

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Annual Report 2023



BLACKBURN
with
DARWEN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Blackburn with Darwen
Borough Council

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1. Foreword

Welcome to the 2023 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) undertaken by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. We want every single resident, no matter who they are, to have a good quality of life. We recognise that childcare plays a crucial role in the lives of most families and see our statutory childcare responsibilities, as stipulated in the Childcare Act 2006, as a vital component of the council's wider plan to improve outcomes for all. To help us achieve this, we will make progress on four core missions of our corporate plan (2023) -

- A more prosperous borough where no one is left behind.
- Every child and young person to have opportunities to fulfil their potential.
- Deliver our climate emergency action plan.
- Build happier, healthier and safer communities.

Children and young people are this borough's future. For Blackburn with Darwen to be successful and to continue to prosper, we have to get things right for them.

Young people have told us they want every child and young person to have equal opportunities to fulfil their potential. They told us they want Blackburn with Darwen to be a place that is brilliant to grow up in and that there is information, support and guidance available for their transition to adulthood. (Blackburn with Darwen Corporate Plan 2023 -2027)

As a council, we firmly believe everyone in the community should play their part to unlock every child's potential. By working together with parents and carers, schools, further education partners, community groups and the wider community, we can ensure there are opportunities for young people to be the best they can be. (Blackburn with Darwen Corporate Plan 2023 -2027)

Blackburn with Darwen's Early Help Strategy (2022) reinforces the boroughs overall vision to enable children and young people to fulfil their potential. The implementation of effective early help strategies will contribute to ensuring potential is fulfilled and aid in building happier, healthier communities. The Early Help Strategies vision for the borough is that –

“Children in Blackburn with Darwen will grow to have a happy, healthy life and experience success and overcome challenges. To achieve this we will work with our communities, with our partners and our children, young people, and their families to ensure that children get the right help at the right time by building on their strengths and the strength of their family”.

Studies show that “attending high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in nursery classes, nursery schools or playgroups between ages 2 and 4 was associated with better academic results for key stage 1 Maths, key stage 1 Science and for a combined key stage 1 English and Maths outcome during school year 2”. (Gardiner and Melhuish, 2021). Attending nursery settings from an early age, not only assist with academic progress but can have a “positive effect on the educational, cognitive, behavioural and social outcomes of children”. (Melhuish, 2015). The attendance of early year's education also closes the gap with disadvantaged children. “An early start to formal ECEC combined with a higher amount of formal ECEC use was associated with better child outcomes for disadvantaged children” (Gardiner and Melhuish, 2021). Ultimately the sooner a child starts some form of early education, the more likely they are to succeed in the future. “Early education has a considerable influence on school readiness, long-term school attainment and life-long outcomes” (Melhuish, 2004).

The production of this current assessment of childcare sufficiency across Blackburn with Darwen is an ideal opportunity for us to take stock of how well our families childcare needs are met, identify gaps and inform future developments in respect of this key critical service provision.

We would like to thank all of our residents, staff, childcare providers and partners who have participated in the production of this assessment for their continuing commitment and support in helping us work towards making the childcare market in Blackburn with Darwen the best that it can be for our children and families and one that delivers ongoing improvements through the continuing identification of new and future needs.

2. Introduction

2.1 What is a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment?

A Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is a detailed investigation and measurement of the nature and extent of the need for, and supply of, childcare within each local area. The assessment enables local authorities to identify whether there are any gaps in the childcare market. Where gaps are identified, the local authority is required to consider the most efficient and effective way of addressing them to ensure that parents are always able to work; and that childcare places are available, accessible, affordable, and are delivered flexibly in a range of high quality settings. The assessment should not only look at the current position, but also have regard to trends or developments that are likely to affect demand and supply in the foreseeable future. The assessment should be kept under regular review to ensure that any assumptions remain robust and valid.

2.2 The National Picture and Legislative Context

The Childcare Act 2006 (Section 6) informs that Local Authorities should secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 – 14 years (or up to 18 years for disabled children as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995). In assessing what is “reasonably practicable”, the local authority may take into account:

- The state of the local childcare market, including the demand for specific types of providers, in a particular locality and the amount and type of supply that currently exists;
- The state of the labour market;
- The quality and capacity of childcare providers, including their funding, staff, premises, experience and expertise.

In exercising their duties, Local Authorities are required to report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare, and make this report available and accessible to parents. Local Authorities are responsible for determining the appropriate level of detail in their report, geographical division and date of publication. However, the report should include:

- A specific reference to how they are ensuring there is sufficient childcare available to meet the needs of: disabled children; children from families in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit; children aged two, three and four taking up early education places; school age children; and children needing holiday care;
- Information about the supply and demand of childcare for particular age ranges of children, and the affordability, accessibility and quality of provision; and
- Details of how any gaps in childcare provision will be addressed.

The Childcare Act 2006 (Section 7 as substituted by section 1 of the Education Act 2011) informs that Local Authorities should secure sufficient funded early education places for every eligible child in the borough.

Under section 11 of the Childcare Act 2006, Local Authorities are required to assess childcare provision and prepare an assessment of the sufficiency of childcare provision in their area at least every three years.

2.3 What is Childcare?

Childcare is defined in section 18 of the Childcare Act 2006 as “any form of care for a child” including “education and any other supervised activity”.

The following are specifically **excluded** from this definition:

- Education or activities provided by a school for a pupil during school hours, unless that pupil has not yet started key stage 1 (thereby including nursery and reception classes);
- Care provided for a child by a parent, step-parent or person with parental responsibility; or any relative; or foster parent (Local Authority or private); or
- Care provided by a children’s home, a care home, a hospital or a residential family centre, a young offenders’ institution, a secure training centre, or a secure care home within any of those establishments.

In the Childcare Act 2016 ‘early years provision’ means childcare for a child aged from birth until the 31st August following the child’s 5th birthday and ‘later years provision’ means childcare for a child from the 1st September following the child’s 5th birthday until the age of 18 years.

Local Authorities should regard childcare as any provision that is regular and reliable and provides children a safe place to be. It would not include, for example, before school or after-school activity that was unsupervised or that was provided as a one-off activity.

2.4 What are Funded Early Education Places for Three and Four Year Old Children?

All three and four year old children are eligible for a Funded Early Education (FEE) place, comprising of up to 570 hours a year delivered over no fewer than 38 weeks of the year. 30 hours free childcare is available for families who meet the national eligibility criteria up to a maximum of 1,140 hours per year. (This is an additional 15 extended hours of childcare per week on top of the standard 15 universal hours entitlement). Children become eligible from the beginning of the term following their third birthday, until they reach compulsory school age. In Blackburn with Darwen, children are able to start reception year of school from the September following their 4th birthday.

2.5 What are Funded Early Education Places for Two Year Old Children?

Some two year old children are eligible for a Funded Early Education (FEE) place, comprising of 570 hours a year delivered over no fewer than 38 weeks of the year. Children become eligible from the beginning of the term following their second birthday and for three terms in total. Eligibility for funding is based on both national applied criteria.

National Criteria:

Your 2-year-old can get free childcare if you live in England and get any of the following benefits:

- [Income Support](#)

- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit, and your household income is £15,400 a year or less after tax, not including benefit payments
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit (or both), and your household income is £16,190 a year or less before tax
- the Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)

2-year-olds can also get free childcare if they:

- are looked after by a local authority
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- get [Disability Living Allowance](#)
- have left care under an adoption order, special guardianship order or a child arrangements order

If you're a non- UK citizen who cannot claim benefits:

If your immigration status says you have 'no recourse to public funds', you may still get free childcare for your 2-year-old. You must live in England and your household income must be no more than:

- £26,500 for families outside of London with one child
- £34,500 for families within London with one child
- £30,600 for families outside of London with two or more children
- £38,600 for families within London with two or more children

You cannot have more than £16,000 in savings or investments.

2.6 What is Tax Free Childcare?

Tax free childcare is a UK wide government scheme to help working parents with the cost of childcare. For every £8 paid in, the government will add an extra £2, up to the total of £2000 per child. Parents and carers can also get tax free childcare at the same time as 30 hours free childcare.

2.7 What are the planned changes from the 2023 Budget?

There is to be an extension of the free childcare offer for parents, by expanding childcare to support more parents returning to work after parental leave ends.

