

2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

Cheshire East Council



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Key Findings and Proposed 2026 Action Plan

1 Key Findings – Early Years Childcare

1.1 In early 2026, early years childcare providers - i.e. private, voluntary and independent nurseries and school-based nurseries - and childminders are evidently experiencing a relatively high demand for the extended funded childcare places for eligible working parents with 9 month year olds – 23 month year olds (1 year).

However, feedback for this CSA demonstrates that, in early 2026, only 40% of PVI sector nurseries were offering funded places for this age cohort.

Encouragingly however, 90% of childminders stated that they *offered* funded 30 hours entitlement places for eligible working families for 9 months – 23 month year olds (1 year).

1.2 The **Macclesfield South Schools Planning Area** was accounting for feedback from both childcare providers and parents/carers that demonstrated it could be *the* priority geographical area for childcare sufficiency planners within Cheshire East Council - including as an outcome of the facts that:

- It accounted for a relatively high number of parents/carers who stated that they wished to increase, over the forthcoming years, the number of hours that they accessed funded childcare
- It accounted for a relatively high number of parents/carers who stated that the extended funded childcare entitlement for children aged 9 months, would motivate them to start accessing formal childcare sooner than they had previously intended
- 29% of respondents to a survey with parents/carers in early 2026 stated that the changes/extensions to the funded entitlements would enable them to work more.
- Parents who were resident in this locality most frequently stated they were not accessing formal childcare at the present time because: I am waiting until I can use my funded entitlements
- The locality accounted for a relatively high incidence of parents describing themselves as being in a form of employment.
- The three Schools Planning Areas which accounted for the highest proportional incidence of a responding parents of 0-4 year olds intending to access a Cheshire East-located day nursery at some point in the future were:
 - Knutsford Village
 - Nantwich Town
 - **Macclesfield South**

- 1.3 69% of early years childcare providers stated that they had a waiting list in early 2026 - with such settings most frequently being located in the Wilmslow South Schools Planning Area, followed in frequency by the Congleton Central Schools Planning Area. Conversely, a lower percentage at 33% stated that they had vacant places - therefore potentially demonstrating a broad sufficiency theme, particularly when it is factored in that only 5% of childminders have stated they had vacant places in early 2026.

The incidence of vacant places at *early years childcare providers* was proportionally highest in the Nantwich Town Schools Planning Area, followed in frequency by the Poynton Village Schools Planning Area locality.

- 1.4 53% of early years childcare providers stated that over the past 12 months they had observed particular trends, with the three most frequent being:
1. A notable increase in the demand for places for babies – and a discernible decrease in the demand for places for 3 and 4 year olds.
 2. Parents of 2-4 year olds having an enhanced *awareness of wraparound childcare*.
 3. A continuing increase in enquiries from carers of children with SEND.
- 1.5 39% of early years childcare providers stated that they were still experiencing difficulties with recruitment of staff or the retention of staff in early 2026, particularly for Level 2 and Level 3 requisite positions. Aligned to 1.2 above, the School Planning Areas which accounted for the highest frequency of recruitment being stated as a **challenge/difficulty** were:
- Macclesfield South and
 - Crewe South.

Childcare providers who stated that the theme of recruitment was a **big concern** to them were most frequently located in the Macclesfield South Schools Planning Area - followed in frequency by the Nantwich Town Schools Planning Area.

- 1.6 A frequently recurring type of training gap, which was highlighted by representatives of early years childcare providers - including nurseries located at primary schools - was managing challenging behaviour. A number of such representatives explained that guidance about training that was recommended for dealing with challenging behaviour would be welcomed.

1.7 The neighbouring geographical axis of Crewe, Alsager accounted for a relatively high percentage of early years childcare providers and registered childminders who were expecting the demand for the extended funded entitlement places for 3 months – 3 years old to be somewhat **higher** over the forthcoming two years.

It should be noted that the Alsager Schools Planning Area also accounted for a relatively high percentage of parents/carers who stated that they would like to increase their hours of formal childcare use over the forthcoming years.

1.8 All early years childcare providers were asked whether the introduction, in April 2024, of the funded entitlement for eligible working families with 2 year olds had meant that their setting needed to decrease the number of funded entitlement 2 year old places for those in receipt of certain benefits which they offered.

Only 10 responding early years childcare providers and childminders stated that such a decrease in places for 2 year olds whose families were in receipt of relevant benefits had happened, with the following two School Planning Areas accounting for *two or more* such responses:

- Crewe South School Planning Area
- Poynton Village School Planning Area.

1.9 The demand for places for SEND children at all forms of childcare provision across the locality is evidently increasing.

The two types of SEND designation that childcare providers are evidently supporting with the highest frequency are:

1. Speech, Language and Communication Needs - stated by 21% of providers.
2. Autism - stated by 20% of providers.

1.10 It is viable to judge that as of early 2026 there are sufficient childcare places for children with SEND aged 0-14 years - and also such care-type of provision for 15-25 year olds.

93% of the carers/parents who stated that they had a child with SEND or additional needs stated that they *were* accessing formal childcare for the young person in question – and none of these carers stated that they were unable to access childcare at the hours that they required. Challenges aligned to sufficiency SEND were more aligned to: (a) childcare providers themselves considering that potential increasing numbers – up to 2030 – may stretch their ability to keep pace with demand and; (b) childcare providers having concerns that they were able to meet the needs of children's with severe learning difficulties, complex medical needs and/or those with a physical disability.

1.11 30% of all childcare providers stated that they *did not* consider they could support the SEND designation of physical disability as effectively as they would like to - frequently because of accessibility for children who are wheelchair users. This opinion was stated with the highest proportional frequency by representatives of settings from the Nantwich Town Schools Planning Area.

1.12 There is evidently a trend whereby *certain* parents/carers who are tactfully told by a childcare provider that their child *may* be evidencing SEND respond by taking their child out of that provision.

1.13 When representatives of responding early years childcare providers were invited to state how confident their setting was as a whole in supporting children with SEND, an average rank on a scale of 0-10 given (with 1 being: completely unconfident and 10 being: completely confident) was: 7.27 – with the most frequently stated rank being: 8. In comparison, childminders gave an average rank of 6.96.

The Schools Planning Area which accounted for the *lowest* average rank given by early years childcare providers was: Macclesfield South (6.6).

The Schools Planning Area which accounted for the *second lowest* average rank was: Crewe South (6.7).

2 Key Findings - Out of School Wraparound Childcare

2.1 All parents and carers of 5-14 year olds - or up to 25 years if they have SEND - were invited to state if they were accessing wraparound out of school childcare, in early 2026.

41% of relevant responding parents/carers stated that in early 2026 they were accessing term time wraparound childcare all of the time. This response was most frequently stated by a parent/carer who was resident in the Macclesfield South School Planning Area - followed in frequency by the Shavington School Planning Area.

38% of responding parents/carers stated that in early 2026 they were accessing wraparound childcare some of the time.

Only 21% of responding parents/carers stated that in early 2026 they were not accessing wraparound childcare at any time.

2.2 Although the *majority* of schools are offering wraparound childcare places (both before school and after school) in early 2026, the same is not the case for PVI sector nurseries. This can be viewed as an important theme due to the fact that, as an outcome of this research, typically all childcare providers and schools stated that **demand for both before school places and after school places was increasing** – as a trend – and that a particular associated characteristic was an increasing demand for such places for 2-4 year olds. Indeed, the three Schools Planning Areas which accounted for the highest proportional incidence of responding parents of 0-4 year olds intending to access a Cheshire East-located wraparound after school club at some point in the future were:

1. Holmes Chapel
2. Poynton Village and to its south,
3. Macclesfield South

- 2.3 71% of responding early years childcare providers confirmed that their wraparound childcare could include support for children with SEND. 29% stated that there were contingencies around such an inclusive provision, typically dependent on a requirement for 1:1 care and wheelchair users.
- 2.4 30% of primary schools and early years childcare providers stated that they were, in early 2026, experiencing challenges with: (a) recruiting staff for wraparound childcare and/or: (b) encouraging existing team members to help resource such provision. In the main, these challenges were aligned to a reluctance to work the hours: 15:00pm to 18:00pm.
- 2.5 Responding parents/carers who stated that wraparound childcare was an important form of support for them: *so I can go to work*, were most frequently resident in the Macclesfield South Schools Planning Area - followed in frequency by the Shavington Schools Planning Area.
- 2.6 Parents/carers repeated a request that the local authority could continue to help to set up affordable holiday clubs, playschemes and places. The Schools Planning Areas which accounted for the highest incidence of responding parents and carers stating that they were currently accessing such holiday childcare provision was Macclesfield South, followed in frequency by Crewe South.

2026 – 2028 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Action Plan

The Action Plan has been informed by the outcomes of the 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and it's key findings that are presented over pages 3-7.

Headline Action	Proposed Timeline	Specific Action Dynamics
Early Years Childcare		
Publish and promote the 2026 CSA School Planning Area Profiles.	April 2026 → May 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that early years childcare providers can access the School Planning Area Profiles as part of their business ambitions. - Anchor development priorities to the sufficiency-themed School Planning Area Profiles. - Anchor support of DfE School Based Nursery Programme - Phase 3 and onward – applicatuions to the 2026 School Planning Area Profiles and encourage applications - when systematic approach is promoted - from schools located in specific geographic areas.
Prioritise a strategic understanding to the PVI sector nurseries and pre-schools that the whole sector is experiencing an increased number of enquiries/demand for funded places for 9 months – 23 months.	June 2026 → August 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer business support and advice to help settings attune and remodel (if viable) to ensure that they can support 0-2 years children.
Maintain a strategic relationship with officers who have responsibility for SEND sufficiency for children and young people aged 0-25 years.	April 2026 → March 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress early intervention support and advice as a means of co-supporting the mitigation of EHCP numbers and any eventual forthcoming systems for children (aligned to the White Paper: every child achieving and thriving) which replace EHCPs. - Work in cooperation with the Start for Life Journey Programme.
Maintain a strategic relationship with officers who have responsibility for planning of housing developments and regeneration	April 2026 → March 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue to welcome the initiative that all new (free) schools which complement major new housing developments have a requisite nursery provision on-site - On a periodical basis, receive updates on major new housing developments from relevant officers.
Retain a strategic awareness that certain School Planning Areas require a sufficiency-themed priority for early years childcare-themed development and intervention - and harness this ongoing strategic prioritisation as part of systematic approach to update the DfE at the end of Q4. each year moving forward, commencing in March 2027.	April 2026 → March 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The outcomes of the 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment direct that the five top priority School Planning Areas are – from an early years childcare perspective: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crewe North 2. Macclesfield South 3. Wilmslow North 4. Shavington 5. Nantwich Town - Have an ambition of termly monitoring of sufficiency of early years childcare places, from a statistical perspective.

Headline Action	Proposed Timeline	Specific Action Dynamics
Early Years Childcare		
Continue to offer and advise achievable and realistic interventions to support recruitment and retention, including via joined-up working with relevant college and employability organisation and their websites.	April 2026 → March 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing work to support recruitment and retention with the active promotion of the national Do Something Big Campaign with local Job Centres, the Early Years Apprenticeships Scheme.
Continue to be reactive to training needs highlighted by childcare providers.	April 2026 → March 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mindful that the 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment directed an ongoing facilitation of access to training on themes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - managing challenging behaviour - supporting children with complex disabilities - approaching the subject of SEND with parents who could be unaware of their child(ren) exhibiting characteristics.
Maintain an overview of ensuring that funded 2 year olds places accessible to families in receipt of specific benefits are <i>not</i> being depleted by an offer of extended entitlement funded places for working families	April 2026 → March 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitor termly funded childcare returns - Monitor DWP metrics on eligible numbers in locations that experience disadvantage and which will experience new housing developments.
Continue to prioritise early years childcare settings that are at risk of closure or a reduction in hours or capacity.	April 2026 → March 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proactively offer business modelling support and management.
Continue to align the overall strategy for early years childcare across the Cheshire East locality to the Start for Life Journey programme	April 2026 → March 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further specific focus on supporting the Start for Life Journey programme with transitions support from early years to Reception. - Be mindful that Family Hubs are now eligible to bid for Capital funding via the DfE School Based Nursery Programme.

Out of School Wraparound Childcare – Action

<p>To progress action aligned to the DfE December 2025 Guidance on maintaining sufficiency of School Aged Childcare</p>	<p>April 2026 → March 2028</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designate a specific officer to oversee the sufficiency of school-aged wraparound childcare. - Ensure development projects progress – including the continued roll-out of the school-based breakfast clubs programme. - Progress joined up working between HAF and other holiday provisions across Cheshire East - Develop a sub School-Aged Childcare Strategy. - Continue to improve sufficiency data for School Age Childcare, including monitor and developing joined-up systems and processes for long-term delivery.
<p>Publish and promote the 2026 CSA School Planning Area Profiles</p>	<p>April 2026 → May 2026</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that school-aged wraparound childcare providers can access the School Planning Area Profiles as part of their business ambitions. - Anchor development priorities to the sufficiency-themed School Planning Area Profiles.
<p>Retain a strategic awareness that certain School Planning Areas require a sufficiency-themed priority for out of school wraparound childcare-themed development and intervention</p>	<p>April 2026 → March 2028</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The outcomes of the 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment direct that the five top priority School Planning Areas are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crewe North 2. Macclesfield South 3. Wilmslow North 4. Shavington 5. Macclesfield North - Continued promotion of the free Breakfast Clubs Scheme.
<p>Retain a strategic awareness that there is an evident increasing demand for wraparound childcare places for 2-4 year old (pre-reception age) children</p>	<p>September 2026 → March 2027</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on supporting capital projects which can expand accessibility to wraparound childcare places for the 2-4 years age cohort. - Focus on enabling the PVI sector, where viable and enthused, to extend their ability to provide wraparound places for the 2-4 years cohort.
<p>Retain a strategic awareness that a relatively high number of parents who engaged with the 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment stated that they intended to access a holiday club over forthcoming years</p>	<p>June 2026 → August 2026</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working with HAF coordinators to ensure that that there is a holistic joined-up approach to funding to support the sustainability of holiday clubs, particularly in geographical locations which evidence a high proportion of working parents. - Working with HAF coordinators to explore opportunities for introducing or expanding using mixed models (joining the delivery of free and paid for provision) in line with the HAF programme guidance.

Glossary of Terms

Key terms used within the report that follows are:

PVI sector day nursery: refers to a daycare setting for 0-4 year olds that has identified their business structure as private, voluntary or independent, and which typically provides full daycare childcare from approximately 7:30am – 18:00pm.

An independent sector nursery is a privately owned or managed early years setting that operates outside of local authority control, focusing on providing care and education for children from birth to five years old. These nurseries are part of the broader Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI) sector and are funded primarily through parental fees, although they may also receive government funding for free early education entitlements.

A Multi Academy Trust may also have an on-site nursery, which would be managed by a school which is a member of that Trust.

Indeed a number of Multi Academy Trusts are benefitting from the Department for Education's School Based Nursery programme¹ and opening new nursery provisions at a academy or are extending existing nursery provisions.

Maintained sector nursery class: refers to a local authority/Cheshire East Council-run nursery class based at a local primary school. These typically provide up to 30 hours of free early education per week for children aged 2–5 years. They are open during school term-time only. Sessions are usually mornings or afternoons, although some may be able to deliver this flexibly.

Local Authority nursery school: is a local authority school, and is funded and controlled by the local authority, just like any other local authority school. They must be led by a head teacher and employ other qualified teachers, and like all schools in the country the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) must be a qualified teacher.

Pre School/Playgroup: refers to early years settings which provide education for children aged 2-5 years, typically at a local community setting.

Pre Schools (also known as Playgroups) provide early years education to under 5 year olds and specialise in offering such young children a chance to learn and play in small groups.

The types of provision above are collectively referred to in the report as: *early years childcare providers/settings.*

Registered Childminder: is someone who is registered by Ofsted in their own home to care for unrelated children under the age of 8 for more than 2 hours per day for a payment. Childminders are permitted to care for up to 6 children at any one time. They can care for 3 children under 5 (only one baby under 1 year old) and 3 children aged between 5 and 8. Group childminders are where 2 or more people are registered together and can look after larger numbers of children.

¹ <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2025/09/nurseries-in-schools-everything-you-need-to-know/> .

Types of Funded Childcare:

1. Free for families with 2-year olds who are receiving specific types of benefits

Such eligible 2-year-olds can get up to 15 hours of free childcare per week for 38 weeks of the year. Once a parent confirms they are eligible for a free 2-year-old place, the funding will remain with your child until they take up their universal or extended funded entitlement place, even if your circumstances change.

2. Working Parent Entitlement for children from 9 months old – 4 years

From September 2025, eligible working parents could apply for 30 hours of childcare for a child aged 9 to 35 months. Some childcare providers may offer fewer hours a week over more weeks of a year (up to 1,140 hours) – which is called stretched funding.

3. Universal Entitlement (15 hours) for 3 and 4 year olds

All 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to 15 hours of free childcare each week for 38 weeks a year. There is no application process or eligibility criteria for this funding as all children are entitled to this funding the term following their third birthday.

Wraparound Childcare: childcare that 'wraps around' the conventional (term-time) school day, both before and after it. **It does not refer to school-delivered themed clubs, like for example, football club, netball club, arts club etc.**

This provision can be offered by schools or private providers and can be run on a school site or at another setting in the area. It should not require parents to pick their child(ren) up from school and drop them off at another location. It should support them with their working day and their working hours between 8am-6pm.

Introduction and Key Demographics

The Childcare Act places a duty on local authorities in England to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of parents who are resident in their area who require childcare - and this includes securing provision of funded early education entitlement places, for eligible young children under compulsory school age (see page 12). Subsequently, Cheshire East Council, like all local authorities, is required by law to *report annually to its elected council members on how it is meeting its duty to secure sufficient childcare, and make this report available and accessible to parents, carers and families.*

Context for the ongoing importance of sufficient childcare and early years - across the Cheshire East locality - can be proposed from multiple sources and policies.

