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Department for Education

Reporting year 2026

Funded early education and childcare

Annual January statistics on children under 5 registered for government funded entitlements in England, and on providers and staff delivering them.

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Headline facts and figures

Summary

Table

Total: eligible children registered

1.7 million

Down 0.2% or 2,700 from 2025

► Total: children aged 9 months to 4 years



Universal: percentage of 3 and 4-year-olds registered

90%

Down 0.8 percentage points from 2025 and lowest in the series

► Universal: 3 and 4-year-olds percentage



Universal: 3 and 4-year-olds registered

1.1 million

Down 2.4% or 28,300 from 2025 and lowest in the series

► Universal: 3 and 4-year-olds



WP: percentage of eligible 9 month to 2-year-olds registered

80%

Up 8 percentage points from 2025

► WP: 9 months to 2 years percentage



WP: eligible 9 month to 2-year-olds registered

502,000

Up 7.5% or 35,000 from 2025

► WP: 9 months to 2 years



WP: percentage of eligible 3 and 4-year-olds registered

91%

Up 4 percentage points from 2025 and highest in the series

► WP: 3 and 4-year-olds percentage



WP: eligible 3 and 4-year-olds registered

389,000

Up 2.6% or 9,700 from 2025 and highest in the series

► WP: 3 and 4-year-olds



EL2: percentage of eligible 2-year-olds registered

72%

Up 6 percentage points from 2025

► EL2: 2-year-olds percentage



EL2: eligible 2-year-olds registered

86,000

Down 9.9% or 9,400 from 2025 and lowest in the series

► EL2: 2-year-olds



In 2026:

- around 9 in 10 children aged 3 and 4 were registered for the universal entitlement. The number and percentage of children registered both fell to the lowest in the series (started in 2011), continuing the downward trend from earlier years.
- around 9 in 10 eligible 3 and 4-year-olds were registered for the working parent entitlement. Both the estimated percentage and number of children registered increased to the series peaks, continuing the upward trend since the series started (in 2018).
- around 8 in 10 eligible children aged 9 months to 2-years were registered for the working parent entitlement. Similarly, the percentage and number of children registered increased from a year earlier (when the series started).
- around 7 in 10 eligible children were registered for early learning for 2-year-olds. Whilst the number of children registered fell to the lowest in the series, continuing the downward trend from earlier years, the percentage of eligible children registered increased from a year earlier. This was because the fall in eligible children (down 18%) was greater than the fall in children registered (down 10%).

In January 2025, children aged 9 months to 2 years with eligible working parents were entitled to 570 hours of government funded early years provision a year. In January 2026 (specifically since September 2025) that entitlement had doubled to 1,140 hours.

As a result, the number of registered hours has also almost doubled from 6.8 million hours a week (adjusted to be based on 38 weeks) in 2025 to 13.5 million hours a week in 2026, up 97.6% or 6.7 million hours. Similarly, the average number of weekly registered hours per child (adjusted to be based on 38 weeks) has also almost doubled from 14.6 in 2025 to 26.9 in 2026, up 83.8% or 12.3 hours a week.

Just over half a million children aged 9 months to 2 years were registered for the working parent entitlement in 2026, up 7.5% or 35,000 children from a year earlier; this may be attributable, at least in part, to the higher number of hours offered.

About these statistics

These annual January statistics report on children under 5 registered for government funded entitlements in England and on providers and staff delivering them. Specifically, the:

- the universal entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds;
- the working parent entitlement for children aged 9 months to 4 years;
- early learning for 2-year-olds (formerly known as the disadvantaged entitlement and then as the families receiving additional support entitlement).

Please note that the percentages at a national level between 2022 and 2025 of children registered for the universal entitlement and of eligible children registered for the working parent entitlement have been revised in this year's release, due to the denominators being calculated using revised population estimates.

Data is collected from local authorities covering state-funded schools (including nurseries), via the spring [school census \(opens in new tab\)](#) and from private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) providers (including childminders) via the [early years census \(opens in new tab\)](#). In addition, general hospital schools data is collected via the [school-level annual school census \(opens in new tab\)](#).

Children's age for each reporting year is defined as how old they were on the preceding 31 December. For example, 4-year-olds for the 2026 reporting year were aged 4 on 31 December 2025.

