

# Luton Council Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2021

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## About this report

The Childcare Act 2006<sup>1</sup> places a duty on all local authorities to secure sufficient childcare, so far as it is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 to 14 (or up to 25 years old for disabled children). The Childcare Act 2016<sup>2</sup> places a further duty to secure funded childcare for qualifying children of working parents following the introduction of the 30 hours extended entitlement.

Luton Council has a statutory duty to work with providers from the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sector to create sustainable, accessible, affordable and high quality childcare, sufficient to meet the needs of all parents and carers.

This report was written in April 2021 and focuses on the sufficiency of the childcare sector before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-pandemic summaries of areas and take up of early years free entitlements by ward can be found in the CSA 2019-2020 at [Reports and surveys - childcare in Luton](#).

## Methodology

This report provides an overview of childcare sufficiency using qualitative and quantitative data from a number of sources:

- Department of Education statistical data of childcare providers and inspections<sup>3</sup>
- Luton 2017 Mid-Year Population Estimates<sup>4</sup>
- Luton Council two, three and four year old funding data 2020 and 2021
- funding and childcare provision data from the Early Years Census January 2020<sup>5</sup>
- The Coram Family and Childcare Trust – Childcare Survey 2020<sup>6</sup>
- analysis of 90 responses to the Provider Sustainability Survey April 2020

## Limitations

Due to COVID-19 and the experiences of the childcare sector over the last year, it is not possible to complete a full Childcare Sufficiency Assessment for 2020/2021. Although the provision of places and the sustainability of the early years providers has been monitored each term throughout the pandemic, the long term effects on parental demand for places and the financial stability of the sector are not yet known.

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1 [Childcare Act 2006](#)

2 [Childcare Act 2016](#)

3 [Ofsted-31-august-2020](#)

4 Business Intelligence Luton Council

5 [January 2020 census data](#)

6 [childcare-survey-2020](#)

## Executive summary

The early years' sector has experienced an incredibly challenging year supporting the children and families of Luton during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Government guidance in March 2020 advised that early years settings should remain open only for children of critical workers and vulnerable children, however this changed in June 2020 when they were asked to be open for all children.

In spring 2021, when another national lockdown was announced, and schools once again restricted attendance and most other sectors remained closed, early years providers were asked to remain open for all children.

The early years providers of Luton have proved themselves to be resilient, dedicated and adaptable by continuing to provide safe early years education and childcare despite many challenges, caring for children both in the setting, and providing remote support for those that needed or chose to stay at home.

Although childcare providers were able to receive financial support through the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), Self Employment Income Support Scheme and changes to funding for free early education entitlement places, many have seen a reduction in their income.

As this support ends there is concern over longer term sustainability with almost half of providers who responded to a survey reporting that they are concerned about their setting's sustainability over the next twelve months.

Luton has been able to ensure that all children who needed an early years place over the last year have been able to access one, and those spaces have been safe, and in line with government guidance.

The take-up of the early years free entitlements has fallen during the pandemic which suggests that some parents of newly eligible children chose not to start at an early years setting either due to local guidance or parental concern.

This has been particularly evident in the take-up of two year old places which fell from 66% in January 2020 to 50% in January 2021. Universal funding places for three and four year olds also fell from 86% in 2020 to 82% in 2021.

The demand for places moving forward is as yet unknown as levels of employment and working patterns may change, therefore the early years sector will need to remain flexible and respond to future changes in demand. There is also a risk that financial pressures could cause some providers to close which could potentially create shortages in some areas.

## Recommendations

- to continue to support early years providers to adapt and remain sustainable as the effects of COVID-19 on the early years sector are more fully understood – advising on financial and business support and helping providers maximise funding opportunities and reduce costs

- to continue to provide support and guidance around safeguarding and changes to practice in early years education following the pandemic
- to use social media and community partners to promote parental confidence in early years education focusing on the key role that childcare plays in the learning and development of young children and improving their outcomes
- to continue to maintain the quality of childcare in Luton by working closely with providers offering help and advice to improve practice and support with the changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) which is due to be rolled out nationally from September 2021 - Ofsted suspended inspections throughout the pandemic but these are expected to resume in the summer term 2021
- to encourage and support practitioners in Luton to access funded Level 3 Early Years courses to ensure a skilled workforce is maintained
- to monitor the effectiveness of promotional materials in different languages and increase the use of community and partner social media sites
- to work more closely with social care and health to promote early years entitlements to Luton's most vulnerable children
- to monitor the effects of COVID-19 on the out of school childcare sector and holiday care to ensure that adequate provision remains available for working parents
- to ensure that sufficiency and the quality of childcare provision remain considerations for the Luton Investment Framework and long term development within Luton

