

BEST START IN LIFE

Kirklees Plan

April 2026 – March 2029



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1. Kirklees Best Start in Life Plan – Executive Summary

The Kirklees Best Start in Life Plan 2026–2029 sets out a shared, system-wide approach to improving outcomes for children and their families. It is underpinned by a clear ambition to ensure every child in Kirklees has the best possible start in life, regardless of background, need or circumstance, and to increase the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of Reception.

Early childhood is a critical period for development, with experiences during pregnancy and the first five years shaping lifelong health, learning and wellbeing. While outcomes in Kirklees have improved, too many children still start school without the communication, language, literacy and mathematical foundations they need. Inequalities remain for disadvantaged children, children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), children with English as an Additional Language (EAL), and summer-born boys, particularly in communities facing higher levels of deprivation.

Our Best Start Plan translates national Best Start and Start for Life ambitions into a local, place-based response shaped by Kirklees communities. It aligns with the Government's ambition for 75% of children nationally to achieve GLD by 2028 and with key local strategies, including Our Kirklees Futures, the Kirklees Council Plan, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and SEND improvement priorities.

The Plan is structured around the three national pillars of better support for families, more accessible early education and childcare, and improved quality in early years and Reception. Central to the local approach is a strong focus on the first 1001 days, recognising the importance of early attachment, parental wellbeing and infant

health. Alongside this, improving school readiness is a core priority, strengthening communication, language, early literacy, independence and physical development.

Delivery will be driven through an integrated Families Together and Best Start Family Hub model, providing accessible, place-based support across Kirklees. Children and families will be supported through joined-up pathways spanning pregnancy, infancy, early years provision, health, SEND, family support and community services.

The Plan places strong emphasis on prevention, early identification and early intervention, improving use of developmental checks, shared data and evidence-based programmes to identify and respond to emerging needs as early as possible. This includes a clear commitment to improving outcomes for children with SEND and supporting effective transitions into early years settings and school.

A skilled, confident and sustainable workforce across early years, health and family support services is critical to success. The Plan prioritises workforce recruitment, retention, development and leadership capacity.

Strong governance, shared leadership and collective accountability underpin this Plan. Partners across the local authority, NHS, education and voluntary and community sector share responsibility for delivery, embedding co-production so that lived experience informs design, delivery and continuous improvement.

Through this shared commitment, Kirklees will reduce inequalities, improve early development and create the conditions for children to be safe, healthy, achieving, happy and attending – ensuring every child in Kirklees has the very best start in life.

2. Introduction

In Kirklees, we share a clear ambition and a strong collective vision to secure the very best outcomes for children and their families. We believe that the foundations laid in the earliest years shape children's lifelong health, learning and wellbeing, and that every child, regardless of background, need or circumstance, deserves the opportunity to thrive.

Through strong partnership working across education, health, care, the voluntary and community sector and with families themselves, we are committed to building an inclusive, preventative and high quality early support system. Our vision is rooted in reducing inequalities, strengthening family support and resilience, and ensuring that children enter school ready to learn, confident and well supported, giving every child in Kirklees the very best start in life.

Our Kirklees Best Start Plan sets out how we will deliver our ambition, alongside the national ambition, of 75% of five-year-olds achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028, by strengthening family services, making early education and childcare more accessible and affordable, and improving quality in early years and Reception.

Kirklees Best Start Plan translates national strategy into a local, place-based programme shaped by Kirklees families, partnerships and communities.

3. Interdependencies and Alignments

The Kirklees Best Start Plan is closely aligned with key local and national strategies to ensure a coordinated, whole-system approach to improving outcomes and safeguarding children from pre-birth through early childhood and beyond.

Delivery is intentionally integrated with the Families First Partnership Programme (FFPP), the Integrated Neighbourhood Health agenda, the Healthy Child Programme (HCP), the Kirklees SEND Partnership: SEND – The Big Plan, and national Early Years reforms.

Best Start in Life forms the early-years foundation of the Families Together model, with a focus on pregnancy to age five. Where wider and whole family needs or safeguarding concerns are identified, families transition seamlessly to other provisions within the Families Together Family Hubs and/or FFPP through shared pathways and multi-agency Team Around the Family working. This ensures early help, targeted support and statutory responses operate as a single continuum.

Alignment with the Integrated Neighbourhood Health agenda embeds Start for Life priorities into place-based delivery. Families Together and Best Start Family Hubs act as neighbourhood anchors, improving access to integrated health, early years and community services in areas of greatest need, and contribute to the reduction of health inequalities.

The Healthy Child Programme is a core delivery element within the Best Start system, providing universal reach through health visiting, developmental reviews and early identification of need. Integrated pathways between HCP provision, early years, SEND and family support services strengthen

safeguarding, increase uptake of checks such as ASQ at 2–2.5 years, and enable timely intervention when concerns emerge.

The Plan directly supports the Kirklees SEND Partnership: 'SEND – The Big Plan' by prioritising early identification, inclusive practice and smoother transitions into early years and school. Joint workforce development, shared pathways and co-production with families ensure SEND reforms are implemented consistently across universal and early help services.

Through alignment with national Early Years reform, the Best Start Plan ensures that increased access to childcare and early education is matched by a strong emphasis on quality, inclusion and safeguarding.

Together, these interdependencies create a coherent system focused on prevention, early identification and protection, ensuring children in Kirklees are safe, supported and able to thrive.



4. Vision and Ambition

Kirklees Best Start Plan aligns to the three pillars set out in Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy. It aims to increase the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of reception nationally to 75% by 2028, as part of the Governments Plan for Change:

- better support for families
- more accessible early education and childcare
- improving quality in early years including reception.

Ensuring that every child in Kirklees has the best start in life is a shared priority across our local partnership. Kirklees Best Start Plan sets out how we will deliver that ambition between April 2026 and March 2029.

In Kirklees, this mission aligns closely with our existing strategic commitments, including [Kirklees Council Plan, from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029](#), [Our Kirklees Futures | Kirklees Council](#) our approach to learning 2021- 2030. [Our Kirklees Future Executive Action Plan](#) sets out shared key actions in the first 1-3 years and has a shared action to prioritise early years. [Kirklees Council SEND - The Big Plan](#) outlines the work taking place to develop SEND services. [Kirklees Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022 - 2027](#) sets out the vision, values, ways of working and priorities for action by the Kirklees Partnership. [The Inclusive Communities Framework | Kirklees Council](#) sets out our commitment to work better with communities by changing how we do things. [The West Yorkshire strategic commissioning plan](#) sets out the Integrated Care Board's (ICB) vision for improving access to services, outcomes for our population and reducing health inequalities.

Together, these frameworks set out our ambition for children and families to be Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Happy and Attending, supported by an inclusive and sustainable system.

Our approach is rooted in a whole system commitment to prevention, early identification, inclusion and partnership working. To deliver measurable improvement in early childhood outcomes, we will work collaboratively across education, health, care, voluntary and community organisations, local integrated partnerships, midwifery and 0-19 services, early years providers, commissioned services, and families themselves. The plan has been co produced with these partners, including parents and carers, ensuring that lived experience shapes our priorities.

We will focus on breaking the link between background and outcomes, particularly for children living in communities with the highest levels of disadvantage. Our local challenge mirrors the national one: while outcomes are improving, too many children start school without the communication, language, literacy or mathematical foundations they need, and too many families face barriers in accessing support. The national strategy outlines major reforms to address these issues, including expanded Family Hubs, a strengthened Start for Life offer, more accessible childcare from nine months, and programmes to raise workforce quality and early years teaching.

Our Kirklees Best Start Plan describes how we will implement these reforms in a way that reflects the strengths and needs of our area. It sets out the outcomes we aim to achieve, the actions we will take together, and the impact

we expect for children and their families. Most importantly, it reflects our shared belief that every child in Kirklees deserves the very best start in life, and that achieving this requires whole system commitment, partnership and purposeful action.

Our vision is set out by ‘Our Kirklees Futures’: By 2030, Kirklees is a place where children, young people and learners have the best start in life and are safe, healthy, achieving, happy and attending... and our system is inclusive and sustainable.

This vision reflects our collective ambition to create the conditions which all children can thrive, regardless of background, need or circumstance and builds a system that works effectively with families, partners and communities to support the best possible outcomes from the very beginning.