The following table indicates when the series started for each entitlement. This corresponds with when figures were first collected or when comparable figures first became available.

Year	Entitlement type
2011	Universal: 3 and 4-year olds
2015	EL2 (with the full eligibility criteria): 2-year-olds (formerly known as the disadvantaged entitlement and then as the families receiving additional support entitlement)
2018	Working parent: 3 and 4-year olds
2025	Working parent: children aged 9 months to 2 years

Early learning for 2-year-olds

Since 2015, eligible 2-year-olds have been entitled to receive 570 hours of government-funded early years provision a year. This can be taken as 15 hours a week over 38 weeks of the year, or as fewer hours over more weeks.

Early learning for 2-year-olds (EL2) was previously known as the disadvantaged entitlement and was referred to as such in the statistics for 2024 and earlier years. It was also previously known as the families receiving additional support entitlement and was referred to as such in the 2025 statistics.

2-year-olds are eligible for EL2 if their parents (or the sole parent in a lone parent household) are in receipt of certain income-related benefits or have no recourse to public funds. 2-year-olds are also eligible for non-economic reasons including if they have an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan, receive disability living allowance, are looked after by a local authority, or have left care under an adoption, special guardianship, or child arrangements order.

The number of 2-year-olds eligible for EL2 is estimated using the number of households with 2-year-olds that are in receipt of income-related benefits or have a child receiving disability living allowance. However, children eligible for the other reasons listed above are not accounted for. Therefore, the true number of 2-year-olds eligible is underestimated. In turn, the percentage of eligible 2-year-olds registered for EL2 is overestimated. However, the size of this overestimate is expected to be small given that 2-year-olds in households that claim universal credit make up the majority of eligible children.

Universal entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds

All 3 and 4-year-olds are entitled to receive 570 hours of government-funded early years provision a year. This can be taken as 15 hours a week over 38 weeks of the year, or as fewer hours over more weeks.

The universal entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds aims to support child development and school readiness. Children (mainly 4-year-olds) in a state-funded reception class are considered to be registered for the universal entitlement (375,700 children or 33% of all 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the universal entitlement); these children are not entitled to receive additional hours of early years provision as the universal (and working parent) entitlement is considered to be met through the reception class provision.

Working parent entitlement for eligible children aged 9 months to 4 years

Children aged 9 months to 4 years are eligible if their parents (or the sole parent in a lone parent household) work the equivalent of at least 16 hours a week at national minimum wage or living wage but earn under £100,000 per year (adjusted net income). These children may be eligible, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria, until they start reception year or the start of the term after they turn 5.

Eligible children aged 9 months to 2 years

From April 2024 up until August 2025, 2-year-olds with eligible working parents were entitled to receive 570 hours of government-funded early years provision a year; the same entitlement was extended from September 2024 up until August 2025 to children aged 9 to 23 months with eligible working parents. This could have been taken as 15 hours a week over 38 weeks of the year, or as fewer hours over more weeks.

Since September 2025, the entitlement has been expanded with children aged 9 months to 2 years with eligible working parents becoming entitled to receive 1,140 hours of government-funded early years provision a year, effectively doubling their entitlement. This can be taken as 30 hours a week over 38 weeks of the year, or as fewer hours over more weeks.

Eligible 3 and 4-year-olds

Since 2018 (specifically September 2017 onwards), 3 and 4-year-olds with eligible working parents have been

entitled to an additional 570 hours, on top of already being entitled to 570 hours via the universal entitlement, taking their total entitlement to 1,140 hours a year. This can be taken as 30 hours a week over 38 weeks of the year, or as fewer hours over more weeks. All 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the working parent entitlement are also included in the counts of 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the universal entitlement.

The working parent entitlement for eligible 3 and 4-year-olds is commonly referred to as '30 hours free childcare'.

Estimated number of children eligible and estimated percentage of eligible children registered

The number of children eligible for the working parent entitlement is estimated from various sources including the Family Resources Survey (FRS), the Survey of Personal Incomes (SPI), Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data, the Schools Census, the Early Years Census and population estimates derived from ONS estimates and projections.

