



Wigan[♥]
Council

Best Start in Life Plan

March 2026

www.wigan.gov.uk



Wigan will give every child the best start in life by building an integrated 0–5 system rooted in the first 1,001 days, improving early development, reducing inequalities, and ensuring more children are safe, healthy, happy and ready to learn by school entry.

Our vision aligns with our council and partnership plan: Progress with Unity. Through our Progress with Unity approach, Wigan will ensure every child has the best possible start in life, improving outcomes in health, wellbeing and school readiness, from pregnancy through the early years.

Our vision for 2028

By 2028, Wigan will have an integrated Best Start in Life system spanning pregnancy to age five, where families experience clear, joined-up pathways through maternity, health visiting, Family Hubs, early help and early education.

Children's needs will be identified earlier, support will be better connected around families, and place-based delivery will ensure help reaches those who need it most.

GLD outcomes will rise from 65.9% to 72.9%, with faster improvement for children currently achieving least well. Wigan will see measurable progress in early language, communication and school readiness, with stronger home learning environments, improved uptake of universal and targeted services, and earlier support for children with emerging needs.

Delivering Our Vision

Our Best Start in Life approach will contribute directly to Wigan's Progress with Unity ambitions for children:

- **Best Start-** Ensuring every child has the best possible start in life, with a focus on the first 1,001 days, early development and reducing inequalities.
- **Live Well-** Supporting children's physical health, emotional wellbeing and resilience through integrated health and family support.
- **Learn Well-** Improving school readiness and increasing the number of children achieving a Good Level of Development, with a strong focus on speech, language and communication.
- **Be Safe-** Ensuring children are safeguarded with effective early help and coordinated support for families.

Aligned with the two missions in Progress with Unity: A New Era for Wigan Borough, this document adopts a strengths asset-based approach to support children and young people in learning, growing, and flourishing.

Mission 1

Create fair opportunities for all children, families, residents and businesses.

"Together, we will break down the barriers that create financial, health, education and environmental inequalities in our borough."

Mission 2

Make all our towns and neighbourhoods flourish for those who live and work in them.

"Together, in genuine partnership with our residents and businesses, who know our communities best, we will help each town and neighbourhood in the borough to celebrate and maintain their identity whilst understanding and helping to achieve what is needed to thrive."

Helping all children to flourish, in every neighbourhood

Local context

Sustained progress

Wigan has made strong and sustained progress in improving outcomes for young children. In 2025, the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception increased at a faster rate than both regional and national averages. This reflects the collective effort across early years settings, schools, health services and wider partners, and demonstrates that coordinated, data-informed improvement can deliver measurable impact.

At the same time, Wigan recognises that a strong Best Start in Life must be built on more than end-of-Reception outcomes alone. Children's later attainment is shaped by what happens much earlier: healthy pregnancy, parent-infant relationships, physical and emotional wellbeing, communication and language development, and the strength of the home learning environment. The first 1,001 critical days are particularly important, and the borough is increasingly focused on ensuring that babies are visible within the wider system and that "baby blind spots" are reduced through stronger partnership working and earlier identification of need. This approach is underpinned by a clear understanding of social determinants of health and development, including inequalities in health, education, environment and family financial circumstances, which begin before birth and shape outcomes across the life course.



While outcomes are improving overall, local data shows continued variation between neighbourhoods and groups of children. Developmental and health inequalities are evident before school entry, particularly for children experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, children with emerging additional needs or SEND, children with English as an Additional Language, and families requiring earlier joined-up support to prevent escalation.

Wigan's child outcome priorities are therefore focused on strengthening early development and school readiness for all children, accelerating progress for those who start from a lower baseline, and narrowing gaps linked to disadvantage. This includes a strong focus on communication, language, social and emotional development, physical development, and the wider determinants that influence children's readiness to thrive.



Local context

Recent data shows encouraging progress. In 2024/25, 65.9% of children in Wigan achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD), up from 63.9% in 2023/24 and 63.4% in 2022/23. This demonstrates a sustained upward trajectory and reflects the impact of targeted improvement activity across the borough.

Wigan is building on a strong foundation of early years improvement, with clear opportunities to further accelerate progress for children who face additional barriers. As we deepen our focus on equity through delivery of our Progress with Unity missions, we can strengthen outcomes for groups who have achieved less well. Local data and intelligence highlights where targeted action will have the greatest impact with clear evidence that progress can be made in word reading, listening and attention, understanding, and writing, where the gaps to national averages are relatively small and therefore it is achievable to raise children progress in Wigan to national standards.

| | | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 Milestone | 2027 Milestone | 2028 TARGET |
|---|--|------|-------|-------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| A | National | 67% | 68% | 68% | | | 75% |
| B | Regional | 64% | 65% | 65% | | | |
| C | Wigan – ALL | 63% | 64% | 66% | 68.3% | 70.6% | 72.9% |
| D | Wigan All v National | -4% | -4% | -2% | | | |
| E | Wigan all change | | | +2% | +2.4% | +2.4% | +2.4% |
| F | Wigan GLD Disadvantage | | 45.9% | 48.1% | 50.1% | 52.1% | 54.2% |
| G | Wigan GLD Disadvantaged change | | | +2.2% | +2% | +2% | +2% |
| H | GAP | | | 17.9% | | | 18.7% |
| I | Wigan internal target to ensure our gap closes | | | | +2.5% | +2.5% | +2.5% |
| J | Target gap | | | 17.9% | | | 17.3% |

Wigan’s ambition is to accelerate progress for disadvantaged children so that gaps narrow over time rather than widen.

Earlier developmental indicators and wider health measures show that inequalities are already present before school entry. At the 2–2½ year review, 78.0% of children were at or above expected levels across all five areas of development, below the national average of 81.4%, with the largest gaps in communication (-6.5), problem solving (-6.6), personal-social (-5.5), gross motor (-5.3) and fine motor (-4.8).

Health and wellbeing indicators also point to wider vulnerabilities, including lower breastfeeding at 6–8 weeks, higher premature birth rates, dental decay at age five, and variation in healthy weight.



