

Childcare Sufficiency in Merton Annual Report 2020



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Introduction

London Borough of Merton has a statutory duty under Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 to work in partnership with childcare providers to influence childcare provision, as far as is practicable, to ensure that there is sufficient childcare for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 to 14 years or up to 18 for disabled children.

An annual assessment and subsequent report are produced and published to fulfil this statutory requirement.

Sufficient, high quality childcare is not only a vital part of the local economy and can support regeneration, but ensures that families can access the right type of childcare to meet their needs that enables them to seek work or maintain their employment. In addition, a market that can offer high quality, accessible and affordable childcare has the potential to contribute to the reduction of child poverty.

Evidence shows that high-quality Early Years provision has a positive and lasting effect on children's outcomes, future learning and life chances - regardless of the economic circumstances of their parents. Therefore, high quality childcare supports the Local Authority in its role to improve the wellbeing of young children and reduce inequalities between them.

In this report, we share this year's assessment of the sufficiency of Merton's childcare market place and the actions lay out our intention for managing any shortfall in a specific type or need in the borough.

This Childcare Sufficiency Report is subject to review and endorsement by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Name	Signed	Date of Signature
<i>Councillor Eleanor Stringer</i> <i>Cabinet Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Merton</i>		28 January 2021

Summary of key findings

The global coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has affected the childcare sector significantly since March 2020. Despite the challenges, providers of childcare and education for children aged under 5 in Merton have responded well and have met the many demands face-on. An amazing 66% of the sector who were allowed to remain open did so. These providers supplied care for children of key workers and for vulnerable children throughout the lockdown period. Of those that closed, the vast majority are now open again, albeit having to deliver their services differently in some cases.

Merton's childcare sector has suffered during the pandemic, like in other areas across the country, and two group childcare providers confirmed the permanent closure of their businesses at the end of August 2020 because the situation made their businesses unsustainable.

The London Borough of Merton retains good levels of childcare despite this very difficult period. Providers continue to be able to offer a level of flexibility that meets the needs of parents. Throughout the pandemic, Merton's Early Years providers responded exceptionally with a high level of professionalism to make sure that, wherever possible, they were able to maintain a service for children of key workers and vulnerable children.

The population of Merton's under-fives will continue to decrease over the next five years. This is likely to reduce the demand for childcare. In addition, the population of children of primary school age (5-11 years old) is also falling.

The number of families with children claiming out-of-work benefits continued to fall according to the latest data from the DWP (published in 2018). However, it is likely that the coronavirus pandemic will impact on the employment and work patterns of some Merton families in the next year, which we would anticipate to affect the demand for childcare.

Merton's take-up of funded early education for two-year-olds remains steady (58% in January 2020). This means that we are in the mid-range compared to our statistical neighbours. However, since January, there has not been a Headcount to tally up the number of two-year-olds in provision. However, estimates provided by providers for the autumn term indicate that take-up is falling. In a recent survey, 46% of Merton's Early Education providers stated that they have fewer two-year-olds than they did at the same point in 2019. The Early Years team at Merton Council will keep the numbers under review and work closely with the sector to consider what type of support may be required.

Take-up of the Universal Entitlement for 3 and 4-year-olds remains reasonably stable. This may be because over 70% of children take up a place in maintained

school nursery classes. However, 43% of private, voluntary and independent providers state that they will have fewer children taking up a place in the autumn term 2020. A key reason given is that many parents are working from home and do not necessarily require a full day of childcare. Take-up of the Extended Entitlement (30 hours) has increased compared to the previous year and there is still sufficient supply to meet demand across the borough.

Childcare costs continue to rise, with the average hourly cost of a place at a day nursery / preschool rising by 6% this year and by 4% for childminders. Providers continue to say that Early Education funding rates are substantially below the actual costs of delivering childcare in London.

Information about the range of childcare services for children with SEND is available via the [Merton Local Offer website](#). Additional information about how childcare providers can support children is supplied and is searchable to help families find providers who may be able to support their child's specific needs.

17 Merton early years practitioners achieved the Level 3 qualification *Working with Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities* provided via the Local Authority this year, even though half of the course had to be delivered online.

The quality of childcare provision in the borough is consistently high.

Key findings are based on data covering 1 August 2019 to 31 July 2020 unless otherwise indicated. Data sources are indexed by numbers and details can be found at the end of this report.

Actions undertaken academic year 2019 - 20

Demand

- Throughout the peak of the coronavirus outbreak in early / mid 2020, Ofsted registered childcare providers received daily bulletins from the Local Authority containing specific and relevant information, advice and guidance to make sure they had the most up-to-date information at a time where guidance was changing on an almost daily basis.
- The [Family Services Directory](#) was updated constantly during the outbreak, showing which settings had a coronavirus status of open or closed to the children of key workers and vulnerable children. This helped parents who were key workers to find alternative childcare quickly and easily, especially when their usual provider had to close.

Supply

- The tender process completed for a pre-school at Newminster Children's Centre in Ravensbury ward, increasing the number of places in that ward by 20. The start date was delayed due to the coronavirus outbreak, but it has now opened and is offering essential places to local children.
- In February 2020, Merton Council organised a Local Authority network meeting with five neighbouring boroughs to agree data sharing protocols for funded early education places for two-year-olds. This shared data will increase local knowledge on the number of eligible in total who are taking up their funded early education place.

Childcare costs

- During the coronavirus outbreak from March 2020, families were supported via the [Merton Information for Families Facebook page](#) with key messages linked to childcare and fun activities they could do with their children while in lockdown. The reach of the Facebook page increased from 202 families on 20 March 2020 to 545 families by 1 July 2020. In addition, the service fielded a high volume of calls and emails from families seeking information about childcare.

Take-up of funded Early Education

- Over 600 families were contacted over the year by the Childcare Engagement team. 97% were successfully reached by phone, email or in person and offered support to arrange funded places for their 2-year-old children. The team is employed to help families to find and take-up places for their eligible children where they need support to do so.
- There has been an increase in the take-up of 30 hours of funded Early Education for 3 and 4-year-olds from 970 children in January 2019 to 995 children in January 2020
- A total of 32 Merton primary schools are now offering the Extended Entitlement. This is up from 26 last year.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- 12 newly Ofsted-registered childminders have added their details to the [SEND Local Offer website](#) so that 110 childminders now detail their services on the Local Offer. This information supports parents who are looking for childcare for a child/ren with SEND.
- Just over 30 children aged under 5 with an EHCP received funded Early Education (this figure includes children in a school nursery class, but not those in a school reception class).

- 59 practitioners have completed the full *Working with Children with SEND* accredited course and a further 26 have completed the *Working as a SENCo* module since April 2019. These training courses were delivered to staff from schools, settings and to childminders by the Local Authority.
- A review to secure synergies between childcare sufficiency and the Short Breaks offer for disabled children has been delayed due to the coronavirus outbreak and carried forward into 2020-21.
- A detailed analysis of supply and demand for funded early education for eligible children aged 2 to 5 years with identified SEND has been delayed due to the coronavirus outbreak and carried forward to 2020-21.

See also: [Merton's Autism Strategy](#) and [Merton's SEND Strategy](#)

Quality

- 11 providers who had been awarded either Requires Improvement or Inadequate grades by Ofsted received specific advice, challenge and training from the Merton Early Years Continuous Improvement team. The result of this support is not fully realised yet due to Ofsted ceasing inspections during the coronavirus outbreak.
- Research to better understand the impact of quality on outcomes at the end of the Reception Year for children eligible for Free School Meals, Pupil Premium and those with SEND has been delayed due to the coronavirus outbreak and carried forward to 2020-21.
- Settings continue to be evaluated in terms of their quality through Ofsted inspections, SEN and Safeguarding Audits and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Inclusion Fund (SENDIF) Audits. Due to the coronavirus outbreak, Ofsted ceased inspections and many Merton Council audits were undertaken virtually. Where there were concerns in the last audit or after the last audit took place, there will be an in-setting audit in 2020-21.

