

westsussex.gov.uk



Good levels of development

March 2026

Lizzie Vass

West Sussex Public Health and Social Research Unit



Purpose of briefing

This briefing provides a summary of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile assessments and available data for West Sussex, based on the Department for Education's annual statistics report.

Good to know

The graphs featured in this briefing were inspired by the work of Sheffield City Council and we wish to acknowledge their work in this area.

What is the early years foundation stage (EYFS) profile?

The early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework sets standards that school and childcare providers must meet for the learning, development and care of children from birth to five years old (Department for Education, 2025).

At the end of the EYFS, typically the summer term of reception year (academic year in which a child turns 5), teachers or early year practitioners must complete an EYFS profile assessment for each child, unless an exemption has been granted for the setting or individual child (Department for Education, 2026). This assessment is a statutory requirement which summarises a child's development across 7 areas of learning set out in the EYFS framework. Across the 7 areas of learning, there are 17 early learning goals (ELGs) which outline the knowledge, skills and understanding children should have at the end of the reception year (Local Government Association, 2018).

Table 1 provides a summary of the EYFS learning and development requirements set out in the framework.

Table 1 Summary of the EYFS learning and development requirements

Areas of learning and development	Early learning goals	
Communication and Language	E01	Listening, Attention and Understanding
	E02	Speaking
Personal, Social and Emotional Development	E03	Self-Regulation
	E04	Managing Self
	E05	Building Relationships
Physical Development	E06	Gross Motor Skills
	E07	Fine Motor Skills
Literacy	E08	Comprehension
	E09	Word Reading
	E10	Writing
Mathematics	E11	Number
	E12	Numerical Patterns

Understanding the World	E13	Past and Present
	E14	People, Culture and Communities
	E15	The Natural World
Expressive arts and design	E16	Creating with Materials
	E17	Being Imaginative and Expressive

Source. Department for Education and Sheffield City Council (2026).

The assessment takes place in the classroom and for each ELG, teachers and practitioners are expected to use their professional judgement to assess whether a child is meeting the level of development expected at the end of the EYFS, or if they are not yet reaching this level and therefore, assessed as ‘emerging’ (Department for Education, 2025). The aim of the assessment is to support a successful transition from the EYFS to key stage 1 (KS1) by informing year 1 teachers about each child’s stage of development and learning needs (Department for Education, 2025).

Good to know

EYFS reforms were introduced in September 2021 and as part of those reforms, the EYFS profile assessment was significantly revised. These changes were made to improve outcomes at age 5, particularly in relation to early language and literacy, and reduce workload (Department for Education, 2021). This led to revisions for the 7 areas of learning and 17 ELGs, removal of ‘exceeding’ assessment band (with children now being scored as ‘emerging’ or meeting the ‘expected’ standard) and removal of statutory local authority moderation.

Due to the scale of these revisions, it is not possible to directly compare 2021/22 assessment outcomes with earlier years. Therefore, this briefing will provide a summary of available data for children in West Sussex from 2021/22 to the latest available data for the 2024/25 academic year.

In 2024/25, 66.9% of children in West Sussex achieved the expected level across all 17 ELGs and 7 areas of learning. This percentage has increased in each of the three years since the EYFS reforms were introduced in 2021/22, from 63.1%. This increasing trend is aligned with the national picture.

Areas of learning

Across the 7 areas of learning, children in West Sussex were most likely to reach the expected level in expressive arts and design in 2024/25 (88%). In contrast, literacy was the area with the lowest percentage of children at the expected level (70.8%). This is aligned with the national picture (85.1% of children reached the expected level in expressive arts and design compared to 70.5% for literacy).

Compared to the previous year, the percentage of children in West Sussex at the expected level decreased at least slightly across most areas of learning in 2024/25 (by up to 0.9% for ‘understanding the world’ and ‘expressive arts and design’). The percentage of children in West Sussex meeting the expected level for literacy and mathematics increased slightly by 0.2% and 0.5% respectively.