## Summary of the previous 2019-2020 CSA

### Main findings

- the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2019/2020 indicated that Luton was able to meet the pre-pandemic demand for childcare spaces and had adequate vacant spaces to manage an increase in the take up of early education funding
- the 2019-2020 CSA was updated in April 2020 to recognise that the childcare sector was experiencing huge challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including temporary closures, a reduction in income and major changes to early years practice
- Luton continued to provide high quality childcare with 96.4% of early years providers being judged as good or outstanding

- Luton saw an increase in the take up of two year old funding from 60% in 2019 to 66% in 2020 - this compared to an increase both regionally and nationally of 2% and 1% respectively
- the number of children accessing universal funding remained the same during 2019/2020 however, the take up rate increased from 87% to 88% due to revised population figures
- Business Intelligence data analysis indicated that a significant number of children with a home language of Polish, Romanian and Urdu were not accessing early education funding, so promotional materials in these languages were produced and shared with partner services and on social media
- survey responses continued to indicate that cost and timings of childcare remained a concern to working parents in Luton

## Responses

- Luton Council has continued to support providers throughout the pandemic by advising on financial support, offering additional business support sessions and advising providers how to maximise funding opportunities and reduce costs
- Luton Council has provided support and guidance around safeguarding, risk assessments, changes to practice and regaining parental confidence in childcare following the pandemic
- Luton Council has worked closely with providers to maintain the quality of childcare throughout the pandemic and help and advice continues to be available to improve practice and support within the new Ofsted education inspection framework
- as attendance in childcare settings and the take up of funded entitlements has fallen during the pandemic, as providers and families have followed government and local council guidance, Luton Council is now focused on building parental confidence in early years settings

Strategies to increase take up include:

- increasing the use of promotional materials in Polish, Romanian and Urdu in local communities and on social media
- improving links and communication with Health Visiting teams
- working with Social Care to ensure Luton's most vulnerable children are able to access a childcare place.
- increasing the use of social media to promote the benefits of early education and the availability of the free entitlements

## Introduction

This report provides an analysis and evaluation of the childcare sector and childcare sufficiency in Luton in spring 2020 and how this has been impacted by COVID-19.

The findings in this report are presented as a Luton summary, however to understand local differences the previous [2019-2020 CSA](#) provides a more detailed assessment of five areas, North, East, South, West and Central and childcare supply and demand pre COVID-19 in each ward.

## Luton summary

**Population of Luton – 213,052<sup>7</sup>**

### Childcare type in Luton

Childminders	Day Nurseries	Pre-schools	Maintained Nursery	Nursery in a school
119	44	29	6*	16

\*over 7 sites

### Early education funding

Early education funding is available to eligible two, three and four year olds and is paid directly to approved childcare providers by Luton Council.

### Funded two year old places

Children aged two whose families receive certain benefits (including low-income families in receipt of in-work benefits), or those who meet additional non-economic criteria, are entitled to 15 hours funded early education per week.<sup>8</sup>

Nationally, around 40% of two year olds are estimated to be entitled to this offer with Luton having an above average of 42% of two year olds being eligible.

**Eligible children taking up their two year funded place (for at least some of the available hours) in Luton and nationally as at January 2020.<sup>9</sup>**