Timeline:

- **April 2024:** Working parents of two year olds will be able to access 15 hours free childcare.
- **September 2024:** 15 hours free childcare will be extended to all children from the age of nine months.
- **September 2025:** Working parents of children under the age of five will be entitled to 30 hours free childcare per week.

3. Local Context



Total Population:

- Blackburn with Darwen = 154,900
- North West = 7,422,300
- England = 56,490,000
- Population growth = 3.26%



Economic: In Employment

- Blackburn with Darwen = 53.2%
- North West = 55.5%
- England = 57.4%

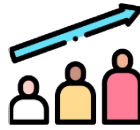


Deprivation:

- Blackburn with Darwen = 58.8%
- North West = 53.2%
- England = 51.6%

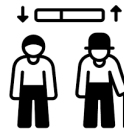
Total Households:

- Blackburn with Darwen = 58,800
- England and Wales = 24,782,800



Number of 0 - 19 Year olds:

- Blackburn with Darwen = 43804 people/28.3%
- North West = 130,578,75/23.1%
- England = 17,360,87 / 23.4%



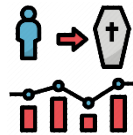
Ethnic Background:

- 35.7% identified their ethnic background as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh.
- 60.4% identified as White.



Number of Households with No adult in Employment:

- Blackburn with Darwen = 5600
- North West = 373,900
- Great Britain = 2,858,400



Birth Rate and Death Rate - per 1000 of population:

- Blackburn with Darwen = BR 12.7/DR 9.6
- North West = BR 10.7/ DR 11.0
- England - BR 10.7/ DR 10.0



Average Salary:

- Blackburn with Darwen = £28,210
- North West = £31,392.40
- Great Britain = £33,394.40

4. Recommendations from CSA 2022

The 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, produced by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council detailed a number of recommendations including:

- **Recommendation One:** Undertake termly reviews of vacancy levels across the borough to monitor any significant changes.

Action One: On a termly basis a dashboard of graphical data is produced and looked at analytically to see if there are any significant changes within the borough and how these changes could impact the provision of childcare to our families. In the summer 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment it can be seen that there is a healthy supply of childcare places by 16%, this has been a trend year-on-year. The important element here is to ensure that the oversupply does not increase as this could then be detrimental to childcare businesses in the borough. If they do not get enough children attending then they financially may not be able to continue.

- **Recommendation Two:** Address the shortfall of responses regarding the provision of out-of-school childcare places for children of statutory school age to understand the true levels of supply.

Action Two: Emails are sent regularly to out-of-school providers regarding the provision of out of school childcare. It is ensured that emails are followed up with a phone call. The early year's team have also sent out questionnaires in the post with stamped addressed envelopes, however responses continue to show a shortfall of responses. This is an area which needs more work to address.

- **Recommendation Three:** Continue to work in close partnership with early education and childcare providers to support the continuous quality improvement of our childcare provision.

Action Two: Communication between Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and early education and childcare providers is continuous, we pride ourselves on the positive relationships we make and continue to work hard to work in close partnership to improve the quality of childcare provision.

- **Recommendation Four:** Actively promote the financial support available for parents, carers and families who choose to use formal childcare.

Action Four: The Blackburn with Darwen early year's area on the website holds all the information that parents would need to get the information regarding financial support. Along with this Blackburn with Darwen's Family Information Service (FIS) is available for calls, emails and web-chat, to ensure that parents get the information that they require. We have also been into the Job Centre to deliver training to Job Centre staff about giving information to parents seeking employment and wanting to access free childcare.

5. Percentage of Questionnaires Returned

All providers were asked to complete a sufficiency questionnaire so that the Local Authority can analyse the data and help plan for the future. There are currently 124 childcare providers active in the borough and 79% of providers responded (Fig 1). This is a 5% increase on last year.

The majority of returns are from children's centres and LEA maintained nurseries (class and school). Only 62.5% of childminders (35 out of 56) and 87.5% (35 out of 40) of Private, Voluntary and Independent providers (PVI's) returned their questionnaires, whilst this is an improvement on last year's returns; it is still an area for improvement. The more data that is acquired the more reliable the results.

Figure 1: Numbers and type of childcare providers in BwD – of the 124 childcare providers, 79% returned their vacancy data.

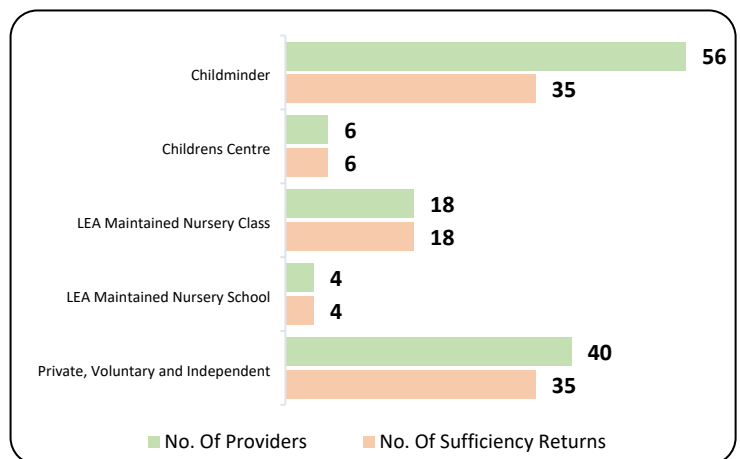
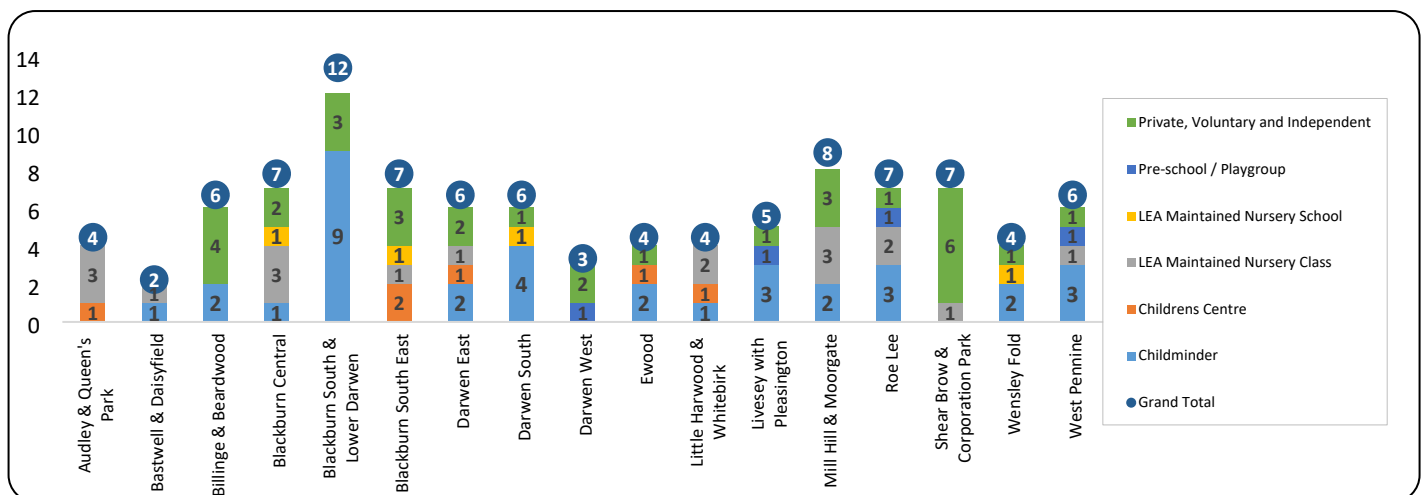


Figure 2: Numbers of providers by type and ward – Location by ward of those who returned their sufficiency data.



6. Type of Provision in Blackburn with Darwen*

Childminders - are registered with Ofsted to care for children under eight but may also care for older children. There are childminding networks in Blackburn with Darwen which ensure the quality of the childcare their members provide. These networks are assessed and approved by the National Childminding Association.

Pre-School/Playgroup – These give parents/carers the opportunity to prepare children for the education system before going into “reception” following an early year's curriculum.

Nursery schools and classes - tend to provide 15 hours per week early education during term time. Some may provide extended services before school, after school or in the school holidays.

Children's centre nurseries - have nursery provision for children aged 2, 3 and 4 years old directly delivered by the Local Authority. Some children's centres have nursery provision for children aged birth to 5 years delivered in partnership with a private, voluntary or independent childcare provider.