For example, from a mid-decade perspective, the July 2025 Department for Education document: *Giving every child the best start in life*² provides such suitable and relevant context – including as it outlined how the government will improve child development and ensure that all children have the chance to achieve and thrive - which would be achieved through:

- improving family services
- providing high quality support to parents and children, from pregnancy to age 5 years
- **making it easier and cheaper for families to access early education and care and;**
- **improving the quality of education and care that children receive with: early years settings; (b) childminders and; (c) reception classes.**

For this 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, the local authority has broadly analysed the factor of sufficiency as of early 2026 using contemporary data, principally about the need (demand) for childcare and the amount (supply) of:

- early years *funded* childcare, including aligned to the extended funded entitlements
- before school and after school wraparound childcare
- childcare places that are accessible in the Cheshire East localities specific 29 Schools Planning Areas

Additionally, this 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment has particularly focused on:

- Highlighting Cheshire East Schools Planning Areas which may have potential for undersupply or oversupply of early years childcare places, due to the new early education entitlements for 2-year-olds and under in working families
- Highlighting areas of potential undersupply or oversupply following the National Wraparound Childcare Programme
- Highlighting workforce issues and continuing recruitment challenges.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/giving-every-child-the-best-start-in-life>

With regard to the National Childcare Wraparound Programme, in February 2024, the Department for Education set out its vision in the document: *Wraparound childcare: guidance for schools and trusts in England*⁸ which outlined how **Local Authorities are responsible for ensuring there are sufficient wraparound childcare places in their area**, and that, therefore, they should work with schools, Multi Academy Trusts and PVI sector providers to do so - using Government funding to set up new provision and expand existing provision, where needed. In addition, the document reiterated that primary schools are expected to:

- respond to their community's wraparound needs
- consider and respond to parents' requests for their school to deliver wraparound childcare
- support the Local Authority to understand parental demand and, where relevant, existing wraparound provision (as per this assessment document).

Therefore, this 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment further focuses on the extent to which Cheshire East-resident families can access - including working parents - wraparound care, either from their primary school or from another 3-11 years out of school hours provider in their local area, by September 2026.

This 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment also focuses on the extent to which Cheshire East-resident families can access the expanded **funded early years entitlement for 9 months – 3 year/(35 months) olds** for working parents, which saw its final extension in September 2025 when 30 hours of funded childcare became accessible to eligible parents with a child from 9-months-old up to school age.

The themes which are included in the context above are all relevant, including as childcare providers, parents and carers continue to experience their own challenges. For example, in October 2025, Coram Family and Childcare promoted the outcomes of research they had undertaken via the report: *Early education entitlements – the disadvantage gap (September 2025)*. Their report concluded that:

- Many children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) will not be entitled to the expanded 30 hours of funded early education because their parents/carers may be less likely to be in work
- Support with childcare costs for working parents (i.e. what was introduced as the final extended entitlement in September 2025) is very welcome - but focusing support this way gives less early education to children who stand to benefit from it the most and risks widening the disadvantage gap.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65d735262197b201e57fa72a/Wraparound_childcare_guidance_for_schools_and_trusts_in_England.pdf

- A universal right to 30 hours of funded early education would remove the current inequality for disadvantaged children, reduce confusion and complexity for parents and facilitate work.

An announcement made by the DfE in March 2026 may help with the challenges from an out of school wraparound childcare perspective.

The Guidance document: *School-age childcare sufficiency (including local authority capacity funding 2026-2027)* – sets out DfE’s expectations on how local authorities should use further specific grant funding to support the delivery and sustainability of school-age childcare including through supporting the national rollout of free breakfast clubs and fostering links between holiday childcare and the holiday activities and food (HAF) programme to maximise opportunities to deliver a sustainable school-age childcare market.

The funding is intended to support wraparound school-aged childcare provision across term-time and holiday periods, including to:

- ensure the sustainability of wraparound places already created
- support the market to deliver further places where needed
- support the rollout of free breakfast clubs
- support the delivery of the HAF programme to ensure join up between HAF funded holiday activities and wider holiday childcare in the area, within a thriving childcare market.

Ultimately, local authorities were reminded of their responsibility for maintaining strategic oversight of the local school-age wraparound childcare market and developing strategies to ensure that provision of school-age childcare in their local area meets the needs of parents and carers, and children.

The production of the 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was supported by Place Group - an early education themed project management that has significant experience of working on Childcare Sufficiency Assessments.

Place Group had previously supported Cheshire East Council in 2020 and 2022 with previous Childcare Sufficiency Assessments.

Place Group implemented the following [methodology](#) to deliver the assessment.

1. Structured telephone/virtual interviews with representatives of the Cheshire East locality’s **early years and out of school wraparound childcare providers and registered childminders** which focused on the themes of: (a) early years childcare places supply, observed demand and themes relevant to the expansion to the Government’s funded early years entitlements and; (b) the incidence of the delivery of wraparound childcare places, before school and after school.

2. An online survey which was promoted to the Cheshire East locality-resident parents and carers of 0-14 year olds, in January and February 2026, that invited them to provide their views on early years childcare and wraparound childcare places – and to think about both in the present and in the forthcoming future.

3. Analysis of contemporary demographic and socio-economic factors, including a focus on: (a) existing and forecast population levels of 0-14 year olds and; (b) the forthcoming incidence of new housing developments, which would have a potential effect on demand for funded early years childcare places and wraparound childcare places, at specific locations (i.e. wards) throughout the Cheshire East locality.

The demographic context for the Cheshire East locality

The population of the Cheshire East locality is growing - demonstrated by the fact that the growth of 7.7% between the 2011-2021 census outpaced both the North West region (5.2%) and the England (6.6%) averages. This population growth will likely be accelerated (even accounting for outward migration), particularly within geographical locations that are accounting for the inception of major/notable new housing developments – for example:

- Copenhall East development in Crewe
- Proposed Congleton Road East development in Macclesfield
- Handforth Garden Village development
- Ongoing Basford East development, to the south of Crewe
- Potential Middlewich Road (close to Leighton Hospital) in Crewe.

As stated above, the effects of these new major housing constructions and occupations, including by a proportion of new inward moving families is outlined within the format of our 29 Schools Place Planning area demand profiles, which supplement this 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment.

Two other relevant contextual factors should be considered too, in terms of how they will effect the demand for types of funded childcare and wraparound childcare.

Firstly, data published by the Department for Work and Pensions in 2024 outlined that the proportion of children under the age of 16 living in relative low-income families/relative poverty in Cheshire East was 14.7%.

The government's updated Index of Multiple Deprivation figures, released in December 2025, indicate that the Cheshire East locality continues to account for geographical locations which are within the top 30% nationally aligned to a factor of income deprivation – which can indicate a presence of child poverty.

These are:

Local Authority District code (2024) & vicinity of:	Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Decile (where 1 is most deprived 10% of LSOA)
E01018462 – Crewe Central – Victoria Avenue	1
E01018466 – Crewe Central - Coppenhall	1
E01018476 – Crewe East – Middlewich Street	1
E01018486 – Crewe South – Edleston Road	1
E01018388 – Alsager East	2
E01018400 – Congleton East – Bromley Road	2
E01018423 – Middlewich – George VI Avenue	2
E01018445 - Crewe South - Alexandra area	2
E01018447 - Crewe South – Nantwich Road	2
E01018459 – Crewe North – Selworthy Drive	2
E01018463 – Crewe Central – Henry Street	2
E01018464 – Crewe East – Queen Street	2
E01018485 – Crewe - St. Barnabas	2
E01018487 – Crewe South – Derrington Avenue	2
E01018497 – Crewe West – Wistaston Road	2
E01018498 – Crewe West – Queens Park Drive	2
E01018398 – Congleton West – Crescent Road	3
E01018401 – Congleton East - Edinburgh	3
E01018402 – Congleton East – Rood Hill	3
E01018435 – Sandbach Town	3
E01018454 - Nantwich North and West	3
E01018461 – Crewe North – Ellis Street	3
E01018478 – Crewe East – Remer Street	3
E01018482 – Crewe West – Middlewich Road	3
E01018484 – Crewe, St. Barnabas	3
E01018489 – Crewe South – Walthall Street	3
E01018511 – Wistaston Green Road	3

Secondly, the *Cheshire East SEN Sufficiency Plan 2023-2026*⁴ outlines how the trajectory of increasing numbers of children and young people with SEND and with EHCPs was requiring the establishment of further special school places and the establishment of Specialist Resource Units, at a number of the locality’s schools. The document outlined how:

- In 2023, schools across the Cheshire East locality were supporting 4,029 children and young people with an EHCP with 1,455 (36%) requiring support in a specialist provision – a proportion of which were naturally reaching Reception class from their early years
- The need for specialist provision in the secondary phase of education was *much higher* when compared with the primary phase of education

⁴ <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/livewell/sen/send-sufficiency-statement-for-children-and-young-people-with-special-educational-needs-2023-2026.pdf>

- Social Emotional and Mental Health, Speech Language and Communication Needs and Autistic Spectrum Condition are the largest areas of need, representing 73% of all children and young people with an EHCP.

The increasing number of children aged 2-4 years who are evidencing SEND is a reason why this particular Childcare Sufficiency Assessment has taken a 'deeper dive' into the theme of the relevant experiences of childcare providers - with the relevant outcomes being presented over pages 32-46 of this narrative.

1 Outcome of Consultation with Early Years Childcare & Wraparound Childcare Providers

In early 2026, childcare providers were invited to participate in a structured telephone or virtual interview with a member of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment research team. Three types of childcare providers were invited to take part in such a structured interview with the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment research team:

1. **Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector day nurseries and pre-schools** (the PVI sector) - who might offer both funded early years entitlement places and wraparound childcare places (before school and after school)
2. **Maintained sector nursery class** (the maintained sector) - who again might offer both funded early years entitlement places and wraparound childcare places (before school and after school)
3. **Registered childminders** - who could offer both funded early years entitlement places and wraparound childcare places (before school and after school)

A total of 225 such providers engaged in an interview - and their collective feedback on key themes and sufficiency-related subjects is presented and narrated below.

It can be noted that the term: **early years childcare providers** in the narrative below aligns to a combined analysis of the two types of provision: 1/ above - the PVI sector and; 2/ above - primary schools, that may have a nursery and/or deliver a type of wraparound childcare.

1.1 Occupancy

1.1.1 All *responding* Private, Independent and Voluntary (PVI) sector early years childcare providers were invited to state the extent to which they were open throughout a calendar year.

69% of early years childcare providers stated that they were open

All Year Round, with 31% stating that they were accessing Term-Time Only.

In comparison, 93% of registered childminders stated that they were

accessible All Year Round, with 7% stating that they were accessible Term-Time Only.

1.1.2 All *responding* early years childcare providers were invited to state whether they had a waiting list⁵ at the time of their interview, in January 2026.

69% of early years childcare providers stated that they did - and the age cohort that was evidently experiencing the most frequent incidence of waiting lists, among such providers, was 9-12 months, followed in frequency by 2 years.

⁵ It is acknowledged that waiting lists can be a subjective theme – especially aligned to timelines – and providers were invited to state whether, in February 2026, there were children due to access their care, in the *foreseeable* future.

Additionally, those providers that *did* have a waiting list were requested to state whether it had changed in size since spring 2025:

- 27% of relevant providers stated: Yes, it has increased in size (this was feedback received to a most frequent extent from relevant representatives located in the Wilmslow South Schools Planning Area, followed in frequency by the Congleton Central Schools Planning Area)
- (Only) 4% of relevant providers stated: Yes, it has *decreased* in size.

The incidence of having a waiting list for early years childcare providers was also proportionally highest in the Wilmslow South Schools Planning Area, followed in frequency by the Congleton Central Schools Planning Area.

Similarly, all *responding* registered childminders were invited to state whether they had a waiting list at the time of their interview, in February 2026. 48% stated that they *did* - and the age cohort that was evidently experiencing the most frequent incidence of waiting lists was 0-8 months – followed in frequency by 9-12 months.

Additionally, those registered childminders that *did* have a waiting list were requested to state whether it had changed in size, since spring 2025.

- 30% of childminders stated Yes: it has increased in size (this was feedback received to a most frequent extent from childminders located in the Nantwich Town Schools Planning Area)
- 0 childminders stated that it has decreased in size.

1.1.3 Conversely, all early years childcare providers were also invited to state whether they had any **vacant places** at the time of their interview.

33% stated that they did - and the age cohort that was evidently experiencing the most frequent incidence of vacant places was 3 years, followed in frequency by 2 years.

The incidence of vacancies at early years childcare providers was (proportionally) highest in the Nantwich Town Schools Planning Area, followed in frequency by the Poynton Village Schools Planning Area locality.

All registered childminders were also invited to state whether they had any vacancies at the time of their interview.

(Only) 5% stated that they *did* - and the age cohort that was evidently experiencing the most frequent incidence of vacant places in early 2026 was 3 years.

1.1.4 Early years childcare providers were also invited to state whether they had observed or experienced any new trends - aligned to demand - at their establishment in the past 12 months - since spring 2025.

53% of such providers stated that they had - and the four recurrent such trends were:

1. A notable increase in the demand for funded places for 2 year olds.
2. A notable increase in the demand for places for babies – and a discernible decrease in the demand for places for 3 and 4 year olds.
3. Parents of 2-4 year olds having an enhanced awareness of wraparound childcare.
4. A continuing increase in enquiries from carers of children with SEND.

Similarly, all registered childminders were invited to state whether they had observed or experienced any new trends - aligned to demand - at their establishment since spring 2025.

68% of such professionals stated that they had - and the four recurrent trends were:

1. An increase in enquiries about places for babies -expressions used included “*massive demand*” and “*never-ending enquiries*”.
2. A notable demand for the extended funded places for “*9 months – 23 months*”.
3. A notable increase in *enquiries for* full-time places – at the expense of part-time places.
4. An increase in the theme of expectant parents placing their name on a waiting list.

1.2 Opening Hours

Analysis of the responses from early years childcare providers, i.e. nurseries and pre-schools, indicated that:

- The most frequent opening hours for day nurseries were: 7:30am – 18:00pm. Four responding early years childcare providers stated that they did not close until after 18:00pm, with the latest ‘finish time’ being 18:30pm.
- The most frequent opening hours for sessional pre school/playgroups were: 09:00am – 15:15pm, and:

Analysis of the responses from registered childminders, indicated that for that sector:

- The most frequent opening hours were: 07:30am (followed in frequency by 8am) – 17:30pm. 0 responding childminders stated that they offered childcare beyond 18:00pm, on a typical weekday.

1.3 Staffing and resourcing

1.3.1 39% of early years childcare providers stated that they were still experiencing difficulties with recruitment of staff or the retention of staff in early 2026.

The **repeated** types of positions that most were most frequently affected by recruitment challenges were (in order of frequency):

- Qualified Level 3 staff/positions
- Qualified Level 2 staff/positions
- Recruiting apprentices
- Room leaders.

Repeated thematic comments *include*:

“We are not getting applicants at the moment for Level 2, Level 3 and managerial positions”.

“The last four years have been ‘shocking’, it has been so difficult to find Level 2 and 3”.

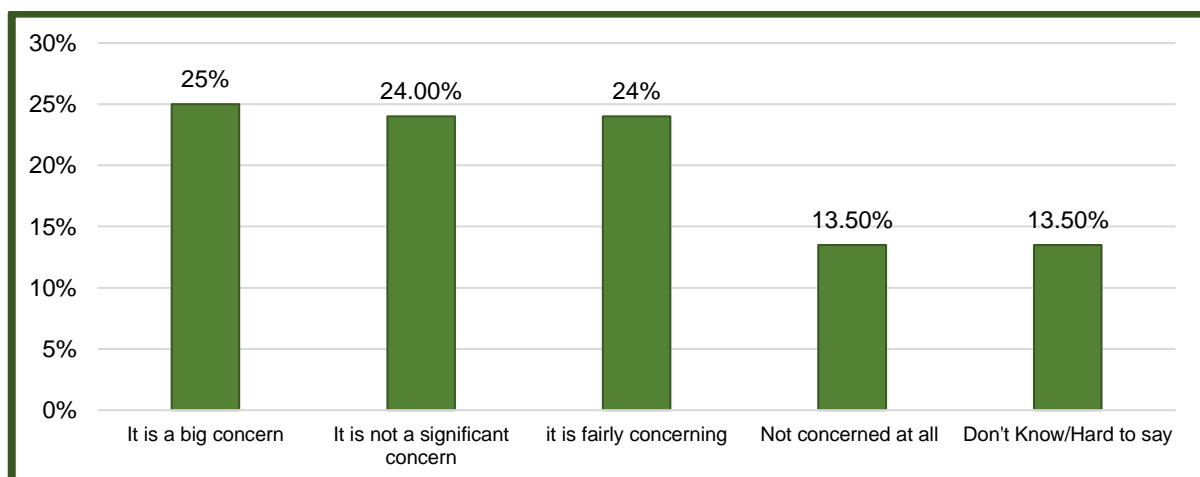
“We are only getting unqualified 18 year olds applying. We are then training them ourselves... and then there is the risk that they move on. People are not turning up for interviews ...they only have to have an appointment for an interview and then it counts for continuing on benefits”.

“When we advertised for qualified staff, no qualified people applied. Those who have completed courses recently are not really committed. We now take on apprentices and train them ourselves”.

The two School Planning Areas which accounted for the highest frequency of recruitment being stated as a *challenge/difficulty* were:

- Crewe South
- Macclesfield South.

Image 1 - outlines the extent to which early years childcare providers were concerned about workforce recruitment and retention over the next 24 months



Those responding early years childcare providers who stated: ***it is a big concern*** were most frequently situated in the Macclesfield South Schools Planning Area - followed in frequency by the Nantwich Town Schools Planning Area.

1.3.2 29% of early years childcare providers stated that their team had training needs - or that there were considered to be training gaps - in February 2026.

The recurrent types of training needs outlined were:

- (With a notable incidence – stated by 30% of relevant settings) SEND-themed training
- Courses on the specific SEND designation of Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)
- Early Years Professional Development qualifications
- Training on managing challenging behaviour
- Courses for a team member to become a SENCO
- Makaton communication training.