5. Aims of the Kirklees Best Start Plan

Our Kirklees Best Start Plan aims to:

Reduce inequalities in early childhood outcomes

We will break the link between a child’s background and their future success by identifying and responding to the specific needs of babies, young children and families, particularly those living in communities facing the highest levels of disadvantage in Dewsbury (North Kirklees) and Huddersfield (South Kirklees).

Improve levels of child development by the end of Reception

We aim to increase the proportion of children in Kirklees achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) from 65.5% to 74.5% by 2028. This includes a strong focus on the current 3 and 4 year old cohort, particularly:

- literacy
- mathematics
- communication and language
- summer born boys
- children living in the 30% most deprived areas
- support for families who have children with SEND
- support for children with EAL.

Strengthen early years systems and support

We will embed a whole system approach that supports families early, improves access to high quality early years provision, and enables professionals and services to work together effectively across education, health, care, voluntary and community sectors.

Ensure the best possible start for every child

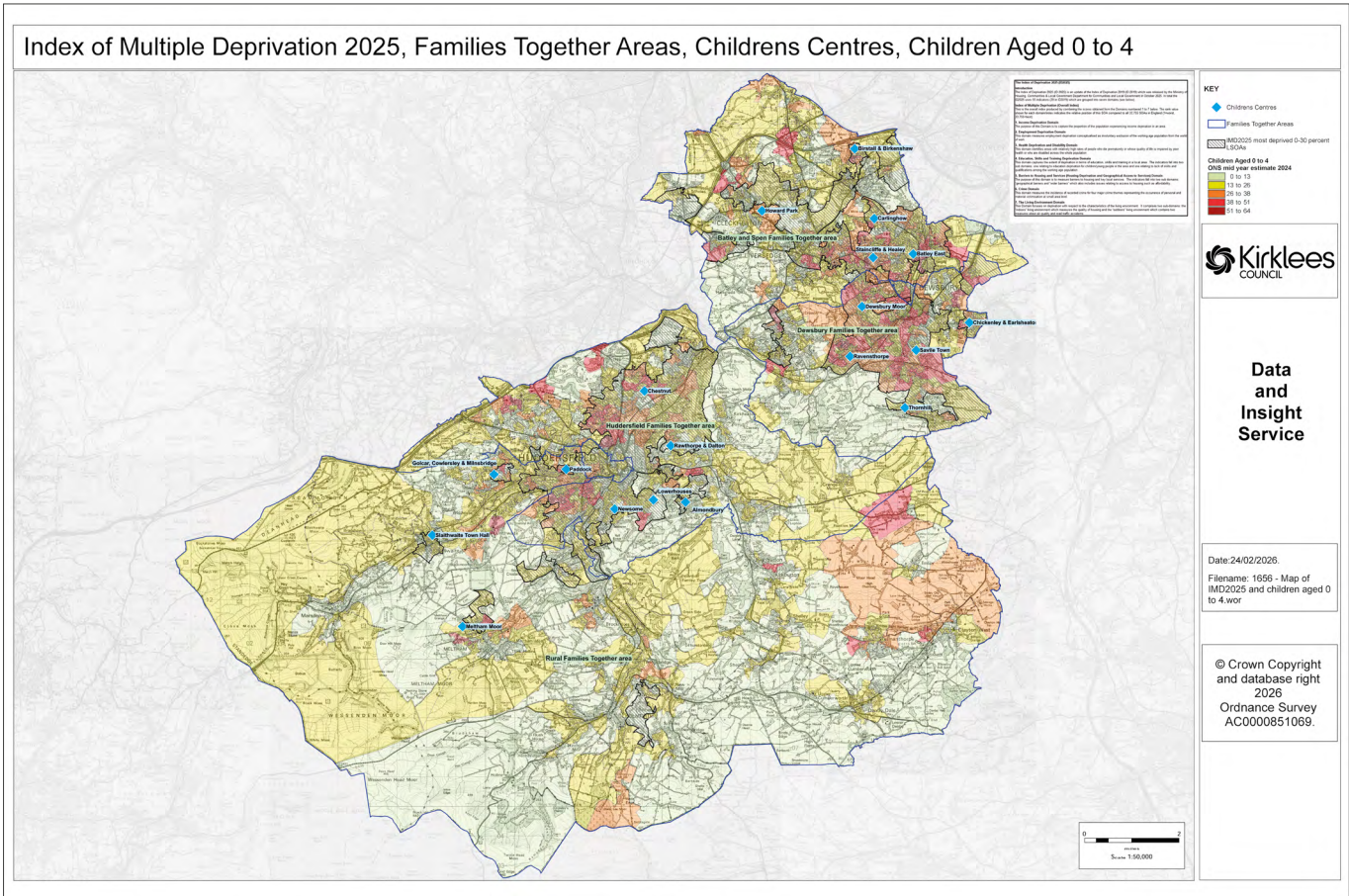
By building a cohesive, inclusive and sustainable early years system, we will create the conditions in which all children in Kirklees can thrive, reach their potential, and transition confidently into school.

6. Kirklees Context

The map below illustrates the four Hub geographies of Kirklees and highlights the areas experiencing the highest levels of deprivation, with the red shading indicating the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Levels of vulnerability are most pronounced in the Dewsbury and Mirfield geography, particularly within the Dewsbury locality, with further concentrations in Huddersfield and Batley and Spen, and additional smaller pockets within the Rural geography.

Our Families Together Family Hubs are strategically located across all four geographies, with the greatest concentration positioned within the areas of highest need to ensure accessible, place-based support for families.

Figure 1: Families Together Best Start Family Hub locations



The maps below identify the numbers of children under 5 living in each Families Together geography:

Figure 2: Batley and Spen Families Together Geography

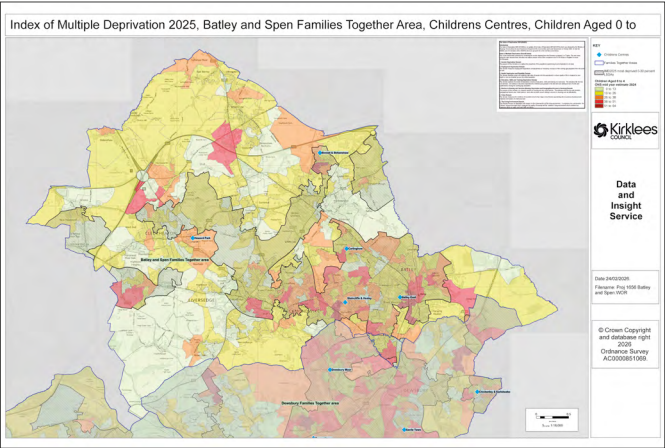


Figure 3: Dewsbury and Mirfield Families Together Geography

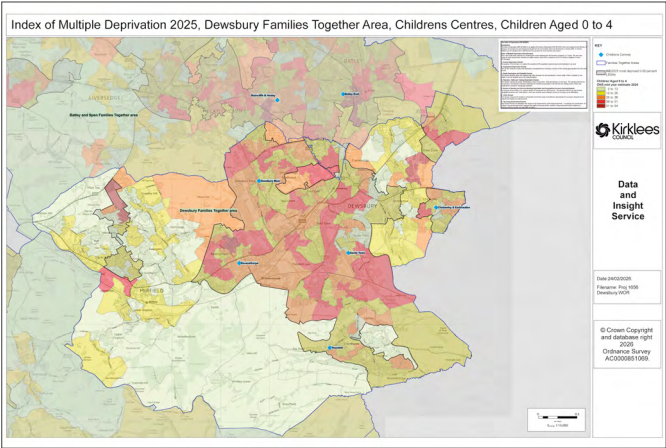


Figure 4: Huddersfield Families Together Geography

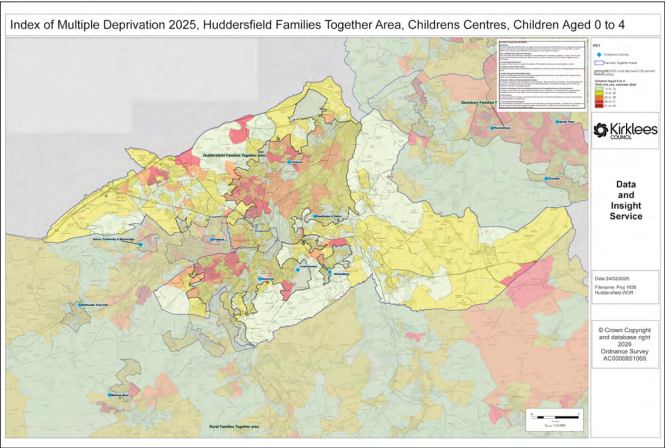
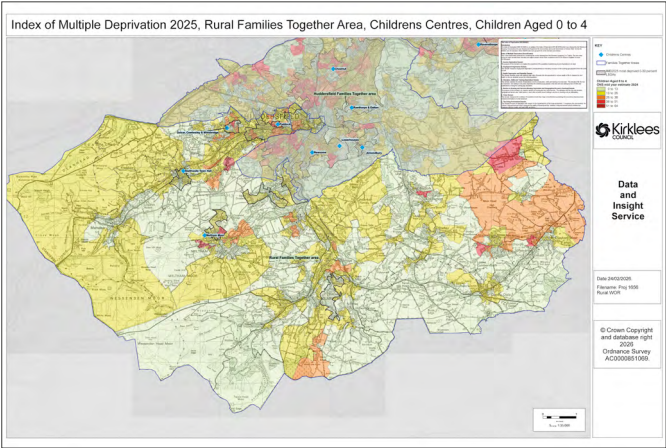


Figure 5: Rural Families Together Geography



Key

- Childrens Centres
- Families Together Areas
- IMD2025 most deprived 0-30% LSOAs

Children aged 0 to 4
ONS mid-year estimate 2024

- 0 to 13
- 13 to 26
- 26 to 38
- 38 to 51
- 51 to 64

Capita per square kilometre

Kirklees has approximately 108,969 children and young people aged 0–19 (including 30,352 aged 0–5). In the 2025 EYFSP cohort (4,943), 66.4% achieved a GLD. To reach the 2028 ambition of 74.5%, an estimated additional 390 children need to achieve GLD overall (including around 62 free school meal (FSM) eligible children). Gaps are most pronounced in communication, language and literacy and in mathematics.

Figure 6: Data highlights (EYFSP 2024/25)

Indicator	Kirklees	National /Target
GLD (overall)	66.4%	Target 74.5% by 2028
GLD (FSM)	50.5%	Target 58.2% by 2028
Cohort size	4,943	—
Children achieving GLD (count)	3,273	—
Additional children needed (overall)	390	to reach 74.5%
Additional children needed (FSM)	62	to reach 58.2%

6.1. Good level of development

The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) provides a key measure of children’s readiness for school at the end of Reception. In the 2024/25 cohort, **66.4% of children in Kirklees achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD)**. While this represents steady improvement over recent years, outcomes remain below the national average and significant gaps persist for key groups of children.

Performance overview

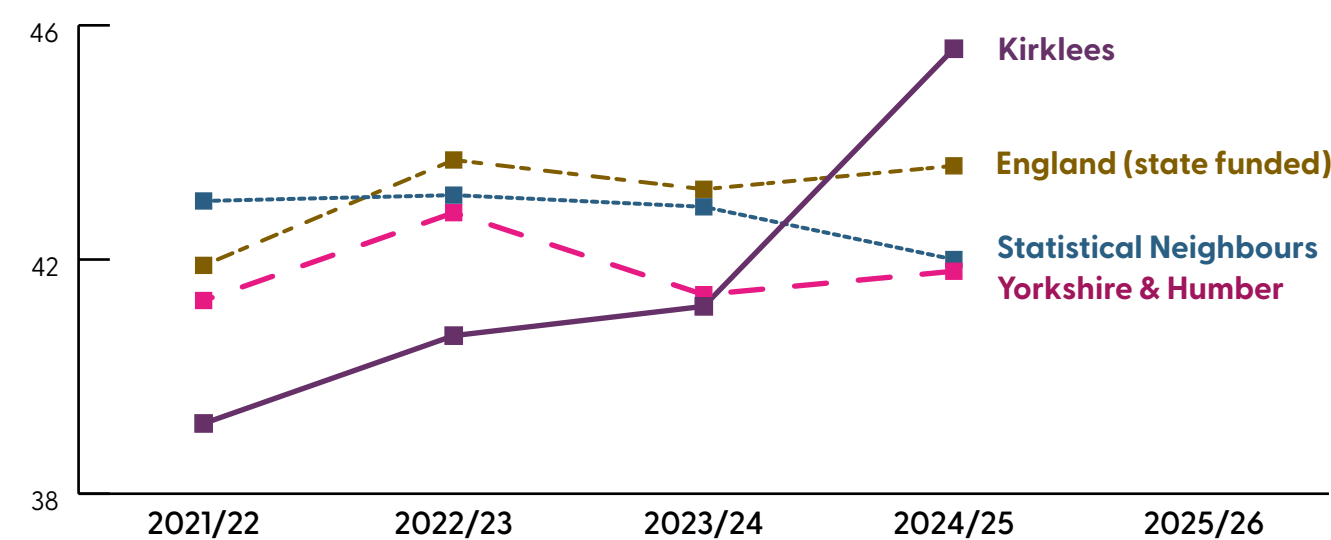
- 66.4% of children achieved GLD (3,273 of 4,943 pupils).
- 34% (1,670 children) did not achieve GLD, indicating areas where further improvement is needed.
- GLD outcomes have improved gradually since the pandemic—63% (2022), 65% (2023), 66% (2024 and 2025) but have not closed the gap with national performance.

Disadvantaged children

- Outcomes for disadvantaged children remain an area of concern:
- 50% of disadvantaged children in Kirklees attained GLD, compared with 51.4% nationally.
 - National and regional outcomes for this group declined by 0.3%, while Kirklees improved by 0.7%, narrowing the gap slightly.
 - The remaining gap between Kirklees and national performance for disadvantaged pupils is 1.9%.

The graph below details the % of FSM eligible boys, to avoid cohort variation, refer to the average three-year trend, which remains below the regional average. More recent data suggests an upward trajectory, with Kirklees performing above the regional average in 2024/25, indicating that the gap may be closing.

Figure 7: Trends – England, Yorkshire and the Humber, and Kirklees



Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- GLD outcomes for children receiving SEN Support are 20.6%, compared with 16% for all children locally, however, this represents a 2.1% decrease since last year
- Nationally, this group improved by 0.8%, highlighting the need for targeted local action to strengthen early identification and support
- Outcomes for children with SEND are below national figures in all areas, with the largest gaps in:
 - Communication, Language and Literacy (5.1%)
 - Literacy (4.6%)
 - Mathematics (5.1%)

Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL)