Wigan's Strong Foundations



Wigan does not start from a blank page. The borough already has a substantial infrastructure of early years; health and family support services delivered through close partnership working across the local system. This includes universal and targeted early education and childcare, health visiting and the Healthy Child Programme, early help and family support, specialist early intervention, SEND support, speech and language pathways, and school improvement activity. Together these services provide a strong base for prevention, early identification and coordinated support.

While Wigan was not selected as a national pathfinder area for Family Hub delivery, the council and its partners made a strategic decision to invest in and implement the Family Hub model locally. As a result, six Family Hubs have been established, providing accessible, place-based support for families and a strong platform for integrated working across early years, health and family services.

These hubs are central to Wigan's delivery model and create the conditions for more joined-up support around families from pregnancy onwards.

System collaboration is further strengthened through the Early Years Collaborative, which brings partners together around the first 1,001 critical days and a shared focus on prevention, early development and improved outcomes. This collaborative approach aligns activity across health, early years, family support and wider partners, helping to move the borough toward a more coherent Best Start system.

We have a strong and evolving infrastructure for early help.

Wigan's Best Start in Life system is underpinned by a strong, integrated infant feeding and early relationship model aligned to the UNICEF Baby Friendly Gold Standard. A multi-agency workforce is in place, including the Community Infant Feeding Team (CIFT), Health visiting, Midwifery and Family Hubs, and wider partners, working together to provide seamless support from pregnancy through to early childhood. This includes delivery of the Healthy Child Programme, ensuring a universal and targeted offer for all families

Families are supported through a comprehensive antenatal and early parenting offer, which provides antenatal education on pregnancy, birth, infant feeding, bonding and parental wellbeing. This is complemented by wider support through Be Well services to improve maternal health behaviours, and strong partnership arrangements are established with health partners including the Maternity Voices Partnership (MVP), Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals WWL, ensuring a consistent and coordinated offer across the system. Baby Friendly Champions are embedded across Family Hubs to support leadership, consistency and quality of practice.

The borough has made progress in strengthening its speech, language and communication (SLC) offer, creating a more consistent, accessible and equitable system for children, young people and families. A full mapping of provision has clarified strengths, gaps and future priorities, while Wellcomm is now fully embedded across all Family Hubs, supporting consistent early identification. Referral pathways have been streamlined through redesigned, co-produced referral pathways, and engagement with key education forums has strengthened system wide understanding of the Balanced System approach.



Wigan's Family Hubs Offer

Wigan has developed a network of six family hubs across the borough along with a number of linked sites. This ensures that services are accessible to babies, children and families in their local area or at one of the neighbouring locations. There are in excess of 100 different service providers offering whole family support. By the end of February 2026 over 108,000 visits have been made to the family hubs. The hubs provide a broad and flexible offer, including both one-to-one and group-based support. Sessions are available through a mix of pre-bookable and drop-in provision, designed to meet families where they are. The introduction of the Qnomy booking system in April 2026 will further strengthen our approach, enabling richer data insights to better understand engagement, identify gaps, and proactively reach seldom heard voices.

Our family hubs are warm and welcoming spaces which include living room areas and/or café's on many sites to encourage a home from home space where good home learning environments can be demonstrated.

As part of our model for locality based working the family help teams are co-located in the family hub and a number of partners and key stakeholders regularly use the space to drop down and work or see babies, children and families. Our family hubs have over 50 volunteers who provide support and a strong voice across our sites. From volunteers, parents and youth inspectors we know that people want services that are easily accessible and a place where people are not asked to repeat their story and we have considered this in the design of roles and structures within the service.

Youth Inspectors have individually assessed four out of six of our family hubs and have awarded a minimum of 4.5 out of 5 stars across the network.



Some of What we Already Offer

who offer a comprehensive package of early years support through group sessions which in February alone was accessed by in excess of 3000 babies, children and families.

These include:

- Infant Massage
- Baby & Me
- Ready, Steady, Play
- Pram Pushes
- Outdoor Play
- Save a Baby's Life

These offers support parent-infant relationships, promote early development, and contribute to improved health and wellbeing outcomes.



Wigan's Strong Foundations

Existing Services

Early Years Collaborative

Brings partners together around the first 1,001 critical days and a shared focus on prevention, early development and improved outcomes. This collaborative approach aligns activity across health, early years, family support and wider partners, helping to move the borough toward a more coherent Best Start system.

Best Start in Life system

Underpinned by a strong, integrated infant feeding and early relationship model aligned to the UNICEF Baby Friendly Gold Standard. A multi-agency workforce is in place, including the Community Infant Feeding Team (CIFT), Health visiting, Midwifery and Family Hubs, working together to provide seamless support from pregnancy through to early childhood.

The Balance System

A full mapping of provision has clarified strengths, gaps and future priorities, while Wellcomm is now fully embedded across all Family Hubs, supporting consistent early identification. There is also a School Link Worker pilot in Leigh, an area with high SLCN need, aiming to improve early identification, workforce confidence and communication between services. Early feedback indicates strong integration and positive impact.

Portage Service

Portage provides a structured and impactful intervention for children with SEND and their families. The programme supports parents to embed learning within everyday routines, models interaction strategies and helps families understand developmental next steps.

Early Years Forum

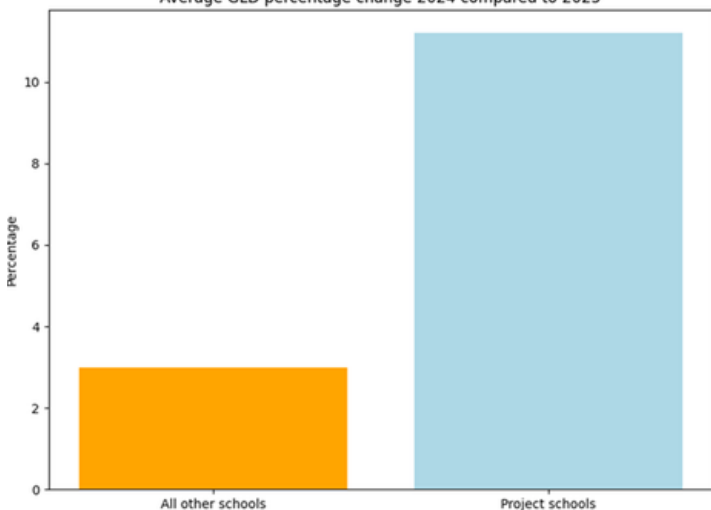
An active Early Years Forum also supports early identification and response by bringing services together around children and families at the earliest opportunity. Through health notifications, shared intelligence and coordinated discussion, partners wrap support around families more effectively, improve continuity, and reduce the risk of later escalation.

