

Childcare in schools for 2–4 year olds in Wigan and Bolton

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The experiences of childcare providers in developing school-based provision for 2–4 year olds in Wigan and Bolton: a preliminary report with emphasis on the early education offers and the experience of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)



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1. Introduction

Early education and childcare can bring a range of benefits. Early education and childcare can support child development and promote school readiness; it can provide social opportunities for children; it can support families (for example through providing childcare and promoting parental employment); it can help narrow the gaps between the most disadvantaged children and their peers; it can help identify and address children's needs at an early stage before they become more severe.

This report has been commissioned by the charity Family Action, which has been delivering a two-year project supporting a number of schools in London and the North West to develop and deliver flexible and affordable childcare for children aged 8–14, (8am to 6pm, 50 weeks a year). For more on this initiative – the 'Childcare in Schools' project – see (Lugton, 2015).

This report looks at the childcare that schools are delivering for children aged 2–4, providing additional context to the 'Childcare in Schools' project. It also provides additional background for Family Action's recent pilot on helping schools develop inclusive childcare. This research looks at the barriers to setting up childcare in schools for 2–4 year olds in Wigan and Bolton, with a focus on those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). It also looks at how these barriers can be overcome.

Childcare in schools for this age group can include a number of components such as the free early education offer for 3s and 4s, the (recently expanded) 2 year old offer, after-school clubs open to the under 5s, and the increased availability and flexibility of hours of early education made available by schools.

Successive Governments have recognised the importance of early education to promoting school readiness and since 1998 has expanded the provision of free early education. This is now available for 15 hours a week for 3 and 4 year olds, and the most disadvantaged 2 year olds for 38 weeks of the year.

September 2014 saw the expansion of the 2 year old offer to the 40 per cent most disadvantaged children (previously the most disadvantaged 20 per cent). Many local authorities have struggled to find sufficient provision in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector and some schools have started to provide early education for 2 year olds.

Given the recent expansion of the 2 year old offer and the prominence this has been given by Government and local authorities, this report primarily focuses on free early education for 2–4s. It is aimed at those who want to set up new childcare provision in their school for this age group (for instance, between the hours of 9–3) or to scale up their existing provision (for instance provide for a greater number of children, or to offer more hours – e.g. 8–6 wraparound care).

Lessons learned through this research may be usefully applied elsewhere – for instance, as the 2 year old offer continues to expand to accommodate the children made eligible in September 2014 and as schools continue to make their childcare more inclusive to children with SEND.

The Family and Childcare Trust believes that early education for 2–4 year olds can be very important for development, narrowing the gap between more disadvantaged children and their peers, supporting families with childcare and promoting parental employment.

We believe that schools are well placed to meet some of the demand for childcare for this group of young children, and would like to see them able to do so as effectively as possible. Schools have particular strengths in this area, such as access to highly-qualified staff, expertise in supporting school readiness, connections to the local authority and other organisations and being located in a convenient location for parents who have older children also attending the school.

We also believe that schools have an important role to play in addressing the significant gaps in the availability of childcare for children with SEND. These have been highlighted in the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Childcare for Disabled Children (Contact a Family et al., 2014).

Terminology

This report will take ‘childcare in schools’ to mean early education and care provided by a school in a nursery class (or through an attached nursery), for those not yet old enough to attend compulsory education/enter reception class. This can take a variety of forms, such as childcare in nursery school classes, in nurseries linked to schools, and in after-school clubs accessible to younger children and breakfast and holiday clubs. As mentioned above, this report is primarily focused on the free early education offers. For a report on childcare in schools for older children, see (Lugton, 2015).

It is important to note that schools need not deliver childcare for 2–4s directly themselves – they could arrange for an external provider to do so. Schools may, for example, have an external provider using a room on the school site to deliver childcare. Other arrangements are possible, for instance leasing out a building/part of the school site. Involving a third-party provider in the delivery of childcare in schools can sometimes be a helpful way of bringing in external expertise and established ways of working.

Barriers

The main barriers to setting up childcare in schools for 2–4s are constraints on funding, space and staff and competition from other strategic priorities. Without a commitment to deliver childcare, schools will not attempt to implement it, and without adequate resource, schools have extremely limited room for manoeuvre in any attempts to do so.

Resource challenges such as constraints on funding, space and staff can also deter a school from setting up childcare in the first place – if they do not believe that it is practicable to deliver this provision given the school’s resources then they are unlikely to pursue it. The 2 year old offer is particularly challenging from the

point of view of financial sustainability, with many schools finding it hard to cover the costs of delivering the provision with the funding available.

Less significant, but still common challenges include achieving and maintaining a high level of demand, outreach to eligible families, provision not being located near certain families and certain communities being harder to engage. SEND-specific issues include the demands of achieving effective inter-agency working, timely diagnoses and effectively engaging parents – who may well have anxieties or misconceptions about the subject – about their child’s needs.

Methodology

The research for this report was conducted in early 2015 and draws on a number of site visits, interviews, official statistics, figures from the Department for Education, other recent reports and desk research. Interviews were conducted with Family and Childcare Trust staff and consultants working on the 2 and 3–4 year old offers, local authority early years team staff in Wigan and Bolton, staff at St Bede Academy, and discussions with schools in the North West. The most recent Childcare Sufficiency Assessments (CSAs) for Wigan and Bolton were also examined as part of the research.

Legalities and regulations

Please note that the information in this paper concerning legalities and regulations is true as of March 2015, but may be subject to change. Please check the gov.uk website for up to date legislation and guidance.



2. Background

Historical background to childcare for 2–4s in schools

In England, children are required to start school in the September after their fourth birthday, although they will typically join a reception class before this (Department for Education, 2014). Before reception, childcare provided by schools is centred on the free early education offers for all 3–4 year olds and some 2 year olds.

This can be delivered through nursery classes in schools or in linked nurseries. Although this report looks at childcare in schools, it should be borne in mind that the free early education entitlement can also be taken up in a number of different settings for instance, private and voluntary sector providers (see below).

This entitlement can be traced back to when it was introduced, in a much more limited form, in 1998. In this year, local authorities were required by law to provide a free place at a maintained setting or PVI provider for 12.5 hours a week for 33 weeks a year, for all 4 year olds. This entitlement was expanded to all 3 year olds in 2004.

The duration of the entitlement was increased to 38 weeks a year in 2008 and in 2010 the number of hours available increased from 12.5 hours a week to 15. In 2012 parents were empowered to use these hours over two days if they wanted to (instead of spreading out the sessions over a longer period).

The free entitlement for 2 year olds was rolled out during this time. In 2006 the first pilot was announced to look at extending free nursery education to 2 year olds, and in 2013 an entitlement to 15 hours a week of free nursery education per week for 38 weeks a year was introduced for the most disadvantaged 20 per cent of 2 year olds. In September 2014, this was extended to the most disadvantaged 40 per cent of 2 year olds (based on income and certain other criteria such as looked after status or having a statement of special education needs).

In 2005, the Department for Education and Skills published 'Early Years Foundation Stage: Direction of Travel' (Department for Education and Skills, 2005), which set out a vision for a new framework to approach learning development and care in the early years. The aim was to improve outcomes for children, and to close the gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers. After a consultation in 2006, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was made compulsory for all registered early years providers and schools in 2008, and was updated in 2014.

Recent research – the benefits of quality early education

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project looked at a sample of children from across the country, and examined their progress between the ages of 3 and 7 (Sylva, et al., 2004). This ground-breaking study found that pre-school education could help give the most disadvantaged children in particular a better start to primary school. The research also suggested that specialist

support at this time, particularly for language and pre-reading skills, was effective for helping children for whom English was an additional language (EAL).

This suggests that early education can help break patterns of social disadvantage and promote more inclusion among disadvantaged children in schools, and can be seen as a form of early intervention. The quality of provision was found to be a key component of achieving these outcomes.

The National Audit Office's 2004 report emphasised the importance of the early years for child development and the importance of quality. It stressed the role that early education has for disadvantaged groups such as children with special educational needs or from ethnic minorities, and the importance of early education for the government's welfare to work policies (National Audit Office, 2004). For a more recent report that looks at disadvantaged families accessing early education, see (Ben-Galim, 2011).

The most current research on quality for children under 3 gives an overview of recent evidence, examines what quality consists of and the impact it can have. (Mathers, et al., 2014). This report emphasised the importance of qualified staff and continued training for professionals working in the early years. It also argued that there is a need for the government to develop a new approach to quality improvement in the early years sector that combines local authorities and those in the sector.