The estimated number of children eligible for the working parent entitlement should be treated with caution due to the reliability of the survey-based data underpinning the calculations, particularly for 2026, which DfE plans to revise in next year's publication (when more timely data becomes available). In turn, the estimated percentages of eligible children registered for the working parent entitlement are suitable to assess trends over time but should also be treated with caution. For more information, see the data quality section of the [methodology page](#).

Support for disadvantaged children

3 and 4-year-olds registered for the universal entitlement (who have not yet entered reception) are eligible for [early years pupil premium \(EYPP\) \(opens in new tab\)](#) funding if their parents are in receipt of certain income-related benefits, if they are looked after by a local authority, or if they have left care under an adoption, special guardianship, or child arrangements order.

Since September 2024, children aged 9 months to 2 years registered for the working parent entitlement and children registered for early learning for two-year-olds have also been eligible for EYPP funding.

When children join a state-funded reception class, they cease to be eligible for EYPP, so these statistics also identify children who are in reception and eligible for [free school meals \(opens in new tab\)](#). Children are eligible for free school meals if they are in full-time education in a state-funded school and their parents are in receipt of certain income-related benefits or have no recourse to public funds.

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Universal entitlement

The percentages of 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the universal entitlement are derived from ONS population estimates (for the 2012 to 2024 rates in this release), ONS population projections (for the 2026 rates in this release) or a combination of both (2025 rates in this release).

Revised population estimates/projections, based on the latest ONS data, were used to calculate revised

percentages at a national level from 2022 to 2025 in this release.

The impact of these revisions on the percentages has ranged from a fall of 0.1 percentage points in 2022 (from 96.0% to 95.9%) to a fall of 2.2 percentage points in 2025 (from 93.1% to 91.0%). Further information can be found within the [methodology page](#).

Children (mainly 4-year-olds) in a state-funded reception class are considered to be registered for the universal entitlement. In 2026, an estimated 90.2% of 3 and 4-year-olds were registered for the universal entitlement and an estimated 85.9% of 3 and 4-year-olds were registered for early years entitlements only (i.e. excluding reception). This represents decreases of 0.8 and 1.2 percentage points respectively from a year earlier, both falling to the lowest points in the series and continuing the downward trend from the series peaks in 2018.

Percentage of 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the universal entitlement, 2018 to 2026

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Percentage	97.2	97.1	97.0	94.2	95.9	94.2	92.0	91.0	90.2
Annual change (pp)	0.4	-0.1	-0.1	-2.8	1.7	-1.7	-2.2	-1.1	-0.8
Percentage, early years only	95.8	95.7	95.6	91.5	94.0	91.6	88.5	87.1	85.9
Annual change (pp)	x	-0.1	-0.1	-4.2	2.6	-2.5	-3.1	-1.4	-1.2

In 2026, the estimated 3 and 4-year-old population fell to the lowest figure in the series (1.25 million). This continues the downward trend from the series peak in 2016 (1.39 million), following an overall [decline in births in recent years \(opens in new tab\)](#).

There were 1.13 million 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the universal entitlement and 751,000 3 and 4-year-olds registered for early years entitlements only (i.e. excluding reception) in 2026. These figures represent falls of 2.4% or 28,300 children and 3.2% or 24,700 children from a year earlier, both falling to the lowest points in the series and continuing the downward trend from earlier years.

Chart

Table

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Number of 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the universal entitlement and estimated 3 and 4-year-old population, 2011 to 2026

	Number of registered children	Estimated number of eligible children
2011	1,224,465	x
2012	1,264,416	1,328,610
2013	1,283,497	1,342,766
2014	1,299,908	1,357,281
2015	1,321,897	1,376,624
2016	1,339,431	1,387,167
2017	1,317,658	1,361,619
2018	1,284,632	1,322,234
2019	1,277,137	1,315,386
2020	1,271,544	1,310,667
2021	1,211,991	1,286,698
2022	1,212,234	1,263,562
2023	1,196,031	1,269,736
2024	1,169,541	1,270,735
2025	1,155,342	1,270,170
2026	1,127,056	1,250,185

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Footnotes

1. Data collected in 2021 (and to a lesser extent 2022) was affected by the impact of COVID-19 uncertainty on providers and parents. Further information is available on the methodology page.

Source: Early years census, school census, school-level annual school census, and ONS population estimates and projections.

