Eligibility Criteria for Funded Children aged 9 months +

Eligibility	Offer	Criteria
All three- and four-year-olds.	15 hours a week x minimum 38 weeks a year. 570 hours a year.	Universal offer open to all age eligible children resident in East Sussex. No financial criteria to be met.
Some eligible three- and four-year-olds.	Extended Entitlement. 30 hours a week x minimum 38 weeks a year. 1,140 hours a year.	For working family's resident in East Sussex where both parents are working, or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family.
Some eligible two-year-olds.	15 hours a week x minimum 38 weeks a year. 570 hours a year.	For family's resident in East Sussex on either low income or a range of benefits, including Universal Credit.
Some eligible two-year-olds from April 2024.	15 hours a week x minimum 38 weeks a year. 570 hours a year. From September 2025 the number of hours increases to 30 hours a week x minimum 38 weeks a year.	For working family's resident in East Sussex where both parents are working, or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family.
Some eligible under twos from September 2024.	15 hours a week x minimum 38 weeks a year. 570 hours a year. From September 2025 the number of hours increases to 30 hours a week x minimum 38 weeks a year.	For working family's resident in East Sussex where both parents are working, or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family.

30 Hour Extended Entitlement for working parents or carers of children aged 9 months+ - additional criteria:

- Parents or carers must each expect to earn at least £152 per week. This is equal to 16 hours at the National Minimum or Living Wage for persons aged 23 and over.

- If parents or carers are on maternity, paternity or adoption leave they may still be eligible. If they are unable to work due to a disability or having caring responsibilities, they may also be eligible.
- If either parent or carer earns more than £100,000, they will not be able to receive 30 hours free childcare but will still receive the universal 15 hours per week over a minimum 38 weeks a year.
- Foster carers may also apply (subject to approval from the child's social worker) if they meet the above financial criteria.

Funded places for eligible two-year-olds on low income or benefits - additional criteria:

- Looked after children, those that have left care through special guardianship or through an adoption or residence order are also eligible.
- Children in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) can also apply for a funded place for a two-year-old.

For non-European Economic Area (EEA) citizens who cannot claim benefits, some families with an age eligible child may get free childcare if they are receiving support under the Immigration and Asylum Act and have either:

- claimed asylum in the UK and are waiting for a decision (known as 'part 6')
- been refused asylum in the UK (known as 'section 4')

Families may also receive free childcare for a two-year-old they care for if their household income is £16,190 a year or less after tax, and they have:

- leave to remain with 'no recourse to public funds' on family or private life grounds, or
- the right to live in the UK because they are the main carer of a British citizen (known as a 'Zambrano Carer')

Families can check with their local council if they are unsure if they qualify for free childcare.¹

Government funding is intended to deliver 15 or 30 hours a week of funded, high quality, flexible childcare. It is not intended to cover:

- the costs of meals
- other consumables
- additional hours
- or additional activities.

Families can, therefore, expect to pay for any meals offered by the provider alongside the fully funded entitlement, as well as paying for consumables e.g., nappies, or additional activities.

¹ Statutory Guidance for local authorities updated by the Department for Education April 2024

Key findings

Some of the key findings of the East Sussex Sufficiency Duty 2025 are summarised below. More information on each of the key areas is provided in later sections of this document.

East Sussex is growing and changing

The overall population in East Sussex has grown steadily, rising from 501,100 in 2003 to 555,500 in 2023 (Source: ONS Mid-year estimates).

Sufficiency of provision

East Sussex has 588 funded and non-funded childcare providers across the county. Several providers operate more than one type of childcare. Schools may have a breakfast and or after school club as well as a nursery or a pre-school offering a holiday club. Generally, across East Sussex there are sufficient early years places to meet demand, but we are forecasting shortfalls in some areas.

Quality of childcare in East Sussex is high

The quality of early education and childcare in East Sussex is high. The percentage of early years providers in East Sussex judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding at the end of January 2024 was 98.9%. The national average was 96.5% in August 2023.

In the 2023/24 academic year, 69% of children attained a Good Level of Development (GLD) in the EYFS profile assessment at the end of the foundation stage, which is 1.3% above the national average.

The cost of childcare remains just below national average

The average hourly charge by providers for day-care in East Sussex is £6.00 per hour. The national average hourly charge according to the Family and Childcare Trust is £6.35 for children aged three and four².

Cost of childcare places

Data on the cost of childcare is currently gathered annually, in December, by the Family Childcare Trust. Figures 2, 3 and 4 show the current average cost of 25 hours of childcare a week (part-time place) and 50 hours of childcare a week (full-time place), in England and in the Southeast³.

Figure 2: Average cost of 25 hours of childcare for children 0-5

Cost of 25 hours a week childcare	Nursery under two	Two and over	Childminder under two	Two and over
England	£159.61	£153.69	£132.85	£131.52
Southeast	£169.15	£159.39	£139.70	£139.58

Figure 3: Average cost of 50 hours of childcare for children 0-5

Cost of 50 hours a week childcare	Nursery under two	Two and over	Childminder under two	Two and over
England	£305.11	£290.77	£254.12	£253.83
Southeast	£333.33	£307.81	£273.65	£277.73

² [Childcare Survey 2024 | Family and Childcare Trust](#)

³ Family Childcare Trust: Childcare Survey 2024

Figure 4: Average cost of 25 or 50 hours of childcare for children aged three to five accessing funded hours including the free entitlements

	Cost of 25 hours a week childcare, including universal entitlement for three- and four-year-olds (paying for 10 hours)	50 hours a week, including extended entitlement (paying for 20 hours)
England	£63.54	£120.93
Southeast	£62.86	£122.17

Childcare for younger children is often more expensive due to factors such as staff to child ratios. Most parents or carers find that their childcare costs reduce as their child grows. All children are entitled to some form of funded nursery education from the funding period following their third birthday, meaning childcare fees for parents or carers fall.

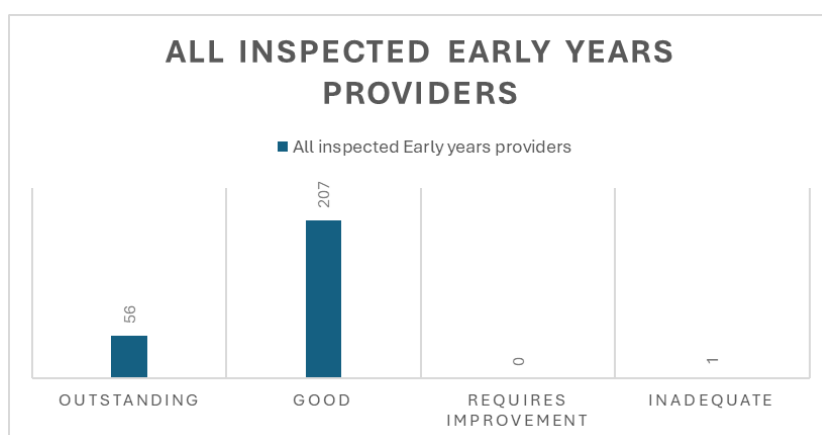
The childcare picture in East Sussex

In the Southeast there has been a higher than national decline in the numbers of childminders since 2015. In March 2024 there were 144 registered childminders in East Sussex offering childcare places, a reduction of 9% on the number in August 2023.