Support for childcare providers

- 560 places on training courses and meetings provided as part of the Firm Foundations programme were taken up by Early Education and childcare providers between September 2019 and March 2020 (when the coronavirus outbreak interrupted the scheduled programme). Training topics included safeguarding and supporting children with SEND. Since September 2020, training sessions and meetings have resumed online via Zoom.
- As of April 2020, due to the coronavirus outbreak, all Early Years and childcare providers were offered free Firm Foundations membership for the whole financial year. This has provided them with free opportunities to network with other

providers, as well as to find out about the latest research and information coming from the government and Ofsted. Managers and SENCo's at private, voluntary and independent childcare settings (PVI's) and childminders can meet through Zoom sessions. In addition, the sector has received a high level of support throughout the coronavirus outbreak to make sure that they have up-to-date information. This included a weekly contact call to each funded provider from our advisory team and additional support around understanding the outbreak guidance. Weekly emails sent to all Early Years providers also made sure that information has been shared promptly.

- All providers new to delivering funded early education and Merton's Directory of Providers attended a training session to equip with them with all the information they need to accurately manage their claims and submissions for Early Education Funding.

Actions for the academic year 2020 - 21

Demand

- Support providers to be responsive to the economic climate and anticipated change in parental demand. Provide information about a range of options to support the sector with business planning and financial management, such as via the GLA / Mayor's office.
- Continue to work with schools to support them in the delivery of the extended entitlement for 3 and 4-year-olds
- Support providers to utilise their Family Services Directory information and make connections using social media – such as Facebook, Instagram etc. - and consider how they can support parents to find, select and connect with their service

Supply

- Provide information to the sector around the local, regional and national business support packages that are available to help providers to develop and maintain sustainable, flexible businesses.
- Take part in the Mayor of London's research into sector-specific business support needs for the London's Early Years sector and how they can be met. To promote and share outcomes from this research with the sector.
- Update the Merton website pages about support for childcare providers and make sure that coronavirus business recovery support information is published on them. To share and promote this resource to providers.
- Send out a market management survey to Early Years providers and develop a range of support options based on the results

- Continue to support the whole sector with emerging Government guidance and advice that enables providers to offer a safe service to families
- Review the data linked to supply of wrap provision and afterschool and holiday childcare to support parents.

Childcare costs

- Continue to promote funded early education via social media and promote Tax Free Childcare and childcare support via tax credits to parents
- Develop a range of examples of real family experiences to promote the take-up of early education through the ongoing pandemic with the aim of boosting parental confidence in taking up childcare places
- Support providers with the delivery of early education places in accordance with funding guidance and guidance relating to the coronavirus outbreak.

Take-up of funded early education

- Investigate further options for increasing the number of places for funded two-year-olds in Figge's Marsh, Ravensbury and St Helier that respond effectively to the demand for these places.

SEND

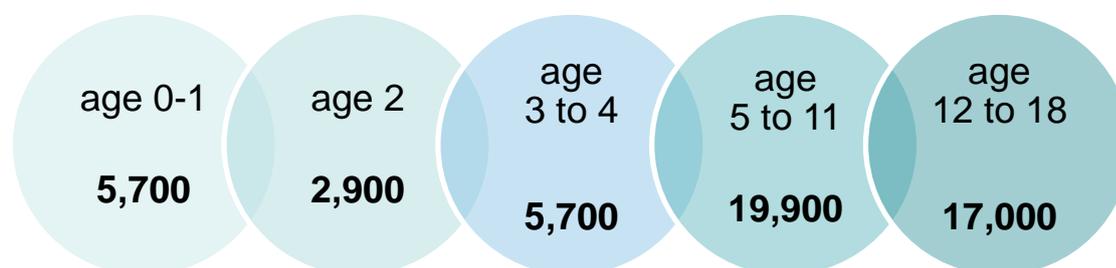
- Carry out detailed analysis of supply and demand for funded early education for eligible children aged 2 to 5 years with identified SEND, including a review of the pathways of Early Years Foundation Stage children attracting Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Inclusion Funding (SENDIF) and those with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- Carry out a review of the quality of the SENDIF interventions by Early Years settings to make sure that funding is being used for the improvement of outcomes for children.
- Where children with SEND are not entitled to SENDIF, inclusion officers will continue to provide support and advice to help settings with interventions to improve outcomes for children.
- Support settings to develop effective interventions and improve the accuracy of assessment so that the workforce is more confident and children needs are met.
- Undertake a review to secure synergies between childcare sufficiency and the Short Breaks offer for disabled children.

Quality

- Develop a range of online support resources and virtual online training opportunities so that the sector can continue to receive information, advice and training
- Connect providers in the sector by offering peer support and highlighting national and local partners where there can be sharing of ideas and thinking.

Demand for childcare

Estimated 2020 / 2021 child population ^{Source: 1}



In five years' time, in 2025 / 26, the population of children aged under 5 in Merton is estimated to fall by approximately 700, compared with 2020. The number of primary school aged children is expected to fall more by about 900 in the next five years.

It is estimated that there will be 1,600 more 12 to 18 year olds in Merton in 2025 / 26. A new secondary school opened in Merton in September 2018, moving to its permanent site in Wimbledon in November 2020 with 180 places in each year group.

Demand for childcare is greatest for children aged under the age of 5, although all families are entitled to statutory maternity pay for the first year of a child's life reducing the need for childcare in that first year. There are estimated to be 14,300 children under the age of five in Merton.

Of the estimated 19,900 children aged 5 to 11, some need childcare before and after school and during the school holidays. Whilst London Borough of Merton does not hold data on the demand for this type of childcare, we rarely receive enquiries from parents who are not able to find the childcare they need from what is available. Our local information about provision in primary schools suggests there are a wide variety of out of school services available across the borough. For children over 12, the childcare need becomes less but they may still require a safe place to be sometimes after school. Many Merton Secondary schools offer clubs and activities after school which provide this service to some children.

Table 1: 2019 estimated numbers of children by age and number of economically active adults by ward Sources: 1, 8, 8a

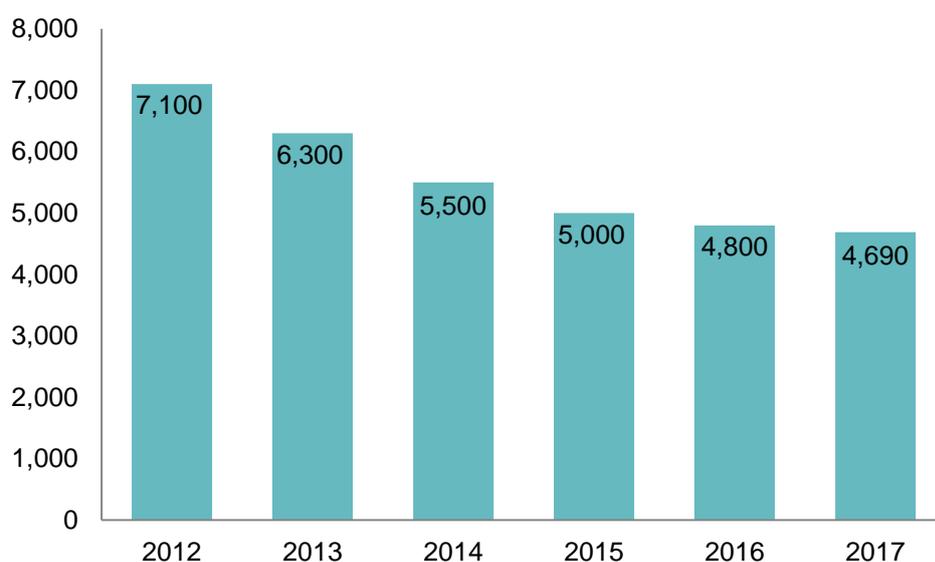
Ward	0-1	2	3-4	5-11	12-18	Percentage economically active adults Source: 8
Abbey	300	150	270	920	610	80.9%
Cannon Hill	200	130	280	860	820	73.1%
Colliers Wood	290	130	260	770	520	78.1%
Cricket Green	370	190	380	1,340	1,200	69.6%
Dundonald	300	150	290	980	620	82.0%
Figge's Marsh	380	190	350	1,280	1,120	70.7%
Graveney	280	110	270	870	680	73.3%
Hillside	260	120	220	670	540	78.6%
Lavender Fields	340	170	310	1,050	980	75.7%
Longthornton	340	200	290	1,100	1,010	72.6%
Lower Morden	180	110	210	800	830	76.2%
Merton Park	200	110	250	1,010	800	73.3%
Pollards Hill	320	150	310	1,140	1,350	71.4%
Ravensbury	270	150	310	970	950	70.7%
Raynes Park	260	120	280	1,050	820	75.8%
St Helier	320	180	300	1,050	1,100	70.6%
Trinity	290	130	280	970	590	81.6%
Village	170	70	140	740	730	67.6%
West Barnes	260	160	350	1,080	840	75.4%
Wimbledon Park	360	180	360	1,230	880	78.2%
Total	5,690	2,900	5,710	19,880	16,990	85.8%