Private, voluntary and independent nursery providers - provide childcare and education for children aged six weeks to five years old. They tend to open for full days all year round.

Out of school clubs - tend to provide sessional childcare, usually before or after school or in the school holidays for children up to the age of 14.

Home carers (Nanny) - care for children in their own home, or they can care for children from two separate families, in one of the cared for children's house.

Early year's childminding agencies - are responsible for the recruitment and quality assurance of childminders affiliated to the agency. There are no early year's childminding agencies registered in Blackburn with Darwen at the time of this publication.

Informal childcare - refers to childcare provided by grandparents, other relatives, friends and neighbours and is **not** registered with Ofsted or any other regulatory body.

Local authorities should regard childcare as any provision that is regular and reliable and provides children a safe place to be. It would not include, for example, before school or after-school activity that was unsupervised or that was provided as a one-off activity.

* All providers of free early education must comply with appropriate registration requirements. For further details log on to the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk or the Department for Education website at www.gov.uk.

7. Supply and Demand – Do we have enough childcare?

There is an 11% reduction in childminders in comparison to last year, however there are still plentiful vacancies for 0 – 5 year olds.

There are four wards which have an undersupply of places available, Billinge and Beardwood, Roe Lee, Wensley Fold and Darwen West. There are plans in place for two new nurseries opening in Wensley Fold, one new nursery in Billinge and Beardwood, and also a new nursery in Livesey with Pleasington.

In the Darwen West locality there is an undersupply of available places, however the neighbouring wards (Darwen East, Darwen South and West Pennines) have a healthy supply of available places, and are within reasonable distance for parents/carers to access.

Whilst we can advise perspective new early years and childcare providers, with regards to supply and demand; the regulatory body for registering provision is Ofsted.

8. Out of School Clubs and Holiday Provision

Similar to previous years there is no significant difference in the number of vacancies, however the number of sufficiency returns from the out of school sectors is low and will be addressed in our recommendations.

Figure 3:

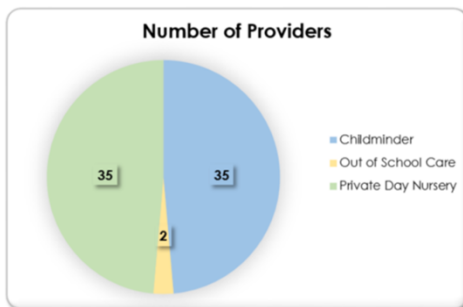


Figure 4:

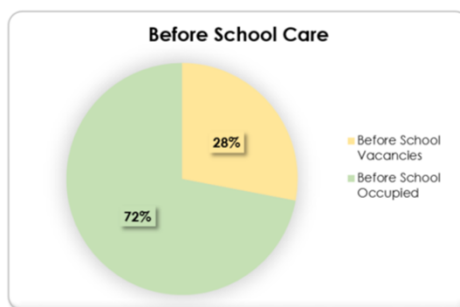
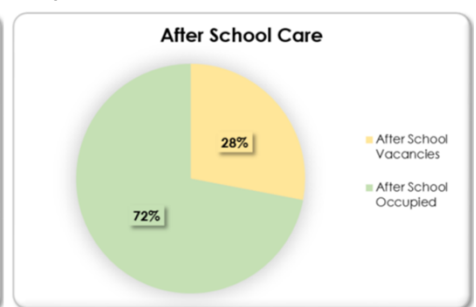


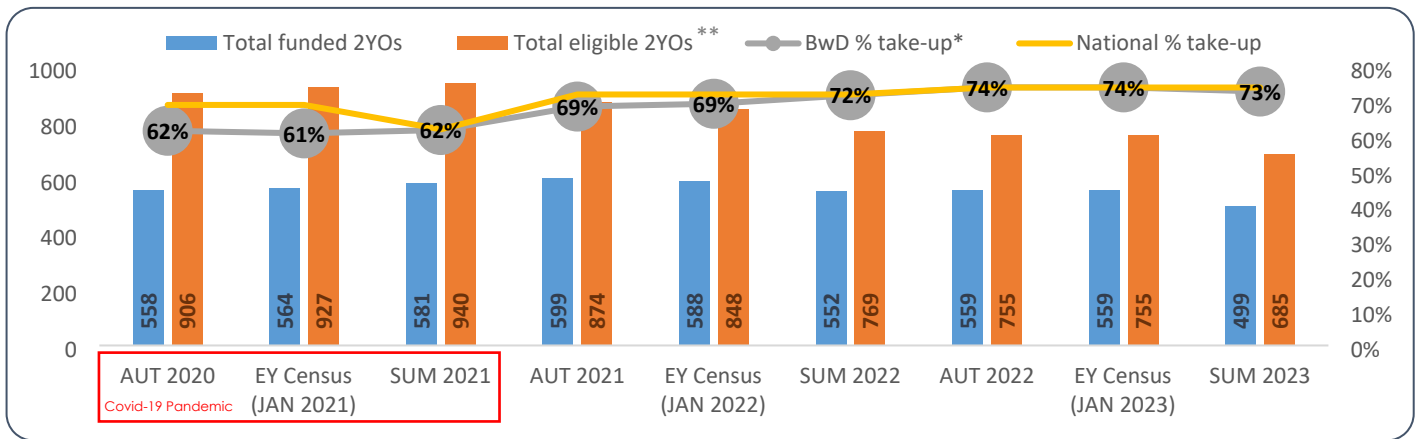
Figure 5:



9. Funded Take Up 2, 3 and 4 Year Olds

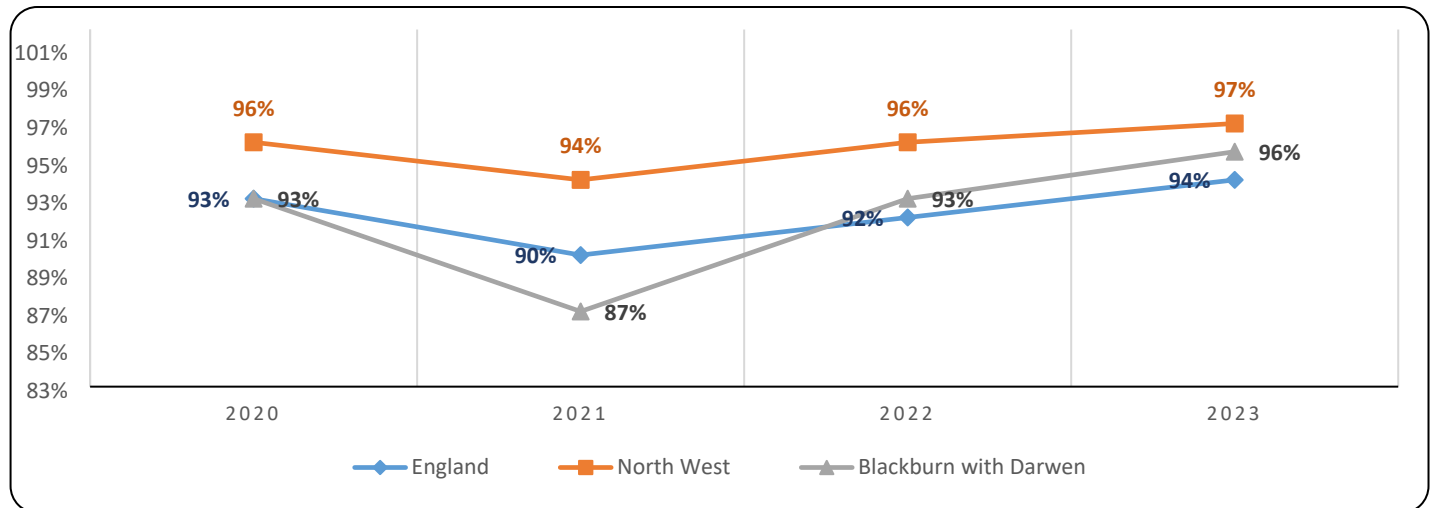
Take-up of early year's entitlements remains stable across Blackburn with Darwen. Blackburn with Darwen saw an average take up of 74% of 2 year old's in 2022 – 2023, this is in line with national take-up (Fig 7). The take-up for 3 to 4 year olds is higher than the national average by 2% and -1% lower than the regional average. Working parents accessing 30 hours for 3 to 4 year old's are increasing steadily (Fig 8).