[Childcare providers and inspections as of 31 March 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

In East Sussex, 264 early years providers had been inspected by March 2024. Figure 5 shows how many providers fell under each outcome.

Figure 5 Ofsted outcomes



Childcare sufficiency - areas for development

To ensure the supply of high-quality early years and childcare provision, the Council will take the following actions in three key areas:

Data and sufficiency

- Propose to undertake regular capacity audits through the online provider portal as well as an annual data refresh. This will help to identify any sufficiency issues.
- Track areas of new housing development and community growth to target new early years places. Align the development of new early years places with school place planning priorities where applicable.
- Continue to track all sectors of the market to identify potential reasons for any decline in provider numbers.
- Use the early years forecasting model to analyse sufficiency across all five districts, looking particularly at supply and demand.
- Encourage take-up of funded places, particularly disadvantaged two-year-old funded places, in areas where take-up rates are lower.

Family information

- Use social media and the East Sussex Children and Families web pages to widen access to information about early education and educating children at home.

- Help parents or carers (particularly vulnerable families) to understand the benefits of high-quality childcare and early learning for their children.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

Enhance the quality of education offered by early years providers by:

- Creating a pre-referral support pathway.
- Provide access to an advice line.
- Offer time with qualified teachers to help providers use the Graduated Approach.
- Review and adapt service offers to help providers meet children's needs, including to help SEND children to attend for their full hours.
- Provide training on early communication development alongside the Children's Integrated Therapy Service (CITES).
- Continue to improve the transition to school support package so that everyone is confident in mainstream education placements.
- Keep all service information current and accessible on the Local Offer web page.
- Update and review all training on SEND. Training is provided for free by the Council.

Support for Parents and Carers

Affordability

For childcare to be sustainable, providers need to generate income to ensure they are meeting operating costs. Legislation states that councils cannot intervene in how providers operate their personal business, including any fees they may charge for provision over and above a child's funded place.

At the same time, childcare needs to be affordable to parents and carers, and councils have a legal duty to ensure there is sufficient affordable childcare for families who need it and will identify any gaps in the market.

Help with childcare costs

There are options available to parents and carers to help with childcare costs. Parents and carers must select the option that best suits their personal circumstances. Further information can be found on the [Help paying for childcare: Childcare you can get help paying for \('approved childcare'\) - GOV.UK](#)

In addition, during 2024 eligible working families of children aged 9 months+ were able to access 15 hours of funded childcare per week for 38 weeks per year. From September 2025, eligible working families will be able to access up to 30 hours of funded childcare for children from 9 months old up to school age. Information can be found at [Childcare Choices | 30 Hours Childcare, Tax-Free Childcare and More | Help with Costs | GOV.UK](#).

Population Statistics in East Sussex

Population

According to the Office for National Statistics, the population of East Sussex is around 555,500 in 2023. This is approximately 1% of the population of England.

Around three quarters of the population live in urban areas (Source: 2011 Census). The main centres of population and employment are concentrated in the southern coastal strip of the county in Eastbourne, Hastings and St Leonard's, Bexhill, Newhaven, Seaford, and Lewes.

In the urban areas of Eastbourne and Hastings there are 119 funded providers, in the more rural areas of Lewes, Rother and Wealden there are 207 funded providers. There are 186 unfunded providers across the county including non-funded childminders and holiday provision.

It is estimated that there are 103,606 children and young people aged 0 to 17 in East Sussex (ONS Mid-year estimate 2023). Between 2013 and 2023, the population in East Sussex in the 0-17 age group decreased by 0.6%, from 104,182.

Figure 6: Population Increase (all ages) in the last decade 2013 to 2023⁴

Area	2013	2023	Percentage change 2013-2023
England	53,918,690	57,690,320	7.0%
East Sussex	533,180	555,480	4.2%
Eastbourne	100,660	103,800	3.1%
Hastings	90,990	90,820	-0.2%
Lewes	99,220	101,360	2.2%
Rother	90,490	94,860	4.8%
Wealden	151,830	164,650	8.4%

⁴ ONS 2011 and 2021 Census data

ESCC's Dwelling-led population projections (January 2024) suggest that the whole population of the county will increase by 11.9% between 2022 and 2037. The 0-17 population is projected to increase by 1.6% over the same period.

Figure 7: Population projections (all ages) from 2022 to 2037

Year	Population 2022	Projected population 2037	Projected change 2021-2035	% Change 2021-2035
East Sussex	550,720	616,340	65,620	11.9%

Source: East Sussex County Council 2022-based population projections, January 2024

The table in figure 8a below shows the of numbers of children aged 10-17 and figure 8b the number of disabled children aged 0-17, based on the ONS Census 2021 .

Figure 8a: Number of children aged 0-17 and disabled children aged 10-17

	Total population aged 10-17	Number of children with a disability aged 10 to 17	Percentage of children with a disability aged 10 to 17
East Sussex	48,470	5,670	11.7%
Eastbourne	9,140	1,130	12.3%
Hastings	8,280	1,070	12.9%
Lewes	9,100	1,180	12.9%
Rother	7,550	880	11.7%
Wealden	14,410	1,410	9.8%

Source: ONS 2021 Census

Figure 8b: Number of children aged 0-17 and disabled children aged 0-17

	Total population aged 0-17	Number of children with a disability aged 0-17	Percentage of children with a disability	Percentage of children whose activities are significantly limited
East Sussex	102,160	8,670	8.5%	3.3%
Eastbourne	19,380	1,770	9.1%	3.8%
Hastings	18,620	1,660	9.1%	3.6%
Lewes	18,950	1,760	9.3%	3.3%
Rother	15,510	1,360	8.8%	3.2%
Wealden	30,060	2,120	7.1%	2.7%