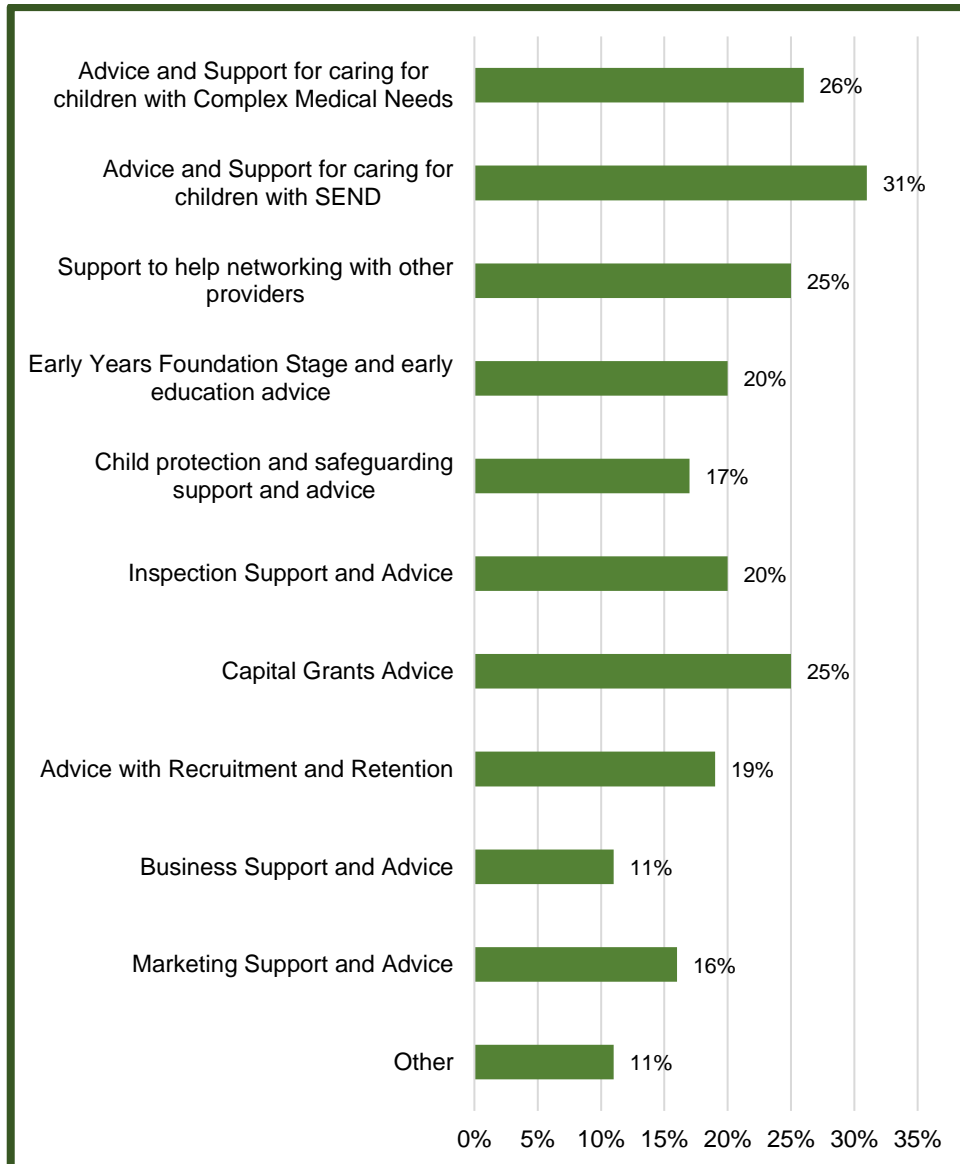
1.3.3 21% of registered childminders stated that they had training needs, for themselves - or for a childminding assistant. The two considered recurrent types of training needs outlined were:

- SEND-themed training (recurrently aligned to Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Autistic Spectrum Condition)
- “*Refresher courses*” on the theme of Autism.

1.4 Support from Cheshire East Council

1.4.1 Early years childcare providers and registered childminders were invited to state any types of general support and advice they would welcome from Cheshire East Council over the forthcoming twelve months.

Image 2 - Types of support welcomed by early years childcare providers



Feedback which represented *repeated* requests *included*:

“Continued support and advice to help us navigate the Ofsted changes”.

“Due to behaviour we have had to use extra staff – guidance about ‘advanced’ training available on dealing with behaviour and ‘restrain’ would be very helpful”.

“Guidance on sources of funding for outside play”.

A number of early years childcare providers also highlighted themes related to SEND - an area of focus that this assessment picks up in section 1.6 - for example:

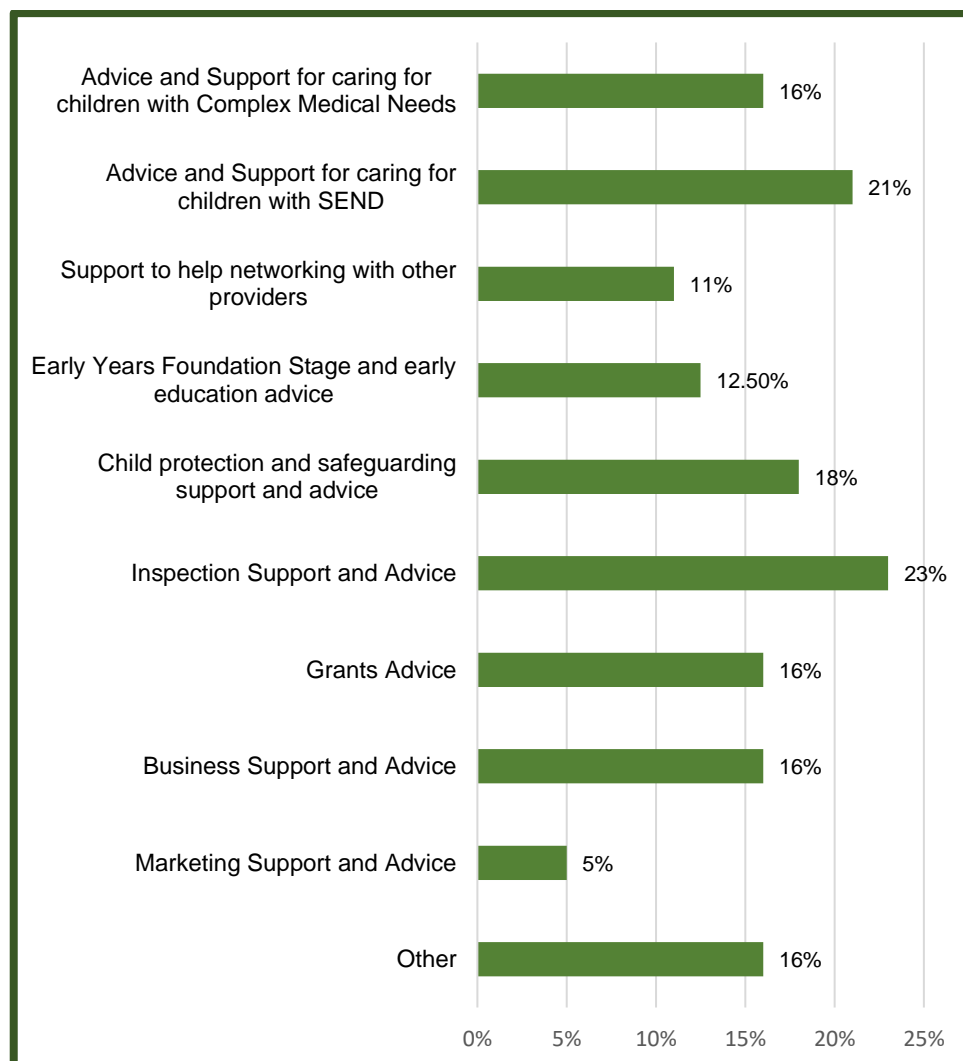
“When we had a ‘physical team’ of health visitors they came in and supported us and took time to observe a child. If that specific team could even just visit once every 4 months that would help massively”.

“[In our opinion] the SENIF funding is not adequate. I have a child who comes in three days a week and the funding only covers 2-hours of support. I could not find anyone who would do 2 hours a week driving out to our rural location”.

“[In our opinion] the SEND referral process needs to be reviewed... so as childcare providers can receive external support quicker”.

“My first stop is the Council’s Inclusion Officer as it is ‘very hard’ to see either Health Visitors or Speech and Language Therapist... It would be helpful to have a dedicated person to contact regarding SEND children”.

Image 3 - Types of support welcomed by registered childminders



1.4.2 Feedback which represented *repeated* requests included:

“Our profile. Childminders want to be acknowledged within the childcare sector. We offer so much to our families and others. We feel undervalued and under-appreciated and it needs to improve!”.

“It would be good if there was somewhere on the live well website that showed childminders who have SEND experience - alongside their name”.

It can be noted, above, that there was a difference in the incidence of (more) registered childminders requesting support and advice on inspections - in comparison with the feedback from the localities responding early years childcare settings/providers.

1.5 Funded Early Years Childcare

1.5.1 61% of early years childcare providers stated that they provided funded entitlement places for 2 year olds in receipt of specific benefits in February 2026, with the average number of such places being 6.

29% of relevant providers stated that they currently had vacant funded entitlement places for 2 year olds receipt of specific benefits - at an average of 1 place/relevant setting.

78% stated that they provided universal 15 hours funded entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds places in February 2026, with the average number of such places being 9.

In this case, 25% of relevant providers stated that they currently had vacant universal 15 hours funded entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds places - at an average of 4 places/relevant setting.

32% of childminders stated that they provided funded entitlement places for 2 year olds in receipt of specific benefits in February 2026, with the average number of such places being <1.

Only 10% of childminders stated that they currently had vacant funded entitlement places for 2 year olds receipt of specific benefits - at an average of 1 place/childminder.

28% of childminders stated that they provided universal 15 hours funded entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds places in February 2026, with the average number of such places being 1 – and there being no indication of any vacant places.

Table A below outlines the extent to which responding **early years childcare providers** were offering extended funded childcare places up to 30 hours for eligible working parents of 9 months – 4 year olds in February 2026.

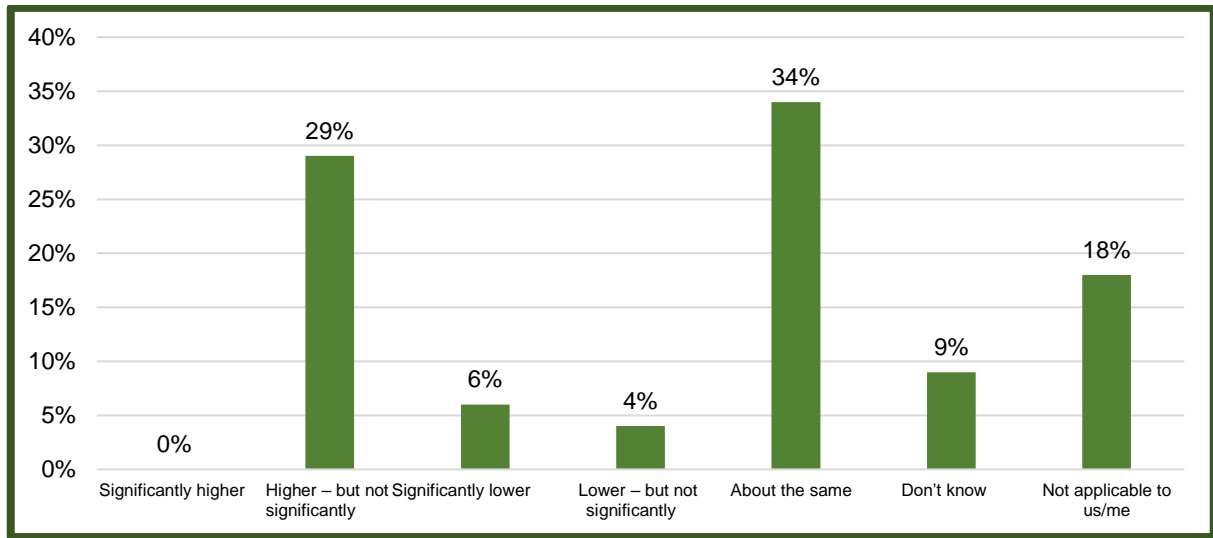
Age Group	Percentage of early years childcare providers offering extended funded childcare to this age cohort	Average number of places delivered by this sector	Average number of relevant vacant places/provider
Funded 30 hours entitlement for eligible working families for 9 months & 1 year olds	40%	19	1
Funded 30 hours entitlement for eligible working families for 2 year olds	69%	15	1
Funded 30 hours entitlement for eligible working families for 3&4 year olds	81%	22	2

Table B below outlines the extent to which **childminders** were offering extended funded childcare places up to 30 hours for eligible working parents of 9 months – 4 year olds in February 2026.

Age Group	Percentage of early years childcare providers offering extended funded childcare to this age cohort	Average number of places delivered by this sector	Average number of relevant vacant places/childminder
Funded 30 hours entitlement for eligible working families for 9 months & 1 year olds	89%	2	0
Funded 30 hours entitlement for eligible working families for 2 year olds	93%	2	0
Funded 30 hours entitlement for eligible working families for 3&4 year olds	64%	1	0

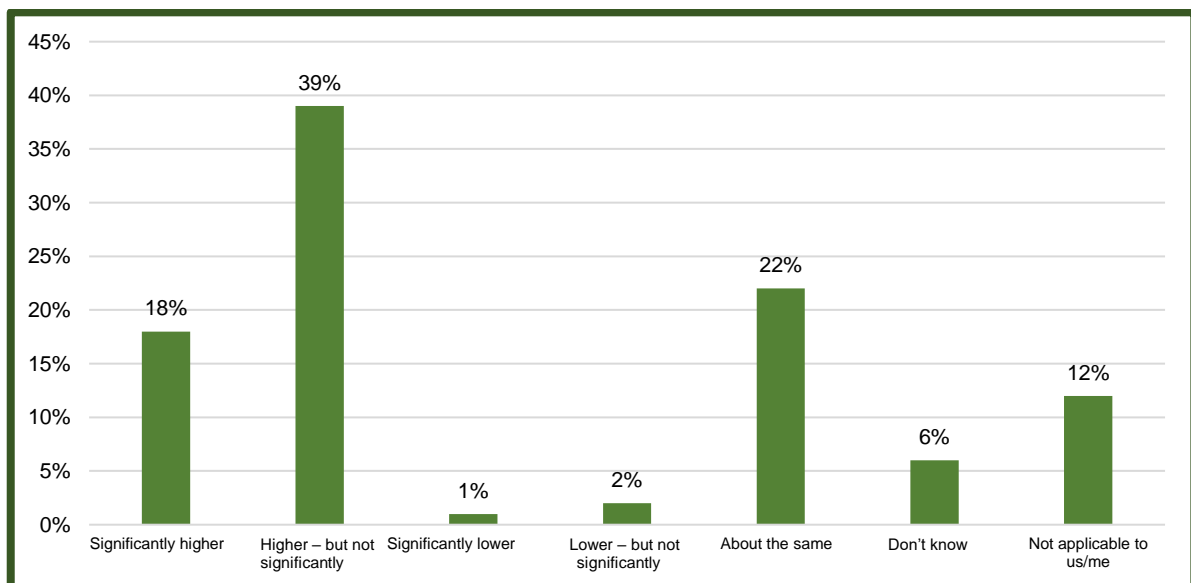
1.5.2 Early years childcare providers and registered childminders were invited to answer the question: *Considering the introduction over the past two years of the extended entitlements: how much higher do you expect demand for funded entitlement places to be **at your setting** in **summer 2027?***

Image 4 - Early years childcare providers and childminders: assessment of demand aligned to the Government’s announcements on the extensions to the funded entitlement specifically for 2 year olds



The locality which accounted for the highest incidence of the response: significantly higher, or higher – but not significantly, was the area which comprised the Alsager Schools Planning Area.

Image 5 - Early years childcare providers and childminders: assessment of demand aligned to the Government’s announcements on the extensions to the funded entitlement specifically for all age groups 9 months – 3 years



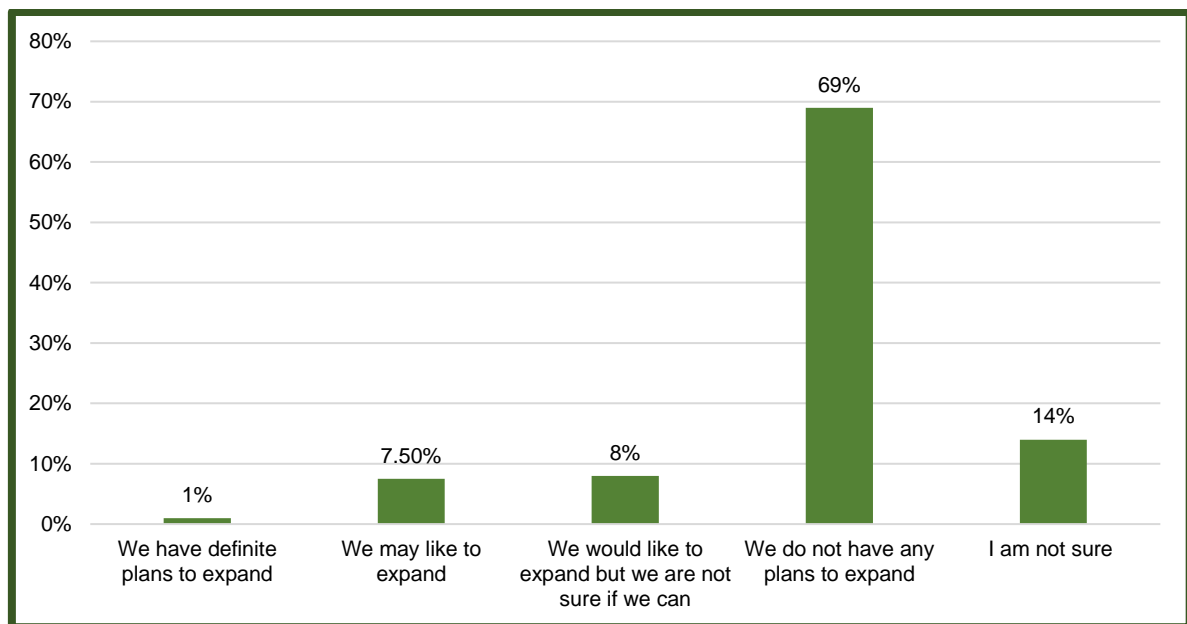
The locality which accounted for the highest incidence of the response: significantly higher, or higher – but not significantly, was the Crewe South Schools Planning Area.

All relevant childcare providers were asked whether the introduction in April 2024 of the funded entitlement for eligible working families with 2 year olds had meant that their setting had had to decrease the number of funded entitlement 2 year old places for those in receipt of certain benefits which they offered. Only 10 responding early years childcare providers and childminders **stated that such a decrease in places for 2 year olds whose families were in receipt of relevant benefits had happened**, with the following two Schools Planning Areas accounting for *two or more* such responses:

- Crewe South Schools Planning Area
- Poynton Village Schools Planning Area.

