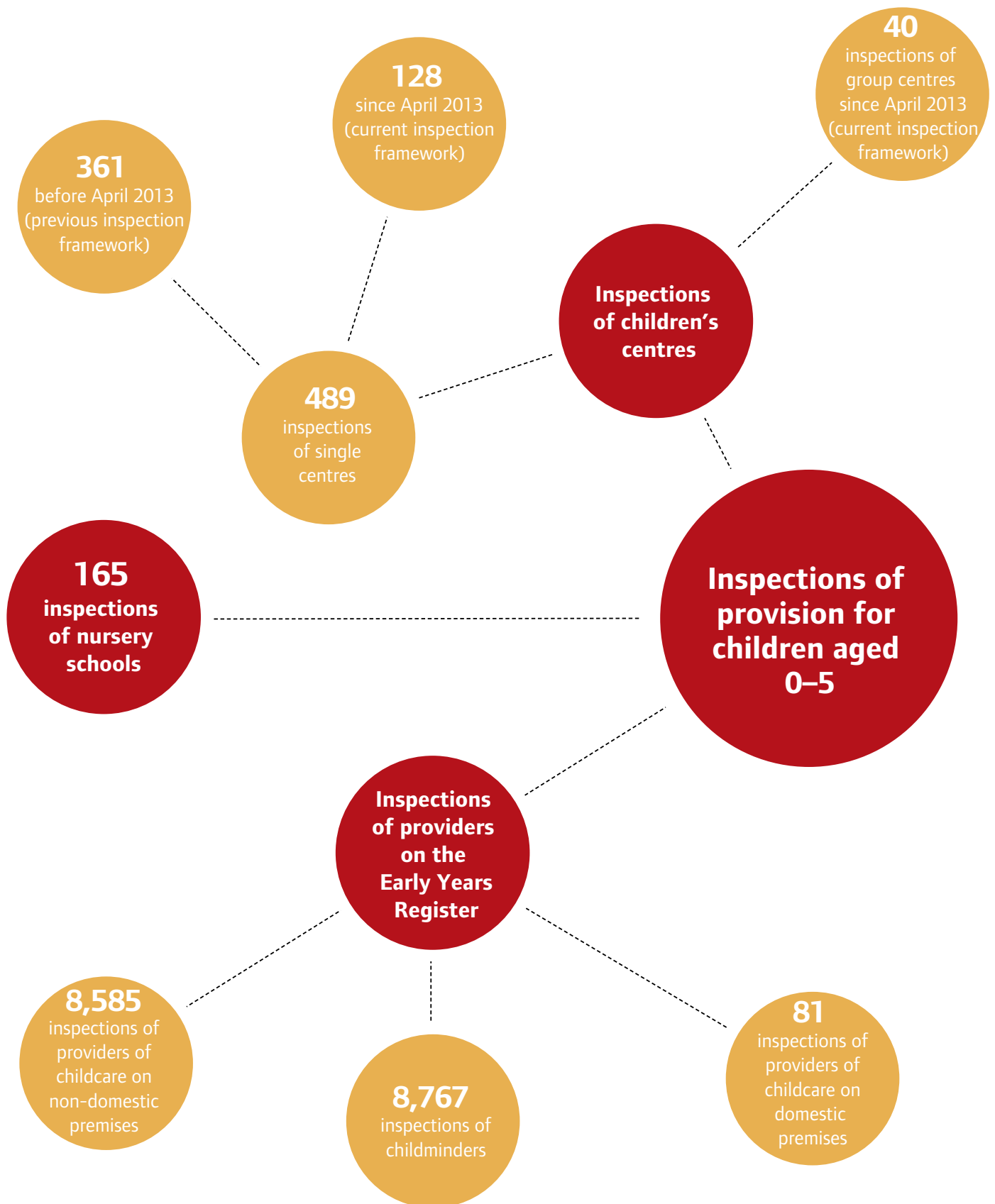


The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
of **Education, Children's Services and Skills**

Early years



Figure 1: Inspections carried out between 1 September 2012 and 31 October 2013^{1,2}



1. Inspections of providers on the Early Years Register are carried out under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006; inspections of children's centres under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006; and inspections of nursery schools under the Education Act 2005, as amended in 2011.

2. Early years and children's centres data include inspections conducted between 1 September 2012 and 31 October 2013. For children's centres this includes the last seven months of the old inspection framework (September 2012 to March 2013) and the first seven months of the new framework (April 2013 to October 2013). Inspections of children's centre groups were introduced as part of the new framework. Nursery schools data includes inspections conducted between 1 September 2012 and 31 August 2013.



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Data View: Inspection findings can also be viewed at www.dataview.ofsted.gov.uk. Data View enables users to compare the performance of providers over time from Ofsted inspection across England by region, local authority and constituency area.





Foreword

This early years report represents a departure for Ofsted – the first time we have published our annual review of the sector separately from the other sectors we inspect. This represents an opportunity to shine a light on pressing issues facing this particular sector and to make a contribution to raising the prestige and profile of the important work done by practitioners in early years.

But the messages within this report should not be seen in isolation. This is one chapter in a longer story about the importance of raising expectations for children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and communities. Ofsted's publication in June 2013, *Unseen Children: Access and Achievement 20 years on*, emphasised the importance of the early years for breaking the cycle of disadvantage. It also powerfully demonstrated the importance of parenting. Parenting style, parental involvement in education and the quality of the home learning environment are major factors that explain the differences between children from low income backgrounds and their wealthier peers. Not enough is being done to support and encourage parents, but particularly those who need the most help, to secure for their children the benefit that the best early education and childcare can offer.





However, it is because of, not in spite of, the importance of parents that this report unashamedly tries to break down the barriers between schools that teach the youngest children and the early years provision outside of schools. The parents who teach, whether they realise they are doing it or not, give their children the greatest advantages from the very start. Teaching for small children is not blackboards and desks, it is counting bricks when building a tower, learning nursery rhymes and familiar songs, or gently coaching a child to put their own arms into their coat. The most successful early years providers, whoever they are, are focused on helping children to learn. The most successful children's centres work to engage parents who don't know how to teach and give them the tools to be teachers too. Children's centres can play a fundamental role in tackling disadvantage, but realising this ambition will require greater clarity for this rapidly changing sector. The contribution that schools make, and the similarities between what schools do and what other early years providers do, should be clearer and better understood.

In this report, we make recommendations for change. We acknowledge the work that Ofsted will need to undertake to deliver a simpler, more flexible and accountable early years sector. Within Ofsted we are sharpening the focus on teaching and learning in our inspection reports. We are consulting on improving the way we inspect early years in schools. If these improvements are introduced, it will mean that in future we can report on the quality of nursery classes in primary schools, alongside the inspection outcomes for provision for this age group in this report. We hope this latest consultation is only an interim measure as we work with colleagues in government and with the sector towards an even more ambitious vision.

We look forward to working with you to meet this challenge.

Nick Hudson
National Director
Early Education, Ofsted





Executive summary

1. **Parents are the most important influence on any child's early years**, but for children who experience early education and childcare, quality matters considerably. The quality of early education and childcare is important to most parents, and the majority of parents are happy with the quality of early education and childcare that is available to them. **Quality in this sector has been rising**, and 78% of providers on the Early Years Register are now good or outstanding, which is the highest proportion since the register was established. Ofsted has contributed to the rising quality of providers on the Early Years register by being more rigorous.
2. Though there is some evidence of better outcomes for children overall, in 2013, **only a little more than a third of children from low income backgrounds reached a good level of development**. In some local areas, this was less than a fifth. One factor is that some types of provision, such as childminders, are considerably less likely to be good or outstanding in deprived areas. Children from low income families make the strongest progress when supported by highly qualified staff, particularly with graduate level qualifications. Nursery schools have high levels of graduate level staff and perform as strongly in deprived areas as in more affluent ones.
3. **Schools are important providers of early education and childcare but the current system of inspection and regulation does not do enough to recognise this**. Schools and providers on the Early





Years Register are inspected and regulated differently, and this makes it hard for parents to compare quality. It also creates barriers for schools who want to meet demand by offering early education and childcare for younger children. There are active disincentives for schools to work with early years providers to raise the proportion of children who are well prepared to start school.

4. Children are disadvantaged if they are not ready to learn when they start school, but at present **neither parents, nor providers, nor anyone in government is clear enough about which children are going to be ready for school and which children are not.** This is because, even though children are regularly assessed in their early years, this is not done in a standardised way and the assessment data are not collected, published or made clear enough to parents.
5. **The choice of an early years provider can be too difficult because the information that is available to every parent is not clear and simple enough.** Some local authorities provide excellent information, but the quality of what is available locally and nationally varies widely. The government, Ofsted and local authorities could all do more. There is too much complexity in the words we use to talk about early education and childcare, how we compare quality, and how we publish details about providers. All these need to be much simpler, clearer and more accessible, particularly to those families whose children would most benefit from access to the highest quality provision.

6. **Our recent inspections of children’s centres have found a sector that is characterised by turbulence and volatility.** Recent inspections have focused more on the accountability of the local authority, and fewer centres have done well as a result. Children’s centres are changing rapidly, including reductions in numbers and changes in structures and organisation, and there is ongoing debate nationally about the purpose of children’s centres. More children’s centres are now organised in groups, and fewer of these groups have been judged good or outstanding than single centres.
7. **Ofsted is committed to improving its inspection and regulation of early years, but this will only be effective if it is part of a large-scale vision for reform in order to tackle the weaknesses in the system:**
 - It should be easier for parents to compare the quality of services for children before the start of Reception.
 - There should be clear accountability for outcomes and Ofsted should have the means to hold providers fully to account for their performance, particularly where they are in receipt of public money.
 - Schools should have greater flexibility to support children in their early years and be incentivised to do so through the inspection and regulation system.
 - The accountability of children’s centres for outcomes should be made clearer.
 - More should be done to stop children from low income families from falling behind.

Our specific recommendations for change to achieve these ambitions are on pages 30–31.





About early years

What do we mean by early years?

8. Children's early years, otherwise known as the foundation years,¹ are the time between birth and the 31 August following their fifth birthday.
9. The early education and childcare provision for this age range is diverse and offered by a mix of public, private and voluntary providers. Unlike attendance at school, none of the provision offered is compulsory and many incur charges for parents, which for some families can represent a major item of expenditure. Though families have to pay for full-time early education and childcare, once children reach the age of three² (or the age of two for eligible families), they are offered up to 15 hours of government-funded provision per week.
10. While children are not required to attend primary school until the term following their fifth birthday, most start in the September of the academic year in which they turn five. Local authorities must now offer all children a place in a school Reception class from the September following their fourth birthday. While the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) includes primary school Nursery and Reception classes, this report will primarily focus on the inspection of provision for

children who have not yet started Reception. We will also look at the development outcomes for children in this age range, which are reported on nationally by the government at the end of the EYFS when most children are aged five.

What is the purpose of early years provision?