Making A Big Difference Project

A data-led programme targeting schools to accelerate GLD, strengthen practice and deliver sustained improvements in outcomes for children.

Impact- In 2025, Good Level of Development, (GLD), increased at a faster rate than both regional and national averages. Project schools improved 11% vs 3% across all schools.

Average GLD percentage change 2024 compared to 2025



Our approach

- Targeted 20 schools using GLD data, intelligence and context
- Delivered structured Early Years improvement cycles
- Provided bespoke coaching, moderation, challenge and support
- Focused on sustained improvement
- Shared exemplary practice and networking opportunities



Our priorities



Wigan Council

1

Strengthening the Home Learning Environment and Parenting Support

- 1.1 Increase parent and carer confidence in supporting learning, routines and development from pregnancy to school entry.
- 1.2 Embed Wigan's Home Learning Environment (HLE) pathway across universal, targeted and specialist tiers including evidence-based approaches such as PEEP Learning Together programme.
- 1.3 Deliver a coordinated parenting offer, including evidence-based parenting and communication programmes to build parent and carer confidence in supporting early language, attachment and learning at home.
- 1.4 Develop a community-based approach to peer support, building trusted relationships and increasing engagement through local family networks.
- 1.5 Increase engagement with families least likely to access universal early years and parenting services, particularly in priority neighbourhoods. Including targeted approaches to engage fathers, male carers and underrepresented groups.

2

Supporting Healthy Development Across the First 1001 Days

- 2.1 Ensure children experience healthy development from pregnancy to age two through strengthened delivery of the Healthy Child Programme.
- 2.2 Promote healthy pregnancies, secure attachment and positive infant mental health through universal and preventative approaches.
- 2.3 Enhance the integrated 2- 2 ½ year review to improve coordination, between health, early years and family support services.
- 2.4 Provide families with access to a trusted digital Start for Life offer, ensuring consistent information and support
- 2.5 Use population health and early years data to identify emerging needs and inform continuous improvement across the first 1,001 days.
- 2.6 Ensure safeguarding is a visible and accessible part of the Start for Life offer for families during the 1,001 critical days.

3

Improving Access to High – Quality Early Years Education and Childcare

- 3.1 Ensure sufficient high quality early years places are available across the borough, supported through robust sufficiency planning, market development and ongoing engagement with providers.
- 3.2 Increase take up of funded early education entitlements and drive continuous improvement across early years settings.
- 3.3 Ensure early years and childcare provision is affordable, flexible and responsive to family and employment needs.
- 3.4 Support early years providers and the childcare workforce through training, recruitment initiatives and professional development opportunities.
- 3.5 Promote effective transitions between early years provision and Reception, supporting continuity in children's learning, development and wellbeing.

4

Raising Early Years Quality and School Readiness Outcomes

- 4.1 Increase the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of Reception (72.9% by 2028).
- 4.2 Close attainment gaps in outcomes for disadvantaged children and children with additional language (EAL), and for priority groups agreed locally.
- 4.3 Embed a shared 'school readiness' approach across early years settings, schools, families supported by the Kindred Squared 'Starting Reception' tool.
- 4.4 Embed consistent, high-quality transitions across the early years journey, including into Reception, so that children are ready to learn and services are ready for children (Early Years Transition Charter).
- 4.5 Embed evidence-informed approaches to speech, language and communication development, supported by WellComm and the Balance System.

5

Identifying Need Earlier and increasing Early intervention and SEND support

- 5.1 Improve early identification of developmental delay and SEND ensuring emerging concerns are recognised and responded to early.
- 5.2 Ensure access to targeted early intervention support, including specialist services such as Portage where developmental delay is identified.
- 5.3 Use the Early Years Forum to support collaboration, shared learning and continuous improvement across early years health and SEND services.
- 5.4 Promote inclusive practice across early years provision, supporting settings to meet the needs for children with SEND within mainstream environments wherever possible.
- 5.5 Increase consistency and quality of SEND support across early years settings and neighbourhoods, helping families experience joined up support.

Our targets



By 2028

- 1** Increase overall GLD from 65.9% to 72.9%.
- 2** Increase GLD for children eligible for Free School Meals from 48.8% to 54.2%.
- 3** Develop a comprehensive parenting offer to ensure parents are able to access evidenced based parenting support.
- 4** Accelerate improvement in the weakest Early Learning Goals, particularly word reading, listening/attention/understanding, and writing.
- 5** Improve early developmental outcomes at age 2-2.5, particularly in communication, problem solving and personal-social development.
- 6** Narrow gaps in outcomes for children experiencing disadvantage, children with SEND or emerging developmental needs, and children with English as an Additional Language.
- 7** Strengthen engagement with universal health reviews and earlier pathways into targeted support.
- 8** Reduce variation in outcomes between neighbourhoods and cohorts.



By 2030

- 1** Achieve 75% or more of children reaching a Good Level of Development.
- 2** Sustain accelerated improvement for disadvantaged children and priority cohorts.
- 3** Embed a whole-system approach in which education, health, family support and community-based services contribute to shared early outcomes.

Governance and Accountability

Delivery of Wigan's Best Start in Life Plan is underpinned by a strong and evolving governance structure, designed to drive system-wide alignment, accountability and impact. A Best Start in Life Strategic Group currently provides oversight of delivery, bringing together senior leaders from education, health, early years, family hubs and the voluntary and community sector.

This group is supported by a series of thematic subgroups, which form the core delivery infrastructure of the programme. These subgroups drive forward key priorities including the Home Learning Environment, parenting, speech, language and communication, and family hub integration ensuring a coordinated and consistent approach across the system.

Recognising the opportunities presented through national policy reform, Wigan is undertaking a wider refresh of its strategic governance arrangements. This will further strengthen alignment across Education, Early Help, Family Hubs, Start for Life and Early Years services, ensuring a more integrated, outcome-focused system for children and families.

