Improving school readiness
Creating a better start for London
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The purpose of this report is to:

• describe the importance of school readiness
• describe the economic case for investing in school readiness
• provide a descriptive analysis of school readiness in London
• summarise the evidence of what works to improve school readiness in order to facilitate improvements in service planning and delivery
What is school readiness?

School readiness is a measure of how prepared a child is to succeed in school cognitively, socially and emotionally. The good level of development (GLD) is used to assess school readiness. Children are defined as having reached a GLD at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage if they achieved at least the expected level in the early learning goals in the prime areas of learning (personal, social and emotional development, physical development and communication and language) and in the specific areas of mathematics and literacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of learning</th>
<th>Early learning goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication and language</td>
<td>Listening and attention; Understanding; Speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical development</td>
<td>Moving and handling; Health and self-care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal, social and emotional development</td>
<td>Self-confidence and self-awareness; Managing feelings and behaviour; Making relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Reading; Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Numbers; Shape, space and measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the world</td>
<td>People and communities; The world; Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive arts, designing and making</td>
<td>Exploring and using media and materials; Being imaginative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Department for Education (2014) *Early years foundation stage profile attainment by pupil characteristics, England 2014*
School readiness starts at birth with the support of parents and caregivers, when young children acquire the social and emotional skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for success in school and life.

School readiness at age five has a strong impact on future educational attainment and life chances.

Children who don’t achieve a good level of development aged 5 years struggle with:

- Social skills
- Reading
- Maths
- Physical skills

which impacts on outcomes in childhood and later life:

- Educational outcomes
- Crime
- Health
- Death
What school-ready children look like

- Recognise numbers and quantities in the everyday environment
- Participate in music activities such as singing
- Have good oral health
- Are able to take turns, sit, listen and play
- Are able to communicate their needs and have a good vocabulary
- Are able to socialise with peers and form friendships
- Are independent in eating
- Develop motor control and balance for a range of physical activities
- Are independent in getting dressed and going to the toilet
- Have received all childhood immunisations
- Are well nourished and within normal weight for height

Milestones of normal child development aged about four years (based on the work of Mary Sheridan, From Birth to Five Years)
Why invest in school readiness?

Failing to invest sufficiently in quality early care and education short changes taxpayers because the return on investment is greater than many other economic development options.

- **Every £1 invested in quality early care and education saves taxpayers up to £13 in future costs.**
- **For every £1 spent on early years education, £7 has to be spent to have the same impact in adolescence.**
- **The benefits associated with the introduction of the literacy hour in the UK outstrip the costs by a ratio of between 27:1 and 70:1.**
- **Targeted parenting programmes to prevent conduct disorders pay back £8 over six years for every £1 invested with savings to the NHS, education and criminal justice system.**
Early years interventions have been shown to have a higher rate of return per investment than later interventions. The costs of delivery per child are outweighed by the benefits to the individual, taxpayers and others through improved educational outcomes, reduced healthcare costs, reduced crime and increased taxes paid due to increased earnings as adults.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Benefit to cost ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity corner</td>
<td>£78</td>
<td>£5,466</td>
<td>70.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family nurse partnership</td>
<td>£7,562</td>
<td>£14,694</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood education</td>
<td>£6,141</td>
<td>£11,525</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry preschool programme</td>
<td>£13,393</td>
<td>£21,598</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inequalities in school readiness (2013/14)

**Gender**
Girls are **1.3x more likely** to have a GLD compared to boys

**Free school meals**
Pupils who are not eligible for FSM are **1.3x more likely** to have a GLD compared to those who are eligible for FSM

**Ethnicity**
White British pupils are **3.3x more likely** to have a GLD compared to Gypsy/Roma pupils

**Pupils with a statement of educational needs**
Pupils who do not have a SEN are **3.5x more likely** to have a GLD compared to those who have a SEN
## Indicators of school readiness in London

**Ready families + Ready children + Ready communities + Ready services**

= *Children ready for school success*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ready families</th>
<th>Ready children</th>
<th>Ready communities</th>
<th>Ready services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family homelessness per 1,000 households</td>
<td>Eligible pupils in nurseries and primary schools claiming FSM</td>
<td>Children living in poverty (2012)</td>
<td>3 and 4 year-olds benefitting from funded early education (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2012/13)</td>
<td>(2014)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 18 conceptions per 1,000 females aged 15-17 years (2013)</td>
<td>Low birth weight of term babies (2012)</td>
<td>Overcrowding from 2005/06 – 2007/08</td>
<td>MMR for 1 dose at 2 years (2013/14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2013/14, **39,500** five year-olds living in London **did not** achieve a good level of development aged five years, that’s about **2 in 5** children.