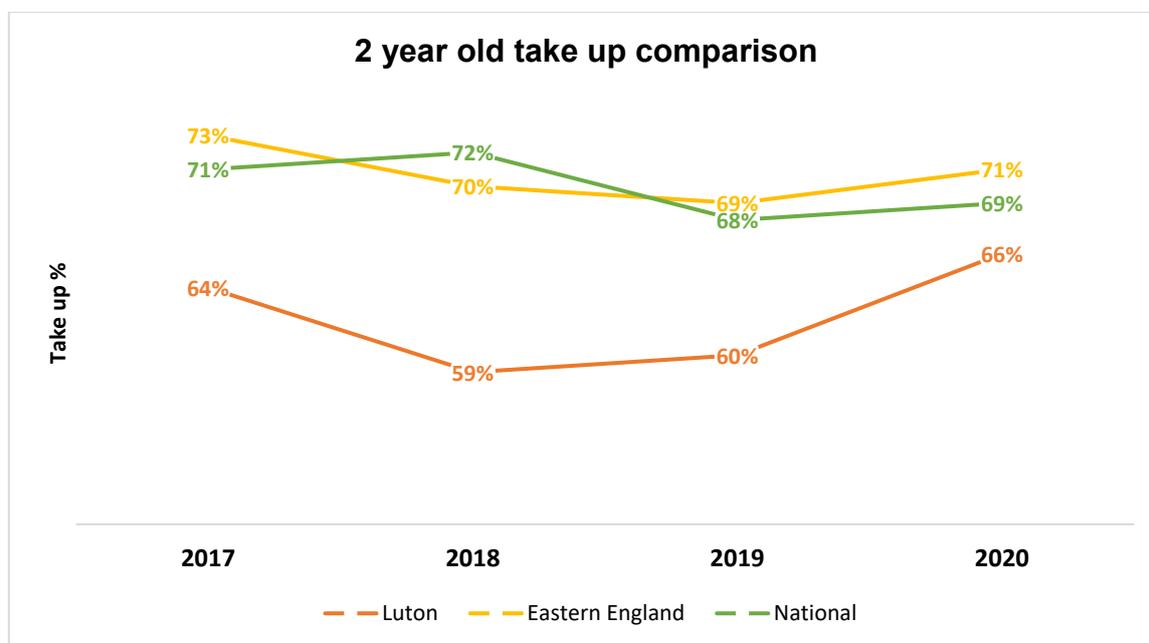
Two year old funding	% of eligible children in Luton	% of eligible children nationally
Take up	66%	69%

<sup>7</sup> Luton 2019 Mid-Year Population Estimates – Business Intelligence Luton Council

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs/free-childcare-2-year-olds>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2020>

Luton saw an increase in the take up of two year old funding from 60% in 2019 to 66% in the January census in 2020. Luton's increase compared to an increase both regionally and nationally of 2% and 1% respectively. The gap between National and Luton take up reduced from 13 percentage points in 2018 to 3 in 2020.



### Statistical neighbour comparison

Luton has ten statistical neighbours when comparing Ofsted and Department of Education (DfE) data and these range from being 'Very Close' to 'Somewhat Close' to various statistical aspects of Luton.

The 'closeness' of these statistical neighbours has been decided by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)<sup>10</sup> who was commissioned by the DfE to identify and group similar local authorities in terms of their socio-economic characteristics. Each local authority was assigned 10 such neighbours.

These socio-economic characteristics include among others; the mean weekly pay, the percentage of pupils known to be eligible for Free School Meals, the percentage of residents from different ethnic backgrounds, and the general health of those in the area.

In January 2020 Luton ranked fifth (previously eighth in 2019) out of its eleven statistical neighbours with the take up of two year old funding in these local authorities ranging between 49% and 71%.

<sup>10</sup> Statistical neighbours

### COVID-19 impact on funded two year old places

During autumn 2020 the take up of two year old funded places fell to approximately 55% and then to 50% in spring 2021 due to the national lockdown and local guidance, despite early years settings being able to stay open to all children.

A rise in take-up during summer 2021 is expected as parental confidence in early years settings increases.

### Three and four year old universal funding

All children aged three and four are entitled to 15 hours funded early education per week until they start reception class in school.

Parents do not have to use all the hours of their child’s funded entitlement and can choose to split the hours between providers. With the agreement of their provider, parents may also spread them across the year – for example, rather than taking 15 hours for 38 weeks a year they could take just under 12 hours for 48 weeks a year.

### Eligible children taking up their universal funded place (for at least some of the available hours) in Luton and nationally as at January 2020.<sup>11</sup>

Universal funding Age 3 and 4	% of eligible children in Luton	% of eligible children nationally
Take up	88%	93%

The take-up of the 15 hours universal funding in Luton has risen from 87% in 2019 to 88% in 2020, however Luton is ranked tenth out of eleven of its statistical neighbours.

### COVID-19 impact on three and four year old universal funding

Universal funding fell to between 81% and 82% in autumn 2020 and spring 2021 which suggests that some parents of newly eligible children chose not to start at an early years setting either due to local guidance or parental concern.

### Three and four year old extended (30 hours) funding

Since September 2017 children aged three and four from eligible working families are **entitled** to 30 hours funded early education per week until they start in a reception class in school.

To qualify parents must each expect to earn (on average) at least £125 per week (equal to 16 hours at the National Minimum or Living Wage) and less than £100,000 per year. Parents may still qualify if they are on maternity, paternity or adoption leave, or are unable to work because they are disabled or have caring responsibilities.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2020>

Parents who think they are entitled to a 30 hours extended hours place apply for this online through the government’s Childcare Support website [Childcare Choices](#). The same website is used to apply for tax free childcare and parents can apply for either or both.