Figure 6: Two year old early education: Take-up of funded places.
*BwD % take-up is calculated at the end of each term. EY Census is calculated as at census week in January



Total eligible 2YOs – This number is sent to local authorities from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), it highlights families who **may be eligible for the entitlement.

Figure 7: Three and four year old early education: Take-up of funded places – Provision for children under 5 (Annual EY Census)



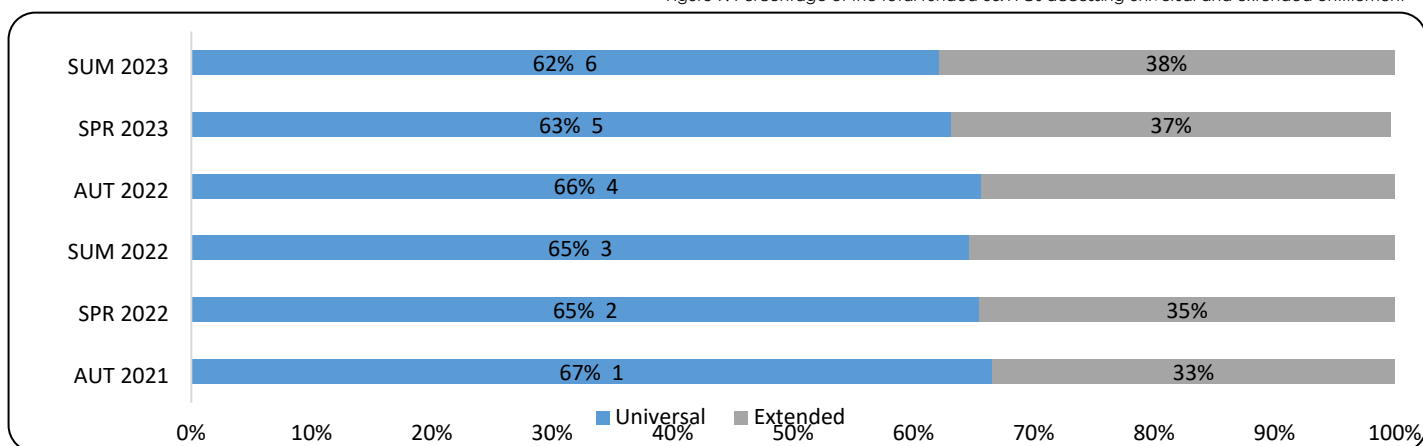
Term	2020/21			2021/22			2022/23		
	Autumn 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Autumn 2021	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Autumn 2022	Spring 2023	Summer 2023
Total funded 3&4 YO's	1991	2481	2897	1907	2510	2921	1949	2514	2940
DEP 1 (Postcodes)	1226	1430	1789	1164	1521	1754	1181	1488	1737
Dep 2 (CP/CIN)	12	12	18	7	4	9	11	8	10

Looking at the summer data (Fig 9), it can be seen that the total number of children accessing Funded Early Education (FEE) has increased in the last 2 years. The numbers of providers receiving additional funding for children living in a deprived locality (DEP 1: Postcodes) has decreased over the last 4 years.

The English Indices of Deprivation which calculates the areas that are the most disadvantaged is published by the government and updated regularly. This means that areas which are classed as deprived one year may change the year after. The number of providers receiving additional funding for children in relation to a child protection order or a child in need plan (Dep 2: CP/CIN) has also decreased over the last 4 years.

Universal entitlement is a Funded Early Education (FEE) place, which provides a child with early education until they reach school age. The universal entitlement is 15 hours per week per child. Some families can access an extended entitlement of an additional 15 hours per week, this extended entitlement is for eligible working parents. The two entitlements combined, total 30 hours per week during term time. The percentage of the total funded 3 and 4 year olds accessing the universal entitlement have been fairly consistent over the last 3 years between 62% and 67%. There are less children accessing the extended entitlements overall, this could be linked to Blackburn with Darwen's unemployment rate. However, over the last 3 years it has also remained fairly consistent between 33% and 38% (Fig10).

Figure 9: Percentage of the total funded 3&4YOs accessing universal and extended entitlement



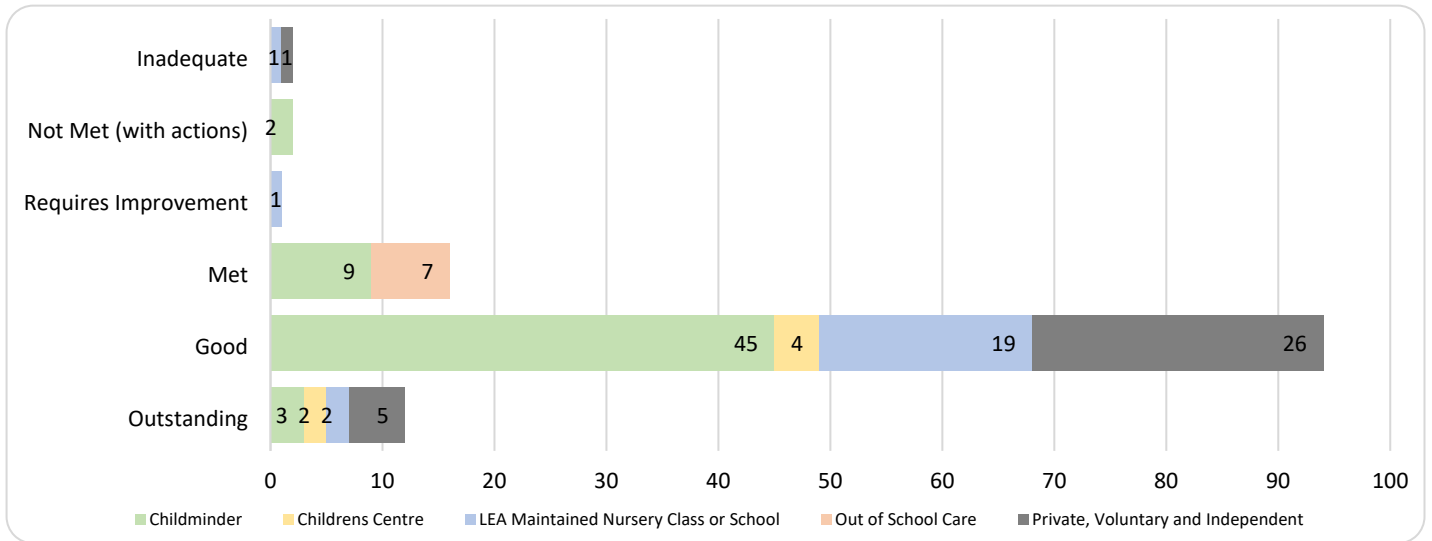
10. Flexibility

Parents and carers were surveyed on their views of the flexibility of childcare providers within the borough, they were asked "How do you perceive your own childcare arrangement?" Of those questioned 72% said that they have had no issues finding childcare that is flexible enough to fit their needs. Of the 28% which said that they had issues, the majority of them stated that the summer holidays availability and extending hours from 8am to 6pm, would be an improvement to meet their needs. The new wraparound entitlements coming in September 2024 would ensure that there is capacity within the borough for childcare provision outside of normal working hours.

11. Quality

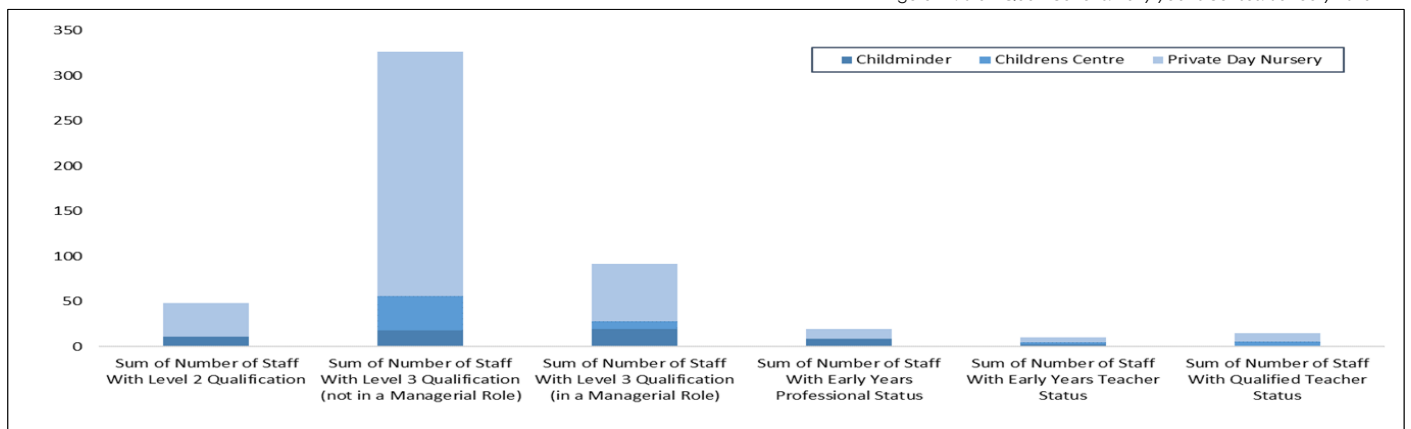
All providers that offer free early education are registered with and inspected by the Ofsted or the Department for Education.

