



Best Start Local Strategy / Plan Gloucestershire

‘Summary Read’

**“Gloucestershire - A great place to grow up
where children and young people thrive and
live lives of choice and opportunity. “**

1. Vision

Gloucestershire's vision is for every child to grow up healthy, safe, included and ready to learn, with the strongest foundations for lifelong wellbeing. The strategy commits to ensuring children can access high-quality, joined-up services from pregnancy to age five, reducing inequalities and supporting children in diverse communities across the county. It prioritises early relationships, strong attachment, high-quality play experiences, and a rich home learning environment. Family Hubs will act as accessible, culturally competent spaces where families can access support for health, parenting, Special Education Needs and Disabilities, early learning and community help.

2. Intention and Core Ambition

The strategy aims to transform Gloucestershire's early years system so that families experience seamless support across maternity, health, early education, early help and community services. It responds to persistent inequalities across Gloucestershire and aims to narrow Good Level of Development gaps for disadvantaged children, Special Education Needs and Disabilities and diverse ethnic communities. The intention is to create a system focused on stopping problems early that is supported by strong data, co-production with families, and coordinated investment across partners. The strategy emphasises play as a universal driver of early learning, emotional wellbeing and communication, embedding it across Family Hubs, early years settings, community spaces and parent support pathways.

3. Local Context and Needs Summary

Population data indicates approximately 37,885 children aged 0–5 in Gloucestershire, with increasing ethnic diversity and pockets of significant deprivation. Children in deprived areas experience higher risks of developmental delay, reduced school readiness, poorer oral health and greater maternal health inequalities. The strategy highlights rising concerns around home-learning inequalities, screen overuse, food insecurity, maternal mental health pressures and variable access to high-quality early education in rural areas. Evidence shows correlation between deprivation, ethnicity and Special Education Needs and Disabilities which compounds disadvantage from birth, reinforcing the need for targeted, place-based early intervention.

4. Delivery Approach

Delivery is centred on Best Start Family Hubs acting as a universal front door to services. Hubs will coordinate maternity, health visiting, early years education,

Special Education Needs and Disabilities pathways, speech and language, parenting support, play opportunities, and community-led initiatives. A whole-system workforce development plan will strengthen quality and consistency across services. Integrated multi-agency pathways will support early identification of developmental needs, maternal mental health concerns and Special Education Needs and Disabilities. A test-and-learn innovation model will be used to pilot approaches in high-need areas, scaling effective practice countywide. Voluntary Community Sector partners will be integrated as core contributors offering culturally competent, community-based support and outreach.

5. Priority Area 1 – Early Childhood Education & Childcare

The county currently benefits from around 600 early years providers, with 97% rated Good or Outstanding. The strategy aims to expand sufficiency, particularly in high-need areas, increase Special Education Needs and Disabilities inclusion, strengthen take-up of funded entitlements and address workforce variation. A comprehensive Quality and Inclusion offer will support practitioners with Continuing Professional Development in pedagogy, communication-rich environments, early language, play-based learning and trauma-informed practice. Childcare sufficiency assessments will shape market development, including expansion of school-based nurseries. Addressing workforce gaps and strengthening quality in deprived areas are key to improving Good Level of Development outcomes and reducing attainment gaps.

6. Priority Area 2 – Readiness for Learning and Transitions

The strategy highlights inconsistency in school readiness assessments and quality of transition information shared between early years settings and schools. The Ready for Learning tool will become the countywide assessment tool, used during the preschool year. A new Local Authority-wide Transition Pathway will support consistency, with Transition Information Passports completed for every child. Collaborative Early Year Foundation Stage assessment networks, and improved professional relationships between providers and schools aim to strengthen transition quality and reduce disparities in support for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities and emerging needs. Parent workshops and co-produced readiness guidance will strengthen parental involvement.

7. Priority Area 3 – Maternal and Early Health

Health Visiting provides a strong universal base, but improvements are needed in uptake of mandated contacts and integrated pathways. The strategy strengthens

perinatal mental health pathways, oral health initiatives (such as supervised toothbrushing), breastfeeding support, immunisation uptake and nutrition initiatives via Healthy Start. Rising screen use, food insecurity and geographic inequalities (rural transport, reduced access to dental care) are core concerns. Integrated reviews and improved data sharing between health visiting, early education and Family Hubs will aid earlier detection of developmental concerns. Enhanced outreach aims to reduce missed contacts and engage underserved families.