Early learning goals

Across the 17 individual ELGs, gross motor skills were the area with the most children in West Sussex meeting the expected level (93.3%) in 2024/25. In contrast, writing had the lowest percentage of children at the expected level (72.3%), also aligned with the national picture.

In 2024/25, compared to the previous year, the percentage of children at the expected level decreased at least slightly across most of the ELGs (by up to 1.3% for ‘the natural world’; e15). There were slight increases observed for three ELGs: writing (e10), number (e12) and numerical patterns (e13).

What is the definition of ‘good level of development’?

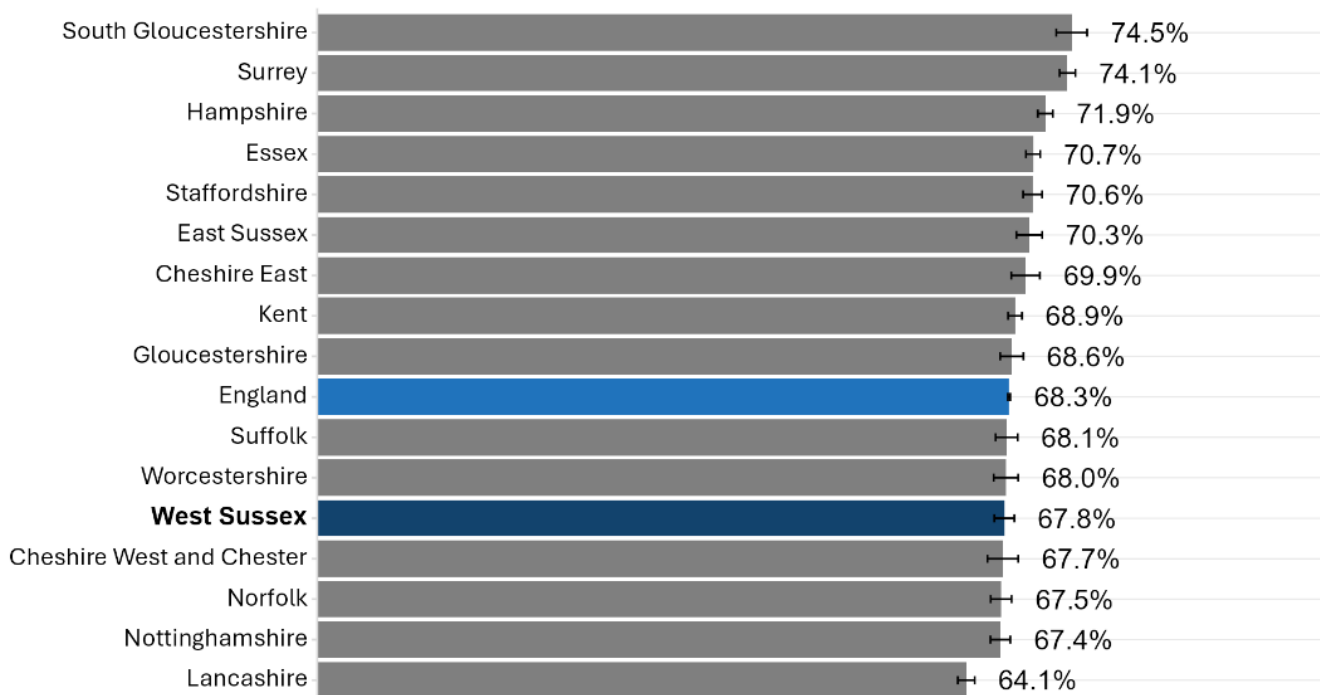
A child is defined as having reached a ‘good level of development’ (GLD) at the end of the EYFS if they have achieved at least the expected level for the 12 ELGs within the three prime areas of learning (communication and language, personal, social and emotional development and physical development), alongside specific areas of mathematics and literacy (Essex City Council, 2025).

For 2024/25, 67.8% of pupils in West Sussex achieved GLD by the end of reception. This is statistically similar to England. The percentage achieving a good level of development has increased in each of the three years since the EYFS reforms were introduced in 2021/22, from 64.4%.

