

Childcare Sufficiency Duty Report 2025 Review



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What is a Childcare Sufficiency Duty Report?

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that sufficient childcare places are available for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 to 14 or up to 18 for disabled children. The Childcare Sufficiency Duty Report gives details of the type and amount of childcare available, the quality of this provision and if the places available are sufficient for the local population.

This statutory duty is outlined in Sections 6 and 7 of the Childcare Act (2006) and associated statutory guidance.

The purpose of the Childcare Sufficiency Duty report is:

- to provide information to elected council members on how the Local Authority is meeting their statutory duty to ensure sufficient childcare places
- to provide information for parents and carers on the type, quality, affordability and accessibility of childcare available
- to provide information on the current and projected supply and demand of childcare

This report will provide information on the childcare provision available for:

- Children taking up funded early education and childcare places
- School aged children needing wraparound childcare (8am-6pm during term time)
- Children needing holiday care
- Children with special educational needs or disabilities
- Children from families in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit
- Children with parents who work irregular hours

The information presented in this Sufficiency Duty Report accurately reflects the current supply and demand for childcare places in Halton at the time of writing.

Note: Halton Borough Council does not guarantee the accuracy of this Sufficiency Duty Report, nor does the council accept any liability for any direct or indirect loss, damage or any other consequences arising from the use of the information in this document.

Rationale

Childcare, by design, is flexible to meet the needs of different families with a variety of needs and requirements. Families can choose childcare to meet their individual circumstances, this means variation. Families can make a choice of whether or not to access early education and childcare. They can choose the age of their child when they begin to access childcare. Families are able to choose how many hours childcare they wish to access and where they want to access childcare, this may be in a different part of Halton to where they live or in another Local Authority. All of these factors make it difficult to accurately calculate the number of children that will require childcare and the amount of childcare hours each child will require.

The childcare sector is similarly variable. Places available within settings can change depending upon the age and needs of children attending settings and the level of staffing available to meet the needs of children. These factors make precise forecasting challenging and mean that caveats must be applied to information within the Sufficiency Duty Report.

In order to assess the level of demand for childcare provision across all market segments, an analysis of population and uptake trends has been undertaken. PCT GP registration data is used to identify the population of 0-1 Year Olds, 2 Year Olds, 3 and 4 Year Olds and 5-10 Year Olds by ward. Termly headcount data and provider surveys are used to identify how many children in each age group are accessing a childcare place. This information is used to calculate the % of children in each age group who have accessed a childcare place in each of the past three years. The trend identified is used to inform estimates based on the current population of children. The data is analysed at ward, town and local authority level as the percentage of children accessing childcare can vary significantly between wards.

National Context - Government Childcare Expansion

The childcare sector continues to undergo significant change following the Chancellor's announcement of childcare reforms in the Spring Budget 2023. The reforms set out plans for two key policies, to expand funded childcare hours to include children of eligible working parents in England from the age of 9 months old, and for all primary aged children to be able to access wraparound care. This measure is intended to support increased parental participation in the labour market.

The final phase of the early years childcare expansion is scheduled for implementation in September 2025. By this time, eligible working parents of children aged 9 months to 4 years old will be entitled to up to 30 hours of funded childcare per week. 2 year olds from families receiving additional support (FRAS) will continue to be entitled to 15 hours per week, this was formerly known as funding for disadvantaged two-year-olds. The ambition for the wraparound programme is for all primary school age children to be able to access before and after school childcare by September 2026.

At present, the full scope and uptake from parents of these new entitlements remains unknown.

Within early years, the anticipated increase in demand for childcare places has broader implications beyond the physical capacity of current early years providers which will impact on the sufficiency of childcare places. It includes national challenges relating to the recruitment and training of new early years practitioners in the workforce, and the influence of other government initiatives—such as the expansion of school-based nurseries, and new flexibilities for childminders to operate on non- domestic premises.

As the implementation of the expanded childcare offer continues to unfold, the early years sector is facing transformation, offering new possibilities for models of childcare and delivery approaches.

About Halton – The Local Context

Halton Borough Council was created as a unitary authority in 1998 with the two largest settlements of Widnes and Runcorn facing each other across the River Mersey.

Halton is part of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. This is one of the few City Regions to have secured a Devolution Agreement with the Government, meaning decision making and resources around key priorities are managed locally.

Population & Demographics

The population of Halton is 128,964. 6.8% of the population is under 5 years of age. 16% of the population is between 5 and 14 years old.

The table below shows the projected population figures for 2025-2035 by age group.