11. The government has three aims that high-quality affordable childcare provision makes a contribution to:³
 - helping to improve children's outcomes, and so putting them on the path to success in later life
 - enabling parents to work, if they want to make that choice
 - getting children into early years provision at an early age to provide an opportunity to identify and intervene earlier in potential problems.

As well as the findings from our inspection evidence, in this report we will consider how effectively early years services support each of these aims.

¹ The term 'the foundation years' was introduced by Frank Field in his independent review on poverty and life chances, which reported in December 2010.

² Funding is available from the start of the term following a child's third birthday.

³ Letter from Elizabeth Truss MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education and Childcare, to all local authorities, January 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-provision-letter-from-elizabeth-truss-to-councils.



Children's outcomes

Who contributes to higher outcomes?

12. Parents and carers are the prime educators of young children, and have the greatest influence on their development. At some stage between birth and the age of four, most children will also attend an early years setting that has been inspected by Ofsted. This is because around 94%⁴ of children will, at some point before starting primary school, benefit from government-funded early education and childcare located in early years settings that have been inspected by Ofsted.⁵ For the majority of children, much of the early education and childcare that they receive between birth and four will not be in formal settings. This early education and childcare will mostly come from their parents, but also from many different combinations of family and friends, and paid carers who may be registered with Ofsted but not routinely inspected.
13. The majority of formal early education and childcare places are in providers that are described in regulatory terms as 'childcare on non-domestic premises', such as nurseries and pre-schools. These offer over a million places in total. What this regulatory category does not show is the diversity of provision that is captured under this broad term. Early education and childcare are available in the public, private and voluntary

sectors. Quite often, single organisations, including schools, can be registered more than once with either Ofsted or the Department for Education, depending on the age of the children, how long the children are with them, and the type of activity they do with them. The infographic on page 18 illustrates the complexity of this sector.

14. Children grow and develop quickly when they are very young, but with the right support they are more likely to develop specific skills and abilities that will help them succeed in life. Specifically, the early years are a critical time to develop the skills that will prepare them to start school. Early years providers play an important part in this development.

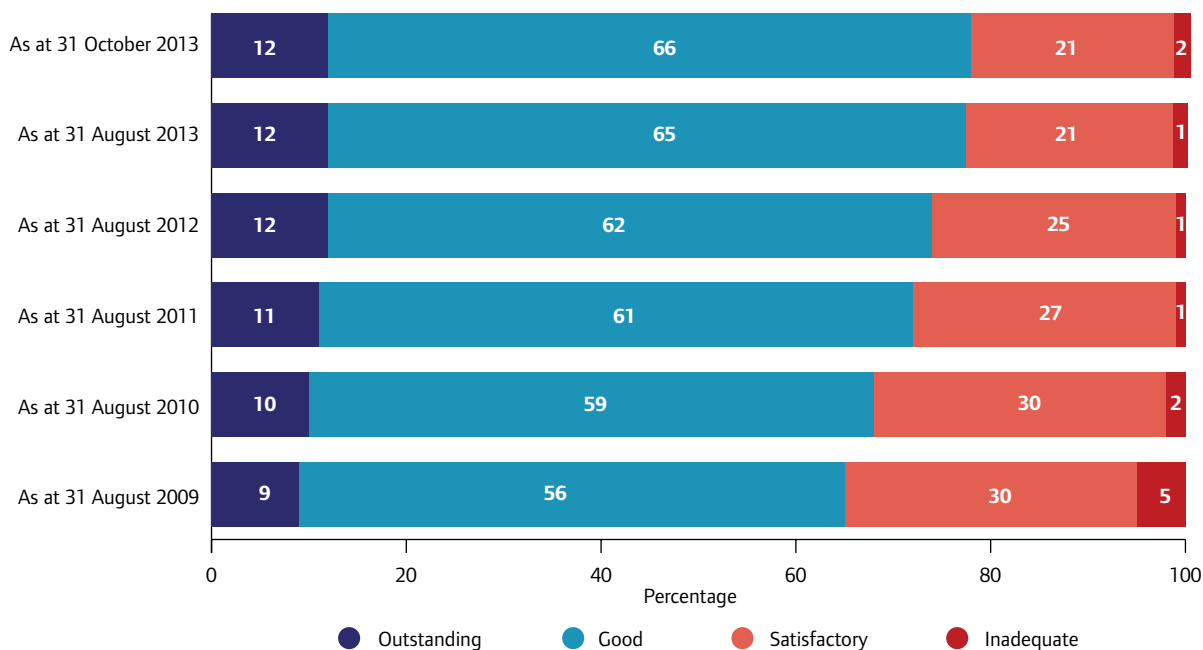
What does inspection tell us about quality?

15. Over the past four years, there has been a steady improvement in the quality of the early years providers that are on the Early Years Register. There is now a higher proportion of good and outstanding providers than at any point since the Early Years Register was created. To be on the Early Years Register, a provider needs to deliver early education as well as childcare.

⁴ Department for Education official statistics, *Provision for children under five years of age in England, Jan 2013, children aged 3 benefitting from a funded place*; www.gov.uk/government/publications/provision-for-children-under-5-years-of-age-in-england-january-2013.

⁵ The exception is nursery places in association independent schools. These schools are inspected by designated independent school inspectorates, not by Ofsted.

Figure 2: State of nation: most recent inspection judgements for overall effectiveness of all providers on the Early Years Register as at 31 October 2013



1. Percentages in the charts are rounded and may not add to 100.
2. Data include the most recent overall effectiveness judgements for all active providers on the Early Years Register on 31 October 2013 compared with 31 August for previous years.
3. Data include inspection judgements made since the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2008.
4. Data exclude providers that were active but had not yet been inspected.
5. 2013 data include inspections where the report was published by 31 October 2013.

Source: Ofsted

The government's standards for early education and childcare are set out in the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Research suggests that most parents are satisfied with the quality of childcare that is available to them, with only 10% thinking quality is less than good and 8% thinking that quality is an area for improvement.⁶ The quality of provision is important to parents, with 81% rating Ofsted judgements as important for childcare.⁷

school overall, without a separate grade for the quality of the Nursery or Reception Years. Looking only at the overall judgements given, nursery schools perform considerably better than other types of early years provision. While nursery schools have features that support this picture, such as a higher proportion of graduate-level staff, it will require inspection frameworks to be fully aligned before such comparisons can be made in any reliable way.

16. Ofsted also inspects nursery schools and other schools that include nursery provision. Most nursery classes are in maintained primary schools, but a small number can be found in secondary and special schools.
17. In order to reflect the existing legislation and regulations, school inspections use a different framework from the framework used to inspect providers on the Early Years Register. It is therefore not possible to directly compare the judgements from these two types of inspection. In primary school inspections, the school is given a grade for the primary

Ofsted's contribution

18. Ofsted has contributed to the rising quality in early years provision by being increasingly rigorous in inspection and regulation of providers on the Early Years Register. We introduced a new inspection framework for early years inspections in September 2012. We put a much stronger emphasis on children's learning and development, including assessing how well teaching is enabling children to make progress

6 *Childcare and early years survey of parents: 2012 to 2013*, Department for Education, SFE 06/2014 2014, p. 147; www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-and-early-years-survey-of-parents-2012-to-2013.
 7 *Exploring the flexibility of the free entitlement to early education: research among parents*, Department for Education, 2012; www.gov.uk/government/publications/exploring-the-flexibility-of-the-free-entitlement-to-early-education-research-among-parents.

towards achieving the Early Learning Goals in the EYFS. More inspections now include periods of joint observations with the manager of each setting to look at how well the children are learning.

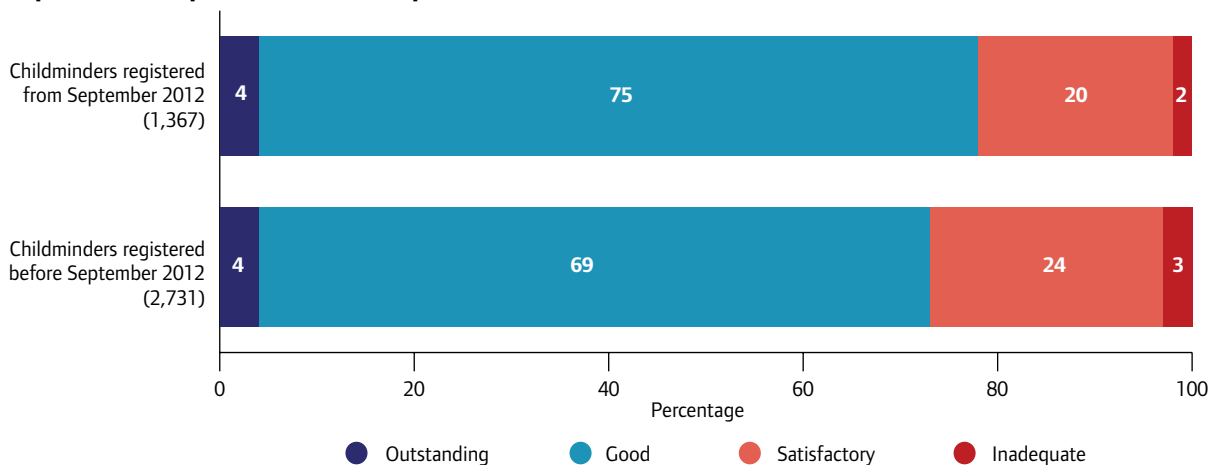
- 19. These new, much tougher arrangements were introduced in September 2012, and in the period to October 2013 the proportion of providers judged good or outstanding was seven percentage points lower than in the 2011/12 academic year. In addition, 8% of providers inspected were judged as inadequate.⁸
- 20. We are responding swiftly to complaints about settings. Where complaints or concerns about providers have been made, we have assessed the risk and, where appropriate, we have used 'brought forward' and 'priority' inspections in order to check that children are educated and cared for in a suitable environment and their safety is not put at risk.⁹ In addition, we prioritised re-inspecting providers previously judged satisfactory since September 2012. These two factors have contributed to the higher proportion of settings judged less than good since September 2012.
- 21. While inspection judgements awarded since the start of the new framework may have been lower than in past years, the proportion of good and outstanding providers in the sector has risen overall. This is because of the effects of the tougher standards:

- providers have raised their game and have been awarded higher grades at their latest inspection
- providers who are not well equipped are discouraged from joining
- providers who are committed to joining the sector are encouraged to prepare better before they start taking children
- lower performing providers choose to leave.

The sector overall is left stronger.

- 22. The impact of changes to the registration process for childminders illustrates this most clearly. We said we would introduce a tougher registration process for childminders and our evidence shows it has been effective. Last year, we received almost 6,200 applications from individuals applying to be childminders, over 2,100 fewer than the year before. There was also a higher drop-out rate during the process, as providers became aware of the high expectations they needed to meet to be accepted as suitable for educating and caring for children. One-third of childminders (34%) who provided a reason when they withdrew from the registration process said they withdrew because of insufficient knowledge of the revised learning and development requirements of the EYFS.¹⁰ The proportion of applicants whose registration was refused rose by almost four percentage points this year.