When compared to its nearest statistical neighbours, West Sussex has the fifth lowest percentage of pupils in West Sussex who achieved GLD by the end of reception for 2024/25. Figure 1 provides an overview of data for the latest academic year.

Figure 1 Percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception; West Sussex and its statistical neighbours 2024/25

Proportion of of all eligible children. West Sussex compared to Nearest Statistical Neighbours (NHS England) and England

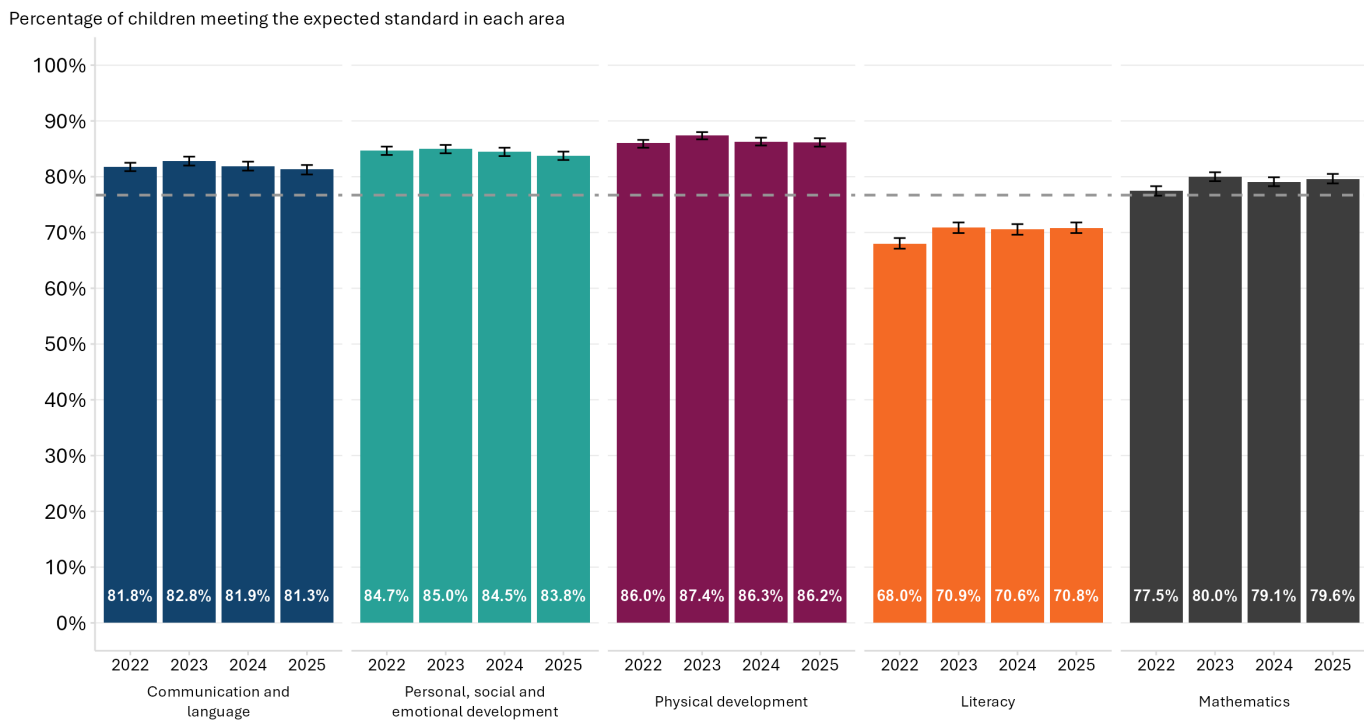


Source. Department for Education.

Under the Government’s [‘Giving every child the best start in life’ strategy](#), 75% of five-year-olds in England are expected to have GLD by 2028. Each local authority has their own individualised GLD targets - for West Sussex, the statutory target for 2027/28 is 76.7% of children achieving a good level of development, and 53.4% of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM).