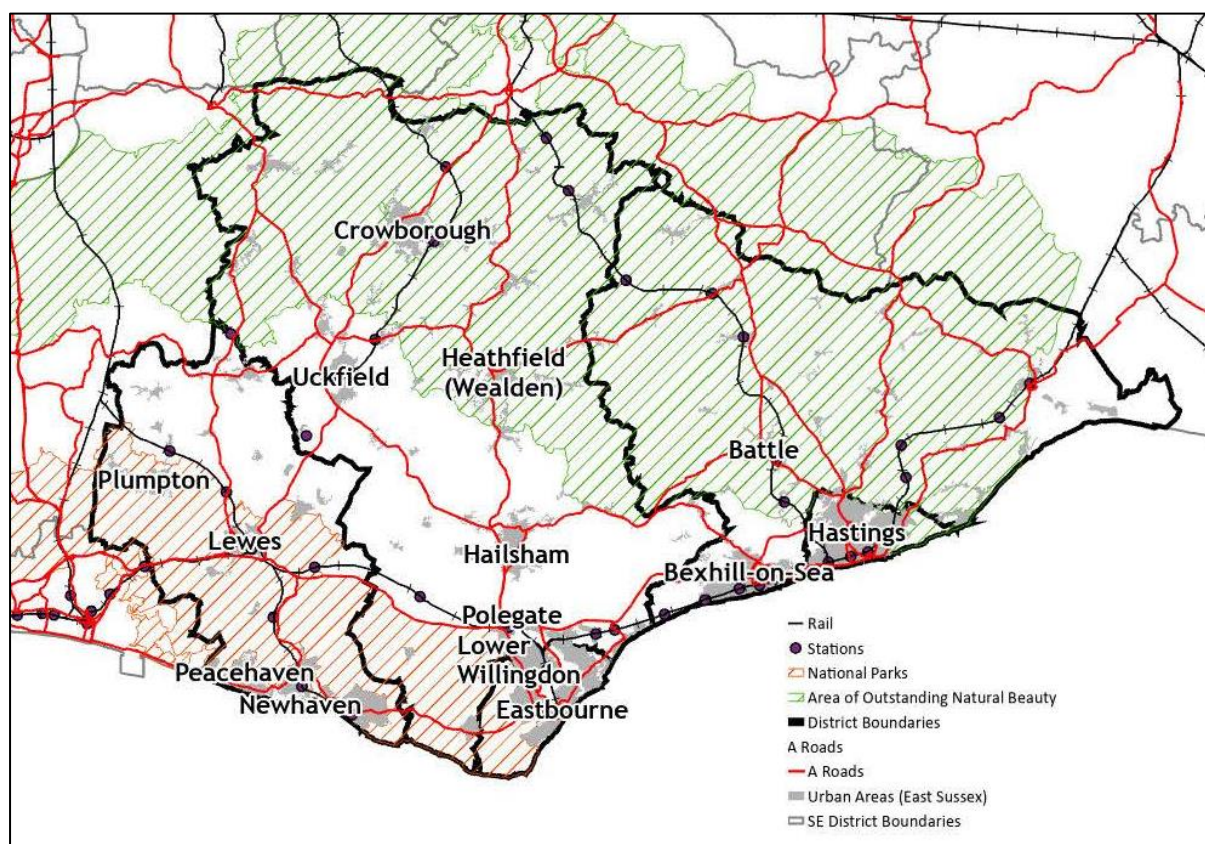
Source: ONS 2021 Census

In the 2021 Census, 8.5% of all children aged 0-17 were classified as disabled under the Equality Act, and 3.3% had a disability which meant that their day to day activities were significantly limited.

Districts and Boroughs

East Sussex comprises five borough and district council areas: Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Rother, and Wealden. Parts of the county are within the South Downs National Park.

Figure 9: Map of the five borough and district council areas, with main transport connections and settlements in East Sussex



Ethnicity

Around 512,440 residents (93.9%) of East Sussex identified their ethnic group as white in the 2021 Census, including both white-British or Northern Irish (NI) and other white ethnic groups. The second most common ethnic group was "Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups", comprising 2.3% of the population (12,310 people).

However, there was a higher proportion of people in different ethnic groups among children and young people. 85.7% of people aged 0-17 in the county were in the white-British (or NI) ethnic group, 5.6% were from mixed or multiple ethnic groups, 4.1% were white-not British (or NI), and 2.5% were Asian or Asian British.

Figure 10(a): Population by ethnic group in 2021

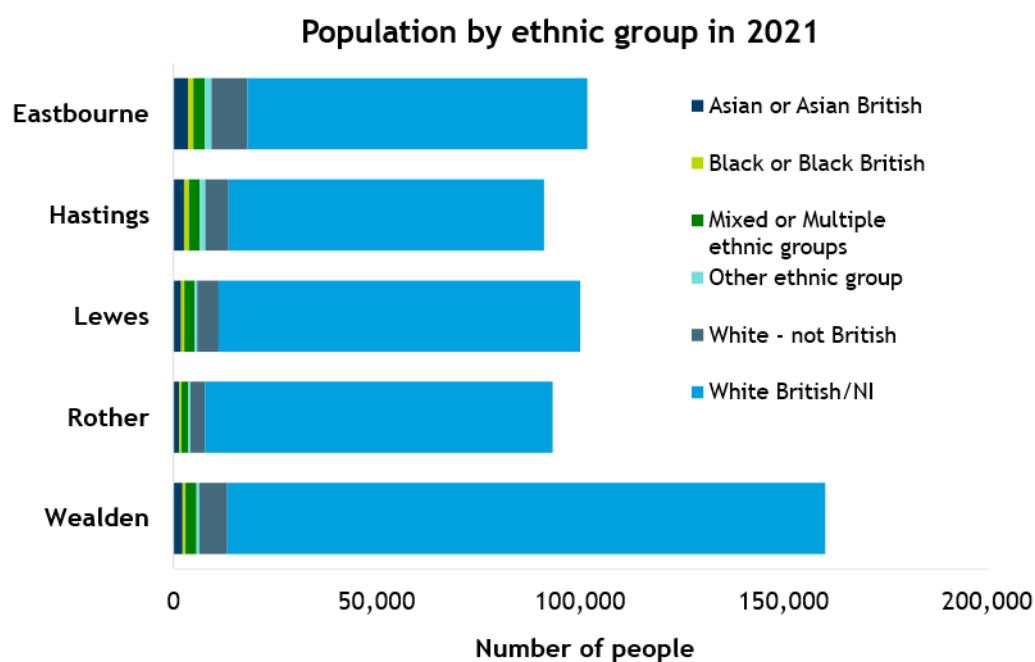
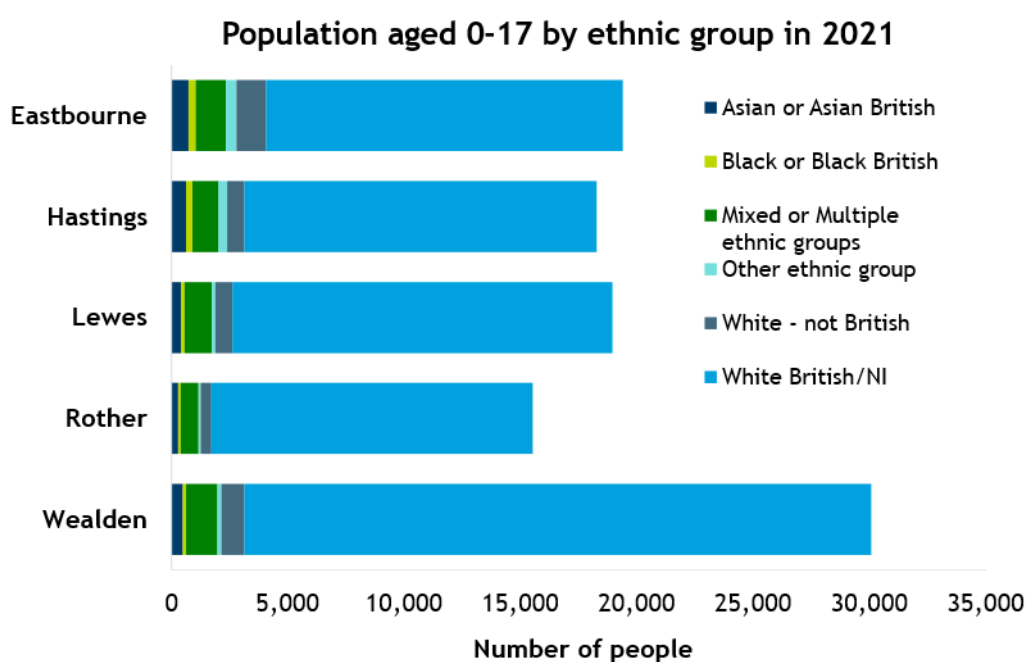


