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**first**



# Right from the start

## West Sussex Early Years and Childcare Strategy

2024-2027





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## Introduction

Right from the Start, West Sussex Early Years and Childcare Strategy, has been developed to acknowledge the importance that the early years plays in establishing and embedding positive outcomes for children. It recognises that family life is vital for developing children's health and wellbeing.

**"Children are part of families, who are part of communities, who are part of society. If we want a diverse, inclusive and welcoming society we first have to include children in settings, which are part of communities." - Ann Van Dyke, 8 November 2023**

Services supporting early years children and their families can make a difference when they work together. West Sussex County Council (WSCC) is committed to working with our partners to ensure that services are fully coordinated and based on evidence. We want to provide seamless pathways for children and families so that they have access to high quality universal services from conception to 5 years old, as well as additional support where required. We want to create a system-wide approach to early years and childcare, health, and educational outcomes, supporting families from birth and beyond, overcoming deprivation and reducing inequalities, ensuring children are safe, happy, and make the best start in life.

WSCC knows that good, high quality, affordable childcare is an essential ingredient in economic, social, educational outcome and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Investment in the expansion of funded entitlements for early years education and childcare is central to this strategy, along with the development of pathways to support the early years and childcare workforce.

## Vision

**"From birth every child is nurtured, supported, and given the opportunity to develop well and achieve their full potential in inclusive, safe, inspiring environments. The voice and needs of children and their families is sought and acted upon with holistic needs being identified early and effectively met, enabling children and families to be healthy and thrive."**

The strategy considers all children from conception to 5 years and their families in West Sussex and children up to 14 years who are accessing childcare provision (18 years if they have a Special Educational Need and/or Disability [SEND]).

It seeks to enable families in supporting their children's health, well-being, learning and development through early home learning and access to other services. It seeks to support all families including those returning to work. It will support providers and professionals with the quality and sustainability of their provision and will help to build and strengthen communities.

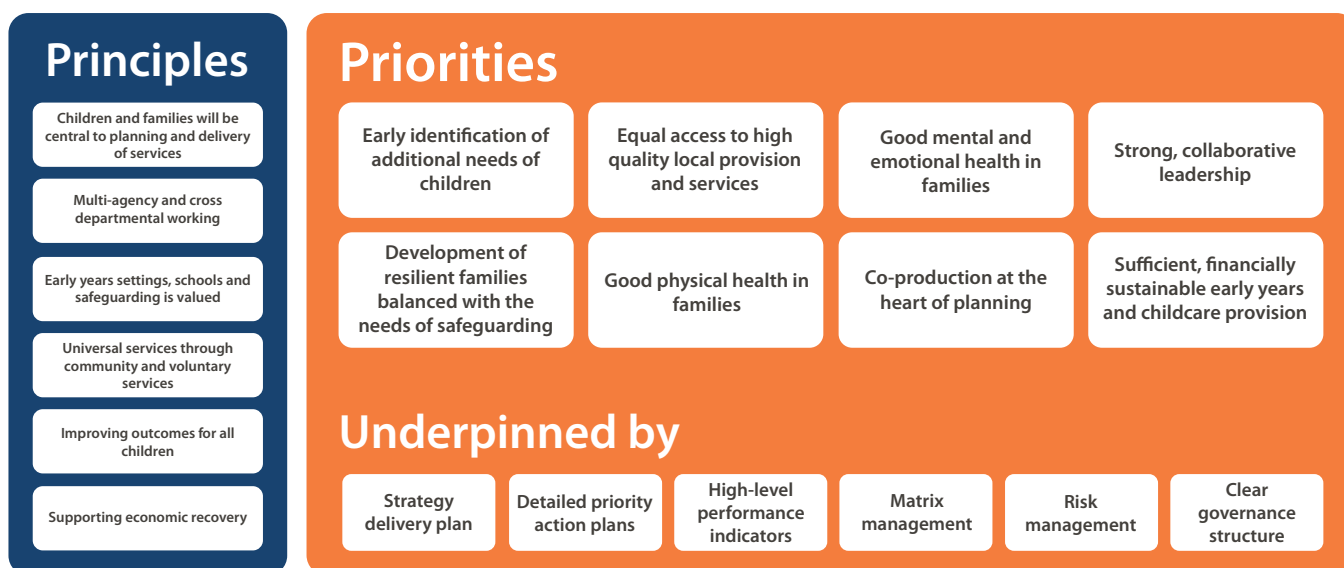


This will lead to the best start for all children and enable positive choices for families. Right from the Start will drive continuous improvement in early years and childcare provision and services in West Sussex.