Figure 3: Overall effectiveness judgements from the first inspections of new childminders, where the inspection took place between 1 September 2012 and 31 October 2013



1. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.
 2. Data refer to childminders active on the Early Years Register as at 31 October 2013.
 3. Includes inspections published by 31 October 2013.

Source: Ofsted

8 Official statistics: Early years and childcare registered providers inspections and outcomes (20110015), Ofsted, 04 Mar 2014; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/official-statistics-early-years-and-childcare-registered-providers-inspections-and-outcomes. In the 2011/12 academic year, 74% of inspections were good or outstanding and 3% were inadequate.
 9 A 'priority inspection' is when Ofsted schedules an urgent inspection for completion within five working days after receiving concerns that indicate that there may be a significant risk to children at the provision, but that are not of a safeguarding nature. A 'brought forward' inspection is where we schedule an inspection for completion within 30 working days after receiving concerns that indicate that there may be a risk to children at the provision, but that do not indicate an immediate threat to children's safety.
 10 In the period September 2012 to March 2013, there were 551 withdrawals, of which 207 provided a reason for withdrawing.



23. The success of this tougher policy is demonstrated by the fact that those who did complete the registration process were more likely to perform well in their first inspection than those registered before the changes were implemented.
24. We continue to raise expectations in this sector. In November 2013, we introduced a 'requires improvement' judgement to replace 'satisfactory', to reflect the fact that only good is good enough for children or their parents and to bring this framework into line with the other sectors we inspect.

Are outcomes improving?

25. Research evidence has shown that children's progress in the early years depends on the quality of the early education and childcare they receive.¹¹ The rising quality of provision is therefore likely to have an impact on the progress made by those children who attend.
26. The only outcomes data for ages 0–5 that are consistently recorded and published are in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP). The EYFSP is an assessment conducted by schools at the end of the Reception Year. As well as individual judgements about the development of each child in different areas of learning, the EYFSP includes an assessment of whether each child has reached a 'good level of development', based on criteria set by the government.¹²
27. When the EYFSP was first published in 2009, 52% of children were judged to have reached a good level of development. In 2012, this proportion had risen to 64%. In 2012, the government introduced a new EYFSP Profile and the criteria for a good level of development changed, including an increased focus on attainment in physical development, literacy and mathematics. The proportion of children who achieved a good level of development in 2013 using this new standard was 52%.¹³
28. On the basis of these outcomes, there was clearly improvement over the four-year period before the EYFSP was revised. The rising quality of early years providers may have played a role in this. However, the outcomes and inspection data leave a number of issues unresolved:
 - The EYFSP provides data for the end of Reception, but what is needed in order to understand the true impact of a school in adding value, or to be able to distinguish between the contribution of a school compared with provision before a child starts school, is a baseline assessment at the start of Reception. The government has recently announced the introduction of a baseline assessment.
 - It is not currently possible to link the level of development children reach at the end of Reception to the place where they received their early education. So while the good practice and progress inspectors have seen on inspection in early years settings are likely to lead to better development in the children in their care, we have no means of judging whether the development assessed by the early years provider has actually translated into a good level of development once at school.
 - This also means that it is not possible to comprehensively assess the types of settings, the number of hours in a setting or levels of staff qualifications that result in the best development outcomes.
 - Because the EYFSP is not published at the same level of detail as Key Stages 1 to 4 for each child, we do not know whether better development in early years is having the necessary impact throughout a pupil's schooling; and we are not able to identify trends in different local areas for particular groups of children who may be falling behind.
29. Researchers have compared Ofsted judgements of quality against the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales, which have been designed by researchers and are used internationally to assess the quality of early years provision based on evidence of impact on children's development outcomes. They found that the results from the two assessments were likely to agree if the setting was of high quality. However, for lower quality settings, the results were less likely to agree. Furthermore, there was little agreement about quality for children between birth and 30 months.¹⁴ Though these two measures would

11 K Sylva, E Melhuish, P Sammons, I Saraj-Blatchford and B Taggart (Eds), *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-School to the end of Key Stage 1*, Institute of Education, University of London, 2004.

12 A 'good level of development' is currently defined by the Department for Education as the number and proportion of children achieving at least the expected level within the three prime areas of learning: communication and language; physical development and personal, social and emotional development; and the early learning goals within the literacy and mathematics areas of learning.

13 Statistical First Release – Early years foundation stage: profile results in England, academic year 2009 to 2010, 2011 to 2012 and 2012 to 2013, Department for Education; www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-in-england-academic-year-2009-to-2010, www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-in-england-academic-year-2011-to-2012, www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2012-to-2013.

14 Mathers, et al., *Improving quality in the early years* (2012), Oxford University and the Daycare Trust and A+ Education Ltd; www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/fell/research/improving-quality-in-the-early-years.

not be expected to correlate entirely, Ofsted judgements should still be a reliable reflection of the contribution provision makes to better development. It is likely to be a challenge in the future to provide robust assurance that there is a clear link to development outcomes for all ages without access to outcomes data to inform inspection judgements.

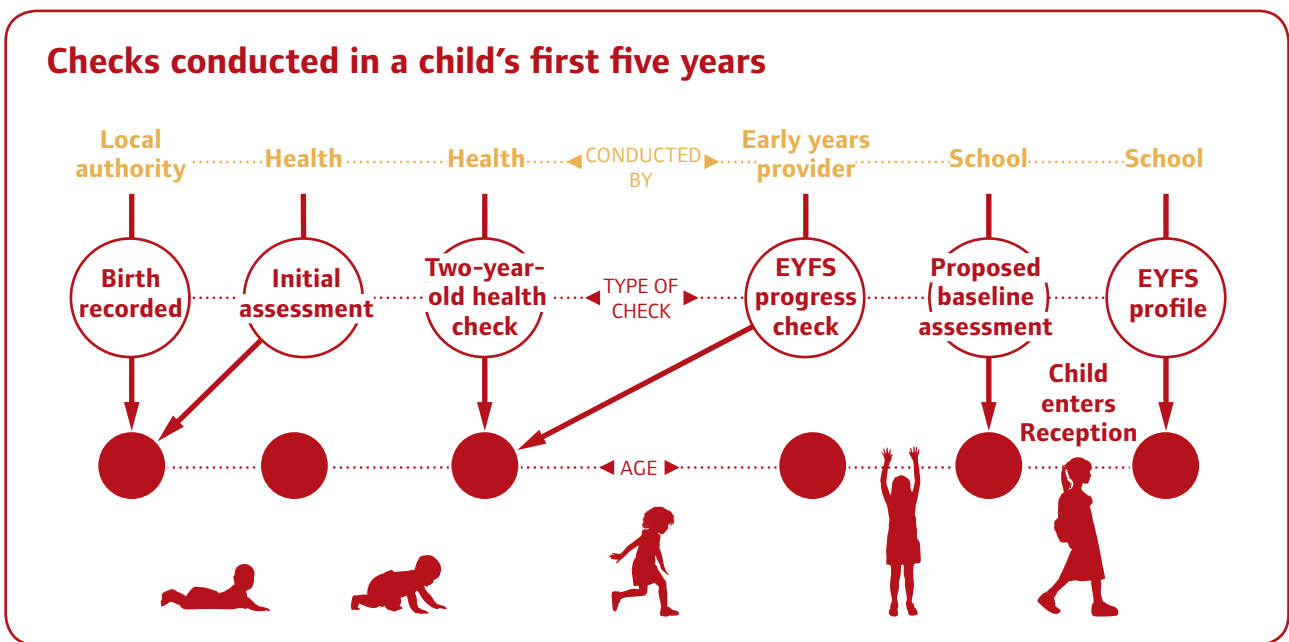
Data for accountability

30. The lack of outcomes data does not reflect a lack of assessment activity in children's early years. The progress that children make as they develop from birth is assessed but not published. The illustration below shows the opportunities to assess and record information about children in England. When children are born, their birth is recorded. Health visitors also visit immediately after the birth and assess the child's family environment to identify possible information and support that may be needed. There are further checks as part of the Healthy Child Pathway at six weeks, three to four months, five to eight months and one year. At around the age of two, all children should be assessed again by health services, and there should also be a check against the EYFS if the child is in an EYFS registered setting – which includes all nurseries and childminders. There are currently pilots underway to integrate the separate checks that happen at age two and to publish data on children's development at this age from 2015. As noted above, the government

has also announced a new 'baseline' check, which would be carried out at the point a child enters Reception, rather than at the end of the year.

31. Data on outcomes are critical to ensure that providers can be held to account for the impact they have. Lack of data in the early years sector means that accountability for outcomes is weak. Changes are being proposed, but they will not have the impact needed unless certain conditions are met. We have commented previously on our concerns about the reliability of assessments at Key Stage 1. These teacher assessments are not externally marked and, where schools have an incentive to raise Key Stage 1 results, such as in infant schools where Key Stage 1 is the final assessment in the school, results are higher than in primary schools that continue to Key Stage 2.^{15,16} This is unlikely to be the result of better teaching, as infant schools perform less well than all-through primary schools in the externally validated phonics test.¹⁷ A review of 30 infant schools that have merged with junior schools to become primary schools found that the average point score for Key Stage 1 assessments dropped following the merger.

32. The 'value added' that a school delivers depends on the ability to securely compare pupils' starting points to their end points. A good baseline assessment would provide a clear view of where pupils begin, but it would only do so if it was reliable. The experience of Key Stage 1 suggests that external marking would be



15 Based on the proportion of pupils reaching Level 2+ in Key Stage 1 teacher assessments (2013 data).
 16 Assessment and reporting arrangements Key Stage 1, including the phonics screening check, Standards and Testing Agency, 2013; www.education.gov.uk/assessment.
 17 Mean proportion of pupils meeting phonics check threshold, by type of school (2013 data).



as critical for a baseline as for that key stage. Schools already assess children when they join a school using their own variable standards, and the only value in a national baseline would be if it is a standardised assessment that would allow comparison from one school to the next.