Estimated population figures indicate the possible total demand for places. However, they do not take account of the number of families requiring childcare, which is usually driven by employment patterns, or numbers of children living in working households. Population profiles are just one measure of planning for demand.

In addition, population data does not consider the movement of children, not only across ward boundaries, but also across borough boundaries. For example, families may choose childcare in a neighbouring borough because it is closer to home, work or a school that older children are attending.

Children living in Merton households where out-of-work benefits are claimed

Source: 6



Note: Data from Department for Work & Pensions, 2018⁶

The number of families with children across the whole age range (0-18) and claiming out-of-work benefits fell year-on-year; by a total of 34% over the six years to 2017. The rate of decline has slowed since 2015, but continues. In spite of this decrease, there does not appear to have been a sufficiency issue in terms of a potential increase in the demand for childcare places across the borough

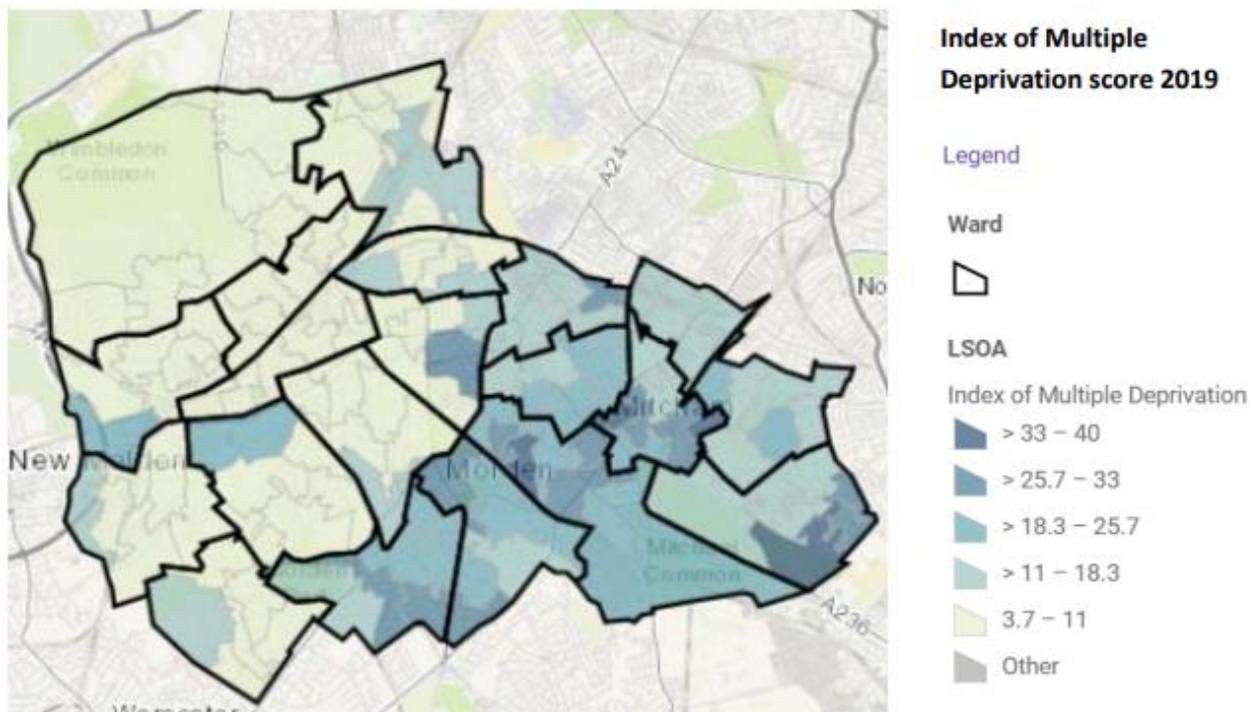
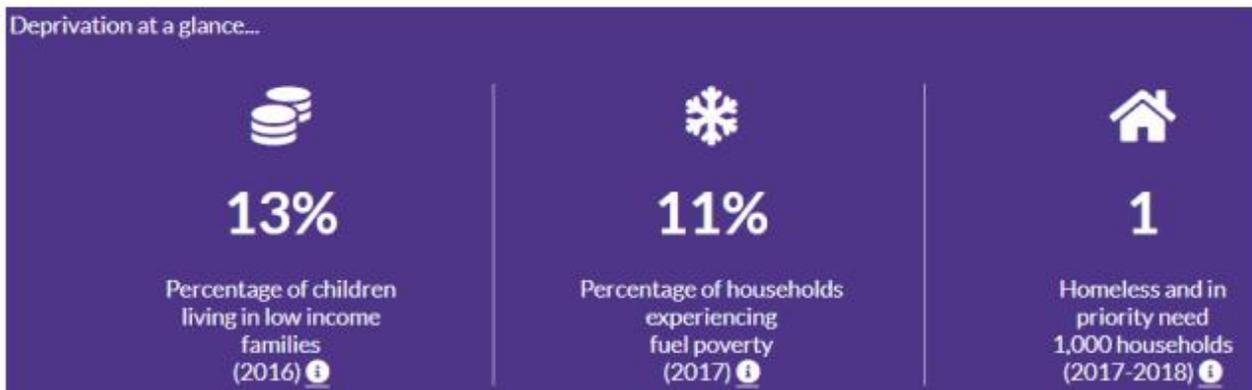
There have been changes to welfare over the past few years meaning that some families with older children are no longer able to claim certain out-of-work benefits. This considerable fall in claimant families with children tends to imply that it was caused by families with older children moving into work. As older children with working parents may still need childcare when not at school, the demand for breakfast, afterschool and holiday childcare could increase if this trend continues.

The extended entitlement (30 hours) for 3 and 4-year-olds was not available until September 2017, so has not yet been recorded in these figures. Any impact should show in the most recent annual release of this data. However, there has not been a

2020 release and the latest release containing data up to 2017 was published in 2019.

Deprivation

Merton ranks as 'very low' in terms of overall social deprivation compared to other London boroughs and nationally in the UK. It is the sixth least deprived of the 33 London boroughs and ranks 114th out of 326 authorities (where 1 is the most deprived) in England.



This overall lack of deprivation does, however, hide inequalities and extremes in the borough between deprived wards in the east of the borough that are some of the top 15% most income-deprived in the country, and the more affluent wards in the west that are amongst the top 5% most affluent. Three wards are more deprived than the average for London: Cricket Green, Figge's Marsh and Pollards Hill. Source: 20

There are also small areas or pockets of deprivation within wards, which are shown by the darker shades in the map on page 11.