As part of this, Wigan has a clear ambition to be held meaningfully accountable through the Children First Progress with Unity Board, co-chaired by the Youth Cabinet. This will ensure that strategic oversight is informed by the voices of children and young people, and that our work remains focused on what matters most to families.

Feedback



We will build a system where feedback leads to action, and where families can clearly see the difference they have made. We will do this by building on the existing neighbourhood networks established within Family Hubs.

Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny committee provide democratic oversight and challenge, ensuring the Best Start in Life programme delivers measurable impact for children and families.



Children First Progress with Unity Board

We will be held accountable to the Children First Progress with Unity Board- co chaired by Youth Cabinet. Who will provide strategic challenge and oversight, ensuring our work reflects what matters most to families



The Children First Progress with Unity Board

“Our further ambition is to be held meaningfully accountable through the Children First Progress with Unity Board, co-chaired by the Youth Cabinet, ensuring our system is shaped, challenged and strengthened by the voices of children and young people”

Golden Threads

Wigan's Best Start in Life plan is underpinned by a set of shared principles or "golden threads", that guide how partners across Wigan work together to improve outcomes for babies, young children and their families. These threads reflect the borough's commitment to a whole-system approach that combines strong evidence, partnership working and a focus on prevention.

1 A focus on the first 1,001 days

Pregnancy and the first two years of life represent a unique window of opportunity to influence children's lifelong health, development and wellbeing. Wigan will prioritise support during this period by strengthening connections between maternity services, health visiting, Family Hubs and early years services. This includes recognising and addressing potential "baby blind spots" within the wider system, ensuring babies and infants are visible in service planning and receive the earliest possible support.

3 Whole-system, place-based approach

Children's development is shaped by a complex web of influences including health, family relationships, early learning opportunities and wider social and economic factors. Improving outcomes therefore requires coordinated action across services. Wigan's Best Start in Life plan brings together partners from health, early education, family support, SEND services, neighbourhood services, housing, financial support and the voluntary and community sector to deliver a place-based approach that reduces barriers for families and improves access to support.

5 Evidence into Practice

Wigan is committed to implementing approaches that are grounded in research and evidence. The plan prioritises evidence-based interventions that strengthen parenting, communication and language development, and school readiness. Practitioners across the system will be supported to use evidence, data and shared learning to continuously improve practice and outcomes.

7 Continuous learning and improvement

Improving outcomes for children and families requires a system that learns and adapts over time. Wigan will adopt a test and learn approach, piloting new approaches where appropriate, using data and feedback from families and practitioners to understand what works best, and scaling effective practice across the system. This commitment to continuous improvement will ensure the Best Start in Life plan evolves in response to evidence, learning and the needs of local communities.

2 Families at the centre

Parents and carers play the most significant role in their child's development. Wigan's approach focuses on building parental confidence, capability and relationships. Services will work alongside families to strengthen the home learning environment, promote secure attachment and support positive interactions that enable children to thrive.

4 Early identification and early intervention

Intervening early in a child's life is more effective and sustainable than responding once difficulties have escalated. Wigan will strengthen early identification of developmental needs through integrated health and early years pathways, including developmental reviews, speech and language screening and strong multi-agency working.

6 Collective leadership and community connection

Improving early childhood outcomes requires collective leadership and strong community engagement. Wigan will continue to build partnerships across agencies and with local communities to mobilise assets and resources around families. This includes strengthening trusted relationships between services and communities and developing approaches such as community connectors, helping families access support through trusted peer networks and local relationships.

Direction of travel

The next phase of improvement is focused on moving from strong foundations and improving overall outcomes to a more equitable, intelligence-led system that secures earlier impact for babies, young children and families who need the most support.

What we will do differently

This means strengthening the integration of health, early years, Family Hubs and community-based services so that **priority cohorts** are more clearly identified and tracked, and so that intervention happens earlier in the pathway rather than waiting until Reception. It means using developmental, health and education data together to understand which children and communities are furthest from expected outcomes and to **target support proportionately**.

Local intelligence already points to the need for stronger action on **early language and communication**, the home learning environment, earlier identification of emerging developmental needs, and improved connection between universal services and targeted help. Wigan's direction of travel is therefore to **deepen integration** between maternity, health visiting, Family Hubs, early years settings, speech and language pathways, **SEND support** and schools, so that **families experience** a clearer and more coherent journey through the system. Focus will be placed on **accelerating progress** for children experiencing disadvantage to ensure that improvements in overall outcomes do not mask widening inequalities.

Alongside this, Wigan will continue to **strengthen** its **community reach**. The borough will explore approaches that strengthen trusted relationships between services and communities, improving outreach, engagement and early identification of need. This will include the development of a **community connector type approach**, helping to build stronger links between families, community networks and local services so that support can be accessed earlier and families are better able to navigate the help available to them.

Alongside this, Wigan will continue to strengthen its strategic use of evidence. The borough intends to **develop a shared outcomes framework** and a more mature approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning, informed by research and, over time, supported by **university collaboration**. This will help ensure the system remains responsive, evidence informed and accountable for impact.

Improving GLD to at least 72.9% by 2028 and beyond will require a whole system response that addresses developmental, relational, health and socio-economic factors together. Wigan has strong foundations and clear ambition. The task now is to build on that platform with greater consistency, sharper targeting and **stronger alignment** across the full Best Start in Life system.





Best Start in Life Core service aims

Home Learning Environment

A borough-wide review of the Home Learning Environment system was undertaken across Health Visiting, Family Hubs, Early Years services and specialist SEND provision as part of the Best Start in Life programme. This review highlighted the critical role of the wider home environment, including housing quality, stability and living conditions, in shaping children's early development and experiences during the first 1001 days.

Universal Tier

The review identified strong universal engagement with families through Family Hubs, health visiting and community-based early years provision. Families can access a wide range of opportunities including baby massage, stay and play sessions, story and rhyme groups, sensory play opportunities, Baby Hub sessions and health-led workshops focused on sleep, feeding and routines. Book start packs and speech and language advice are widely available through accessible drop-in clinics and community sessions. These services create welcoming environments, strengthen relationships with families and support parental confidence.

Universal provision successfully offers a wide range of accessible opportunities to support children's development. The next phase of development is to enhance how this offer is structured as a progressive learning journey, ensuring children's communication and literacy skills are consistently built over time.

