



Key Early Years messages for leaders

Autumn 2025-26

Michelle Jenkins

Early Years and Childcare Quality
Improvement Manager

Sharon Hunt

Lead Early Years Advisory Teacher

Early.Years@Oxfordshire.gov.uk



2025-26 National Context

Breakfast Clubs

Early years foundation stage statutory framework

For group and school-based providers

Setting the standards for learning,
development and care for children from
birth to five

Dated: 14 July 2025
Effective: 01 September 2025



Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance

Guidance for group and school-based
providers and childminders in England

April 2025

**BEST
START
IN LIFE**



The writing framework

July 2025

School Based Nurseries

Family Hubs

The
Wraparound
Programme

The Early Entitlements



School Based Nurseries

Phase 2 bidding round (Sept-Dec 25)

DfE Webinar for Schools - Thursday 16 October 10 am register at [Microsoft Virtual Events Powered by Teams](#)

Schools apply direct to the DfE with evidence of LA approval

3rd November 2025 (noon)- LA Expressions of Interest deadline

DfE application deadline 11 December (5pm)

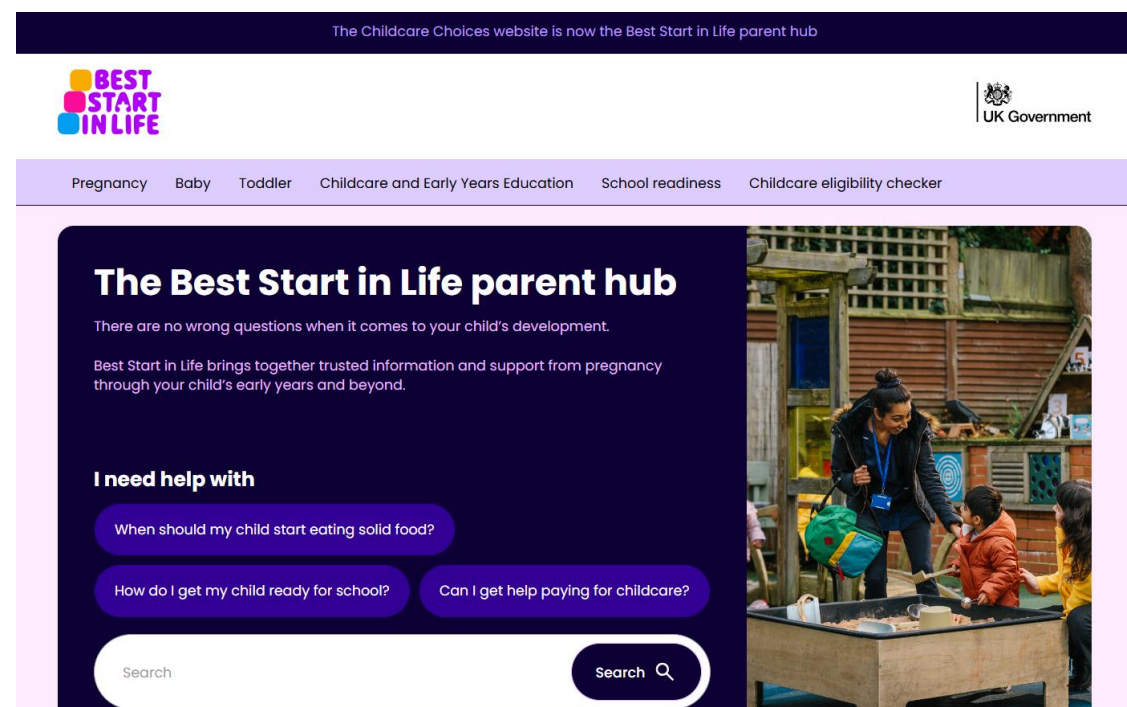
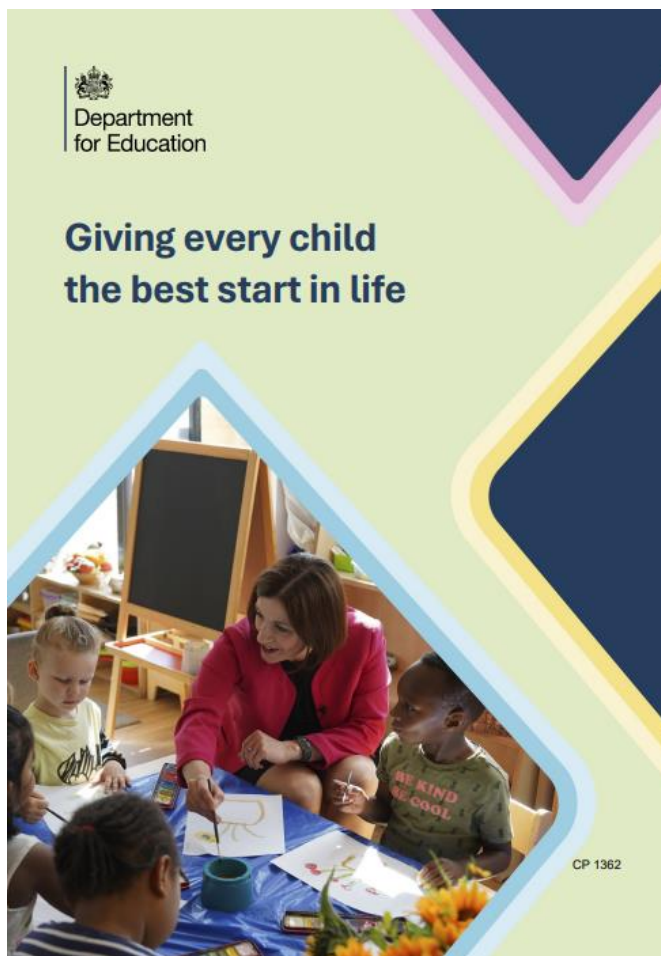
Grants for schools to apply for up to £150k to create new early years places for:

- Nursery classes in a primary school
- Maintained Nursery Schools
- Nursery units led by governors or academy trusts
- Childminders, private, voluntary and independent (pvi) early years places operating on a school site

Increased focus on supporting nursery access by disadvantaged families

For more information e mail: school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Giving every child the best start in life - GOV.UK





The DfE's ambition:

“Life shouldn't come down to luck. So this new government is on a mission to spread opportunity far and wide, to give every single child the best life chances.” The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education and minister for Women and Equalities.

“We will measure our progress through **75%** of 5-year-olds reaching a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage assessment – which looks at children's development across areas like language, personal, social and emotional development, and maths and literacy – **by 2028**.”

This is an increase from **67.7%** currently and would mean an additional 40,000 to 45,000 children a year hitting developmental goals”.



Best Start and GLD target


HM Government

Oxfordshire County Council

7 August 2025

Dear Martin Reeves,

I am delighted to be writing to you following the publication of [‘Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life’](#) on 7 July, which set out this government’s strategy for meeting the ambitious target of a record proportion of children starting school ready to learn, first announced in [‘Plan for Change’](#). We want to work with you so that by 2028 75% of 5-year-olds in England reach a good level of development (GLD) in the early years’ foundation stage. That is between 40,000 and 45,000 additional children being ready for school.

This is a collective endeavour and improvements can only be achieved through working with a range of partners across the early years system in health, family services, education and childcare. You, as local system leaders, have a critical role to play.

The action needed to tackle the barriers that hold children back will be different from place to place. Local knowledge and expertise are essential to drive forward this agenda. This letter highlights your role in delivering the strategy, including the proposed target for your local authority, and the statutory process for finalising these this year.

Local area targets

The draft Local Government Outcomes Framework (published on 3 July) includes the proportion of children achieving GLD at the end of reception as an outcome measure.

[Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life](#) confirmed that we will also set a specific statutory numerical target for each local authority. The department will follow the process for setting targets for local authorities that is set out in the Local Authority Targets (Well-being of Young Children) Regulations 2007. In accordance with the Childcare Act 2006, local authorities are under a duty to then act in a manner best calculated to secure that such targets are met.

The statutory target for your local authority will be considered “achieved” if the following two conditions are met:

- a) The proportion of children in Oxfordshire County Council achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the 2027/28 academic year is at least 77.8%; and
- b) Disadvantaged children have benefitted *at least equally* from this improvement; that is, that the proportion of children eligible¹ for Free School Meals (FSM) and achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the 2027/28 academic year is at least 50.8%².