Current use of early education and childcare for 2–4s

The Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents found that 89 per cent of parents of 3 and 4 year olds had received government-funded early education (79 per cent for 3 year olds and 98 per cent for 4 year olds)¹. Among those who were not receiving any free early education, almost 30 per cent (37 per cent) were unaware of the entitlement (Huskinson, et al., 2014). Across England in November 2014, 60 per cent of children eligible for the 2 year old offer were taking up a place (Rutter, 2015).

Just over 60 per cent (62 per cent) of parents of children aged 0–4 accessed childcare to allow them to work, look for work or study. Almost as common a reason was child development or for the child's enjoyment (57 per cent). One in four (25 per cent) children aged 0–4 who were accessing pre-school childcare did so because of concerns related to parental time (for example to allow their parents to do domestic activities or socialise).

The same survey gives us figures for childcare for children aged 0–2. Although this is not directly applicable to the 2 year old offer (2 year olds are only a section of those in the 0–2 age bracket, and the 2 year old offer does not cover all 2 year olds), it can be taken as indicating some general issues for the 2 year old offer.

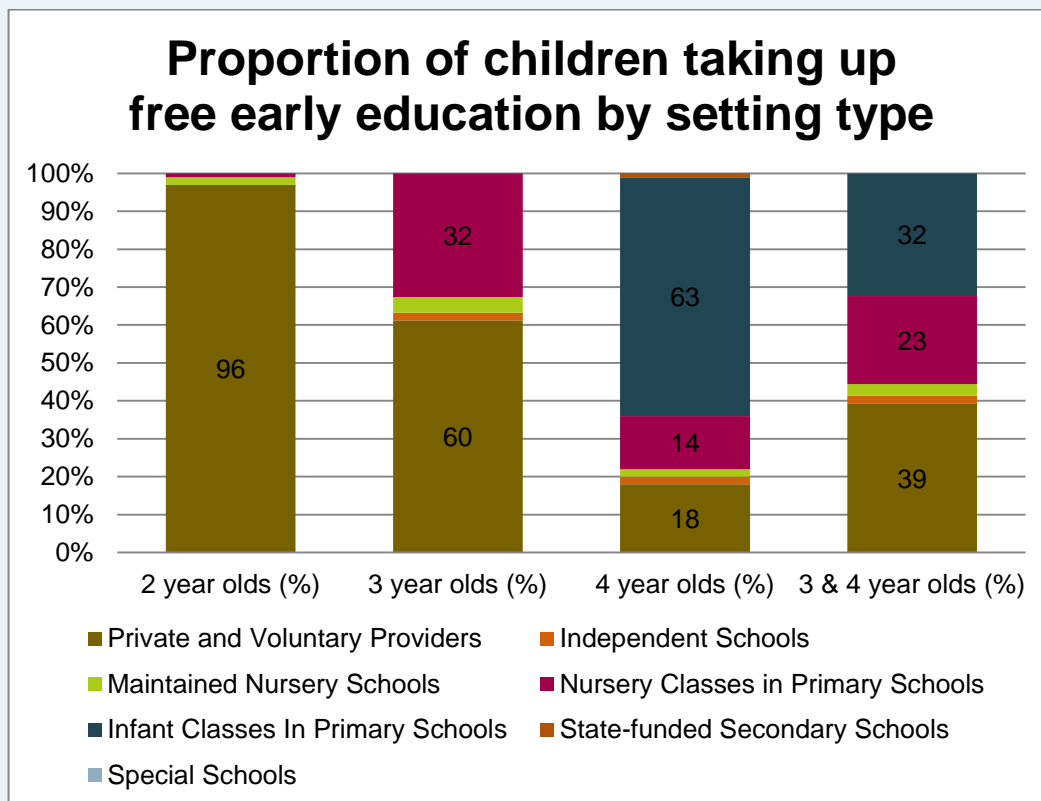
¹ This broadly matches with the 96 per cent uptake among 3 and 4 year olds reported in the Early Years Census and Schools Census, as quoted in (Huskinson, et al., 2014).

Almost seven in ten (69 per cent) children aged between 0 and 2 received no nursery education (61 per cent of these had received no childcare at all, 30 per cent only informal childcare and 6 per cent from other formal providers). The most common reason parents of children this age had for not taking up nursery education were: that they felt their child was too young (55 per cent), that they had personal preferences for not using nursery education (29 per cent), costs were a barrier (20 per cent) or problems with availability (10 per cent).

Again, it should be borne in mind that these figures are not directly relevant to the 2 year old offer, although they do suggest some areas for attention.

The role of state providers in early education and childcare for 2–4s

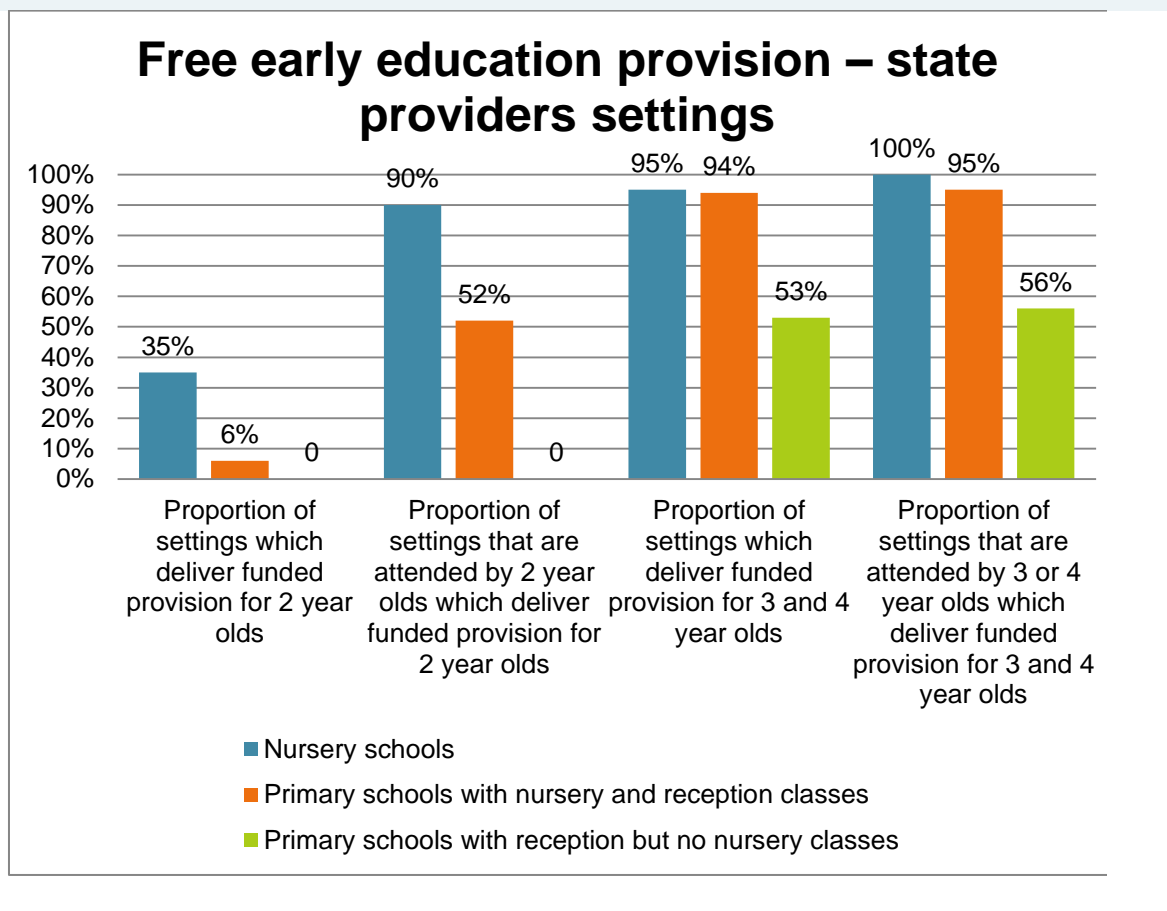
Department for Education figures give us an idea of how much of this childcare is taking place at maintained (i.e. state) settings (Department for Education, 2014). At the time the report covered (Jan 2014), PVI providers had the greatest share of 2 and 3 year olds, whereas maintained settings had the greatest share of 4 year olds (partly because of those starting reception classes in schools at age 4 appearing in the figures).