Targeted Tier

Targeted services across the borough, including speech and language clinics, Family Help, Early Help occupational therapy, educational psychology and SEND-specific support are responsive and highly valued once needs are identified.

There is a clear opportunity to strengthen earlier, structured prevention for children who are beginning to show emerging needs but so not yet meet specialist thresholds. This will include developing a more connected pathway within the Home Learning Environment offer, ensuring children with emerging speech and language delay, developing vocabulary, or limited access to structured literacy experiences can access timely, targeted support before escalation. Strengthening this 'middle' offer will help create a clearer prevention bridge between universal and specialist services, supporting earlier intervention and improved outcomes over time.

Specialist Tier

Specialist support is well established and provides high-quality, targeted intervention for children with more complex needs and their families. Services such as Portage, Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy and SEND support, evidence-informed approaches that strengthen parent-child interaction, build parental confidence and support children's developmental progress.

The next phase is to enrich connections between universal, targeted and specialist services, ensuring families experience a seamless and well-understood pathway, with support introduced at the right time and at the right level as needs evolve.



Home Learning Environment

The Home Learning Environment (HLE) is a key determinant of early language development, literacy and school readiness. Wigan's approach focuses on strengthening parental confidence, supporting high-quality parent-child interaction and ensuring families have access to structured early learning experiences that promote communication, language and early literacy.

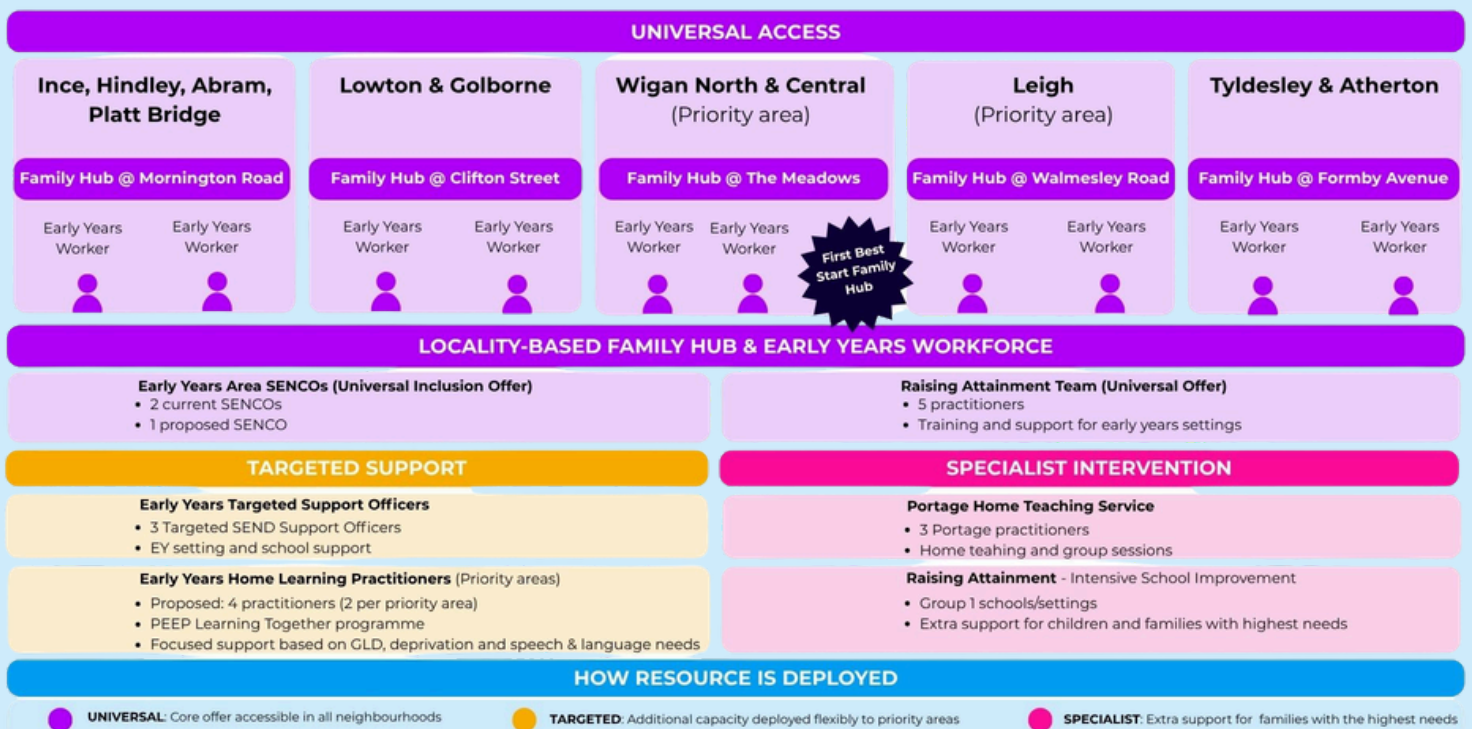
To strengthen prevention and system coherence, Wigan will introduce a structured targeted tier within the Home Learning Environment pathway. The preferred model for implementation is the PEEP Learning Together Programme, an evidence-based parent-child intervention focused on early communication, language and literacy development. PEEP emphasises high-quality adult-child interaction, shared book experiences, vocabulary development, phonological awareness and embedding learning through everyday routines.

The programme aligns closely with the Portage model, with both approaches characterised by structured progression, parent empowerment and fidelity to evidence-based practice. Introducing PEEP will create a coherent developmental pathway across the HLE system: Universal engagement → Structured targeted literacy (PEEP) → Specialist intervention (Portage).

Initial implementation will take place within Wigan Central, aligned to the borough's first Best Start Family Hub demonstrator locality. Learning from this phase will inform phased expansion to additional priority neighbourhoods, ensuring that families in areas experiencing greater disadvantage can access structured early literacy support.