This is of course the minimum expectation. The Government believes all children deserve the Best Start in Life, and we know that this ambition is shared by local leaders and professionals. Once children reach school, the disadvantage gap persists and widens, two-fifths³ of the FSM disadvantage gap among children at age 16 is already present by age 5. Your local authority must

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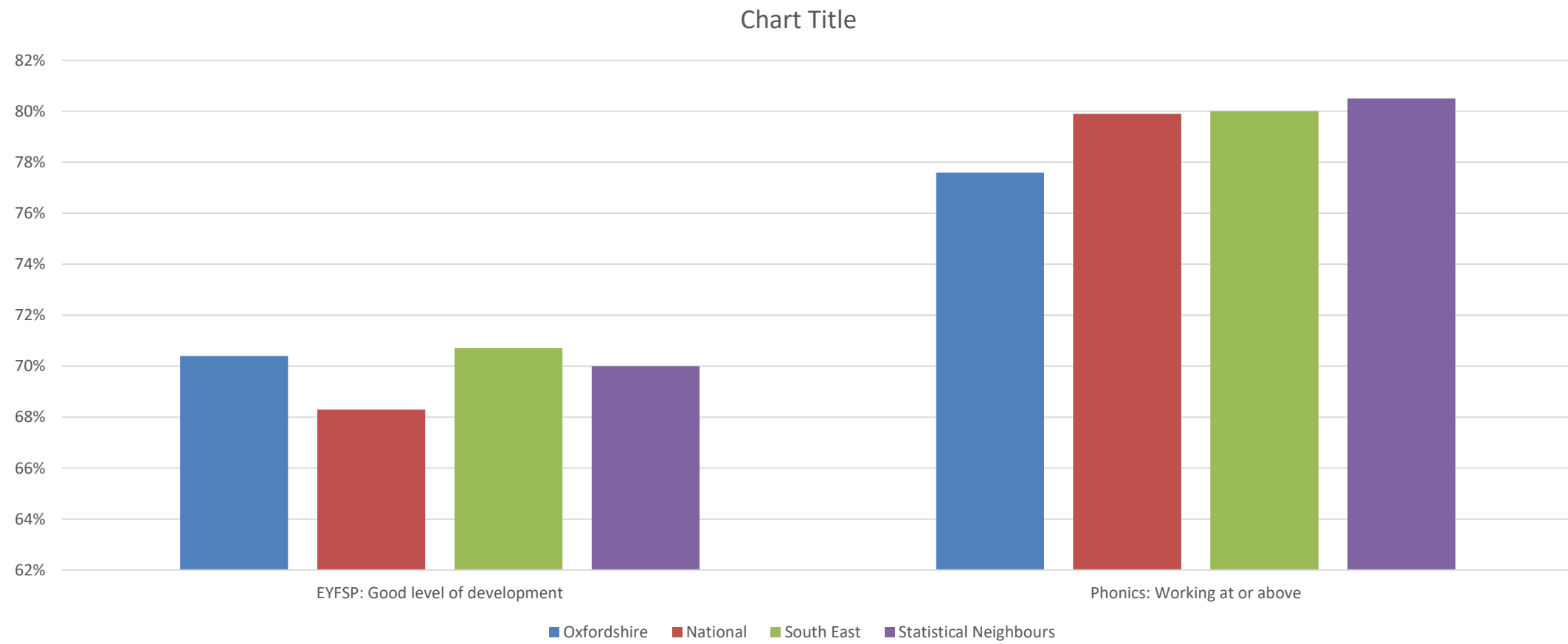


Bigger picture

- Oxfordshire Public Health - increasing the number of 2.5-year-old checks conducted by Health Visitors
- Family Hubs – development looking at parenting programmes and supporting families across Oxfordshire
- Early Help and Intervention
- Oxford is becoming a Marmot Place



Attainment –Academic Year 2024/25 (provisional)





Local and National Data - provisional

A Good Level of Development (all children)

	2025	2024
Oxfordshire	70.4%	68.8%
National	68.3%	67.7%
Statistical Neighbours	70.0%	67.7%

A Good Level of Development – Free School Meal Children (FSM)

	2025	2024
Oxfordshire	43.8%	42.1%
National	51.3%	51.5%
Statistical Neighbours	46.8%	47.9%

Phonics Screening – Year 1 (all children)

	2025	2024
Oxfordshire	77.6%	79%
National	79.6%	80%
Statistical Neighbours	80.5%	80%



FSM data analysis 2025

Children at risk of not attaining a Good Level of Development:

- Boys in receipt of Free School Meals
- SEND and or EAL in receipt of Free School Meals
- Summer born children in receipt of Free School Meals

Improving outcome for all children in the Early Years:

Oxfordshire will provide:

- Continuing Professional Development for Reception and Year 1 staff and Leaders, including governors
- Peer to Peer Sessions facilitated by the LA for reception teachers
- Guidance on the ELGs and EYFS Profile including toolkits
- Wellcomm
- Targeted programs such as Tots Talking, Talk Boost
- 50 Things to do before you are 5 App for parents
- Phonological Awareness NEW resource

Oxfordshire Early Years Quality Improvement Team

'Making a Difference in Reception'



Reception is a vital foundation year that sets children up for success throughout primary school and beyond.