If a parent is eligible, the system creates a code which they can use with their chosen childcare provider. If they are ineligible, they will still be entitled to the universal 15 hours of funded childcare.

**Eligible children taking up their extended hour funded place (for at least some of the available hours) in Luton and nationally as at January 2020.<sup>12</sup>**

Extended 30 hours 3 and 4 year old funding	% of eligible children in Luton	% of eligible children nationally
Take up	66% <sup>13</sup>	80%

Based on the indicative number of families that may be eligible for extended hours provided in September 2017 the take up in Luton has increased from 62% in 2019 to 66% in 2020.

However it still remains significantly lower than the national average at 80%. The increase relates to an additional 67 children taking up a 30 hour space in Luton, totalling 1,042 in January 2020.

**COVID-19 impact on three and four year old extended hours**

Parents choosing to access 30 hours of funded childcare fell to 537 in autumn 2020, a 24% decrease compared to autumn 2019. However in spring 2021 this number had risen to 919 families accessing 30 hours. This number is expected to rise during summer term 2021.

**Providers offering funded early education places**

The percentage of providers offering early education funding is show in the following table:

Type of provision	Number of providers	2 year old funding	3 and 4 year old universal 15 hours	3 and 4 year old extended 30 hours
Childminders	119	47%	46%	42%
Nursery classes in schools	16	0%	100%	6%
Maintained nursery schools	6	100%	100%	100%

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2020>

<sup>13</sup> Based on 2017 DfE estimate of potential eligible families in Luton - 1580

Type of provision	Number of providers	2 year old funding	3 and 4 year old universal 15 hours	3 and 4 year old extended 30 hours
Private, voluntary and independent nurseries	73	86%	100%	90%

Providers are paid by the government for delivering funded early education. Luton providers currently receive £5.24 per hour for a funded two year old and £4.50 for a funded three or four year old. They are not required to offer funding to parents, but parents may choose to use a different provider if they do not. Some providers offer a restricted number of funded places.

Data suggests that there are currently sufficient childcare places to provide the 30 hours extended entitlement in Luton. This is monitored by the Family Information Service (FIS) who record vacancies as well as applications and enquiries made by parents. Some childminders have chosen not to offer the 30 hours funding due to the impact the hourly funding rate has on their income.

### Early education funding by provider type

The number of two, three and four year olds accessing early education funded places in Luton as at the January 2020 Early Years census<sup>14</sup> is shown below.

Type of provider	2 year old funded children	Universal funded children
Private and voluntary	636	2779
Childminders	19	103
Maintained nurseries	204	707
Nursery classes in schools	1	637
Total children	860	4226

## COVID-19 and childcare in Luton

### Spring term 2020

Following the national lockdown announced in March 2020 early years providers were asked to remain open only for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children. This guidance remained in place until the government announced that from 1 June, early years settings, including childminders were able to open to all children.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2020>

During spring 2020 many early years settings provided childcare for priority children and were supported to be able to open safely to more children from June onwards.

Demand from parents remained low throughout this term with only approximately 17% of funded children attending a setting. Throughout this time settings adapted quickly and effectively to provide home learning and support for children and their families.

Early years providers received funding for all children on roll in spring 2020, however many were impacted financially by the reduction in privately paid hours.

### Autumn term 2020

Early years providers were able to open to all children in autumn 2020, however the confidence of providers and parents impacted on the number of children actually attending.

Some settings also had to manage positive cases within the setting or in practitioners' families, which caused temporary closures of either 'bubbles' of children or in some cases the entire setting.

Autumn 2020 saw an 18% decrease in the take-up of two year funded children and a 5% decrease in take-up of three and four year olds in universal places, compared to autumn 2019. There was also a fall from 703 to 537 in children accessing the extended 30 hours, a 24% decrease.

#### Autumn term 2020 funded children

<b>2 YO</b>	<b>Autumn 2019</b>	<b>Autumn 2020</b>
Places	850	695
Take-up	65%	55%

<b>3 &amp; 4 YO Universal</b>	<b>Autumn 2019</b>	<b>Autumn 2020</b>
Places	3161	2994
Take-up	83%	81%

Luton Council funded providers at either their autumn 2019 or 2020 hours, whichever was the higher, which meant that over half of Luton early years providers were funded at autumn 2019 levels as they had experienced a fall in demand for spaces.