Projected Year	All Ages	Age 0 - 4	Aged 5-9	Aged 10-14
2025	131,793	6,954	7,822	8,538
2026	132,154	6,922	7,674	8,505
2027	132,504	6,900	7,545	8,437
2028	132,845	6,882	7,451	8,292
2029	133,158	6,870	7,419	8,167
2030	133,472	6,867	7,378	8,018
2031	133,790	6,870	7,348	7,872
2032	134,084	6,884	7,327	7,744
2033	134,376	6,906	7,312	7,655
2034	134,666	6,938	7,302	7,624
2035	134,952	6,976	7,298	7,587

Source: ONS Population Projections, NOMIS.

The population of Halton experiences higher levels of deprivation than are found nationally. 30% of the population are living in areas of high deprivation. 22.3% of the working age population are on Universal Credit (LG Inform Nov 2024). The average yearly earnings of a Halton resident are £33318.

30.4% of 16-64 year olds are qualified to Level 4 and above, this is the lowest level in the Liverpool City Region. The average Attainment 8 score at GCSE in 2022/23 was 42.6, this is lower than the North West and England average.

96.5% of the population is White, and 97.3% speak English as their main language. 4.8% of people were born outside of the UK.

All data is sourced from the Halton Data Profile unless stated otherwise ([Local Area Profiles and data for Runcorn and Widnes](#)).

Early Years Childcare Provision in Halton

Early Years Childcare in Halton is provided by a range of provider types. This is similar to other Local Authority areas nationally. Day nurseries, pre-schools, childminders, maintained nursery schools and nursery classes within primary schools all offer early years childcare within Halton. This mix of provision types allows families to choose the provision which best meets the needs of their children and their family.

There are currently 115 Early Years Providers operating within Halton (January 2025). This comprises of 21 day nurseries, 19 pre-schools, 55 childminders, 3 maintained nursery schools and 17 nursery classes within primary schools.

The table below shows the type and location, by ward, of the Early Years provision across Halton.

Ward	Child-minder	Nursery School	Pre-School	Day Nursery	Nursery Class	Grand Total
Appleton	3		1	3	1	8
Bankfield	3		1	2	1	7
Beechwood & Heath			1	2		3
Birchfield	5			1		6
Bridgewater	3		1		2	6
Central & West Bank	2			2	2	6
Daresbury, Moore & Sandymoor	3		2	1		6
Ditton, Hale Village & Halebank	1		2		1	4
Farnworth	4			1		5
Grange	1			2		3
Halton Castle	4		1	1	3	9
Halton Lea	1		1	1	3	6
Halton View	3	1				4
Highfield		2			1	3
Hough Green	5		1	1	1	8
Mersey & Weston	4		4	3		11
Norton North	9		3			12
Norton South & Preston Brook	4		1	1	2	8
Grand Total	55	3	19	21	17	115

Early Years providers in Halton, January 2025

Provision for 0-1 Year Olds

Childcare provision for this age group is provided by day nurseries and childminders.

Since 1st September 2024 children aged 9 months and above with eligible working parents are entitled to 15 hours funded childcare (38 weeks per year). This is an equivalent of 570 hours per year. Children become eligible the term after they turn 9 months old; for example a child would be eligible on the 1st April if they turn 9 months old between 1st January and 31st March. From 1st September 2025 the funded hours entitlement for children aged 9 months and above with eligible working parents increases to 30 hours a week (38 weeks per year), 1140 hours per year.

Parents and carers can use the Childcare Choices website ([Homepage | Childcare Choices](#)) for information on eligibility for funded childcare hours.

The use of formal childcare will vary for this age group; some families will not require formal childcare, some will access some or all of their funded entitlement and some families will pay for all childcare or additional hours of childcare.

The introduction of funded childcare places for this age group is expected increase in demand. This is explored in further detail in the supply and demand analysis within this report.

Provision for 2 Year Olds

Childcare provision for this age group is provided by day nurseries, childminders and some pre-schools, nursery classes and maintained nursery schools.

2 year olds from families receiving additional support (FRAS) are eligible to 15 hours funded childcare for 38 weeks per year. This is an equivalent of 570 hours per year. Children become eligible the term after they turn 2 years old; for example a child would be eligible on the 1st April if they turn 2 years old between 1st January and 31st March.