[Giving every child the best start in life](#)

Using the provisional data available to us, we have identified the areas where outcomes have been consistently lower for some children. In line with the newly published aspirational aims for all children, we have used this information to develop a brand-new training package, at no charge, with an aim to support reception teachers and headteachers to:

- Identify barriers to learning early
- Use assessment effectively to support all children
- Incorporate inclusive learning opportunities into daily routines
- Facilitate rapid progress where needed



6 sessions run across the 25/26 academic year. No charge.

Join us online, 3.30 to 5pm on:



1. Monday 6th October 2025
2. Monday 17th November 2025
3. Monday 12th January 2026
4. Monday 2nd March 2026
5. Monday 20th April 2026
6. Monday 1st June 2026

Book via [Making a difference in reception | Oxfordshire | Education Services](#)



Early years foundation stage profile handbook - GOV.UK

- EYFSP data submitted from the summer term in 2026 onwards will be available in Analyse School Performance (ASP) a secure web-based platform accessible via Department for Education Sign-in from the end of the 2026 autumn term. Schools will be able to view their own school-level data within this platform, including the percentage of children reaching a good level of development and the percentage of children at the expected level for each early learning goal.
- Ofsted will also have access to the same school level EYFSP data that is available in ASP. As stated above, this will apply to EYFSP data submitted from the summer term in 2026 onwards and therefore will feature in Ofsted's inspection data summary report (IDSR) from the end of the 2026 autumn term. EYFSP data will be used as a starting point for conversations during inspection, including how schools use the data to support transitions from reception into key stage 1.
- From September 2025, using EYFSP data from the 2021 to 2022 academic year onwards, the DfE will also share school-level EYFSP data on the view your education data (VYED) platform, as part of plans to give all schools, local authorities and trusts better insight to inform improvements in early years. Responsible bodies (trusts and local authorities) will also have access to school-level and aggregated data for their schools. The data, analysis and insight available on this platform will continue to improve through 2025 to 2026 and beyond. Ofsted will not have access to the EYFSP data in the VYED platform.



Transition between Reception and Year 1

School:

Do Year 1 teachers and Reception teachers moderate together at the end of the year?

Do Year 1 teachers and senior leaders understand what 'expected' looks like at the end of Reception? – particularly in writing.

Has the school considered how to best reduce cognitive load and overwhelm for the children at the start of Year 1? How can the potential clash of pedagogical approaches between Early Years and Y1 be avoided or diminished?

Does the school have a robust transition programme in place? Do Y1 teachers really know their new children?



Staff:

Have Y1 staff seen, and studied, the end reception phonics assessment data? Will this information help inform their groupings for Autumn term 1?

How do teaching staff ensure that all children continue to make progress from their end point in Reception? Are Y1 teachers able to clearly see where Reception children finished the year – not just whether they were ‘emerging’ or ‘expected’?

Do Year 1 teachers read end of year Reception reports?

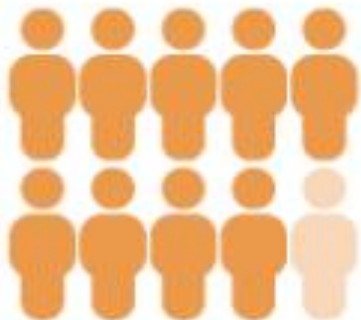
Children:

How has the school ensured that the children are ready for the transition between phases? Are the children familiar with their new environment? Do the children know their new teachers? Would some children benefit from using a social story to aid with transition?



Children's early language development is the foundation upon which all future success is built.





Approximately 10% of children and young people have long-term SLCN which cause them significant difficulties with communication or learning in everyday life



Children from socially disadvantaged families are more than twice as likely to be identified with a SLCN. Due to social clustering, more than 50% of children living in areas of high social deprivation may start school with SLCN

Prevalence

**Speech and
Language UK**



Changing young lives.



Why Speech, language and Communication in the Early Years?