Local Development Scheme

Every local planning authority must publish an Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) each year containing information on the implementation of the Local Development Scheme (LDS) and the extent to which the planning targets set out in the Local Plan documents are being achieved, including the five year supply of housing developments. The latest published report for Merton is covers 2018-19.

In 2019 there were 85,110 households in Merton. For the 15 year period 2011 to 2026, Merton’s minimum new housing target is 5,801.

Table 2: Sites with 10 or more housing units gained following completion between April 2019 and March 2020 Source: 20

Development	Ward	Net gain housing units
Haigh Housing, Green Lane	St Helier	68
High Street, Colliers Wood	Colliers Wood	34
The Woodman Hotel	Wimbledon Park	18
Inglemere Road / Grenfell Road	Graveney	14

Across the whole borough, a net gain of 174 housing units were completed between April 2019 and March 2020

The 68 unit development in Morden is a Haig Housing Development for ex-service personnel and their families.

The impact of these developments on local childcare demand is not expected to be significant.

Supply of childcare

Early education and childcare providers and places (under 5's)

Table 3 Sources: 9, 11

Number of providers and places		
Type of provision	Providers	Places
Childminders	251	1,340
Primary school nursery classes and one special school	44	2,925
Private and voluntary nurseries and preschools	81	3,456
Total	377	7,721

(The total number of registered places has been provided in Table 3 for childminders, although some of these places will be offered to children aged over 5).

For private and voluntary nurseries / preschools and childminders, the number of places represents the maximum number of places they are registered to provide. However, in practice many providers may supply fewer than the registered maximum number of places, due to staff capacity, for example.

This number represents full time places, and many providers offer one full time place to more than one child. For example, a provider is open for 10 hours a day and one child attends in the morning, another child attends in the afternoon.

For primary school nursery classes and the special school, the number of places given is the maximum for the universal entitlement (15 hours a week to which all 3 and 4-year-olds are entitled).

There is little variance in the total number of providers and places between this year and last year. This means that the childcare market in Merton remains quite stable. However, it is expected that the on-going impact of the coronavirus outbreak is likely to have affect the market within the next 6 months to a year.

Early education and childcare hours (under 5's)

Table 4 Source: 9

Type of provision	Number providers	Sessional Mon to Fri	Full day care Mon to Fri	Saturdays and Sundays
Private and voluntary preschools and nurseries	81	19	62	None
Nursery classes in schools and special schools	44	All	None	None
Childminders	251	N/A	251	21

Childcare is mostly commonly delivered by private and voluntary nurseries and preschools as either sessional care (3 hour sessions) or as full day care (up to 9 hours from 9am to 6pm).

Most full day care providers also offer shorter sessions. Of the providers that are sessional, many offer day care over 6 hours or more across a lunchtime session. 7 sessional providers are only able to provide sessions of 3 hours because they are only open for half-days.

Most childminders offer flexibility to meet parental demand across the day, with some being able to provide care from 7.30am to 6.30pm and some at weekends.

Providers are given the opportunity to promote their current vacancies via London Borough of Merton's Family Services Directory at www.merton.gov.uk/fsd and Information for Families Facebook page at www.facebook.com/MertonIFF

In practice, turnover of place availability is high and not enough providers update this information regularly enough for it to be reported on.

Childcare providers and places (over 5's)

Table 5 Source: 9

Type of provision	Providers	Places
Breakfast club - primary school age	42	1,100
After-school club - primary school age	40	1,119
Holiday club - primary school age	29	1,347

Tracking supply of childcare for school age children is not as easy compared with supply across the Early Years sector. This is because registration with Ofsted is only

mandatory when caring for children aged 0 to 7 and is on a voluntary basis for providers open for fewer than 2 hours a day (such as breakfast clubs). Therefore, it is possible that there are more breakfast and afterschool clubs and holiday clubs in Merton than are counted here. Parents may also use provision which is not considered 'childcare,' for example sports or arts clubs after school or in the holidays.

Many childminders also offer care for children aged over 5. All but a handful of childminders in Merton are registered to deliver care for children from 0 to 7 and some choose to care for over 8's. These childminders may choose to care for under 5's only, or spread their places across the whole age range and include out-of-school care in their service, depending on demand. Therefore, a count of the number of places for before or after school or into the holidays is not possible for childminders..

However, to give an idea of the out-of-school services offered by childminders in Merton, 171 offered drop-off and / or pick-up from schools as of August 2020. These services can extend to 53 schools, including some in neighbouring boroughs ^{Source: 12}

Childcare places gained and lost

Table 6: ^{Source: 9}

September 2019 to August 2020	Providers opened	Places gained	Providers closed	Places lost	Net places
Childminder	18	96	18	86	+10
Sessional / full day care	9	349	4	97	+252
Out-of-school	3	51	2	51	0

There was significant growth in places at new day nurseries and preschools across the year.

Average hourly childcare costs

Sources: 14, 15



On average, childcare for under 5's in day nurseries, preschools or with childminders in Merton is more considerably more expensive than the outer London average.

The average hourly cost of a day nursery / preschool has gone up by 6% since the 2019 Childcare Sufficiency Report. The average cost of a childminder has risen by 4% ^{Source 17}.

Take-up of funded early education

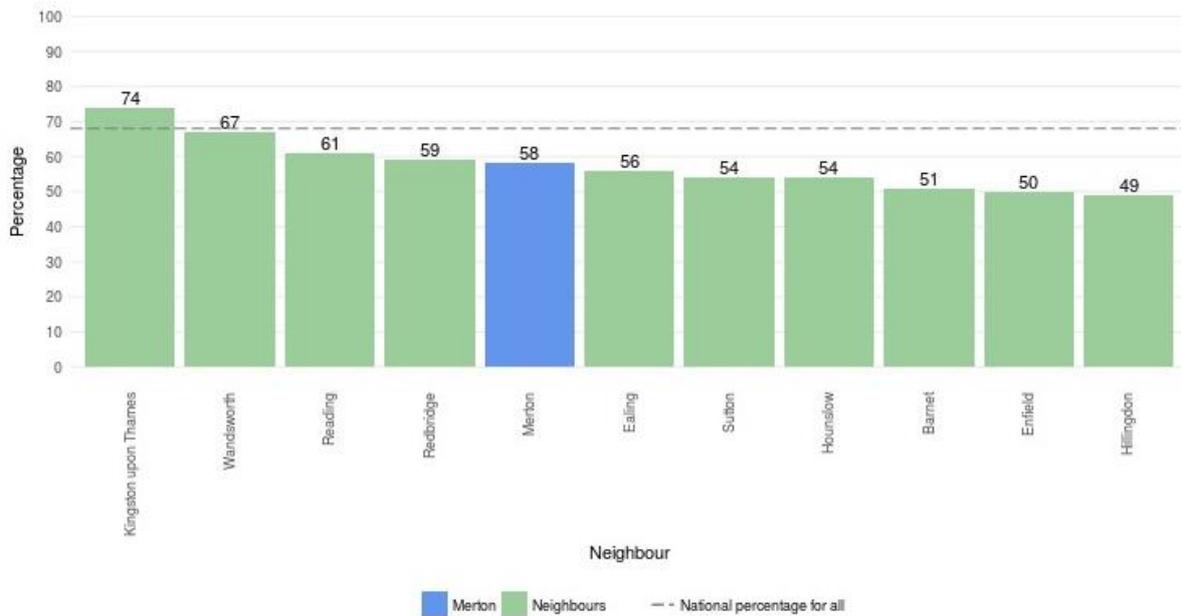
Most 3 and 4-year-olds take up their Universal Entitlement in primary school nursery classes in Merton. The Extended Entitlement became available to eligible families in September 2017. 30 schools, 66 day nurseries and preschools and 71 childminders were offering extended entitlement (30 hours) places as of the end of the academic year 2019-20.

