

The Bristol Best Start in Life Plan

2025-2030



Making steps together so families can thrive and belong



**HEALTHY
BABIES**





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The building blocks of our plan

Our Vision

Making steps together so families can thrive and belong

Our Ambitions

- 1: Children thrive and meet their health and learning potential
- 2: Schools, families, and communities are “ready together”
- 3: Families get the support they need, when they need it, not only when problems grow
- 4: Inequalities reduce across Bristol
- 5: Families can access the childcare and early learning opportunities they need

Our overall target

By the end of the 2027/28 academic year, Bristol aims for at least 77.4% of children to achieve a Good Level of Development, with children receiving Free School Meals benefitting at least equally, so that at least 58.9% also meet this benchmark.

Our Pillars

- Providing joined up support for families
- Creating better access to early years education and childcare
- Developing high-quality early years education everywhere

Our Plan

- | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Working better together | Involving children, families and communities | Reducing inequalities and removing barriers | Using what works | Growing good practice and new ideas |
|-------------------------|--|---|------------------|-------------------------------------|

1 Why ‘Best Start’ matters

Every child deserves to belong, thrive and have the best possible start in life. The early years, from pregnancy to age five, shape how children learn, grow, communicate, and cope with all of life’s challenges. These first years help build the confidence children need to try new things, enjoy learning, and feel ready for milestones like starting school. A strong start also supports wellbeing in the teenage years and adulthood.

Parenting and caring are wonderful, but it can also feel overwhelming at times, especially in a world that moves quickly, is increasingly digital and expensive. That is why the support around families in the early years matters so much.

We want Bristol to be the best place for children and young people to grow up, regardless of who they are or where they are born. Giving children the best start in life is the first step to this and it means:

- Everyone involved in a child’s life – from family members to professionals – understands how to help them grow, be healthy and flourish.
- Communities are strong and more connected, with children and families able to participate in the things that matter to them.

- Families feel supported and strengthened, and empowered to succeed because services are working together to offer help and support early on.
- We work together to tackle inequality and remove the barriers to children getting the best start in life.
- This is our Best Start in Life Plan and our vision is clear and ambitious, to **make steps together so families can thrive and belong**. Through this, we will make Bristol the best place for all children to grow up in.

This is a shared plan involving a range of organisations who deliver support to children and families but will only be possible by working in partnership with families and communities. Creating one clear, joined up plan will ensure that no one part of a child’s early life is seen in isolation, but as one whole.

Our focus will be on identifying needs as early as possible, delivering high quality universal and targeted services, including early education and learning opportunities and strengthening collaboration and skills in our workforce. By improving how services work together, we will ensure children and families receive the right support at the right time. This collective approach will lead to more children achieving a Good Level of Development, particularly those from underserved communities.



2 Bristol today – Our starting point

Our strengths and challenges

Bristol is a vibrant city with strong communities and services that care deeply about children.

We already have a lot to build on:

- 16 Family Hubs across the city, with expertise in providing support to families from pregnancy to age five and beyond.
- Great childcare and nursery provision, with 98% of settings rated good or outstanding.
- Trained and dedicated early years workforce.
- A high performing health visiting and speech and language service providing a strong universal offer, and specialist support for families that need it most.
- Strong partnership working across health, education, Family Hubs and community and faith organisations.
- Effective support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and strong inclusive practice.
- Early Years Portage and Inclusion Specialist for each setting and support for Child Minders.

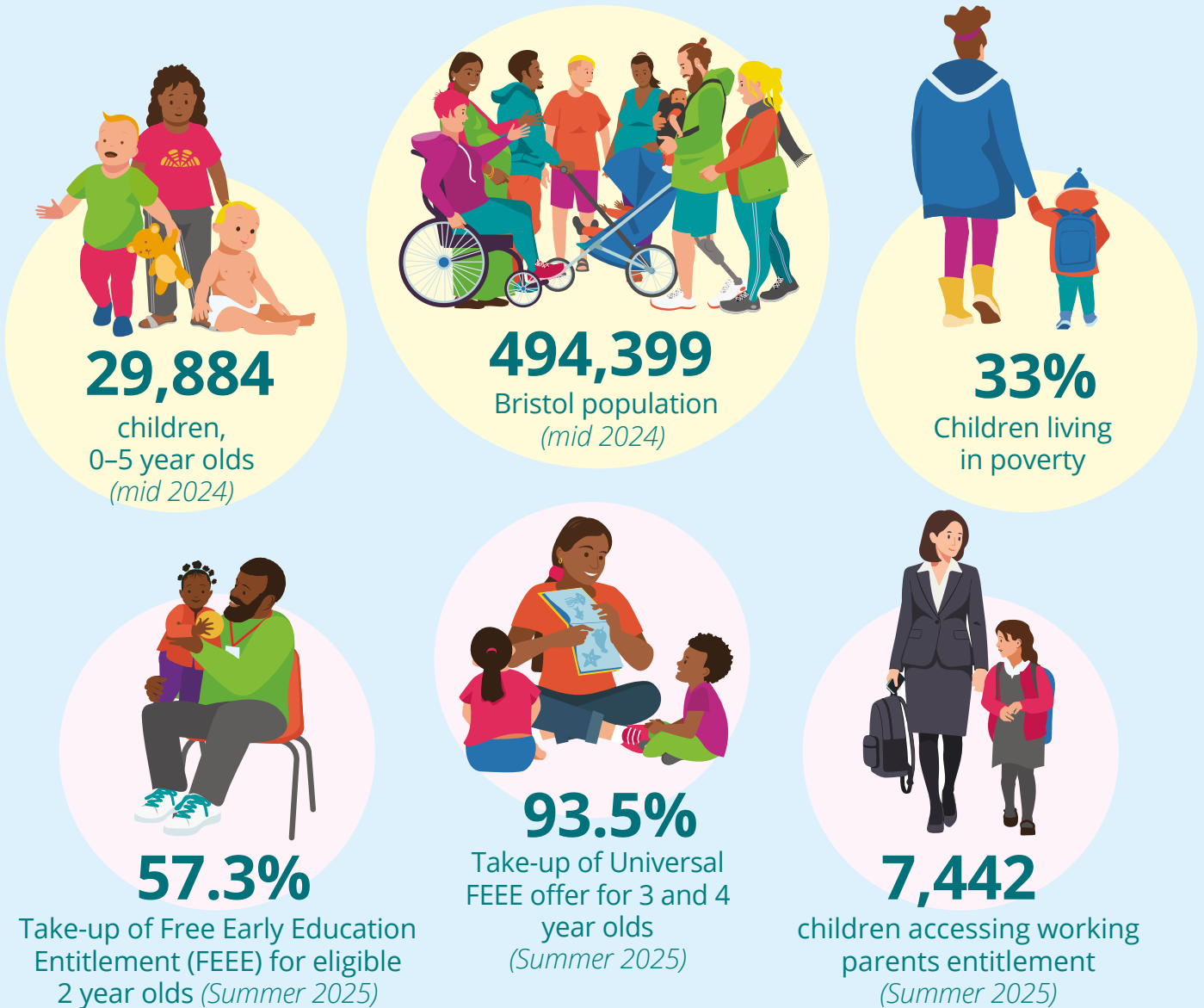
But, like many other parts of the country, not all children have equal opportunities to have the best start.