Early language as measured by the EYFS profile is predictive of scores in reading, writing and maths at the end of KS1 and into Year 3.

Language skills at age five have been found to be more predictive of reading skills at age eleven than other factors such as behaviour, peer relationships, attention, emotional wellbeing and pro-social behaviour.



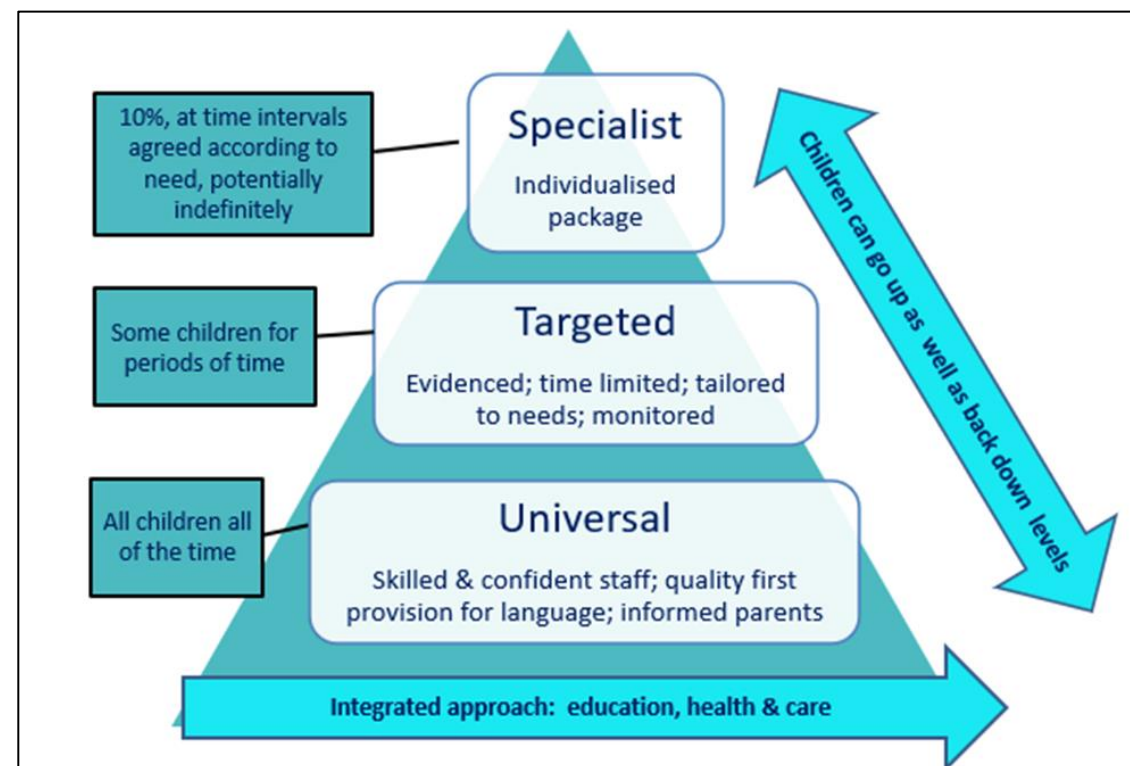
Consequences of speech and language challenges



Speech and Language UK 
Changing young lives.

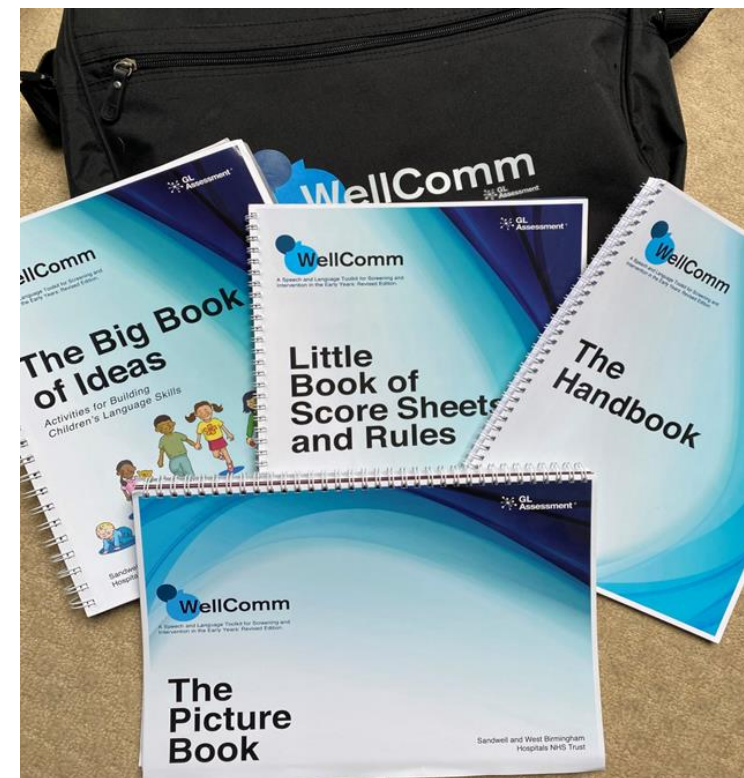
We are working with Speech and Language UK to develop an early language pathway