33. In the inspection of primary schools, inspectors note the school's own assessment of attainment on entry. For the purpose of this report, we reviewed 46 recently inspected primary schools with the least challenging intakes in the most affluent areas with attainment at Key Stage 1 considerably above average for reading, writing and mathematics. Only nine of these schools judged their pupils to have above average attainment on entry and two judged attainment to be below average. A similar review of 64 schools in Shropshire, a local authority where overall EYFSP outcomes exactly matched the level seen nationally, did not find a single school that assessed pupils to be above average on entry. Any assessment against 'average' attainment should find around half of all schools to be above average, which would be approximately 8,000 primary schools nationwide.
34. But accountability should not only be for schools. At the present time, there are no outcomes data that can be used to hold providers to account for the early education they provide before reception age. Improving accountability for this sector would require one important change: as well as recording how well children are developing, practitioners should also record the early years providers the child attends. This is particularly critical where that attendance has been made possible through a government-funded place, but equally parents should have information about those places that they pay for that is based on solid evidence of what a provider has supported children to achieve.
35. A baseline assessment that could underpin 'value added' would need to be detailed to be robust. It is therefore unlikely to address the concern raised by many schools that some children are arriving in Reception not ready for school. In his report *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults*, Frank Field provides an illustration of the type of skills that some children lack, such as not being toilet trained or knowing the meaning of the word 'no' (see box on the right).¹⁸
36. The difference is considerable in what professionals need to know about development compared with what parents need to be clear about before sending their

child to school. This may explain why our inspectors found that, even within the same provider, there can be considerable debate about what it means for a child to be 'ready for school'.

37. Alongside this report we are publishing a companion piece on the topic of 'readiness for school'. Our inspectors visited schools and early years settings to capture how the most successful early years providers ensure that disadvantaged and vulnerable children are better prepared to start school. The findings of the report emphasise the importance of engagement with parents, the significance of effectively supporting the development of communication, language and literacy and some of the current good practice in increasing the accuracy of baseline assessments.
38. It is parents who are ultimately accountable for a child's development, and the system could do more to help them to meet their responsibilities. Alongside a comprehensive baseline assessment, every parent needs a short list of essential skills that they can take responsibility for ensuring their child has mastered before the first day of school. The two-year-old check must be the checkpoint for parents where they can be clearly advised if their child is or is not on track to master these essential skills. Parents also need to be clear where they can go, and what they can do, if they are told that their two-year-old child might not be ready by the start of school. This includes helping parents to access support for their child if special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified.

Types of skills that some children lack by the time they join the Reception Year

- To sit still and listen
- To be aware of other children
- To understand the word no and the borders it sets for behaviour
- To understand the word stop and that such a phrase might be used to prevent danger
- To be potty trained and able to go to the loo
- To recognise their own name
- To speak to an adult to ask for needs
- To be able to take off their coat and put on shoes
- To talk in sentences
- To open and enjoy a book.

¹⁸ Frank Field, *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults*, 2010; www.frankfield.com/campaigns/poverty-and-life-changes.aspx.



Choices for parents

What do parents need to be able to choose well?

39. Children will only experience childcare or early education if their parents choose to send them. Early years provision can have benefits for children, but it also serves an important purpose in enabling parents to pursue other activities, including work. An important function for Ofsted is to act as the main arbiter of quality for early years provision and to help provide information to parents about the quality of the provision available to them to enable them to choose well.

40. Ofsted supports parental choices by publishing inspection reports on its website. Childminder reports are also linked to the official source of information about early education and childcare, which is the Family Information Service provided by each individual local authority. However, recent research with parents^{19,20} found that:

- 70% of parents were not aware of Family Information Services
- 39% of parents said there was too little information on childcare options

- parents on a lower income, lone parents and those not already using childcare were less likely to feel they had enough information
- the proportion of parents who did not know whether there were enough places available locally had risen by eight percentage points in the past five years
- the proportion who did not know what the quality of services are locally had risen by five percentage points in the past five years
- 35% of couples where neither parent was working were not aware of the free entitlement for three- and four-year-olds.

Information sources for parents

41. For the purpose of this report, a search of a selection of local authority websites to find information on available childcare illustrated the variation in what local authorities offer. Parents are expected to contact their Family Information Service for information on availability – but may not be aware that it exists. The advice provided is of variable quality and parents with little or no knowledge of the sector may find it difficult to navigate.

19 *Childcare and early years survey of parents: 2012 to 2013*, Department for Education, SFR 06/2014, 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-and-early-years-survey-of-parents-2012-to-2013.

20 *Exploring the flexibility of the free entitlement to early education: research among parents*, Department for Education, 2012; www.gov.uk/government/publications/exploring-the-flexibility-of-the-free-entitlement-to-early-education-research-among-parents.



42. The Family Information Service website for Brighton and Hove City Council,²¹ for example, is very comprehensive. Providers can be viewed on an easily navigable map, every provider is linked to the Ofsted website (including a unique reference number for childminders). There is also detailed information about location, links to local schools, costs and availability of funded places, hours of operation and whether places are currently available. Results can be filtered using a range of these factors. The website can be located easily with a search engine.
43. By contrast, other Family Information Services can be considerably more limited, for example:
- information on the internet is very limited or non-existent; parents are expected to email or call a number, which is only operational during working hours
 - providers are listed online but there is no clear link to guide parents to the Ofsted inspection report
 - websites do not provide listings for all registered providers in the area or make parents aware that they may need to do another search across local authority boundaries
 - the council has a policy against providing contact details for childminders unless they have a current vacancy
 - the council's Family Information Service cannot be easily found using an internet search.
44. At the national level, there is no comprehensive online source for parents to access information about early education and childcare. The information that is available nationally is disjointed, difficult to locate and does not always link directly to council Family Information Service websites.
45. Ofsted's website allows parents to search for registered provision near them and includes every inspected provider in the country. However, the information that we publish also has limitations:
- data protection rules limit the information we can provide about childminders, therefore a parent may be able to see that there is a childminder near them, but not be able to access contact information without going through the local authority
 - because there are different regulations for schools, children's centres and other early years providers, parents selecting 'early years and childcare' will only be shown information about providers on the Early Years Register and not local nursery schools or nursery classes.
46. The government has commissioned an independent review of the information available to parents, which is due to report later in 2014. Ofsted can contribute to the improvement of information sources available to parents, but this will require a broader look at some of the legislative and regulatory barriers that characterise the current fragmented landscape. In particular, we are concerned about the conflict between data protection rules and the legitimate public interest in easy access to childminder inspection reports, especially considering that the production of each report is heavily subsidised through public funding and childminders are operating a private business.²²

How we talk about childcare and early education

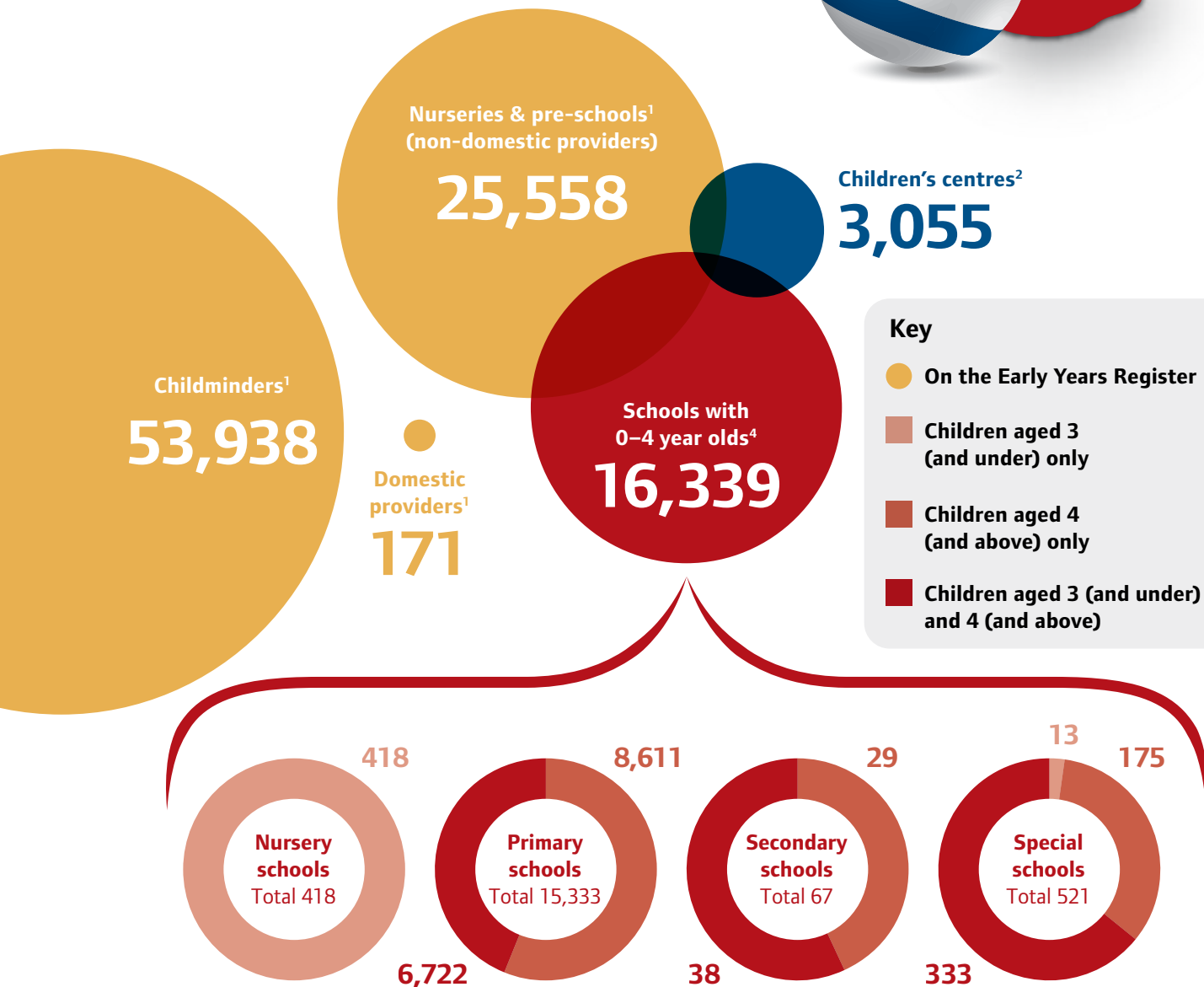
47. The language used to describe different forms of early education is confusing. The regulations for this sector divide providers into five broad categories:
- childminders
 - domestic (groups of childminders on domestic premises)
 - non-domestic (including private and voluntary sector pre-schools, nurseries and after-school clubs)
 - local authority-maintained, academies and free schools (these can be either nursery schools, or primary, secondary or special schools with nursery provision)
 - independent schools with nursery provision.
48. While Ofsted uses these categories as defined by the government, they may not be helpful to parents. All providers work to the same standards set out in the EYFS. All of these types of provider can offer the 15 hours of funded early education available to three- and four-year-olds. Parents may be additionally confused because settings and childcare are known by many different names, some of which are on page 20:

²¹ www.familyinfobrighton.org.uk

²² On average, an established childminder contributes £140 over a four-year cycle to the cost of being inspected, out of a full cost of £708. The remainder of the cost is met by the taxpayer.