Fig. 10(b) Population aged 0-17 by ethnic group in 2021



Languages

There are over 100 languages spoken in East Sussex. For around 8% of school children (5-16) in the county English is not their first language. Polish is the most spoken language other than English across schools in East Sussex.

Figure 11: Number of Languages Spoken in Schools in East Sussex⁵

Language	Percentage of Pupils
English	91.91%
Polish	0.81%
Malayalam	0.54%
Arabic	0.39%
Romanian	0.39%
Ukrainian	0.36%
Portuguese	0.30%
Turkish	0.30%
Russian	0.28%
Other than English*	0.25%
Bengali	0.23%
Kurdish	0.23%
Believed to be English*	0.21%
Chinese	0.19%
Albanian or Shqip	0.18%
Tamil	0.17%
Spanish	0.17%
Information not obtained	0.16%
Shona	0.14%
Hungarian	0.13%
French	0.12%

⁵ Data from May 2024 School Census

Language	Percentage of Pupils
Italian	0.12%
Tagalog or Filipino	0.11%
Other Language	0.11%
Czech	0.10%
Sinhala	0.10%
Lithuanian	0.10%
Bulgarian	0.10%
Urdu	0.10%
Other	1.71%
Total Number of Children	100%

Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 (IMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas (or neighbourhoods) in England.

The map below in Figure 11 shows the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), which measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived families.

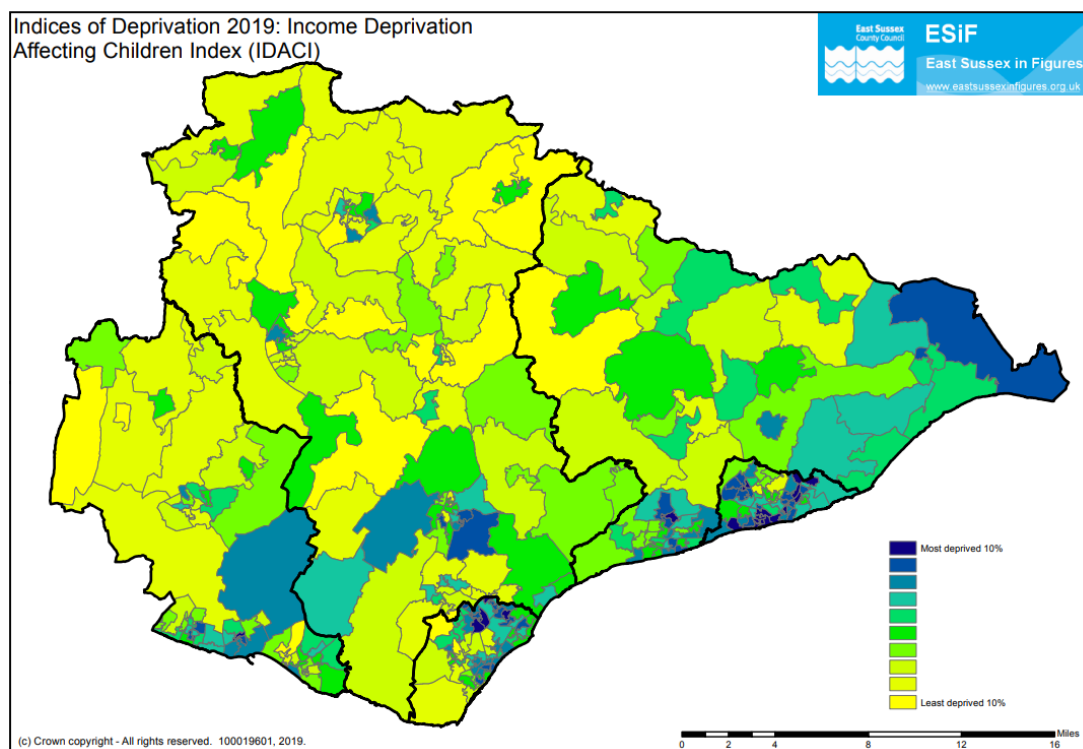
IDACI is a data subset of the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 (IMD). This data measures the proportion of the population in an area experiencing deprivation relating to low income.

The small areas used are known as Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), and there are 32,844 in England. The measures rank every LSOA in England from 1 (the most deprived area) to 32,844 (the least deprived area).

The 10% of LSOAs with the lowest rank in the country are in the most deprived decile (coloured dark blue on the map below).

The 10% highest rank are in the least deprived decile (yellow).

Figure 12: National deprivation rank in neighbourhoods LSOAs in East Sussex



In East Sussex there are 329 LSOAs, of which 22 are in the most deprived 10% nationally:

- 16 of these are in Hastings
- four are in Eastbourne
- two are in Rother.

21 LSOAs are in the least deprived 10%, of which:

- 13 are in Wealden
- six are in Lewes
- two are in Eastbourne.

In 2022, 20,908 (18.6%) children and young people aged 0-19 lived in families with relative low-income (less than 60% of median income). A quarter of children in Hastings live in low-income families.

Figure 13: Children living in relative low-income families 2022/2023

	Number			Percentage		
	All children	Aged 0-15	Aged 16-19	All children	Aged 0-15	Aged 16-19
Eastbourne	3,859	3,082	773	17.5%	18.0%	15.9%
Hastings	4,690	3,753	939	23.5%	23.4%	24.2%
Lewes	2,696	2,111	583	12.9%	12.7%	13.7%
Rother	3,078	2,437	635	17.6%	17.6%	17.2%
Wealden	4,298	3,394	904	12.4%	12.4%	13.6%
East Sussex	18,621	14,776	3,845	16.3%	16.3%	16.5%
England	2,599,372	2,091,956	507,416	19.5%	19.6%	18.8%

Source: DWP StatXplore website

In February 2024, there were 73,450 working age people in the county who were receiving one or more Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefits (23.1% of all working age people aged 16-64).

Of these, 44,969 (14.2% of working age) were receiving a benefit because they were not in work (many will receive benefits because they have a disability or are too sick to work, others because they have caring responsibilities).