Despite West Sussex having a high percentage of children meeting the expected standard across most areas contributing to overall GLD, this percentage is noticeably lower for literacy (70.8%). Therefore, increasing performance in literacy could help to improve overall GLD for the county.

Figure 2 Percentage of children in West Sussex meeting the expected standard by area of learning



Alongside an overview of the prime, and specific, areas contributing to the good level of development measure, data can be broken down by the individual ELGs within each area. Across the 12 ELGs contributing to overall GLD, the percentage of children meeting the expected standard is lower for writing (e10; 72.3%) in 2024/25 compared to other goals. As seen in Figure 5, the percentage of children meeting the expected standard for writing has remained consistently lower overtime.

Figure 3 Percentage of children in West Sussex meeting the expected standard by area of learning and early learning goal

Percentage of children meeting expected standard in each area, alongside percentage of children with a good level of development



Note. Y-axis does not start at 0. Dashed line indicates the statutory GLD target for West Sussex for 2027/28 (76.7%). Source. Department for Education

By characteristic

Alongside the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the EYFS profile assessment and good level of development measure overall, the Department of Education provides the percentage of children achieving a good level of development across different groups according to characteristics such as the sex of the child and eligibility for free school meals (Mooney, et al., 2025)

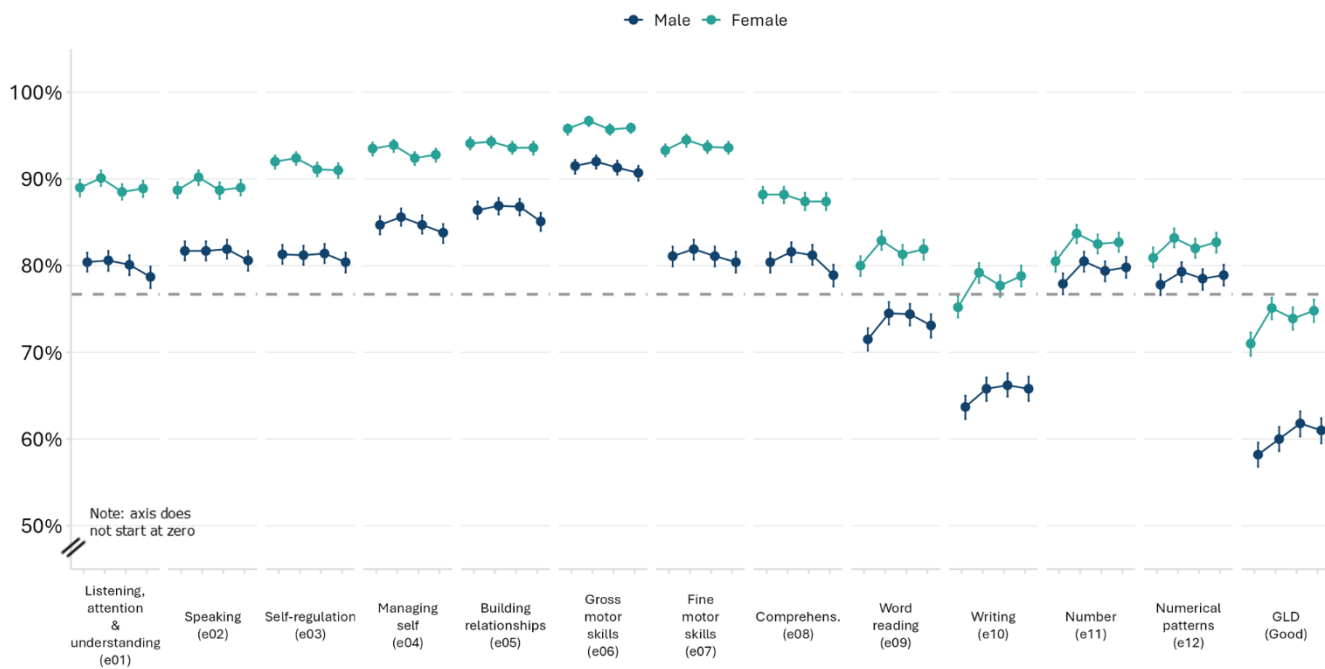
Sex

Girls in West Sussex are consistently more likely to achieve a good level of development compared to boys. This difference is statistically significant, see Figure 5 for a breakdown by the good level of development measure, alongside areas of learning contributing to this measure. In 2024/25, 74.8% of girls in West Sussex had a good level of development compared to 61% of boys. This represents a 13.8% difference, wider than the previous academic year (12.2%).

In addition, girls are more likely to meet the expected standard across the 12 ELGs contributing to the good level of development measure. Across the ELGs, the widest difference in the percentage of boys and girls in West Sussex meeting the expected standard in 2024/25 was for fine motor skills (74.8% of girls compared to 61% of boys).

Figure 4 Percentage of boys and girls in West Sussex meeting the expected standard, by area and year

Percentage of children meeting expected standard in each area, alongside percentage of children with a good level of development



Note. Y-axis does not start at 0.
Dashed line indicates the statutory GLD target for West Sussex for 2027/28 (76.7%).
Source. Department for Education