1.5.3 Early years childcare providers and registered childminders outlined plans to expand capacity at their setting, so as to meet any future potential increased demand.

Image 6 - Early years childcare providers: Incidence of plans to expand the capacity at early years childcare providers, so as to meet any future potential increased demand



The Schools Planning Areas which accounted for the highest incidence of the response: we have plans to expand. or would like to expand but are not sure if we can, were: Crewe North and Poynton Village.

1.5.4 Specific feedback from settings who had plans to expand or reconfigure - or that were considering such an option - tended to relate to the possibility of securing grant funding and included:

“We have a number of telephone calls regularly asking if we can accommodate 2 year olds. This could be viable if the Council could fund an extension to our existing mobile classroom or build us a new two-room mobile...”

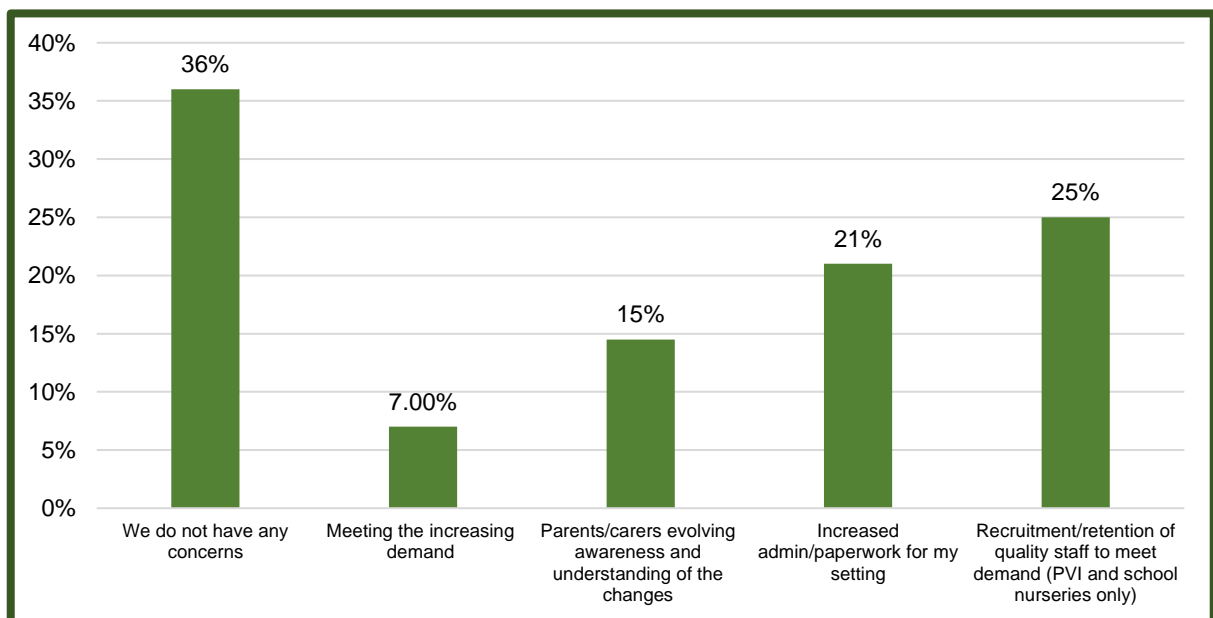
“We are in a portacabin and there is no space in it to expand. It would depend on grants...”

“There is a house next door our church-based pre-school - and if could secure planning permission and grant funding, this could be a viable possibility for us to expand in to”.

“We are [a school and are] considering going in for the next round of grant funding to either expand our pre-school for a further 6 additional spaces or possibly seeing if we could secure funding for a new building in order to maybe have a nursery for 0-4 year olds... this would enable us to offer wraparound for the nursery children there too”.

1.5.6 Early years childcare providers and registered childminders were invited to confirm whether they had any **concerns about the (continuing) implementation of the expansions to the funded entitlement for working parents with 9 months – 2 year olds.**

Image 7 - Early years childcare providers and childminders: Incidence of specific concerns about the still evolving expansion to the funded entitlements



The Schools Planning Area which accounted for the highest incidence of the response: recruitment and retention of quality staff to meet demand was: Nantwich Town, followed in frequency Crewe South.

Other concerns were highlighted and the recurrent themes (which were not related to the level of the funding rate, which is an ongoing criticism expressed by childcare providers that operate in all English local authorities) included:

“Some parents are still ‘misunderstanding the [eligibility] codes... putting in the code for spring rather than summer... and then it's too late for anything to be done for the term” – and similarly:

“Parents think that as soon as they get their code... their child can start nursery, rather than having to wait until the term after their child's birthday. Also, parents re-confirming their codes is [in our experience] problematic, as many forget or leave it too late and then nursery misses out on payments for 3 months”.

“Some parents think that they do not have to pay for consumables” – and similarly:

“Certain parents don't understand when their code starts and that [fee] charges for snacks have to be invoiced to them”.

1.6 Theme of SEND

1.6.1 All *responding* early years childcare providers and childminders were invited to state how many children with a specific type of *diagnosed* SEND, were attending their provision - in early 2026.

53% of responding early years childcare providers and childminders stated that they did not have any children with diagnosed SEND at their setting at the time of the survey.

47% stated *that they were* providing childcare for at least one child/pupil with SEND - at an average of 4 children per relevant setting.

Table C - Incidence of children with specific SEND designations attending responding childcare settings in early 2026

SEND designation	Percentage of childcare providers that they were caring for at least one child with relevant SEND designation
Autistic Spectrum Condition	20%
Sensory Impairment: i.e.: Hearing impairment/Visual impairment	9.5%
Moderate Learning Difficulties	5%
Physical Disability	4%
Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties	4%
Profound, Severe and Complex Needs	5%
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	6.5%
Severe Learning Difficulties	4.5%
Specific Learning Difficulties	3%
Speech, Language and Communication Needs	21%
Other	10%

The four SEND types that were stated with the highest frequency were;

1. Speech, Language and Communication Needs - stated by 21% of relevant providers
2. Autism - stated by 20% of providers
3. Sensory Impairment: i.e.: Hearing impairment/Visual impairment - stated by 9.5% of providers
4. Social, Emotional and Mental Health – stated by 6.5% of providers

The Schools Planning Area that proportionally accounted the highest frequency of the response: a child(ren) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs was Nantwich Town.

The Schools Planning Area that proportionally accounted the highest frequency of the response: a child(ren) with Autism was: Crewe South.

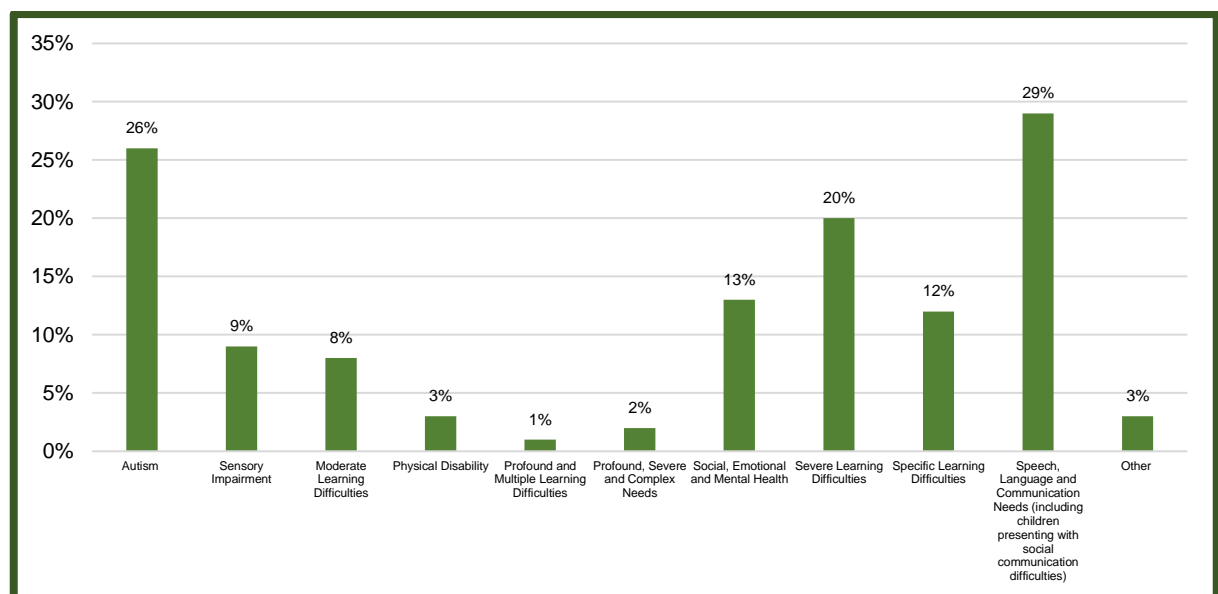
The most frequent response for 'Other' SEND type(s) was a child under Portage, with other *repeated* responses being:

- Downs Syndrome
- Global Development Delay
- Cerebral Palsy
- Cystic Fibrosis.

1.6.2 All representatives of responding early years childcare providers *and* childminders were invited to feedback on how effectively *they* believed they were able to support children with *specific* SEND needs, at their setting.

Image 8 - Frequency with which *responding* providers felt well equipped to support a specific SEND type

(note: respondents were invited to state multiple SEND types, if relevant)



'Other' types of SEND that were repeated by settings, as a SEND designation they felt well equipped to support were:

- All SEND types (stated by 31% of providers)
- Downs Syndrome (stated by 3 providers)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (stated by 2 providers).

1.6.3 Subsequently, representatives of the early years childcare providers and childminders were invited to state whether, in their opinion, they believed that there were particular SEND types that their setting **could not** support as effectively as they would like to. They were invited to highlight up to four SEND types.

47% of all respondents stated that: Yes, there was particular SEND type(s) that their setting was *less well equipped* to support.

Image 9 - Percentage of responding providers that stated that they considered themselves less well equipped to support

(note: respondents were invited to state multiple SEND types, if relevant)

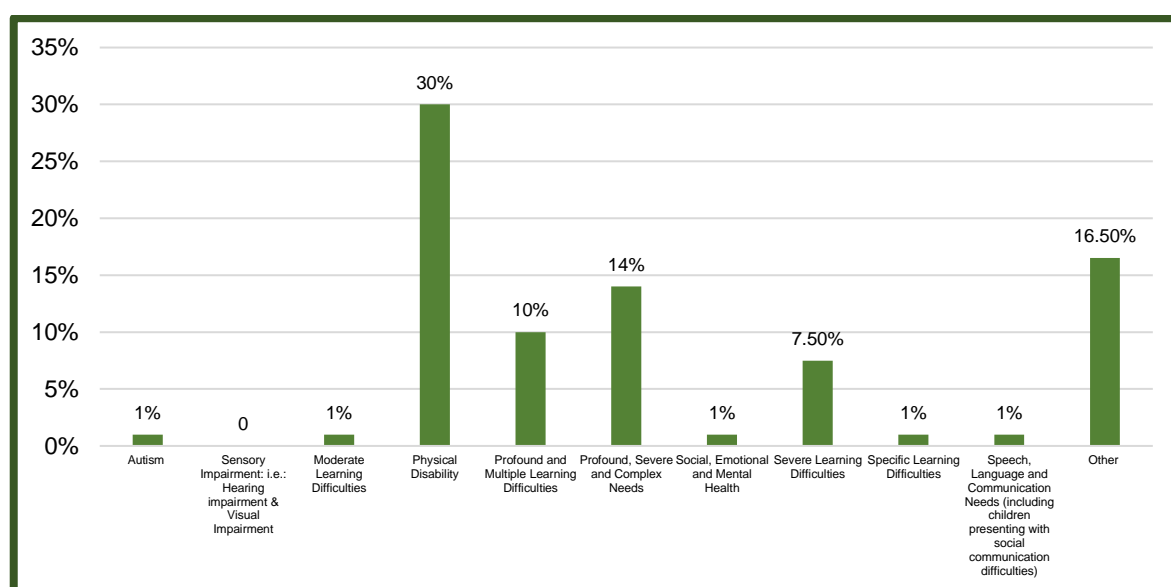


Image 10 indicates that four SEND designations that were repeatedly highlighted by certain settings as being types which they believed they **could not** support as effectively as they would like to:

1. Physical Disability (30% of settings, and stated with the highest proportional frequency by representatives of settings from the Nantwich Town Schools Planning Area)
2. Profound, Severe and Complex Needs
3. Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties
4. Severe Learning Difficulties

All **relevant** *responding* early years childcare providers were asked to give the reasons why they highlighted specific themes aligned to the designation of physical disability – and feedback which reflected multiple responses focused on accessibility for wheelchair users:

‘Our space for specific physical equipment is our difficulty’ – and similarly:

“The environment and space may not be easy for a wheelchair”.

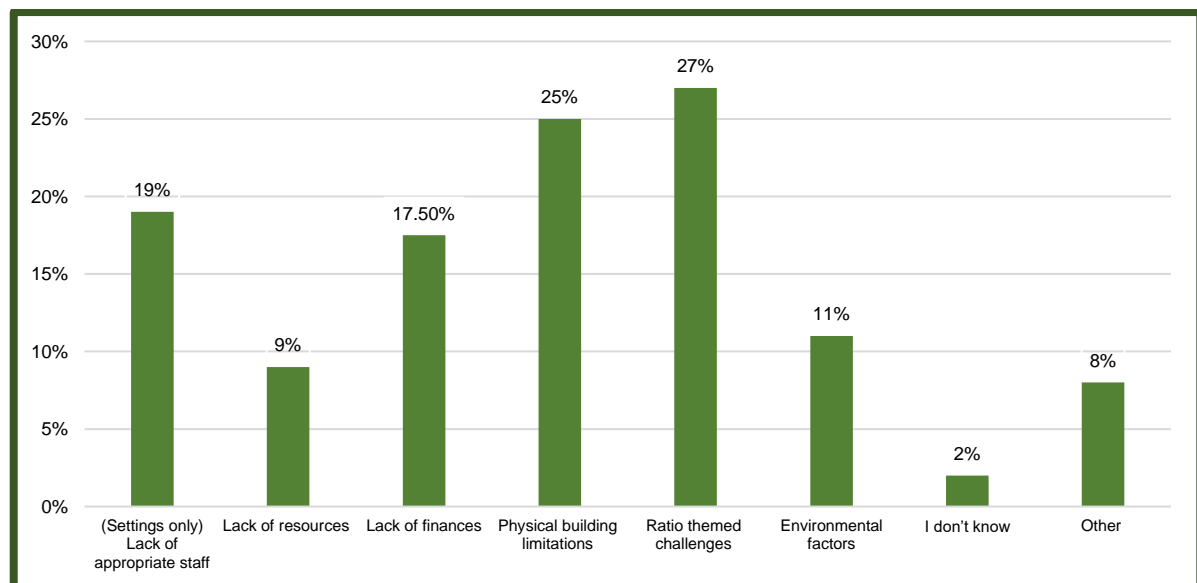
“[as a childminder] for a child with a wheelchair, it would be difficult to get a wheelchair into the car for trips along with the buggy”.

“We are in a Forest School-type setting, so a wheelchair may have difficulties and a walking frame may be difficult to use”.

“We are on two floors, which may make it difficult to care for non-mobile children”.

1.6.4 Respondents were asked: if your setting is ever unable to take a child with SEND – what could be the *typical* reasons?:

Image 11 - Recurrent reasons why an early years childcare providers could **not** take on a child with SEND at their setting



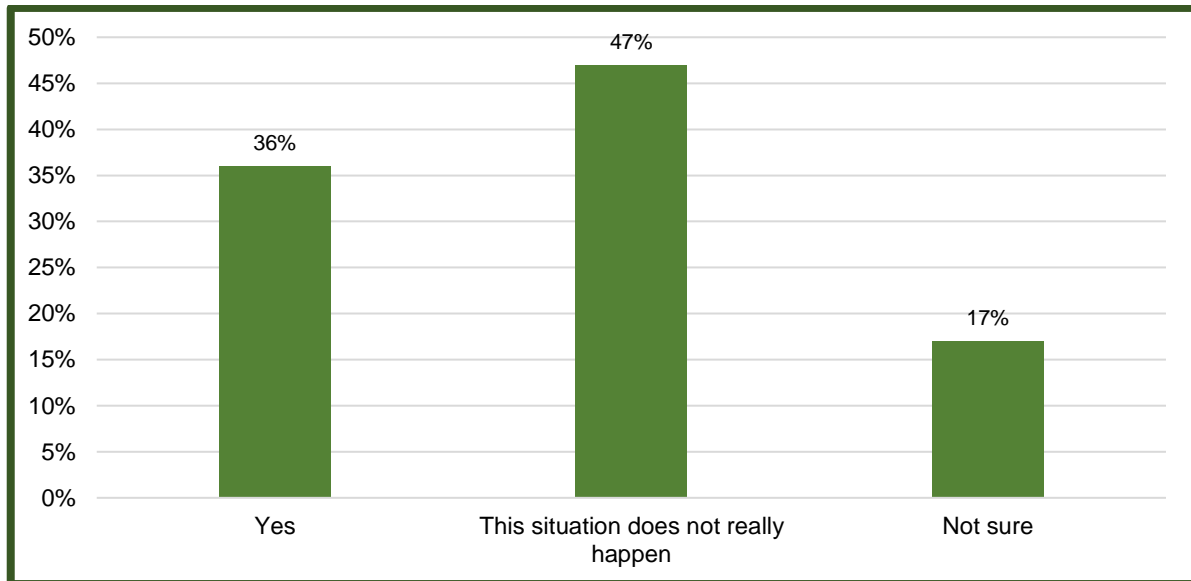
Encouragingly it can be noted that 33% of representatives of early years childcare providers did not feel that this was a situation that really occurred at their setting.