28,490 benefit claimants were not on an out-of-work benefit. Claimant rates were much higher in Hastings (32% on at least one DWP benefit) and Eastbourne (28%), with nearly 21% of working age people in Hastings on at least one out-of-work benefit.

In September 2024, there were 53,370 people in East Sussex (17% of all working age people) claiming Universal Credit, of whom 19,720 (37%) were in employment.

In May 2024, there were 43,450 households receiving Universal Credit, of whom 20,880 had at least one child dependent, and 14,500 were single parent families.

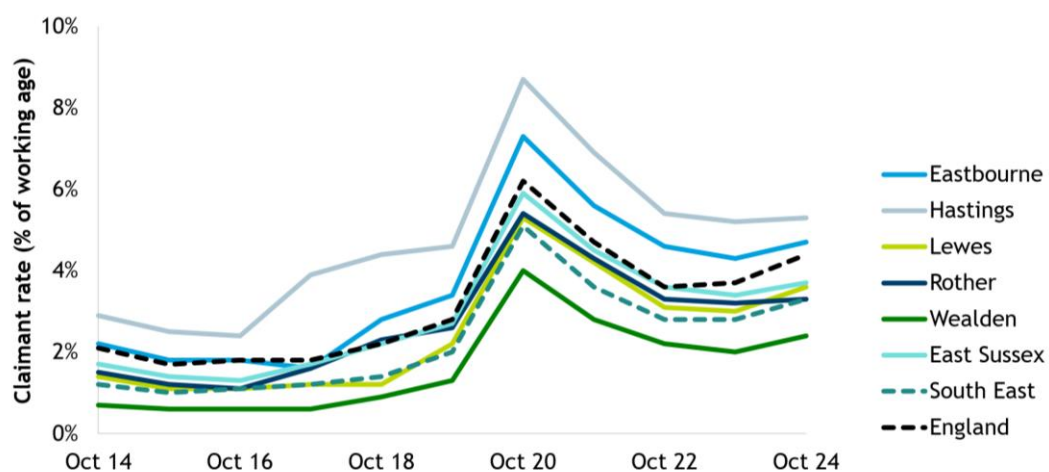
Unemployment

High unemployment will impact on the number of families accessing the Extended 30 Hours entitlement as this offer is only open to families in work.

According to the 2021 Census, although East Sussex had a lower unemployment rate (4% of people aged 16-64) than in England as a whole (4.4%) it was slightly higher than in the Southeast region (3.9%).

Figure 14 below shows claimant rates for the ten years from 2014 to 2024. Unemployed claimant rates in East Sussex reflect the downward England and regional trend since the Corona virus pandemic, but rates have been rising locally and nationally since 2023.

Figure 14: Claimant rate October 2014 - October 2024, districts



Source: ONS Nomis Claimant Count Data

Projected housing growth

Local Plans produced by local planning authorities, including the South Downs National Park Authority, show the level and distribution of planned housing growth across the county, see Fig15.

Figure 15: Number of new dwellings to be built by area⁶

Adopted Local Plans (adoption date) in District and Boroughs	Number of dwellings still to be built over plan period
Lewes and the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lewes DC- remaining Local Plan period 2024/25 to 2029/2030• The SDNPA existing Local Plan period 2024/25 to 2032/33	3,600
Hastings: Hastings Borough Council has published a draft new Local Plan period 2024/25 to 2039/40	2,500
Eastbourne: Remaining Local Plan period to 2026/2027	900
Rother: Remaining Local Plan Period 2027/2028	2,500
Wealden: Wealden District Council has published a draft new Local Plan (period 2024/25 to 2039/40)	15,500

⁶ East Sussex School Organisation Plan- 2024 to 2028

In some areas of the county new housing may attract the need for childcare provision which may exceed current levels of supply and require new or expanded provision to meet demand for places.

Sufficiency of childcare places

East Sussex has 588 childcare providers across the county. Several providers operate more than one type of childcare. Schools may have a breakfast and, or after school club as well as a nursery or a pre-school offering a holiday club.

Figure 16: Number of providers (funded or non-funded) by type in East Sussex⁷

Childcare Provider Type	September 2024
Childminder and Childcare on Domestic Premises	152
Nurseries in maintained schools and academies	50
Independent School Nursery	10
PVI Settings	148
Crèche	3
Nanny	29
Out of School Clubs	160
Stand-alone Holiday Play Scheme	36
Total	588

Funded early education places

Not all childcare providers offer funded early education places. The table below shows the number of childcare providers by borough or district offering funded early education places in the PVI sector, in local council-maintained schools and in non-maintained schools, including academies.

⁷ East Sussex Synergy FIS Portal- September 2024

Figure 17(a): Number of Nursery Providers & Childminders Providing Funded Places by Sector in Each District⁸

District	Nursery Private	Nursery Voluntary	Childminder
Eastbourne	23	3	29
Hastings	24	6	11
Lewes	20	7	31
Rother	15	12	8
Wealden	29	18	39
Totals	111	46	118

Figure 17(b): Number of Schools Providing Funded Places by Sector in Each District⁹

District	Non-Maintained (including Academies)	Maintained	Independent
Eastbourne	6	2	2
Hastings	8	1	2
Lewes	2	8	0
Rother	5	3	1
Wealden	4	12	4
Totals	25	26	9

The number and distribution of funded childcare places offered by childcare providers varies between districts. Most places are located within urban areas. For families living in rural areas the choice of type of provision is more limited.

⁸ East Sussex Synergy FIS Portal- October 2024

⁹ East Sussex Synergy FIS Portal- October 2024

Figure 18(a): Number of full time equivalent (FTE) places available by borough or district¹⁰

Districts	(FTE Places) 2023 to 2024
East Sussex	10,073
Eastbourne	2,174
Hastings	1,668
Lewes	1,864
Rother	1,671
Wealden	2,995

Figure 18(b): Demand for full time equivalent (FTE) places by borough or district¹¹

Districts	Demand for FTE Places 2022 to 2023 Onwards
East Sussex	10,343
Eastbourne	2,157
Hastings	1,739
Lewes	1,755
Rother	1,571
Wealden	3,120

¹⁰ Early years forecasting Model - July 2023

¹¹ Expanded Entitlement Modelling -East Sussex Estimates October 2023

Take up of funding streams¹²

Take up of the 15-hour universal entitlement for three- and four-year-olds is strong across all areas of the county with an increase of 2.4% since 2022, from 93% to 95.4%. This is above the national average of 93.7%.

Figure 19 shows the number of three- and four-year-olds accessing their universal 15 hour offer by borough or district.

Figure 19: Number of three- and four-year-olds accessing a funded place in April 2024¹³

District	Number of children accessing a Universal 15 hour offer place in April 2024
East Sussex	7,636
Eastbourne	1,641
Hastings	1,502
Lewes	1,365
Rother	1,013
Wealden	2,115

In East Sussex, the number of children taking up the extended 30-hour entitlement for the summer claim period in 2024 was 46.4% of the total number of three- and four-year-olds accessing a funded early education place. This equates to a 2% increase on the same period in 2023.