We know that:

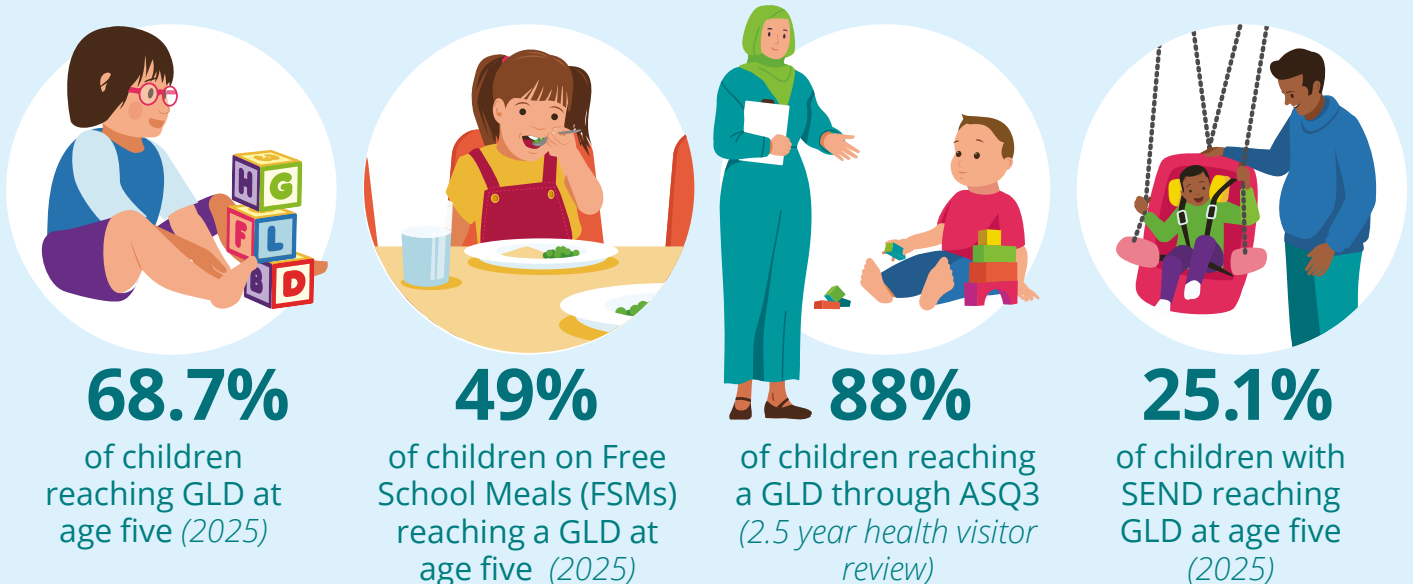
- Not all families know what is available or how to access support within their community.
- Barriers like transport, language, work pressures and confidence can make it hard to join in.
- Some areas experience more disadvantage than others and the challenges families face have been increasing.
- The early years workforce faces challenges with recruitment and retention of staff.
- Data about children and families does not always flow smoothly between services, making it difficult to know how best to support.



Bristol's children and families in numbers



Good Level of Development (GLD)



Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes in Bristol continue to show marked disparities between different groups of children.

While 73.4% of White British children achieved a Good Level of Development in 2025, the proportion was significantly lower for several global majority groups, including Black Caribbean children at 51%, Somali children at 57.4% and Pakistani children at 54.2%. Children with English as an Additional Language also achieved a lower GLD rate at 61.5%.

These differences highlight the continued impact of structural inequalities and barriers that affect children’s early learning experiences and outcomes across the city.

In summer 2025, GLD data showed that children aged 4–5 with the fewest barriers to learning are already achieving highly in Bristol. However, outcomes vary significantly

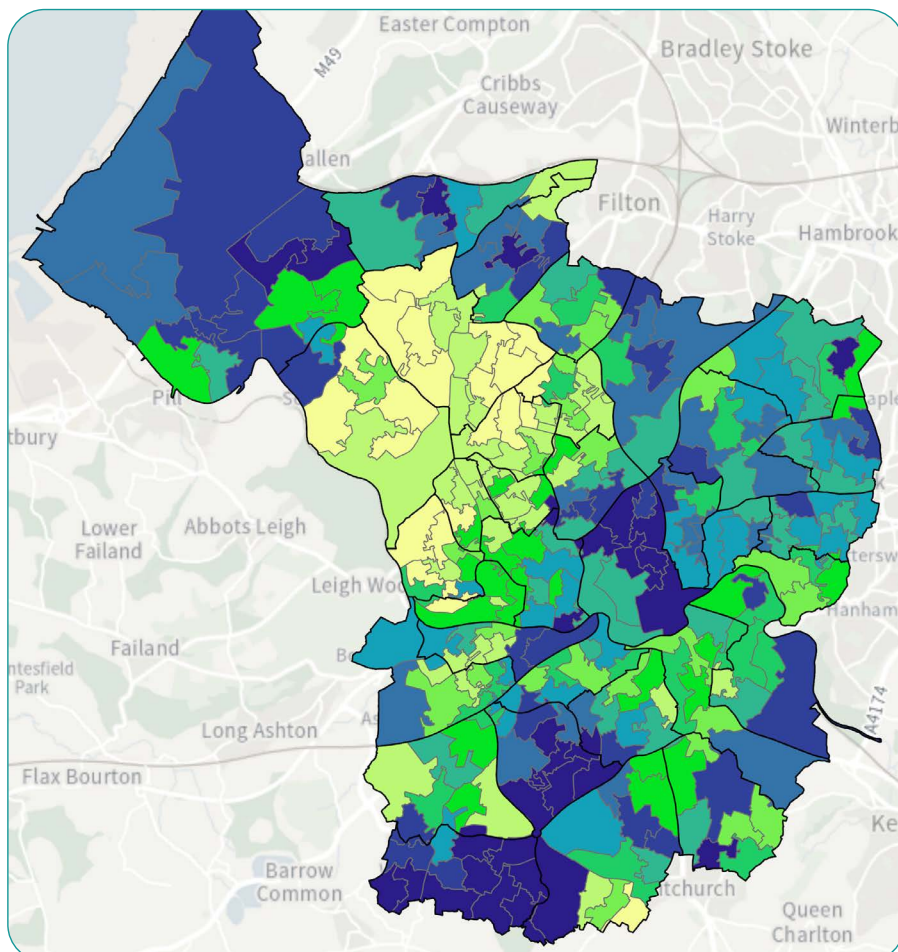
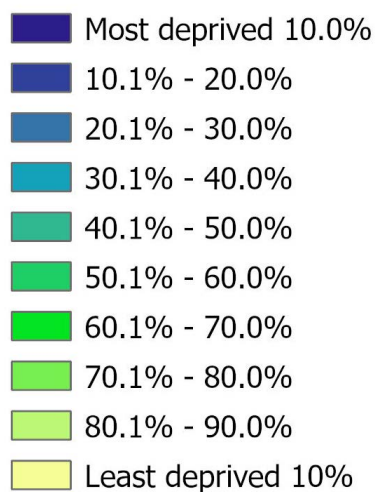
across the city. Children living in the most deprived areas achieved notably lower GLD rates; for example, Filwood (55.5%), Hartcliffe (60%), Lawrence Hill (56.9%), Southmead (61.4%), St George (63.2%) and Windmill Hill (62.3%).