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In 2026, a third or 33% (376,000 children) of all 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the universal entitlement were in a state-funded reception class and this percentage has remained stable over time.

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Working parent entitlement

This release includes figures for the second time on eligible children aged 9 months to 2 years registered for the working parent entitlement.

This release also includes figures for the second time on the percentages of eligible children registered for the working parent entitlement. While they are suitable for assessing trends over time, these percentages should be treated with caution due to the reliability of the survey-based data which they are based on, particularly for 2026, which DfE plans to revise in next year's publication (when more timely data becomes available). For children aged 9 to 11 months, the effect of maternity/paternity leave has not been accounted for when estimating eligibility. For further information, see the data quality section of the methodology page.

Eligible children aged 9 months to 2 years

An estimated 8 in 10 eligible children aged 9 months to 2 years were registered for the working parent entitlement in 2026, up from 7 in 10 eligible children in 2025. In 2026, this ranged from around 5 in 10 eligible children registered for those aged 9 to 11 months to around 9 in 10 eligible children registered for those aged 2 years.

In January 2025, children aged 9 months to 2 years with eligible working parents were entitled to 570 hours of government funded early years provision a year. In January 2026 (specifically since September 2025) that entitlement had doubled to 1,140 hours.

As a result, the number of registered hours has also almost doubled from 6.8 million hours a week (adjusted to be based on 38 weeks) in 2025 to 13.5 million hours a week in 2026, up 97.6% or 6.7 million hours. Similarly, the average number of weekly registered hours per child (adjusted to be based on 38 weeks) has also almost doubled from 14.6 in 2025 to 26.9 in 2026, up 83.8% or 12.3 hours a week.

Just over half a million children aged 9 months to 2 years were registered for the working parent entitlement in 2026, up 7.5% or 35,000 children from a year earlier; this may be attributable, at least in part, to the higher number of hours offered.

Number of children registered, estimated number of eligible children and estimated percentage of

eligible children registered for the working parent entitlement, 2025 and 2026

Age range	Number of children registered		Estimated number of eligible children		Estimated percentage of eligible children registered	
	2025	2026	2025	2026	2025	2026
9 to 11 months	29,200	30,700	67,000	66,000	44	46
1 year	195,100	210,800	283,000	278,000	69	76
2 years	242,500	260,200	297,000	283,000	82	92
9 months to 2 years	466,700	501,700	647,000	627,000	72	80

Eligible 3 and 4-year-olds

In 2026, an estimated 91% of eligible 3 and 4-year-olds, or 388,700 children, were registered for the working parent entitlement, up 4 percentage points or 9,700 children respectively from a year earlier.

The latest figures represent the series peaks, continuing the upward trend since the series started in 2018, up from around 7 in 10 eligible children registered to around 9 in 10 eligible children registered.

Whilst the estimated 3 and 4-year-old population has decreased since 2018, the estimated number of 3 and 4-year-olds eligible for the working parent entitlement has been more stable in comparison over the same period.

Estimated percentage of eligible 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the working parent entitlement, 2018 to 2026

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Percentage	73	77	79	76	82	80	84	87	91
Annual change (pp)	x	4	1	-2	6	-2	4	3	4

Chart

Table

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Number of 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the working parent entitlement, estimated number of 3 and 4-year-olds eligible for the working parent entitlement and estimated 3 and 4-year-old population, 2018 to 2026

	Number of registered children	Estimated number of eligible children	Estimated number of all children
2018	296,924	405,000	1,322,234
2019	328,127	425,000	1,315,386
2020	345,704	440,000	1,310,667
2021	328,662	432,000	1,286,698
2022	348,126	425,000	1,263,562
2023	362,982	452,000	1,269,736
2024	361,790	430,000	1,270,735
2025	379,029	435,000	1,270,170
2026	388,741	425,000	1,250,185

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Footnotes

1. Data collected in 2021 (and to a lesser extent 2022) was affected by the impact of COVID-19 uncertainty on providers and parents. Further information is available on the methodology page.

Source: Early years census, school census, and ONS population estimates and projections.

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Early learning for 2-year-olds

There has been a downward trend since the series started in 2015 in the estimated number of 2-year-olds eligible for early learning (EL2). It fell from the series peak of 269,800 children in 2015 to 119,600 in 2026, the lowest figure in the series.