Overall take-up of funded early education Source: 21

Percentage take-up of places by two-year-olds in Merton

Statistical Neighbours

The percentage of two year olds in Merton benefitting from funded early education places compared with the 10 nearest statistical neighbours.

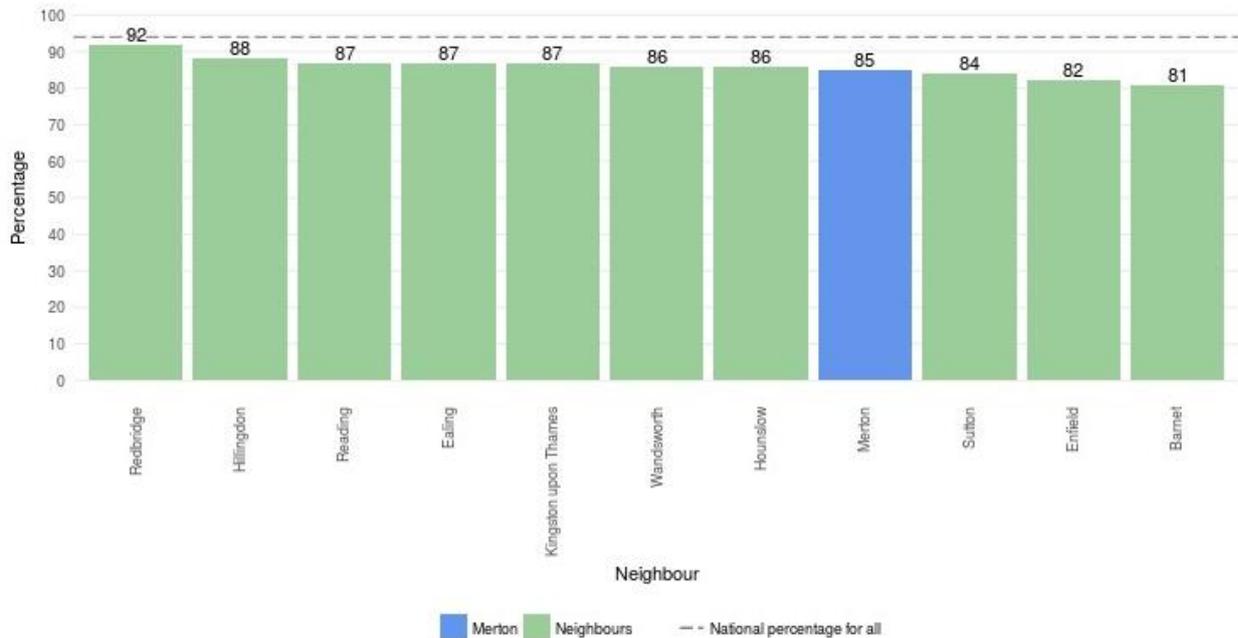


The percentage of eligible two-year-olds benefitting from funded Early Education places was 58% in 2019. The national average fell by 4% from 2018 to 2019 to 68%. Merton was ranked 5th of the 11 authorities designated as statistical neighbours. Data for 2020 was not available at the time of publication

Percentage take-up of places by three and four-year-olds in Merton

Statistical Neighbours

The percentage of three and four year olds in Merton benefitting from funded early education places compared with the 10 nearest statistical neighbours.



The percentage of three and four-year-olds benefitting from Universal funded Early Education places was 85% in 2019. The national average has been 94% take-up for the three years to 2019. Merton was ranked 8th of the 11 authorities designated as statistical neighbours. Data for 2020 was not available at the time of publication.

Funded early education for 2-year-olds

Table 7 Sources: 2, 10, 18

Ward	Funded Early Education for 2-year-olds by ward				
	Eligible children living in ward	Places at providers in ward	Variance in availability	Funded children living in ward	% take-up by children living in ward
Abbey	20	55	+35	15	75.0%
Cannon Hill	20	26	+6	10	50.0%
Colliers Wood	20	6	-14	15	75.0%
Cricket Green	73	142	+69	47	54.4%
Dundonald	8	51	-	-	-
Figge's Marsh	82	37	-45	56	68.3%
Graveney	29	15	-14	23	79.3%
Hillside	8	28	-	-	-
Lavender Fields	56	44	-12	33	58.9%
Longthornton	42	50	+8	29	69.0%
Lower Morden	20	95	+75	15	75.0%
Merton Park	21	64	+37	7	33.3%
Pollards Hill	68	79	+11	41	60.2%
Ravensbury	58	8	-50	35	60.3%
Raynes Park	15	41	+26	8	53.3%
St Helier	44	12	-32	14	31.8%
Trinity	21	64	+43	8	38.1%
Village	7	6	-	-	-
West Barnes	14	21	+7	7	50.0%
Wimbledon Park	21	6	-15	5	23.8%
Totals	647	850	+203	422	65.2%

- Note: families do not have to take up places in the ward in which they live. In addition, families could choose to take up places in neighbouring boroughs
- Dundonald, Hillside, and Village wards have fewer than 10 eligible families so figures are too small to provide meaningful results
- Excludes out-of-borough families

Table 7 highlights those wards where there are fewer places than there are resident eligible children in the column “Variance in availability”. Amber shading denotes a deficit of up to 30 places and red denotes a deficit of over 30 places.

It also highlights those wards where take-up at a Merton setting by eligible Merton resident children is less than 40% (red)

This brings one ward into sharp focus – St Helier – which is red in both areas. In this ward, the number of eligible children is reasonably high and it is a deprived area, so low take-up is a priority area of focus. This ward, it has a southern boundary with London Borough of Sutton. It is possible that Sutton settings are providing funded places for these families instead, though the ward lacked in the year of evaluation

As St Helier abuts Ravensbury ward on its eastern side, so an increase of places in either of these two areas could help in both wards as Ravensbury does have a deficit of places, though over 60% of eligible resident children are in placement. A new setting on the site of a children’s centre in Ravensbury is open at the end of September 2020 and focuses on providing places for funded 2-year-olds.

Ultimately, the figure that matters is percentage take-up. Overall, take-up places by eligible 2-year-olds has increased by just under 8% since the last Childcare sufficiency report, which shows good growth.

Take-up of free early education by eligible children living in Graveney is a healthy 79.3% - the highest in the borough. This is despite there being significantly fewer places in the ward than there are eligible children. These families must be finding places outside of the ward in which they live.

At the other end of the scale, only 33.3% of children living in Merton Park are taking up free places in Merton, despite the ward having plenty of places to accommodate them. Though take-up has increased by 10% since the last Childcare sufficiency report, it is still very low.

Wimbledon Park is an area of concern, with less than a quarter of eligible families taking up places. There are only 6 places in this ward and lack of provision may be dissuading families as they have to look further afield for a place.

Funded early education for 3 and 4-year-olds

All children aged 3 and 4 are entitled to 570 hours a year of free early education (the Universal Entitlement). In September 2017, the Government introduced the 30-hour nursery offer (extended entitlement) which provides an additional 570 hours a year for many working families.

Providers of places for 3 and 4-year-olds are asked to notify the Local Authority of the number of extended entitlement places they offer. Based on this data, we can roughly see how availability is currently distributed across the types of provider.