8. Priority Area 4 – Special Educational Needs & Disabilities

The strategy identifies gaps in early identification, access to early years provision and sufficiency of specialist places. To address this, specialist Special Education Needs and Disabilities advisors will be embedded within each Family Hub, and early identification processes across health, early years and Family Hubs will be standardised. Inclusion Funding pathways will be simplified, and stronger monitoring introduced. Workforce development for inclusive practice will expand significantly. The strategy responds to increases in deferred school entry requests due to insufficient specialist places, aiming to strengthen pathways and ensure children receive appropriate provision earlier.

9. Priority Area 5 – Parenting, Home Learning Environment and Play

A strong universal parenting offer currently exists, however reach and consistency vary. Evidence-based parenting programmes will be expanded using a test-and-learn approach and a new digital parenting support offer. The countywide Play Strategy will promote high-quality play in homes, settings, community spaces and Family Hubs. Universal Stay & Play, Special Education Needs and Disabilities-friendly play groups, outdoor play and low-cost play initiatives will be expanded. Priority families include those experiencing deprivation, families with English as an additional Language, families seeking asylum and those living in rural isolation. A refreshed data and outcomes framework will track parental confidence, play behaviours and home-learning engagement.

10. Priority Area 6 – Speech, Language and Communication

Speech Language and Community Needs needs are high and drive inequalities in Good Level of Development outcomes. The strategy builds on Early Language Support (ELSEC) and expands screening using tools such as Every Child a Talker (ECAT), Wellcomm and Early Talk Boost. Workforce training will increase capacity for universal and targeted language support. Resources will be

translated into priority languages and multilingual parent workshops delivered. Referral pathways between Early Language Support, Speech and Language Therapy and community interventions will be streamlined. Data systems will improve tracking of children's progress from red→amber→green and earlier identification aims to reduce unnecessary specialist referrals while supporting earlier intervention.

11. Intended Impact

The strategy expects improved Good Level of Development outcomes, closing attainment gaps for Free School Meals, Special Education Needs and Disabilities, Black and Asian children, and children living in deprived areas. It aims for earlier identification of health, developmental and communication needs; improved breastfeeding continuation; reduced dental decay; improved parental confidence; stronger transitions and more equitable access to early years education. Systemically, it aims for a more coordinated workforce, shared data systems, sustainable Family Hubs, and community-driven prevention offer that reaches families earlier and more effectively.

11. Key Actions, Outputs and Measures

Early Childhood Education & Childcare

- Actions: Expand school-based nursery places; targeted support for providers in deprived areas; strengthen workforce pedagogy; improve Special Education Needs and Disabilities inclusion.
- Outputs: Sufficiency assessment; Continuing Professional Development completion; Special Education Needs and Disabilities funding usage; parental engagement reach.
- Measures: Increased Good Level of Development; higher entitlement take-up; reduced attainment gaps; improved provider quality.

Readiness for Learning & Transitions

- Actions: Implement countywide Transition Pathway; universal Ready for learning tool; moderation networks.
- Outputs: Completed Transition Passports; provider/school feedback.
- Measures: Improved readiness scores; reduced school deferrals; increased phonics outcomes.

Maternal & Early Health

- Actions: Increase Health Visiting contact completion; strengthen oral health and breastfeeding pathways; improve Perinatal Infant Mental Health referrals.

- Outputs: Ages and Stages Questionnaire coverage; dental kits distributed; breastfeeding peer-support groups.
- Measures: Reduced dental decay; improved breastfeeding continuation; increased vaccination uptake.

Special Education Needs and Disabilities Support

- Actions: Embed Special Education Needs and Disabilities advisors; simplify inclusion pathways; expand Special Educational Needs Coordinator training; improve triage.
- Outputs: Training volumes; early identification numbers; referral pathway implementation.
- Measures: Reduced assessment delays; increased Special Education Needs and Disabilities entitlement access; improved early outcomes.

Parenting, HLE and Play

- Actions: Deliver evidence based programmes; digital Home Learning Environment offer; expand play sessions; targeted outreach.
- Outputs: Programme enrolment; family feedback; number of play sessions delivered.
- Measures: Increased parental confidence; improved Home Learning Environment indicators across priority families.

Speech, Language & Communication

- Actions: Universal screening; Early Language Support expansion; practitioner Speech Language and Communication Needs training.
- Outputs: Screening coverage; Early Language Support participation; Talk Boost programme delivery, multilingual resource distribution, speech and language support pathways developed..
- Measures: Improved Communication and Language, Early Learning Goals; reduced Speech and Language Therapy referrals; improved parent confidence.