These figures are somewhat out of date, however. The expansion of the 2 year old offer in particular has a potentially significant impact on the relative prominence of schools in delivering this type of childcare.

Other recent figures show the proportion of schools and nurseries that are delivering childcare for 2–4s (Brind, et al., 2014). These highlight the significant role of school-based providers in the free early education offers, with over 90 per cent providing childcare for 3 and 4 year olds.

The figures also show how the 2 year old offer is much more commonly provided by nursery schools than primary schools with nursery classes.



Source: (Brind, et al., 2014) Table 5.1

Recent research also highlights the significant role that school-based providers play in the most deprived areas. Almost two thirds of nursery schools (64 per cent) and four in ten primary schools with nursery and reception classes (40 per cent) were found in the 30 per cent most disadvantaged areas in 2013.

Childcare for children with SEND

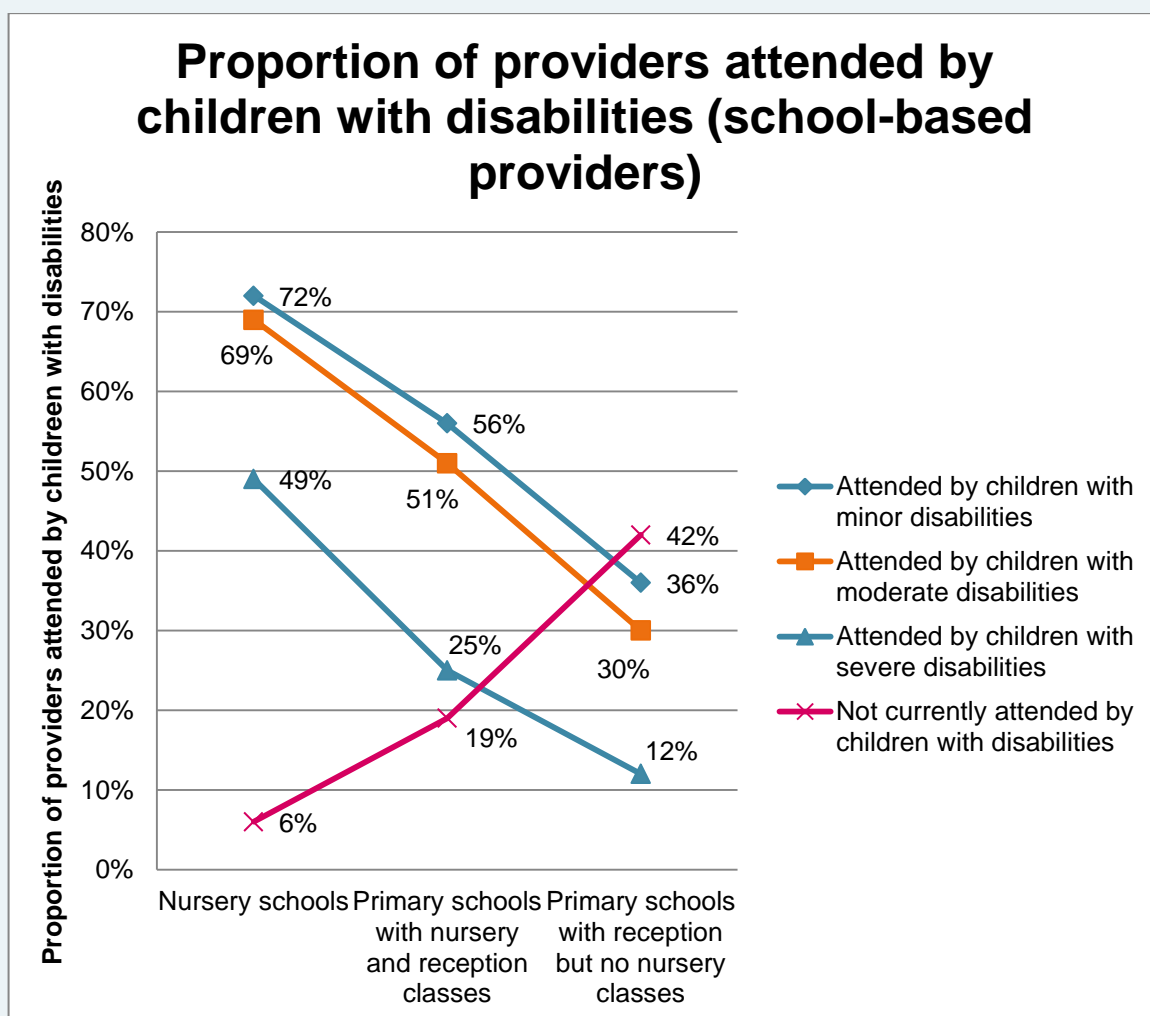
A particular focus of this report is childcare for children with special educational needs or disabilities. Childcare is particularly challenging to access for this group. The recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Childcare for Disabled Children found that childcare for disabled children is typically more expensive, and there are particularly severe problems accessing appropriate childcare for this group (Contact a Family et al., 2014).

The Inquiry also found that in many cases, adequate funding is not available to support the extra costs of high needs or one-to-one support. 1 in 3 said that lack of appropriately experienced staff prevented them from taking up childcare.

In relation to the free early education offers, more than four in ten of parent carers responding to the inquiry’s survey (41 per cent) said their children did not access the full 15 hours of the free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds.

The Family and Childcare Trust’s annual Childcare Costs Surveys highlight deep and persistent gaps in childcare supply for disabled children. Although not focused specifically on 2–4 year olds, the survey found that only 21 per cent of English local authorities had enough childcare for this group, compared with 28 per cent in the previous year (Rutter, 2015).

As the figure below shows, nursery schools have relatively high attendance of children with moderate and minor disabilities. Attendance of children with severe disabilities is substantially lower, but still high relative to other school-based providers. Primary schools with nursery and reception classes have markedly lower attendance of children with all levels of disability. This suggests that primary schools with nursery classes have relatively more work left to do when it comes to inclusion than standalone nurseries.



Source: (Brind, et al., 2014) Table 4.20b
2–4lt

3. The local context in Wigan and Bolton

Both Wigan and Bolton have significant pockets of deprivation, where demand for childcare is sometimes lower because parents struggle to pay for it. This makes it more challenging for childcare providers to make enough money to stay in business, which can lead to gaps in supply.

Bolton has areas with communities that can sometimes be hard to engage with free early education offer, due to language barriers or preconceptions about childcare. There are also some challenges with the supply of childcare not being located in the same areas as demand. Both Wigan and Bolton have had considerable numbers of newly eligible 2 year olds to find places for.

Uptake of free early education in Wigan and Bolton

- 2 year olds
 - In both Wigan and Bolton, uptake of the 2 year old offer is currently below regional and national averages.
 - In Bolton in September 2014, 2,140 2 year olds were eligible for free early education. Uptake was 58 per cent in November 2014, lower than regional (64 per cent) and national averages (60 per cent).
 - In Wigan in September 2014, 1,714 2 year olds were eligible for free early education in September 2014 and uptake stood at 50 per cent in November 2014.²
- 3 and 4 year olds
 - In Bolton, uptake of free early education for 3 and 4 year olds (93 and 104 per cent) is broadly in line with regional and national averages.
 - In Wigan, uptake is slightly below regional and national averages for 3 year olds (92 per cent) and 4 year olds (94 per cent).³

Providers in Wigan and Bolton delivering free early education

- 2 year olds
 - In Bolton in January 2014, free early education for 2 year olds was being provided by 74 PVI providers and 4 maintained nurseries, 11 state-funded primary schools, and 1 special school.

² (Provision for children under 5 years of age data set.)

³ Table 2b: Percentage of 3- and 4-year-old children benefitting from funded early education places by local authority, England, 2010 to 2014

- At the same time, the figures for Wigan were 81 PVI providers, 1 maintained nursery school and one special school.⁴
- 3 and 4 year olds
 - In Bolton, free early education for 3 and 4 year olds was delivered by 108 PVI providers, 2 independent schools, 4 maintained nurseries, and 94 nursery and infant classes in primary schools and 3 special schools⁵.
 - In Wigan, the 3 and 4 year old offer was being delivered by 110 PVI sector providers, 2 maintained nursery schools, 101 nursery and infant classes in primary schools and 3 special schools.