This is due to [declining births in recent years \(opens in new tab\)](#) and unchanged maximum earnings thresholds for both legacy (through child tax credits) and universal credit eligibility criteria, while average incomes have [Release home](#)

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registered for EL2 via universal credit were likely smaller previously, than [universal credit being rolled out nationwide since late 2018 \(opens in new tab\)](#).

The fall in 2-year-olds eligible for EL2 has contributed to the number of 2-year-olds registered for EL2 falling from the series peak of 166,900 children in 2016, to 85,600 in 2026, the lowest figure in the series.

Changes between 2019 and 2024

Between 2019 and 2024, the number of 2-year-olds eligible for EL2 decreased by 29%, which is greater than the 4% fall in the overall 2-year-old population, indicating that declines in births only partially explain the fall. In particular, over the same period, the fall in 167,300 children eligible via legacy benefits was not offset by the rise in 103,000 children eligible via universal credit. In addition, as the 29% fall is greater than the 22% fall in eligible children registered, the percentage of eligible 2-year-olds registered increased by 7 percentage points over the period to 75% in 2024, the highest in the series.

Chart

Table

► Export options

Number of children registered for early learning for 2-year-olds, estimated number of children eligible for early learning for 2-year-olds, and estimated 2-year-old population, 2015 to 2026

	Number of registered children	Estimated number of eligible children	Estimated number of eligible children: legacy benefit	Estimated number of eligible children: universal credit	Estimated number of all children
2015	157,036	269,777	269,777	0	695,862
2016	166,924	246,085	246,085	0	665,278
2017	163,249	230,892	230,892	0	660,229
2018	154,962	215,879	215,879	0	660,161
2019	148,751	219,316	186,449	32,867	656,280
2020	143,439	207,392	120,252	87,140	637,384
2021	124,543	201,562	64,583	136,979	618,385
2022	135,410	188,318	40,020	148,298	615,698
2023	124,211	167,976	26,034	141,942	606,503
2024	115,852	154,957	19,107	135,850	629,820
2025	95,031	145,824	5,547	140,277	608,555
2026	85,629	119,598	2,669	116,929	582,143

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Footnotes

1. Data collected in 2021 (and to a lesser extent 2022) was affected by the impact of COVID-19 uncertainty on providers and parents. Further information is available on the methodology page.

Source: Early years census, school census, school-level annual school census, Department for Work and Pensions data, and ONS population estimates and projections.

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Estimated percentage of eligible children registered for early learning for 2-year-olds, 2015 to 2026

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Percentage	58.2	67.8	70.7	71.8	67.8	69.2	61.8	71.9	73.9	74.8	65.2	71.6
Annual change (pp)	z	9.6	2.9	1.1	-4.0	1.3	-7.4	10.1	2.0	0.8	-9.6	6.4

Changes between 2024 and 2025

Between 2024 and 2025, the 18% fall in the number of 2-year-olds registered for EL2 was greater than the 5.9% fall in the number of 2-year-olds eligible for EL2.

2-year-olds eligible for both EL2 and the expanded working parent entitlement should be recorded under EL2 as per statutory guidance. However, indicative DfE analysis and feedback received from some local authorities during data collection suggested that a substantial proportion of 2-year-olds eligible for both had been recorded under the working parent entitlement instead in 2025 (although this picture varies at local authority level). Therefore, this has likely contributed to the annual fall nationally in 2025 in the number and percentage of eligible 2-year-olds registered, which fell to 95,000 children (down 18% or 20,800 children) and 65% (down 10 percentage points) respectively. The impact of the new working parent entitlement on the recording of EL2 should be considered when interpreting the fall in these figures between 2024 and 2025, and therefore the 2025 figures should be treated with caution.

Since 1 April 2025, DfE has shared data with local authorities that enables them to identify households with 2-year-olds that are likely to be eligible for both EL2 and the working parent entitlement so that they can ensure these children are recorded under the correct funding stream.

Changes between 2025 and 2026

In contrast, between 2025 and 2026, the 9.9% fall (or 9,400 children) in the number of 2-year-olds registered for EL2 was less than the 18% fall (or 26,200 children) in the number of 2-year-olds eligible for EL2. This indicates that the recording of 2-year-olds registered for EL2 and the working parent entitlement has improved nationally since 2025, as does indicative DfE analysis. In addition, information DfE has received from local authorities anecdotally and during the data collection process also suggests that data recording has improved at a national level since 2025 (although this picture varies at local authority level).