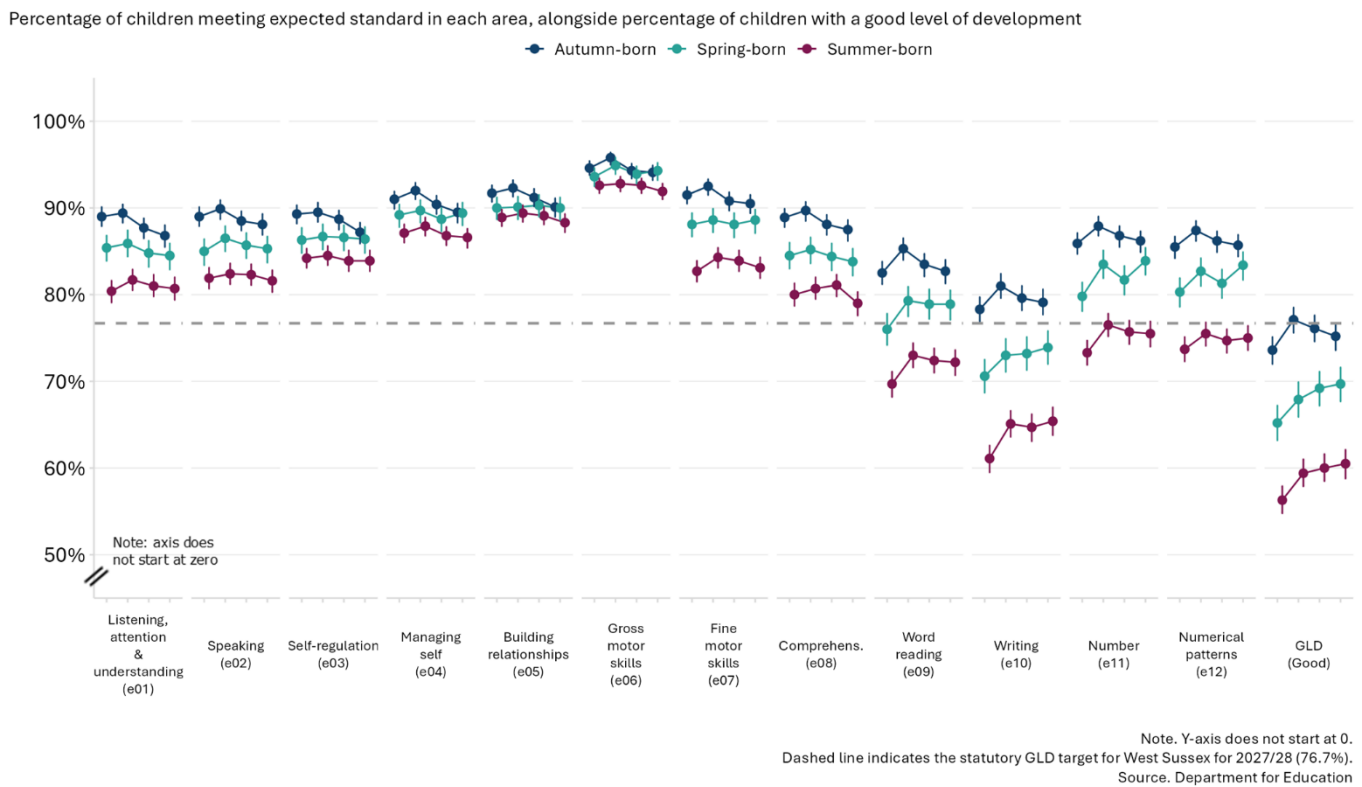
Term of birth

Children born in Autumn (defined as births during September-December) in West Sussex are consistently more likely to achieve a good level of development, compared to children born in Spring (January-April) and Summer (May-August). This difference is statistically significant, see Figure 7 for a breakdown by the good level of development measure, alongside areas of learning contributing to this measure.

In 2024/25, 75.1% of children born in autumn achieved a good level of development compared to 69.7% of spring-born and 60.4% of summer-born children. However, the difference between autumn-born and summer-born children achieving a good level of development is decreasing over time, from 17.7% in 2022/23 to 14.7% in 2024/25.

Across the 12 ELGs contributing to the GLD measure, there is variation in the percentage difference of children meeting the expected standard by season of birth. For example, the gap is narrowing between autumn-born and spring-born children amongst the early learning goals within the personal, social and emotional development area of learning, self-regulation (e03), managing self (e04), building relationships (e05), and gross motor skills (e06).

Figure 5 Percentage of children in West Sussex meeting the expected standard, by term of birth