These figures in themselves do not say anything about the location or the capacity of these providers, but they are suggestive of the broad shape of the childcare market in these areas – for instance, it highlights the prominence of PVI providers in Wigan, and the comparatively larger role for maintained settings in providing the 2 year old offer in Bolton. While we have to bear in mind the influence of 4 year olds in reception classes on these figures, the figures for 3 and 4 year olds indicate a greater role for the maintained sector in this area in both Wigan and Bolton than for 2 year old provision.

This broadly mirrors the figures from early years benchmarking tool (Department for Education, 2014), which show that 29 per cent of 3 and 4 year olds in Bolton authority were receiving free early education in PVI providers. For Wigan, this figure was 41 per cent, suggesting a greater significance of the PVI sector in this area. This compares to 34 per cent and 38 per cent of for 3–4 year olds at a regional and national level respectively.

Places for 2 year olds

Childcare Sufficiency Assessments (CSAs) are documents produced by local authorities that audit the supply of childcare in the area to see whether it meets parental demand. In England and Wales the Childcare Act 2006 and its statutory guidance require local authorities to produce these.

In its most recent CSA, Wigan Council identified areas of undersupply of 2 year old places, which would be heightened by the expansion of eligibility in September 2014, and noted that plans were underway to develop more 2 year old places, (Wigan Council, 2014). The CSA observed that in some areas, children accessing their 2 year old entitlement at a PVI provider stay at that provider to access the 3–4 year old entitlement rather than moving to a maintained nursery.

⁴ Table 10: Number of providers delivering funded early education to 2-year-olds by type of provider and local authority

⁵ Table 10a: Number of providers delivering funded early education to 3- and 4-year-olds by type of provider

Bolton's most recent CSA noted that although at the time there were more than enough places for children eligible for the 2 year old offer, these places might not always be located where demand was, so that in some wards, families may need to travel to access a place (Bolton Council, 2013).

The report went on to note that with the increase in eligibility in September 2014, "sufficiency will be reviewed to plan for areas where additional childcare places will be required."



4. Management barriers

Schools have a number of strategic priorities to pursue, and finite resources to do so. Whether childcare for 2–4s ‘takes off’ in a particular school is determined in large part by how it sits alongside these other strategic priorities, as they can potentially compete for scarce attention and resources.

When childcare in schools is prioritised, this usually means that it is given particular focus in planning; extra attention and energy is devoted to solving any problems and implementing effectively; and typically it is allocated extra resources (particularly financial). These factors all help make it easier to address some of the other issues that can arise for childcare in schools for this age group.

In other words, when childcare in schools is given priority, a number of ‘downstream’ challenges become less problematic. This means that any barriers to giving childcare in schools strategic priority are very significant in determining its overall success.

The barriers to giving childcare in schools strategic priority can generally be addressed through shifting the understanding of the relative strategic priorities of the school (and how childcare for 2–4s fits in with these) or securing sufficient resource to properly deliver childcare for this group. Within certain limits, resource constraints can be overcome or worked around, and in some cases, schools may not initially be aware of the range of strategic benefits providing childcare for 2–4s can bring.

Main management-related barriers include:

- other strategic priorities competing for priority
- demographic concerns
- concerns over intakes and different sizes of different years
- concerns about finances
- concerns about staff commitment/willingness to delivering childcare
- concerns about growing populations in the local area (especially in areas that have had a baby boom) already creating extra demand for space in the rest of the school
- concerns about registration and inspection.

It is worth noting that the different offers, the 2 year old offer and the 3–4 year old offer, may compete with each other for a school’s attention and resource. Some schools may view the 3–4 year old offer as more financially sustainable (for example due to more generous staffing ratios permitted for this offer) and therefore pursue this option at the expense of providing for 2 year olds.

Inspections for children aged between 2 and 8 typically occur every 3 to 5 years, and some schools are concerned to avoid starting new provision that would involve additional inspections. For some schools, securing a separate registration for childcare for 2 year olds represents a significant hurdle.

At present, schools require a separate Ofsted registration for their 2 year old provision and have to undergo separate inspections, but this is planned to change in September 2015. (Department for Education, 2014). For upcoming changes to inspections, such as aligning the notice period given to early years providers with that given to schools see (Ofsted, 2015).

Some schools are anxious to avoid creating a 'bottleneck' in their intake. This 'bottleneck' would occur if they took in more 2 year olds than they could accommodate at older ages in the school. A desire to not find themselves unable to offer places for many of the 2 year olds when they got older deters some schools from expanding their 2 year old intake.

Some schools initially regard the 2 year old offer as similar to the 3–4 year old offer, whereas in fact 2 year olds are at a very different developmental stage and have very different needs. (There are also different legal requirements as set out above.) It is crucial that schools considering the 2 year old offer have the best possible information about what the offer entails and looks like on the ground.



The value of childcare for 2–4s for schools

Childcare in schools for 2–4s connects to a number of strategic priorities that schools have. Seeing the fuller strategic picture can often make delivering childcare in schools a more attractive prospect. A number of agendas can be addressed through childcare in schools, for instance:

- It can support child development.
- It can provide social opportunities for children.
- It can promote school readiness.
- It can support families (for example through providing childcare and promoting parental employment).
- It can help narrow the gaps between the most disadvantaged children and their peers.
- It can help address needs at an early stage before they become more severe and offers opportunities for early intervention.
- It can help engage the most disadvantaged children and their families with the school (see, for example, (Goody, 2012), making things easier when they start formal education.

Looking at the 2 year old offer in particular, there are a number of important considerations. A 2013 report following up on the 2 year old offer pilot sites found that children attending high-quality settings performed somewhat better at age five, whereas those attending low or adequate quality settings in the pilot did not see a benefit (Maisey, et al., 2013).

For children from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, those who attended free education as part of the pilot at age 2 were more likely to attend early education aged 3 and 4. This is significant as other research tells us that take-up among children from a BME background is particularly low for early education. This suggests that the 2 year old offer can be seen as a valuable way of engaging these groups in early education.

Recent changes to the School Admissions Code allow schools to give priority in admissions to disadvantaged children. Children eligible for the early years pupil premium or service premium attending a school nursery class, or a nursery established and run by the school, can be given priority in a schools oversubscription criteria (Department for Education, 2014).

Resources

To make childcare work in schools, resources are needed in a number of different areas:

- to support staff costs and training (especially for children with SEND)
- to support new equipment (and any building work)
- to ensure that schools are providing adequate space for each child to meet their legal obligations
- to help schools to identify premises they were not previously using or underutilising
- to allow schools to market their provision to parents effectively
- to allow staff to engage with parents
- to help schools more effectively manage the finances of the provision.

Some schools might conclude that they do not have the resources or capacity to deliver the 2 year old offer. These resources typically include money, staff capacity (particularly availability and skills) and space.

Within certain limits, these resource challenges are hurdles to be overcome – developing new ways of working and creating innovative solutions can allow them to be overcome (for more, see later sections). It is crucial that there is continued commitment on the part of government and local authorities to making the resources available to support the free early education offers, and that there is a continued drive to demonstrate to teachers what can be done with the resources that are being provided.

Concerns regarding resource can come in a number of different forms, leading to a number of different solutions. In some cases the appropriate response is for schools to be helped to use their existing assets and resources more effectively; in others the best solution will be to help schools develop ways to minimise or work round their existing resource gaps; in some situations, what will be required is new resource altogether – for instance, more money or training.

Achieving a financially self-sustaining 2 year old offer is an acute challenge for schools (Greene, et al., 2015). Some schools are willing to 'run the provision at a loss' and support it with other school funds because of the benefits it brings to the school or the savings it would bring about later on (for example through reduced levels of need for the most disadvantaged children). Other schools place more of an emphasis on the provision being able to support itself financially. In either case, effective strategies and techniques used by schools are outlined below in the sections on financial sustainability, staffing and demand/outreach.

Professional attitudes and school ethos

Some of the barriers to childcare in schools are related to attitudes among staff. These preconceptions can act as a barrier to wanting to deliver childcare in schools for this age group. In some schools, the sort of childcare offered to 2–4s is perceived to lie outside of the ‘core’ educational work of the school.

This can feed into the idea that childcare for this age group is ‘not the school’s business’, or that other organisations are better placed to address any needs in this area. In some schools, staff members may be reluctant to become involved in delivering childcare, feeling that it is something very different from their ‘core’ work in the school. Sometimes, the idea of providing childcare might simply seem alien, or it might seem that childcare has little to do with the school’s ethos. Some schools and their staff may have preconceptions about certain kinds of childcare, be it for 2 year olds, or 3s and 4s. For instance, in some cases, there is an anxiety that 2 year olds accessing the free offer might have higher levels of need.