Figure 10: Quality of Childcare



Over the last 10 years, there has been a consistent downward trend in the number of Ofsted-registered childminders. The quality of childcare remains high in Blackburn with Darwen. In Blackburn with Darwen, 96% of all childcare providers with an Ofsted grading are rated as good or above (Fig 11).

Figure 11: Staff Qualifications: Early year's census: January 2023



There is a slight reduction of staff with a level 3 qualification (not in a managerial role), this is attributable to an increase in the number of staff with early year's professional status, with early year's teacher status and with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) (Fig 12). This demonstrates a continued commitment to professional development. Early years providers continue to report challenges with recruitment and retention, which is the same across the board for the education sector.

12. Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)

Early education is an opportunity for children to join in play based activities in quality environments to support their developmental learning journey and prepare them for school. As mentioned previously an "early start to formal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) was associated with

better child outcomes for disadvantaged children" (Gardiner and Melhuish, 2021), known today as Pupil Premium children. Early year's providers are able to claim extra funding through the Early Year's

Pupil Premium (EYPP) fund to support children's development, learning and care. The extra funding can be used in a variety of ways to support children's individual learning, through the early year's education. The data shows that whilst there is a high number of EYPP children there is an overall decreasing trend (Fig 13).

Figure 12: Total number of children accessing Early Year's Pupil Premium (EYPP) additional supplements

Term	2020/21			2021/22			2022/2023		
	Autumn 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Autumn 2021	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Autumn 2022	Spring 2023	Summer 2023
EYPP	243	302	398	248	354	387	196	242	271

13. Costs and Affordability

Nationally, childcare costs have continued to rise at a steady rate, unfortunately at a time when parents and carers are already struggling with the cost of living. A part-time place (25 hours a week) in England for a child under two now costs an average of £148.63 per week, an annual increase of 5.6% (Family and Childcare Trust, 2023). This is similarly reflected in the increases in childcare costs across Blackburn with Darwen for the same period.

However, all of the childcare costs in Blackburn with Darwen remain lower than the England averages and some are lower than the North West averages, as outlined in Figure 14 below.

Figure 13: Comparison of provider costings

Region	Blackburn with Darwen	North West	England
Nursery – 50 hours (children under 2yrs)	£228.06	£251.16	£286.97
Childminder – 50 hours (children under 2yrs)	£211.16	£214.62	£247.86
3 and 4yrs assessing 50 hours (30 hours FEE, paying for 20 hours)	£102.34	£94.71	£117.60
After school club (children 5yrs and over)	£63.20	£62.33	£67.68
Childminder to 6pm (children 5yrs and over)	£65.35	£56.14	£72.46

In the early year's parent and carer's questionnaire, 76% of those questioned stated that changes which could be made, that would improve their formal childcare setting should be more affordable childcare. Of those which gave this response, 68% do not receive any help towards their childcare. Whilst this is not ideal that childcare costs are rising, for nursery and childminder hours Blackburn with Darwen's costing does come under the North West and the England average.

14. SEND Provision

Some children have special educational needs in relation to learning, physical disabilities or medical needs, which means they may need additional support. For most children the providers will meet their needs, as most early years providers make reasonable adjustments for children with additional needs. Early years providers are also able to access central support services who can provide advice and assistance. The service offers impartial information, guidance and support to parents of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The service aims to provide pupils, young adults, parents and carers, schools and other professionals with the opportunity of working together to meet the special educational needs and/or disabilities of the individual pupil.

There are two areas where funding can be accessed to support children with SEND:

- **The SEN Inclusion Fund (SENIF):** The SEN Inclusion Fund is to support Local Authorities to work with providers to address the needs of individual children with SEN. Support is led and managed directly by the child's early year's providers with additional financial support paid annually direct to the Early Years provider for the provision of additional resources e.g. staffing, staff training and equipment.
- **The Disability Access Fund (DAF):** The Disability Access Fund (DAF) is available funding for early year's providers to support children with disabilities or special educational needs. It aids access to early year's places by supporting providers in making reasonable adjustments to their settings.

Support is also provided through the Portage home visiting service for children under 3 with significant SEND. Early Years Specialist SEND Practitioners (SSPs) work in early year's settings to support setting staff to meet the needs of children with SEND and Blackburn with Darwen also have a Specialist Early Years Educational Psychologist who provides specialist assessment and advice to settings and staff. The primary SEND need of early year's children is Speech, Language, and Communication Need (SLCN).

Figure 14: Total number of children accessing SEND additional supplements

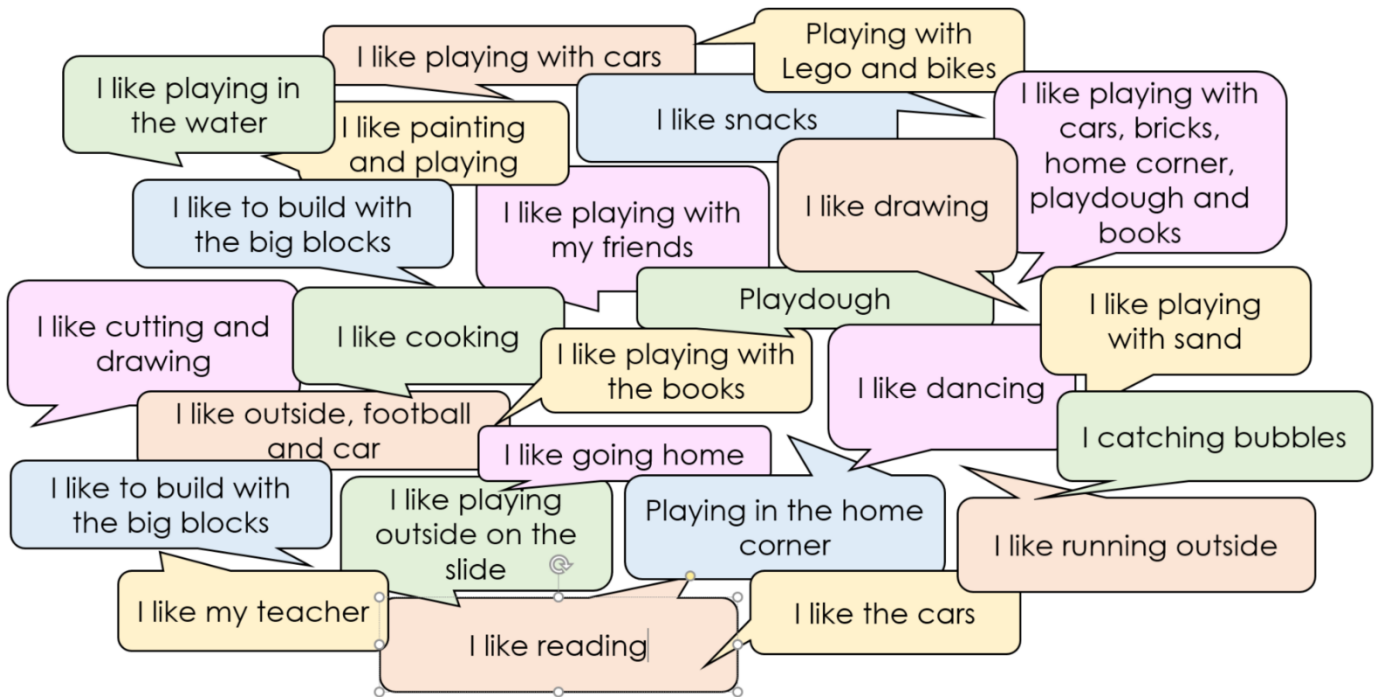
Term	2020/21			2021/22			2022/2023		
	Autumn 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Autumn 2021	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Autumn 2022	Spring 2023	Summer 2023
SENIF	311	382	230	256	301	296	361	493	281
DAF	9	7	6	16	4	6	21	18	21

The take-up of SEN Inclusion Funding (SENIF) supplements remain steady for Blackburn with Darwen, with a significant increase of claims for the Disability Access Funding (DAF) (Fig 15).