The 18% fall in 2026 in the number of 2-year-olds eligible for EL2 (119,600) was the largest in the series, with the following factors contributing:

- The doubling of the working parent entitlement for children aged 9 months to 2-years, encouraging parents to earn more and in turn more families to be above the maximum earnings threshold for the universal credit eligibility criteria.
- As of 5 April 2025, eligibility criteria no longer including families in receipt of tax credits following their closure and them being replaced in full by universal credit.
- The continued annual rise in the national minimum wage in April 2025 causing more families to be above the maximum earnings threshold for the universal credit eligibility criteria.

85,600 2-year-olds were registered for EL2 in 2026, down 9.9% or 9,400 children from a year earlier. However, as the number of children eligible for EL2 fell by a greater percentage, the proportion of eligible 2-year-olds registered for EL2 increased by 6.4 percentage points to 72%. Nonetheless, the 2026 figure is still down from the 2024 figure of 75% (by 3.2 percentage points), which is the latest figure prior to the expansion of the working parent entitlement.

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Children registered by early years pupil premium / free school meals, SEN, ethnicity and provider type

In 2026:

- 16,500 children aged 9 months to 2 years registered for the working parent entitlement were in receipt of the early years pupil premium (EYPP), over double the 2025 figure of 7,500. During the data collection process, many local authorities reported that they had increased awareness of EYPP with settings and parents, which has likely led to this rise.
- Just over half of 2-year-olds registered for early learning (EL2) were in receipt of the EYPP.
- Around 1 in 6 children in nursery registered for the universal entitlement were in receipt of EYPP.
- Around 1 in 6 children in reception were in receipt of free school meals.

Number and percentage of children registered for entitlements with early years pupil premium and free school meals, by entitlement type, 2026

Entitlement type	Working parent: eligible children aged 9 months to 2-years		EL2: eligible 2-year-olds		Universal: 3 and 4-year-olds reception		Universal: 3 and 4-year-olds nursery	
Early Years Pupil Premium	16,500	3.3%	45,300	52.9%	z	z	128,100	17.0%
Free School meals	z	z	z	z	62,200	16.6%	z	z

Special educational needs (SEN)

The percentage of children with SEN ranged from 2.4% for those registered for the working parent entitlement to 9.1% for those registered for the universal entitlement.

Percentage of children with SEN by entitlement type, 2026

SEN	Universal: 3 and 4-year-olds	Working Parents: eligible children aged 9 months to 4 years	EL2: eligible 2-year-olds
No SEN	90.9	97.6	93.9
Total SEN	9.1	2.4	6.1
SEN support	7.5	2.1	5.4
EHCP	1.7	0.3	0.7

Ethnicity

Where ethnicity was known, 19% of children registered for the working parent entitlement were from an ethnic minority (excluding White minorities) background, lower than the 31% of children registered for the universal entitlement and EL2, respectively. This compares to 28% of the under 5 population in general being from an ethnic minority (excluding White minorities) background (figure from [2021 census \(opens in new tab\)](#)).

Provider type

Excluding children (mainly 4-year-olds) attending reception in state-funded schools, across all entitlement types, around 2 in every 3 children (64%) were registered at private, voluntary, and independent providers.

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Providers delivering entitlements

The figures in this section are based on providers delivering funded entitlements where at least one child was registered for all their entitlement or any proportion of their entitlement if it was split across multiple providers. For more information see the [methodology page](#).

In 2026, there were 55,300 providers delivering the entitlements, up 0.6% or 300 from 2025 and the second consecutive annual increase.

Total number of providers delivering entitlements, 2018 to 2026

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Total	53,600	53,800	53,900	52,400	51,300	49,900	49,200	55,000	55,300
Annual change	x	300	100	-1,500	-1,100	-1,400	-700	5,800	300
	x	0.5%	0.2%	-2.8%	-2.1%	-2.8%	-1.4%	11.8%	0.6%

This was mostly driven by an increase in the number of providers delivering the working parent entitlement and by the number of childminders delivering any entitlement.