**Speech and
Language UK** 
Changing young lives.



Improving early identification in Oxfordshire

- We are committed to using WellComm as a universal screening tool in Oxfordshire for children aged birth to 5
- A WellComm toolkit has been provided for every nursery setting in Oxfordshire (2021). This includes PVI settings and school nurseries.
- Childminders have access to WellComm digital
- Free access for all to a digital data tool
- Primary School WellComm pilot
- There is multi-agency buy in – Speech and Language Therapy, Health visiting, EY SEND
- Standalone training from GL assessment is available [here](#).
- Free training available for EY practitioners via [Education Services](#).





Supporting children with SEND

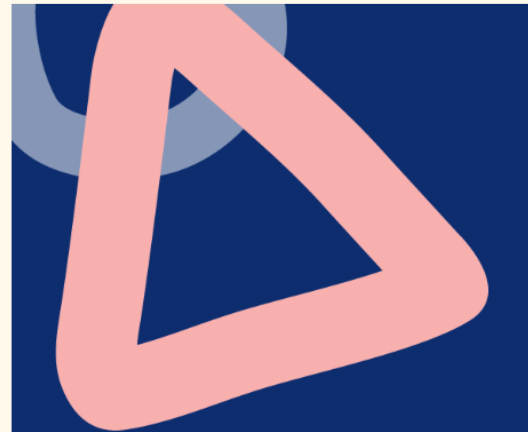
Oxfordshire

SEND local offer

Support and services for children and young people with additional needs from 0-25.



I am a parent or carer



I am a young person



I am a professional



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL



Language Leads

The aim of a 'Language Lead' approach is to improve universal early language provision within every early years setting in Oxfordshire by establishing a named practitioner with a responsibility for communication and language.





Early language assessment and resources available

Birth to five

	ASQ 2 years	WellComm	How Babies learn to talk	Talking to your toddler webinar	Early Talk Boost	Tots Talking	ASQ 4 years
Birth to 1 year							
1 year to 2 years							
2 years to 3 years							
3 years to 4 years							
4 years to 5 years							



The importance of
early language
nutrition...



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

Phonics – a pause for thought...

- What was your PSC outcome this year? Was this typical for your school? Does it feel representative of the same cohort's GLD at the end of their Reception year? What % of the year 1 cohort achieved the reading ELG in 2024?
- Does your current scheme still match the needs of your school? Do you feel you need to switch schemes to better meet the needs of your cohorts? Did you know that there is DFE funding available to enable this?
- Do your year 2 staff continue to deliver your chosen phonics scheme to ensure that children fully embed their phonetic knowledge and develop reading fluency?
- When did you last audit your phonics provision?
- Is everyone in school trained? Including the head?
- Does your school need a phonics review?

0118 987 2585
ewoodward@whitknightsenglishhub.org.uk
www.whitknightsenglishhub.org.uk
Fairlawn Green, Strimfield Rise,
Reading, RG2 8EP



A promotional poster for a free DFE funded reading audit. The background shows a stack of books and a blurred image of a person reading. The text is in bold, pink and orange colors. It says 'BOOK YOUR FREE DFE FUNDED READING AUDIT WITH US' and 'AND YOUR SCHOOL COULD RECEIVE UP TO £6000 IN FUNDING'. There is a quote from a 'Wave 4 Partner School' that says 'A brilliant experience and I would recommend the programme of support for any school looking to improve their phonics provision.' At the bottom, it says '*£100 supply cost available for time spent with us during the audit.'



Some of the right questions to ask your reading/phonics lead about your school's provision for phonics?