¹² DfE Local Authority Interactive Tool - October 2023

¹³ East Sussex Headcount data - April 2024

Nationally, in January 2024, 361,800 children registered for the extended 30-hour entitlement. This is 30% of the total number of children (1.2 million) registered for the universal 15-hour entitlement, a 0.3% decrease from 2023.

Analysis of the supply of and demand for places for eligible funded two-year-olds shows that take-up is lower than for the universal three- and four-year-old entitlement. Only 40% of the two-year-old population meet the DfE eligibility criteria to access a funded place.

In East Sussex 2,043 children accessed a funded two-year-old place in April 2024. This equates to 21% of the total estimated 2-year-old population. The economic and social vulnerability of these families can impact on take-up rates. One key factor is parental preference for wanting to keep very young children at home; this is particularly relevant for two-year-olds.

Local childcare offers which do not meet parental preferences and the use of informal childcare instead of the more formal options such as a nursery, all contribute to the impact on the pattern of take-up. Figure 20 shows the number of eligible two-year-olds accessing a funded early education place by district.

Figure 20: Number of eligible funded two-year-olds accessing a funded place in April 2024¹⁴

District	Number of funded two-year-olds (disadvantaged) accessing the 15-hour offer - April 2024
East Sussex	956
Eastbourne	246
Hastings	251
Lewes	142
Rother	128
Wealden	189

¹⁴ East Sussex Headcount data - April 2024

Consultation with parents and carers

Consultation with parents and carers is an important part of establishing the demand for childcare. The most recent Childcare Sufficiency Duty Parental Survey was undertaken in September 2024. It ran from 9 September to 7 October 2024 and was available on the East Sussex County Council [Consultation Hub](#). The survey was advertised to parents, carers and early years providers in East Sussex via social media and via direct email communication.

By the close of the consultation period, 900 responses had been received. The responses can be broken down as follows:

- 89% of respondents were female
- 84% of respondents were a couple parent or carer household
- 51% of those that responded had children four years old or younger
- 83% of those that responded had school age children (Reception to age 14, or 18 if disabled)
- 24% of respondents had children with a special educational need and or disability
- 56% of those that responded worked more than 30 hours a week and 32% worked part-time (29 hours a week or less)
 - 2% of respondents indicated they were unemployed and looking for work and 3% indicated they were not looking for work
 - 1% of respondents were in education or training and 2% indicated being long term sick and or disabled
 - 4% indicated other

Respondents told us:

- 6% of respondents wanted childcare all year round
- 73% of respondents wanted childcare on Monday to Fridays only
- 5% of respondents wanted childcare on Saturdays and 4% wanted childcare on Sundays
- 21% of respondent's wanted between 20-30 hours of childcare a week

- 65% of respondents were willing to use more than one provider
- 65% of respondents needed childcare through the school holidays
- 47% of respondents with school aged children used a breakfast club and 67% used after school provision
- 39% of respondents looking for early years provision found it difficult to afford the childcare they wanted. 24% of families using before and after school care found affordability an issue. When accessing school holiday provision, 34% of parent or carers found affordability difficult
- 36% of respondents used the government's Tax-Free Childcare benefit
- 85% of respondents were aware that funding was available to help with childcare costs
- 37% of respondents were happy with the funded sessions offered
- 41% of respondents were happy with where they could access funded hours
- 28% stated they were happy with the choice of childcare available
- 71% of respondents said childcare provision was within the right location
- 42% of respondents were happy with the quality of childcare provision on offer
- 41% of respondents found it difficult to access information on childcare provision in their area
- In the last 12 months, 22% of respondents to the survey stated they had been unable to access childcare when needed

The information provided by respondents will be used to inform where there are gaps in provision within the county. This information will be shared with current providers and new providers moving into East Sussex to help meet the needs of families.

The Council's Customer Relations Team (which incorporates the Family Information Service) takes enquiries by email, social media and by phone between 10am and 3pm during weekdays. This service helps parents (particularly vulnerable families) to understand and access the benefits of high-quality childcare and early learning for their children.

For the period 1 September 2023 to 31 July 2024, the Customer Relations Team responded to 1,214 enquiries, a 0.41% increase over the previous year. The enquiry data shows that childcare and early years funding enquiries, where identified, saw an increase in requests for free school meals vouchers.

The helpline now receives the more complex enquiries regarding eligibility to additional available funding streams from professionals working with vulnerable families.

The Customer Relations team uses social media to promote the Early Years Education Entitlement, 30 hours funded childcare and tax-free childcare. For the period 1 September 2023 to 31 July 2024, Facebook has increased post engagement rate from 1.45% to 1.59% and followers have increased from 4,141 to 4,271 in this period.

In the period from 1 September 2023 to 31 July 2024, the number of ‘entrances’ where visitors entered our website through our ‘How to get funded childcare’ page about funded childcare (formerly ‘Help with childcare costs’) was 4,657. The bounce rate, where a user enters the site and leaves instantly without spending any time in the site, was 55%.

The page has information about funded early education, tax credits and childcare vouchers for parents and professionals working with families, such as social workers and health visitors.

¹ East Sussex customer management system - Fresh Desk and Google Analytics

Consultation with providers

Consultation with providers is an important part of establishing the demand for childcare. The most recent Childcare Sufficiency Duty Provider Survey was undertaken in September 2024. It ran from 9 September to 7 October 2024 and was available on the East Sussex County Council [Consultation Hub](#). The survey was advertised to early years providers in East Sussex via social media and via direct email communication.

By the close of the consultation period, 104 responses had been received. The responses can be broken down as follows:

- 89% are registered on the Ofsted early years register
- 53% are registered on the Ofsted childcare register
- 15% are registered on the Ofsted voluntary register
- 4% are not registered.
- 62% of respondents care for children 0-23 months old
- 81% of respondents care for children 2 years old
- 91% of respondents care for children 3-4 years old
- 46% of respondents care for children 5-8 years old
- 31% of respondents care for children over 8 years old
- 54% of providers offer full year care
- 36% of providers offer term time only care
- 49% of providers operate for more than 40 hours per week with the remaining percentages working less than this but generally more than 15 hours per week
- 57% of providers offer all funding options to parents
- 86% of providers stated that are not thinking of expanding in readiness for the expansion of the 30 hours in 2025
- 25% of providers stated they had staff vacancies
- 43% of providers had children with SEND attending

Staffing was listed as the biggest barrier to expansion. The council will continue to promote the governments 'Do Something Big' campaign. We are also exploring the options of two specific local campaigns aimed at childminders and the early years sector. These are being built in partnership with DWP, local colleges and teams from across the council.

The council will continue to support the expansion of the Government's school-based nursery programme as well as working with the PVI sector to try address the shortfall of places.

The Council continues to develop its support to providers to ensure providers are well supported and that the needs of children and their families are met.