There is a wide variation in the proportion of children who are school ready across London.

In **Hillingdon** about **1 in 2** children are school ready compared to **Lewisham** where about **3 in 4** children are school ready.

Source: [www.fingertips.phe.org.uk](http://www.fingertips.phe.org.uk)
In 2013/14, **10,052** of 21,085 five year-olds receiving free school meals (FSM) living in London **did not** achieve a good level of development aged five years, that’s about **1 in 2** children.

There is a wide variation in the proportion of children receiving FSM who are school ready across London.

**In Richmond upon Thames** just over **1 in 3** children are school ready compared to **Lewisham** where just under **7 in 10** children are school ready.
School readiness **improved** in all London boroughs between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

The biggest increases were seen in Richmond upon Thames (21.5 percentage points), Sutton (18.9 percentage points), Hounslow (18.0 percentage points) and Harrow (16.6 percentage points).

### Trends in school readiness in London

**Percentage point difference in school readiness between 2012/13 and 2013/14**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enf</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hdy</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brn</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hgy</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wth</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hns</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hms</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kns</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wst</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cty</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tow</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nwm</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rch</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wns</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lam</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swr</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lsh</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grn</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bxl</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kng</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrt</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crd</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brm</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stn</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** www.fingertips.phe.org.uk
School readiness for children receiving free school meals improved in 31/33 London boroughs between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

The biggest increases were seen in Hounslow (20.0 percentage points), Harrow (17.1 percentage points) and Barking and Dagenham (17.0 percentage points).

School readiness decreased by 1.7 percentage points in Brent.

Source: www.fingertips.phe.org.uk
• good maternal mental health
• learning activities, including speaking to your baby and reading with your child
• enhancing physical activity
• parenting support programmes
• high-quality early education

Department of Education, Department of Health (2011) Families in the foundation years evidence pack
Maternal mental health and school readiness

One of the **strongest** predictors of wellbeing in early years is the mental health and wellbeing of the mother or caregiver.

**1 in 10 women** will suffer from a perinatal mental illness, that’s about 13,400 new mothers in London.

**5x**
Children of mothers with mental ill-health are **five times** more likely to have mental health problems themselves.

**Impact of maternal depression on school readiness**
- Behaviour problems
- Impaired parent-child attachment
- Emotional problems
- Conduct disorders
- Language development delay
- Learning difficulties

**Actions to reduce maternal depression include**
- Development of a shared vision and plan
- Effective screening and referral to services
- Family strengthening and support
- Increased public awareness

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Greater London Authority (2014) *London mental health: The invisible costs of mental ill health*  
Department of Education, Department of Health (2011) *Families in the foundation years evidence pack*  
Children’s Defense Fund Minnesota (2011) *Maternal depression and early childhood*
A child’s communication environment is a more dominant predictor of early language than their social background.

By the age of 3 children from low income families have:

- heard on average 30 million fewer words than children in high income families
- half the vocabulary of children in high income families

Language proficiency is a key predictor of school success.

- 61% of low income children have no books at home
- 1 in 4 children leave primary school without reading well
- 2 in 5 poorer children leave primary school without reading well
- £23 billion

If all children were reading well by age 11, GDP in England in 2020 could be an extra £23 billion.

Actions to improve a child’s communication include:

1. Research
   - Social marketing to identify current practices and potential cultural barriers

2. Develop
   - Development of a strategic plan, including development and dissemination of resources

3. Implement
   - Dissemination of information to reach the community using existing structures

4. Evaluate
   - This should include short-term process measures and agreed long-term outcome measures

References:
- OECD (2012) Social marketing to identify current practices and potential cultural barriers
- Save the Children (2014) Read on get on: How reading can help children escape poverty
- State Government of Victoria (2014) Parenting support strategy
Enhancing physical activity and school readiness

Physical activity for young children is an important component of early brain development and learning.