## Our Strategy

Our strategy provides a framework for service delivery within the context of statutory duties (namely but not exclusively the Childcare Act 2006) to reduce the risk of legal challenge, ensure the best use of public funds and directly contribute to the local authorities' strategic priorities for children and young people.

Listening to parents, carers, partners and providers, the strategy sets out eight priorities. The priorities seek to improve the wellbeing of young children and reduce inequalities to ensure the best start in life for all children and support positive choices for families.



## Priorities

- Facilitate the early identification of additional needs so that children and their families benefit from an inclusive, tailored support service with timely intervention, including effective transitions processes.
- Families are supported early by services to be resilient, building on strengths and encouraging self-help so that children are cared for and kept safe whilst balancing the need for safeguarding.
- All children and their families will have equal access to high quality provision and services which are local, where barriers to that access are removed, diversity is celebrated, and children are enabled to reach their full potential.





- Families are enabled to promote good physical health for themselves and their children from conception and beyond, so that inequalities are reduced and those with health needs are understood and well supported.
- Families are enabled to promote good mental and emotional health for themselves and their children from conception and beyond, so that inequalities are reduced and those with emotional and mental health needs are well supported.
- Participation from parents, carers, children, and their community ensure that co-production is at the heart of planning, so that services are fully accessible and meet the needs of their users.
- The strategy is underpinned by a strong, collaborative leadership systems to ensure ongoing focus and commitment to delivering cost effective, invest to save, services for children and families.
- There is sufficient, financially sustainable early years and childcare provision across the county to meet the needs of families and support is available for the sector to maintain a highly qualified workforce with desirable career pathways.

## Principles, Wider Impact, and Better Value

The priorities will be driven within this ethos:

- Children and families will be held central in the planning and delivery of the strategy and services. An active effort to include all children and families will be paramount throughout. Considerations will be given to ensure reach, engagement and empowerment of children and families across West Sussex.
- Service positioning, accountability and coordination should reflect the significant importance of early years. Multi-agency and cross departmental working must be embedded and a culture of working with the services must celebrate and build on family strengths, encourage self-help, and peer support, as well as balance the need for safeguarding.
- The profile and importance of the early years and childcare sector should be improved to reflect the value placed on it by the council.
- An invest-to-save agenda will balance the need for universal services (many of which are already supported by voluntary services engagement and a community development approach) alongside the provision of more targeted interventions.
- Improving outcomes for all children in the early years and focus on narrowing the attainment gap.
- Supporting economic recovery through sustainable provision and services which enables families to work.

**"It is easier to build a strong child than it is to repair a broken adult." – Frederick Douglass**



To meet the aims and objectives within the strategy, as well as linking and contributing to other plans within WSCC and wider partners, delivery will need to be underpinned by:

- A strategy delivery plan which links activity to council and partner strategies and priorities, so everyone knows how their role fits within the bigger picture and legislation. The delivery plan will identify key leads and partners to drive the actions forward. Key performance indicators will be identified.
- Regular reporting via a dashboard on high-level performance indicators. Partners will work to provide data and case studies, where applicable, to illustrate progress.
- Ensure that services are led by central and local government strategy, are consistent and are delivered coherently in communities.
- Awareness of the risks that may impact on progress.
- A clear governance structure that oversees the implementation of the Early Years and Childcare Strategy. Further details can be found in Appendix C.

**"The period from pregnancy to age 3 is the most critical, when the brain grows faster than at any other time; 80% of a baby's brain is formed by this age... This is a window of opportunity to lay a foundation of health and wellbeing whose benefits last a lifetime and carry into the next generation."** - *Nurturing care for early childhood development, World Health Organisation 2018*





## Parent and Carer Voice

WSCC undertook a large survey of parents and carers of children aged 0-14 years (up to 18 years with SEND) to understand their current and future childcare needs. Over 93% of respondents were in support of the priorities identified in the strategy.

Over 90% of respondents with children under 5 felt their child's early years and childcare provision had a positive impact on their child's development. 83% could access all the formal childcare they required. Those who could not was reported to be in the main due to cost, not availability of places.