The data shows that currently, 63% of extended entitlement places are being offered by day nurseries and preschools

Universal and Extended Entitlement places by type of provider

Table 8 Sources: 10, 11

Type of provider	Universal Entitlement places	Extended Entitlement places
School nursey classes	2,610	548
Day nurseries and preschools	1,526	1,219
Childminders	125	147
Independent school	229	21
Total	4,490	1,935

Universal Entitlement for 3 and 4-year-olds

Take-up of universal free early education for 3 and 4-year-olds is published by the DFE and shows take-up at 87% in 2020, the same as in 2019. This is the same percentage take-up as Outer London as a whole (Source: 13)

Extended Entitlement (30 hours) for 3 and 4-year-olds

The Extended Entitlement (30 hours) for 3 and 4-year-olds provides up to 15 extra free hours of early education a week for many families where both parents are working (or the sole parent is working in sole parent families).

24% more children living in Merton took up places in 2019-20 than in the previous year (Source: 17). The number of places across the borough has grown by 25% in a year and there are sufficient places to meet demand, as Table 9 shows, except in St

Helier ward (highlighted in red). However, the wards surrounding St Helier do have sufficient places.

Table 9 Source: 2, 10

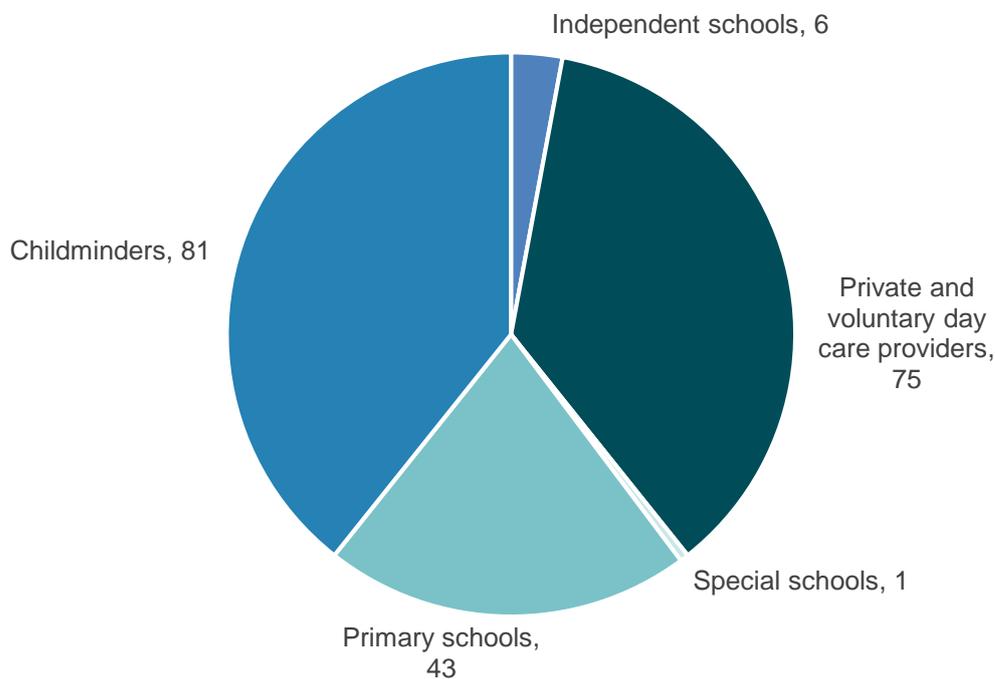
Ward	Extended entitlement for 3 and 4-year-olds by ward		
	Funded children living in ward	Places at providers in ward	Variance in availability
Abbey	47	97	+50
Cannon Hill	66	66	0
Colliers Wood	43	81	+38
Cricket Green	53	192	+139
Dundonald	55	170	+115
Figge's Marsh	48	80	+32
Graveney	28	55	+27
Hillside	27	109	+82
Lavender Fields	45	97	+50
Longthornton	25	62	+37
Lower Morden	46	140	+94
Merton Park	45	118	+73
Pollards Hill	49	64	+15
Ravensbury	38	75	+37
Raynes Park	25	87	+62
St Helier	49	29	-20
Trinity	53	141	+88
Village	11	72	+61
West Barnes	56	93	+37
Wimbledon Park	31	107	+76
Total	995*	1,935	+940

*excludes out of borough families

Number and types of providers of funded early education Source: 10

The number of childminders offering funded early education continues to increase – up 9 since the 2019 Childcare Sufficiency Report. Families are increasingly driving the market and approaching childminders for their additional 15 hours as part of the

30 hours offer for 3 and 4-year-olds. Requests from childminders to join the Directory of Providers of funded early education continue to be received regularly.

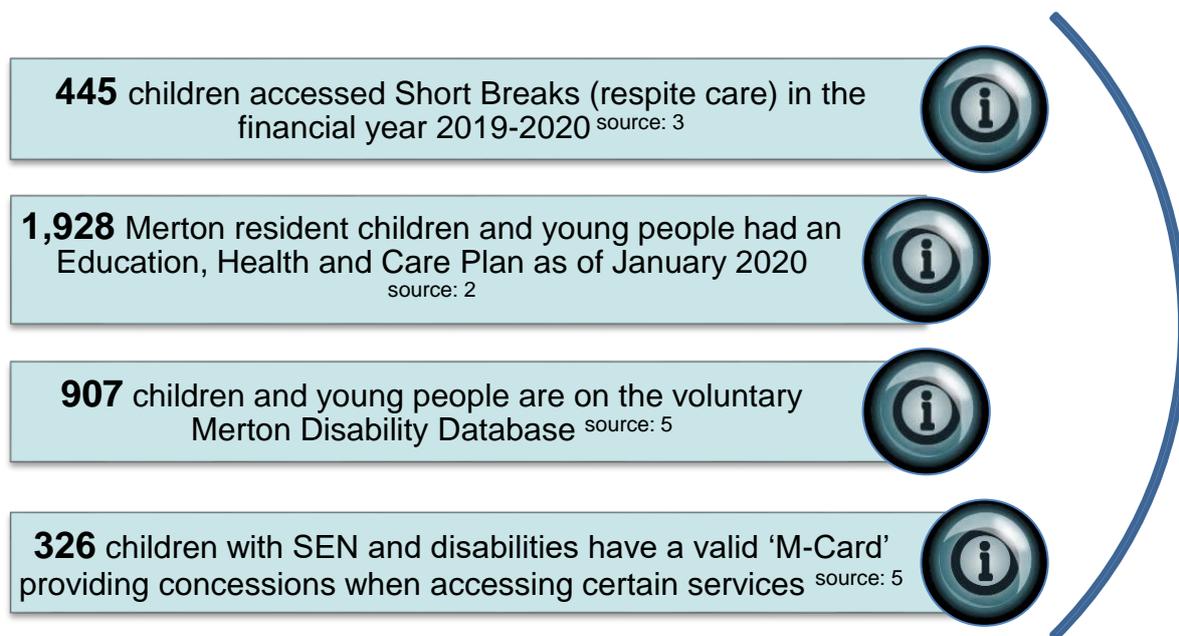


The number of schools offering the Extended Entitlement (30 hours) has increased over the year since the last report in 2019. So, whilst the number of schools remains static at 43, 31 of them are now offering 30 hours places

Children with SEN and disabilities

The Local Authority has a duty to secure sufficient childcare for children with disabilities up to the age of 18.

All childcare providers should be inclusive to all children, including children with individual needs. Some providers have extensive experience of caring for children with particular needs and information about this can be found on Merton's SEND Local Offer and Family Services Directory websites (www.merton.gov.uk/directories). This information can help families and professionals in finding the most appropriate care for a child.



The needs of children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) are identified at different ages depending on a range of factors. This can mean needs are identified whilst the child is very young, often by a health practitioner, or may be identified as they are older once they are at school, for example.

Table 10: number of children and young people in Merton with an Education, Health and Care Plan Source: 3

Age	Number of children with an EHCP
Under 5 years	99
Age 5 to 10	698
Age 11 to 15	678
Age 16 to 19	344
Age 20 to 25	109

The number of children and young people with an EHCP has risen year-on-year since the SEND reforms came into place in 2015, with a 13% rise in the past year (January 2019 versus January 2020)

SEND early education and childcare Sources: 2 and local records

Some children receiving funded early education and childcare in Merton who are identified at SEN support level are funded via the Local Authority through the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Inclusion Fund (SENDIF).