Total number of providers delivering entitlements by entitlement type, 2025 and 2026

Entitlement type	2025	2026	Annual change	
Universal	47,300	46,800	-600	-1.2%
Working parent	44,800	45,800	1,000	2.2%
EL2	19,000	18,800	-200	-1.2%

Number of providers delivering entitlements by provider type, 2025 and 2026

Provider type	2025	2026	Annual Change	
State-funded schools	16,800	16,700	-50	-0.3%
Private and voluntary providers	17,800	17,300	-470	-2.6%
Local authority day nurseries	280	400	120	44.2%
State-funded governor-run	840	670	-170	-20.4%
Independent schools	790	800	10	1.3%
Childminders	18,500	19,200	640	3.4%
Other PVIs	20	260	240	1,100.0%

Since 2019, DfE has contacted local authorities to ask them to reclassify other private, voluntary and independent providers (PVIs) where necessary, particularly to childminders and state-funded governor run provision. Due to resource constraints, the volume of these checks was reduced during the 2026 collection, and this is likely to account for the increase in other providers.

In addition, since Autumn 2025, children who are receiving early years provision that is directly run by an academy, on academy premises, must be registered pupils of the academy and recorded on the school census, not the early years census. This is likely to account for at least some of the fall in state-funded governor run providers.

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Early years staff delivering entitlements

Staff qualifications data relates to private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) providers only.

Accredited graduate status for early years staff represents early years professional status, early years teacher status, or qualified teacher status.

In 2026, the number of staff delivering the entitlements in PVIs increased for the fifth consecutive year, up 5.2% or 14,200 from a year earlier. This was driven by an increase in staff with level 2 and level 3 qualifications.

Number of early years staff delivering entitlements at PVIs, 2018 to 2026

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Total	254,400	261,900	256,400	243,700	249,300	250,700	254,300	272,500	286,700
Annual change	x	7,600	-5,500	-12,700	5,600	1,400	3,600	18,200	14,200
	x	3.0%	-2.1%	-4.9%	2.3%	0.6%	1.4%	7.2%	5.2%

Number of early years staff delivering entitlements at PVIs by highest qualification level, 2025 and 2026

Highest qualification level	2025	2026	Annual change	
Accredited graduate status	22,500	22,300	-200	-1.0%
Full and relevant EY level 3	158,200	164,900	6,700	4.2%
Full and relevant EY level 2	31,300	35,000	3,700	11.8%

In 2026, the number of staff delivering the entitlements in PVIs increased across all provider types, apart from in state-funded governor run providers.

Since 2019, DfE has contacted local authorities to ask them to reclassify other PVIs where necessary, particularly to childminders and state-funded governor run provision. Due to resource constraints, the volume of these checks was reduced during the 2026 collection and is likely to account for the increase in staff delivering entitlements in other settings.

In addition, since Autumn 2025, children who are receiving early years provision that is directly run by an academy, on academy premises, must be registered pupils of the academy and recorded on the school census, not the early years census. This is likely to account for at least some of the fall in staff in state-funded governor run providers.

Number of early years staff delivering entitlements at PVIs by provider type, 2025 and 2026

Provider type	2025	2026	Annual change	
Private and voluntary providers	229,200	237,300	8,100	3.5%
Local authority day nurseries	3,100	5,200	2,100	68.2%
State-funded governor-run	4,600	3,900	-800	-16.8%
Independent schools	9,300	9,400	100	0.9%
Childminders	26,100	28,300	2,200	8.3%
Other	200	2,700	2,500	1,372.8%

In 2026, around a third of providers employed at least one graduate staff member. The proportion varied by provider type, with independent schools reporting the highest level and childminders reporting the lowest level.

Across all provider types, except for other PVIs, these proportions have either remained stable or increased slightly compared to the previous year.

Percentage of providers with at least one graduate member of staff by provider type, 2025 and 2026

Provider type	2025	2026	Annual change (pp)
Total	33.5	33.6	0.1
Private and voluntary providers	47.4	47.4	0.0
Local authority day nurseries	56.1	61.6	5.5
State-funded governor-run	65.3	65.4	0.1
Independent schools	84.3	85.3	1.0
Childminders	16.2	17.1	0.9

Other	68.2	46.0	-22.2
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Contact us

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Phone: 0370 000 2288

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