Respondents who stated: *Other* provided (repeated types of) reasons *including*:

“We have no sensory room... and for some children with challenging behaviour and biting, our setting might not be best for them” – and similarly:

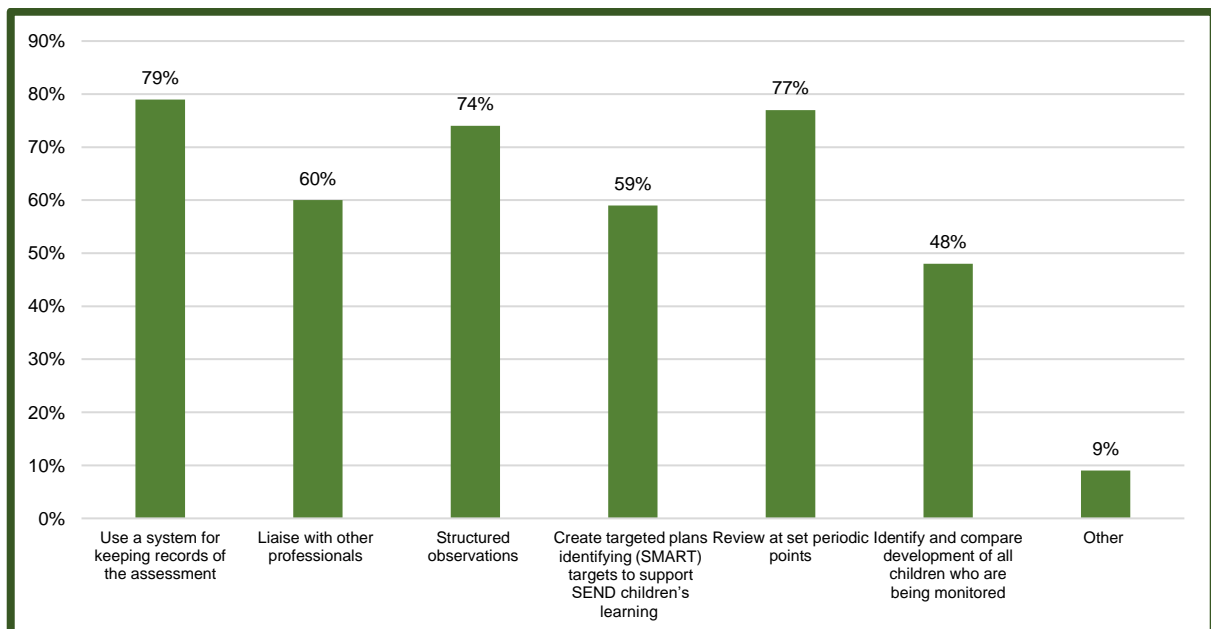
“We are in one room and are a ‘pack-away setting”.

1.6.5 Image 12 - Representatives of early years childcare providers and childminders were asked: if there was a situation where their setting was ever unable to accept a child with SEND, did you then try to refer that family to another childcare provider?:



Childcare providers located in the Sandbach Schools Planning Area responded: Yes with the highest frequency.

1.6.6 Image 13 - Representatives of early years childcare providers and childminders were asked: how do you monitor and evaluate the progress of child(ren) with SEND at your setting?



Those early years childcare providers who stated 'Other' repeatedly accessed a tracking system called Stokes Speaks Out⁶.

⁶ <https://www.stokespeaks.org/> .

1.6.7 On a similar theme, representatives of childcare *settings* were also asked about challenges relating to parental perceptions - specifically whether they had ever welcomed a child with SEND to their setting where the parent[s]/carer[s] were not willing to accept advice on the child's needs - and therefore were unwilling to accept: (a) support and/or; (b) signposting to further assessments and support services. 33% of representatives of early years childcare providers said this *had happened*, to certain extents, and the following *repeated* types of impacts were outlined:

"The parents simply took their child out" – and similarly:

"We have had one child whose parent would not accept our advice, which was frustrating. She took the child away from our nursery".

"We had a parent with two children, and as soon as SEND was mentioned, they took both children straight out of the nursery".

"One parent wanted their child to be 'kept back'... the school did not think this was necessary or appropriate, but the parents held him back a year".

"Parents sometimes get overwhelmed by the SEND title - the jargon can be a barrier and they don't want to think about special needs. For one such child, we were not able to get SEND funding and one family has taken their child out of our setting and are not answering my calls".

We had one child who struggled with mental health... the parents said they did not want to label her. We did our best, but she started school without the support she needed in place".

1.6.8 All representatives of responding early years childcare providers were invited to state how confident their setting was as a whole in supporting children with SEND.

With an understanding that early years childcare settings may consider their ranking aligned to specific SEND types or age groups, all respondents were invited to add context to their score.

The average rank on a scale of 0-10 - with 1 being: completely unconfident and 10 being: completely confident was:

7.27 – with the most frequently stated rank being: 8.

The Schools Planning Area which accounted for the **lowest** average rank – aligned proportionally to the incidence of settings was:
Macclesfield South (6.6).

The Schools Planning Area which accounted for the second lowest such average rank was:
Crewe South (6.7).

The Schools Planning Area which accounted for the highest average rank was:
Bollington (9.5).

Table D - Average ranks stated by responding PVI sector early years childcare providers in each Schools Planning Area

Schools Planning Area	Average Confidence Ranking
Alsager	8.14
Bollington	9.5
Congleton Central	7.9
Congleton East	9.1
Congleton West	8
Crewe North	7
Crewe South	6.7
Disley	8
Haslington	9
Holmes Chapel	7.2
Knutsford Rural	7
Knutsford Village	8
Macclesfield North	8.2
Macclesfield Rural	9
Macclesfield South	6.6
Nantwich Rural North	7
Nantwich Rural South	6
Nantwich Town	7.4
Poynton Village	7.7
Sandbach	7.5
Scholar Green and Woodcocks Well	6
Shavington	7.6
Wilmslow North	7
Wilmslow South	7.7
Rural North East	6

Of the responding early years childcare providers who felt confident (i.e. a ranking score of 8 – 10) their setting could provide for children with SEND, additional context stated *included*:

Score of 10: *We are very experienced. We have a sensory space and we manage to get SEND children their EHCP before they leave us.*

Score of 10: *If I could not say: 10, I would need to do something about it.*

Score of 9: *Our own SENCO is very good and we do our own SEND training and Cheshire East Council's as well. We've had a lot of experience and for complex needs we have good support from Cheshire East Council when we ask for it.*

Score of 9: *We attend all the local authority SEND courses and have a wide range of experience. However, there is always room for improvement.*

Score of 8: *It's very difficult to recruit staff who are experienced and who understand children's behaviour well. It can also be difficult to fund 1:1 support ourselves – hence a score of 8.*

Score of 8: *I put it at an '8' due to the challenges of staffing and resources.*

Of the early years childcare providers who felt somewhat confident or neutral (i.e. a ranking score of 5 – 7) their setting could provide for children with SEND, additional context stated *included*:

Score of 7: *I think my staff may need more training.*

Score of 7: *We are feeling slightly overwhelmed because we are seeing SEND [numbers] increasing and it is putting more pressure on my team.*

Score of 6: *Our expertise and experience would be a 9 - but the outside space is not suitable for SEND children.*

Score of 6: *Because of the financial and physical constraints of the nursery.*

Score of 5: *A lack of SEND training opportunities informs my score.*

None of the representatives of early years childcare providers stated *they did not feel confident* (i.e. a ranking score of 1 – 4) that their setting could provide for children with SEND.

With an understanding early years childcare settings may consider their ranking aligned to specific SEND types or age groups, all **childminders** were also invited to add context to their score. The average rank on a scale of 0-10 - with 1 being: completely unconfident and 10 being: completely confident was: **6.96 – with the most frequently stated rank again being: 8.**

The Schools Planning Area which accounted for the **lowest** average rank was: Holmes Chappel (5.3).

The Schools Planning Area which accounted for the second lowest average rank was: Crewe North (6)

The Schools Planning Area which accounted for the highest average rank was: Wilmslow North (multiple score of 10).

Table E - Average ranks stated by responding childminders operating in each Schools Planning Area

Schools Planning Area	Average Confidence Ranking
Alsager	7
Bollington	n/a ⁷
Congleton Central	8.5
Congleton East	n/a
Congleton West	7.75
Crewe North	6
Crewe South	7.8
Disley	n/a
Haslington	n/a
Holmes Chapel	5.3
Knutsford Rural	8
Knutsford Village	7.5
Macclesfield North	7
Macclesfield Rural	n/a
Macclesfield South	7.5
Nantwich Rural North	8
Nantwich Rural South	n/a
Nantwich Town	7.2
Poynton Village	7.75
Sandbach	6.75
Scholar Green and Woodcocks Well	6.2
Shavington	7.75
Wilmslow North	10
Wilmslow South	7
Rural North East	8

Of the responding childminders who felt confident (i.e. a ranking score of 8 – 10) their setting could provide for children with SEND, additional context stated *included*:

Score of 10: *I have been childminding for a long time, I also have done a SENCO course.*

Score of 10: *We - as a business - are well equipped to look after SEND children.*

Score of 9: *I have a lot of experience, particularly in Autism and ADHD.*

⁷ n/a indicates that there were 0 responding childminders operating in the Schools Planning Area.

Score of 9: *I am confident, however, I may struggle with physical/sensory needs because of the physical space and environment of my home.*

Score of 8: *I was part of Portage Inclusion team so I aware of the process for getting support. I would do extra training if necessary.*

Score of 8: *It depends on the needs of the child – my assistant and I undertake research and find out any extra training needed, as required.*

Of the childminders who felt somewhat confident or neutral (i.e. a ranking score of 5 – 7) their setting could provide for children with SEND, additional context stated *included:*

Score of 7: *It would depend on the dynamic, how many children I had at the time... as lack of space could make it difficult to manoeuvre a wheelchair but I would always try and adapt where possible.*

Score of 7: *I have never looked after any SEND children.*

Score of 6: *I have not had any experience in looking after children with SEND.*

Score of 6: *I feel I have the experience but I would like more SEND training that is above the basic SEND training – although below Level 3.*

Score of 5: *I had a child who was very disruptive and upsetting the other child. I had to ask the parent to take him away.*

Score of 5: *I have had a lack of SEND training.*

None of the childminders said *they did not feel confident* (i.e. a ranking score of 1 – 4) that their setting could provide for children with SEND.

1.6.9 Encouragingly 61% of early years childcare providers stated that they had staff with SEND themed qualifications who worked at their establishment.

The most frequent SEND-themed qualifications cited were:

- By a significant margin, Level 3 award for Special Educational Need Co-ordinators
- Another type of Level 3 SEND
- Autism training facilitated by the local authority
- General SEND-focused training
- Qualified teaching status.

In comparison, only 28% of responding childminders stated that they had staff with SEND themed qualifications who worked at their establishment.

Their repeated SEND-themed qualifications cited were:

- Past experience as a Special Educational Need Co-ordinator
- Another type of Level 3 SEND
- Attention to Autism training

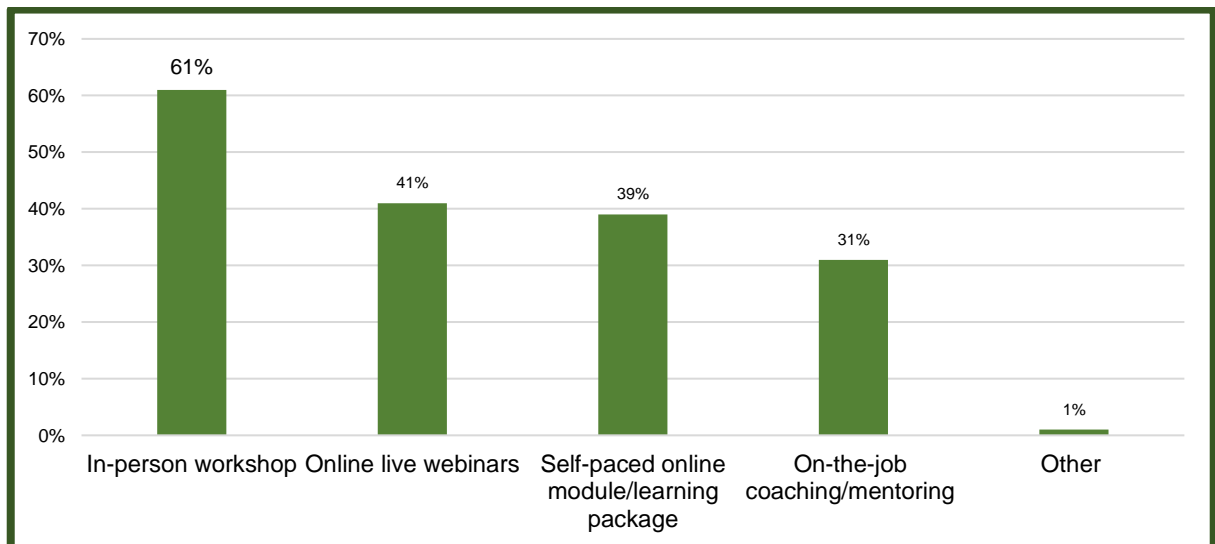
- Autism and other SEND-focused training facilitated by the local authority
- Speech and language-themed training.

1.6.10 However, at the time of the survey, 37% representatives of early years childcare providers felt that they did have SEND-specific staff/workforce training needs or gaps. 63% felt that they did not have any.

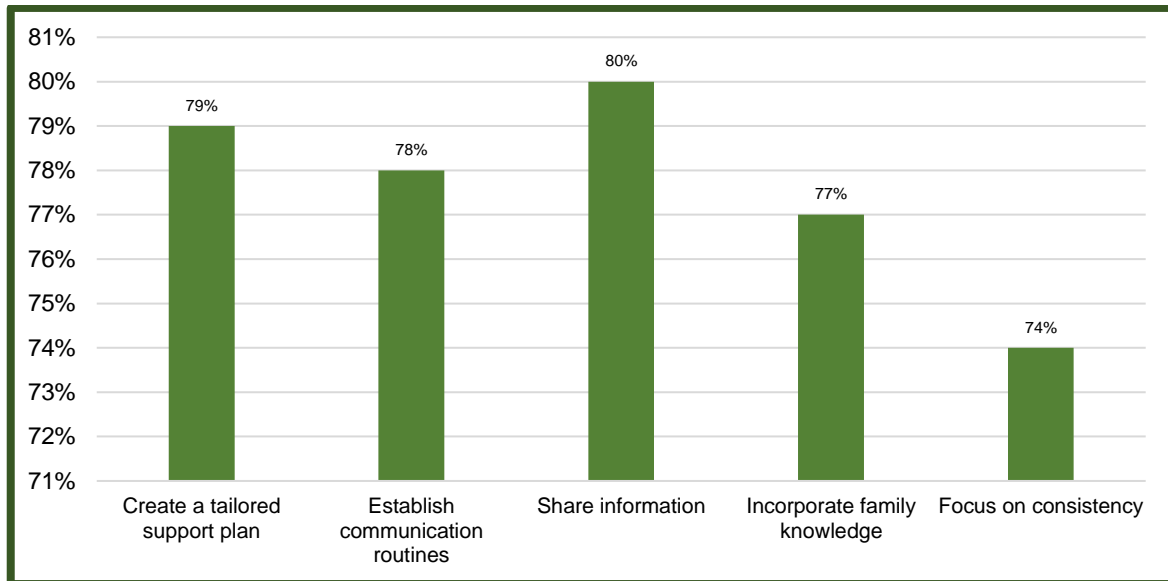
The three types of training and/or development needs that were repeated (by the relevant 37% of respondents) were:

- How to support children with mental health challenges
- *Further* advanced type(s) of training in Autism awareness
- *Further* speech and language training.

1.6.11 Image 14 presents how responding PVI sector early years childcare providers and childminders stated that they preferred to receive training on the theme of SEND:



1.6.12 Early years childcare providers and childminders outlined the extent to - and the methods via which - which they involved parents/carers in planning and reviewing support for their child with SEND – Image 15:



1.6.13 70% of early years childcare providers stated that their setting/themselves provided additional (1:1) support for child(ren) with SEND – with feedback on this theme having a focus on funding – i.e.:

“We offer as much support as we can, though there are limitations while waiting for SEND funding”

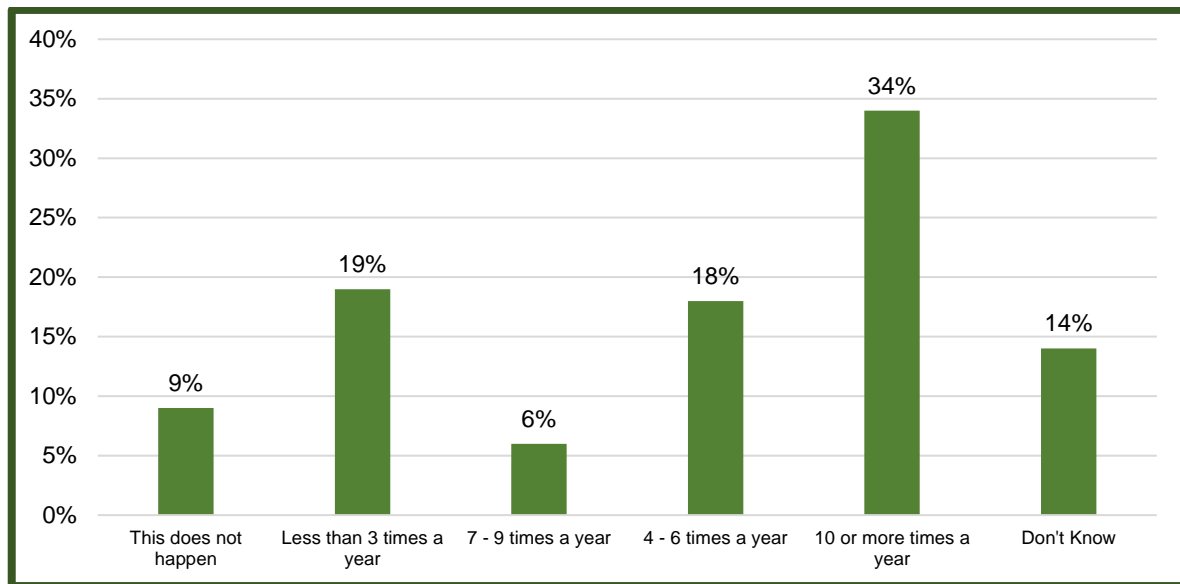
“Only when we have the funding”.

“We do, but it has become more difficult because of funding”.

“It depends on the child's needs, however It is a ‘financial burden’ if they require 1:1”.

1.6.14 Early years childcare providers and childminders were asked about how frequently their setting engaged with Cheshire East Council and/or health professionals to support the early identification of SEND for children they cared for. Image 16 shows their collective responses.