As of January 2020, 17 funded 2-year-olds were identified by their setting as “SEN Support” and 12 settings received SENDIF administered by the Local Authority.

14 two-year-olds took up a free funded place because they received Disability Living Allowance. 189 funded 3 and 4-year-olds were identified by their setting as SEN Support and 74 settings received SENDIF

A nursery class at Cricket Green School that will provide new places for children with additional needs is in development. This is part of a recent expansion at Cricket Green School. As of September 2020, the school had a capacity of 260 pupils from Reception age upwards (up from 199).

Merton offers Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) for children with SEND in 5 primary schools. The latest is a base for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at Stanford Primary School which opened in late 2019.

Melrose is an independent school for children and young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Expansion plans for new places to allow children from age 4 to attend and to create more places for children aged 11 to 16 have resulted in a temporary class opening in September 2020 and a permanent build is underway, with the new provision due to open in October 2021.

Plans for further school expansions / additional facilities to support children and young people with SEND are in the pipeline.

Disability Access Fund (DAF)

DAF is additional annual funding available to Early Years providers delivering funded hours to eligible three and four-year-old children. The following children are eligible:

- child is accessing three and four-year-old entitlement, and;
- child is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance

78 children benefited from DAF funding from April 2019 through to March 2020.

Sources: 2 and local records

DAF has been set at a national rate of £615 per financial year, and this is paid as a lump sum payment to one Early Years provider nominated by the parent. The purpose of the fund is to support Early Years providers to make initial reasonable adjustments and build the capacity of their setting to support disabled children.

The Merton Portage Service provides a structured, home-based teaching service for preschool children with disabilities, following a model of support that provides guidance and information for parents and carers of the children and supports them to taking-up their free entitlement(s). From April 2019 to March 2020, the service supported 57 families providing individualised support at home as well as access to Portage Group and sessions in the sensory or play rooms at Merton Children`s centres. The service also supported 48 families through its Communication Group programmes for families with children with communication and language delay. Source: 4

The Local Authority also provides an Early Years SEND Advisory Support service to help settings to support the progress of children with SEND. This takes the form of visits and information sharing with the provider. Over the course of the financial year 2019 to 2020, 27 Schools, 43 PVI settings and 7 childminders requested and subsequently received this advisory support Source: 5

The Local Offer website describes the range of services and support for children and young people, aged 0 to 25 with (SEND). It is accessed by around 2,500 unique users each month. The most popular pages are those covering the M-Card (concessions card) for children and young people, Family Wellbeing Short Breaks, the Merton SEN Team, Merton`s Special Educational Needs Information and Advice and Support Service, and Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments and Plans Source: 7

75 day nurseries and preschools provide additional information about their support for children with SEND for publication on the Local Offer website. This includes experienced staff as well as any additional resources / equipment. 110 childminders were listed on the Local Offer at the time of this report, including all 81 who offer Funded Early Education places. 70 childminders on the website have detailed their experience in supporting children with SEND.

Families can search the Local Offer for providers who have experience of supporting particular types of additional needs, so helping them to find childcare which is suitable for their child. The Local Offer can be found at www.merton.gov.uk/localoffer

Childcare for school-age children with SEND

Some children with SEND will access childcare locally, particularly if it is located on a school site. For children who have additional and complex SEND needs, provision can be via specialist services or for children with disabilities, in accordance with eligibility criteria, via the Merton Short Breaks Service.

445 children with disabilities received a Short Break between April 2019 and March 2020. Families are assessed and the outcome of the assessment could offer a direct payment to the parent to organise their own Short Breaks and leisure opportunities for their child, or access to activity clubs provided by a range of providers that are



commissioned through the Short Breaks Service. Merton also has a specialist out-of-school service for children with more complex needs.

In addition to the Short Breaks Service, a range of leisure activities are available to Merton children with SEND which have no eligibility criteria. Details of these can also be found on the Local Offer website

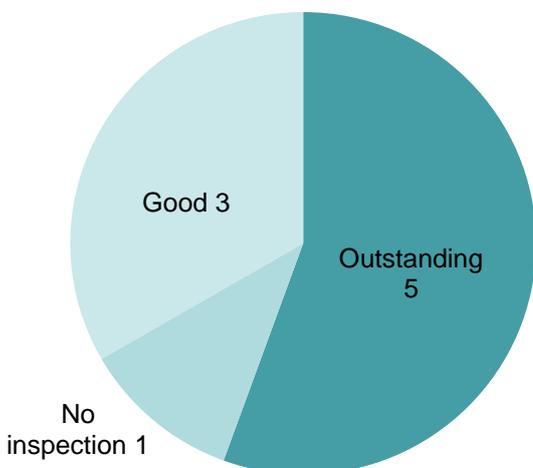
Quality of early education and childcare

Schools and childcare providers register with and are inspected by Ofsted, who give them an overall grade for the quality of their provision.

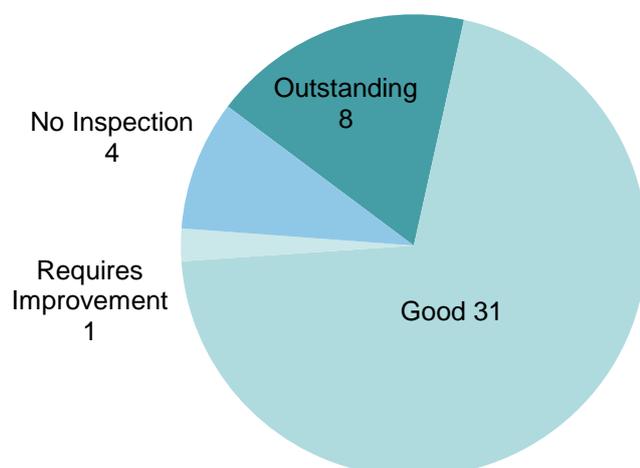
Childminders and private and voluntary providers are on the Early Years Register, schools are on the Schools Register. The grades for both registers are comparable. Schools with nursery classes have an overall inspection grade for the whole school and also have a separate Early Years grade. Providers register with Ofsted and it can be up to two years before they are inspected.

Both schools and Early Years providers have four possible Ofsted grades: 'Outstanding,' 'Good,' 'Requires Improvement,' and 'Inadequate.' Some providers are still awaiting their first full inspection, and this is shown. Schools' data does not include special schools or those independent schools which are inspected by Ofsted

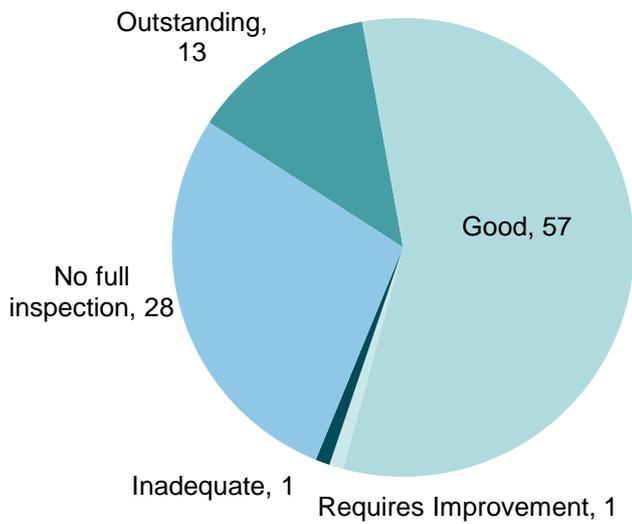
Maintained and academy secondary schools source: 16