Best Start in Life Delivery Model: Integrated Early Years and Family Hub Support

A borough-wide, graduated model of universal, targeted and specialist support



PRIORITIES AND MEASURES OF PROGRESS



Priorities

- Commission and deliver the PEEP Learning Together Programme within Wigan Central for children aged 3–4 identified as at risk of not achieving GLD.
- Integrate PEEP within a clearly articulated universal → targeted → specialist HLE pathway to improve system coherence and consistency of support.
- Embed the Balance System approach across early years and reception to strengthen early identification, graduated response and workforce confidence in supporting speech, language and communication needs.
- Deliver a 'Confident Communicators' offer through Family Hubs for parents and carers, building confidence and skills to support children's speech, language and communication at home.
- Establish the Kindred Squared 'Starting Reception' approach across the borough to strengthen school readiness, aligning early years settings, schools and families around shared expectations and practical strategies.
- Develop a targeted 'Ready to Grow' programme to support children who have not accessed early years provision, providing additional support to build school readiness, confidence and early learning foundations.

Measures of progress

- Improved consistency of HLE support across the system, evidenced through workforce confidence measures and quality assurance activity.
- Reduction in gaps in early language and communication outcomes between disadvantaged children and their peers.
- Participation and completion rates for PEEP cohorts.
- Pre- and post-intervention improvements in early speech, language and communication indicators.
- Increased parent and carer confidence in supporting early literacy and communication at home, evidenced through feedback and evaluation.
- Increased engagement in wellbeing-based HLE programme-including the use of wellbeing packs.
- Reduction in escalation to specialist services through effective early intervention.
- Improvement in GLD outcomes, with a focus on communication and literacy.
- Increased engagement with digital HLE platforms (e.g. Anya, Essential Parent, BeWell), including reach and sustained usage.

Parenting

Supporting parents and carers to feel confident, connected and capable in their parenting role is central to improving early childhood outcomes in Wigan. Parenting support is a core component of Wigan's early intervention system, enabling families to access support earlier and in ways that feel welcoming, accessible and relational.

Our approach recognises parents should be the experts on their own children and focuses on strengthening the home learning environment, promoting secure attachment and supporting positive parent-child relationships during the critical early years. Wigan is strengthening its parenting offer to ensure that support is evidence-based, coordinated across services and embedded within communities so that families can access the right support at the right time.

Wigan is also committed to strengthening father-inclusive practice, building on existing targeted sessions for fathers and male carers, and exploring opportunities to work with the Fatherhood Institute to further enhance our offer.

Wigan has a strong foundation of early help and parenting support, with a range of universal, targeted and specialist offers already in place. However, our review has identified an opportunity to further strengthen and align our delivery of key evidence-based programmes, including the Nurturing Programme and Pre-School Riding the Rapids, to ensure a more consistent and coherent borough-wide offer for families with children aged 3-4, particularly those at risk of not achieving a Good Level of Development.

We recognise the importance of ensuring families can access support at the earliest opportunity and that provision is delivered consistently across the system. Strengthening engagement, capacity and completion rates will enable more families to benefit from high-quality support and achieve improved outcomes.

In response, Wigan will enhance its parenting offer with a sharper focus on early years prevention, ensuring that all families can access high-quality, evidence-based support that builds confidence, strengthens relationships and supports children's readiness for school. Alongside structured programmes, we will continue to build community capacity through peer support and trusted relationships, including the development of a community connectors approach to increase engagement, strengthen family networks and improve access to early help.

Parents and carers will play an active role in shaping Wigan's parenting offer through co-production, ensuring services reflect the lived experience, strengths and needs of families across the borough.

PRIORITIES AND MEASURES OF PROGRESS



Priorities

- Commission and implement a borough-wide, evidence-based parenting offer, including the introduction and scale-up of the Nurturing Programme and Pre-School Riding the Rapids, with a focus on children aged 3–4.
- Develop a clearly articulated early years parenting pathway, aligned to universal → targeted → specialist support, ensuring families can access support earlier and more consistently.
- Increase delivery capacity and reduce waiting times for parenting programmes, particularly in priority neighbourhoods and Family Hub all localities in the Wigan borough.
- Strengthen engagement and access, including improving the digital offer and ensuring parenting support is inclusive of fathers, families with SEND and those least likely to engage.
- Work with partners, including the Fatherhood Institute, to strengthen father-inclusive practice and increase participation of fathers and male carers in parenting support.

Measures of progress

Reach and access:

- Increase in the proportion of families with children aged 0–5 accessing parenting support through Family Hubs or community delivery.
- Increased uptake of evidence-based parenting programmes across the borough.
- Increased engagement from families living in priority neighbourhoods or experiencing disadvantage.

Parent capability and confidence:

- Improvement in parent confidence and parenting self-efficacy measured through pre- and post-programme tools.
- Increased parental understanding of child development and early learning.

Parent-child relationships:

- Improvement in parent-reported quality of parent-child interactions following participation in parenting support.
- Reduction in parent-reported child behaviour and emotional difficulties.

System change:

- Increased referrals to parenting support through integrated pathways (health visitors, early years settings, Family Hubs and VCFSE organisations).
- Increased number of parents involved in co-production and service design.
- Increased community-based delivery of parenting support through Family Hubs and partner organisations.

Access to High Quality Early Years Education

We will ensure that all children can access high-quality early education and childcare that supports their development, school readiness and long-term outcomes, with a particular focus on children in disadvantaged communities. Our approach is aligned to national childcare reforms, including the expansion of early education entitlements, the School-Based Nursery Programme, school age childcare expectations and the rollout of free breakfast clubs. Locally, this is underpinned by robust, place-based sufficiency analysis, drawing on data relating to demand, deprivation, workforce capacity and projected population growth.

We are taking a targeted approach to expanding provision through the Phase 3 School-Based Nursery Programme, prioritising areas with the greatest sufficiency gaps and lowest outcomes. This is supported by a structured Expression of Interest (EOI) process, enabling schools to bring forward proposals aligned to local need and strategic priorities. In parallel, we are refreshing our School Age Childcare (SAC) offer to ensure a coherent, high-quality system of provision that supports children and working families beyond the early years.

Quality improvement is central to our approach. We will deliver a structured, data-informed improvement programme, targeting schools, settings and childminders based on Good Level of Development (GLD) data and wider intelligence. This includes our Making a Big Difference programme and ongoing improvement cycles, which provide targeted support, coaching and challenge to drive sustained improvement.

Our workforce development model is built on collaboration, coaching and continuous learning. Practitioners are supported through targeted training, gap tasks to embed learning, and opportunities to engage in peer-to-peer support, including visiting high-quality provision to strengthen practice across the system. This is delivered through a multi-agency model, drawing on expertise across education, health and early help to provide coordinated support to settings and practitioners.