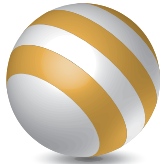
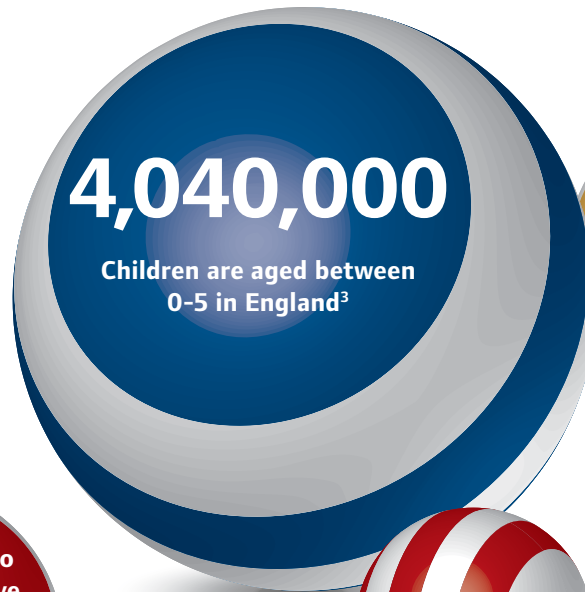
It's not all child's play in early years

The sector includes both providers on the Early Years (EY) Register and schools. Children's centres provide support for families with young children. There are also a number of both children's centres and schools that are additionally on the EY Register. Some settings operate as all three: EY registered provider; school; and children's centre. How many settings provide these double or triple functions is not systematically monitored. In addition to the maintained schools shown here, there are 890 independent schools offering funded early education and childcare.

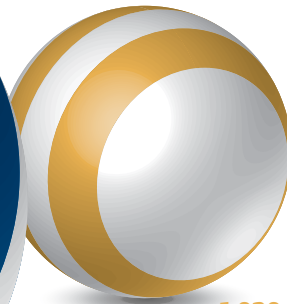




Breakdown by number of children



270,000
Aged 0-5 children receive education and care at childminders¹



1,020,000
Aged 0-5 children receive education and care at nurseries and pre-schools¹



630,000
Aged 4 children receiving education and care in maintained schools⁴

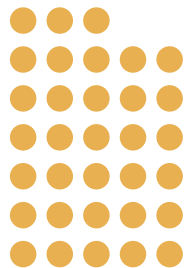
45,000
Aged 2 children receive education and care in maintained schools⁴



290,000
Aged 3 children receive education and care in maintained schools⁴

Reasons for not using free early education for 3- and 4-year-olds⁵

14%
Prefer to look after child themselves



33%
Didn't know their child could get free hours/were unaware they were eligible



Percentage of parents that use formal childcare by deprivation⁶



Since September 2013, the poorest 20% of two-year-olds have been eligible for free early years provision of up to 15 hours a week – **130,000 children⁷**

92,000⁷ children had taken up a free place by October 2013



From September 2014, the government has said it will expand that offer to the least advantaged 40% of two-year-olds – **260,000 children⁷**

Sources and footnotes:

¹ Data on the number of non-domestic providers (nurseries and pre-schools), domestic providers, and childminders are based on the numbers on Ofsted's Early Years' Register, as at 30 September 2013.

² The number of children's centres is from Department for Education and is the number of main centres as at 30 November 2013.

³ Office of National Statistics Mid-2012 population estimate.

⁴ The number of schools and children in these schools are estimates calculated by Ofsted using unredacted data from the Department for Education's Schools Census. In the census the child's age is based on their age as at 31 August 2012, so those aged four are likely to be in Reception Year when the census was taken in January 2013, although some may join later in the academic year. Only the 16,339 schools recorded as having some children aged 2-4 are included in the chart. Data is illustrative only.

⁵ Department for Education/Ipsos MORI, Exploring the flexibility of the free entitlement to early education: research among parents, June 2012.

⁶ Department for Education, Childcare and early years survey of parents 2012-13, January 2014.

⁷ Department for Education press release 11 November 2013, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/92000-2-year-olds-already-receiving-free-childcare>.

Nursery, childminder, pre-school, pre-school play group, day-care nursery, day care, wraparound care, kindergarten, play group, after- and before-school clubs, childcare, childcare centre, crèche, prep, primary school, early years...

49. There is no clear definition of what any of the terms above mean and they do not mean the same thing even across local areas. Parents are most likely to seek information from informal networks of family and friends.²³ But this illustrates how inaccessible the sector can be to parents in the most vulnerable communities, who may be less likely to include in their informal networks people who are confident in navigating a landscape that appears considerably more complicated than it is.

Inspection reports and practices

50. The current regulatory framework means that the way that Ofsted regulates, inspects and reports on inspection can align poorly with the current landscape or the perspective of parents. Ofsted operates two registers (Childcare and Early Years Registers) and five inspection frameworks for children before the start of Reception (maintained schools, independent schools, Early Years Register, Childcare Register and children's centres). The introduction of a new framework for inspecting childminding agencies from September 2014 will be a sixth framework. These inspection frameworks reflect the different regulatory arrangements for these different settings, rather than being designed specifically to support parental choice. Because our frameworks and reporting reflect the regulatory framework set by the government, regulatory change will be needed to improve how we support parental choice through our inspection work. In the meantime, we will consider what action we can take to improve our information for parents.

51. One disadvantage of so many frameworks is that, where there is a school and children's centre that also offers childcare for children under three,²⁴ inspection and regulation become extremely complex. Parents will experience one building, one group of children, one set of managers and one governing body, providing continuous services that they probably welcome for being seamless and relevant. In common sense terms, this would be considered a single organisation. But in regulatory terms, it is treated as three different providers and inspected three times under three different frameworks. We try to make it easy for parents to find reports that share the same postcode, and inspectors try to make reference to other reports published under different frameworks in each report that they produce, but we cannot avoid the inefficiency and potential for confusing messages that is inbuilt in the system.

52. From a parent's perspective, different frameworks not only make it hard to compare inspection outcomes, but can make it unclear whether different settings are offering comparable provision. There is a single market for early education and childcare and parents should be able to clearly compare cost and quality.

53. For all these reasons, we welcome the government's expressed desire to see a simpler, more coherent and flexible inspection system.²⁵ We are keen to contribute to this being delivered quickly.



²³ *Childcare and early years survey of parents: 2012 to 2013*, Department for Education, SFR 06/2014, 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-and-early-years-survey-of-parents-2012-to-2013.

²⁴ Unless the childcare is only for 'rising threes'.

²⁵ Elizabeth Truss, speech to the Resolution Foundation, February 2014; www.gov.uk/government/speeches/elizabeth-truss-speaks-about-childcare-reform--2.



Preventing future problems

54. There is extensive literature²⁶ on the importance of intervention in the early years to avoid the long-term costs and potentially highly damaging impact of problems later in life. Three key areas where potential problems should be identified and tackled early on are:

- avoiding the need for child protection intervention through supporting parents in difficulty at an early stage
- avoiding the lifelong educational disadvantage that is already sometimes apparent in children from low income backgrounds by the age of three
- avoiding the need for healthcare by creating healthy habits and behaviours.

55. Currently, Ofsted inspects the quality of intervention in all these areas, though the extent to which we can give a view of the effectiveness of interventions is limited for various reasons. We will in time be able to give a view on early help through our recently introduced single inspections of local authority children's social care. This will indirectly include the contribution of children's centres. While health outcomes are included in Ofsted's children's centres framework, this is not an area of expertise for our inspectors and it is relevant to ask whether these outcomes should be overseen by the Care Quality Commission.

Outcomes for children from low income families

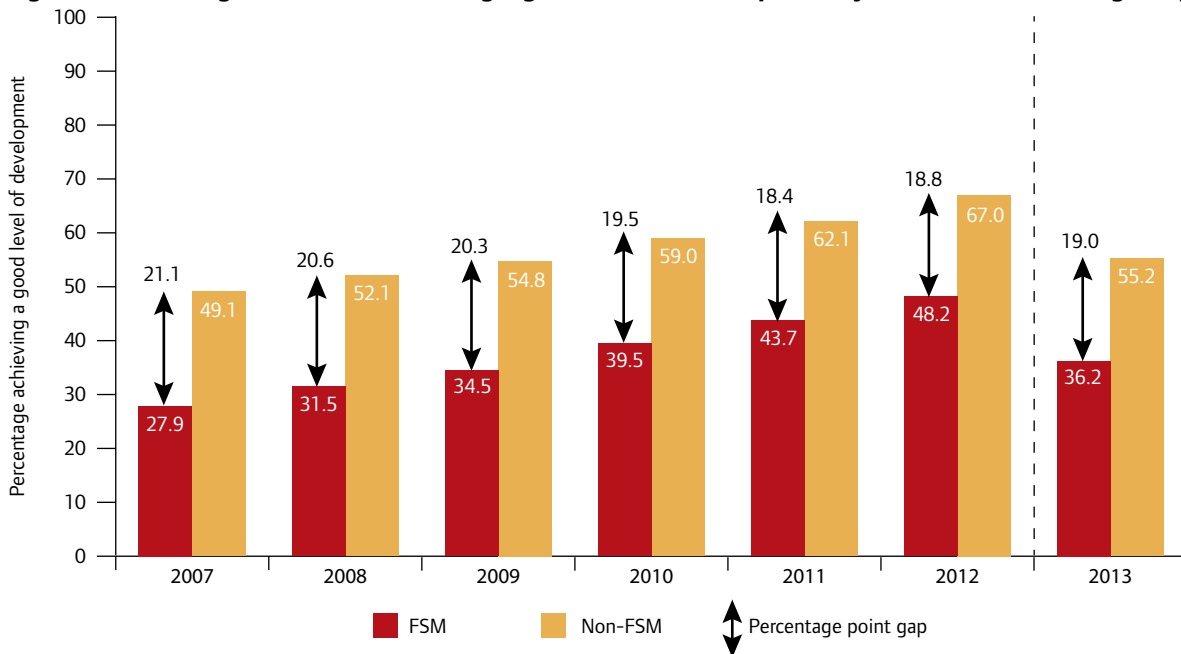
56. Between 2006/07 and the introduction of a new standard in 2012 for a 'good level of development', there has been improvement in the outcomes measured for both pupils eligible for free school meals and those not eligible. What has not substantially changed is the gap in outcomes between the children from low income families and their better off peers. Though some reduction in the gap was seen in the four years from 2007, this reduction was small and the past two years have seen the gap widen slightly. There are local authorities now²⁷ where the gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and all others is as low as five percentage points, compared with over 30 in other local authorities. It is clear, therefore, that the barriers can be overcome. This report concludes with a comparison of local authority performance for children from low income background in the early years: see page 32.

57. The EYFSP shows that, overall, children from low income backgrounds have fewer skills in the prime areas of learning, particularly in language and communication, than their more affluent peers. Research shows that not only do children from low income backgrounds have fewer words in their

²⁶ For example, Graham Allen, *Early intervention: the next steps*, 2011; www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-intervention-the-next-steps--2.

²⁷ The EYFSP gap in Newham, Hackney and Tower Hamlets are two, three and five percentage points, respectively.