They identified that the main challenges for families in West Sussex are:

- Affordability of childcare.
- Availability of childcare places for children with SEND, with high quality experienced staff who can meet the needs of the child.
- The flexibility of childcare providers to meet the changing needs of families.
- Availability of wraparound care for school age children.

## Partner Voice

WSCC, NHS and Public Health teams provide services all over the county for children in the early years, those accessing childcare and their families. There is a wealth of knowledge and expertise in their delivery.

Services are delivered by a number of discreet teams across the council and external partners, as outlined in the West Sussex context in the Appendices.

This can be confusing for staff, childcare providers, and parents. Respondents strongly supported the development of an Early Years and Childcare Strategy to develop a system-wide approach.

Professionals told us what should be addressed in the delivery of the strategy included:

- Support for children and their families with additional needs. This included timely access to expert advice, guidance, and support networks as well as access to medical equipment and training that supports children with SEND to attend provision.
- Mental health featured highly, including access to support for families and training for service providers.
- Investment in developing a sustainable and high-quality sector, with knowledgeable staff and fair funding rates, making the career path attractive and recognising the challenges in recruitment and retention.



- Appropriate support and information for expectant and new parents, so information is received early, this is when we can make a difference.
- Simplified and joined up pathways to support families to navigate services.
- There was concern that a lot of services for the earliest years have been cut and that in some cases they do not happen early enough.
- Flexible and affordable childcare was at the top of parental priorities.

**“There is a phenomenal amount of expertise, knowledge and experience within the existing services and across agencies.”** - *West Sussex’s Local Government Association Early Years Peer Review 2023*. The report highlighted that there should be greater connection between early years and council and strategic plans, with clear accountability and comprehensive datasets to support a sustainable framework.

## National Context and Legal Framework

Local authorities are facing several challenges, resources have been under pressure for some time. This needs to be carefully balanced with the need for local authorities to comply with their statutory duties and legal requirements as set out in the delivery framework in The Childcare Act (2006):

- The early years outcomes duties require the provision of early years services and joint working between agencies to reduce inequalities, improve outcomes and narrow the gap.
- The sufficiency duties require local authorities to ensure sufficient early education and childcare for the early year’s entitlements that enable parents to take part in employment and employment-related activities.
- The information duties require local authorities to ensure information for both childcare providers and families is available.

**“Science tells us that a child’s experiences from conception through their first 5 years will go on to shape their next 50.”** – *Jason Knauf, CEO of the Royal Foundation, December 2020*

The expansion of the early years entitlement and wraparound childcare will add additional pressure to local authorities and the services supporting and providing this entitlement. A range of statutory guidance exists to support local authorities in delivering on these entitlements. From April 2024, existing childcare support will be expanded in phases, and by September 2025, working parents with children aged 9 months old to when they start school will be eligible for 30 hours childcare support. It is hoped that this will make it easier for parents with childcare responsibilities to move into, or take on, more paid work.





The Children and Families Act (2014) placed additional responsibilities on local authorities to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and build on legislation set out in The Equalities Act (2010) and was strengthened by the SEND Code of Practice (2015). Subsequent guidance had further developed the requirement of Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018).

Of course, these are also underpinned by United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) that set out civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that children everywhere are entitled to.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the experiences of families and children. This inevitably varies between families, but has a lasting impact on the access to services and support received as well as the opportunities to socialise and develop language. We are committed to using this strategy to ensure the best support for potentially widening inequalities which may have resulted from the pandemic.





## The West Sussex Approach

Our Council Plan 2021 to 2025 has four priorities all of which, the Early Years and Childcare Strategy contributes to. These priorities are:

1. Keeping people safe from vulnerable situations – there is an emphasis on health, well-being, safety and resilience for both families and providers, though joint working with children's services.
2. A sustainable and prosperous economy – there is a focus on workforce development and financial sustainability of early years and childcare providers. The expansion of funded entitlements and wraparound childcare sit within the strategy and will support families in returning to work.
3. Helping people and communities to fulfil their potential – accessible, continuous and high-quality provision for all children including those with additional needs and vulnerabilities and their families are available at the earliest opportunity, leading to improved outcomes before children start school.
4. Making the best use of resources – the strategy will support this through a partnership approach and joint commissioning where possible to avoid duplication between organisations and create clear pathways for families from birth onwards.