In contrast, children in less deprived areas achieved much higher GLD rates, such as Cotham (93%), Bishopston and Ashley Down (83.2%), Clifton Down (86.2%), Hotwells and Harbourside (80%), Redland (80%), and Westbury-on-Trym and Henleaze (84%).

This pattern makes clear that deprivation continues to have a strong influence on early learning outcomes in the city. We know these gaps continue and widen as children progress through school. In Bristol, outcomes for children from lower-income families are below national levels, while outcomes for more affluent children are above them.

Indices of deprivation, Bristol 2025

National Deciles



Source: Strategic Intelligence and Performance, Bristol City Council
 Data: MHCLG English Indices of Deprivation 2025
 Boundaries: ONS licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0.
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What our families have said

As we put this plan together, we heard from nearly 100 families about what matters to them and how things could get better. We took away the following:

- 58% of families found it 'very easy' or 'easy' to find information or support when they needed it, with only 14% saying it was 'hard'
- 41% of families have found it 'very easy' or 'easy' to get a childcare place, but there were still 34% of families who have found it 'very hard' or 'hard'
- 82% of families found it 'very easy', 'easy' or 'okay' to apply for free childcare hours, but many commented that there was a lot to read and understand

We heard some encouraging things from families that we want to build on:

"Incredibly useful. There are so many hubs, feeding groups and opportunities to access midwives and HV advice."

"All incredible at getting me and baby out of the house and having something to base our day around."

"I have used all services ... They have been an incredible support for me navigating through the systems I now need to assist in developing my children and their special needs."



3 Bristol in the future – What we want to achieve

The bigger picture nationally and regionally

- The national **Best Start in Life Strategy** sets out a plan to increase the number of children who reach a Good Level of Development by the end of reception. It requires us to have a local partnership plan
- **Every child achieving and thriving** sets out the UK government's reforms to ensure early, fair and consistent support, delivered through coordinated local systems, enabling every child to achieve and thrive
- The **NHS 10 Year Plan** sets out plans to have more care delivered in communities, use digital technology to support health care and focus on preventing poor health from happening
- The government's **Families First Programme** is changing the way partners work together to provide early support for families and keep children safe in their homes and communities
- **The West of England Child Poverty Action Plan** sets out an ambitious plan for reducing child poverty across the region, including boosting support for families with babies and young children

The bigger picture locally

- **Bristol's Belonging and Thriving Strategy** is the city's partnership strategy for children and young people in the city. Our vision is to work together so that all children and young people in Bristol feel they belong, can achieve and thrive, and where they are supported to be ambitious, safe and joyful'
- Our first priority for the strategy is thriving in the early years. This priority will be supported by the city's **Early Help Strategy**, which sets out how partners will create simpler ways for families to get the right support at the right time
- Our **Healthy Babies** plan, will detail how we work with families from conception to ensure the foundations are laid to meet development potential, including bonding, attachment, parental mental health and infant feeding.
- Our partnership strategy **Bristol Future** is focused on breaking the link between deprivation and poorer educational outcomes. This includes reducing inequalities in educational attainment in the early years.
- The **Bristol Neighbourhoods Wellbeing and Health Plan** sets out a plan for how partners will make it simpler for children, young people and families to access the right health support within their communities



Our Ambitions

We have great ambitions for our children, families and communities and believe our plan will help make lots of positive change. We have identified five key ambitions to translate Bristol's Best Start vision into clear and measurable priorities, including our overall target for improving the number of children who reach a Good Level of Development (GLD) by the end of reception when they are 4 or 5 years old.

The GLD is the standard way of finding out if a child has reached the expected early learning goals at the end of reception. It includes assessing a child's physical development, communication and language, and literacy and maths learning.

It is an important measure of whether a child is getting the best start, but it is not the only one. Wherever possible, we will measure a range of ways to show how we're helping children, families and communities to get better outcomes across the city.

Ambition 1: Children thrive and meet their health and learning potential

We will support all families, right from the start of their parenting journeys, to create the relationships and environments that help children be healthy, meet key developmental milestones and thrive. Children thrive when early relationships build the communication, curiosity and social skills that make them feel secure, ready to explore, and able to meet their earliest learning milestones. These foundations support the confidence, relationships and early learning behaviours children need to reach a Good Level of Development by the end of Reception year.

By the end of the 2027/28 academic year, Bristol will increase the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development to above 77.4%. We will be deliberately ambitious for children on Free School Meals (FSM), ensuring that at least 58.9% meet the same benchmark so that more children start school with the skills, confidence, and opportunities they deserve.

Ambition 2: Schools, families, and communities are ready together

Children are ready for school when everyone around them is ready too, when schools are welcoming and inclusive, families feel confident, and communities provide the everyday experiences children need to take part in school life. Well planned transitions into Nursery and Reception help children feel secure, emotionally settled and ready to learn, giving families the reassurance, information and relationships they need at this important step.