Demand for childcare

Data taken from the Council's early years forecasting model, updated in October 2024, indicates that across the county there are some areas that have insufficient capacity due to the introduction of funding streams to support working families. Countywide, GP data is showing that the number of children aged under five is likely to fall in the short term. Pressures on the early years sector may start to increase in the next few years as birth rates start to rise. The new funding streams for working families have increased demand for places.

Figure 21: Shows the towns in East Sussex where there is expected to be a shortfall of early years childcare places in 2025/2026 onwards:

Town	Capacity	Solution to sufficiency gaps
Eastbourne West	Comprising Meads, Old Town and Upperton Wards. Insufficient capacity by 2026/27	Working with schools to identify eligibility to apply for DfE's School Based Nursery programme
Eastbourne Central South	Comprising Devonshire and St Anthony's Wards. Insufficient capacity from 2025/26 onwards	Working with schools to identify eligibility to apply for DfE's School Based Nursery programme
Hastings South-Western	Comprising West St Leonards, Central St Leonards, Maze Hill, Gensing, and Braybrooke Wards. Insufficient capacity from 2025/26 onwards.	Look at capacity of existing provision and support opening new provision. Working with schools to identify eligibility to apply for DfE's School Based Nursery programme
Hastings South-Eastern	Comprising Castle, Old Hastings, Tressell, Baird and	Working with schools to identify eligibility to apply

Town	Capacity	Solution to sufficiency gaps
	St Helens Wards. Insufficient capacity from 2025/26 onwards	for DfE's School Based Nursery programme
Peacehaven	Insufficient capacity in 2025/26	Look at capacity of existing provision. Support opening of new provision if required
Bexhill	Insufficient capacity from 2025/26 onwards	Working with schools to identify eligibility to apply for DfE's School Based Nursery programme.
Battle	Insufficient capacity by 2026/27	Look at capacity of existing provision. Support opening of new provision if required
Crowborough	Insufficient capacity from 2026/26	Working with schools to identify eligibility to apply for DfE's School Based Nursery programme
Hailsham	Insufficient capacity from 2025/26	Working with schools to identify eligibility to apply for DfE's School Based Nursery programme
Heathfield	Insufficient capacity from 2025/26 (possible shortfalls may not emerge due to underestimating current capacity)	Look at capacity of existing provision. Support opening of new provision if required
Uckfield	Insufficient capacity to meet current demand. Demand increasing 2025/26 and 2026/27	Look at capacity of existing provision. Support opening of new provision if required

Town	Capacity	Solution to sufficiency gaps
Hankham and Stone Cross	Insufficient capacity from 2025/26 (possible shortfalls may not emerge due to underestimating current capacity)	Look at capacity of existing provision. Support opening of new provision if required
Newick	Potential insufficient capacity from 2025/26	Working with school to identify eligibility to apply for DfE's School Based Nursery programme
Wivelsfield	Potential insufficient capacity from 2025/26	Additional EY provision in West Sussex. Recruitment drive for registering new Childminders
East Hoathly	Potential insufficient capacity from 2025/26	Recruitment drive for registering new Childminders in the area
Five Ashes	Potential insufficient capacity from 2026/22	Recruitment drive for registering new Childminders in the area

Figure 22: Shows rural areas in East Sussex with currently no early years provision: ¹⁵

Area	Demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Firle Burwash 	These areas currently do not have enough demand to enable sustainable

¹⁵ Local early years area boundaries are based on primary school place planning areas which are largely determined by the school's admissions areas for the local primary school

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winchelsea • Playden • Buxted • Danehill • Fletching • Park Mead Primary School, Upper Dicker Area • St Michaels Primary School, Withyham area 	<p>early years provision to be in place.</p> <p>Future demand will be monitored.</p>
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Quality of provision and workforce development in East Sussex

Registered early years providers and childminders in East Sussex are offered a package of support by a team of Early Years Officers. The support includes a management and safeguarding audit and observations of practice. This is to ensure providers are confident in delivering the Statutory Framework for the EYFS. Consequently, all new early years providers have achieved good or outstanding at their first Ofsted inspection. All early years providers are invited to take part in this support on a rolling basis. This is dependent on their last Ofsted inspection. All providers are contacted at least once a year. This is either by phone or a one-off visit to discuss current provision.

The Council has a statutory duty in relation to the provision of childcare training. The training programme is delivered by the Council. It aims to improve outcomes for children through the development of a skilled workforce. The training is available to practitioners working in any registered provision.

Fully funded bespoke training can be provided to whole teams in settings. This could be as a part of a package of support or as a traded service. Feedback from providers demonstrates that training is required and positively impacts on outcomes. Providers who have received a 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' Ofsted grade receive priority access to training.

Recruitment of qualified and experienced practitioners remains a challenge for providers across the county. This reflects a national issue. The Council provides a recruitment website for providers to support the appointment and development of their workforce. Providers can use the Council website to advertise vacancies at a cost. They are also able to use the government website for free as part of the [Do something big campaign](#).

To help cover the costs of childminder set up, the previous government announced set up grants in March 2023 running until March 2025. The scheme operates in England only. It is only open to new childminders. The current offer is:

- £600 for those registering with Ofsted
- £1200 for those registering with a childminder agency

The Council established Early Years Hubs for Excellence over ten years ago. The Early Years Hubs enable all EYFS practitioners in East Sussex to work together to deliver sustained improvement. The hubs are led by reception teachers and pre-school leads. Networking and training opportunities to meet the needs of their locality are identified. There are 14 Early Years Hubs linked to school Education Improvement Partnerships.

The Council has continued to focus on the development and improvement of baby room provision. In preparation for the expansion of funded places for children aged two and under from April 2024 the Council has visited all baby rooms. The Integrated Progress Review is now embedded amongst our health visitors and early years practitioners. This allows for swift intervention and support to children identified through the review process.

‘50 Things to do before you’re 5’, continues to be promoted with families and settings in East Sussex. The activities are all low or no cost. Settings have reported that children are keen to share activities they have experienced. Recent evidence demonstrates that this has directly improved their communication and language skills. Nearly 7,500 families have signed up to the scheme since its launch in 2019. There is a Facebook page for the project to share ideas with schools, settings, and families. In 2024 the next phase for 5-11-year-olds has been launched to promote activities for primary aged children.

A project to revive the use of poetry and rhyme to support oracy was launched in early 2022. This has been bought from Make Believe Arts and is called 'Poetry Baskets'. Settings have access to poems and rhymes through a website. Settings have been tasked with using one per month from a pre-selected list which has been linked to an activity from '50 Things to do before you're 5'. Anecdotal evidence shows that children have picked up the poems quickly and whole families have become involved. A few settings have reported that children with English as an additional language have participated with more confidence.