These sorts of barriers can be addressed in a number of ways. Some reluctance on the part of staff to engage with childcare is down to a lack of confidence, skills and experience. This can be addressed through training and practical experience, which is covered in a separate section below.

Some of the concerns are best addressed through inviting staff to understand childcare in schools differently – for instance, to see how it might connect to the school’s ethos, and how it can support the work of the school by promoting school readiness. School leadership has an important role in championing the childcare in schools agenda, and in making sure that the right staff are involved in implementing it.

In some cases, bringing in a third-party provider to deliver childcare can be a helpful strategy. An external provider can bring established ways of working and experienced staff. In addition, establishing service level agreements, financial agreements and agreeing access to resources in advance with an external provider may allow the school to feel more confident and able to predict the future course and resource demands of the provision.

Some effective strategies for addressing management/institutional barriers

- School leadership can signal change through making childcare a priority.
- School leadership/senior staff can champion the cause of childcare in school by:
 - explaining how the childcare connects to the work of the school – supporting child development, supporting families, promoting school readiness, helping the most disadvantaged children get the most out of their education and addressing needs at an early stage before they become more severe
 - explaining that childcare for 2–4s is an investment in supporting the most disadvantaged children, and a form of early intervention

- explaining that schools are well placed to deliver childcare, for example expertise on school readiness and good links to local authority organisations
- consulting/talking to staff about changes and plans to secure buy-in.
- When childcare provision is actually set up and running, it becomes more tangible – as does the value of its work for children, parents and the school.
- Hands-on experience often allows staff to overcome any anxieties they might have about delivering childcare.
- Having the right staff as the childcare’s day-to-day manager will help encourage and support their staff to get comfortable delivering childcare.
- Training helps address concerns about looking after children with SEND.
- Headteachers who have good experience of setting up childcare can advocate to headteachers in other schools.

Unique issues for 2 year olds and children with SEND

2 year olds are developmentally very different to 3s and 4s. This might feed in to some anxieties among those who currently work with 3s and 4s in schools about whether they want to work with this younger age group. Working with 2 year olds involves nappy changing, toilet training, and a host of distinct activities that may initially be intimidating or off-putting.

As long as staff are properly trained, ‘getting stuck in’ is typically the best way to get used to doing these things. Recruiting new staff is another way of securing a team that is comfortable and confident delivering childcare. (For more on these issues, see the later section on training.)

Many teachers are anxious about working with children with SEND due to a lack of experience and training. They are often concerned that they might not be able to deal with certain issues or lack confidence about their own ability to deal with challenging circumstances.

This anxiety can hold back schools that would otherwise be enthusiastic from taking on more children with SEND. This clearly has significant implications for the ability of children with SEND to access childcare that is appropriate for their needs. Providing staff with proper training and support allows this barrier to be overcome. (For more detail on inclusion, see the sections on staff and training, and on SEND below.)

Making childcare in schools work financially (for 2 year olds especially but also for 3s and 4s) often requires a bit more of a ‘business’ approach than schools might be used to. Training and support are required to help schools to do this. (For more on this issue, see the section on funding and financial sustainability below.)

5. Funding and financial sustainability

One of the most important barriers to delivering childcare for 2–4s in practice is funding and financial sustainability. Schools that are committed to delivering childcare can achieve a good deal and overcome a number of problems, but without adequate financial resources, schools only have so much room for manoeuvre.

Funding is needed to overcome a number of other barriers, and financial concerns often contribute to the reluctance of some schools to deliver childcare in the first place. If a school does not believe that it is financially viable to offer the 2 or 3–4 year old offer, or if they do not believe that they can afford to deliver it effectively, then they will be much more reluctant to do so.

The 2 year old offer is particularly challenging from the point of view of financial sustainability, with many schools finding it hard to cover the costs of delivering the provision with the funding available. Some of the financial challenges associated with delivering childcare in schools include:

- upfront capital costs associated with 2 and 3-4 year old offers:
 - cost of redesigning existing space into somewhere that early education for 2–4s could be delivered
 - cost of new building work if needed (see below for space/equipment regulations)
 - new equipment needed such as sleeping and changing areas, age-appropriate play equipment and washing machines
- ongoing staffing costs
- cost of recruiting new staff if needed
- staff training costs
- costs associated with insurance
- costs associated with marketing and parental engagement
- level of financial support for free early education relative to the cost of delivering it – particularly in deprived areas or areas with high staffing costs.

A 2015 report which looked at 49 different schools delivering the 2 year old offer found that around half (53 per cent) were only offering funded places for 2 year olds (and not providing additional fee-paying places or extra hours).

The majority offered somewhere between eight and 36 places. Some of the schools ran the provision in term time only, whereas others spread it over the year. Some schools also offered additional care or support options, for example holiday childcare.

Around half of the schools that this research looked at expected their 2 year old provision to break even, but some expected it to lose money (at least initially). Some schools planned to use revenue from fee-paying places to cover this shortfall (Greene, et al., 2015).

Business ethos and business support

In some cases, there may be a cultural element to financial sustainability challenges. One strategy for making childcare in schools for 2–4s financially sustainable involves approaching it primarily as a business venture, with a sustained focus on how to maximise the money it brings in and an alertness to all new opportunities to do so.

For instance, one popular strategy is to charge parents for additional hours of childcare in addition to the free hours they receive. These fee-paying places can help support funded places that may attract a lower level of financial support (this is known as cross-subsidising). In some cases, this sort of business approach might be initially perceived as a departure from normal ways of working – they might be unwilling to treat parents as ‘customers’.

Approaching the childcare provision as a business might seem unusual, and some schools may initially not be used to treating part of their work as a directly money raising venture. Schools that are committed to offering childcare for 2–4s will likely find that this sort of business-minded approach is unavoidable if the provision is to support itself financially, and they may well believe that it is an important way of supporting a valuable resource for pupils and their families.

A report into the expansion of the 2 year old entitlement found that some providers needed additional business training and assistance to deliver the offer, suggesting that some schools need support to help them make best use of their financial resources and most effectively deliver childcare for this group (Goody, 2012).

Funding formulas

Funding for the 3–4 year old offer is allocated on the basis of historical precedent (pupil premium money is added to this). The 2 year old offer is funded on a per head basis which is then adjusted to reflect employment costs in the particular area. This money is given to the local authority and is then divided among schools in the area by the schools forum.

Area	Delegated budget allocated to providers per hour for 3–4 year olds			Funding for 2 year old offer		
	PVI	Nursery Schools	Primary Nursery Places	PVI	Nursery Schools	Primary Nursery Places
Bolton	£4.18	£5.57	£4.09	£4.85	£4.85	£4.85
Wigan	£3.28	£6.95	£4.03	£4.95	£4.95	£4.95
England	£3.95	£7.18	£4.08	£5.15	£5.29	£5.28

Source: Department for Education Benchmarking Tool, (Department for Education, 2014)

A recent National Audit Office report looked at the financial arrangements for the free offer for 3 and 4 year olds (National Audit Office, 2012). It summarises the current financial landscape for the 3-4 year old offer:

The Department has announced additional funding for local authorities to build up their provision, of £64 million in 2011–12 increasing each year to £760 million in 2014-15, the first full year of the new entitlement. The Department’s ongoing commitment to the core entitlement will be funded from within local authorities’ overall spending limits.

The report found that funding formulas were complex, varied between local authorities and at least a third were “based on a limited understanding of provider costs”. Funding formulas typically include base rates (with a set amount of funding per child) as well as specific supplements for certain areas of activity. Some local authorities set a number of different base rates for various types of childcare, whereas others had a single base rate. Different funding formulas gave more or less emphasis to the base rate funding relative to the supplementary components. Analysis in the report suggests that only 20 per cent of the differences in funding between local authorities were caused by factors such as variations in wages – in other words, some of the variation was simply down to difference in approach among different local authorities and not due to any specific information local authorities had about their area.

The report found that 72 per cent of local authorities thought that their formula funding was adequate to cover costs for most or all of the providers in their areas. 10 per cent, however, believed that the funding was sufficient for few or none of their providers. Funding rates were higher for maintained providers than for non-maintained providers.