### Spring term 2021

Government guidance was for early years to remain open to all children during spring term. However parental concern and the council's message to reduce attendance at early years settings during lockdown had an impact on both attendance and the take up of new funded spaces in spring term.

### Spring term 2021 funded children

<b>2 YO</b>	<b>Spring 2020</b>	<b>Spring 2021</b>
Places	860	633
Take-up	66%	50%

<b>3 &amp; 4 YO Universal</b>	<b>Spring 2020</b>	<b>Spring 2021</b>
Places	4226	3768
Take-up	88%	82%

All types of providers had fewer two year old children attending than the previous term, with a reduction of between 6% and 8%. Uptake of the universal funding for 3 and 4 year olds saw a smaller decrease than that of 2 year olds in spring 2021.

Early years settings continued to provide home learning for many of their children with attendance at settings remaining low in spring. Providers were able to claim funding for children on roll but 70% saw a reduction in funded hours.

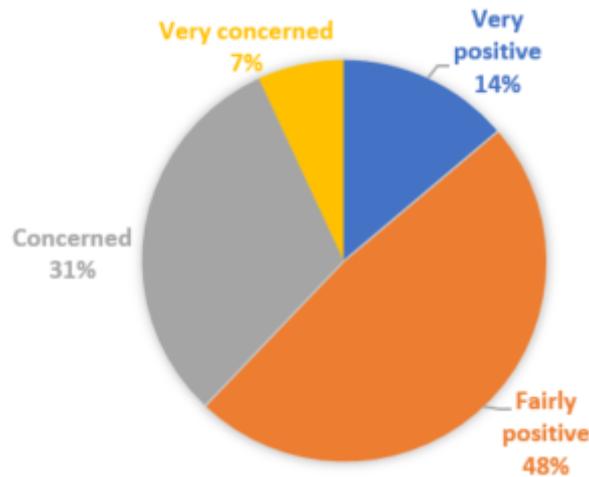
## Provider views on sustainability

In April 2021 private, voluntary and independent (PVI) early years settings and childminders were asked how positive they were feeling about their financial situation in summer 2021 and for the next 12 months, and whether they felt their business was sustainable.

Responses varied with some providers feeling reasonably confident and others being very concerned. Some of those that expressed concern were settings that had previously experienced low numbers of children or had financial concerns before the pandemic.

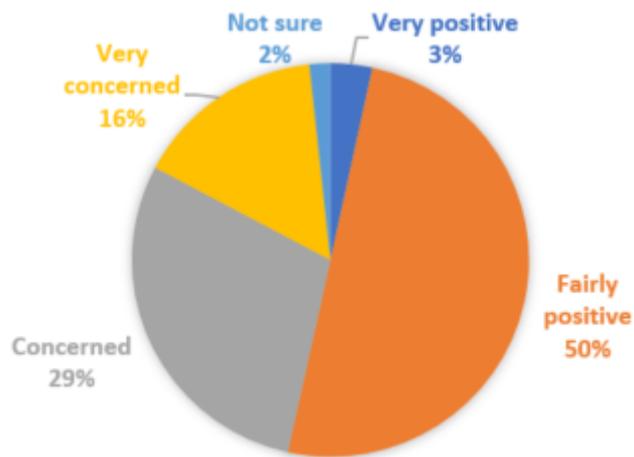
84% of PVIs who were contacted responded to the survey which represented 58 settings. Of these settings 36 were either positive or very positive about the summer term, however 18 were concerned and 4 were very concerned.

**How positive are you feeling about your setting's financial situation for summer term 2021?**



Providers were less confident about their sustainability over the next twelve months with 31 being either positive or very positive, 17 being concerned and a further 9 feeling very concerned.

**How are you feeling about your setting's financial situation and long term sustainability over the next 12 months?**



Half of the settings who responded had used the CJRS (Furlough) to support their setting and a further 7 had made staff redundant during the pandemic.

Childminders were also asked the same questions around sustainability, but the response was low with only 32 childminders (26%) answering the survey. Of these, 14 were either positive or very positive about the summer term, however 13 were concerned, 2 were very concerned and 3 were not sure.

Childminders were also concerned about the next twelve months with only 13 being positive or very positive, 14 being concerned and 4 were very concerned. One childminder added that she had recently resigned due to future uncertainty.

There were 10 resignations by childminders in 2020, which is lower than in 2019 when there were 13, and there were also 8 new registrations.

## Childcare to meet the needs of children of working parents

### Cost of childcare

Due to COVID-19 the Luton parental survey was not completed in 2020. However, previous CSA surveys have indicated that the cost of childcare remains an issue with 25% of parents who expressed an opinion being either unhappy or very unhappy.