When schools, early years providers, families and local services work together, and transitions are predictable, relational and child-centred, children of all backgrounds begin school feeling capable, connected and excited about learning.

Bristol will ensure early years educators, schools and partners are equipped with the high-quality training and accessible multi-agency support needed to create smooth, emotionally safe transitions and inclusive environments, so that children begin their school journey confidently and well prepared.

Ambition 3: Families get the support they need, when they need it, not only when problems grow

Families should be able to get help early, in welcoming local spaces, without waiting for issues to escalate. Prevention is central to our approach, ensuring every family can easily access the universal health offer, from conception and maternity care, through health visiting, and the support available in Family Hubs, early years settings, and wider community services.

By making information easy to find and services simple to navigate, we want families to know where to go and find support that is relevant, timely and right for them. We want families to feel connected, confident and supported by their communities.

Bristol's ambition is that all families can access timely early help through Family Hubs, early education providers and community-based partners, with increasing numbers receiving support at the earliest stage and fewer families needing referral to specialist or statutory services.

Ambition 4: Inequalities reduce across Bristol

Every child in Bristol should have the chance to thrive, but we know that children from minoritised groups, global majority communities and those facing multiple disadvantages face greater barriers than others, leading to inequitable outcomes across different communities.

We want every child not only to succeed, but to be healthy, and we will work to reduce all forms of inequality, including health inequalities, that limit children's opportunities. By removing barriers that some families experience and by working closely with the communities most affected, we can ensure that opportunities to succeed are fair, accessible and consistent for all children.

Bristol's ambition is to significantly reduce early years inequalities by increasing participation in early education, health visiting, speech and language, reviews and Family Hub support among families in disadvantaged communities. By strengthening access where it is needed most, we will ensure that children in the most deprived areas benefit from the early learning and support opportunities that build the foundations for future success.



Ambition 5: Families can access the childcare and early learning opportunities they need

Families should be able to choose the childcare and early education that is right for them; affordable, high-quality, inclusive and easy to navigate; especially in our most disadvantaged communities. We will ensure that families can access enriching early learning opportunities in their communities, through Family Hubs, libraries, play spaces and local community services.

We want families to feel confident and informed, with clear information and a range of high-quality options that meet their child's needs. By working closely with early years providers and wider partners across the city, we will strengthen the quality, availability and inclusivity of early learning, whether in formal childcare or community-based provision.

Bristol's ambition is to increase the number of families accessing childcare and funded entitlements where this is right for them, while also improving access to high-quality early learning beyond formal settings. Through this combined approach, we will work to reduce the GLD deprivation gap and ensure all children benefit from the early experiences that help them thrive.



4 Our Pillars

These Pillars create the core areas of focus that will be embedded in organisations across the partnership; these are:

1. Providing joined up support for families
2. Creating better access to early years education and childcare
3. Developing high quality early years education everywhere

Pillar 1: Joined up support for families

We want families to experience services that feel connected, warm and easy to navigate. This means:

- No wrong front door – families can walk into any Family Hub and get the support they need, early years providers and schools are able to link with the support on offer.
- Effective relationships between midwives, health visitors, speech and language services, nurseries, schools, early years education teams, family support, libraries and community and faith groups.
- Easy to understand pathways for getting support from pregnancy, through to children starting school and beyond.

Families will get the right help at the right time, from the right people, without feeling bounced around within teams and services.

Pillar 2: Better access to early education and childcare

We want families to be able to find childcare that:

- They have chosen and feel right for their child.
- They can afford, ensuring that families know what they are entitled to and know how to access it.
- Is close to home and their community.
- Is provided in a way that supports families to return to work.
- Is high quality and inclusive and supports children requiring additional support and children with SEND.

We will work with schools, nurseries, childminders, and community partners to expand access where it's needed most.



Pillar 3: High quality early years education everywhere

Children thrive and learn best when adults working with and for them understand and apply child development knowledge, the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and are research-informed practitioners. We want:

- A skilled, confident and connected early years workforce.
- A strong system that supports children's transitions from early years providers to reception classes.
- Strong multi-disciplinary partnerships wrapped around every setting.
- Inclusive environments where every child, including those with SEND and those facing barriers to achieving, can flourish.
- Settings that actively promote children's health and wellbeing, and support families to create home environments that enable children to be healthy and thrive.

We will empower families as children's most important educators, while ensuring early years education is inclusive, high-quality and supports every child to thrive.



5 Our Plan

Providing joined up support for families, creating better access to early years education and childcare, and developing high quality early years education everywhere requires us to work in partnership.

Our plan is built around five core action areas that will drive improvements across the entire system of support for families with children from maternity through the early years:

1. Working better together.
2. Involving children, families and communities.
3. Reducing inequalities and removing barriers.
4. Using what works.
5. Growing good practise and new ideas.

Working better together

We want every professional who works with babies and young children to feel part of one joined up early years workforce. Whether they work in health, education (the stronger practice hub, early years education teams, child minders, nurseries and schools), Family hubs, libraries or are a part of a community or faith organisation we want all practitioners to understand each other well and be able to be able to work seamlessly together for the benefit of families and communities.

This means:

- Sharing our priorities and working towards shared outcomes for children. We will share data and check our progress against our ambitious milestones.
- Using the same language and approaches, so families can feel supported by the whole workforce.

- Creating smooth pathways across agencies so families are held for as long as is needed.
- Reducing handoffs so families build trusting relationships; introducing families to new services should not mean that others fall away.
- Supporting positive transitions into Reception classes that are planned, consistent and child centred.

Families should feel the difference: a system that listens, connects and supports.

How we will do this:

1. Strengthen communication and access for families

- Develop a clear communications strategy and a new digital system to support easy membership and access, helping families connect with the Best Start Family Hub offer across neighbourhoods.
- Improve mechanisms for professionals to introduce families to the Family Hub offer through upgraded online referral systems and triage processes.

2. Improve data sharing, early identification and system learning

- Create shared data agreements across partners to track progress, highlight gaps and identify children and families who would benefit from earlier support.
- Ensuring data from health visitor mandatory reviews, early years checks, early education providers, Family Hubs and specialist services is consistently captured, connected and used to target resources where they are most needed.
- Establishing clear, secure data-sharing agreements to identify families requiring antenatal or early years support, ensuring timely introduction to their local Best Start Family Hub.
- Embedding universal and targeted Speech and Language Therapy input within early years settings to strengthen early identification, early intervention and practitioner confidence.
- Using shared data to drive system-wide practice improvement and inform a joined-up early years outcomes framework that supports readiness for school, including communication-focused transition materials and information-sharing protocols.