For 2, 3 and 4 year olds, a Schools Forum is allowed to use four criteria to allocate additional funding to providers, on top of the basic rate per child and within an overall set budget. They must provide extra money on the basis of deprivation, and can optionally provide extra funding on the basis of the flexibility of provision, the quality of provision and to promote business sustainability, for instance for new or small settings. How a Schools Forum decides to allocate its money varies considerably between local authorities.

Recent research into the 2 year old offer highlights the way that the fiscal context of the offer varies considerably across the country. This depends on the specifics of the local authority’s approach to the offer, available local resources and the cost pressures in that area. There are variations across the country in the additional money that local authorities paid to schools, for example some schools received enhanced hourly rates to reflect increased levels of need presented by some 2 year olds.

The introduction of the early years Pupil Premium in April 2015 will hopefully make financing childcare in schools easier for more disadvantaged groups, but there are some outstanding issues with this change: the early years Pupil Premium will only be available for 3 and 4 year olds, not those on the 2 year old offer, and will amount to around 53p per pupil per hour.

Funding levels

As set out above, the amount given to deliver free early education for 3s and 4s can be more relative to the typical cost of delivering childcare in some areas, and less in others. It is sometimes perceived that the amount of money given to deliver the 2 year old offer makes it challenging to make the offer financially viable. (For the 2014-15 levels of funding for the 2 year old offer, see (Department for Education, 2013). The more challenging staff: child ratios for the 2 year old offer (and greater space requirements) make it especially demanding in this respect.

The introduction of the early years Pupil Premium in April 2015 will hopefully make financing childcare in schools easier for more disadvantaged groups, but there are some issues to note with this change. Firstly, this support will amount to about 53p per pupil per hour, which can only fund so much additional support for each child. The early years Pupil Premium will only be available for 3 and 4 year olds, not those on the 2 year old offer. There are also concerns that low uptake of pupil premium money (i.e. some parents not returning eligibility forms and therefore not being eligible for pupil premium money) will mean that some schools that need this extra support will be unable to use it.

Some of the lessons from research into the 2 year old offer pilot sites are relevant here (Gibb, et al., 2011). The study found differences in opinion among the pilot sites about whether enough funding was provided for delivering the offer. Views on this subject were largely linked to the cost of childcare in the area – in some areas, the funding provided for 2 year olds was higher than the standard local rates for childcare, whereas in others it was below this. In some cases, the funding provided was enough to cover basic childcare, but was not sufficient to provide resources for the most vulnerable 2 year olds. This highlights the importance of ensuring that financial support for the free offers is sensitive to the local context.



Some effective strategies for funding and financial sustainability

- Investigate what a third-party provider could offer for the school – they might be able to provide quality care more cheaply than the school would be able to itself, due to their experience, economies of scale and established ways of working.
- Planning:
- Planning gives a clearer picture of what the provision will need to do to be financially sustainable – for instance, how many children it needs to attend and how regularly.
 - Bear in mind that the provision will certainly not become sustainable overnight. Research from the Department for Education noted that primary schools in England found it typically took 2–3 years for their childcare provision to become sustainable.⁶
 - Planning promotes confidence among senior management and helps secure buy-in
 - Investigate what other providers in the local area are doing.
- Payment:
- Consider running provision all year round and selling parents additional hours on top of the free offer.
- Payment (this applies to additional hours that a school may charge for on top of the free entitlement):
 - Get parents ‘locked in’ to a payment scheme.
 - Encourage use of direct debits by making it a cheaper payment option.
 - Consider introductory discount/reductions for parents who recommend a friend.
 - Consider offering payments the ability to pay for blocks of childcare in advance.
 - Be proactive about debts – talk to parents about them, do not let them grow.
 - It is often better to get parents signed up to a plan for repayment and have them pay off a small amount each week than to have them leave the provision and have to chase up the debts.
 - For debts over £100, consider going to [moneyclaim.gov.uk](https://www.moneyclaim.gov.uk)

⁶ The likely features of sustainable nursery provision in schools, (Department for Education, 2014).

- Fundraising:
- Run fundraising events to support the provision financially – these will also raise awareness of the provision and help to boost demand.
- Look in to other sources of funding – there are a range of different funds available to support capacity building. For example, Awards for All will sometimes pay towards building charges such as adding toilet or changing areas. Some local authorities have funding packs for developing childcare or for providing training. The Learning Exchange Website has information about funding options (see bibliography).
- Build up a portfolio of materials that can be re-used across different applications – this saves you re-inventing the wheel.
- Staffing:
- Have a range of different staff at different levels of qualifications and seniority working on the provision.
- Make sure that you take into account the staffing ratios when deciding how many children to have attend the setting. Having each member of staff supporting the maximum number of children they are legally allowed to can promote financial sustainability, but quality concerns need to be borne in mind.
- Marketing:
- Market the provision to parents proactively.
- Market the provision to parents early, as they often make plans in advance.
- Emphasise the school's 'unique selling points', for example EYFS expertise.
- Talk to other schools and find out what good ideas they have in this area.
- Pupil premium:
- Make sure that all parents who are eligible for pupil premium money sign up for it – this allows pupil premium money to be used to support the school's childcare provision where appropriate.
- Pupil premium money can be useful to fund outreach/workshop sessions for parents, additional training for staff or to support the cost of an extra member of staff.
- Be proactive in getting parents to confirm eligibility for pupil premium money.
- It is important to handle communications regarding pupil premium sensitively – an effective tactic is to highlight some of the ways the money will be spent.

6. Space and equipment

There are clear legal requirements for the amount of space that schools have to provide per child in their childcare settings and there are requirements about the kinds of environments and facilities that must be made available:

- Space requirements:
 - 2.5m² for every 2 year old.
 - 2.3 m² for every 3 and 4 year old.
- Providers must provide access to an outdoor play area or, ensure that outdoor activities are planned and taken on a daily basis.
- Providers must have an adequate number of toilets, hand basins and changing facilities.
- Providers must have an area where staff can talk to parents/carers confidentially.
- Providers must have an area for staff to take a break that is not used by children.

Providing childcare for children aged 2–4 requires different equipment – and different kinds of environments – than schools have set up by default as part of their ‘core’ education work. This can include:

- age and size appropriate equipment, for example for 2 year olds:
 - extra washing machines to clean clothes and materials
 - nappy changing facilities
 - facilities for children to sleep.

In the context of a wider school site, provision for 2s and 4s is often appropriate at the edge of the main site or in a distinct building, to ensure that they feel comfortable and secure. This space and equipment also needs to be set up so as to be accessible and comfortable for children. There needs to be a mix of different spaces to suit different moods and needs that a child might have – for instance, sometimes they might want somewhere relatively secluded where they can feel secure and quiet.

Recent research into the 2 year old offer found that the schools involved all recognised the need to provide environments for 2 year olds that were homely, nurturing and stimulating. This included indoor and outdoor space, with enough flexibility to allow opportunities for learning and play led by children and adults. (Greene, et al., 2015)

Some effective strategies for space and equipment

- Think creatively about how you could best use existing space in the school – you do not necessarily need to build new rooms.
- Think about timetabling – there might be a way to use rooms differently to free up space.
- Talk to the school site manager – they will have the expertise and knowledge of what might be possible.
- Talk to other nearby schools – they might have some good ideas you can use.
- Look at the possibilities for partnership working – there might be ways of working together with another school to pool resources or rooms.
- There might be space in the local community that you can use to run provision – even if on a temporary basis during building work.



7. Demand/outreach

For each school setting up childcare for 2–4s, achieving a good level of demand is crucial. A low level of demand could mean that the school is failing to achieve the strategic objectives it set for its childcare – for instance, failing to promote the outcomes of the most disadvantaged pupils. From a financial point of view, reliable and high levels of attendance are important for achieving sustainable provision.

Most of the schools examined in recent research into the 2 year old offer reported strong local demand for places. This suggests that there was potential to expand the size of the provision and to consider offering fee-paying places/additional hours to parents. It should be noted that some of the schools surveyed felt that there was no demand for fee-paying places in their local area. A recurring theme from this research was that many schools were surprised by the amount of planning and engagement work that had to be done with families for their child to take up a place (Greene, et al., 2015).

In Wigan and Bolton, there are certain areas where it is more challenging to encourage uptake of the offer, particularly in certain deprived areas and among minority ethnic groups. There are a number of reasons for these problems with demand:

- The childcare supply is not located near to where people live, and some people are reluctant or unable to travel.
- Childcare provision is at a provider which does not have an established reputation among the community.
- There is a belief that children of 2–4 are too young to attend early education and in some cases misconceptions about what this entails.
- There are language barriers which make it more challenging to get the message to certain communities.