Each year the Coram Family and Childcare Trust<sup>15</sup> carry out a national childcare cost survey and publish a report on their findings, by contacting the FIS in each local authority. This survey compares the cost of childcare in each local authority with the average cost in the region and nationally.

The 2020 report indicates that in Great Britain, childcare prices for children under three have risen above inflation this year with 25 hours of nursery for a child under three costing around 4% more than it did a year ago.

### Children under three years of age with no early education entitlements

Hours	Childminder	Day Nursery	Home Carer	Out of School Care	Pre-school
Luton 25 hour week	£117.33	£119.47	£112.50	£87.50	£108.66
East of England 25 hour week	£117.20	£145.36	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available
England 25 hour week	£119.02	£140.27	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available

Parents pay considerably less for childcare for three and four year olds due to the early education entitlements. The following table shows the average cost for 25 hours childcare for a three and four year old including the 15 hours universal entitlement. This does not include families who are eligible for the extended 30 hours. This indicates that Luton's charges are slightly below both the national and regional average.

### Children aged three and four accessing 25 hours per week (including 15 hours universal early education funding)

<sup>15</sup> [childcare-survey-2020](#)

Area	Childminder	Nursery
Luton	£46.93	£47.79
East of England	£47.01	£52.63
England Regional	£48.31	£52.44

Whether COVID-19 will have affected the prices either temporarily or long term is not yet known.

With the cost of childcare a concern for families in Luton it is essential that parents are aware of the different types of childcare support available depending on their circumstances: the three free entitlements, childcare vouchers (no longer available to new applicants from October 2018), Tax-Free Childcare, Universal Credit and Tax Credits.

### 30 hours early education funding for working parents

Since September 2017 children of eligible working parents are entitled to [30 hours](#) per week early education funding. In January 2020, 1,042 families in Luton were accessing an extended hour childcare place, an increase of 7% on the previous year.

### Tax-free childcare

Working parents can receive up to £2,000 per child per year towards childcare costs for children under 12, or 17 if disabled. With Tax-Free Childcare, parents get a government top-up of £2 for every £8 paid in. It is available to working parents including the self-employed, who earn (on average) at least £139 per week and less than £100,000 per year.

Tax-Free Childcare payments can go towards a whole range of regulated childcare including nurseries, childminders, before and after school clubs and holiday clubs. Parents can take advantage of the offer at the same time as 30 hours free childcare.

### Universal Credit and childcare

From November 2018 Universal Credit became available to most residents in Luton. Universal Credit replaces many different benefits including the childcare element of Working Tax Credit.

Through Universal Credit parents may be able to claim back up to 85% of their childcare costs. Parents, and partners if living with them, will usually need to either be working or have a job offer and the childcare must be provided by a registered childcare provider.

The Family Information Service is able to provide advice on all the childcare support available to families within Luton.

### Out of school settings

There is concern that some of the out of school settings that were recorded as open in 2019 may have been impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions and protective measures and may not reopen. A full assessment will take place in summer 2021.

### Settings recorded as OOSS November 2019

Type of setting	Number
County Sports Partnership	18
Culture / Drama	17
Faith group	40
Holiday club	1
Holiday and after school clubs	13
Language groups	7
Ofsted Registered setting	16
Sports & activities	37
Supplementary Schools	14
Tuition	30
Uniformed	10
Youth	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>

This list above does not include all the breakfast and after school clubs that run under individual school registrations as FIS has difficulty obtaining this information. This is most likely because these clubs usually only cater for children from their own school, and therefore do not advertise their services through external means.

However, by researching schools' websites FIS was able to find out that of the 75 educational provisions (maintained schools, independent schools, academies, and alternative provisions) there were 39 breakfast and 21 after school clubs operating in Luton in spring 2020.

#### Children needing holiday care

High quality holiday childcare is essential for working families and gives children the opportunity to experience new activities. However, finding suitable childcare can be challenging with some prices being higher than regular childcare and many parents find it difficult to find childcare that covers the hours they require.

Information for every holiday scheme and activity in Luton is not always available, as many of the schemes do not provide their information to FIS. However to meet parental need FIS compile and publish details of activities, schemes and attractions before each school holiday, including universal services and those that are available for children with disabilities and special educational needs.

This information is available on the Family section of the Luton Directory and is also provided directly to over 1,000 families who have subscribed to the e-newsletter<sup>16</sup>. This list will be updated in summer 2021 to provide information regarding the care available to parents over the summer holiday period.