We are strengthening the quality of teaching and learning through partnership working across the system, including collaboration with TESS, Maths and English Hubs, and multi-agency partners such as the Educational Psychology Service, health visiting, early help and development teams, Family Hub practitioners and services such as Embrace. This joined-up approach supports evidence-informed practice, early identification of need and effective transitions into Year 1. We will further embed the Greater Manchester Reflect Tool to provide a shared framework of early years competencies, aligning training, support and quality assurance processes to a consistent standard across the workforce.

Inclusion is a key driver of quality. Our Early Years Inclusion Service has embedded the **Graduated Response Toolkit** to support practitioners in delivering inclusive, high-quality environments that meet the needs of all children, including those with SEND. This is supported through targeted outreach, modelling and coaching to build workforce confidence and capability.

We also recognise the importance of practitioner and child wellbeing in achieving high-quality provision. Our borough-wide wellbeing offer, including innovative approaches such as **Songs That Make You Go “Mmm”** delivered in partnership with the music service, supports emotional wellbeing, engagement and positive learning environments. This approach is being extended into home learning and Family Hub delivery to strengthen the link between settings and families.

Through this integrated, system-led approach, we will ensure that early education and childcare provision is inclusive, high-quality and responsive, contributing to improved school readiness and narrowing attainment gaps.

PRIORITIES AND MEASURES OF PROGRESS



Priorities

- Sufficiency & Access- Deliver the Phase 3 School-Based Nursery Programme, using place-based sufficiency analysis to prioritise areas of need, alongside a structured Expression of Interest (EOI) process to invite proposals aligned to local demand and strategic priorities.
- Childcare System Development- Refresh and implement the School Age Childcare (SAC) strategy and support national programmes, including free breakfast clubs, to ensure a coherent and accessible childcare offer for children and families.
- Targeted Quality Improvement- Deliver a targeted, data-informed quality improvement programme based on GLD and wider intelligence, including continuation of the Making a Big Difference programme and embedded improvement cycles.
- Workforce Development & System Learning- Strengthen workforce capability through a coordinated development offer, including training, coaching, peer learning, gap tasks and collaboration across high-quality provision.
- Partnership & System Integration- Strengthen multi-agency collaboration across education, health and early help services, including partnerships with TESS, Maths and English Hubs, to support early identification, inclusive practice and strong transitions.
- Inclusion & Wellbeing- Embed inclusive and wellbeing-focused practice across the system, including implementation of the Graduated Response Toolkit, the Greater Manchester Reflect Tool and expansion of the early years wellbeing offer through Family Hubs and home learning.

Measures of progress

- Increase in the number of high-quality early years places in areas of identified need.
- Reduction in sufficiency gaps across priority neighbourhoods.
- Improved take-up of funded early education entitlements, particularly among disadvantaged families.
- Improvement in Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes over time, particularly in targeted settings and priority areas.
- Improved quality indicators across early years provision (e.g. Ofsted outcomes, workforce engagement, participation in training).
- Increased workforce confidence and capability, evidenced through engagement in training, peer learning and Reflect Tool competencies.
- Positive feedback from practitioners and families on quality, accessibility and wellbeing support.

Transition to school and reception year

A smooth transition into Reception is critical to children's long-term educational success. In Wigan, we will strengthen collaboration between early years settings, schools and families to ensure children experience consistent expectations, strong communication and well-supported transitions that promote school readiness and improve outcomes at the end of Reception.

We recognise that transition is not a single event, but a continuous journey across the early years, beginning from a child's earliest experiences. This includes transitions from home into Family Hub services, Portage and early years provision, through to Reception and beyond. Our approach therefore focuses on both key transition points and the smaller, day-to-day 'micro transitions' that support children's sense of security, belonging and readiness to learn. To support this, we will embed a consistent, borough-wide approach to transitions, underpinned by the Early Years Transition Charter. This will ensure that children are ready to learn and that services, including schools, are ready for children.

A key feature of our approach is the delivery of structured transition events, bringing together schools, early years providers and childminders to share information about individual children. These events complement, rather than replace, existing setting-level transition arrangements, and provide an additional opportunity to strengthen relationships, support early identification of need and ensure a coordinated response for children and families.

We will further strengthen this through improved data sharing, joint working and alignment across early education, health and family support services. This includes close collaboration with Family Hubs and multi-agency partners to ensure families are supported throughout the transition process and experience a coherent and joined-up pathway.

We are also trialling a digital system (Qnomy) to track children's engagement with early years and family hub services, enabling us to build a clearer picture of individual children's journeys across the 0-5 system. This supports a more personalised and proactive approach, allowing services to identify need earlier, target support more effectively and ensure smoother transitions into early education and school. Focus will be given to children with additional needs and those in vulnerable groups, ensuring that transitions are inclusive, responsive and tailored to individual children, supporting continuity in learning, development and wellbeing.

In addition, we will develop a targeted "Ready to Grow" programme to support children who have not accessed early years provision, providing additional support to build school readiness, confidence and early learning foundations prior to entry into Reception, working in partnership with schools, Family Hubs and early years providers.

This approach ensures no child experiences a fragmented transition into early education or school.



PRIORITIES AND MEASURES OF PROGRESS



Priorities

- Strengthen shared understanding of school readiness across early years settings, schools and families.
- Support improved Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes through targeted improvement work and collaboration across the sector.
- Develop consistent transition practices between early years settings and schools.
- Improve data sharing between early years providers and schools to support continuity of learning and early identification of need.
- Enhance partnerships between schools, early years providers and Family Hubs to support children and families during the transition to school.

Measures of progress

- Increase in the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of Reception, with a particular focus on reducing gaps for disadvantaged children and those with additional needs.
- Improved consistency in transition arrangements across early years settings and schools, evidenced through quality assurance activity and feedback from practitioners.
- Increased proportion of early years providers and schools engaging in structured transition activity, including attendance at transition events.
- Improved quality and timeliness of information sharing between early years providers and schools, supporting continuity of learning and early identification of need.