- Use the audits from the Reading and Writing frameworks
- Do staff access current and relevant CPD to ensure a robust deliver of their scheme? Are all staff trained in the scheme, including
- Time for monitoring
- Consistency
- Fidelity
- Quality of teaching
- Outcomes



Connections between staff



Leadership

Delegation

Monitoring

Avoiding disconnections

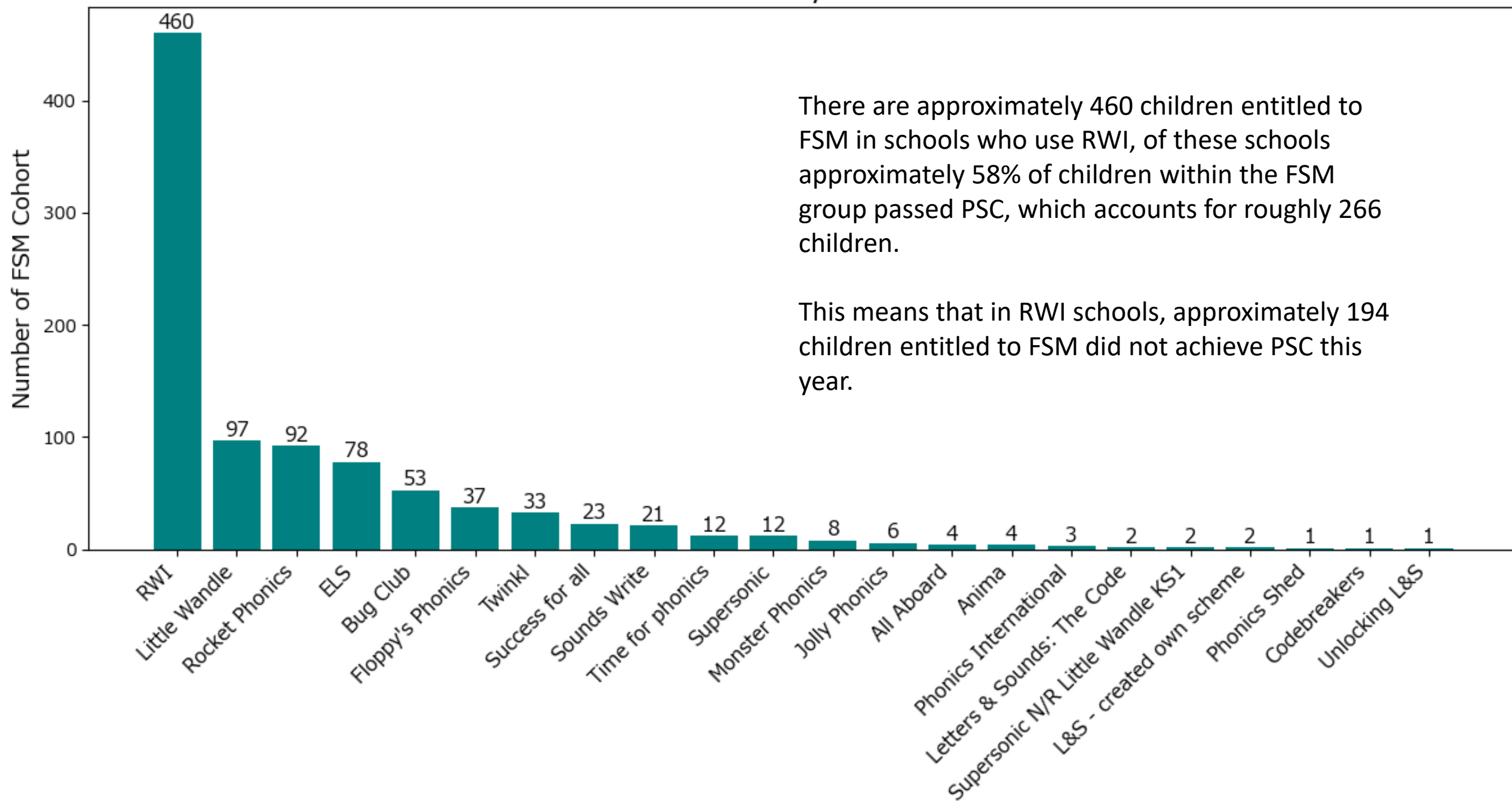
Transition



Phonics and your most vulnerable children

- SEND – even with non-verbal children, research has shown that regular exposure to high quality phonics teaching broken down into small steps enables progress.
- Disadvantaged children – consider each individual child's needs and situation, if there are attendance and punctuality barriers, how do you ensure that they access daily phonics teaching?