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<sup>16</sup> [https://www.luton.gov.uk/Health\\_and\\_social\\_care/children\\_and\\_family\\_services/family-support-guidance/Family%20Information%20Service/Pages/School-holiday-activities-in-Luton.aspx](https://www.luton.gov.uk/Health_and_social_care/children_and_family_services/family-support-guidance/Family%20Information%20Service/Pages/School-holiday-activities-in-Luton.aspx)

Luton Council are not aware of any parents exercising their right to request holiday childcare which allows parents to request that their child's school provides before and after school or holiday childcare, or opens up their facilities for another provider.

## Supply of childcare places in Luton

There has been some movement in childcare in Luton during 2020 as shown in the table below. There has also been an increase in out of school and tuition services registering with Ofsted.

### Luton Provision Changes January 2020 to December 2020

Provider Type	Registrations	Resignations	Proposed as at 31 Dec 2020
Childminder	8	10	6
Day Nursery	3	1	3
Holiday Scheme	0	0	1
Out of School	1	1	2
Pre School	0	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>

Pre-pandemic data suggested that currently Luton had sufficient childcare spaces, and enough vacant spaces to manage an increase in the take up of early education funding. Luton's projected population data<sup>17</sup> indicates a possible decrease of 5% in the 0 to 4 year old age group between 2017 and 2027 therefore demand for childcare in Luton may decrease.

FIS data suggests that the number of spaces for funded children is currently sufficient. As the Social Mobility Action Plan<sup>18</sup> has early years as a priority we need to ensure there is sufficient capacity to support eligible families to access the two year old entitlement and the take up of the universal entitlement for three and four year olds.

## Childcare to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Luton Council is committed to promoting equality and inclusion for children with SEND. We aim to remove barriers that prevent children accessing free places and work with parents, health and social work professionals, and others to ensure that children with SEND are able to access their early education place.

<sup>17</sup> Luton's Projected Population Growth 2017 – 2037 - Source Luton Council POPGROUP software

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-social-mobility-through-education>

Luton Council meets their duties under the Equality Act 2010<sup>19</sup> and take full account of the SEND Code of Practice 0 to 25<sup>20</sup> when securing and providing free places. Early Years SEN Advisors work with practitioners to support them to feel confident that they can support a child with SEND to access and enjoy their early years setting.

### Finding inclusive childcare

Parents and carers are able to find inclusive childcare on the Luton Directory's guide to services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities at the [Luton Directory](#). Currently 115 early years providers, holiday schemes and childminders are registered on the guide.

The recently improved [Luton Local Offer](#) provides further information about local services, support and events for children and young people aged 0 to 25 years who have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

### Disability Access Fund

The Disability Access Fund (DAF) helps children with special needs access early years places. The funding available, currently £615 per year, helps providers make reasonable adjustments to their settings, purchase specialist equipment or seek specialist training that helps to meet the child's needs.

Luton Council's Special Educational Needs Service provides advice and support to settings and parents on the funding available and how to apply for DAF.

### Provision of places

Luton has a range of providers who are able to support special needs; however providers have previously reported the following challenges when providing a place for a child because of their complexity of needs:

- recruiting additional qualified staff members with appropriate skills
- managing additional costs for training, First Aid and DBS checks
- funding not covering all the hours attended

### Specialist holiday schemes

Each year the council publishes a Short Break Service Statement that includes information on how to access residential short breaks and also a directory of services for information on groups, clubs and activities for children with special educational needs and disabilities. The Short Break Service Statement can be found on the council website.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