The council's Children and Young People's Plan 2022 to 2025 focuses on improving outcomes for children, young people and families and sets out the Children First Partnership's shared priorities and framework.

Central threads are protection, inclusivity, co-production, challenging inequalities, and a commitment to building strong partnerships. Two priorities are to:

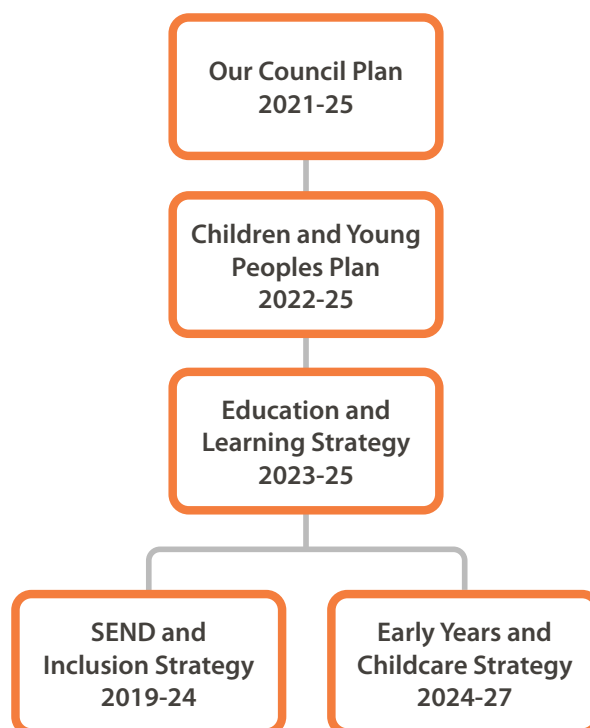
1. Work with early years settings (amongst others) to close the disadvantage gap for children by targeting the most vulnerable.
2. Improve emotional health and wellbeing by providing early years settings with resources to respond confidently to children with these issues.

Stakeholders in West Sussex take a Children First approach to ensure we work with children, young people, families, communities, our partners and schools in a restorative, strength-based way. The Children First Partnership has been established as a sub-group of the Health and Wellbeing Board and will take forward the Children and Young People's Plan as well as provide the strategic oversight needed across all organisations working to improve children's outcomes in West Sussex.



The Education and Learning Strategy 2023-25 sets out key themes and the steps that need to be taken to enable every learner to secure the skills, knowledge, and confidence to achieve their ambitions. It recognises improving child outcomes in the early years is a shared responsibility of all stakeholders and partners through direct delivery. The Education and Learning Strategy 2023-25 identifies a workstream to work collaboratively with the early years and childcare sector to improve outcomes for young children including early language, reading, and personal, social and emotional development.

The council's plans align with those developed by Sussex Health and Care for children and their families and the priorities in this strategy complement the five strategic priorities for children and young people.



## Our Early Years and Childcare Strategy

- We will ensure that early years and childcare fits seamlessly with partners' agendas.
- We will both simplify and amplify links to other strategies and workstreams to avoid duplication and ensure a joined-up approach to implementation.
- We will retain the positive elements of our current work.
- We will ensure that any actions we take will be sustainable.
- We will be guided by evidence, drawing on the knowledge of partners to agree what we are trying to achieve towards population outcomes.

**"The 1,001 days from pregnancy to the age of 2 set the foundations for an individual's cognitive, emotional and physical development. There is a well-established and growing international consensus on the importance of this age range; it is part of the World Health Organisation's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health, the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative, and in England, both the NHS Long Term Plan and Public Health England's 2016 guidance on "giving every child the best start in life." - *The Best Start for Life, The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report, HM Government 2021***





## Next Steps

The Early Years and Childcare Strategy provides the foundation for an evolving and continual improvement journey towards providing the best start for children in West Sussex. It sets out a set of principles, priorities, actions, and outcomes to support delivery of services across the council and external service providers. Our main actions are summarised below.

- Design and structure a joint service offer from pre-birth to 5 years, to ensure improved coordination, simple and continuous pathways for families, the effective use of resources and the avoidance of duplication.
- Ensure that service agendas align and complement each other.
- Maintain an open dialogue and feedback cycle with all stakeholders to support service improvements.
- Ensure that the profile of early years and childcare remains central to decision making.
- Deliver on our statutory duties to expand the funded entitlement across West Sussex.