Total FSM Cohort by Phonics Scheme





EAL children

- Assess understanding, communication and language, i.e. with Wellcomm, using an interpreter/parent to support and identify understanding and development of language if necessary.
- Phonological awareness activities are key to enabling children to make accelerated progress alongside the phonics programme, this includes children with EAL who join in KS1 or 2.

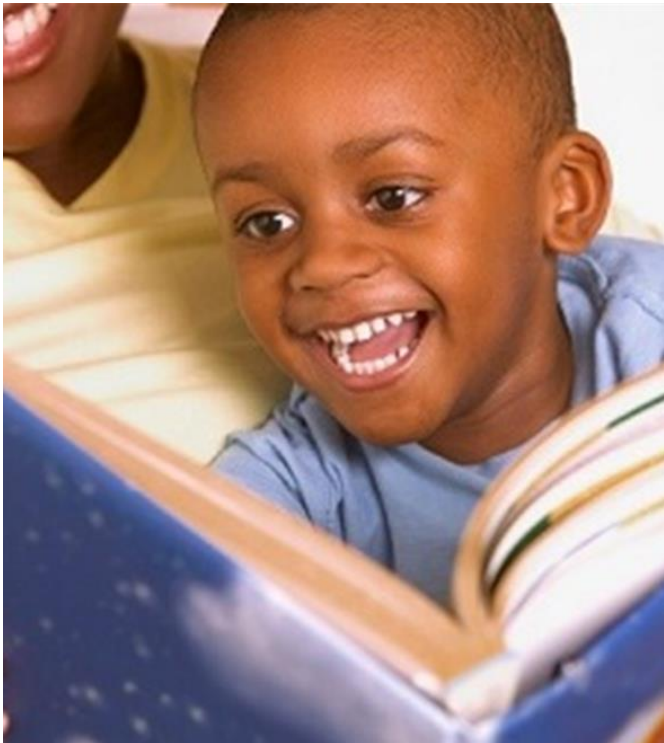


Additional documents to help:

- [Guidance for Early Years practitioners on supporting children learning English as an Additional L...](#)
- [Myth-busting: Bilingualism / English as an additional language - Speech and Language UK: Changing...](#)



What comes before phonics?



- **Phonological awareness** develops as part of children's overall speech and language from birth if they have had rich early language nutrition.
- **Phonemic awareness** is the ability to notice and play with individual blocks of sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.
- ***Without strong phonological awareness children are unable to fully access phonics whatever their age or stage***



What is...Phonological Awareness?

Phonological awareness relates **only** to speech sounds: the sounds we hear when language is spoken.

It does not involve the letters of the alphabet, spelling or whole words.

It does not involve reading or writing: it is a listening skill, not a reading skill.

Phonological awareness is the most important prerequisite for learning to read.

Phonological awareness is not the same as phonics.

Playing with sounds together

Developing Phonological Awareness in Oxfordshire



Draft booklet for pilot scheme
Early Years Quality Team
Oxfordshire County Council
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- The importance of early language nutrition
- What is Phonological Awareness?
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- Curriculum and planning
- Helping children learn to listen
- Games and activities to support Phonological Awareness
 - Listening to different sounds
 - Rhythm, rhyme and sound patterns
 - Playing with voice sounds
 - Hearing the first sound in words
 - Identifying syllables in words
 - Hearing individual sounds in words
- Useful Websites for resources
- Glossary of terms
- Appendices – including planning and tracking templates





Please book now via [Education Services through this link.](#)

Monday	13/10	10am- 12pm	Kidlington
Monday	13/10	4-6pm	Bicester
Thursday	16/10	10am – 12pm	Didcot
Thursday	16/10	4-6pm	Wantage
Monday	20/10	10am – 12pm	Witney
Monday	20/10	4-6pm	Woodstock
Thursday	23/10	10-12pm	Henley
Thursday	23/10	4-6pm	Watlington
Wednesday	5/11	2-4pm	Banbury
Thursday	6/11	4-6pm	Chipping Norton
Monday	10/11	10-12pm	Oxford
Monday	10/11	4-6pm	Kidlington
Monday	17/11	10am-12pm	Thame
Monday	17/11	4-6pm	Abingdon
Tuesday	25/11	4-6pm	Faringdon
Tuesday	18/11	6.30-8.30pm	Online session