SEND Support

Improving outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is a key priority, reflecting increasing levels of need and earlier identification through established multi-agency pathways, including the Early Years Forum. The focus is on ensuring needs are recognised at the earliest opportunity and that children and families receive timely, coordinated support within inclusive environments wherever possible.

This approach aligns with national Start for Life priorities, strengthening early identification and support from pregnancy and the earliest years, and builds into a wider Best Start in Life ambition to create a joined-up 0–5 system focused on improving outcomes and school readiness for all children, including those with additional needs.

Delivery is supported through a coordinated network of services, including the Early Years Inclusion Team, Educational Psychology Service, health partners, Best Start in Life Family hub teams, and the Portage service. These services work alongside early years providers and Family Hubs to provide advice, guidance and targeted support, enabling needs to be identified and responded to earlier and more consistently across the system.

A strong emphasis is placed on building workforce capability, supported by consistent use of a graduated response and shared tools, ensuring practitioners are confident in meeting a wide range of needs within mainstream provision. This is complemented by effective multi-agency working, enabling a more responsive system where children can access the right support at the right time, reducing escalation and improving long-term outcomes.

In line with national direction, families will be able to access specialist knowledge and support through integrated services and teams aligned to Family Hubs, ensuring access to expertise when needed and enabling a coordinated, multi-agency response to emerging need.



PRIORITIES AND MEASURES OF PROGRESS



Priorities

- Improve early identification through consistent use of assessment, observation and screening approaches across early years pathways.
- Support delivery of a clear and consistent graduated response, including use of Wigan's Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision, (OAIP), and Early Years Graduated Response Toolkit.
- Increase access to early intervention and specialist support, including Portage.
- Enhance joint working between early years providers, health services, Family Hubs and specialist teams.
- Promote inclusive practice across all early years provision and reduce variation between settings.
- Provide Educational Psychology drop-in clinics at Best Start Family Hubs.

Measures of progress

- More children identified with SEND at an earlier stage, including prior to school entry.
- Increased practitioner confidence in identifying and supporting additional needs.
- Greater access to early intervention and targeted support.
- More consistent SEND provision across settings.
- Positive feedback from families on the coordination and timeliness of support.



Maternal and Early Years Health Services

In Wigan, we recognise that strong, caring and connected relationships are at the heart of improving outcomes for children and families. Our approach to maternal and early years health is rooted in building trusted relationships from pregnancy through to early childhood, ensuring families feel supported, understood and able to access help at the right time.

We are building on strong foundations, including our Early Years Collaborative and integrated working across maternity, health visiting, early years and Family Hubs. However, we know there is further opportunity to strengthen integration, ensuring families experience a seamless, coordinated system of support.

Our approach is increasingly shaped by local intelligence, including the Children and Young People's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, which highlights key priorities such as early language development, oral health, emotional wellbeing and inequalities in outcomes. We will take a more targeted and preventative approach, focusing on the wider determinants of health alongside key developmental milestones, to ensure every child has the best possible start in life.

● Priorities

- Strengthen a relationship-based model of delivery, ensuring all services prioritise trusted, consistent relationships with families from pregnancy onwards
- Deliver a high-quality, consistent Healthy Child Programme across the 0-5 pathway, with a clear focus on early identification and prevention.
- Improve coordination and integration across maternity, health visiting, early years, Family Hubs and early help services, ensuring families experience a seamless and joined-up system
- Enhance the 2-2. ½ year review, improving quality, consistency and multi-agency involvement to support earlier identification of need.
- Target support using JSNA insights, focusing on key priorities including early language, oral health, emotional wellbeing and inequalities in development outcomes.
- Increase access and engagement with services, particularly for families identified as vulnerable or less likely to engage, through both face-to-face and trusted digital routes.
- Strengthen the focus on wider determinants of health, including parental wellbeing, financial stability and social connection, recognising their impact on child development.
- Build on the Early Years Collaborative model, embedding shared accountability, joint planning and aligned delivery across partners.

● Measures of progress

- Increased uptake and timeliness of Healthy Child Programme reviews, including the 2-2.5 year review.
- Improved developmental outcomes at the 2-2 ½ year review, particularly in communication, language and personal, social and emotional development.
- Strengthened relationships between families and services, evidenced through increased engagement, sustained participation and positive feedback.
- Earlier identification of emerging need, supported by improved multi-agency working and shared intelligence.
- Reduction in inequalities in early child development outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children.
- Improved oral health outcomes, including increased uptake of preventative support and reductions in tooth decay at age 5.
- Increased engagement with Family Hubs and integrated early help services, particularly from priority families.
- Improved outcomes linked to wider determinants of health, including parental wellbeing and access to support networks.
- Evidence of strengthened system integration, building on the Early Years Collaborative through shared delivery, aligned practice and collective accountability.

System Enablers

Delivery of Best Start in Life is supported by a set of core enablers that underpin a coordinated and sustainable early years system. These include integrated services, a capable workforce, effective use of data and digital tools, meaningful family involvement and clear governance arrangements.

Together, these create the conditions for consistent, high-quality delivery across Wigan's localities.

1 Service Integration and Best Start Family Hubs

We will continue to strengthen our locality-based Family Hub model, ensuring services are integrated, accessible and responsive to need. Through co-location, shared pathways and multi-agency working, families will experience seamless support, with earlier intervention and reduced duplication across the system.

2 Workforce Capacity and Capability

We will build a confident, skilled and sustainable workforce across early years, health and family services. Through targeted training, shared learning and strong professional networks, practitioners will be equipped to deliver inclusive, high-quality support that meets the diverse needs of children and families.

3 Digital and Data

We will strengthen our use of data and digital systems to better understand need, track outcomes and target support. Improved data sharing and insight will enable earlier identification, more effective decision-making and a clearer understanding of impact across the borough.

We will ensure families can easily access clear, consistent and up to date information through the Family Information Service.

4 Family involvement and co-production

We will place children, parents and carers at the centre of service design and delivery. Through meaningful co-production, feedback loops and inclusive engagement approaches, we will ensure services reflect lived experience and respond to what matters most to families.

5 Accountability and Governance

We will ensure strong, transparent governance through partnership structures, including the Children First Progress with Unity Board and Scrutiny Committees. This will provide oversight, challenge and assurance, driving delivery and ensuring measurable impact for children and families. This is a developing governance arrangement and will develop over time.