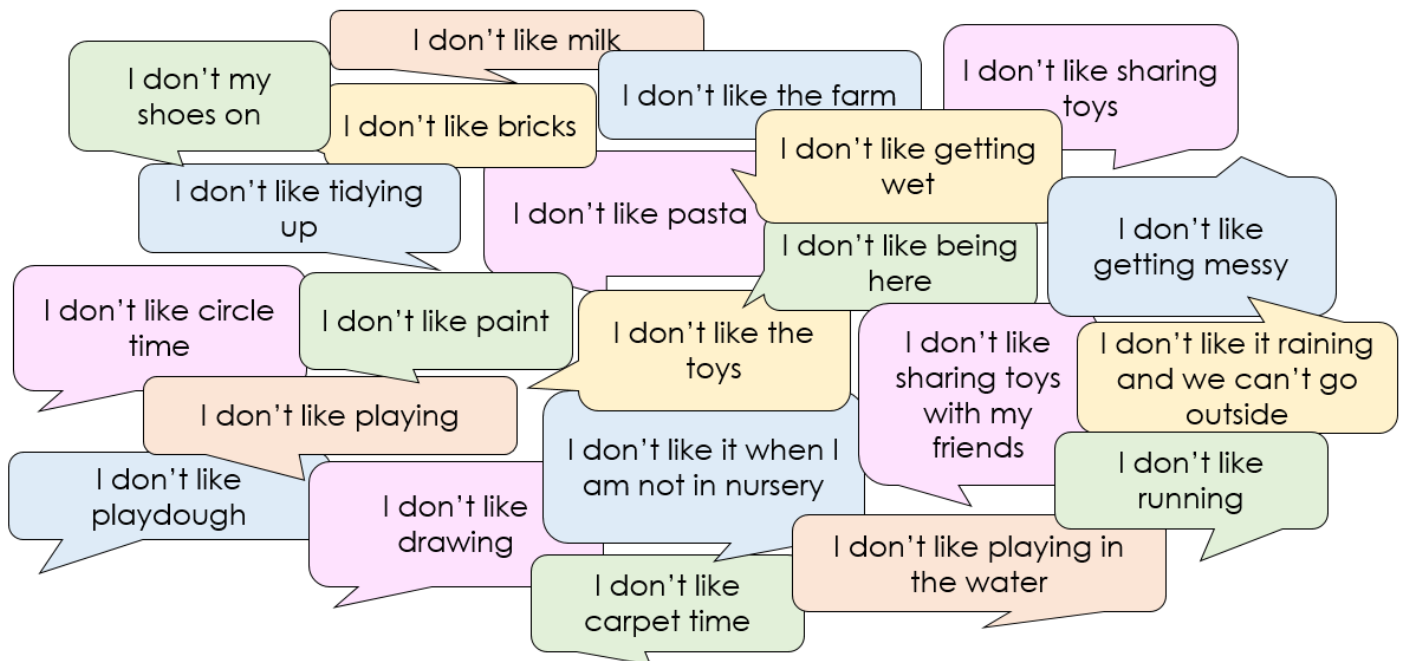
15. Children's Voices

As part of the childcare sufficiency we wanted to seek the views and opinions of those that use the childcare services, so who better to ask than the children. We asked childcare practitioners to ask three questions to the children, the responses are outlined below.

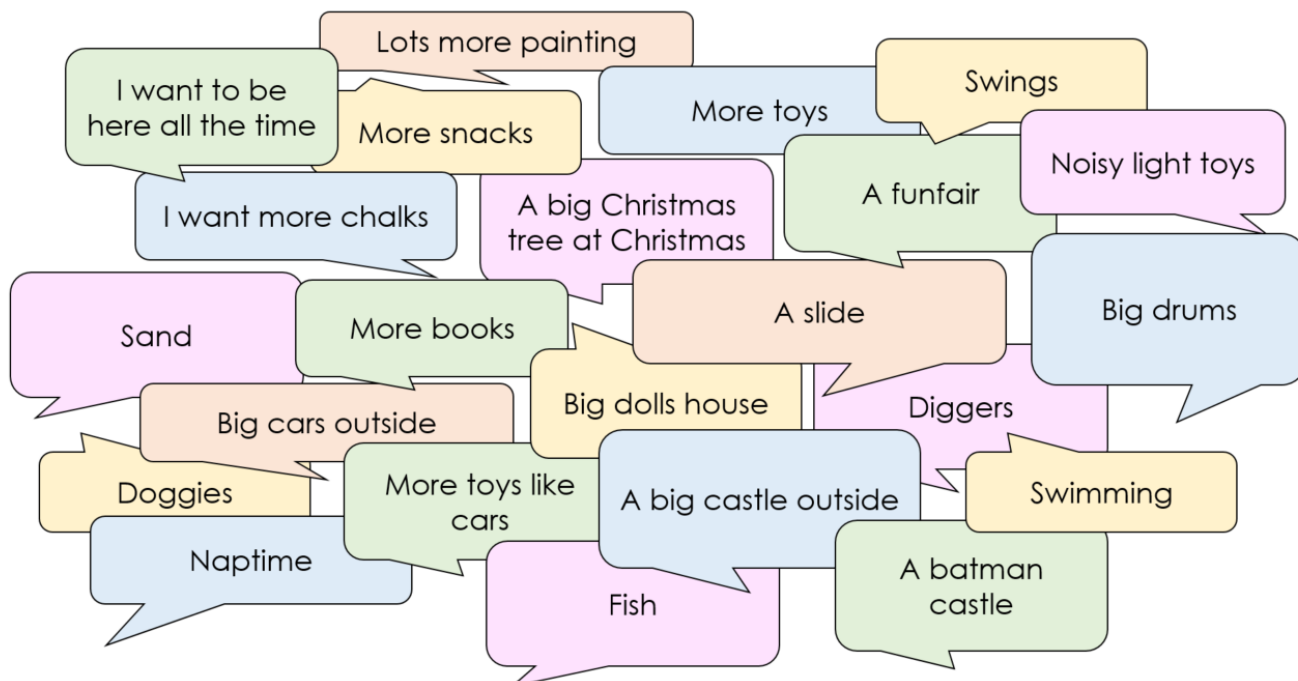
1. What do you like about nursery?



2. What do you NOT like about nursery?



3. What would you like to see or do differently at nursery?



16. Parent's Voices

Questionnaires were conducted via two different methods, from which parents and carers could choose. All methods were conducted using the same questions in a multiple choice format.

- Face-to-face interviewing – in the children's centres.
- Microsoft Forms online questionnaire.

Face-to-face interviews were carried out over the summer of 2023, within randomly selected Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) sessions at the children centres across Blackburn with Darwen. Interpreters were provided where required.

The Microsoft Forms online questionnaire was available for one month, the link was sent out via the children's centre to all parents/carers registered.

Responses were limited, with only 25 returns. This is likely due to the questionnaire being conducted during the summer holidays. This needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the data and questionnaires need to be conducted throughout the academic year in the future.

16.1. Parental Views.

Parents were asked whether they knew the Ofsted rating of the childcare providers they use and whether that has any bearing on their choice of provider. The results showed that 50% of parents and carers knew the Ofsted rating (therefore 50% did not), and similarly 52% said that their knowledge influenced their choice of childcare provider. When asked whether their main provider is their first choice, again 50% got their first choice and 50% did not. This is unlikely to be due to lack of vacancies, but more likely that the provider cannot accommodate the days or hours needed by some parents.

Parents were asked how easy it was to get a childcare place (Fig 16), the results were similar across the board with 54.6% of parents and carers stating that they found it "Very Easy" or "Easy" to get a childcare place (27.3% for each category). Parents and carers that did not find it easy or hard, were

also totalled at 27.3%. 18% of parents and carers did find the process of getting a childcare place difficult, however no one found it very difficult.