3. Embed robust pathways for early years and family support

- Embed consistent pathways for child and family support following health visitor mandatory visits and reviews (2.5-year review) and the early years 2 year check, ensuring data is collated and shared effectively and resources can be targeted where needed.

- Develop and embed a strong health and development review pathway that connects the 2 year and 2.5 year checks with early years entitlement support, speech and language services, Family Hubs support and Section 23 notifications, including the most vulnerable children receiving services from specialist services (e.g. Family Help and social work services).
- Develop a joined up early language pathway to ensure children identified as needing additional early language or communication support (including those waiting for Speech and Language Therapy) receive timely help through joint working across early years education and Family Hubs.

4. Enhance positive transitions into reception

- Strengthen joint planning and information-sharing between early years providers, Family Hubs, health services and Reception staff, so children's strengths, needs and identities, especially for those with SEND or children needing additional support, are understood before they start school.
- Ensure schools provide well-planned, child-centred transition experiences for all children, including those not attending early years settings, through tailored familiarisation opportunities, clear communication with families, and warm relational approaches that build confidence and emotional safety.
- Work closely with schools to understand what will help them deliver effective transitions consistently and align wider community support, such as Family Hubs, health visitors and local services, so that every child arrives in Reception feeling ready to explore, learn and connect.

5. Expand access to evidence-based support for families

- Increase the delivery and range of evidence-based interventions available in Best Start Family Hubs and across Early Years provision to support parenting and home learning.
- Strengthen partnerships with community and faith sectors to enhance the offer with drop-in activities, peer support networks, and stay and play sessions that act as gateways into other forms of support.
- Families will be equipped with practical, play-based strategies to promote talking, listening and understanding at home.

6. Strengthen support for under-represented and vulnerable groups

- Develop clear pathways between Best Start Family Hubs and specialist services (Family Help, Social Care, Family Nurse Partnership, Paediatric Hubs and GPs) so families are held seamlessly across the system.
- Enhance targeted engagement and inclusion, ensuring under-represented groups (eg fathers, care experienced and young parents, global majority families, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities) are proactively reached and welcomed in support through tailored outreach, warm introductions and flexible delivery models.

We will know we are making a difference when:

- Family membership to the Best Start Family Hubs increases and families describe support as effective and meeting their needs.
- Data sharing improves across maternity, health visiting, early years providers, Family Hubs, SEND and SaLT, enabling earlier, proactive support.
- Clear pathways (young parents, 0–2s, 2–2½ reviews, early language) are consistently used across agencies.
- Shared priorities and shared outcomes are used across Family Hubs, Early Years, health services and schools, with visible progress against milestones.
- Joint training becomes common practice, with providers, Family Hub teams, health visitors and Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) partners learning together.
- Family experiences are improved because teams hold families for longer and introduce them more intentionally to new support.
- Transitions improve; settings and schools report better information sharing and children arriving more confident and ready.



Involving children and families

Families tell us that they want opportunities to connect with others going through shared experiences, to build networks of support and have access to spaces that feel inclusive for them and for their children. Families are experts in their own lives and have knowledge to share about how they want the support they receive to be delivered.

This means:

- Building on existing parent voice groups across health services, Family hubs and community and faith organisations and ensuring that all voices are heard and privileged.
- Taking proactive steps to ensure seldom heard communities are meaningfully supported to share their views, including fathers and coparents, care experienced and young parents, global majority communities and other minoritised groups.
- Improving feedback loops when you tell us what you need (less surveying, more action).
- Creating more opportunities for families to codesign and shape service delivery, including the development of locality based early years participation forums.
- Providing increased opportunities for volunteering and support parent champions.
- Ensuring that parent/ carer experiences actively shape how services work.

How we will do this

1. Prioritise meaningful participation across the whole system

- Incorporate the participation ambitions of the Best Start plan into the Children and Education Directorate's emerging participation framework, ensuring lived experience shapes governance, service improvement and decision making, rather than operating as isolated initiatives.
- Take a system wide approach, aligned with national Family Hubs principles, that maps, connects and strengthens participation activity across Bristol, including gathering and acting upon the voice of children and young people.
- Create stronger, inclusive feedback mechanisms and community-based engagement that reflect the diversity of Bristol's families and shape service improvement.

2. Strengthen and expand parent-carer voice and experts by experience roles

- Develop locality-based Family Hub Parent Carer Forums that provide opportunities for parents to support other families, influence service design and access pathways into volunteering and employment (including parent and carer champion schemes and Community Learning partnerships).
- Ensure forums and participation opportunities reflect Bristol's diversity, with targeted engagement of seldom-heard parents and carers.
- Involve trained parents and carers as experts by experience in the co-delivery of interventions, peer groups, workshops and outreach, valuing lived experience alongside professional expertise.

- Create structured progression pathways from expert by experience roles into volunteering, paid community connector roles and wider workforce opportunities.

3. Co-produce accessible, family and community informed resources

- Work with families to co-produce materials that help parents understand early child development and their role in supporting it.
- Develop practical, play-based resources that equip families to promote talking, listening and understanding at home.
- Support families to embed language-building routines into daily life, such as mealtimes, chatting, playing, book sharing and outdoor experiences.
- Ensure all co-produced content reflects the diversity of Bristol's communities, drawing on lived experience to create culturally relevant and accessible resources.

We will know we are making a difference when:

- Participation structures strengthen and align; locality forums, parent/carer panels, maternity voice networks and community groups have strong representation from seldom heard groups and families report they feel listened to and influence decisions.
- More parents and carers progress from participation roles into champions, volunteering, community connector roles and wider employment pathways, supported by clear progression routes.
- Families report that co-produced materials help them better understand child development and feel more confident in supporting talking, listening and early language at home.
- Practical, play-based resources, reflecting the diversity of Bristol's communities, are well-used by families and support everyday language-building routines such as mealtimes, chatting, book sharing, outdoor play and family interactions.
- Co-designed activities lead to more inclusive spaces, well attended groups and stronger sense of belonging in Family Hubs and early years settings.



Reducing inequalities and removing barriers

Inequalities exist in Bristol, and we know they begin early in children’s lives. Some families face additional pressures, such as food insecurity, poor housing, limited access to green space, challenges with healthy weight, barriers to being active, and lower uptake of immunisations, that all shape a child’s health, wellbeing and development. Children growing up in poverty are also statistically less likely to experience the positive early learning and health outcomes that set the foundation for later success, including achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception.