Image 16 - Frequency with which settings and childminders engaged with Cheshire East Council SEND professionals and/or health professionals to support the early identification of SEND in children within their [child]care



With regard to engaging with Cheshire East Council SEND professionals and/or health professionals, the response: 10 or more times/year - was (proportionally) most frequently provided by representatives of settings located in the Poynton Village Schools Planning Area, followed in frequency by the Congleton Central Schools Planning Area.

It was also noted that 44% of early years childcare providers stated that delays in accessing external assessments or services (e.g., SALT, CAMHS) had - in recent years - impacted their ability to support any children with SEND.

All early years childcare providers and childminders were asked if they were aware of the existence of the SEN Inclusion Fund (SENIF). 75% stated that they were, with the other 25% stating either: *Not Sure* or: *No*. Of those childcare providers that had heard about SENIF, 72% stated that they had accessed such funding and *found it useful*.

Additionally, all early years childcare providers and childminders were asked if they were aware of the existence of the Disability Access Fund (DAF). 74% stated that they were, with the other 26% stating either: *Not Sure* or: *No*. Of those childcare providers that had heard about DAF, 57% stated that they had accessed such funding and *found it useful*.

1.6.15 Early years professionals were invited to state whether they had ever been involved in (what they would consider to be) any good/effective internal or external practice when working with specialists (e.g., educational psychologists, speech and language therapists) in the period post Covid-19.

39% of respondents stated that they had and repeated feedback highlighted:

- Support of the concept of Identiplay⁸ for children with Autism
- (Beneficial outcomes of) attaining a referral for a physiotherapist
- (Beneficial outcomes of) a visit from an educational psychologist
- (Beneficial outcomes of) a visit from a representative of Cheshire East Council's Sensory Inclusion Service.

1.6.17 Finally, representatives of responding PVI sector early years childcare providers and childminders were asked to summarise what they believed Cheshire East Council's **key strategic priorities** should be for the second part of the decade in order **to meet the early years and childcare needs of local children (and their families) with SEND.**

The most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect):
to continue to support with training opportunities.

Specific feedback on this theme *included:*

“To continue the excellent support from Cheshire Council SEND team and SALT professionals who do our staff training...”

“To continue ‘any SEND training’ from Cheshire East Council besides the general SEND on aspects of SEND care, strategies and different [SEND] types. Also, training for parents to help them understand their child's SEND needs would be welcome, so that they can better understand the aspects of the pathways suggested by professionals and to help them get to know what the different specialists/professionals do”.

The second most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect):
to ensure paperwork does not become challenging. Specific feedback on this theme *included:*

“Making the application for [SENIF] easier... [in my opinion] much of the paperwork is repetitive when our focus should be on the SEND children”.

“Childminders would benefit from knowing there is a nominated person at the local authority who we could actually speak to get advice about the EHCP paperwork”.

“An overhaul of the paperwork is our priority? and we find that SEND professionals do not work together... the whole process is far too slow”.

⁸ <https://www.structural-learning.com/post/identiplay-complete-teachers-guide-teaching>

“The Council needs to [in my opinion] reduce bureaucracy... there should be a clear pathway for offering Speech and Language practical support... and a lot of time has to be spent on SENIF paperwork, and the actual amount we can receive seems to have decreased”.

The third most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect): **to ensure that the profile and offers of support from the Portage team is maintained.**

Specific feedback on this theme *included*:

“For new childminders, I think it would be helpful if the Portage Team made periodic calls to check in with them to find out how things are going with a child with SEND”.

“It would be great if Portage could come out when needed to support conversations with parents and to suggest different strategies while we are waiting for a referral”.

“Regular portage visits to our setting are always really useful – and we would wish them to continue”.

The fourth most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect): **to maintain an awareness of the challenges that childminders face in attending training courses during weekdays.** Specific feedback on this theme *included*:

“The ‘new meatier training courses’, need to be held on Saturdays or online so that us childminders can attend”.

“It is a priority still for training courses to be held after 6pm - when childminders have finished work”.

1.7 Provision/delivery of Wraparound Childcare

1.7.1 *Exactly 50% of early years childcare providers (i.e. PVI sector and school-based nurseries) stated that they provide an element of wraparound childcare in early 2026 - with the majority of responding schools stating that they do so.*

The average amount of before school wraparound childcare places that responding early years childcare providers were offering was 34.

The average amount of after school wraparound childcare places that responding early years childcare providers were offering was 33.

71% of responding early years childcare providers confirmed that their wraparound childcare could include support for children with SEND. 29% stated that there were contingencies around such an inclusive provision – for example:

“Our wraparound childcare is not accessible for wheelchair users”.

“It depends on the individual child and whether they need 1:1... and therefore if additional staff are available”.

1.7.2 41% of responding registered childminders stated that they provide an element of wraparound childcare.

1.7.3 Typically, all such relevant providers stated that **demand for both before school places and after school places was increasing**. – as a trend. Recurrent *types* of feedback particularly focused on pre-Reception cohort children also occupying wraparound childcare places or signalling demand for such places:

“We are seeing more nursery-age children using wraparound now”.

“Demand has increased - due to the reception cohort using wraparound from a younger age now”.

“We increased our [wraparound] places to 80 in September 2024. The highest demand is for a Wednesday - and similarly from another setting - Last year, a Wednesday was our busiest day”.

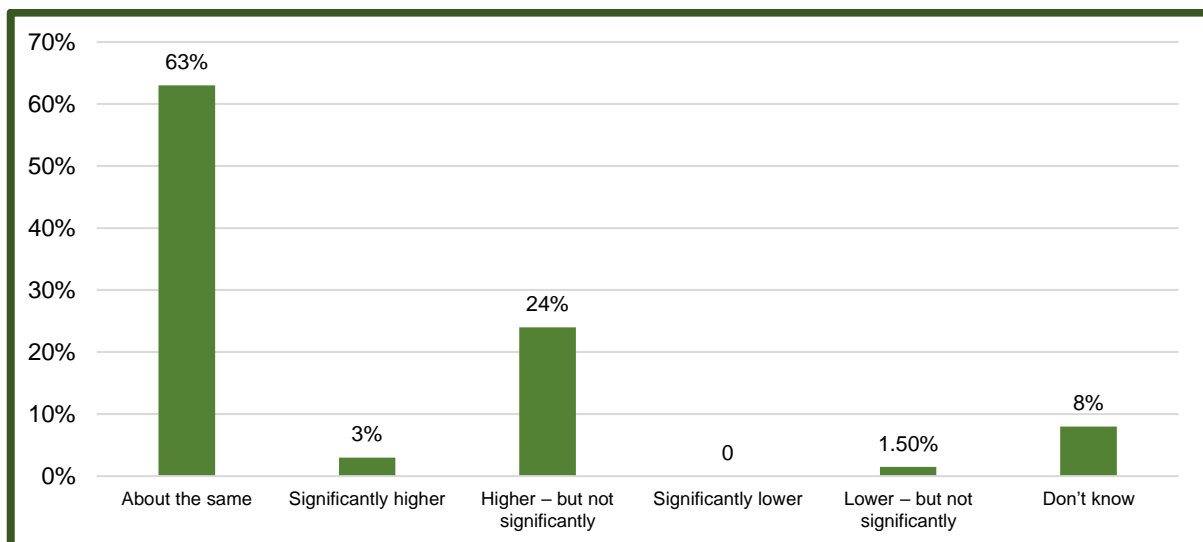
“We’ve introduced funded parents being able to use part of their funding for wraparound and this has increased demand”.

“There is certainly an increasing demand for places for the younger children”.

“There is more demand... indeed a lot more 3 year olds are starting to attend our wraparound care”.

The early years childcare providers/schools *who were offering wraparound childcare* places stated that they expected demand to be higher in autumn 2026 - than it was in spring 2026. Such establishments were most frequently located in the Crewe North Schools Planning Area and the Wilmslow North Schools Planning Area.

Image 17 – Anticipated status of demand in autumn 2026 for wraparound childcare places



1.7.4 30% of primary schools and early years childcare providers stated that they were in early 2026 experiencing challenges with recruiting staff for wraparound childcare and/or encouraging existing team members to help resource such provision. Feedback from relevant settings had a relatively consistent theme:

“It is difficult to recruit staff from outside... we have to recruit from within the school, which is not that easy”.

“It is difficult to persuade school staff to work the hours 15:00pm to 18:00pm”.

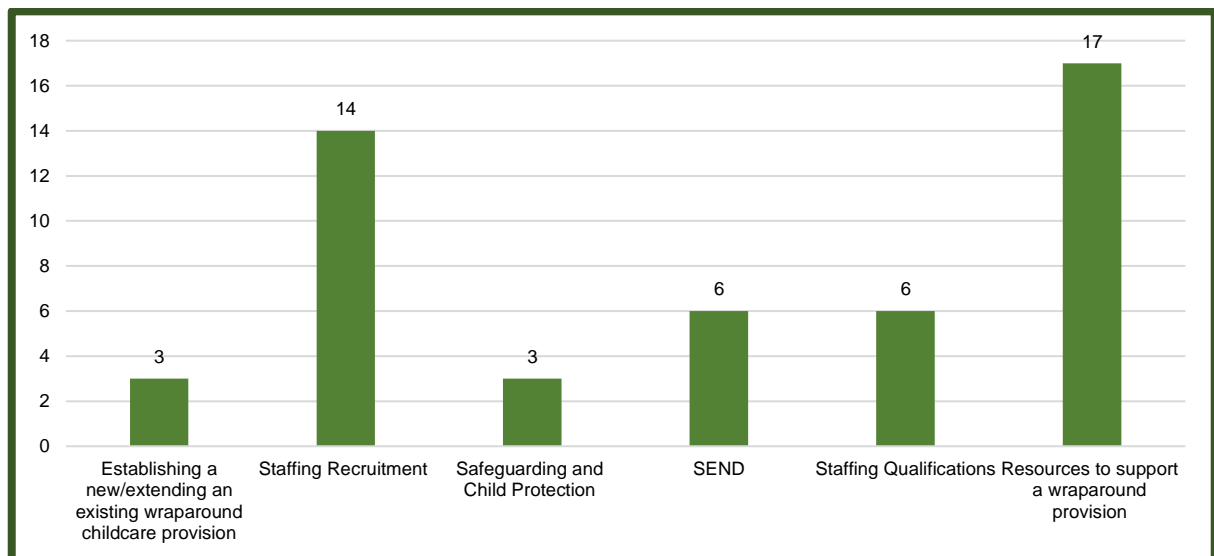
“People do not want to work odd hours”.

“It is hard to fill positions because of the hours”.

“It is ‘tricky’ to find people who want to do split shifts”.

“We are in a rural area and if we need to recruit in the future and can’t find anyone from the village, then it could be difficult to staff wraparound hours... but at the present we are okay”.

1.7.5 Image 18 outlines the frequency (as a number in this case), with which responding primary schools and early years childcare providers stated that they would welcome specific types of support from Cheshire East Council - or advice on – with regard to the themes of wraparound childcare.



11 responding primary schools and early years childcare providers stated other forms of support – and this tended to focus on the subject of meals/snacks – i.e.:

“Funding to pay for the food we provide during after school club would really help us”.

“We have used the government funding to set up a breakfast club... but we don't get any help with resources for food. Could Cheshire East Council help with funding, to help replace kitchen resources, such as cereal containers, or help us find financial discounts on such meals/snacks?”

1.7.6 10% of primary schools and early years childcare settings responded that in the past 12 months they had **successfully** applied for grant funding from Cheshire East Council in order to enable them to create new wraparound childcare places. Across all provision - including those that could not engage with the 2026 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment - the average amount of funding received by such settings was in fact £20,837 - and the average amount of new additional wraparound childcare places created was 18.

2 Outcome of Consultation with Parents and Carers of 0-14 year olds on the themes of early years childcare and wraparound childcare

The narrative below summarises the outcomes of an online survey which was promoted by Cheshire East Council to parents and carers in January and February 2026.

325 parents and carers provided responses to the survey during a 6-week window, and they gave feedback about contemporary themes - including their views and intentions aligned to: (a) funded early years childcare and; wraparound childcare.

Essentially, their feedback provides an insight into **demand-themed** factors, that can inform Cheshire East Council's strategic planning on the themes of early years childcare and wraparound childcare as the second part of the decade commences.

2.1 Backgrounds of Respondents

- 2.1.1 Table F indicates the frequency with which responding parents/carers [who stated that they had a child(ren) aged 0-14 years - or up to 25 years if they have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities - had a child(ren) of a specific age cohort.

Table F - Percentage of children from specific age cohorts that were being raised by responding parents/carers

Age Cohort of children	Percentage of responding parents with at least one child in age cohort ⁹
0-8 months	7%
9-12 months	4%
1 year	10%
2 years	17%
3 years	17%
4 years	13%
5 years	16%
6 years	12%
7 years	12%
8 years	10.5%
9 years	11%
10 years	12%
11 years	6%
12 years	4%
13 years	2%
14 years	2.5%
15 – 25 years (with SEND)	1%

⁹ It was, of course, possible that parents/carers could denote more than one age group.

Table F indicates that parents/carers with children aged 2 or 3 years participated in the survey, with the highest frequency, followed by 5 years.

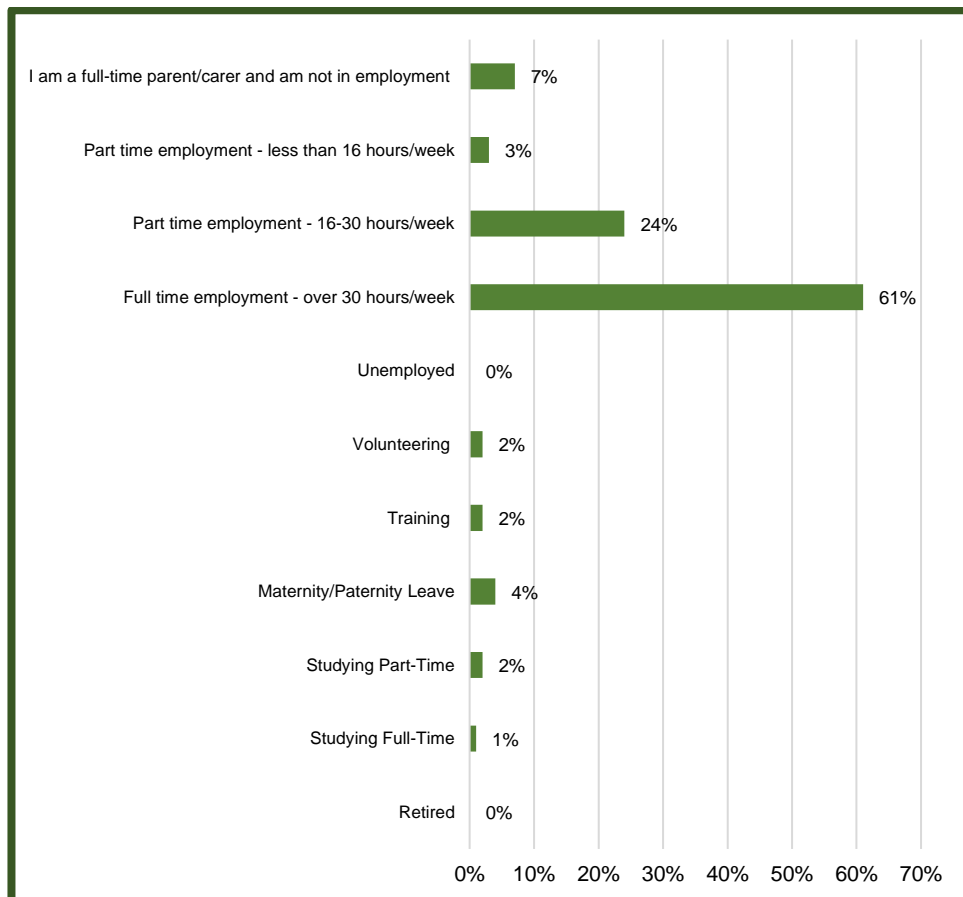
2.1.2 14% of the respondents stated that they had a child *or children* with diagnosed SEND.

90% of those respondents had at least one child aged between 5 - 25 years old with (diagnosed) SEND – and two respondents **only** had a child aged between 15-25 years old who had a diagnosed type of SEND.

The SEND type was most frequently a child with Autistic Spectrum Disorder/Condition who was 5-7 years of age – followed in frequency by a child with Speech, Language and Communication Needs who was 5-7 years of age.

2.1.3 All parents and carers were invited to state (what best described) their current employment circumstances.

Image 19 - Incidence of responding parents' employment circumstances



The three Schools Planning Areas which accounted for the highest incidence of a responding parent/carer being in some form of employment were:

1. Macclesfield South
2. Shavington
3. Crewe North

2.2 Current Usage of Formal Childcare

2.2.1 All parents and carers of 0-4 year olds were asked about their current usage of formal childcare.

90% were, at the time of the survey, using at least one type of formal early years childcare for 0-4 year olds. Table G below indicates the frequency with which responding parents/carers stated specific types of early years and out of school wraparound childcare.

Table G - Types of formal childcare used by responding parents and carers

Type of registered childcare	Percentage of relevant responding parents
PVI-sector Day Nursery – full or part-time	74%
Sessional Pre School/Playgroup	3%
School-based Pre School/Nursery	20%
Registered Childminder	5%
Breakfast Club	13%
After School Club	15%
School Holiday Club	7%
HAF programme	1%

(Only) 3% of the relevant parents/carers stated that they were accessing a type of formal childcare which was located (to the best of their knowledge) outside of the Cheshire East locality - these parents were resident in the Macclesfield and Crewe localities.