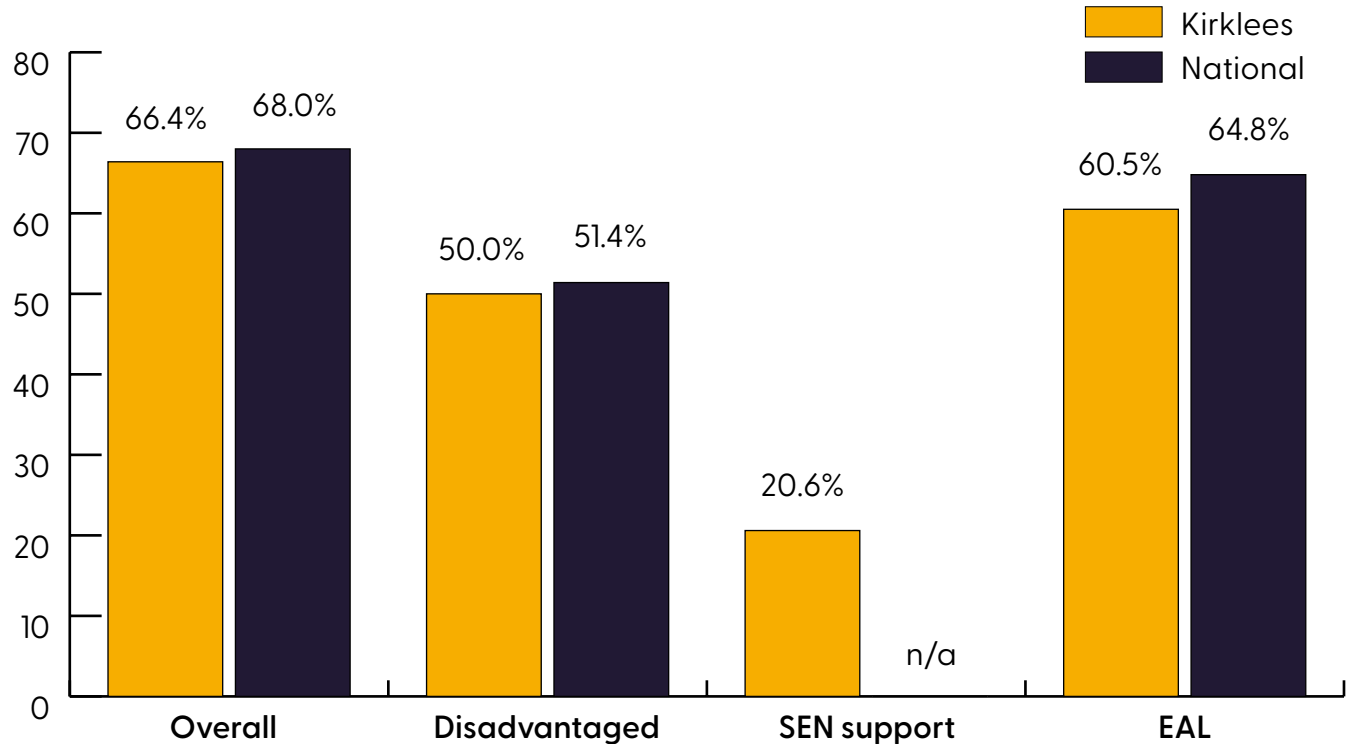
- Nationally, 64.8% of EAL children achieved GLD, compared with 60.5% in Kirklees
- Both national and local outcomes improved, with Kirklees showing a slightly stronger improvement (+1.3%, compared to +1.1% nationally)
- The gap between English-speaking and EAL children in Kirklees is 12.2%, compared with 9% nationally, indicating a need for enhanced support for language development
- National data shows EAL learners outperforming Kirklees pupils in key learning areas, particularly:
 - Communication, Language and Literacy
 - Physical Development
 - Mathematics.

Summary of need

The data highlights persistent inequalities across the early years, particularly for disadvantaged children, boys with free school meals status, those with SEND, and children with English as an Additional Language. The most significant gaps continue to be in communication, language and literacy, and mathematics – areas that are fundamental to future learning.

Improving GLD outcomes across all groups, and closing gaps with national performance, will require a whole-system response focused on early identification, high-quality early years provision, strong family support, and targeted interventions where children need them most.

Figure 8: GLD – Kirklees versus National (key groups)



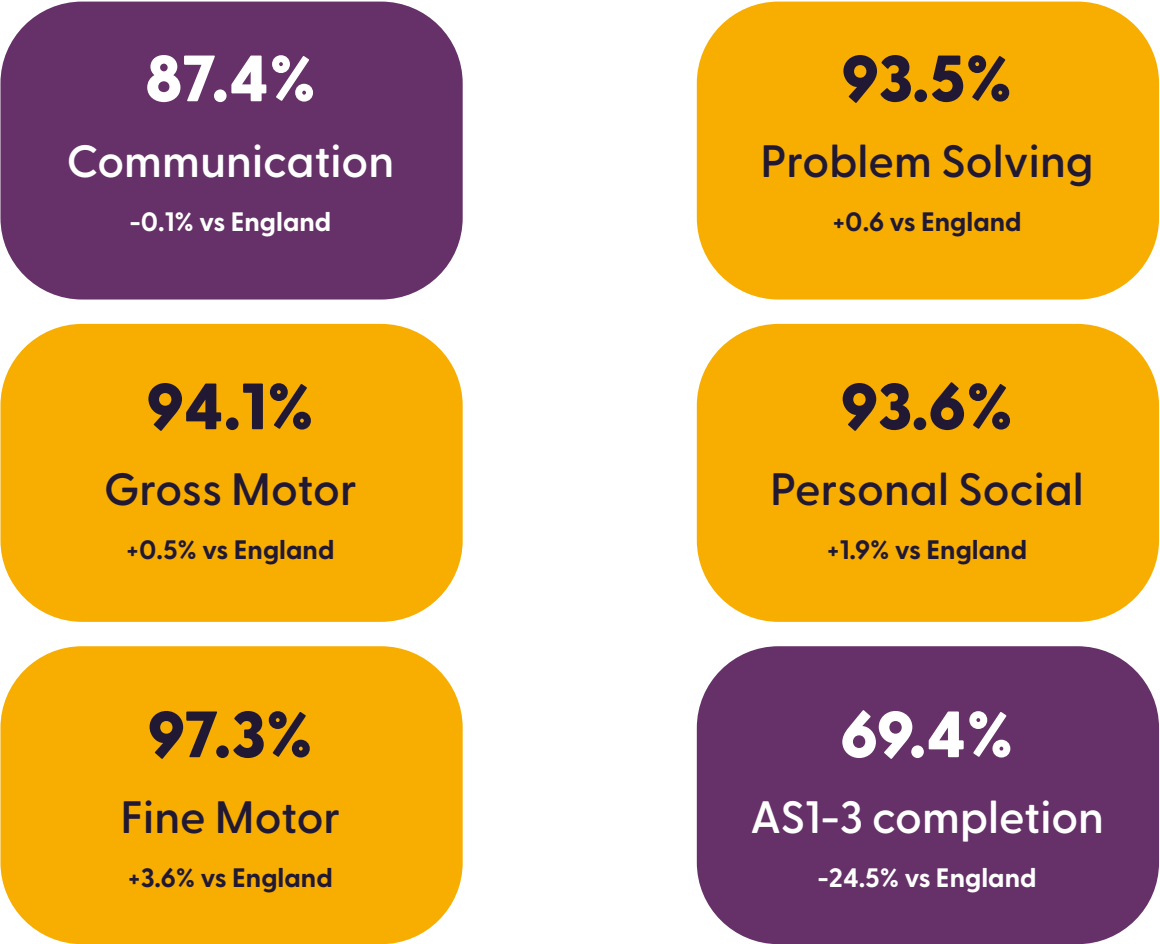
Data represented in the graph: Overall Kirklees 66.4% compared to 68.0% nationally; Disadvantaged Kirklees 50.0% compared to 51.4% nationally; SEN support Kirklees 20.6% (national data not available); EAL Kirklees 60.5% compared to 64.8% nationally.

6.2. ASQ Child Development Check at 2 to 2.5 years

The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) at the 2-to-2.5-year review provides an important early indication of children’s developmental progress across key areas: communication, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, problem solving and personal-social development.

In Kirklees, 82.1% of children were at or above expected levels across all areas, above the national average of 81.4%. However, only 69.4% of children received the ASQ-3 review, highlighting a local challenge around low coverage.