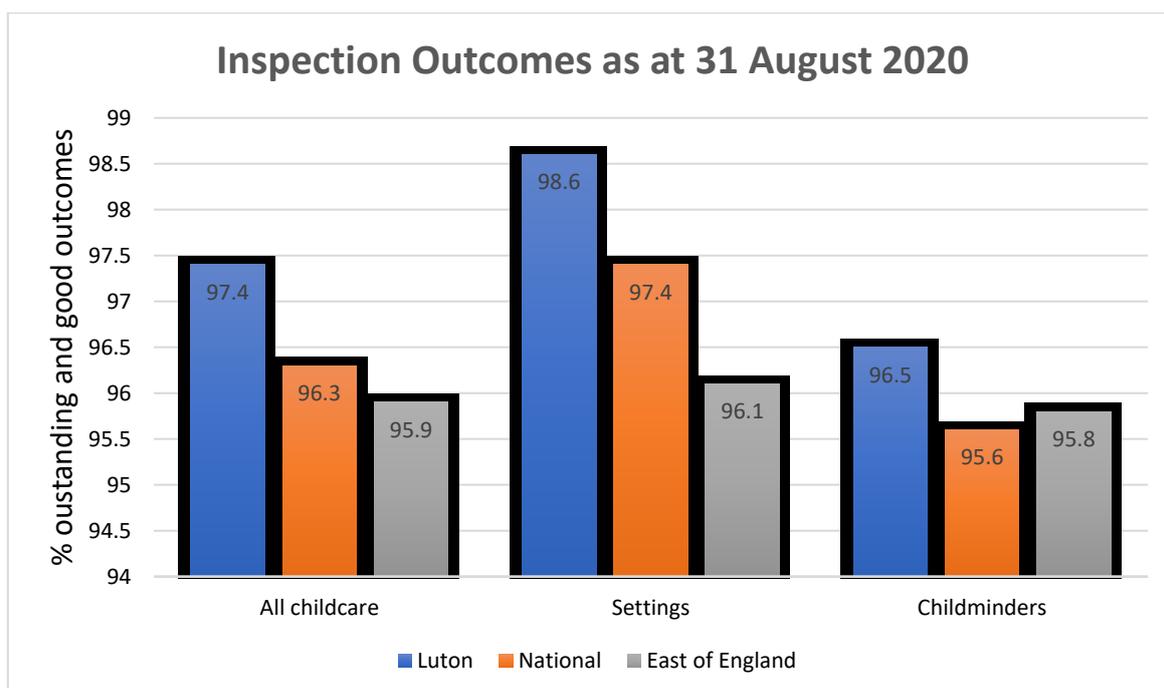
<sup>21</sup> [Short Breaks](#)

## Quality of providers in Luton

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic Ofsted inspections were suspended in March 2021 but are expected to resume in May 2021.

### Latest inspection outcomes

97.4% of all childcare in Luton is judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted. This is above the national average as shown in the table below based on childcare providers and inspections as at 31 August 2020.<sup>22</sup>



In accordance with Ofsted regulations an early years provider will be inspected within the first 30 months of their registration, Luton has 55 providers on the early years register that have not been inspected yet.

When the local authority is made aware of an early years provider being judged to require improvement or as inadequate by Ofsted, an early years consultant or childcare advice and support officer will contact the provider to offer support and advice to help them improve practices and meet the required standards.

The 1.4% of early years settings offering childcare on non-domestic premises judged at August 2020 to be inadequate or requiring improvement represents one provider.

Of the 3.5% of childminders judged as inadequate or requiring improvement, this represents three childminders who have previously received a 'requires improvement' judgement.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-providers-and-inspections-as-at-31-august-2020>

They have all since been re-inspected, but as they had no early years children at the inspection they were given a 'Met' judgement, which means their judgement of requires improvement still remains as their latest full inspection.

The percentage of Luton's early years providers being judged as good or outstanding has increased over the last year by one percentage point and 1.9 percentage points over the last three years.

## Luton Family Information Service

Luton Family Information Service provides information, advice and guidance on a variety of services, helplines and websites that are useful to parents, carers, children and young people under the age of 20 and the professionals who work with them.

Between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2020, the Luton Family Information Service (FIS) logged 993 enquiries, a 10% decrease on 2019.

Information available to parents online has increased both locally and nationally regarding help with childcare costs and provision and there were over 23,207 page views of the FIS pages on the [Luton Council Website](#) an increase of 13% compared to 2019.

## Luton Investment Framework

As Luton undertakes a 20 year plan for major transformation, the supply and demand for childcare will need to be considered throughout the stages of development of the town. The Luton Investment Framework (LIF) includes targets of 18,500 new jobs and 5,700 new homes which may change the demand for childcare in certain areas.

The effect of development on existing childcare settings will need to be a consideration and the areas in which there is major transformation will need to be closely monitored to ensure sufficiency of spaces for early education provision.

## Preparing for future childcare sufficiency assessments

Due to the unknown impact at this stage that COVID-19 will have on the childcare sector and employment in Luton there will be a need to continue monitoring childcare sufficiency each term.

Termly reports of attendance, funded places and provider sustainability will be required to monitor the sector and ensure it is able to continue to provide the number of quality childcare places that is required by Luton families now, and in the future.

## Useful links

[Statutory guidance for local authorities on the provision of early education and childcare](#)

[Family Information Service](#)

[Luton Directory](#)

[Luton Local Offer](#)

[Reports and surveys - childcare in Luton](#)