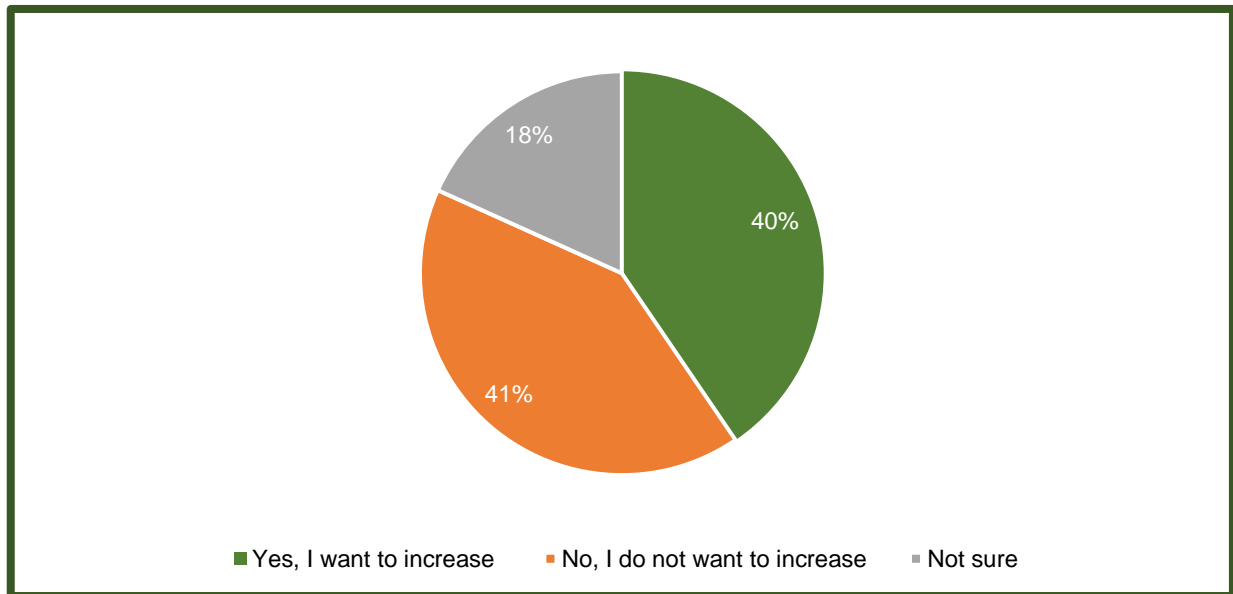
2.2.2 All responding parents and carers were invited to state their annual family income bracket (before tax).

Table H - Incidence of gross household income per year (before deductions/tax)

Annual household income	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers	Most frequently stated type of <i>formal</i> childcare accessed <i>during term-time</i>
Up to £16,190	4%	School-based pre-school/nursery
£16,190 - £29,999	8%	Day nursery – full or part-time
£30,000 - £54,999	17%	Day nursery – full or part-time
£55,000 - £99,999	45%	Day nursery – full or part-time
£100,000 or above	16%	Day nursery – full or part-time
I don't know	3%	Day nursery – full or part-time
I would rather not say	7%	Day nursery – full or part-time

2.2.3 All respondents who stated they were using formal childcare, were asked whether they - ideally - would like to increase the number of childcare hours they were using in the next three years?

Image 20 - Frequency of (applicable) parental responses about increasing childcare hours over the next three years (up to 2029)



The three Schools Planning Areas which accounted for the highest incidence of the response: *Yes, I want to increase the hours* were:

1. Macclesfield South
2. Alsager
3. Macclesfield North

40% of all responding parents/carers stated that they would like to increase their hours of formal childcare over the forthcoming years - and this was most frequently stated by parents who had a three year old. The *average* number of (further, future) hours stated by such a parent was 15 hours/week.

2.2.4 Additionally, all parents and carers of 0-4 year olds were asked whether there was any type of childcare they would like to use between March 2026 → August 2027 (that they were **not** currently using).

Table I below shows which types of childcare parents and carers stated they would ideally like to use in the forthcoming future.

Table I - Type(s) of formal childcare envisaged for future use up to August 2027

Type of childcare registered	Percentage of all parents/carers of 0-4 year olds
Day nursery – full or part-time	22%
Sessional Pre School/Playgroup	14%
School-based Pre School/Nursery	14%
Registered Childminder	3%
After School Club	35%
Breakfast Club	31%
School Holiday Club	31%

Parents and carers of 0-4 year olds most frequently stated that they would like, in the forthcoming years, to access a after school club (35%) - followed in frequency by a breakfast club and/or a school holiday club/playscheme (31%).

The three Schools Planning Areas which accounted for the highest proportional incidence of a responding parents of 0-4 year olds intending to access a Cheshire East-located day nursery at some point in the future were:

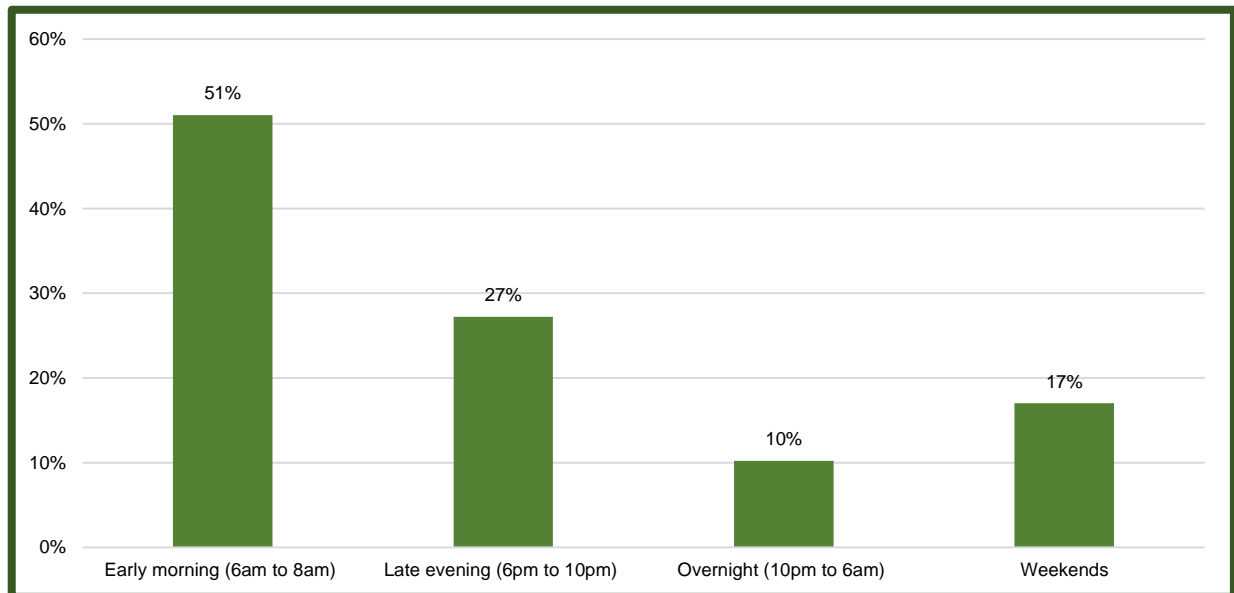
1. Knutsford Village
2. Nantwich Town
3. Macclesfield South

The three Schools Planning Areas which accounted for the highest proportional incidence of a responding parents of 0-4 year olds intending to access a Cheshire East-located wraparound after school club at some point in the future were:

1. Holmes Chapel
2. Poynton Village
3. Macclesfield South

2.2.5 All parents and carers of 0-4 year olds outlined if they (had) needed to access formal childcare at particular times of the day.

Image 21 - Times of a day which applicable responding parents access childcare



The Schools Planning Areas which accounted for the highest incidence of the response: Late evening 6pm – 10pm were:

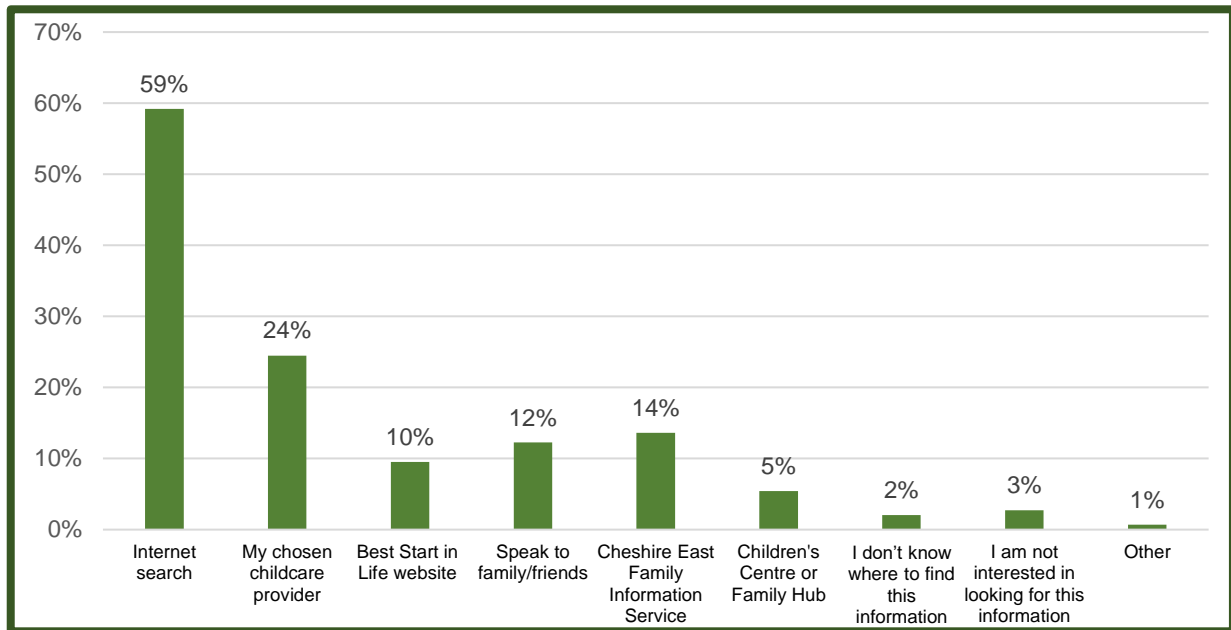
1. Holmes Chapel
2. Macclesfield South
3. Congleton Central

2.2.6 All parents and carers of 0-4 year olds who were ***not*** currently using any type of formal childcare were invited to state the reasons why? **Repeated reasons for not using any type of formal childcare were**, by relevant responding parents, (in order of frequency):

- **I am waiting until I can use my funded entitlements (40% of parents - and most frequently stated by responding parents resident in the Macclesfield South Schools Planning Area)**
- **I could not/cannot find a childcare provider to offer the times/hours that I need (20% of parents - and also most frequently stated by responding parents resident in the Macclesfield South Schools Planning Area)**
- I could not/cannot find a space at a chosen childcare provider (13% of parents)
- I find formal childcare too expensive (13% of parents)
- I did/do not know where to find information about childcare (13% of parents).

2.2.7 Parents and carers outlined where they tend to look for information about the funded childcare entitlements including the extended entitlement for eligible parents with 9 month year olds – 4 years old. **There was one definitive key source: an internet search.**

Image 22 - Frequency of information sources being accessed to find out about funded childcare



2.3 Intended Future Usage of Funded Extended Entitlements

2.3.1 In terms of the Government's funded childcare entitlements, parents and carers who stated they had a child aged 0-4 years were asked whether they had heard of - or were using - one of them?

16% of all responding parents/carers resident in the Cheshire East locality stated that they had a child aged 2 years.

56% of *these* parents/carers subsequently stated that they were currently accessing a funded entitlement place for 2 year olds who were receiving a form(s) of government benefit support – most frequently they were resident in the Macclesfield South Schools Planning Area.

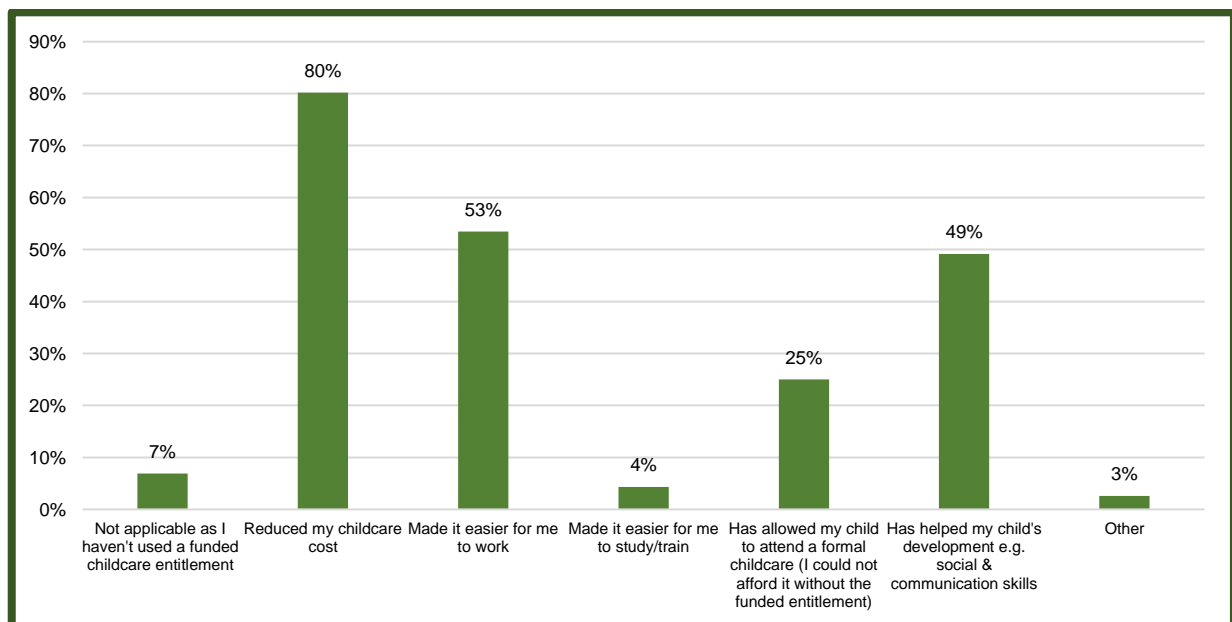
20% of parents/carers of 2 year olds also stated that: I have heard of it, but I am not currently using it.

2.3.2 30% of all responding parents/carers stated that they had a child aged 3 and/or 4 years and 68% of *these* parents/carers subsequently stated that they were currently accessing the universal 15 hours funded entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds.
13% of relevant parents stated: I have heard of it, but I am not currently using it.

2.3.3 60% of all responding parents/carers stated that they had a child aged 3 and/or 4 years and 50% of these parents/carers subsequently stated that they were currently accessing the evolving working parents (up to 30 hours) entitlement for 9 months – 4 year olds.
It can be noted that 12% of relevant parents stated: I have heard of it, but I do not *think* I am eligible to use it?

2.3.4 *all* parents and carers were asked how accessing a funded childcare entitlement had benefitted their family in recent years.

Image 23 - How the funded childcare entitlement was evidently benefitting (relevant and responding) parents



The three Schools Planning Areas where resident parents most frequently responded: this has allowed my child to attend formal childcare - as I could not afford it without the funded entitlement - were:

1. Congleton Central
2. Middlewich
3. Macclesfield South

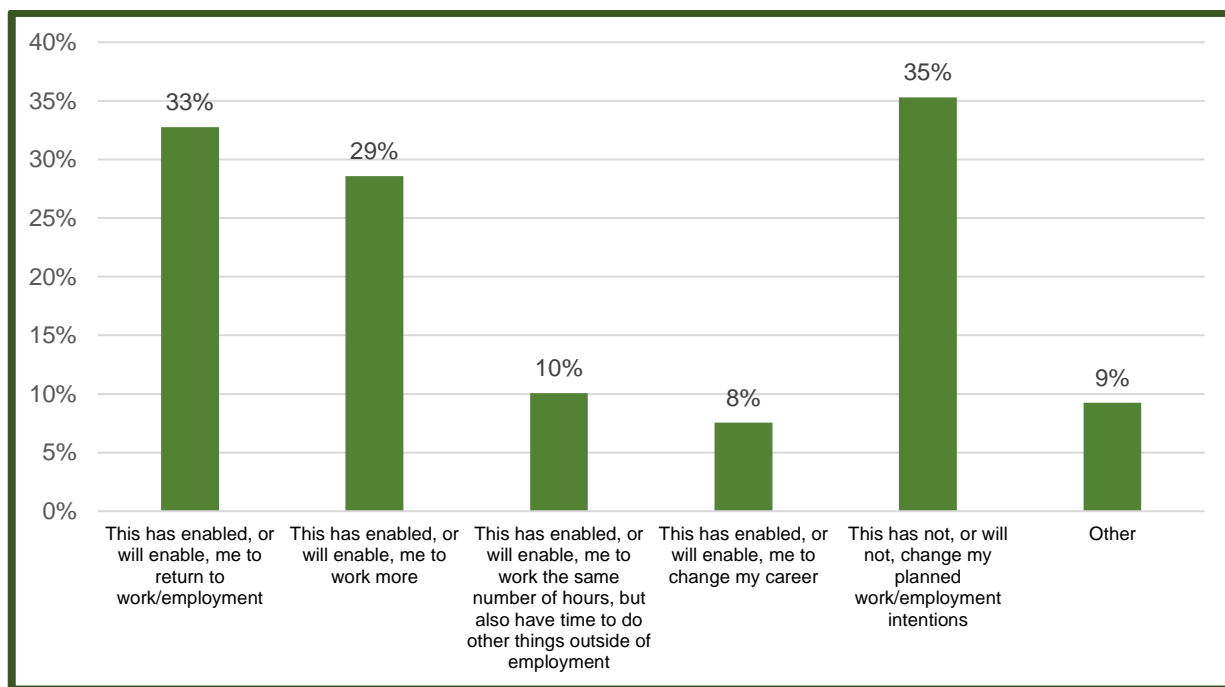
2.3.5 The three Schools Planning Areas where resident parents most frequently responded: funded childcare will allow me to **increase the hours** of childcare my child(ren) uses/is planning to use were:

1. Scholar Green and Woodcocks Well
2. Knutsford Village
3. Middlewich

Additionally, the three Schools Planning Areas where resident parents notably responded: **this will allow a child to start using childcare sooner than previously expected** were:

1. Macclesfield South
2. Crewe North
3. Scholar Green and Woodcocks Well

2.3.6 Image 24 - Extent to which parents and carers believe the recent changes (i.e. extensions) to the funded entitlements may change their employment circumstances/intentions



29% of responding parents and carers stated that the changes/extensions to the funded entitlements would enable them to work more. (Proportionally) these parents/carers were notably resident in the Macclesfield South Schools Planning Area.

It was also observed that 35% of responding parents and carers did not believe the forthcoming changes to the funded entitlements would change their employment circumstances or intentions.