Performance across 2024/25 ASQ-3 domains:

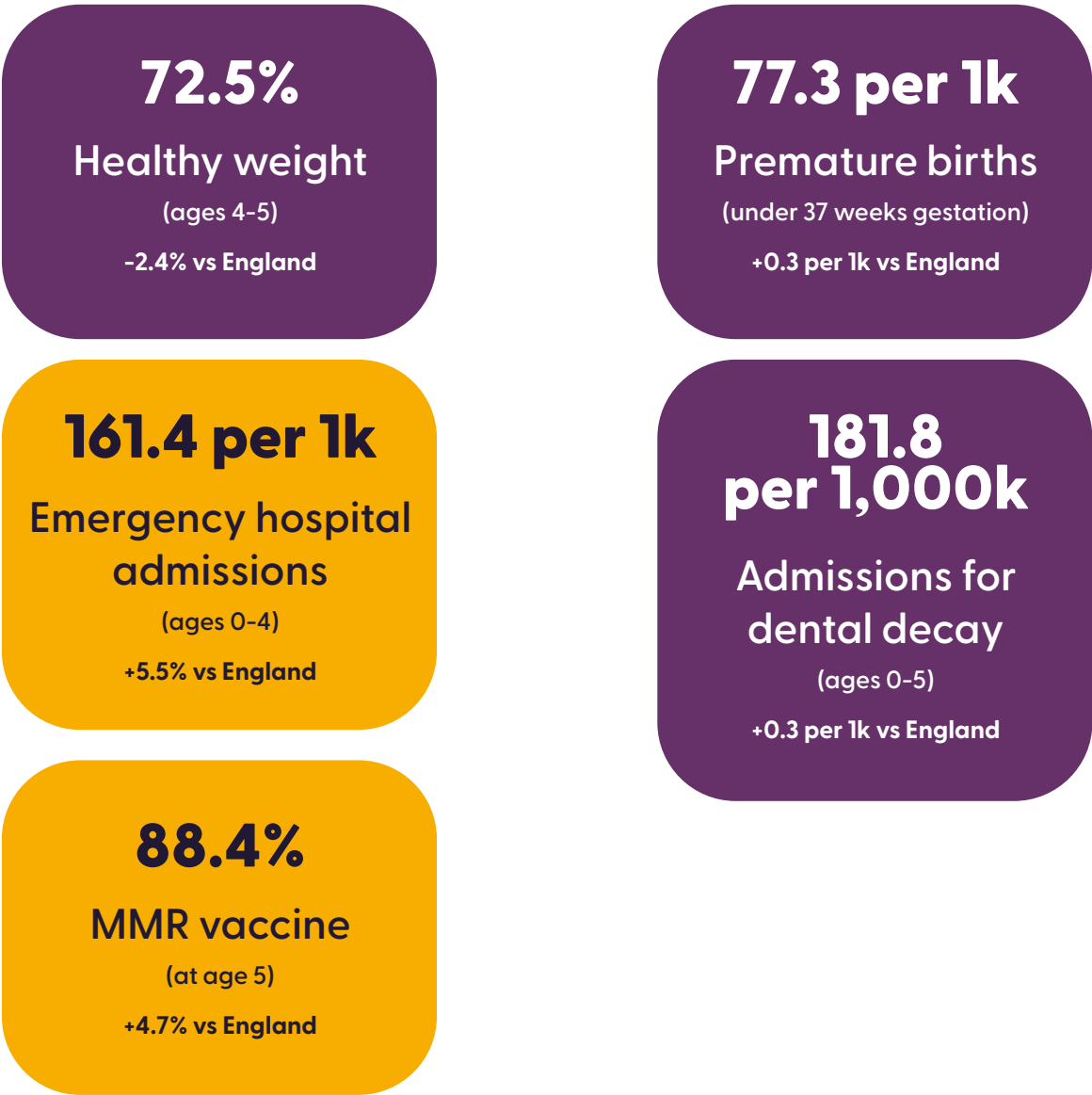


Improving ASQ-3 coverage is crucial for early identification of developmental needs and supports the wider Best Start in Life ambition to improve school readiness and child development outcomes.

6.3. Health data of our youngest children

Children’s early health and wellbeing are strong predictors of their future outcomes, influencing not only physical development but also learning, school readiness and long term life chances. Patterns of health service use in the early years also act as an important indicator of how well families can access the support they need.

In England, we know that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds experience poorer health outcomes from their earliest years, and local data reflects similar inequalities across Kirklees.



The proportion of children aged 4–5 in Kirklees achieving a healthy weight stood at **72.5% in 2024/25**, which is **2.4 percentage points below the England average**. This highlights an ongoing challenge around children’s physical health, nutrition, and access to healthy environments. With obesity risk disproportionately higher in communities experiencing deprivation, a targeted, locality based approach is essential to address the drivers of unhealthy weight in early childhood.

Emergency hospital admissions for children aged 0–4 years were **161.4 per 1,000 in 2024/25** **5.5% below the England average**. While this is positive overall, the rate remains high and reflects pressures related to respiratory infections, accidents, and other preventable conditions. Reducing hospital admissions requires strengthened prevention, improved family support, and consistent pathways across health, early years and community services.

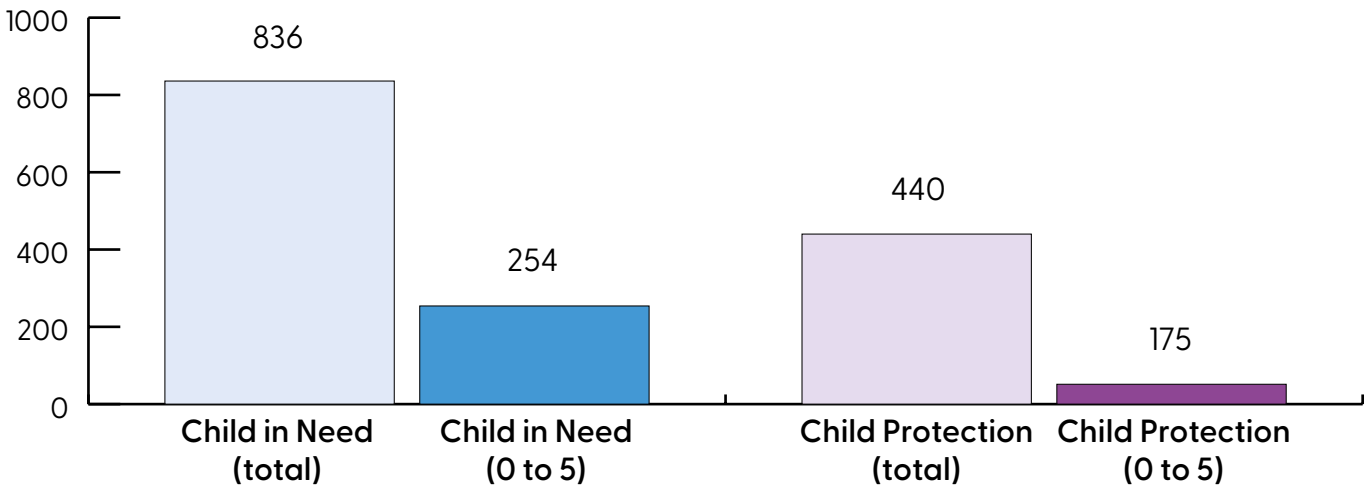
A quarter of five-year-old children in England have tooth decay. This figure can rise to 50% in deprived areas of the country. The most recent local data (2019) showed that 31.2% of 5-year-old children in Kirklees had decayed, missing or filled teeth compared to 23.4% in England overall.



6.4. Kirklees Safeguarding data: children aged 0-5

The chart below shows the number of open Child in Need and Child Protection cases in Kirklees, highlighting how many involve children aged 0–5 years.

Figure 9: Kirklees children in need and child protection (0-5 versus total)



As at February 2026, safeguarding data shows that a significant proportion of the children requiring statutory social care involvement in Kirklees are in their earliest years. Of the 836 open Child in Need (CiN) cases, 254 (30%) relate to children aged 0–5 years.

Similarly, within the 440 open Child Protection (CP) cases, 175 (40%) involve children aged 0–5 years.

This pattern illustrates two key issues. First, infants and young children are naturally more vulnerable and therefore more likely to be identified as needing support when concerns arise. Second, the high proportion of 0-5 year olds within statutory social care reflects the wider pressures faced by families during the early years, such as parental mental health concerns, domestic abuse, poverty, housing instability and challenges with early child development.

These patterns reinforce the importance of a strong, well connected early years and Start for Life system. Strengthening prevention, early help, integrated family support, and effective multi agency working is essential to reducing the number of young children requiring statutory intervention.

The chart reinforces the importance of strong early intervention, integrated support pathways and accessible family services across Kirklees. By strengthening preventative approaches and ensuring families receive the right help at the earliest stage, we can reduce the need for statutory intervention and improve outcomes for our youngest children.

7. Where Are We Now?

7.1. Better support for families

Here in Kirklees, we are committed to ensuring that families can access the right support at the right time and have developed our Families Together Family Hub model, a place based universal, integrated early support offer for children, young people and families aged 0-19yrs (up to 25 with SEND) whole family working.

Our Hubs benefit from strong, collaborative partnership working. Partners are highly engaged, communicate effectively and work collectively to ensure a coordinated approach to improving outcomes for children, young people and families.