Eligible 2-year-olds (FRAS) can claim up to 15 hours of funded early years provision if:

- the parent(s) claim one of the following benefits:
 - Income Support
 - income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
 - income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
 - Universal Credit – if a parent is entitled to Universal Credit and they have an annual net earned income equivalent to and not exceeding £15,400, assessed on up to three of the parent's most recent Universal Credit assessment periods
 - tax credits and they have an annual income of up to £16,190 before tax
 - the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit

- support under Part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (support for asylum seekers)
- the Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)
- the child has a statement of special educational needs made under section 324 of the Education Act 1996
- the child has an Education, Health and Care plan prepared under section 37 of the Children and Families Act 2014
- the child is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance under section 71 of the Social Security and Contributions and Benefits Act 1992
- the child is looked after by a Local Authority (under section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989) or by a Local Authority in Wales within the meaning given by section 74(1) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- the child is no longer looked after by a Local Authority as a result of an adoption order, a special guardianship order or a child arrangement order (within the meaning of section 8(1) of the Children Act 1989 or section 74(1) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014) which relates to either or both of the following:
 - with whom the child is to live
 - when the child is to live with any person

Since 1st April 2024 children aged 2 and above with eligible working parents are entitled to 15 hours funded childcare for 38 weeks per year. This is an equivalent of 570 hours per year. Children become eligible the term after they turn 2 years old; for example a child would be eligible on the 1st April if they turn 2 years old between 1st January and 31st March. From 1st September 2025 the funded hours entitlement for children aged 2 years and above with eligible working parents increases to 30 hours a week (38 weeks per year), 1140 hours per year.

Parents and carers can use the Childcare Choices website ([Homepage | Childcare Choices](#)) for information on eligibility for funded childcare hours.

The use of formal childcare will vary for this age group; some families will not require formal childcare, some will access some or all of their funded entitlement and some families will pay for all childcare or additional hours of childcare.

The introduction of funded childcare places for 2 year olds of working parents has increased the demand for childcare places for this age group. This is expected to increase further in September 2025 when 2 year olds of working parents become eligible for 30 hours a week for 38 weeks a year of funded entitlement. This is explored in further detail in the supply and demand analysis within this report.

Provision for 3-4 Year Olds

Childcare provision for this age group is provided by day nurseries, childminders, pre-schools, maintained nursery schools and nursery classes within primary schools.

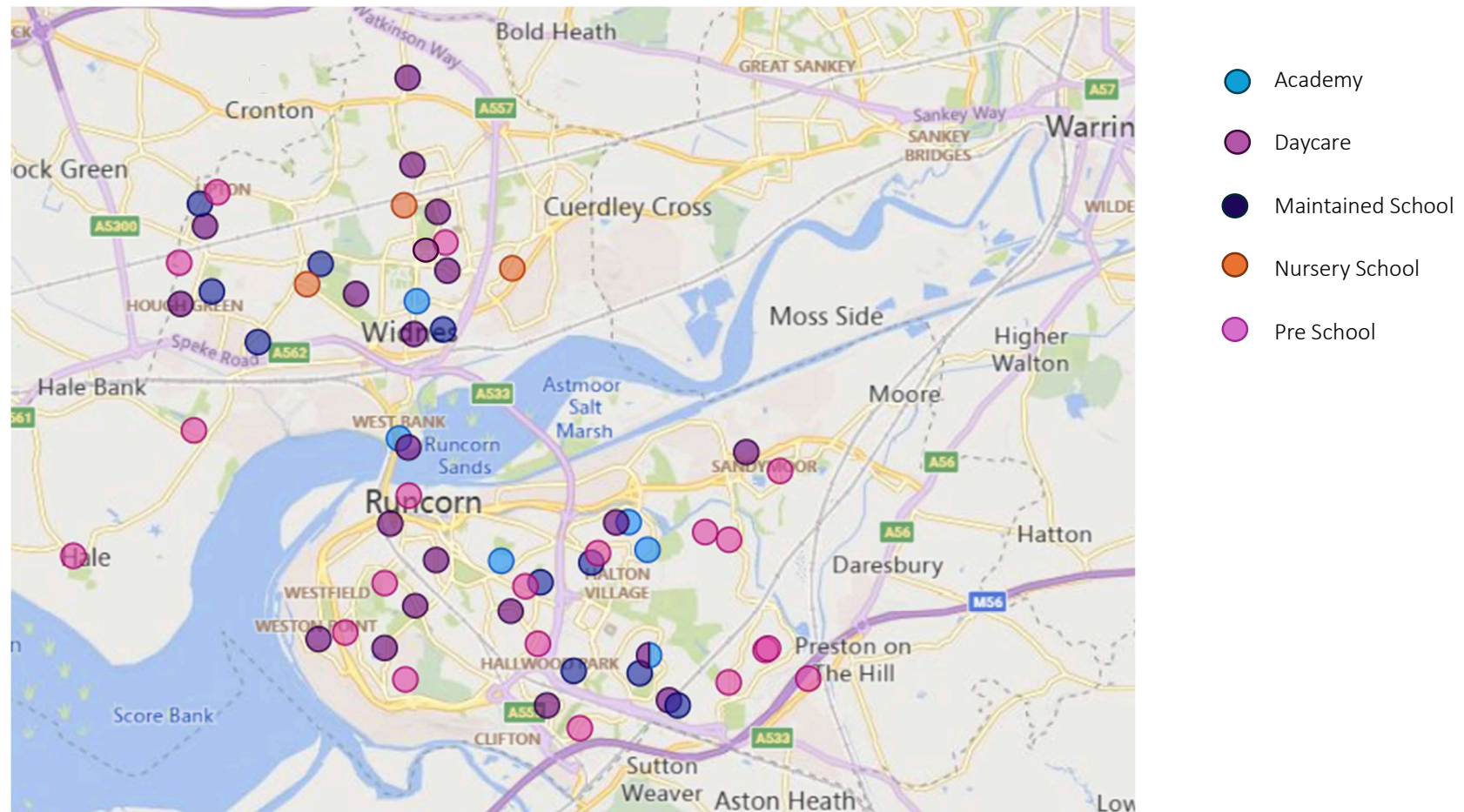
All children are entitled to the universal entitlement of 15 hours per week (38 weeks per year), equivalent to 570 hours per year from the term following the child's 3rd birthday until the child reaches compulsory school age