Movement skills such as eye skills and manipulative skills help children access curricular activities with enjoyment and success. Communication skills depend on well developed physical skills.

1 in 10 children aged 2–4 meet the CMO guidelines of being physically active daily for at least 180 minutes (3 hours), spread throughout the day.

Benefits of physical activity include:

- Helps develop coordination and movement skills
- Promotes healthy weight
- Strengthens developing muscles and bones
- Helps children develop social skills

Actions to promote physical activity in early years include:

- Plan and develop
  Develop initiatives which target adults who interact with children in the early years

- Work with parents and carers
  Provide information on the importance of physical activity and what counts as physical activity

- Work with early years settings
  Integrate physical activity into the daily routine when planning activities

Department of Health (2011) Start Active, Stay Active A report on physical activity for health from the four home countries’ Chief Medical Officers
Cabinet Office (2014) Physical activity Olympic and Paralympic legacy for the Nation
British Heart Foundation National Centre (BHFNC) for Physical Activity and Health, Loughborough University (2015) Early years: Practical strategies for promoting physical activity
Parenting has a **bigger influence** on a child’s life chances in the early years than education, wealth or class.

**Effective, warm, authoritative parenting** gives children confidence, stimulates brain development and the capacity to learn.

2 in 5 children miss out on ‘good’ parenting.

Supporting parents with parenting programmes has a **positive impact** on both parents’ and children’s wellbeing and mental health and is an **important** part of prevention and early intervention.

### Impact of parenting support programmes on school readiness

**Benefits** of the Family Nurse Partnership include **better**:
- language development
- vocabulary and mental processing
- emotional development
- attention and behaviour

### Benefits of early family training/parenting support include **improved**:
- numeracy skills
- vocabulary
- letter identification
- emergent writing skills
- parent-child interaction

### Actions to improve parenting support programmes include

- **Understand** parent’s needs and how to engage them.
- **Intervene early** to maximise impact and reduce longer-term costs.
- **Increase** the accessibility of programmes.
- **Ensure** better integration and co-ordination of parenting support services.
- **Improve** the quality and build the evidence base for support services.

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Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2014) *State of the Nation 2014: Social mobility and child poverty in Great Britain*

Department of Education, Department of Health (2011) *Families in the foundation years evidence pack*


Health Equity Evidence Review 1 (2014) *Good quality parenting programmes and the home to school transition*
High-quality early education and school readiness

By the **age of five** the brain forms as many as **700** neural connections per second.

High-quality early years education **significantly improves** child health and educational outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children.

**2.5 x**

The average **economic benefit** of early education programmes for low income 3 and 4 year-olds is nearly **2.5 times** the investment.

**20-50%**

If all low income children received high-quality early education the gap in achievement could be closed by as much as **20-50%**.

**Impact of high-quality early education**

- Improved school readiness
- Improved future academic attainment
- Improved future productivity
- Higher levels of employment
- Less involvement in crime

**Actions to improve high-quality early education include**

**Systems development**

- continued and increasing investment
- integrated services
- workforce training

**Structural development**

- favourable staff to child ratios
- encouragement of parents to support and engage more actively
- focus on cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of learning

**Process development**

- adoption of more responsive and nurturing staff: child relationships
- work towards an equal balance of child and adult initiated activity

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Department for Education (2007) *Effective pre-school and primary education 3-11 project (EPPE 3-11): Influences on children’s development and progress in Key Stage 2: Social / behavioural outcomes in Year 5*.

Useful resources

- www.beststart.org
- http://www.eif.org.uk
- http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/153.html
- www.literacytrust.org.uk
- www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk
- www.wordsforlife.co.uk
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- Scale by Alex Sheyn from the Noun Project
- Campaign by PJ Souders from the Noun Project
- Child by Jens Tarning from the Noun Project
- Child by George Patterson from the Noun Project
- Money by Jamie Wilson from the Noun Project
- Student by Gerald Wildmoser from the Noun Project
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Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation’s health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. It does this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health.

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