This is a gap we cannot ignore; every child deserves the same chance to thrive. By working together across the system, we can change this.

This means:

- Using better shared data across our agencies so we can tailor the support on offer by neighbourhood, meeting the needs of the communities that need it most.
- Ensuring that families have access to the right information at the right time, so they are aware of their entitlements to childcare, routes into work and the support on offer through improved connections between services.
- Ensuring that early years providers, schools and the wider children’s workforce are trauma informed and inclusive in their practice and that settings and hubs are welcoming and culturally relevant.

- Ensuring clarity and consistency in high-quality early years provision across the city, so that children facing additional barriers and children with SEND are supported through strong professional development and effective multi-agency input.

How we will do this:

1. Improve awareness, access and engagement

- Ensure families know about the Family Hubs offer, antenatally and beyond through shared pathways and joint outreach with Family Hubs services.
- Strengthen digital communication by improving use of online platforms and social media, aligning websites and messaging across the directorate to reduce confusion and improve access.
- Align the Best Start in Life plan with the Bristol Future strategy to break the link between poverty and outcomes, with early literacy a clear priority. This will take a city-wide, whole-system commitment, targeting the areas of greatest need while working with all schools and communities.
- Expand access to community learning, with targeted provision in communities experiencing the greatest disadvantage, creating clear pathways into training, volunteering and employment.
- Ensure families can easily access non-stigmatising, preventative health information and support through Family Hubs and early years providers (e.g. Healthy Start, oral health, smoking cessation, immunisations).

2. Use data to identify and reduce inequalities

- Use data to understand who is and is not accessing the Best Start Family Hubs offer, addressing barriers and improving reach across communities.
- Use improved co-ordinated data to prioritise interventions and training in settings supporting the most vulnerable children, increasing support from Early Years education services and Family Hubs workforce through an enhanced offer. This includes increasing outreach with families to help them access support.
- Monitor communication and language outcomes by locality, deprivation index, ethnicity and SEND status to inform targeted support and commissioning; outreach will prioritise underserved populations.
- Strengthen the use of data to identify gaps in access for children with SEND, children needing additional support and other marginalised groups, working collaboratively across early years providers and schools to address gaps.

3. Strengthen access to early education and entitlements

- Implement a robust strategy to increase take up of the 15-hour early education entitlement (FEEE) for eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds, including:
 - Engaging families through birth registration, health visiting and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
 - Developing clear, targeted campaigns and parent-friendly guidance to support families with applications.

- Expand targeted support for families to understand and access early education entitlements, including practical help and local outreach.
- Ensure sufficiency and expansion plans prioritise communities with the greatest need, aligning with Family Hub data on unmet needs, so childcare availability supports the most disadvantaged children.

4. Support children not in early years education

- Develop a bespoke and inclusive offer for 2, 3 and 4 year olds not attending early years settings through the Family Hubs service, with a strong focus on early language, communication and learning through play.
- Deliver outreach communication programmes in libraries, community and faith venues.
- Ensure the offer is well understood across the children's workforce including Family Help and social care, VCFS and health partners so children have clear pathways into long lasting support.

5. Strengthen inclusion and support for early years providers and schools

- Ensure providers are fully supported to take up the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) and develop high quality, evidence informed guidance and tools to use EYPP effectively to promote inclusion and achievement.
- Improve access to early years providers for children requiring additional support and children with SEND, including workforce development (to include trauma informed practice), inclusion support and enabling adjustments within mainstream provision.

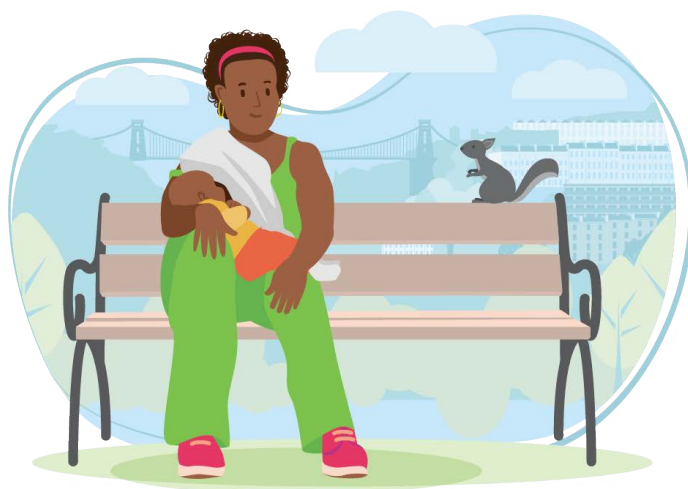
- Support providers to access and complete SENCO qualifications, increasing sector capability to meet needs earlier and enable more children to access their preferred placement.
- Speech and Language resources will be culturally responsive, translated where necessary and designed to be accessible for all.

6. Improve workforce skills to reduce inequalities

- Develop a comprehensive, accessible CPD offer for early years providers and the Family Hubs workforce on key principles of effective practice, including quality interactions, early language, trauma informed practice, and a range of key health related topics (nutrition, feeding, oral health and toileting).
- Strengthen practitioner understanding of early indicators of additional support needs, particularly where these may be linked to trauma, poverty or environmental stresses, and ensure clear, timely pathways into support.
- Strengthen practitioner awareness and confidence around neurodivergence and language development.
- Targeted interventions will prioritise children at risk of delay, including those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, those that have experienced trauma and adversity have English as an Additional Language (EAL), or emerging SEND needs.

We will know we are making a difference when:

- Cross agency data dashboards show increased reach in communities with the lowest access rates.
- Families in priority areas report fewer barriers to access through better communication, outreach, clearer websites and community-based support.
- Take up of FEEE entitlements and EYPP increases, particularly among under-represented groups.
- More children with barriers to achieving, receive earlier identification and quicker routes to support, with clearer pathways for providers and schools, and improved access to inclusive provision so that more children attend their preferred settings with qualified SENCOs and strong multi-agency involvement.
- Health related outcomes (e.g. breast feeding at 6–8 weeks, healthy weight at reception age, reduced tooth decay at 5 years old), improve for all children, particularly for those in more deprived areas of the city, and for marginalised groups.
- Community learning, work readiness support and childcare access routes help families overcome practical barriers around confidence, employment and entitlement navigation.



Using what works

Families should receive support that is proven to help and will genuinely make a difference. Our early years workforce, across all agencies, will use evidence-informed interventions and approaches to support children and families in the most effective way.