The Families Together Family Hubs model

- Four geographies: Batley and Spen, Huddersfield, Rural, Dewsbury and Mirfield
- Four main Hubs: Dewsbury Moor, Slaithwaite Town Hall, Birstall and Birkenshaw, and Chestnut Centre, with additional 'spoke' Hub sites in each locality for local community delivery and accessibility. We also offer outreach support services via early years, schools and community settings.
- Key partners work together to plan, coordinate and deliver the Families Together Family Hubs offer that meets local need and population, to include midwifery clinics, health visiting and infant feeding support, delivery of parenting programmes, play and stay sessions, youth services, support for training and employment, reading friends, family play sessions, smoking cessation, sexual health support, SEND cuppa and chat sessions, perinatal mental health support groups and skills bootcamps.
- Families Together area partnerships commissioned to 4 VCSE sector providers who facilitate local networks including professionals, parents, recruit parent champions, family events, advice fairs and SEND events.
- Our Kirklees Parenting Together offers a range of evidence-based parenting interventions which strengthen relationships and attachment, improve children's behaviour, emotions and learning, boost parental confidence and support school readiness.
- The Best Start in Life programme interfaces closely with the Families First Partnership Programme (FFPP) through the Families Together Family Hubs model, providing a seamless, place based system of early help and whole family support. Best Start in Life focuses on pregnancy to age five, strengthening early childhood development, parenting, health and the home learning environment. When wider family needs are identified, families can be supported to access wider family help through the Families Together Family Hubs, enabling coordinated multi agency assessments, Team Around the Family planning and targeted whole family interventions.
- Kirklees Families Together interfaces with Community Plus and Libraries in Kirklees through an integrated, place based early support system. Community Plus provides relational early help, working within the same local geographies as the Families Together model to support families before issues escalate. Libraries, some co located in Families Together Family Hubs, contribute by supporting early literacy, offering universal early years sessions, and acting as accessible community spaces that extend the Best Start home learning and early language priorities. Together, these services strengthen prevention, widen access, and help reduce inequalities, forming a core part of the Best Start system.

- The Healthy Child Programme (HCP) in Kirklees is delivered through the 0-19 health services, including health visiting, infant feeding support, child development checks and targeted help for vulnerable families. These services continue to be delivered by Locala as part of the universal and targeted 0-5 health offer. HCP forms a core part of the Families Together model by delivering universal health visiting and early health support services through the Families Together model, enabling families to access health, wellbeing, parenting and early support through the same pathways across the four Family Hub geographies. Together, the Healthy Child Programme, Best Start in Life and Families Together create a whole-system prevention and early-intervention approach, ensuring families receive timely support that strengthens health, development and early childhood outcomes.

- Home-Start Kirklees is commissioned to provide three strands of intervention: direct support to families with young children, volunteering development and support, and partnership working. This aligns to the Families Together Family Hubs model, which brings services together from conception through to 19/25 years, offering help with parenting, emotional wellbeing and mental health, and early years support. Home-Start delivers relational, home-based support which complements Families Together's place-based early help system. The contract also aligns with the Best Start in Life strategy by strengthening the home learning environment, supporting parental confidence, identifying early developmental needs, and reducing inequalities. Home-Start's targeted family support, work with vulnerable groups, and volunteer-led capacity building directly contribute to Best Start priorities. Together, these frameworks reinforce a unified early support system that connects health, early years, community and voluntary services to improve outcomes for young children and their families in Kirklees.



7.2. More accessible early education and childcare

In Kirklees we had 90% take-up of Early Learning for 2-year-olds in Autumn 2025 which compares favourably to other LAs. This is underpinned by dedicated support which targets potentially eligible parents, helping them with applications and securing suitable childcare places, with 95-98% take-up of the universal 3-4-year-old entitlement.

The December 2025 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment concluded that:

- there are sufficient childcare places overall in Kirklees
- the average cost of childcare continues to increase
- the number of providers rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted remains high
- the number of childminders continues to decline
- the population of children under 5 continues to decline
- the population of primary-age children continues to decline
- take-up of universal early learning and childcare remains high.

Regarding the national expansion of the free early years entitlement for working parents, most areas have sufficient provision to meet demand. Some localised pressures were identified, but surrounding areas had surplus places. The situation remains under constant monitoring.

As of Summer 2025, 97% of 3-4-year-olds receiving SEN Support were accessing their full universal entitlement (15 hours) with 94% of children with an EHCP aged 3-4 were accessing their full 15-hour entitlement.

A childcare brokerage service is available for families and professionals where placement issues arise. Current data indicates no significant issues in securing places.

7.3. Improving quality in Early Years including Reception

Our Challenge and Support Strategy focuses our quality improvement work to those settings that need targeted support to meet the 'expected' grade (as a minimum) through Ofsted inspection.

Figure 10: Provider types meeting expected grades

Provider type	Percentage meeting expected grade	Percentage change from last term
Childminder	98%	0
Daycare PVI	98%	0
Providers registered for funding	96%	+3%

Our Quality Improvement Activity to support our PVI providers includes:

- comprehensive training programme informed by inspection findings and GLD data, with universal and bespoke in house support
- Early Years Development Board (EYDB) collaboration focused on improving outcomes, with a current emphasis on speech and language pathways
- workforce recruitment and retention plan, including partnerships with colleges, universities and Jobcentre Plus, and leadership development pathways
- two year old Quality Offer available to schools and settings, including audits, external reviews and training
- termly networks for owners and managers to share best practice and hear updates
- signposting to national offers such as SPH, National Literacy Trust and NDNA.
- delivery of the 'Think Equal' project across 94 settings (83 PVIs and 11 schools)

To complement the national RISE programme, the local authority offers targeted, bespoke support to schools with a 'less than good' judgment or those at risk of not meeting the expected EYFS grade. As of March 2026.

Figure 11: OFSTED ratings by type of school

Rating	Maintained school, No. (total 40)	Maintained school, %	Academy, No. (total 38)	Academy, %	Total, No.	Total, %
Good	30	75%	29	76%	59	75%
Outstanding	7	17.5%	3	8%	10	13%
RI	3	7.5%	6	16%	9	11%
Inadequate	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

Further Support for Schools includes:

- termly EYFS leadership networks to strengthen leadership practice
- access to the 2 year old QI package (audits, reviews, training)
- targeted training including use of the DfE 'Analysing Your FSP Data' tool and handwriting in EYFS
- signposting to RISE, Stronger Practice Hubs, literacy and numeracy hubs, and research schools.
- termly EYFSP support sessions focusing on accurate assessment and professional dialogue

7.4. Improving health outcomes

Preconception, maternal health and oral health in under 5's are key priorities within the Starting Well agenda. In relation to preconception, we are working with West Yorkshire Healthier Together to finalise the preconception content for the website. Community engagement through the women's health hub has generated positive feedback on the importance of preconception support.

To support maternal health the PRAMS project, delivered with Auntie Pam's, is providing online group support to help reduce smoking in pregnancy. Work on maternal obesity is being refreshed, expanding the multi-agency group across Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield, with a potential shift toward a wider preconception focus. A co-produced leaflet on gestational diabetes has been developed and is available in multiple languages.

To improve oral health in under 5's a total of 1,400 toothbrushing packs have been allocated to the 0-19 HCP team for distribution at the two-year developmental review, helping to encourage attendance and support oral-health discussions. Three oral-health training sessions have been delivered to health visitors, child-development practitioners and family-support workers.

We are delivering supervised daily toothbrushing schemes for young children, focused on the areas of greatest need, targeting 2-5-year-olds in early years settings (school nurseries, private nurseries, childminders and some schools) with a focus on the 10-30% most deprived wards in Kirklees.

Alongside supervised brushing, we have a community based oral health element, delivered through commissioned VCS partners including Fresh Futures and Home Start Kirklees who deliver community conversations and sessions with families, embed oral health messages into, Stay and Play groups, Family support in the home and through Community champions' work, distribute toothbrush and toothpaste packs to vulnerable families.

We deliver the suite of HENRY parenting programmes to include right from the start, healthy drinks for young children, let's get active, healthy teeth, starting solids, preparation for parenthood targeted at families with children aged 0-5yrs. For families with children aged 0-12 yrs we deliver understanding children's behaviour, eat well for less, fussy eating growing up, and for parents, looking after ourselves.