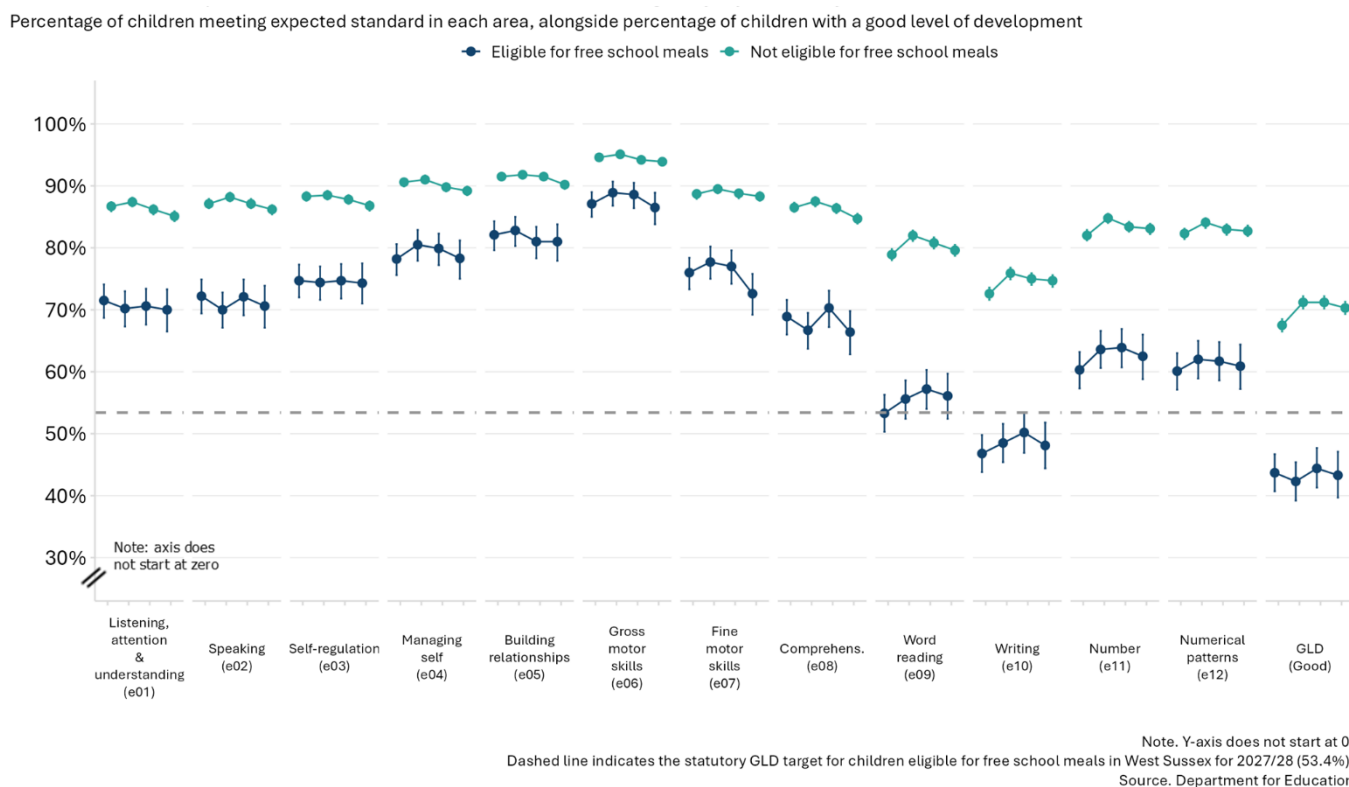


Free school meal eligibility

Under the Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) programme, all pupils in government funded schools are entitled to receive free school meals if they are in reception, year 1 or year 2, regardless of income. For the EYFS profile results, free school meal eligibility refers to children who are eligible to claim through the receipt of one or more qualifying benefits, rather than all children receiving free school meals under the programme (Department for Education, 2026). For further information on the methodology for the EYFS profile results, [refer to this Department for Education webpage](#).

Children not eligible for free school meals in West Sussex are more likely to achieve a good level of development compared to children who are eligible. This difference is statistically significant, see Figure 8 for a breakdown by the good level of development measure, alongside areas of learning contributing to this measure. In 2024/25, 70.1% of children not eligible for free school meals achieved a good level of development compared to 43.3% who were eligible. Across the ELGs, the widest difference in the percentage of children eligible and not eligible for free school meals in West Sussex meeting the expected standard in 2024/25 was for writing (74.7% of children not eligible for free school meals compared to 48.1% of children who are eligible).

Figure 6 Percentage of children in West Sussex meeting the expected standard, by free school meal eligibility



Conclusion

The aim of this briefing was to summarise the latest statistics from the Department of Education’s Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile assessments and what the data provided tells us about children’s development in West Sussex.