Figure 4: Percentage of children achieving a good level of development by free school meals eligibility



1. The dotted line shows a change in EYFSP methodology. New methodology applies for 2013 assessments.
2. A Good Level of Development is defined as the number and proportion of children achieving at least the expected level within the three prime areas of learning: communication and language; physical development and personal, social and emotional development; and the early learning goals within the literacy and mathematics areas of learning.

Source: Department for Education
www.gov.uk/government/publications/eyfsp-attainment-by-pupil-characteristics-in-england-academic-year-2011-to-2012
www.gov.uk/government/publications/eyfsp-attainment-by-pupil-characteristics-2013

vocabulary, but that they acquire new vocabulary at a much slower rate than their better off peers. The difference in their vocabulary not only relates to the number of words they know and understand, but also to the extent to which they are able to use words to express meaning through speech. This is due in large part to the way that their parents speak to them at home. Children from more affluent households hear more words and receive more positive affirmation.²⁸ Disadvantaged children are, by age three, estimated to be on average nine months behind those from wealthier backgrounds and this gap increases throughout their school years.²⁹

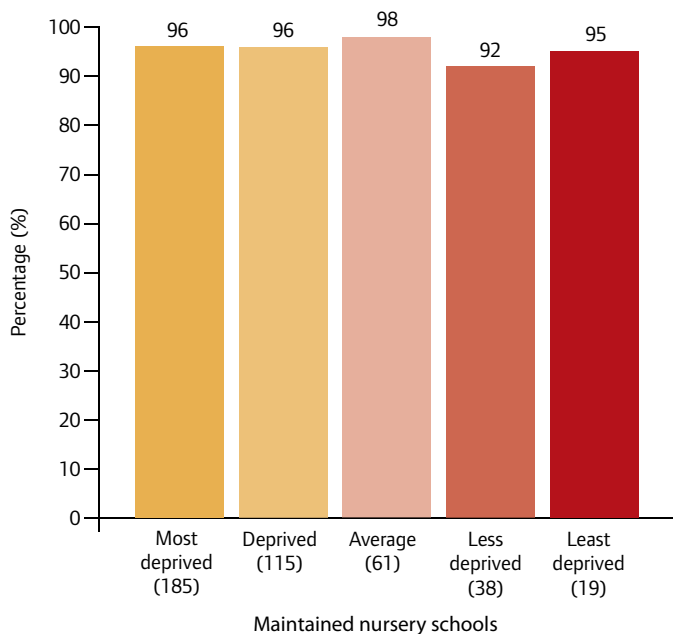
58. Research also demonstrates that children from poor backgrounds who attend an early education setting increase their vocabulary at a quicker rate than those who stay at home. While early education alone does not close the gap, it can improve the performance of children from low-income backgrounds.³⁰

How good is early years provision in more deprived areas?

59. It is widely accepted that progress in early years for children from low income backgrounds depends on attendance in the highest quality settings. This is based on large scale research in 2004.³¹
60. The only early education provision that is at least as strong, or even stronger, in deprived areas compared with wealthier areas is nursery schools. Helpfully, these schools are disproportionately located in deprived areas.³² However, these schools form a very small part of the sector, with only 418 maintained nursery schools nationally. Childminders are considerably weaker in deprived areas, but are less likely to be located there.

28 Hart and Risley, *Meaningful differences in the everyday experiences of American children*, P.H. Brookes, 1995.
 29 Mathers et al., *Sound foundations: a review of the research evidence on quality of early childhood education and care for children under three – implications for policy and practice*, Sutton Trust and Oxford University, 2014; www.suttontrust.com/our-work/research/item/sound-foundations.
 30 Becker, Birgit (2011): 'Social disparities in children's vocabulary in early childhood. Does preschool education help to close the gap?', *The British Journal of Sociology* 62(1): p.69-88. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2010.01345.x/full>.
 31 K Sylva, E Melhuish, P Sammons, I Saraj-Blatchford and B Taggart (Eds), *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-School to the end of Key Stage 1*, Institute of Education, University of London, 2004; www.ioe.ac.uk/research/66744.html.
 32 *Childcare and early years providers survey*, 2011, Department for Education, OSR18/2012, 2012; www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-and-early-years-providers-survey-2011.

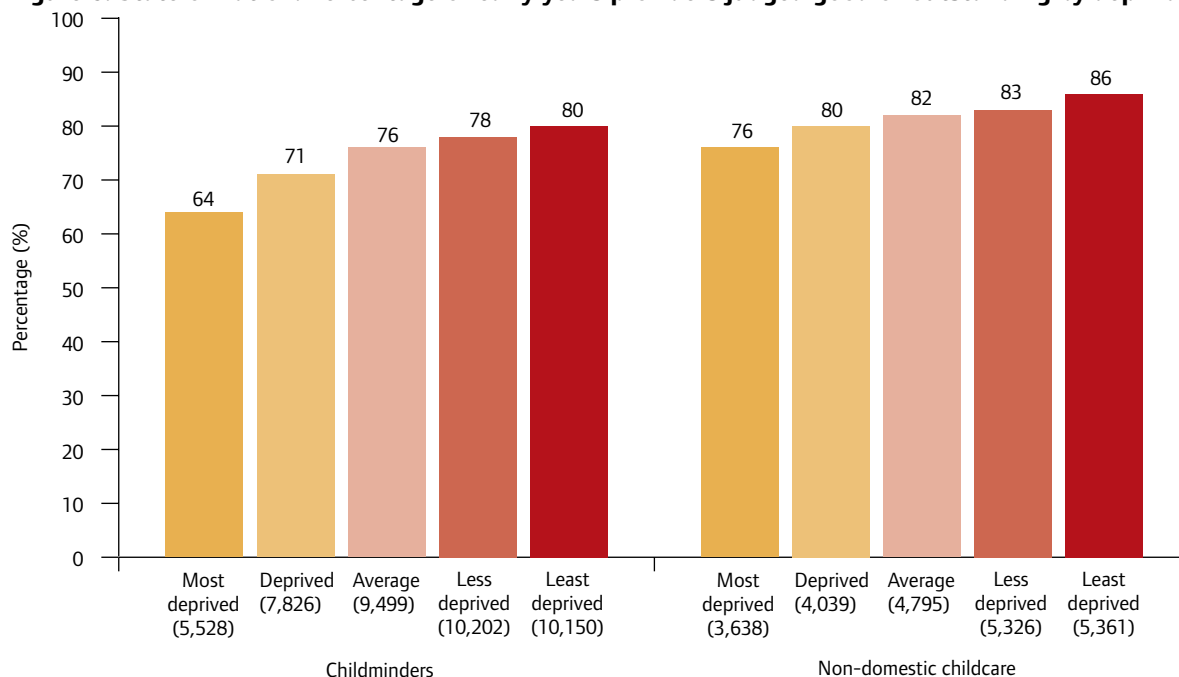
Figure 5: State of nation: Percentage of maintained nursery schools judged good or outstanding by deprivation



1. Data shows the most recent overall effectiveness judgements for all open maintained nursery schools at 31 August 2013.
2. Deprivation is measured using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) 2010. Nursery schools are identified in each deprivation band by matching the postcodes of settings with each lower level super output area (LSOA) in the IDACI. The chart uses quintiles of deprivation. For example, 'most deprived' indicates the most deprived 20%.

Source: Ofsted and Office of National Statistics

Figure 6: State of nation: Percentage of early years providers judged good or outstanding by deprivation



1. Data show the most recent overall effectiveness judgements for all active early years providers at 31 October 2013.
2. Deprivation is measured using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) 2010. Early years providers are identified in each deprivation band by matching the postcodes of settings with each lower level super output area (LSOA) in the IDACI. The chart uses quintiles of deprivation. For example, 'most deprived' indicates the most deprived 20%.

Source: Ofsted and Office of National Statistics

- 61. Three- and four-year-olds living in deprived communities in some local authorities will have access to nursery provision in a local school. As we have reported previously, although the quality of schools is improving overall, children in deprived areas are less likely to attend a good or outstanding school. There is a 15 percentage point gap between the proportion of good and outstanding primary schools in the wealthiest areas and in the most deprived.³³
- 62. Research shows that children from low income families make the strongest progress when settings have highly qualified staff and, in particular, when supported by trained teachers.^{34,35} There is wide variation in the proportion of graduate level staff in different types of setting in deprived areas.³⁶

Type of setting	Proportion of all paid staff in 30% most deprived areas with at least a level 6 qualification
Non-domestic childcare	10%
Non-domestic childcare in a children's centre	22%
Childminder	1%
Nursery school	35%
Primary school with nursery class	41%



What support do poorer families get?

- 63. Disadvantaged children and those looked after by their local authority are eligible for 570 hours of funded early education per year. From September 2013, around 130,000 two-year-olds became eligible.³⁷ Low-income families also receive support through tax credits to pay for childcare. However, despite these incentives, not all free places are taken up. Adding to this problem, the availability of places at outstanding providers is limited for those living in deprived areas. There are nearly twice as many places available in outstanding providers on the Early Years Register in the least deprived areas than in the deprived areas: 47,300 places compared with 25,500 places.
- 64. Children from low income families are more likely to gain benefit from high quality early education than their more advantaged peers.³⁸ However, workless families who receive of income related benefits were less likely to take up their entitlement. Research with parents suggests the most common reason for parents not taking up their entitlement is lack of awareness of eligibility.³⁹ This illustrates the impact of the inaccessible and disjointed information sources discussed earlier in this report.

Who is responsible for tackling disadvantage?

- 65. Responsibility for improving outcomes for children from the most deprived backgrounds sits clearly with local authorities. Local authorities have a statutory obligation to 'improve the well-being of children in their area and reduce inequalities between young children in their area'.⁴⁰ The redefined core purpose of children's centres also includes responsibility for reducing inequalities.

33 www.dataview.ofsted.gov.uk – data as at 31 August 2013.

34 K Sylva, E Melhuish, P Sammons, I Saraj-Blatchford and B Taggart (Eds), *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-School to the end of Key Stage 1*, Institute of Education, University of London, 2004; www.ioe.ac.uk/research/66744.html.

35 This research was conducted before the introduction of the Early Years Professional status.

36 DfE, *Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey, 2011* www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-and-early-years-providers-survey-2011.

37 A family receiving at least one of the following: income support; income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA); income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA); support through part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act; the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit; Child Tax Credit (but not Working Tax Credit) and have an annual income not over £16,190; the Working Tax Credit four-week run-on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit).

38 Becker, *Social Disparities in Children's Vocabulary in Early Childhood: Does Preschool Education Help to Close the Gap?* (2009) (article, not online).

39 *Exploring the flexibility of the free entitlement to early education: research among parents*, Department for Education, 2012;

www.gov.uk/government/publications/exploring-the-flexibility-of-the-free-entitlement-to-early-education-research-among-parents.