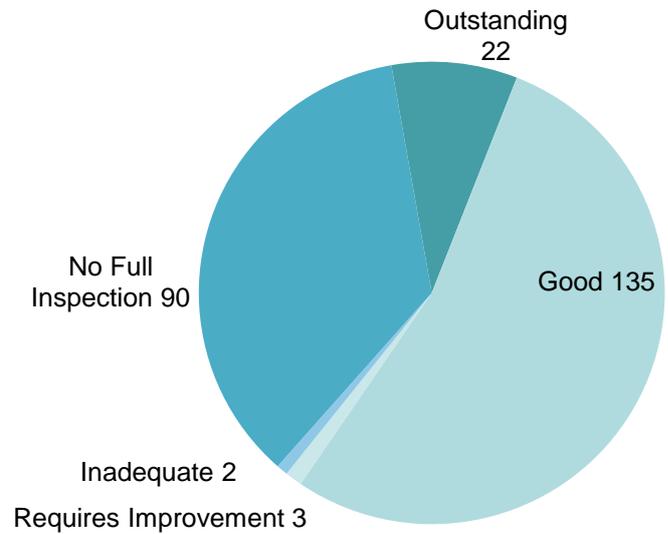
Maintained and academy primary schools source: 16



Private and voluntary childcare settings Source: 9
(Ofsted Early Years Register)



Childminders Source: 9
(Ofsted Early Years Register)



Inspections of Ofsted registered providers were suspended from lockdown in March 2020 and resumed partially from September 2020.

99% of funded 2-year olds attend Ofsted inspected settings with grades of Good or Outstanding source: 13

96% of funded 3 and 4-year-olds attend Ofsted inspected settings with grades of Good or Outstanding source: 13

Data published by Ofsted in Table 11 (overleaf) shows how Merton compares with Outer London and statistical neighbours for take up of funded early education places across the whole sector and Ofsted grade.

Table 11 Source 13

Funded places taken up by children who are:	% of providers with Good or Outstanding Ofsted grades		
	Merton	Outer London	National
2 years old	99%	98%	97%
3 and 4 years old (universal)	96%	95%	92%
3 and 4 years old (extended)	96%	96%	96%

There is currently no cause for concern about the quality of funded places compared to outer London and national outcomes.

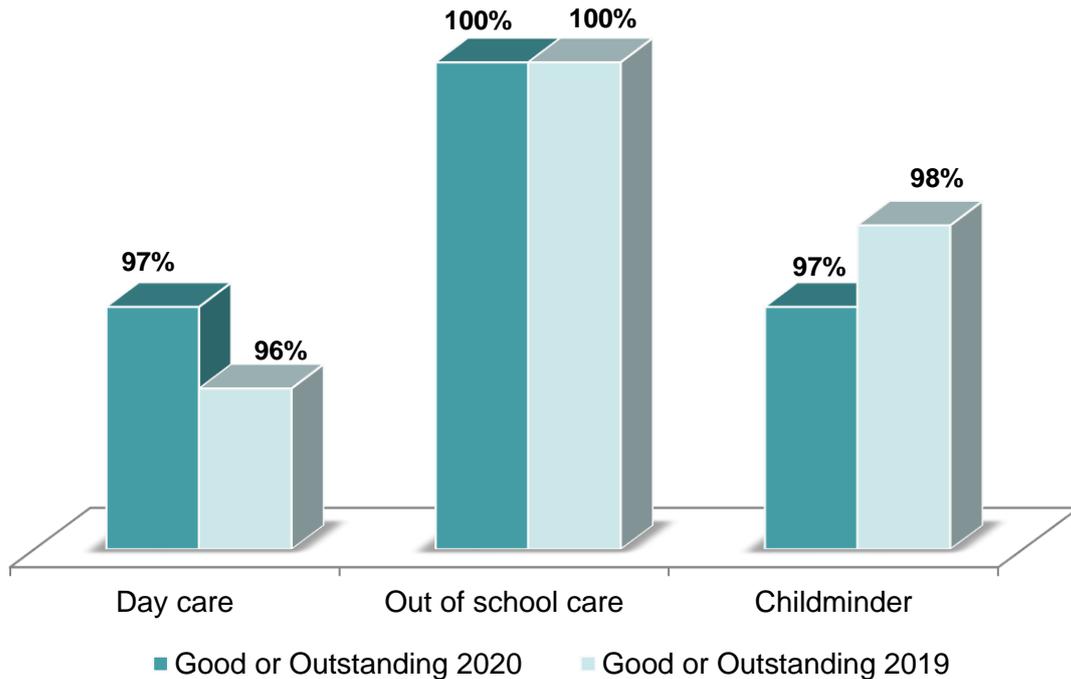
For funded provision for two-year-olds, Merton has a policy of withdrawing funding from providers if they do not achieve Good or above at inspection from the end of the funding period in which the judgement was made. For providers with funded places for 3 and 4-year-olds, funding will be withdrawn over up to two funding periods if they receive an Inadequate grade at inspection, unless there are specific sufficiency / mitigating factors.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) Outcomes

One way of assessing the impact of good quality early education is using the data found in the EYFSP Outcomes at the end of the Reception year. This can be found on page 25 of the document [Achieving Success: Achievement in Merton Schools 2018 - 2019](#). This data shows the proportion of children achieving the Good Level of Development improved by two percentage points, in comparison with more modest increases in the national and outer London averages, and Merton's performance is now securely above these averages.

Variation in Ofsted grades achieved Sources: 9, 17

Compared to the previous year, Good or Outstanding daycare settings increased by 1%, while Good or Outstanding childminders decreased by the same amount. Overall, settings are maintaining extremely high quality across the board



Support for childcare providers

London Borough of Merton provides a universal offer of support, which is fully funded and includes regular communications to the sector. For the academic year of 2020 to 2021, there are be paid-for virtual training courses during school term time and other development opportunities. The Firm Foundations Network provides peer-to-peer support through online (virtual) meetings. There are also pay-as-you-go whole-setting training and advisory support options available.

The aim of the support programme is to improve the quality of provision, share information and provide an advisory service.

Training was suspended during summer term 2020 due to the coronavirus outbreak. Between September 2019 and March 2020, over 560 places were taken up by practitioners at Early Years training courses and meetings.^{Source: 4}

The Local Authority is also an accredited Early Years College. In 2019 to 2020, fully-funded accredited training around supporting children with SEND was offered to the sector. There have been several cohorts of students over the course of the year

Providers receiving Early Education Funding also receive annual safeguarding and SEND inclusion visits. These have been conducted virtually during the coronavirus outbreak.

New childcare providers in Merton can also access support services and can seek advice at any stage in the process of starting up their business. There is an annual programme of training for childminders, including briefings and Introduction to

Childminding Practice Ofsted-approved training for people looking to become childminders.

Methodology

All figures in this report are calculated using available data, unless otherwise stated, and at times are estimates based on the interpretation of the data

Childcare places are calculated as full-time places unless otherwise stated (e.g. free early education places which are for 570 hours a year over a minimum of 38 weeks). Full-time places are all day for 5 days a week. Some of these full-time places could be shared by more than one child on a part-time basis if the provider offers sessions in the morning and afternoons or if two or more children can share a place by attending on different days.

Spend is rounded to the nearest 1,000.

Overall population estimate figures are rounded up or down to the nearest 100. Ward based population projections are rounded up or down to the nearest 10 (figures ending in 5 have been rounded up).

Sources

1. GLA borough preferred option (BPO) 2018-based housing-led population projections. <https://data.london.gov.uk/>
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7. Month Google Analytics reports on www.merton.gov.uk/lcoaloffer
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- 8a Merton Data website. <https://data.merton.gov.uk> (ONS APS (2020-03))

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10. Merton Directory of Providers of funded early education places 2018-19 (as at end July 2020)
11. Ofsted and Merton School Admissions data (as of end of academic year 2019-20)
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