Children aged 3 & 4 with eligible working parents are entitled to 30 hours funded hours childcare for 38 weeks per year. This is an equivalent of 1140 hours per year.

Parents and carers can use the Childcare Choices website ([Homepage | Childcare Choices](#)) for information on eligibility for funded childcare hours.

Location of Childcare

The map below shows the location of Early Years provision in Halton.



Choice & Flexibility of Early Years Childcare

Across Halton there is a range of childcare options available to suit the differing needs of children and their families. Families are able to choose between home based provision provided by childminders, or group based provision provided by day nurseries, pre-schools, nursery schools and nursery classes within schools. Families can opt for provision which is open all year round e.g. day nurseries and childminders or term time only provision, provided by pre-schools, school based provision and some childminders. Some families may choose to access more than one type of provision.

Group Based Providers

60

Home Based Providers

55

Providers Open Year Round

76

Providers Open Term Time

39

The childcare market in Halton, in common with all Local Authority areas, is comprised of a variety of provision, with distinct characteristics. Each sector of the market is well represented across Halton.

Day Nurseries

21

Pre-Schools

24

Childminders

55

Nursery Schools

3

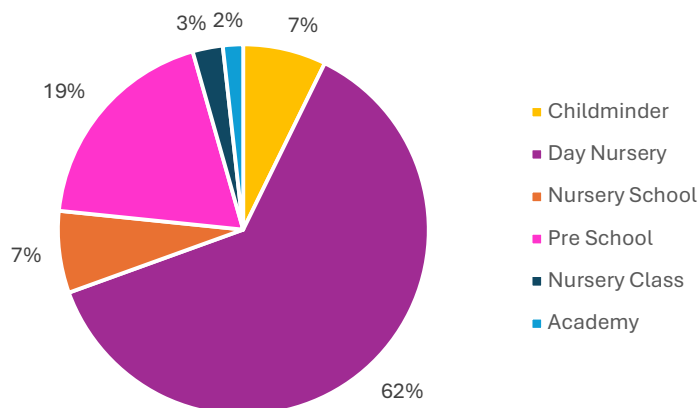
Nursery Classes – Maintained School

5

Nursery Classes- Academy

7

The chart below illustrates the percentage of children accessing a funded place by sector type.



Provider Opening Times	
6:00am	1
6:30am	1
7:00am	8
7:30am	30
7:45am	3
8:00am	26
8:15am	1
8:30am	9
8:45am	8
9:00am	11
9:30am	1

Provider Closing Times	
11:45am	2
2:30pm	1
3:00pm	10
3:15pm	9
3:45pm	1
4:00pm	2
4:30pm	1
5:00pm	9
5:15pm	1
5:30pm	20
5:45pm	1
6:00pm	38
7:00pm	1

Affordability of Childcare

The expansion of funded childcare, discussed elsewhere in this document, has reduced the costs of childcare for many families since the beginning of the expansion in April 2024. The increase in the number of funded hours available to 30 hours per week from September 2025 will reduced costs further.