On discussion with parents and carers, the main topic of conversation was the cost of childcare and how they were struggling to pay for the childcare provision, despite some receiving financial help. Over half of the people interviewed (56.5%) found paying for childcare difficult or very difficult, compared to 17.4% of parents and carers who did not. This links with over a quarter of parents and carers using family friends and family members rather than formal childcare providers, to enable them to keep the costs down (Fig 18).

Figure 15: How easy was it to get a childcare place?

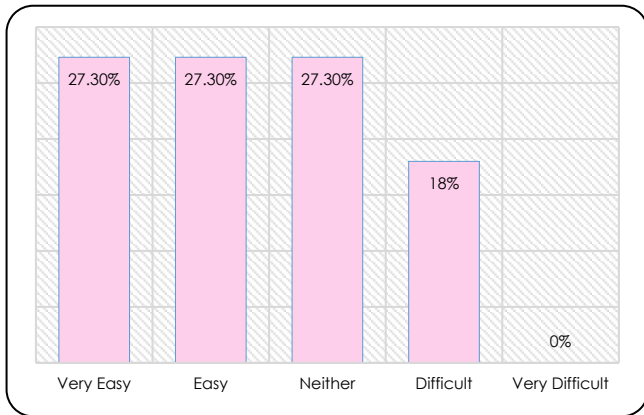


Figure 16: How difficult do you find paying for childcare?

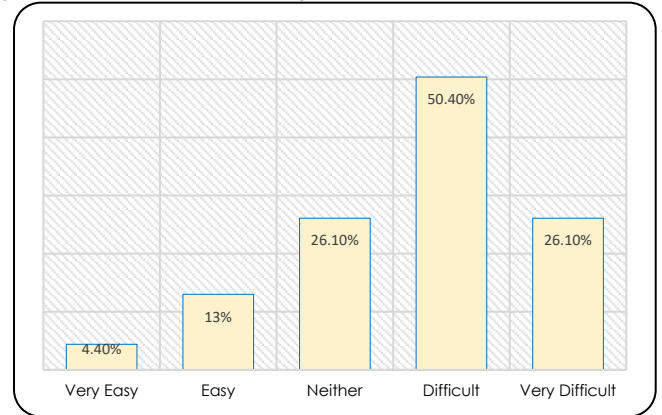
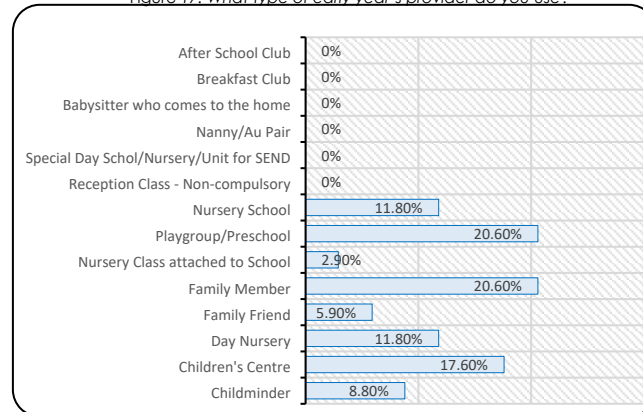


Figure 17: What type of early year's provider do you use?



The number of hours of childcare per week that parents and carers are using, is surprising low. 44% use less than 5 hours of childcare, this could be directly linked to the cost of childcare and the rising cost of living. In comparison only 8% used 30 hours and over, with the majority of parents and carers (32%), used 10 – 19.9 hours per week. This is expected as 16% of the parents and carers interviewed were eligible for the 3 and 4 year old Funded Early education (FEE) place (Fig 20), which gives them 15 hours free. 52% of parents and carers however were not in receipt of any free childcare (their child being under 3 at the time of the questionnaire).

Figure 18: How many hours of childcare do you use per week?

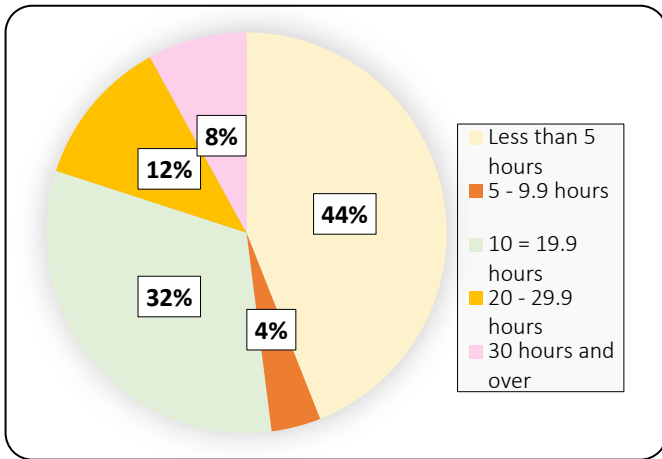
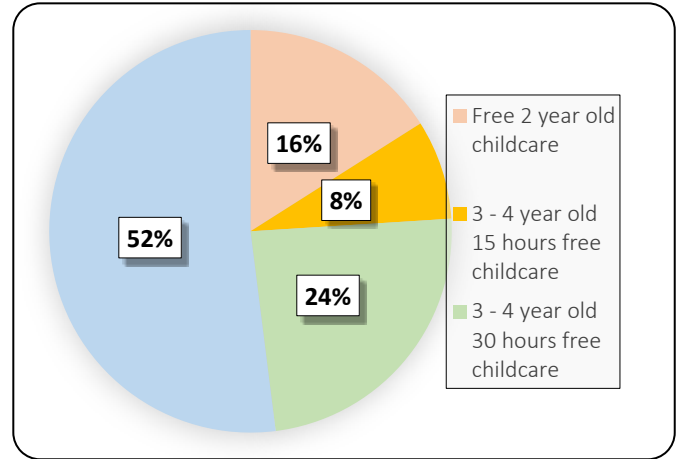
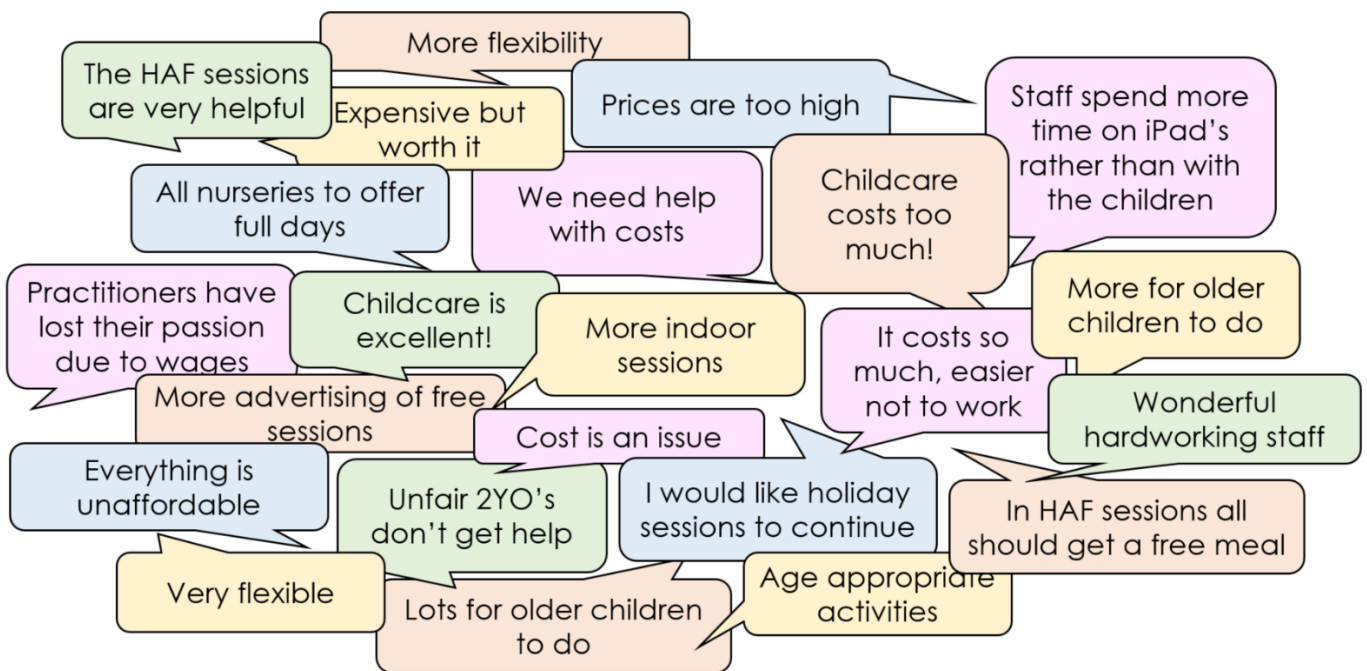


Figure 19: Are you in receipt of any of the following?