# Appendices

## Population

West Sussex is a county on the south coast of England. West Sussex is deemed to be an affluent county but has significant pockets of deprivation, bringing issues of isolation for families and difficulties around business sustainability in these areas for the childcare sector. The 2021 census reported that the population of West Sussex was 882,700. At the time:

- 5.0% of the population were aged between 0 and 4 years old.
- 5.6% were aged between 5 and 9 years old.
- 5.8% were aged between 10 and 14 years old.
- 5.1% were aged between 15 and 19 years old.

Source: Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2021

In 2021 the live birth rates in West Sussex was marginally lower than the South East Region and England (calculated as the annual number of live births per 1,000 population). There were 8,515 live births in the county, with the higher proportions in the north of the county.

West Sussex remained less ethnically diverse than the South East and England in 2021, with 84.2% of the population identifying as the majority White British ethnicity, compared to 73.5% in England. Ethnic minority populations in West Sussex were generally younger than the majority White British population. The proportion of under 16s in the broad mixed or multiple ethnicities group (45.8%) was nearly three-times greater than in the majority White British ethnicity, compared to 73.5% in England.

Area	Live births
Adur	600
Arun	1,375
Chichester	1,032
Crawley	1,525
Horsham	1,444
Mid Sussex	1,557
Worthing	982
West Sussex	8,515
South East	94,292
England	595,948

Source: Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2021



Proportion (%) of total ethnic populations by age and sex in West Sussex in Census 2021. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Ethnic grouping	0 to 15 years		16 to 64 years		65+ years		Total (all ages)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Asian or Asian British	11.0	12.0	36.3	32.8	4.3	3.6	51.6	48.4
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	11.5	12.2	34.1	36.9	3.2	2.1	48.8	51.2
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	22.5	23.3	26.3	24.0	2.2	1.7	51.0	49.0
Other ethnic groups	9.2	9.6	35.4	37.3	4.5	4.2	49.0	51.0
White British	8.2	8.6	29.1	28.6	14.0	11.5	51.3	48.7
White (Other)	6.8	7.2	42.4	35.5	5.2	2.9	54.4	45.6

Source: Census 2021: Ethnicity, language and religion Public Health Briefing August 2023

## Early Years and Childcare Provision

West Sussex has a total of 1,194 Ofsted registered providers offering early years funding and wraparound childcare.

Provider Type	Total number of settings	Number of inspected settings	% of Outstanding, Good or Met of those who have been inspected by Ofsted
Early Years Group Settings (Including Private Pre-schools and Day Nurseries, and maintained nursery classes and nursery schools)	415	329	95.7%
Childminders	469	390	99.2%
Breakfast Clubs	67	41	97.6%
After School Clubs	158	84	96.4%
Holidays Schemes	85	46	91.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,194</b>	<b>890</b>	<b>97.2%</b>

Data from January 2024 based on figures from Autumn Term



## Childcare Sufficiency

The total average number of daily early years and childcare places across the county in March 2023 was 34,950 decreasing from March 2022 when there were 36,063 places. This is a 3.1% reduction of places overall, across all provider types. Despite this decrease, data shows that across the county, there is currently sufficient early years and childcare provision, in most areas, to meet the needs of the families.

West Sussex carries out sufficiency monitoring at District and Borough level. The monitoring includes an action plan for how each area will address the potential gaps in childcare provision. Changes to the level of housing development coming forward, the impact of the childcare expansion and the take up of places across the county may change this need and therefore the requirement for provision.

Area	Early Years Group Settings	Childminders Funded Entitlement	Childminders Non-Funded Entitlement	Breakfast Clubs	After School Clubs	Holiday Schemes	Total
Adur / Worthing	74	61	38	14	30	13	230
Arun	53	50	17	9	18	10	157
Chichester	66	20	20	9	21	18	154
Crawley	54	49	28	8	13	10	162
Horsham	76	49	43	15	34	17	234
Mid Sussex	92	65	29	12	42	17	257
<b>Total</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>1,194</b>

Data from January 2024

## Early Years Funded Entitlement (EYFE)

WSCC has a statutory duty to ensure that there is access to free high quality early education for all eligible 2, 3 and 4 year-olds whose parents would like to take up a place for their child. From September 2024, this is expanding to eligible working families of 9 month olds.