National data shows that childcare costs for a part-time nursery place for a child aged 2 or under have reduced across England.

The table below using data from Coram Childcare Survey 2025 shows the national cost of 25 hours childcare after working parent entitlements have been taken into account (paying for 10 hours).

	2024	2025
Children Aged Under 2	£159.61	£70.51
Children Aged 2 Years	£153.69	£66.34

However, not all families are eligible for the working parent funded entitlements. For families to be eligible both parents (or sole parent in a lone parent household) must expect to earn equivalent to the National Minimum Wage for 16 hours a week but no more than £100,000 adjusted net income annually.

Childcare costs for paid hours vary by sector and by the age of the child. The average cost of provision in Halton is shown below . It should be noted that the costs shown for pre-schools reflect the shorter opening hours compared with day nurseries and childminders.

Day Nursery Provision Costs per day for non-funded hours	
0-1 Year Olds	£60.89
2 Year Olds	£59.92
3-4 Year Olds	£59.60

Pre School Provision Costs Per Day for non-funded hours	
2 Year Olds	£26.33
3-4 Year Olds	£26.33

Childminder Provision Costs per day for non-funded hours	
0-1 Year Olds	£46.36
2 Year Olds	£43.93
3-4 Year Olds	£43.07

In addition to the funded hours available to working parents the government offers additional forms of financial support to help families with the cost of childcare, including the childcare element of Universal Credit and Tax free childcare.

The different types of provision in Halton, allow greater accessibility for families to find a childcare provider that meets differing family circumstances, meaning parents can make a suitable choice for their child which matches their financial situation whether they need full day care, afterschool care, holiday care, or sessional care.

The Department for Education updated statutory guidance on how Early Years providers should deliver the funded early years entitlements, including clarification on the rules on additional charges, which came into effect on 1st April 2025. Any additional charges must be made clear and upfront to parents and must not be included as a condition for parents accessing entitlements for their child.

Halton Early Years team will work with providers proactively around their charging policies, offering audits and advice to ensure that the entitlements are free at the point of use and that families who cannot afford to pay are not excluded.

Provision for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Within Halton, provision for Early Years children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is delivered by all areas of the sector. In Summer 2024 there were no specialist Early Years places available in Halton. However, all childcare settings must have regard for the SEND code of practice and are required to be inclusive and be accessible to children with a range of needs.

Halton has seen an increase in children being identified as having Special Educational Needs in the Early Years. This trend is reflected nationally. It is important to note that some children's needs may not present until they are in school or they may not be known to any services until this point. As such, when assessing the sufficiency of childcare places for children with SEND it is necessary to use the information held by the Local Authority for children across Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 to identify the proportion of Early Years children with additional needs.

There is a direct correlation between disadvantage and SEND. Halton has higher levels of deprivation than are found nationally. In July 2024, 59.8% of Halton children accessing a universal childcare place were living in the top 30% of most deprived areas in the country. Locally, children affected by disadvantage are more likely to have Special Educational Needs.

The table below shows the % of children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 (November 2024) who are receiving support for Special Educational Needs.

	% No SEN	% EHCP	% SEN Support	% All SEN
Runcorn	80.80	5.52	13.68	19.20
Widnes	82.21	3.63	14.16	17.79
Halton	81.49	4.60	13.91	18.51

Data collected from Childcare Providers for sufficiency planning indicates the number of places available for Early Years children across Halton (Supply of Places for Early Years Children column below). Based on upon the percentage of children with SEND in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 the table below shows the number of places that should be available for children with SEND (Supply for Early Years children with SEND).

	Supply of Places for Early Years Children	Supply for Early Years children with SEND
Runcorn	2243	430
Widnes	2333	415
Halton	4576	845

The table below shows the % of children with SEND in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 who were not in a Halton Early Years setting in the summer term before starting school. The percentage of children with SEND who were not accessing an place in a Halton early years setting is lower than those children without SEND. This indicates that there are sufficient places for children with SEND and that inclusive places are available within the sector.

	All	No SEN	EHCP	SEN Support
Runcorn	11.36	12.04	5.96	10.37
Widnes	10.20	10.91	6.19	7.55
Halton	10.80	11.48	6.05	8.97

Of those children who are shown as not accessing a place within a Halton setting there will be a number of reason for this. Some children may be accessing a place outside of Halton, some parents may choose not to access a place, some may have recently moved to the area, some may not have found a place in a specific setting.