2.3.7 Responding parents/carers were invited to state whether - to the best of their knowledge they were aware of/eligible for: (a) Universal Credit and (b) Tax Free Childcare:

Table J - Responses aligned to (a) Universal Credit and (b) Tax Free Childcare

Age Cohort	Percentage of Parents/Carers who stated: Universal Credit	Percentage of Parents/Carers who stated: Tax Free Childcare
Yes, and I access	13%	42%
Yes, but I do not access	0	4%
No, I am not eligible	65%	18%
I don't know what this is	1%	2%
Not sure	3%	17%
Did not say	17%	17%

Relevant parents/carers were then invited to state whether they had encountered any barriers when trying to access Tax Free Childcare. There were three recurrent responses:

1. I **think** I/we earn too much to apply (43% of all responding parents)
2. I do not understand the eligibility criteria (18%)
3. I am using other entitlements so I don't (think) I can apply (14%)

2.4 Parents and Wraparound Out of School Childcare

2.4.1 All parents and carers of 5-14 year olds - or up to 25 years if they have SEND - were invited to state if they were accessing wraparound out school childcare, in early 2026, with a definition provided as to Cheshire East Council's perceived as such childcare – i.e.: *Term time wraparound childcare 'wraps around' the conventional school day, both before and after. Wraparound should not require parents themselves to pick their child(ren) up from school and drop them off at another location. It does not refer to school-delivered themed clubs, like for example, football clubs, netball club, arts club etc.*

41% of relevant responding parents/carers stated that in early 2026 they were accessing term time wraparound childcare all of the time. This response was most frequently stated by a parent/carer who was resident in the Macclesfield South Schools Planning Area - followed in frequency by the Shavington Schools Planning Area.

38% of responding parents/carers stated that in early 2026 they were accessing wraparound childcare some of the time.

(Only) 21% of responding parents/carers stated that in early 2026 they were not accessing wraparound childcare at any time.

2.4.2 Relevant responding parents/carers (i.e. 79% of the respondents who had a child(ren) aged 5-15, or 25 if they have SEND), outlined the type of wraparound childcare that they were currently accessing.

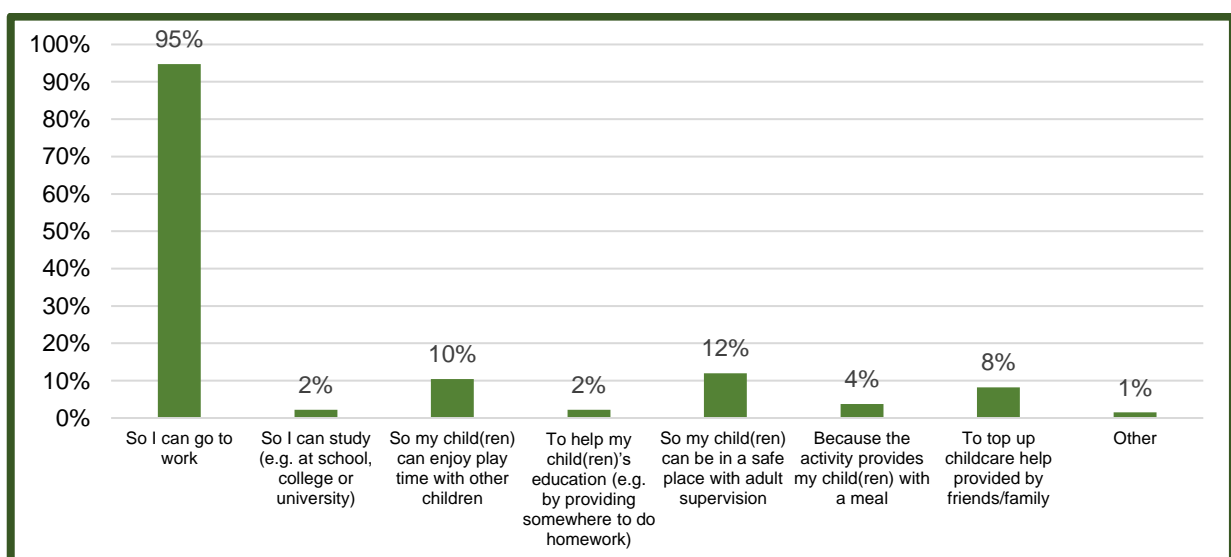
Table K - Incidence of relevant responding parents/carers accessing a type of wraparound childcare in early 2026

Type of wraparound childcare	Percentage of relevant parents/carers accessing in early 2026
Full wraparound at a primary school club run by their school	42%
Full wraparound at a non-school based setting, like a nursery	4%
Full wraparound childcare with a childminder	1%
Breakfast club at a primary school club run by their school	29%
Breakfast club at a primary school run by an on-site provider	0%
Breakfast club only at a non-school based setting, like a nursery	2%
Breakfast time childcare childminder	0%
After school club at a primary school club run by their school	57%
After school club at a primary school run by an on-site provider	0%
After school club only at a non-school based setting, like a nursery	2%
After school period with a childminder	1%

Full wraparound at a primary school club run by their school was most frequently being accessed by a parent/carer who was resident in the Crewe South Schools Planning Area.

2.4.3 Relevant parents/carers were invited to state the reason(s) why they were currently accessing wraparound childcare.

Image 25 - Incidence of reasons why parents/carers were accessing wraparound childcare

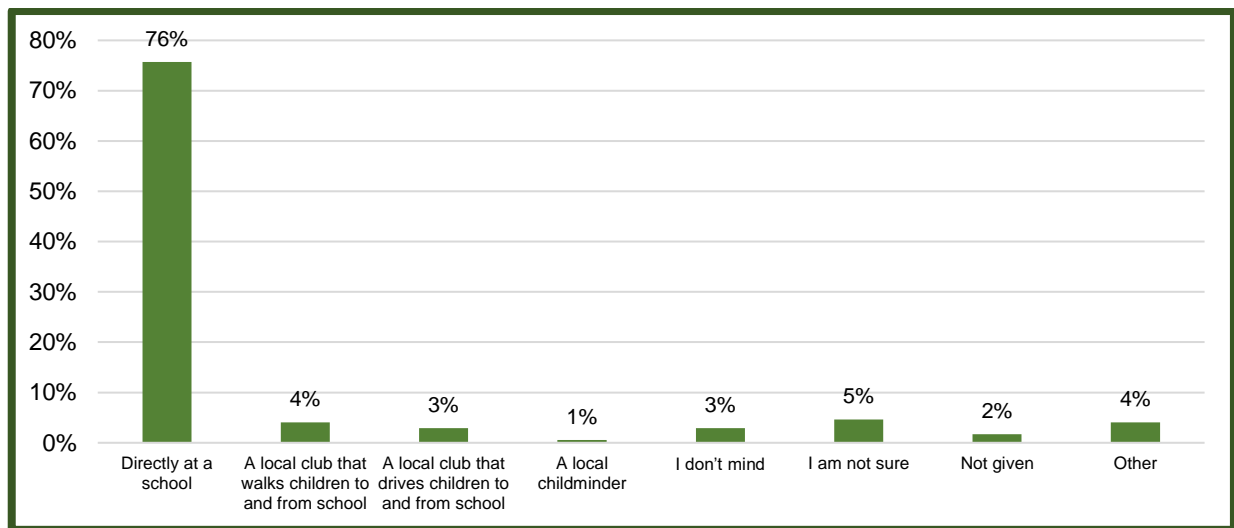


Responding/relevant parents/carers who stated: so I can go to work, were most frequently resident in the Macclesfield South Schools Planning Area - followed in frequency by the Shavington Schools Planning Area.

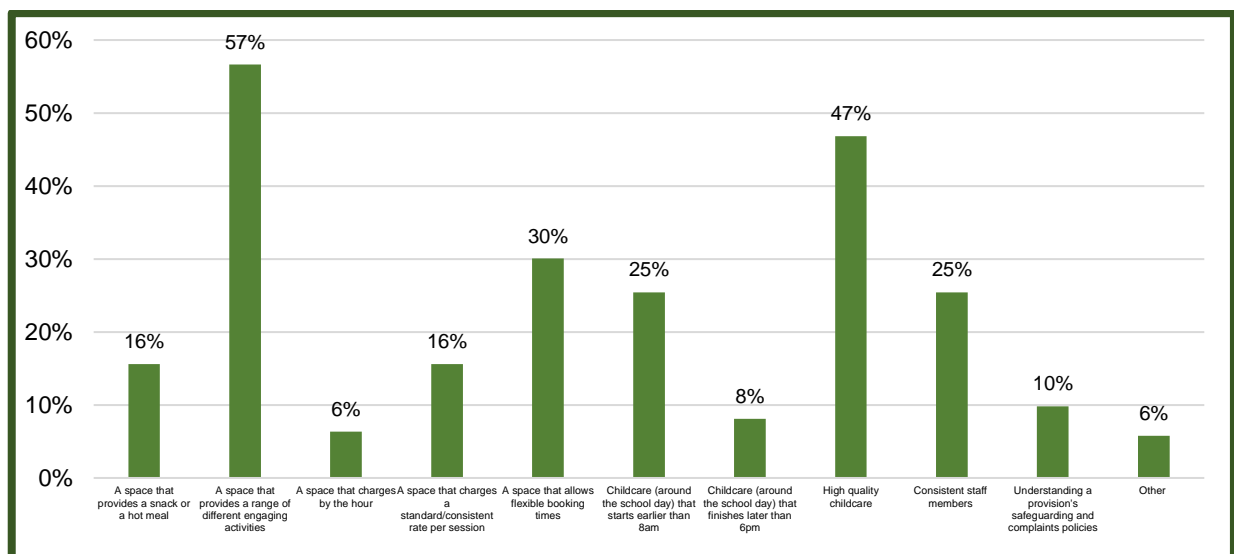
2.4.4 Relevant parent/carers who were *not* using wraparound childcare (22%) - i.e. whether they had used it in the past but stopped using it, or chosen not to use it at all - were asked to give their reasons why?

The most frequent specific reason provided for this was: because it was too expensive (41% of relevant parents) followed by: because it did not meet either/or both my and a child's needs (21% of relevant parents).

2.4.5 All parents/carers who had a child(ren), 5-14 years old, or 25 if they have SEND, were invited to respond to the following question: *If you were to continue to use - or start to use wraparound childcare - in the future for any of your children, where would you prefer this to be provided by?* - see Image 26. The response was very conclusive.

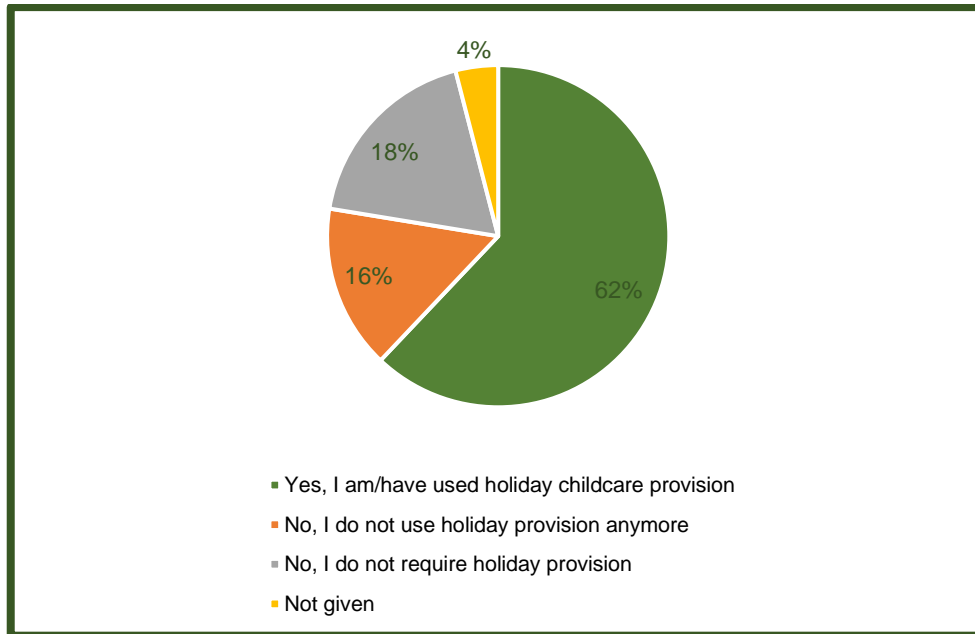


2.4.6 All parents/carers were invited to state what would be important to them, in the future, as and when they chose a type of wraparound childcare - Image 27.



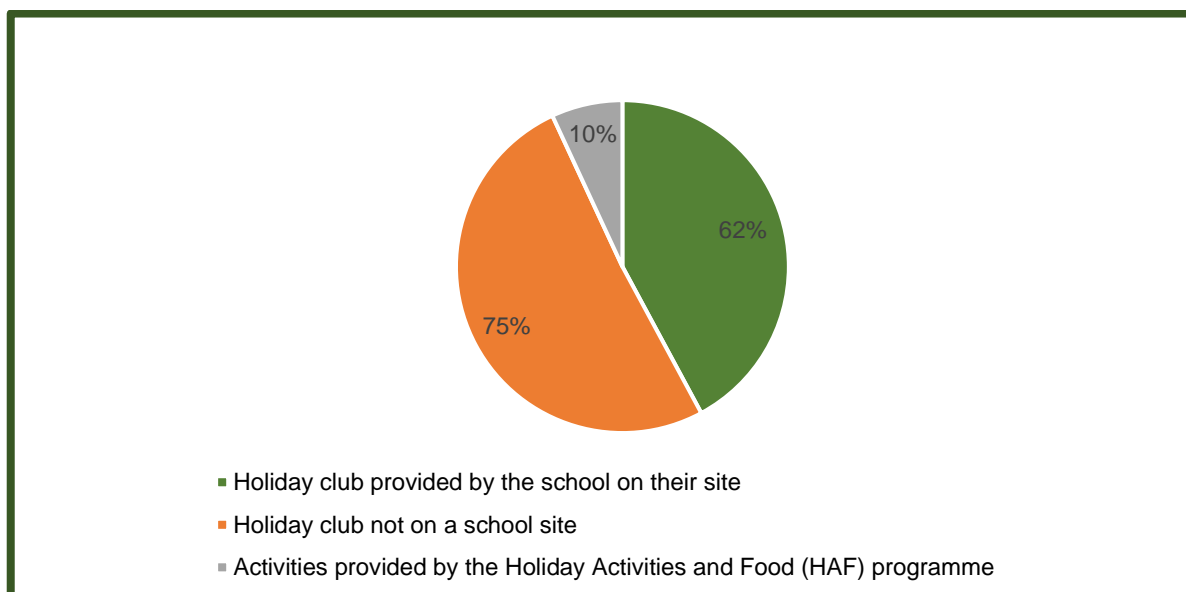
Parent/carers who stated that: a space that provides a range of different engaging activities was important to them when choosing wraparound childcare were most frequently resident in the Macclesfield South Schools Planning Area. Parents/carers who stated: high quality childcare - were most frequently in the Shavington Schools Planning Area.

2.4.7 All parents/carers of 5-14 year olds, or 25 if they had SEND, were invited to state whether they had used holiday childcare over the past 12 months – Image 28.



The Schools Planning Area which accounted for the highest incidence of the response: Yes, I am using/have used holiday childcare provision was Macclesfield South, followed in frequency by Crewe South.

Relevant parents also outlined the types of venue(s) where they had accessed a holiday playscheme or club – Image 29.



The Schools Planning Area which accounted for the highest incidence of the response: Holiday club not on a school site was Macclesfield South - followed in frequency by its geographical neighbour: Macclesfield North.

2.5 Parents perceptions on the role of the LA and early years childcare

All parents and carers of 0-14 year olds were invited to state whether there was anything that the **Cheshire East Council should - in their opinion - be doing**, in terms of supporting parents to access early years childcare.

The first repeated type of feedback was (words to the effect): **“childcare is still unaffordable even with funded hours, and help with affordability is a priority”**.

Specific feedback included:

“Could the local authority have a dialogue with the nurseries?, who are adding so many ‘extra’ costs”.

“Could the local authority do anything about the supplementary payments that private nurseries expect to be paid per day - because the funding does not cover the child’s place. We currently pay £18 per day for ‘consumables’... it seems an ‘extortionate’ amount to pay per day for food and baby wipes?”

“It would be great if the Council could stop the nurseries adding so many ‘extra’ costs”.

“Could the LA give guidance to parents on ‘consumable’ charges - as each nursery charges different rates and different amounts for certain ages?”

The second repeated type of feedback was (words to the effect): **“if the Council could particularly support new places in rural areas - where [in our opinion] there are long waiting lists”**.

Specific feedback included:

“It was very difficult to find availability at a ‘good’ nursery in the rural location that I live”.

“We live in a rural area... and there [in my experience] are no childcare settings that either have a space, or will take my 1 year old”.

The third repeated type of feedback was (words to the effect): **“Continue to help to set up affordable holiday clubs and places”**.

Specific feedback included:

“It is very expensive for me, personally, to pay for my holiday club. I am working full time, but at the end of the week I am left with exactly £5.00 which I use to pay the petrol. So, I work for nothing during the school holiday. My personal work holidays are not enough to cover the children school holidays, to be able to keep them at home. So, yes! working parents need extra support on covering the school holidays!!!!”.

“Holiday clubs are a priority... they are [in my experience] few and far between for preschool age children and often finish too early for working parents”.

The fourth repeated type of feedback was (words to the effect): *“To continue to support the establishment of more wraparound childcare”.*

Specific feedback included:

“[In my opinion] there is not enough wraparound childcare in my local area [Crewe North]... and there are ‘no’ spaces in before and after school clubs”.

“There is only one ‘external provider’ in my village which is always full... It would be better to have funding towards before and after school clubs at all schools - ideally starting from 7.45am to allow multiple drop-offs in the morning traffic”!

“Improving the quality of wraparound provision delivered by some schools. PVI providers are [in my opinion] higher quality, but are often pricier... But the quality of play provision at school wraparounds is lacking and is basically a babysitting service rather than a high quality play environment. A robust workforce development programme is needed for training as are quality improvement support visits from LA officers”.

The fifth repeated type of feedback was (words to the effect): *“Help as much as they can to let childcare providers know that some parents outside of 8am – 6pm hours”.*

Specific feedback included:

“More support for parents who work unsociable hours - for example, in healthcare - is my priority”

“Could they encourage schools to offer more access from 7.15am onwards to breakfast clubs?”