Parents and carers are the most important teachers in their children's lives, and we want to support them in this role, making the journey enjoyable, confident, and full of moments to share and celebrate.

This means:

- Ensuring evidenced based support is prioritised to empower families in supporting their children to start school confidently.
- Ensuring that the range of support on offer is appropriate and relevant for all children and families, that parents and carers have choice and that they empowered to try new things.
- Strengthening consistent messaging so families get clear and consistent advice from those people there to support them.
- Strengthening and sustain the early years workforce through supportive, relevant and high quality Continuous Professional Development (CPD) that focusses on building shared language, consistent terminology and common strategies across services.

How we will do this

1. Strengthen and Sustain the Early Years Workforce

- Implement a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy, led by the Recruitment and Retention Forum, to attract new practitioners and retain experienced staff.
- Provide high quality CPD tailored to sector needs, including leadership development through the National Professional Qualification for Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL), SEND and inclusion training, and funded qualifications such as Level 3 Early Years SENCo and Level 2 SEND. This CPD to be effectively delivered as per [Effective Professional Development](#).
- Through system leadership, early years quality improvement framework and the stronger practice hub, settings will be provided with quality improvement support.
- Increase workforce understanding of evidence-based interventions (EBIs) and the importance of early years practice in driving outcomes for 0–5s, including strengthening knowledge in reception classes.
- Stronger Practice Hub support wider workforce development, including Family Hubs and VCFS, in range of training including Getting it Right for Babies.



2. Embed multi-agency, evidence informed practice, consistently across the workforce

- Strengthen multidisciplinary support for early years providers and schools through collaboration across Family Hubs, Health Visiting, SaLT, Early Years education and the community sector.
- Align training, priorities and use of shared evidence-based interventions (EBIs) across sectors to ensure consistent approaches and outcomes, including the sharing of resources and toolkits to support home learning.
- Adopt a clear, citywide strategy for using core EBIs (e.g., EasyPeasy, Early Talk Boost, Wellcomm, PEEP, Incredible Years, Nurturing Programme, Togetherness) across Early Years settings and schools and Best Start Family Hubs.
- Target EBIs to families who will benefit most, including MESCH and Family Nurse Partnership, supported by community-based outreach, clear communication and practical support to access and engage.
- Expand co-facilitation models between settings and Family Hubs, including collaborative identification of families who need support, joint preparation and coordinated delivery and shared supervision.
- Grow the parenting and home-learning offer within Family Hubs, ensuring strong pathways for families most in need, including home visiting and stronger links with libraries and community resources.

3. Strengthen support for children requiring additional support and for children with SEND

- Improve access to early years providers for children with additional needs and SEND through evidenced based early identification pathways between agencies and by enhancing inclusion support.
- Improve and enhanced the delivery of evidenced based interventions relating to children needing additional support, including neurodiversity or those children who have experienced trauma, across providers and Family Hubs to remove barriers to children achieving and thriving.
- Ensure practitioners understand early indicators of SEND, particularly where linked to trauma, poverty or parenting stress and have clear, well-defined routes into support.
- Expand and promote SENCO qualification pathways across the sector to increase capacity and support more children to access their preferred provision.

4. Improve Speech, Language and Communication Outcomes

- Prioritise speech, language and communication needs through a city wide multi-disciplinary early language pathway, ensuring families understand how to support learning at home through everyday interactions.
- Support the development of a skilled workforce to include competence in early communication development, interaction strategies and inclusive language rich practice through evidenced based training (eg Hanen “Learning Language and Loving It”).

- The universal Speech and Language Therapy Service will provide training, resources and consultation to early years practitioners, Family Hubs and community groups to strengthen universal and targeted support across the system.

We will know we are making a difference when:

- Early years practitioners across all agencies demonstrate a shared language, consistent terminology and aligned approaches due to high-quality CPD and strengthened multi-agency working.
- Evidence-based interventions are used consistently and effectively across Bristol, with families who need them most accessing and benefiting from them.
- Multidisciplinary teams (Family Hubs, Health Visiting, SaLT, Early Years education and community partners) report stronger joint planning, improved information sharing and better coordination around children and families.
- Children’s speech, language and communication outcomes improve, supported by a skilled workforce confident in early interaction strategies and by families embedding language-building routines into daily life.
- Children requiring additional support are identified earlier, supported through clear pathways and able to access inclusive settings with practitioners confident in early identification and support.
- More children arrive at school showing stronger communication skills, improved confidence, and smoother transitions due to consistent support across home, community and early education providers.

Growing good practice and new ideas

Bristol already has many brilliant projects, pilots and community-led initiatives. We now need a more consistent way of understanding what has worked, why it has worked, and how we can build on it.

We want to create meaningful opportunities for communities to shape their own solutions. By working across sectors, we can be bold in growing good practice, testing new ideas and learning together about what has the greatest impact. Innovation shouldn’t remain in isolated pockets; it should benefit every family, especially those facing additional barriers or living in poverty.

This means:

- Developing a framework that supports our shared learning across sector and across the city.
- Scaling up successful pilots.
- Exploring opportunities for joint commissioning to ensure future sustainability of programmes and support joint accountability.
- Connecting community groups, libraries, museums, and health services.
- Testing out new approaches to strengthen transitions between early years and reception classes.

How we will do this

1. Identify What Works and Scaling Up Innovative Practice

- Develop a citywide framework for scaling innovation, using shared KPIs, common evaluation methods and clear baseline measures so outcomes can be tracked consistently across Bristol.
- Build a cross-sector community of practice to share inclusive pedagogy, curriculum development and learning from emerging and established innovations.
- Use Family Hubs grants strategically to grow community-led approaches, supporting VCFS organisations with strong reach into seldom-heard groups and aligning with Bristol's commitment to community ownership and coproduction.
- Clarify and strengthen the role of VCFS partners in connecting families to early support pathways, building on proven community connector and outreach models.
- Agree sustainability plans for all pilots so that successful, evidence-led models can be adopted and scaled, rather than lost when short-term funding ends.