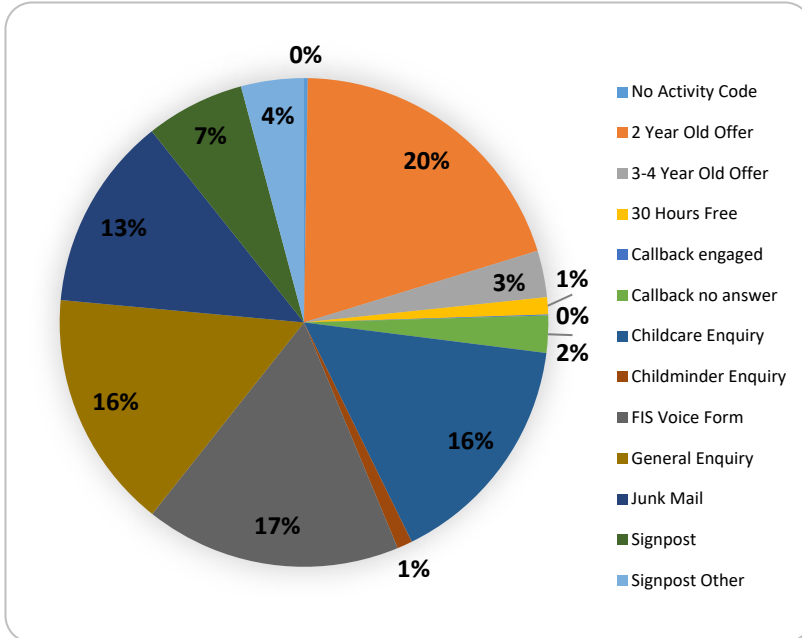
Parents and carers were asked what their perceptions were of their own childcare arrangements in relation to it being flexible enough to fit their needs. A majority of 72% stated that they have no problems finding childcare that is flexible enough to fit their needs and that left 28% that felt that there was limited flexibility. Finally parents and carers were asked if they had any additional comments regarding the childcare provision within Blackburn with Darwen.



17. Family Information

Blackburn with Darwen provide a family information service, which offers information, advice and guidance on a range of childcare services, early learning and other children's services, for example early years provider information, out-of-school clubs and parent and toddler groups. The family information service can be contacted through telephone, email and web-chat. In the past 12 months the majority of enquires have been regarding the 2 year old offer (20%), family information service voice forms (17%), followed by childcare enquires and general enquiries (16%) (Fig 21).

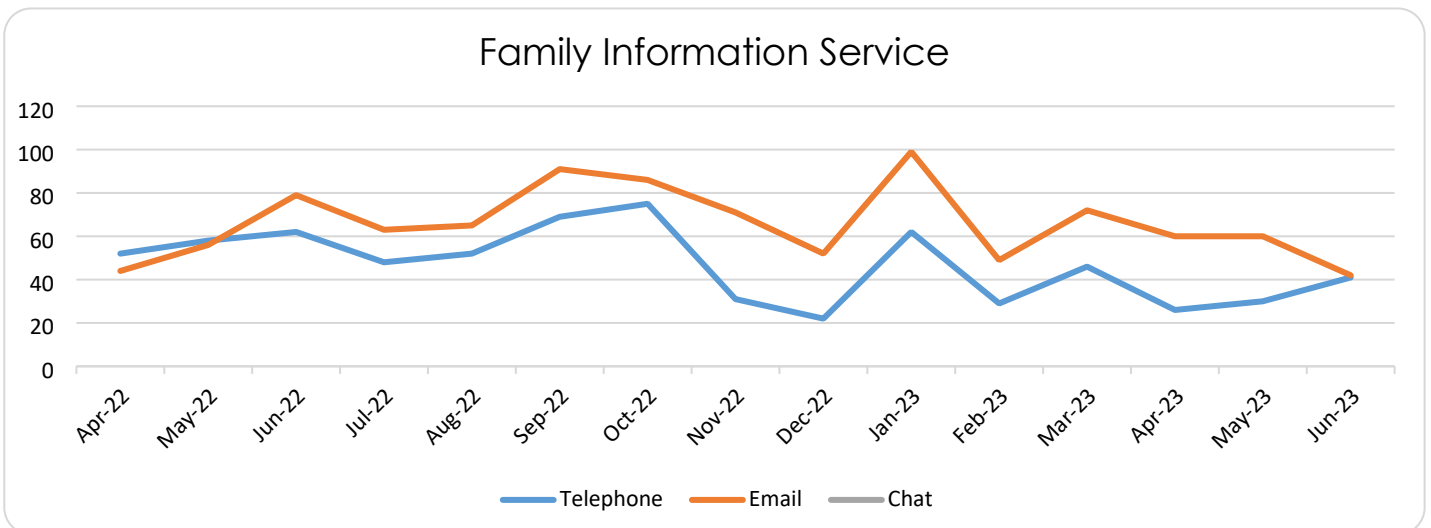
Figure 20: Family Information Service Contact Breakdown



and web-chat. In the past 12 months the majority of enquires have been regarding the 2 year old offer (20%), family information service voice forms (17%), followed by childcare enquires and general enquiries (16%) (Fig 21).

The main form of contact for the family information service has been through email and there are times in the year when this service is at its most busy (Fig 22) which is around the September, December to January and March. This fits in with when parents and carers are required to update their eligibility codes for their universal and extended entitlements.

Figure 21: Contact with the family Information Service over the last 12 months



18. Action Plan 2023/2024

The 2023 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, produced by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council have highlighted a number of recommendations including:

- **Recommendation One:** To work in partnership with early education childcare providers to deliver the governments agenda for the expanded entitlements for children aged from 9 months.
- **Recommendation Two:** Continue to undertake termly reviews of vacancy levels across the borough to monitor any significant changes.
- **Recommendation Three:** Address the shortfall of responses regarding the provision of out of school childcare places for children of statutory school age to understand the true levels of supply. This will be picked up with the new wraparound entitlements in 2024.
- **Recommendation Four:** Ensure sufficient data is completed by all provider and up-to-date so a clear picture can be given of places available, age groups and timings of providers.

19. Glossary

CIN	Child In Need.
CM	Childminder
CP	Child Protection.
DAF	Disability Access Fund. A one-off payment of £828 per year. The fund is for three and four year old children who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and accessing funded early education. The purpose of the fund is to help childcare providers make reasonable adjustments within their provision to support children with a disability to fully participate in early education.
DEP 1 (Postcodes)	Children living within the 20% most deprived postcode areas in Blackburn with Darwen receive an additional 24p per funded hour.
DEP 2 (CP/CIN)	Children who are on a Child Protection or Child in Need Plan will receive an additional 62p per funded hour.
DfE	Department for Education.
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care.
EY Census	Early Years Census. Statutory data collection which takes place every January about early years providers that receive government funding for two, three and four year olds. Census submissions are used by the Department of Education (DfE) and the Education Funding Agency (EFA) to determine how much funding each local authority is allocated.
EYPP	Early Years Pupil Premium. Eligible three and four year old children receive an additional 62p per universal funded hour to support their individual learning.
Extended Entitlement	30 hours free childcare is available for families who meet the national eligibility criteria up to a maximum of 1140 hours per year. (This is an additional 15 extended hours of childcare per week on top of the standard 15 universal hour's entitlement).
FEE	Funded Early Education
FTE	Full Time Equivalent childcare place. The local authority calculates Full Time Equivalent childcare places based on 50 hours childcare per week.
LEA	Local Education Authority childcare provider (includes maintained nursery schools, maintained nursery classes in a school and children's centres)
PVI	Private, Voluntary and Independent childcare provider

SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SENIF	Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (low level/emerging needs). Funding is allocated as a one-off payment of £894.73. Funding is to support early year's providers in meeting the needs of children aged three and four years old who are assessed against the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) at a development level of 16 to 26 months in one or more of the primary areas of learning.
Universal Entitlement	All three and four year old children are automatically eligible for 15 free hours of funded early education per week, up to a maximum of 570 hours a year.

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