More generally, a low level of demand for childcare might be caused by a number of factors:

- provision offered by the school not effectively meeting a need on the part of the parents/pupils
- parents not wanting to take up early education in schools
- hours of provision/cost not being suitable (this applies to the additional hours many parents buy to top up their ‘free’ entitlement, and after-school clubs).
- Marketing/information problems:
 - parents not knowing about the childcare provision offered by the school
 - parents not knowing about the entitlement to free early education

- parents being unwilling to take up free early education (personal preferences, preconceptions about childcare, myths)
- parents preferring to use another provider.
- Geographical problems:
 - parents being unable to travel to the provision
 - parents not wanting to travel to attend the provision because of the distance (particularly in rural areas)/because it is new/unknown.
- SEND:
 - Parents being reluctant to accept that their child has SEND

Research into the experience of the 2 year old offer pilot sites stressed the importance of multi-agency work in engaging parents (for instance, with health services and JobCentre Plus) because of the need to identify and reach eligible families and provide them with support (Gibb, et al., 2011).

Other research suggests that parents need support in accessing the 2 year old offer, in particular in overcoming barriers such as long-term unemployment and low self-esteem (Goody, 2012). This recent research also found that children's centres and health visitors were well placed to identify and support eligible children.

As noted above, children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds who attended free education as part of the 2 year old offer pilot were more likely to attend early education aged 3 and 4 (Maisey, et al., 2013). Given the fact that uptake of free early education among children from a BME background is particularly low, the 2 year old offer can be seen as an important way of engaging these groups in early education.

Some effective strategies for marketing/outreach

- Many parents need time and support to come to terms with their child having SEND and to best factor this into their plans for their child's education.
- English as a second language:
- Try and translate promotional materials into the languages most commonly spoken by harder-to-reach parents.
- Try and translate the school's website as well – one way to do this without spending money is to use a Google translate widget.
- Use the language skills of the parents who attend you school – consider recruiting them to act as advocates for the provision or to spread the word. You can also use volunteers from the local community.

- Promotional activity:
- Consider running special events or ‘taster sessions’. ‘Stay and play’ sessions can be a very effective way of engaging with parents.
- Try and establish a dialogue with parents to see what their needs are and explain to them what the purpose of the childcare you are offering is.
- Consider providing transport, at least initially, to encourage people to attend provision that is further away from their homes than they would normally be comfortable attending.
- Consider running a ‘refer a friend’ scheme that rewards vouchers after a referred child has attended the provision for a certain number of weeks.
- Marketing:
- Market the provision to parents proactively. Target children who have older siblings at the school.
- Encourage parents to act as advocates for the provision through word of mouth.
- Market the provision to parents early- they will often make plans in advance.
- Emphasise the ‘unique selling points’ that the school has, for example expertise in EYFS.
- Recent research suggests that holding informal conversations with parents about their child’s progress, either during for after school, is an effective strategy for engaging with parents (Greene, et al., 2015).



8. Staff and training

Securing, training and retaining the right staff is one of the key components of running successful provision.

For schools that do not use an external provider to deliver their childcare, recruiting the right staff and planning an effective mix of staff to work on the provision are a crucial part of this, as is ensuring that staff confidence and staff skills are promoted. (Skills and confidence are taken to be distinct from professional attitudes/misconceptions, which are dealt with in the section above.)

Skill and confidence gaps can be addressed through training, whereas a strategy of recruitment, training and contractual arrangements is needed to secure the right portfolio of staff.

Staff ratios

Minimum staff:children ratios and qualifications are as follows:

- For 2 year olds:
 - 1 member of staff for every 4 children aged 2.
 - At least one member of staff must have a full and relevant level 3 qualification and at least half the other staff must have a full and relevant level 2 qualification.
- For children aged 3 and over:

Type of provision for children aged 3 and over	Minimum staff: children ratios	Qualification requirements
Registered early years provision where a person with Qualified Teacher Status, Early Years Professional Status, Early Years Teacher Status or another suitable level 6 qualification is working directly with the children	1 member of staff for every 13 children	At least 1 other member of staff must hold a full and relevant level 3 qualification.
Registered early years provision where a person with Qualified Teacher Status, Early Years Professional Status, Early Years Teacher Status or another suitable level 6 qualification is not working directly with the children	1 member of staff for every 8 children	At least 1 other member of staff must hold a full and relevant level 3 qualification. At least half of all other staff must hold a full and relevant level 2 qualification
For children aged 3 and over in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained schools	1 member of staff for every 13 children	At least 1 member of staff must be a school teacher. At least one other member of staff must hold a full and relevant level 3 qualification.

Correct at time of writing: please see the gov.uk website for up to date guidance.

Barriers to getting the right mix of staff working on provision include:

- finding staff with appropriate skills in childcare
- finding staff who want to work with children of this age range
- existing contracts of school staff not allowing them to work the hours needed for the provision for example over the holidays.

Staff who had not worked with children in the early years before can sometimes be apprehensive about doing so. This is particularly true with 2 year olds and those with SEND. Some staff confidence and skill issues can be addressed by giving staff experience.

Staff who are initially unsure whether they would be able to, say, change nappies, usually find that being given actual experience makes them much more confident. Past a certain point, however, addressing staff confidence and skills requires training.

To give staff confidence and expertise in dealing with SEND issues, for example, staff have to be given specific training. Early years training is also important here – for instance learning about child development and the differences between 2 year olds and 3–4 year olds.

In recent research into the 2 year old offer, schools have highlighted the need for staff working with this age group to have specific knowledge and skills, for instance of the Early Years Foundation Stage, child development and of the needs of these children. This research suggests that continuing professional development is crucial to delivering the 2 year old offer and ensuring it is done so to a high quality.

All the schools that responded to the final evaluation survey perceived themselves as effective in providing qualified and experienced staff. This suggests that these schools were able to find ways of meeting these staffing and training challenges (Greene, et al., 2015).

Effective strategies for staff and training

- Recruitment
- Recruiting staff with an existing background in providing childcare is an effective way of covering gaps in skill and confidence. Consider whether a third-party provider might be appropriate.
- Employ staff who are committed to the ethos of the provision and who have a positive and 'can do' attitude.
- Make sure to do practical assessments as part of the interview process.

- Mix of staff:
- When recruiting, bear in mind the expertise of people in the PVI sector – they are often very skilled at dealing with younger age groups. There are many candidates with NVQ level 2 and 3 in childcare that are suitable for recruitment.
- Consider using apprentices. ‘Home grown’ staff are often more committed to the particular setting, which helps promote staff retention.
- Consider having a new contract for staff working on the childcare provision, which just covers their work there.
- Have a mix of staff of different qualification levels to remain sustainable. (See above for the regulations concerning staff qualifications).
- Not all of the staff on the provision need to be qualified teachers; however, ensure your team have appropriate childcare qualifications and experience to offer a quality service. (The gov.uk website has a page that provides guidance on which qualifications are relevant – see bibliography.)
- A steady stream of new staff allows new ideas to be introduced and new best practice to be implemented. This should be balanced against the importance of continuity of staff for children and parents for delivering quality childcare. High staff turnover, for instance, can sever important relationships between staff and parents or children.
- Training:
- Pool resources with other schools when arranging training – get joint training sessions, club together in negotiations to secure a group discount.
- A recent report into the expansion of the 2 year old entitlement found that effective ways to raise staff skill included developing links to local academic institutions, developing partnership relationships with other schools and childcare providers, modelling good practice, visiting other settings and sharing information among practitioners (Goody, 2012). See also (Greene, et al., 2015).
- Training does not need to be expensive: for example a range of e-learning resources are available online. (See, for example, the KIDS website referred to in the bibliography. Many of these are available free of charge.)
- Schools can share ideas and best practice through a range of channels, for example the Learning Exchange website / Facebook page.

9. SEND and inclusion

Although schools are committed to providing childcare for children with SEND, there are some significant practical barriers to achieving this on the ground, including skill gaps, staff apprehension, resourcing and diagnosis. All early years providers have a number of legal obligations relating to SEND and inclusion.