40 Childcare Act 2006, c.21, Part 1 Section 1 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/section/1.



The role of local authorities

66. Ofsted does not inspect the role of local authorities in children's early years or hold them to account for their role in improving outcomes for reducing the disadvantage that starts in the early years. However, Ofsted is responsible for inspecting children's centres, which are the responsibility of local authorities, with funding and structural decisions made at that level. Though these inspections are focused on a centre or group of centres, they also consider the impact of local authority decision-making and leadership.
67. What is evident from our children's centre inspections is that the local authorities with the strongest centres have sharply focused strategic direction, forge strong relationships with stakeholders including primary schools, health professionals and adult learning providers, and include these stakeholders in decision-making. Comprehensive data that are straightforward to use are provided to centre staff and used to set, monitor and evaluate challenging performance targets. In the best authorities, outcome frameworks are in place and performance is measured against locally agreed benchmarks and relevant national indicators where possible. Crucially, where it has been necessary to re-configure provision, the most effective local authorities have a clear rationale for doing so, marshal their resources effectively and preserve what they know works.
68. The importance of strategic leadership and local authority coordination can be seen in the two following case studies of local authorities with a strong recent track record in improving outcomes for deprived children in their communities.





Early years in Hackney

In 2009, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals achieving a good level of development at the end of the EYFS in Hackney was two percentage points below the national figure. It has increased steadily every year since then and in 2013 Hackney was 19 percentage points above the national figure (55% compared with 36% nationally), placing it third highest in England. The gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and those not eligible was only three percentage points. In primary school, children who are eligible for free school meals go on to achieve well. A higher proportion of pupils than is found nationally reach the expected level in the phonics screening check at age six and Key Stages 1 and 2. Hackney has had eight children’s centres inspected, of which six are good or outstanding.

In 2002, The Learning Trust was given a 10-year contract to improve education services on behalf of the London Borough of Hackney. This was the first private, not-for-profit company in the UK to be contracted to run a local authority’s entire education function. The Trust developed a clear strategy delivered through strong networks of children’s centres, schools and other education settings. Parental involvement was a key factor in improving early education and childcare. Strategies such as *Every Child a Talker* and a focus on the social and emotional aspects of development supported those young children most at risk of low outcomes.⁴¹

Clear leadership that is focused on education right from the start has been key to improving outcomes in the early years. Interviewing the leader from Ann Tayler Children’s Centre, it was apparent that the strategy was understood at all levels. What have been key to its success have been communication protocols agreed at a high level that are then carried out by individuals on the ground. The leader perceived that the structures between health, social services and education were tight. They shared information and they tracked the pathways taken by children beyond their own institution. This meant that they could then measure the impact of what they provide against the children’s success later on.

The impact of local authorities

69. From the information available to us from our inspections of children’s centres and from our relationships with local authorities, it is clear that improvement is possible, and that the leadership role and the strategic decisions taken corporately are significant in driving improvement. What is also apparent is that their effectiveness in delivering improved outcomes for the most deprived children varies immensely. The proportion of children from low income families achieving a good level of development in each local authority is compared at the end of this report. It is clear that these children are being failed in some very different areas. **Gateshead, Leicester and Richmond upon Thames** serve very different communities and yet all have similar poor performance. Twelve of the top 20 local authorities on this measure are found in the capital: as we have reported elsewhere, educational performance in London is some of the highest in the country.⁴² But not all London boroughs do so well, with two boroughs in the bottom 20 in the country. Some areas that are more rural, such as **Kent** and **South Gloucestershire**, perform as strongly as many London boroughs.



41 10 Years Transforming Education in Hackney available at: www.learningtrust.co.uk/about_us/Legacy.aspx.

42 The Annual Report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills 2012/13, Schools report www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ofsted-annual-report-201213-schools.



The role of children's centres

70. From the late 1990s, a fundamental part of government strategy to improve outcomes for under-fives, particularly those who were potentially vulnerable to underachieving, was the introduction of children's centres. The Childcare Act 2006 established children's centres on a statutory basis and imposed duties on local authorities to ensure that such provision met the local need. The core purpose of children's centres as defined by the Department for Education (DfE) is:

*'to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in child development and school readiness, parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and child and family health and life chances.'*⁴³

71. For children's centres, the last 12 months have been characterised by turbulence and volatility. Many local authorities are continuing to make changes to the way they organise and commission their children's centres. Inspection evidence and data held on Sure Start-On show that while there are similarities in the approaches being used to reconfigure and deliver provision, the profile and scale of what is offered through children's

centres in each of the 152 local authorities is unique and evolving continually.

72. The number of centres changes extremely rapidly, but according to the latest validated count there are currently 3,055 main children's centres in England. Data from local authorities on the number of centres at the time of Ofsted's last Annual Report suggested there were 3,250 centres at that time. This change is as a consequence of centres that have been merged as well as centres that have closed. The latest data from local authorities identify 65 centres that have closed and six new centres that have opened since April 2010.⁴⁴ In the view of the Education Select Committee, 'there is no accurate picture of the extent of closures across England, although it can be expected that ongoing budget reductions are likely to have a further impact on the number of centres.'⁴⁵

73. As well as volatility around the organisation and number of centres, in practice, the purpose of children's centres now varies considerably in different parts of the country and, as a result, is becoming less clear overall. While the government has defined the core purpose and published a refreshed policy document to this effect,⁴⁶ the Education Select

⁴³ The core purpose of Sure Start children's centres www.foundationyears.org.uk/making-it-happen/sure-start-children-centres/.

⁴⁴ Based on data from November 2013; <http://childrenscentresfinder.direct.gov.uk/snapshot-childrens-centre/>.

⁴⁵ Education Select Committee, *Foundation Years: Sure Start children's centres* (2013);

www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/foundation-years---sure-start/.

Committee recently concluded that the core purpose remains unclear.⁴⁷

74. The debate about what success looks like for the sector is ongoing, with different local areas choosing to pursue different strategic agendas. For accountability to be strengthened in future, it will be essential to resolve what children's centres are for. In this context, Ofsted's inspection of children's centres has attempted to define what an effective children's centre looks like in line with the government's published core purpose. However, this cannot be considered to represent settled opinion on effectiveness.

Ofsted's inspection findings

75. Ofsted has been inspecting children's centres since April 2010. As at the end of October 2013, 1,920 centres had been inspected. This represents 63% of the current number of centres.

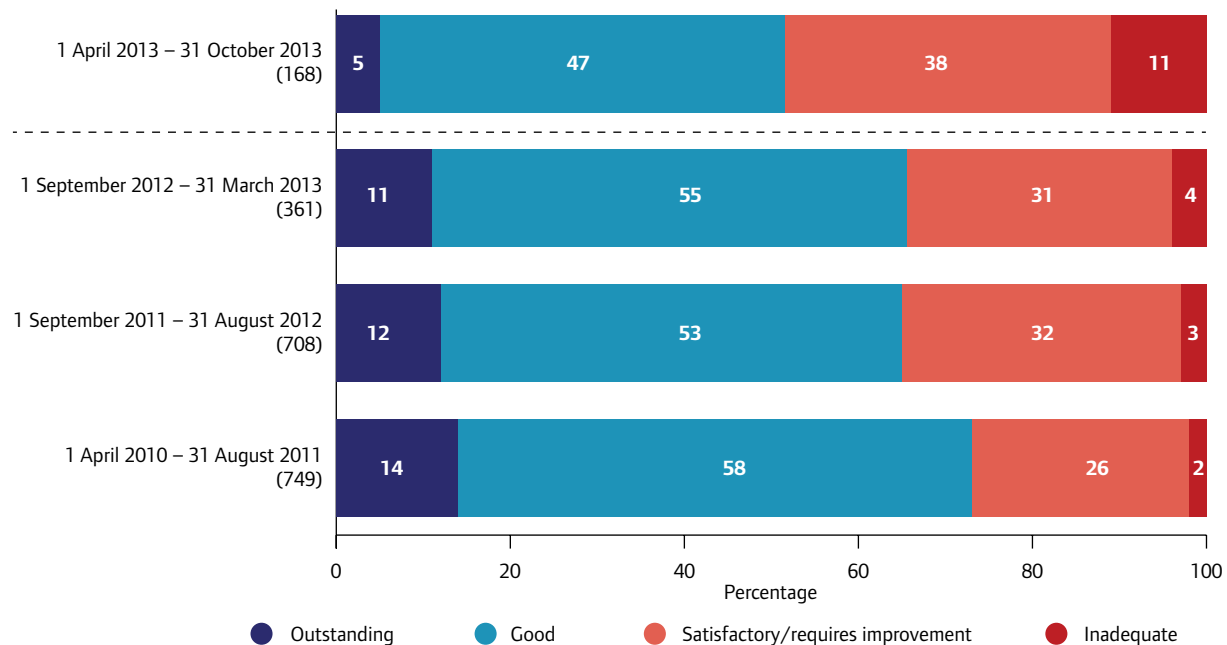
76. Ofsted made changes to the way it inspects children's centres in April 2013, so that the size of inspection

teams, the number of days allocated for an inspection and the way that we report is flexible enough to meet the changing pattern of provision and types of centres seen across local authorities. The new inspection framework reduced the number of judgements from over 20 to four and introduced the 'requires improvement' grade in line with other inspection remits. It places greater emphasis on the accountability of the local authority as the responsible body for children's centres, irrespective of whether they have commissioned these services to other private, independent or voluntary providers to run them on their behalf.

77. The new framework is much more demanding for centres. It focuses on the impact centres are having on young children and their families, especially those that the centres have identified as being most in need of help and support. In the first seven months of the new framework, the proportion of centres judged good or outstanding has been lower than under the previous framework.

78. While to date fewer children's centre groups have been inspected than single centres, the performance of

Figure 7: Overall effectiveness judgement for children's centres inspected since April 2010



1. Ofsted began inspecting children's centres in April 2010. Inspections carried out between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2013 took place under the old inspection framework. Minor changes were made to this framework in September 2011. A new inspection framework was introduced on 1 April 2013.
 2. For inspections prior to April 2013, a grade 3 judgement was defined as 'satisfactory'. Since April, under the current framework, it is recorded as 'requires improvement'.

Source: Ofsted

46 The core purpose of Sure Start children's centres www.foundationyears.org.uk/making-it-happen/sure-start-children-centres/.

47 Education Select Committee, *Foundation Years: Sure Start children's centres* (2013); www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/foundation-years---sure-start/.



those children's centre groups that have been inspected is noticeably weaker than that of single centres. Similarly, while the number of children's centres inspected to date in each local authority varies, some stark differences in the proportion of centres judged to be good or outstanding in each local authority are beginning to emerge. This variation ranges from 22 areas where all inspected centres were found to be good or outstanding to 10 areas where this was at most one in five.

What makes a good children's centre?

79. The most effective children's centres have excellent knowledge of the needs of young children and families in the area and target services precisely to meet them. Rigorous systems are in place to track how many children and families are using the centre and to monitor and evaluate the difference the centre is making to their lives. Activities and provision are well planned and front-line workers pool their knowledge and expertise very well to deliver activities. Participation rates are high and most families access the services regularly. Centre leaders, governors and managers are highly committed to rapid improvement.