2. Develop and Test High Value Pilots to Drive Improvement in GLD:

a) Transitions into Nursery and Reception

- Pilot a consistent citywide transitions framework and a Ready for Reception assessment, co-designed with schools, early years providers and families.
- Strengthen information sharing through consistent templates and by aligning the 2–2½ year review, Early Years Check and school admissions with Reception transition planning.
- Build a shared understanding of what matters most for school readiness across all practitioners.
- Strengthen relational transition practice by increasing nursery–school links, including teacher visits, joint visits, home visits and familiarisation sessions.
- Provide clear, accessible guidance and support for families, including co-produced resources and targeted Family Hub help for children not attending early years settings.
- Enhance the consistency of transition pathways for children with SEND and children needing additional support, with earlier enhanced planning, visual supports, predictable routines, key-person continuity, and close partnership with health, SaLT and Family Hubs.

b) Parenting and Home Learning

- Expand PEEP, and develop other bespoke delivery to support 2, 3 & 4 year olds not currently accessing early years provision, to support school readiness.
- Scale co-delivery models of intervention between SaLT and Family Hubs and Early Years practitioners linked to libraries and support for reading.

- Scale up targeted Easy Peasy delivery within Family Hubs and within early years settings as part of an enhanced offer.
- Develop a Home Learning support pathway for children and families identified as needing additional support at the earliest point.

c) Workforce Capacity and Flexibility

- Explore a WECA brokered Early Years staff bank, supporting stability and quality during workforce shortage periods.

d) Stronger Practice Hub Partnership

- Work with our regional Stronger Practice Hub, Bristol and Beyond, to evaluate and scale up effective early years interventions, embed implementation fidelity, and support scale-up regionally.

We will know we are making a difference when:

- Test-and-learn pilots are delivered effectively, with strong data baselines and evidence-based decisions on what to scale, adapt or stop.
- Community-led initiatives can grow more easily, supported by Family Hub grants and cross-sector partnerships.
- The early years system, workforce and community organisations co-create new opportunities for families to learn, connect and access support.
- Innovations lead to measurable improvements in children's development, early communication and language, and family engagement.
- Transitions into Reception feel clearer and more personalised, with stronger information sharing and joint planning between Reception teachers and early years providers.
- Children arrive at school more confident, settled and ready to learn, including smoother transitions and better inclusion for children with additional needs in their preferred settings.

6. Glossary

Antenatal: The period during pregnancy, before a baby is born.

ASQ3: A questionnaire that helps parents and carers understand how their child is developing. Includes questions about how children move, play, talk and interact with others.

Best Start Family Hub (BSFH): A local centre providing joined-up support for families from pregnancy through early childhood, including parenting support, early help services, and links to health and education.

Co-delivery: When professionals, parents, or different services, work together to deliver support or programmes.

Co-production: When services are designed, delivered or reviewed in partnership with families and communities, rather than developed solely by professionals.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD): Ongoing training and learning undertaken by staff to improve their skills and knowledge.

Cross-agency: Work carried out jointly between different organisations or services (e.g., health, education, social care).

Data dashboard: A visual summary of key data and performance indicators used to monitor progress.

Early Help: Support provided to families as soon as challenges emerge, to prevent problems from becoming more serious or requiring statutory intervention.

Early identification: Recognising concerns about a child's development or a family's needs as early as possible.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS): The national statutory framework that sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to five years in England.

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP): Additional government funding for early years providers to support disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds.

Early Years SENCO: A Special Educational Needs Coordinator working in an early years setting to support children with additional needs.

Evidence-Based Intervention (EBI): A programme or approach that has been tested and shown through research to have a positive impact.

Evidence-informed: Using the best available research, data and professional knowledge to guide decisions and practice.

Families First Programme: A national government programme focused on improving early help services and strengthening support to keep children safely within their families and communities.

Family Hubs: Local services bringing together support for families with children of all ages, including early years services, parenting support and health links.

Family Nurse Partnership (FNP): A specialist home visiting programme for young, first-time parents, delivered by trained nurses.

Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE):

Government-funded early education hours available for eligible two-, three- and four-year-olds.

Free School Meals (FSM): Free school meals are available to pupils in receipt of, or whose parents are in receipt of, one or more benefits such as universal credit (when yearly income does not exceed £7,400). The number of years a child has been eligible for free school meals is the best available marker for childhood poverty.

Good Level of Development (GLD):

A judgement based on early years foundation stage (EYFS) assessments completed by teachers at the end of the academic year in which a child turns 5. The early learning goals in the EYFS statutory framework are used to assess whether children have a good level of development.

Health Visiting Review (2–2½ year review):

A statutory health and development check carried out by health visitors when a child is between two and two-and-a-half years old.

Implementation fidelity: Delivering a programme in the way it was originally designed and tested.

Inclusion Support: Targeted assistance to help early years settings meet the needs of children with additional needs or disabilities.

Joint evaluation framework: A shared approach across organisations to measuring impact and outcomes.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Agreed measures used to assess progress against objectives.

Locality-based: Organised around specific neighbourhoods or local areas.

Mandatory visits: Required health visiting contacts with families during pregnancy and early childhood.

Multi-agency: Involving professionals from different services working together around a child or family.

Multi-disciplinary: Involving practitioners from different professional backgrounds contributing their expertise.

No wrong front door: An approach where families can seek help from any service and be guided to the right support without being turned away.

Paediatric Hub: A local health service providing specialist support for children's medical needs.

Participation framework: A structured approach to ensuring children, young people and families are involved in shaping services and decisions.

PEEP: PEEP Learning Together is an evidenced based programme that support the home learning environment. It helps parents and carers make the most of the learning and play opportunities in everyday life, to support children to become confident communicators and learners.

Perinatal mental health: Mental health support for parents during pregnancy and in the first year after birth.

Reception year: The first year of primary or infant school in England, typically for children aged four to five.

Referral: A formal request for a child or family to receive support from another service.

SaLT (Speech and Language Therapy):

Specialist support for children who have difficulties with speech, language or communication.

School readiness: Children have the potential to be prepared for starting school when families, early years providers and schools work together to support children’s development, including communication, social skills, emotional development and early learning behaviours.

Section 23 notification: A formal notification to the local authority when a child under compulsory school age is identified as having or likely to have special educational needs.

SENCO (Special Educational Needs

Coordinator): A designated practitioner responsible for coordinating support for children with special educational needs and disabilities within a setting.

SEND (Special Educational Needs and

Disabilities): A legal term describing children who need extra or different support because of a learning difficulty or disability.

Statutory services: Services that local authorities or health bodies are legally required to provide.

Sufficiency planning: Ensuring there are enough childcare and early education places available to meet local demand.

System-wide: Across all relevant organisations and services within a local area.

Targeted support: Additional help aimed at families or children identified as needing extra assistance.

Triage: A process of assessing needs to determine the most appropriate level of support.

VCFS (Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector): Charities, voluntary organisations, community groups and faith organisations that provide support outside statutory services.