This briefing provided an overview of the percentage of children in West Sussex meeting the expected standard across the seven areas of learning and 17 early learning goals outlined within the EYFS profile, both for the latest academic year (2024/25) and trends since the statutory reforms were implemented in 2021/22. Alongside an overview of the areas of learning and early learning goals included in the profile, this briefing summarised the percentage of children who achieved a good level of development at the end of the EYFS both overall and by certain characteristics such as sex, term of birth and free school meal eligibility.

The percentage of children in West Sussex who achieved the expected standard in the EYFS profile assessment and good level of development (GLD) measure has increased since 2021/22. This is aligned with the national picture. However, as acknowledged in the Department for Education’s (2026) statistical release, some of this increase may be due to the gradual recovery from educational and social disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, teachers and practitioners have become more familiar with the revised 2021 assessment framework which could increase the accuracy of judgements.

Data from the EYFS profile assessments provides useful information on children’s early development which can help local authorities such as West Sussex to monitor trends, identify specific needs, and compare outcomes across groups, such as those outlined in this briefing (Crompton, 2025).

Further information

For further information on the data from the Department of Education’s Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile annual release used to create this briefing, [refer to this supplementary raw data file](#). The Wilson

Score method was used calculate confidence intervals for proportions which aligns with the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities' Fingertips public health data tool.