The table below shows the average hours attendance of SEN children compared with those without SEN. Children with SEND attend for slightly less hours per week than those without SEND. The reasons for this will vary depending on individual circumstances; including parental choice of hours attended and the hours available at a chosen setting. A likely factor is that not all families are entitled to 30 hours weekly funding . Families without two working parents (or one in a single parent household) are not entitled to the extended entitlement of an additional 15 hours per week (30 hours in total).

	Average Hours at Setting - All	Average Hours at Setting - No SEN	Average Hours at Setting - EHCP	Average Hours at Setting - SEN Support
Runcorn	23.48	24.09	21.31	21.22
Widnes	24.54	25.04	22.84	22.38
Halton	24.06	24.59	22.07	21.96

Support available to providers to help children with SEND access Early Years provision

Support is available for Early Years providers to help children with SEND to access their Early Years entitlements. Providers can access workshops and training for SENCOs and practitioners, they can receive guidance from a range of other professionals, including Health Professionals, Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language, and Specialist teachers.

Halton's Families Information Service (FIS) offers a Brokerage Service to assist parents in finding suitable childcare for children with disabilities or additional needs.

Funding Support for Children with SEND

There are several funding streams available to support children with SEND or developmental delay to help early years providers meet children's individual needs:

1. **Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF)**
SENIF can be applied for by providers to support children with SEND who are claiming Funded Early Years Entitlement (FEYE) from 9 months old until they reach compulsory school age. Funding is allocated at a monthly panel and can be used to enhance staff ratios, support practitioners in implementing specific interventions, and fund training, if appropriate. SENIF can be claimed up until the receipt of an Education, Health and Care plan for eligible children.
2. **Disability Access Funding (DAF)**
DAF is a one-off annual payment paid directly to the childcare provider, available to children who receive Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and are claiming FEYE. This funding is intended to help providers make reasonable adjustments to their settings and enhance inclusive capacity. Detailed eligibility criteria for DAF can be found in the DAF section on Halton's Local Offer website.
3. **Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)**
The Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) is additional funding designed to narrow the attainment gap between children from low-income families and their peers. This funding is provided to Early Years Providers for eligible children aged 9 months and above who are accessing FEYE. The payment is made termly to the provider, with the amount varying depending on the child's eligibility.

Quality of Provision

It is widely acknowledged that a high quality early education and care makes a positive difference to children's learning and is fundamental in shaping a child's future.

The **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework** outlines the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure children learn, develop, and are kept healthy and safe. It supports teaching and learning to equip children with the broad range of knowledge and skills necessary for future success in both school and life.

The **Halton Early Years Team** provides quality assurance to Early Years providers and facilitates access to high-quality training and signposts providers to further support when needed.

Ofsted is the regulator of quality in Early Years education. Through the inspection process, each childcare setting is awarded one of four grades: 'Outstanding,' 'Good,' 'Requires Improvement,' or 'Inadequate.' Some childminders may receive a 'Met' grade, which indicates that they did not have any early years children on roll at the time of the inspection.

	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Met	Not Met
Daycare	10.53	89.47	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Pre-School	5.26	94.74	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Childminders	10.00	78.00	2.00	0.00	10.00	0.00
Nursery Schools	33.33	66.67	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Maintained School	0.00	90.00	10.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Academy	0.00	83.33	16.67	0.00	0.00	0.00
All Early Years	8.41	84.11	2.80	0.00	4.67	0.00

% Ofsted grades – January 2025

Supply and Demand Analysis

Local Authorities are required by legislation, so far as is reasonably practicable, to secure sufficient childcare places. The following assessment uses local and national data sources to assess the current supply of childcare places across Halton and to assess the demand for those places. The analysis will include the current demand and the projected demand from September 2025 when the amount to funded childcare hours increases for children 9 months to 3 years old.

Data Sources & Methodology

- **Number of Children**
Population is derived from the NHS PCT GP Registrations data. This is updated three times a year.
- **Supply of Childcare & Vacancy Rates**
Number of childcare places is based upon data provided to us by childcare providers on a termly basis via Synergy online portal.
- **Funded Early Education**
The number of children accessing funded early education places is based on Early Years headcounts completed by providers on a termly basis.

Sufficiency of places is assessed using the population data and uptake information to assess demand for places and comparing this to the supply of places available identified from the information from childcare providers. An assessment is made for each age group and geographical area.

The assessment of sufficiency that follows is based upon the population, take up rates and places available in the Summer Term 2024. Summer term data is used as this is when demand for early education places is at its highest.