- Providers must have arrangements in place to support children with SEND:
 - Maintained nursery schools (and other providers funded by the local authority to deliver early education places) must have regard to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice.
 - Maintained nursery schools must identify a member of staff to act as Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and other providers (in group provision) also have to do this.

Staff are often anxious about their own ability to work with children with SEND. Specific medical support skills like giving a child an injection were a particular cause of concern. There is also an additional 'fear factor' above and beyond specific skill gaps. These concerns are best addressed through training and practical experience. It is important that staff are aware that not all children with SEND have the same levels of need or require the same kind of support.

Training

Supporting children with SEND – particularly those with higher levels of need – often requires additional resourcing. For example, a child requiring 1 to 1 support throughout the day may require an additional member of staff to be employed. For some children with SEND, adjustments will need to be made to the setting, and sometimes to particular procedures and ways of working. This can often involve additional cost for the school. The financial difficulties related to providing sufficient staff to support children with more challenging needs has been highlighted in recent research into the 2 year old offer (Greene, et al., 2015).

Not all training related to SEND need be expensive. A range of free training resources are available online (see above, and bibliography), and there are a wide range of materials related to SEND available online, produced by a wide variety of organisations. Schools can usefully share top tips and resources that they have found online.

Parental anxiety

Parental anxiety should also be borne in mind in this area. Some parents may be initially unwelcoming to the idea that their child may potentially have SEND and should be referred for to a specialist to investigate their needs, and some parents may also have difficulty coming to terms with their child being given a diagnosis. In some cases, parents may be reluctant to talk about their child's behaviour or requirements for special arrangements because they may fear that the school will not be accepting of their child. Schools need to communicate clearly to parents that they need information so that they can prepare to best support their child.

Diagnosis

Securing a timely diagnosis of SEND, after initially raising concerns about a particular child, was a recurring challenge. In particular, very few 2 year olds are diagnosed with SEND when they arrive to take up the offer. In some cases, pursuing a diagnosis was made more challenging when children had arrived from other settings where no problems had been noted. This added an extra layer of difficulty as in these cases the parents were much less receptive to the idea that their child might have SEND.

For a school that suspects that a particular child has SEND and is going through the process of getting a diagnosis, it can be difficult to find money to give extra support to this child until the diagnosis process is complete and additional resources are 'unlocked'. This means that schools sometimes have to wait for a lengthy diagnosis process to be completed before they are awarded additional money to provide support for that child.

Some schools expressed difficulty in getting a diagnosis for children they suspected might have SEND. This was typically due to long waiting lists at the relevant external agencies. This presented financial challenge, because elevated levels of financial support were typically only available when a diagnosis had been attained. This meant that a school would 'lose out' financially by providing support for the child before they had received a diagnosis.

Inter-agency working

Liaising with the local authority is very important for making sure that schools (and their children) receive the most support possible regarding SEND. Some local authorities provide unique support in this area, for instance providing specific training at a subsidised rate. Local authority early years teams, childcare and inclusion officers, Special Educational Needs coordinators and charities / other agencies that work in the local area can all provide a range of advice, resource and support.

Research into the experience of the 2 year old pilot sites suggest that effective inter-agency working is vital for identifying and reaching eligible families. (Gibb, et al., 2011)

Some schools in Wigan and Bolton expressed a concern that speech and language therapists were particularly busy and therefore harder to engage with in a timely manner. There were also concerns that because of the high demand for these professionals relative to their capacity, sometimes families that missed an appointment were unable to make any more appointments in future.

Effective strategies for addressing this barrier

- Planning and training:
- Offer training to boost skills and confidence – particularly with specialist support. Training is crucial for providing knowledge of the law and best practice.
- Put plans in place to best manage the needs of children with SEND.
- Give staff appropriate practical experience to develop skills and confidence.
- Recruit staff with skills and experience with SEND, to support their colleagues.
- School leadership and policy:
- Have the school leadership make a specific commitment to inclusion in the setting, and put it on the agenda.
- Get staff to sign up to the school's SEND policy, to make expectations and ethos clear from the beginning.
- Learning from others:
- Talk to other schools about how they have found ways to accommodate children with SEND.
- Visit other schools and settings that are being inclusive.
- Talk to other schools about materials and information and useful ideas they have found to be inclusive.
- Look online for SEND materials. Many are produced by schools and other organisations and freely available – there is no need to re-invent the wheel.
- The ICAN Charity helpline was found to be particularly helpful for speech and language issues, and their resources are well regarded.
- Understanding that achieving an inclusive setting is an ongoing process – regularly evaluate how inclusive your childcare setting is and what could be done better.
- Supporting parents:
- Many parents need time and support to come to terms with their child having SEND and to best factor this in to their plans for their child's education. In some cases, information can help address preconceptions or anxieties.
- Consider framing conversations with parents about their child's needs as about the extra support that their child can receive and the difference this can make to them.

10. Summary of key lessons

Barriers

- Main barriers to setting up childcare for 2–4s in schools:
 - Financial sustainability – this is particularly acute for the 2 year old offer, with many schools finding it hard to make this offer sustainable with the funding available.
 - Competition from other strategic priorities that the school may have (this is exacerbated by finance and resource concerns).

Addressing barriers

- Effective general strategies for addressing these barriers include:
 - Provide training, information and resources to address any underlying strategic concerns a school might have.
 - Sharing information between schools. Headteachers should share their experiences of how childcare has supported their school's other aims.
 - Schools should look for opportunities to pool resources – for example when arranging training.
- Schools could also:
 - have leadership signal a commitment to setting up childcare in the school and have a member of staff acting as an advocate for the provision
 - talk to other schools, the local authority and other agencies to gather information about best practice
 - consider whether a third-party provider could best meet the needs of the school
 - make sure childcare provision is being run as the most effective business possible to promote financial sustainability. Consider running provision all year round and selling parents additional hours on top of the free offers
 - pursue other sources of funding – for example charities, fundraising
 - promote provision effectively and maintain high levels of demand
 - provide training to staff to address preconceptions about childcare in school, lack of confidence and skill gaps (Remember that some training materials are available for free/low cost.)
 - offer training and the sharing of best practice – this is particularly important for achieving inclusive childcare for children with SEND.

- Local authorities and central government should:
 - promote effective inter-organisational working and information sharing (This is particularly important for timely SEND diagnosis.)
 - promote business training for schools
 - make sure that the level of financial support provided for the free early education offers is sufficient (In particular, the support must be responsive to the local context – especially in areas that are more deprived or that have higher staff costs.)
- Local authorities have an important role in providing effective market management of the local childcare market.
- The transfer of responsibility for children’s public health to local authorities in 2015 should give an opportunity to promote the effective partnership working relating to early education within local authorities (for example through their new role in commissioning health visitor services).



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Electronic sources

Information on funding sources, legalities, the 2 year old offer, inclusion for 0-5s with SEND, case studies of schools setting up childcare for 2–4s and a range of other resources are available on the Learning Exchange website. This website also allows schools to share ideas and resources: www.learning-exchange.org.uk

A variety of e-learning modules can be accessed at <http://elearning.kids.org.uk>. Many of these are available free of charge, for instance on ADHD. There is also a module available on developing inclusive school-based childcare for 0–5s developed with Family Action.

The gov.uk website has a page that provides guidance on which qualifications can be included in the staff to child ratio for the EYFS. As of March 2015 it can be accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/early-years-qualifications-finder>

This website also contains the most recent guidance on EYFS regulations. As of March 2015 this can be accessed at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335504/EYFS_framework_from_1_September_2014_with_clarification_note.pdf

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About the author

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About the Family and Childcare Trust

The Family and Childcare Trust works to make the UK a better place for families. Our vision is of a society where government, business and communities do all they can to help every family to thrive. Through our research, campaigning and practical support we are creating a more family friendly UK.

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About Family Action

Families come in all shapes and sizes. No matter how they are constructed, Family Action is committed to supporting them to realise their potential. All families encounter difficult and challenging times and many will find ways to deal with their problems, getting the support they need from friends and relatives. There are times, however, when problems can seem too overwhelming to manage.

Family Action works to tackle some of the most complex and difficult issues facing families today – including financial hardship, mental health problems, social isolation, learning disabilities, domestic abuse, or substance misuse and alcohol problems.

These issues can have a huge impact on the stability of family life, and will have a significant impact on the health, wellbeing and development all family members. Family Action believes that families facing these difficulties should have the support they need to become stronger, happier and healthier. With the right kind of support, families can overcome their difficulties and find hope for a brighter future.

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