In February 2023, cohort one practitioners began the Early Years Professional Development Programme. This is being funded by the DfE as part of the Early Years Recovery Programme. The programme supports practitioners with children who:

- have an Education Health and Care Plan
- are in receipt of Early Years Pupil Premium
- access the disadvantaged two-year-old offer

The programme aims to improve outcomes in the following:

- school readiness
- early language
- early mathematics
- personal, social and emotional development

During the project, there will be four cohorts of delegates. It is expected that approximately 60 delegates will complete the course.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

The Council must:

- Promote equal opportunities for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- Ensure early education providers meet these needs.

The Council supports providers to be inclusive environments for children. They make sure that providers meet their statutory requirements. The Council is supporting increasing numbers of children with SEND.

All providers must ensure they are compliant with:

- [Early Years Foundation Stage](#) (EYFS)
- [the Equality Act 2010](#)
- [SEND Code of Practice \(2015\)](#)

The Council supports them to do this with training and guidance.

The Council expects most children with SEND to be supported within high-quality settings. When they have difficulties doing this, they can refer cases to these services for help:

- SEND Early Years Service
- The Children's Integrated Therapy Service (CITES)
- The Child Development Clinic

Information on childcare and SEND resources is available here: [East Sussex Local Offer](#).

The Council provides:

- Training and resources to guide providers on universal and targeted strategies.
- An Inclusion Advice Line.
- Home support for children who are not yet in an education setting.
- Help with transitions into education.

Most children with SEND are supported within mainstream settings. Some can be supported by one of three specialised nurseries.

The council will also organise:

- Training and equipment for children with medical needs if needed.

- Training for early years providers on SEND.
- Access to financial, housing and transport when needed.
- Funding for early years providers to help SEND children.

In 2023-2024, 244 children were funded. This was a 28% decrease from the prior year.

Looked After Children

Looked after children are less likely than their peers to access early education.

In East Sussex 81% of looked after children eligible to access a funded place with childcare providers did so during the 2024 summer funding period.

The Council tracks looked after children to identify access to early years provision. It is acknowledged that childcare provision may not be suitable for all looked after young children.

A number of foster carers are also entitled to claim the extended 30-hour entitlement if they have paid employment outside their fostering commitments. In East Sussex, less than five children were funded under these criteria within the summer 2024 funding period.

The Council also tracks 'hidden children' (pre-school aged children who could be at a setting but are not attending). Over the last year, the Council has looked at ways to remove the barriers to children accessing an Early Years provision. These have included:

- increasing awareness and accessibility of funding
- providing additional support for families with special needs children
- providing alternative flexible and tailored support for families
- advocating for policy changes

Childcare for children over five

Out of school childcare includes breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday play schemes. This form of childcare can operate either on or off a school site and can be run by the school or by the PVI sector.

Many schools provide extra-curricular after school activities such as sports clubs, gardening clubs and film clubs. Although these may not be classed as childcare, they still provide a safe learning environment for children whilst parents or carers are at work or studying. These types of clubs may not operate throughout the school year and may vary from term to term and are often only an hour in duration.

Dependent upon specific criteria, not all wraparound provision is Ofsted registered and there is no legal need to inform councils of operation. A provider who only offers two hours a day or provides two activities or less is not required to register with Ofsted. A setting may choose to join the voluntary part of the childcare register to allow parents to claim childcare vouchers. Providers do not have to meet specified child to adult ratios if they only care for children over the age of eight.

The table below summarises the main source of wraparound provision at schools as of August 2024. Some schools may also be served by PVIs off-site, including childminders, who take pupils from multiple schools.

Figure 23: main source of wraparound provision August 2024

Provision type	Number of schools with BSC provision	% of schools	Number of schools with ASC provision	% of schools
School-run	109	69%	96	60%
PVI on site	18	11%	21	13%
PVI off site	3	2%	4	3%
None	29	18%	38	24%
Total	159	100%	159	100%

Figure 24: Number of holiday clubs and play schemes across East Sussex¹⁶

	Number of holiday clubs or play schemes
Total in PVI Sector	45
Total in Maintained Sector	1

Currently, only one school is registered with the Family Information Service to run a holiday club or play scheme in the maintained sector in East Sussex.

In the Spring budget of 2023, the government announced £289m for a national wraparound programme to achieve the ambition of supporting all families of primary aged children who need it to access wraparound childcare from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. The Council was allocated a revenue grant of £1.67m and a capital grant of £164k to create new or expand existing provision.

A survey was sent to all East Sussex primary schools and known existing wraparound providers in March 2024 to obtain current supply information. From the responses received, and follow-up calls to schools, there were:

¹⁶ Extract from Synergy FIS Provider Portal - September 2023

- 3,473 Breakfast Club places available
- 3,360 After School Club places available
- 1,278 ‘full’ wraparound places available. A ‘full’ place meets the definition of 8 a.m. to 6 p.m

The Council mapped the supply and demand for provision and is in the process of distributing the grant to schools and private, voluntary and independent providers. The Council plans to expand wraparound provision from September 2024 to March 2026 by approximately 1,800 places.

The demand for childcare lowers for young people of secondary school age (11 years and over) as many parents and carers feel their children are independent enough not to need childcare outside of school hours. This age group of children are more likely to access activities run by leisure centres or other organisations or providers.

Figure 25 shows the current average cost of out of school care in East Sussex.

Figure 25: Current average cost of out of school care in East Sussex¹⁷

	Breakfast club session (1 hour) (average cost)	After school club session (average cost) 2 hours and 45 minutes	Holiday play scheme session. Based on 6-hour day (average cost)
Maintained Sector	£3.55	£11.00	£26.64
PVI Sector	£4.15	£13.21	£39.60 per day £198 per week

The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme The HAF programme is a DfE-funded initiative and has been running in East Sussex since April 2021. The programme has helped to develop a range of clubs offering enriching activities and

¹⁷ Synergy Report: FIS Out of School Club Report (October 2024)

healthy food. It funds sessions during the Easter, summer, and Christmas school holidays for school-aged children eligible for free school meals (FSM). The programme has confirmed funding until the March 2026.

The Council has worked with more than 130 local organisations to put in place this programme. It has now funded places at clubs for 11 holiday periods. The programme identified six key target areas with the highest levels of FSM. These were: Hastings, Eastbourne, Bexhill, Hailsham, Newhaven and Peacehaven. However, it secured a geographical spread of provision in all parts of East Sussex.

The council has awarded HAF grants to a range of local organisations. These have included established holiday clubs, enabling them to offer funded places. It has also supported new providers to start offering holiday provision.

Awareness of the programme has been growing, with more schools hosting and promoting HAF provision. The last delivery period (summer 2024) saw the highest level of demand and strongest attendance so far. We are continuing to manage this increased demand and support eligible young people with additional needs to enjoy the clubs.

Families can view the local HAF offer and book places using the [online booking platform](#).

Many local activity providers also use this platform for after school and non-HAF funded holiday provision. The site acts as a resource for local families on provision available throughout the year.

Link to the location of HAF providers in East Sussex for the 2024-2025 financial year:

[2024 HAF Summer Programme - East Sussex County Council | Tableau Public](#)

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