Sufficiency of Places for 0-1 Year Olds

Provision across Halton has contained sufficient places to meet the demand for childcare for 0-1 Year olds in Summer 2024. Provision for this age group was paid provision in Summer 2024. From September 2024 eligible working parents are entitled to 15 hours funded childcare for children between 9 and 23 months, this will rise to 30 hours funded childcare from September 2025. In Halton, children of this age group access 26 hours of childcare per week. The place sufficiency assessment is based upon the average weekly attendance.

There is a greater supply of places in Widnes, leading to more surplus places for this age group. In Widnes, at ward level, Ditton, Hale Village and Halebank, Halton View and Highfield show a deficit of places. This is because no day nursery provision exists within these wards. However, surplus places exist in their neighbouring wards; Central & West Bank, Farnworth and Appleton. In Runcorn, Bridgewater, Daresbury, Moore & Sandymoor, Norton North and Norton South experience a deficit of places whereas Beechwood & Heath, Grange and Mersey & Weston has surplus places.

	Demand	Supply	Sufficiency
Runcorn	237	274	37
Widnes	255	345	90
Halton	492	619	127

The occupancy rates below show that, in Summer 2024, there were vacant places for the 0-1 year old age group across Halton. Occupied and vacant places information is sought from providers on a termly basis. Not all providers choose to provide this information.

	% Occupancy
Runcorn	85%
Widnes	75%
Halton	80%

Projected Sufficiency of Places for 0-1 Year Olds – September 2025

From September 2025 children aged 9-23 months of working parents will be eligible for 30 hours free childcare. This is expected to increase the number of parents accessing a childcare place for children under 2 years old and is expected to increase the average number of hours childcare access by this age group.

Population data, demographic data and uptake trends have been used to produce projections of the likely demand for places from September 2025. This has been analysed alongside the latest local data on the supply of places from the Early Years sector.

Using the latest available data, a shortfall of places is predicted for this age group across Halton as a whole. The shortfall is expected to affect both Runcorn and Widnes to a similar extent. Provision for this age group comes from day nurseries and childminders, with day nurseries providing 84% of all funded places in January 2025. As such the supply of places is not distributed evenly throughout wards, some wards do not contain any day nurseries. Where this is the case provision is available in neighbouring wards.

	Projected Demand	Current Supply	Projected Shortfall/ Surplus
Runcorn	315	267	-48
Widnes	331	283	-48
Halton	646	550	-96

Sufficiency of Places for 2 Year Olds

Provision across Halton contained sufficient places to meet the demand for childcare for 2 Year olds in Summer 2024. Provision for this age group in Summer 2024 was a combination of paid childcare, funded 15 hour childcare entitlement for working parents and funded 15 hour childcare entitlement for families receiving additional support (FRAS). From September 2025 eligible working parents will be entitled to 30 hours free childcare per week. In Halton, children

of this age group access 21 hours of childcare per week. The place sufficiency assessment is based upon the average weekly attendance.

	Demand	Supply	Sufficiency
Runcorn	454	662	208
Widnes	414	711	297
Halton	868	1373	505

The occupancy rates below show that, in Summer 2024, there were vacant places for the 2 year old age group across Halton. Occupied and vacant places information is sought from providers on a termly basis. Not all providers choose to provide this information.

	% Occupancy
Runcorn	89%
Widnes	81%
Halton	85%

Projected Sufficiency of Places for 2 Year Olds – September 2025

From September 2025 children aged 2 years old of working parents will be eligible for 30 hours free childcare. This is expected to increase the number of parents accessing a childcare place for 2 years old and is expected to increase the average number of hours childcare access by this age group.

Population data, demographic data and uptake trends have been used to produce projections of the likely demand for places from September 2025. This has been analysed alongside the latest local data on the supply of places from the Early Years sector.

Using the latest available data, it is predicted that there will be sufficient places for this age group across Halton as a whole.

	Projected Demand	Current Supply	Projected Shortfall/ Surplus
Runcorn	585	612	27
Widnes	440	559	119
Halton	1025	1171	146

Sufficiency of Places for 3&4 Year Olds

Provision across Halton contained sufficient places to meet the demand for childcare for 3&4 Year olds in Summer 2024. Provision for this age group in Summer 2024 was a combination of paid childcare, funded 30 hour childcare entitlement for working parents and universal funded 15 hour childcare entitlement for all children. In Halton, children of this age group access 25 hours of childcare per week. The place sufficiency assessment is based upon the average weekly attendance.