7.5. SEND and inclusion

Kirklees is committed to ensuring that children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) receive timely, inclusive and effective support from the earliest years, enabling every child to thrive and achieve their potential. SEND and inclusion are central to the Best Start in Life approach and are embedded across family support, health, early years education and community services.

A strong and well-established Early Years SEND workforce development offer supports private, voluntary and independent (PVI) providers and schools to meet children's needs confidently within mainstream settings. This combines nationally recognised accredited training, including Elklan, the Level 3 SENCO Award, Portage Workshops and Autism Education Trust training, alongside bespoke local programmes aligned to Kirklees priorities such as speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), supporting play for children with SEND, social, emotional and mental health (SEMH), and parent workshops.

Professional practice is strengthened through termly SENCO networks for both early years settings and schools, locality-based collaboration and access to specialist outreach services. Increased confidence in the graduated approach has improved early identification and resulted in more robust referrals and stronger evidence of early intervention.

High-quality information, advice and guidance for families is a core element of the SEND system in Kirklees. The Kirklees SEND Local Offer provides clear, accessible and up-to-date information about the support services, educational settings and activities available to children and young people with SEND across the borough. It supports families at every stage, from early concerns through to confirmed diagnosis, helping them to understand what support is available and how to access it.

Parents and carers are central to shaping inclusive practice. The Parents of Children with Additional Needs (PCAN) provides trusted information, advice and support for parents and carers, whether they are becoming aware that their child may have additional needs or are supporting a child with a confirmed diagnosis. PCAN plays a vital role in building parent confidence, strengthening co-production and ensuring lived experience informs service design, improvement and evaluation.

Targeted early intervention is further supported through a five-star Portage service, Portage Small Step Stay and Play sessions that reduce isolation and support engagement with early education, an established Reception Transition Fund to strengthen transitions into Reception, and the robust use of SEND Inclusion Fund (SENDIF) to enable inclusive places and timely provision.

Together, this integrated SEND and inclusion approach strengthens early identification, inclusive practice and outcomes for children with SEND and their families across Kirklees.

8. What Parents and Carers Told Us

8.1. Better support for families

- Parents want accessible, welcoming and relationship-based support delivered in trusted community settings.
- Families often rely on family, friends, informal networks and trusted professionals before accessing formal services.
- Trust, familiarity and ease of access are the strongest drivers of engagement.
- Parents want greater support for their own wellbeing and mental health, alongside practical advice on housing, finances and healthy living.
- Peer-to-peer support is highly valued for building confidence and reducing isolation, particularly in the early stages of parenting.
- Parents want joined-up support in one place rather than navigating multiple services.

8.2. More accessible early education and childcare

- Stay and Play sessions are highly valued as accessible, informal entry points into early support.
- Stay and Play helps reduce isolation and build confidence to engage with early education and childcare.
- Parents value low-pressure, inclusive and community-based activities that encourage early engagement.

8.3. SEND and inclusion

- Parents want clearer SEND information, guidance and early advice, particularly when concerns are emerging.
- Families value support that helps them understand how and when to access SEND support.
- Parent-led and peer-supported SEND approaches are strongly preferred.

8.4. Access, engagement and digital support

- Some parents value digital support, but face-to-face support through trusted relationships remains essential.
- Online information should complement, not replace, in-person services.
- Parents want clearer, simpler and more visible early help pathways.

Parent feedback strongly reinforces the Best Start approach. Services are most effective when they are relationship-based, place-based, inclusive and focused on early help.

The Families Together and Best Start Family Hub model provides a strong foundation to respond to these priorities and improve outcomes for children and families across Kirklees.

9. The Key Priorities for Delivery

The key priorities for delivery set out the focused actions our partnership must take to improve early childhood outcomes, particularly raising Good Level of Development (GLD), reducing inequalities, and strengthening early support through Families Together and Best Start Family Hubs in the areas and groups with the greatest need.

What outcomes do we need to improve?

- Kirklees aims to increase Good Level of Development from 66.4% to 74.5% by 2028, requiring 390 more children to achieve GLD.
- The largest development gaps are in communication, language, literacy, and mathematics, critical for future educational success.
- A priority for Kirklees is to focus on the first 1001 days to strengthen early attachment, parental wellbeing and infant health, laying the foundations for improved early development and increased achievement of a Good Level of Development at Reception.
- ASQ coverage at 2-2.5 years is 69.4%, below needed levels to identify developmental needs.
- Below-average healthy weight, high tooth decay rates, and preventable hospital admissions affect young children in Kirklees.
- There is workforce challenge in the early years sector around recruitment and retention of early years practitioners.

9.1. WHERE do we need to focus our service delivery?

Considering our priority neighbourhoods and communities experiencing the highest level of deprivation while maintaining a strong offer across Kirklees:

- Our priority geography is the Dewsbury locality with further concentrations of vulnerability in Huddersfield and Batley and Spen, as well as smaller pockets within the Rural geography.
- In the 2025 EYFSP cohort of 4953 children, 2546 are living in the bottom 30% deprivation postcodes.

9.2. WHO do we need to prioritise?

The priority groups for improvement are:

- Disadvantaged children, summer-born boys, children with SEND, and EAL learners.
- Of 836 open Child in Need (CIN) cases 254 are aged 0-5, of 440 Child Protection (CP) 175 are aged 0-5.

9.3. HOW – our shared local approach

This section sets out how partners across Kirklees will work together to deliver the Best Start in Life ambition. It describes the ways of working, structures and approaches that will enable effective implementation, sustained system changes and improved Good Level of Development outcomes.

Integrated Strategic Leadership

Improving outcomes for children requires shared ownership and accountability across the whole partnership, delivery will be supported by:

- strong, integrated leadership through shared governance arrangements, with clear accountability and agreed delivery workstreams aligned to Best Start priorities
- working as a whole system, bringing together early years, health, family support, SEND, safeguarding, mental health, and community services around shared outcomes
- developing and sustaining multidisciplinary Best Start teams, including maternity, health visiting, early years, family help, SEND, mental health and library services delivering a full early year's pathway from preconception and pregnancy, through infancy and early childhood to transition into reception
- focusing on long-term, sustainable system change by embedding prevention, early help and partnership working as core ways of working across Kirklees (THRIVE model).

Early Identification, Prevention, and Early Intervention

- Embed whole-family working, recognising the importance of parental wellbeing, relationships, and wider circumstances in supporting early child development.
- Strengthening early identification and early intervention within universal services, using evidence-based screening tools and clear referral pathways.
- Provide timely, evidence-based interventions including home learning environment programmes, parenting support and speech and language pathways.
- Strengthen the use of ASQ to identify children at risk of not reaching developmental outcomes.
- Improve outcomes for children with emerging or identified SEND, supporting effective transitions into early years and school settings.
- Support approaches to developing speech, language, and communication skills.

Strengthening workforce capacity, skills and sustainability

Investing in the workforce by:

- strengthening workforce recruitment, retention, and development across Early Years workforce
- investing in workforce development through multi-agency training, peer networks, trauma-informed practice, and shared learning focused on child development and attachment.

Improve accessibility, parent and community engagement

We want to improve access to services and ensure that experience informs delivery as well as design by:

- delivering place based accessible services targeted to where need is greatest from a network of Families Together buildings, Best Start Family Hubs, with outreach to community venues, including early years providers, schools, libraries, faith settings, community pharmacies, and GP practices
- parents and carers will be actively involved in shaping services, testing approaches, and driving continuous improvement
- strengthening the digital offer to improve access to information, advice, and support for families, ensuring clear and consistent pathways across early help, SEND and Best Start services. Digital tools will complement face-to-face provision to widen engagement, support early identification, and reduce barriers, while addressing digital exclusion

- we will consider EAL language and support strategies, using home language to support learning
- deliver outreach and working in the home services
- recruiting SEND trained professionals.

Improve data sharing and the better use of data

- Improve data sharing and intelligence through agreed information-sharing arrangements, shared outcomes frameworks and consistent monitoring and reporting.
- Use data to identify children and families at risk of falling behind, target support earlier and inform place-based decision making.
- Explore the possibility of implementing a single view data system.