Nationally, an average of 74% eligible 2-year-olds benefited from a funded place in 2023, with take up being considerably higher in West Sussex at 87%. 98% of eligible 3 and 4 year olds benefited from a universal funded place in 2023 in West Sussex, with around half of these taking up an extended 30 hours place.

Following the Spring Budget announcements in March 2023, EYFE will be extending, with most working families with children under the age of 5 entitled to 30 hours of childcare support by September 2025.



## Public Health

Public Health data and intelligence focuses on monitoring key influences and milestones of development in infant and young children's lives. The national data reveals some West Sussex children have greater needs than in other parts of the country. The most recently published data is from the year 2022-2023.

Although many early years children will achieve their expected milestones for development, there is a larger than average proportion in West Sussex who have not met milestones for communication skills, gross or fine motor skills, problem solving and personal and social skills by the time of their 2 to 2 ½ year developmental check.

In 2021/22, 15.3% of children under the age of 16 were living in relative low-income families in West Sussex, equating to around 23,700 children. Crawley has the highest proportion of children living in relative low-income families compared to other districts in the County, at 21.9% (around 5,500 children), and exceeds the county (15.3%) and national (19.9%) average.

The proportion of children aged 0-4 years attending Accident and Emergency and experiencing hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries are significantly worse in West Sussex when compared to the National and Regional figures for 2022-2023. Measles, Mumps and Rubella uptake in West Sussex remains below the national target of 95%, whilst higher than the England average, nearly one in five (19.8%) children aged 4-5 years old in reception year of primary school in West Sussex, have been measured as either overweight or obese. This is lower than the national average of 21.3% but the recent trend suggests no improvement.

Children in relative low income families (under 16s) 2021/22				
Area	Count	Value	95% Lower Centile	95% Upper Centile
Crawley	5,480	21.9	21.2	22.7
Arun	4,808	19.0	18.3	19.7
Adur	1,898	16.4	15.4	17.3
Worthing	3,017	15.9	15.2	16.7
Chichester	3,002	15.5	14.8	16.3
Horsham	2,830	10.8	10.3	11.4
Mid Sussex	2,697	9.2	8.8	9.7
West Sussex	23,732	15.3	15.0	15.5
England	2,087,494	19.9	19.9	20.0





## Children's Social Care

West Sussex under 5 population (2021 mid-year estimates): 54,035 of this population:

- 964 (1.78%) are known to social services as a Child in Need (from the 31 March 2023 Census Data).
- 142 (0.26%) are Children We Care For (from the 31 March 2023 903 Statutory return).

## Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

As of December 2023 West Sussex has 2024 children known to the county with identified SEND needs.

- 3.4% of these children are eligible for school start and have delayed or deferred entry to school.
- 40 children who are accessing EYFE hours are in settings in receipt of Disability Access Funding 30% of which are eligible for school.
- There are currently 1204 children known to SEND Under 5 process.
- There are 95 children in early years provision who have an Education, Health and Care Plan, 17 children are of an age where they are eligible for a school place.





## Educational Outcomes

The Good Level of Development (GLD) is defined by the children attaining the expected level in 12 of the 17 Early Learning Goals in the DFE Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework.

The ELGs are statements of what a child is expected to be able to do at the end of the EYFS. For most children this is the end of their reception year before they start in year one. In 2023 67.5% West Sussex children attained the GLD. This is just above the national figure of 67.2%. Measures in individual areas of learning remain in line with or above national averages, with writing having the lowest outcomes in West Sussex.

- 42.3% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving a GLD compared to 51.6% nationally.
- 75.1% of girls and 60.0% of boys achieved the GLD.
- 19.2% of children identified as having SEND support achieved the GLD which is just below the national figure of 19.8%.
- The lowest proportion of all pupils attaining the GLD was in Crawley with 61.4%.
- The lowest proportion of disadvantaged pupils attaining the GLD was in Mid Sussex with 33.1%.

Source: '1 Headline measures by characteristics' from 'Early years foundation stage profile results'; Permanent data table – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK ([explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk))

## Governance

The strategy will be overseen by the Children First Partnership Board.