	Demand	Supply	Sufficiency
Runcorn	1116	1307	191
Widnes	1018	1277	259
Halton	2134	2584	450

The occupancy rates below show that, in Summer 2024, there were vacant places for the 3&4 year old age group across Halton. Occupied and vacant places information is sought from providers on a termly basis. Not all providers choose to provide this information.

	% Occupancy
Runcorn	84%
Widnes	85%
Halton	84%

Term-Time Childcare for School Age Children

Ofsted allows before and after school providers to determine the number of children they provide care for, up to a maximum number, determined by the size of their premises. It is up to each provider, therefore, to ensure that they have the correct staff:child ratio in place for the ages of the children attending the setting. Instead of having a separate registration for school aged children, day nurseries and childminders have extended their provision to offer places to older children before and after school and during the holidays. Many schools also run breakfast and afterschool clubs, which are exempt from separate registration by Ofsted.

National Wraparound Programme

As part of the government's childcare expansion, the Department for Education have set out the ambition for all parents of primary school age children who need it to be able to access wraparound childcare from 8am-6pm during term time.

Wraparound childcare can be provided by:

- School-based provision, delivered by school;
- School-based provision, delivered by private provider;
- Cluster/hub model (on or off a school site);
- Childminders.

This programme began in September 2024 with the aim that provision will be available for all families by September 2026. Across Halton funding has been used to establish new provision where none previously existed, to expand the places available at existing provision to allow more families to access a place and to increase the number of hours provision offered each day to increase flexibility and accessibility for families.

Wraparound provision is paid for by parents and varies in cost. Parents who are eligible may be able to access help with childcare costs by using Tax-Free Childcare, the childcare element of Universal Credit or Learner Support whilst studying.

The table below show the percentage of mainstream primary schools where children can currently access onsite or offsite before school and after school childcare. The aim is for children attending all mainstream primary schools to have access to wraparound provision by September 2026.

	Before School	After School
Runcorn	100%	94%
Widnes	100%	100%
Halton	100%	96%

Holiday Childcare for School Age Children

The information about the number of children attending holiday care is not held by the local authority, it is therefore more difficult to understand the patterns of demand from parents.

The enquiries received by the Family Information Service from parents regarding holiday clubs do not indicate a sufficiency shortfall for school holiday provision.

Halton has 29 Ofsted registered providers for holiday care. This is available for varying age groups of school age children and children with SEND.

In addition to holiday clubs, parents have wider choices when considering their childcare options such as after school activity clubs and holiday sports clubs. Due to the specific focus of these clubs such as sports or dancing for children over the age of 8, they do not need to be registered or regulated by Ofsted, and are therefore not officially considered childcare. For parents this means they will not be able to use financial support such as Tax-free childcare when paying for these clubs.

Halton provides free activities and food to children and young people via the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme. This programme runs during the Easter, Summer & Christmas breaks. The activities aim to engage children aged between 4-17 years, eligibility criteria applies.

Sufficiency Strategy and Future Plans

The supply and demand analysis indicates there is likely to be a shortfall in childcare places, in some age ranges, as the expansion rolls out. This reflects the national picture of the childcare expansion. Data from Childcare Works (DfE delivery partner for the childcare expansion programme) indicates that 89,000 additional childcare places are needed and 45,000 additional workers are needed nationally to support the full rollout of the childcare expansion.

Halton is taking a proactive approach to address the potential shortfall in childcare places through the development of a sufficiency strategy. This approach focuses on both expanding the availability of childcare places and enhancing the flexibility and awareness of existing childcare options. In addition to developing capacity in the early years workforce.

The key components include;

The Childcare Expansion Capital Grant which has been targeted to create new places for 2 year olds and under, this specifically addresses gaps in provision and protects the sufficiency of places for eligible 2 year olds (FRAS) from the likely increase in demand on places from parents claiming working entitlements.

School Based Nurseries, in Halton 2 schools have been successfully awarded funding from the DfE School Based Nurseries Capital Grant. An increase in school based nurseries has the potential to create flexibility in the market to release more spaces for younger children in PVI settings.

Recruitment of childminders and raising awareness of new childminder flexibilities, childminders provide care for 2 year olds and under. The new flexibilities allow childminders to consider new models of delivery such as in a work from a community hall or school, enabling an increase to 4 people that can work together under a childminders registration.

Early Years workforce development This includes a wide promotion of government campaign resources, collaboration with job centres, holding recruitment fairs, Borough-wide targeted recruitment campaigns, engaging with key partners such as colleges to develop pathways for students entering the workforce, and promoting new career development opportunities for level 3 qualifications and graduate pathways.