80. We have previously reported that it has been a characteristic of weaker centres that they have not had access to comprehensive data from the local authority and have struggled to evaluate their effectiveness or monitor take-up.⁴⁸ Evidence from recent inspections suggests that more centres are now making use of data from the EYFSP and reviewing the development of children they have worked with compared with children from families that haven't engaged, in order to judge whether their work is having an impact.
81. Inspection reports very often highlight shared delivery of services and relationships with front-line health staff such as midwives, health visitors and speech and language therapists as significant strengths. However, it is harder to find evidence of the impact of such actions.
82. One of the biggest barriers that remains in delivering services and monitoring the impact of services on children and families is the extent to which health partners share their data with the centre and engage with shaping services strategically. Consequently, one of the most commonly recurring areas for development is related to sharing health data and strategic engagement of partners.



48 The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2010/11, Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/annualreport1011.



Recommendations

Simplicity, flexibility and accountability

83. A child's early years are a critical time. It is also a time when parents and families can find themselves under financial and emotional pressure, faced with costly choices that may require knowledge of provision that parents have never before had reason to learn about. It is therefore essential that the sector that serves this age range is as simple, transparent and effective as possible. This is particularly true for deprived families, where the causes of poverty and exclusion can result in poorer access to the networks, information, advice and support that are needed to navigate a vast system where quality varies considerably.
84. It is therefore of serious concern that the early years sector is complex, opaque and of variable quality. Ofsted's inspection and regulation and how we report on the outcomes of this work are a contributory factor to this picture. While we have taken steps to address this, we operate within the constraints of a regulatory framework set by the government. Moreover, making the system simpler will require a concerted effort by a range of actors both within government and in the sector. We are committed to doing more where the government is willing to set a bold new direction. We have identified five areas that could contribute to improving the system.

It should be easier for parents to compare the quality of provision for children before the start of Reception

To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- There should be agreement nationally on a small number of words for different types of early education and childcare that would make sense to parents and could be used consistently across government.
- The government should coordinate national and local providers of online information on early education and childcare so that parents can access all the information they need to find, compare (including comparing quality through access to inspection reports) and arrange a place for their child.
- Childminder inspection reports that are subsidised by the taxpayer should be published with contact details so that any member of the public can easily find and use the reports.
- The inspection reports and judgements for every type of provision for children before the start of reception should be directly and easily comparable, with regulatory and inspection frameworks changed to make this possible.



There should be clear accountability for outcomes and Ofsted should have the means to hold providers to account for their performance, particularly where they are in receipt of public money

To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- The government should introduce a nationally comparable and standardised baseline assessment at the start of Reception, with external marking for both the baseline and Key Stage 1 assessments.
- There should be a direct read across from the forthcoming integrated two-year-old check to the new baseline assessment so that it is obvious at the age of two if a child is or is not on track to be ready for school.
- The data from both the integrated two-year-old check and the baseline assessment should include information about any early education or childcare provider or providers the child has attended in the two years prior to the assessment. At a bare minimum, this information should be recorded where the child has benefited from a publicly funded place.
- The information held in health records on the outcome of the two-year-old check should be transferred to the integrated education records at the start of Reception.

Schools should have greater flexibility to support children and parents in their early years and be incentivised to do so through the inspection and regulation system

To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- A dimension should be added to the leadership and management judgement in school inspection that recognises exceptional school leaders who voluntarily and effectively make themselves accountable for raising attainment on entry in a group of schools through engagement with the local early years sector.
- The school inspection framework should take account of the quality of education from age two in the first instance, extending this to birth at the earliest opportunity and thereby eliminating the requirement for separate registration, regulation and inspection for this younger age group.

The contribution of children's centres to outcomes should be made clearer

To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- There should be a recognition that the effectiveness of children's centres is based on the contribution that they make in an area to raising the attainment of the most vulnerable children, and to the provision of early help.
- There should be a move away from inspecting children's centres as a separate form of provision:
 - The new single inspection framework for social care already assesses the effectiveness of a local authority's provision of early help, which can include the contribution of children's centres where relevant.
 - For those centres that are fully integrated with schools, the impact of the children's centre could be assessed either through or alongside the school inspection framework, with recognition that this would only be relevant for a minority of schools.
 - Further measures to improve educational outcomes for children from low income families are below.

More should be done to stop children from low income families from falling behind

To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- The new pupil premium for three- and four-year-olds should be extended to two-year-olds at the earliest opportunity.
- Funded places for two-year-olds should only be allocated to providers who have the capability to raise the attainment of children at risk of falling behind.
- Local authorities that do not have enough good and outstanding places for two-year-olds should consider incentives for schools to expand their provision, either on-site or in linked provision.
- The government should hold local authorities to account for their decisions in allocating and providing places for two-year-olds and extending take-up.
- The admissions code for schools should be changed to give priority consideration to children who have taken up a funded early education place in that school from age two.

Key statistics

Overall effectiveness of active early years registered providers at their most recent inspection as at 31 October 2013, by provider type

	Total number inspected	Percentage of providers			
		Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Childminder	43,213	10	65	24	1
Childcare on non-domestic premises	23,174	15	67	16	2
Childcare on domestic premises	138	25	57	14	4
All provision	66,525	12	66	21	2

Percentages are rounded and do not always add to exactly 100.

Includes providers who were active on the Early Years Register as at 31 October 2013, but excludes any who have not yet been inspected.

Source: Ofsted

Overall effectiveness of early years registered providers inspected between 1 September 2012 and 31 October 2013

	Total number inspected	Percentage of providers			
		Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Childminder	8,767	5	62	27	7
Childcare on non-domestic premises	8,585	10	57	23	9
Childcare on domestic premises	81	19	51	20	11
All provision	17,434	7	60	25	8

Percentages are rounded and do not always add to exactly 100.

Some providers may have been inspected more than once in this period.

Source: Ofsted

Overall effectiveness of maintained nursery schools at their most recent inspection as at 31 August 2013

	Total number inspected	Percentage of providers			
		Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory/ Requires improvement	Inadequate
Nursery schools	418	55	41	4	1

Percentages are rounded and do not always add to exactly 100.

Includes all open nursery schools as at 31 August 2013, based on the Department for Education's Edubase database as at 3 September 2013.

Source: Ofsted

Overall effectiveness of maintained nursery schools inspected between 1 September 2012 and 31 August 2013

	Total number inspected	Percentage of providers			
		Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Nursery schools	165	58	34	6	2

Percentages are rounded and do not always add to exactly 100.

Source: Ofsted

Overall effectiveness of children's centres at their most recent inspection as at 31 October 2013

	Total number inspected	Percentage of providers			
		Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory/Requires improvement	Inadequate
Children's centres	1,920	12	56	30	2

Percentages are rounded and do not always add to exactly 100.

Source: Ofsted

Includes all open centres as at 2 January 2014 but excludes those that have not yet been inspected.

Overall effectiveness of children's centres inspected between 1 April 2013 and 31 October 2013

	Total number inspected	Percentage of providers			
		Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Children's centres	168	5	47	38	11

Percentages are rounded and do not always add to exactly 100.

Source: Ofsted

These judgements were recorded under the new framework that began in April 2013.





Percentage of children on free school meals achieving a good level of development at the end of the EYFS

Local authority	% GLD	Local authority	% GLD	Local authority	% GLD
Greenwich	60	Liverpool	37	Sefton	32
Lewisham	60	Hampshire	37	Solihull	32
Hackney	55	Kingston upon Thames	37	Cambridgeshire	31
Newham	54	Nottinghamshire	37	Cheshire West & Chester	31
Brent	52	Sheffield	37	Harrow	31
Southwark	52	Swindon	37	Norfolk	31
Waltham Forest	52	Barking and Dagenham	36	North Tyneside	31
Ealing	49	Bradford	36	Somerset	31
Devon	48	Cheshire East	36	Telford and Wrekin	31
Kent	48	Darlington	36	York	31
Redbridge	48	Islington	36	Cumbria	30
Bexley	47	Lambeth	36	Hartlepool	30
Lincolnshire	47	Shropshire	36	Northumberland	30
South Gloucestershire	47	Staffordshire	36	Poole	30
Barnet	46	Croydon	35	Bath and North East Somerset	29
Portsmouth	46	Essex	35	Calderdale	29
Knowsley	44	Kingston upon Hull	35	Central Bedfordshire	29
St Helens	43	Kirklees	35	Doncaster	29
Tower Hamlets	43	North Lincolnshire	35	Hounslow	29
Bournemouth	42	Sandwell	35	Rochdale	29
Coventry	42	Windsor and Maidenhead	35	Wiltshire	29
Medway	42	Wolverhampton	35	Derby	28
Plymouth	42	Bracknell Forest	34	Hillingdon	28
Thurrock	42	Bristol	34	Middlesbrough	28
Enfield	41	Camden	34	Newcastle upon Tyne	28
Haringey	41	Dudley	34	Nottingham	28
Hertfordshire	41	Gloucestershire	34	Surrey	28
North East Lincolnshire	41	Herefordshire	34	Tameside	28
Salford	41	Isle of Wight	34	Wirral	28
Stoke on Trent	41	Leeds	34	Brighton and Hove	27
West Berkshire	41	Peterborough	34	East Sussex	27
Westminster	41	Stockport	34	Oldham	27
Blackpool	40	Sunderland	34	Oxfordshire	27
Bromley	40	Barnsley	33	Sutton	27
Dorset	40	Cornwall	33	Worcestershire	27
Hammersmith and Fulham	40	East Riding of Yorkshire	33	Durham	26
Havering	40	Merton	33	Southend on Sea	26
Kensington and Chelsea	40	Northamptonshire	33	Warwickshire	26
Lancashire	40	Redcar and Cleveland	33	Wokingham	26
Luton	40	South Tyneside	33	Leicestershire	25
Reading	40	Suffolk	33	Rutland	25
Rotherham	40	Walsall	33	Halton	24
Wandsworth	40	West Sussex	33	North Yorkshire	24
Birmingham	39	Bedford	32	Stockton on Tees	22
Manchester	39	Blackburn with Darwen	32	Leicester	21
North Somerset	39	Bolton	32	Richmond upon Thames	21
Trafford	39	Buckinghamshire	32	Gateshead	20
Wakefield	39	Bury	32	Wigan	19
Slough	38	Derbyshire	32	Warrington	18
Southampton	38	Milton Keynes	32		

1. A Good Level of Development is defined as the number and proportion of children achieving at least the expected level within the three prime areas of learning: communication and language; physical development and personal, social and emotional development; and the early learning goals within the literacy and mathematics areas of learning.
2. Figures for Isles of Scilly and City of London suppressed due to small numbers. Figures for Torbay not published by Department for Education.

Source: Department for Education www.gov.uk/government/publications/eyfsp-attainment-by-pupil-characteristics-2013

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