10. Governance

We are committed to delivering a collaborative and connected system of support, built on strong principles of shared governance and collective accountability. This approach brings together partnership, operational, council strategic and political oversight to ensure alignment at every level.

While these elements are already in place, the detailed governance arrangements will be further developed and agreed over the coming weeks, reflecting our ongoing commitment to co-design and continuous improvement.

11. Next steps

Over the coming months we will develop our Best Start Family Hub and delivery Plan, an operational plan for 2026 to 2029 describing how we will deliver the Best Start Family Hub and Healthy Babies expectations set out in Part B of the Local Authority guidance.

We will align the Best Start Family Hub to our Families Together Hubs and services across 0-19/25 years, and we will further align to wider national reforms and policy improvements across children and family services.



Appendices

Appendix 1: Overview of the Early Learning Goals (ELG)

Communication and Language

Listening, Attention and Understanding

- Listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions when being read to and during whole class discussions and small group interactions.
- Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding.
- Hold conversation when engaged in back-and-forth exchanges with their teacher and peers.

Speaking

- Participate in small group, class and one-to-one discussions, offering their own ideas, using recently introduced vocabulary.
- Offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of recently introduced vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems when appropriate.
- Express their ideas and feelings about their experiences using full sentences, including use of past, present and future tenses and making use of conjunctions, with modelling and support from their teacher.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Self-Regulation

- Show an understanding of their own feelings and those of others, and begin to regulate their behaviour accordingly.
- Set and work towards simple goals, being able to wait for what they want and control their immediate impulses when appropriate.
- Give focused attention to what the teacher says, responding appropriately even when engaged in activity, and show an ability to follow instructions involving several ideas or actions.

Managing Self

- Be confident to try new activities and show independence, resilience and perseverance in the face of challenge.
- Explain the reasons for rules, know right from wrong and try to behave accordingly.

- Manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs, including dressing, going to the toilet and understanding the importance of healthy food choices.

Building Relationships

- Work and play cooperatively and take turns with others.
- Form positive attachments to adults and friendships with peers.
- Show sensitivity to their own and to others' needs.

Physical Development

Roots Motor Skills

- Negotiate space and obstacles safely, with consideration for themselves and others.
- Demonstrate strength, balance and coordination when playing.
- Move energetically, such as running, jumping, dancing, hopping, skipping and climbing.
- Hold a pencil effectively in preparation for fluent writing - using the tripod grip in almost all cases.
- Use a range of small tools, including scissors, paintbrushes and cutlery.
- Begin to show accuracy and care when drawing

Understanding the World

Past and Present

- Talk about the lives of the people around them and their roles in society.
- Know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Understand the past through settings, characters and events encountered in books read in class and storytelling.

People, Culture and Communities

- Describe their immediate environment using knowledge from observation, discussion, stories, non-fiction texts and maps.
- Know some similarities and differences between different religious and cultural communities in this

country, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.

- Explain some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries, drawing on knowledge from stories, non-fiction texts and (when appropriate) maps

The Natural World

- Explore the natural world around them, making observations and drawing pictures of animals and plants.
- Know some similarities and differences between the natural world around them and contrasting environments, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Understand some important processes and changes in the natural world around them, including the seasons and changing states of matter.

Expressive Arts and Design

Creating with Materials

- Safely use and explore a variety of materials, tools and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function.
- Share their creations, explaining the process they have used.
- Make use of props and materials when role playing characters in narratives and stories.

Being Imaginative and Expressive

- Invent, adapt and recount narratives and stories with peers and their teacher.
- Sing a range of well-known nursery rhymes and songs.

Perform songs, rhymes, poems and stories with others, and (when appropriate) try to move in time with music.

Mathematics

Number

- Have a deep understanding of number to 10, including the composition of each number.
- Subitise (recognise quantities without counting) up to 5.
- Automatically recall (without reference to rhymes, counting or other aids) number bonds up to 5 (including subtraction facts) and some number bonds to 10, including double facts.

Numerical Patterns

- Verbally count beyond 20, recognising the pattern of the counting system.
- Compare quantities up to 10 in different contexts, recognising when one quantity is greater than, less than or the same as the other quantity.
- Explore and represent patterns within numbers up to 10, including evens and odds, double facts and how quantities can be distributed equally.

Literacy

- Demonstrate understanding of what has been read to them by retelling stories and narratives using their own words and recently introduced vocabulary.
- Anticipate (where appropriate) key events in stories.
- Use and understand recently introduced vocabulary during discussions about stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems and during role play.
- Say a sound for each letter in the alphabet and at least 10 digraphs.
- Read words consistent with their phonic knowledge by sound-blending.
- Read aloud simple sentences and books that are consistent with their phonic knowledge, including some common exception words.
- Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.
- Spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters.
- Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others.

1

Families Together Gateway

2

3

Targeted Family Help

Families Together Support Services:

‘Best Start in Life’ and ‘Healthy Babies Universal Community-Based Support’



1001 Days

- Midwifery Clinics
- Perinatal Mental Health Support Groups
- Preparation for Parenthood
- Baby Sensory Sessions

0-19 Healthy Child Programme

- Infant Feeding & Baby Weigh Clinics
- Immunisation Bus
- Supervised tooth brushing schemes, distributing toothpaste/brush packs
- Wellness clinics, stop smoking

Home Learning Environment

- **PEEP Learning Together Programme** – helps parents/carers make the most of learning and play opportunities
- **Easy Peasy App** – transforms everyday parenting into playful learning experiences

Relationship Support

- Reducing Parental Conflict
- Relationship Matters

Parenting Support

Evidence-Based Parenting Programmes

- **HENRY** – Better understanding around healthy eating, importance of being active, improved emotional health and wellbeing
- **Triple P Online 0–12s** – strategies to reduce social and emotional, and behavioural issues
- **Triple P Online – Fearless** – get a better understanding of anxiety and fear, improve your relationship with your child
- **Triple P Online – Baby** – helps you to adjust to parenting a newborn
- **Triple P – Family Transitions** – designed for parents who are experiencing personal distress from separation or divorce
- **Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC)** – helps parents to support their children’s social, emotional and behavioural development.

Offer to Young People

- Crow Nest Adventure Park – Play
- Little Deer Wood – Outdoor Learning
- Schools Out (HAF)
- YPAT – SEND Young persons Activities

Family Hub Services

- Play and Stay Groups
- Family Play Sessions
- Baby Boutique
- Uniform Exchange
- Adult Learning – Success Centre
- Healthy Start
- Speech Stars
- Wellness Support, Healthy Lifestyles, stop smoking
- Reading Friends
- DWP Support for Work and Training
- ESOL
- Eaton Smiths Solicitors
- Craft Club/Lego Club

SEND

- PCAN Play and Stay
- PCAN Cuppa & Chat
- SEN Family Links – Nurturing programme promoting self-esteem, emotional health, resolving conflict, managing challenging behaviour
- CYGNET – programme to support parents/carers of children aged 5–18 who are autistic
- Triple P Stepping Stones – tailored for parents of children 0–12 with SEND
- Portage Stay and Play

VCSE Sector

- Families Together Area Partnerships
- Aunty Pams
- Fresh Futures
- Homestart
- Happy Moments
- LS2Y

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

- Kirklees Keep in Mind
- SAPuk Safe Space: 1 to 1 chat to improve mental health

Libraries

- Story & Rhyme Sessions
- Events for 0–3’s
- Boromi – Evidence based play libraries

Early Years Providers

Schools

GPs

Appendix 3: Further reading

- i. [Giving every child the best start in life - GOV.UK](#)
- ii. [Plan for Change - GOV.UK](#)
- iii. [Kirklees Council Plan, from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029](#)
- iv. [Our Kirklees Futures | Kirklees Council](#)
- v. [Our Kirklees Future Executive Action Plan](#)
- vi. [Kirklees Council: SEND - The Big Plan](#)
- vii. [Kirklees Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022 - 2027](#)
- viii. [Inclusive Communities Framework | Kirklees Council](#)
- ix. [West Yorkshire ICB Strategic Commissioning Plan](#)
- x. [Local Offer Home | Kirklees SEND Local Offer](#)



KEEPING CHILDREN IN KIRKLEES:

SAFE – HEALTHY – ACHIEVING – HAPPY – ATTENDING