

Best Start In Life Strategy

2026 - 2031



 **BEST
START
IN LIFE**



HILLINGDON
LONDON

www.hillingdon.gov.uk

Introduction and our Vision

Hillingdon's 'Best Start in Life' Strategy sets out a shared vision that:

Every child in Hillingdon will have the best possible start in life: safe, healthy, happy, engaged, valued and ready to learn.

It is widely evidenced that children who get the support needed in their earliest years are more likely to thrive at school, develop strong social and emotional skills, enjoy better health, and go on to lead fulfilling, productive lives. While genetics play a role, it is the quality of early relationships and environments that most powerfully shape a child's path. Providing caring and stable support helps children's brains develop well and makes them stronger, while social problems like neglect or an unstable environment can cause lasting harm.

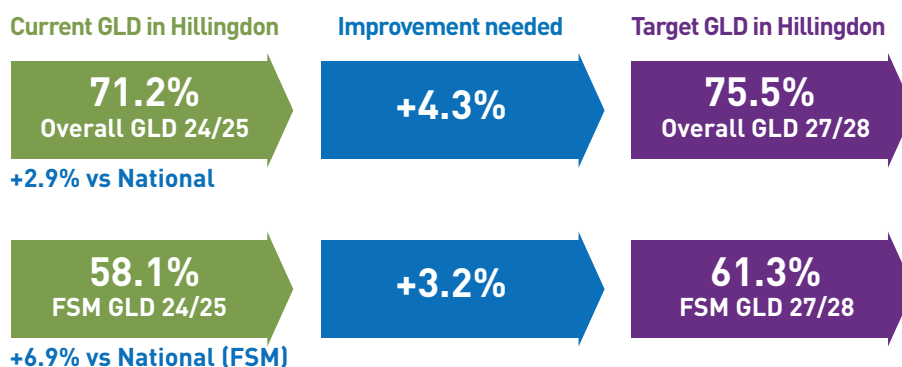
Supporting children to have the best start is not just the responsibility of parents and carers; it's a shared responsibility across our whole community. In Hillingdon, this includes everyone involved in a child's life, particularly during their early years, including health professionals, early education and childcare settings, social care, voluntary, faith and community organisations, and, most importantly, children and families themselves.

The government's Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life strategy, sets out an ambitious goal to ensure that all children, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to reach their full potential, with a national target for 75 per cent of five-year-olds to achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028. This means they should meet the basic learning standards at the end of their early years, so they are ready for Year 1 at school.



Hillingdon's targets

We want more children in Hillingdon to be ready for school by age 5, reaching the overall Good Level of Development (GLD) in alignment with national standards. The specific targets set for Hillingdon are shown below:



Achieving this vision requires a clear focus on what matters most. The Best Start in Life Strategy is based on what families in Hillingdon have told us, what our local data shows, evidenced-based practice and national guidance. It focuses on what matters most to families and sets out clear, practical steps to help every child thrive, ensuring resources are targeted where they will make the greatest difference.

Priorities Overview:

Better support for families

The right support, at the right time, in the right place.



What this means for a child:

'I have a secure, stable and caring home'.
'I have the support I need, when I need it'.
'I feel listened to and valued'.

Healthy Beginnings:

Strong foundations for physical health from pregnancy through the early years.



What this means for a child:

'I am healthy and happy'. 'My parents/carers keep me healthy, so I don't get poorly from things we can avoid'

Moving forward, together we will ...

1. Design, create and produce services with families, ensuring parents' voices help shape decisions and programmes that support children and family wellbeing.

2. Better identify children in need of family help, so that more children are identified early through better data sharing and the use of language screening tools, especially those with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

3. Improve access to services in disadvantaged areas, by opening Best Start Family Hubs where they are needed most and working more closely with faith and community groups.

4. Increase access to parenting and Home Learning Environment (HLE) programmes, so that a greater number of parents can join programmes that help them build skills and confidence, while more children aged two to four take part in early learning activities more often.

5. Enhance support for children with additional needs and SEND, by ensuring every Best Start Family Hub has a dedicated SEND professional, and more children receive early support before an autism diagnosis.

6. Strengthen support so every baby and child has a safe, nurturing start in life, so that fewer babies and young children will need child protection because of domestic abuse or neglect, and more children will be able to stay safely with their families.

7. Promote good oral health and help families get dental care, so that that children have healthier teeth and fewer dental problems.

8. Increase the number of children who get their vaccinations on time, by having all their recommended vaccinations before starting school.

9. Help more families access Healthy Start Vouchers and Vitamins for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and children.

10. Increase the number of children achieving and maintaining healthy weight, with more children eating well and fewer at reception age children being overweight.

11. Help more families have their health visitor checks, especially those who need extra support, so children get help early and families are linked to the right services.

12. Improve maternal health and reduce inequalities in maternity care, by reducing smoking, narrowing newborn mortality gaps, increasing maternity care access for Black, Asian, and low-income women, offering language support, and improving infant feeding.

13. Support parents' and children's emotional wellbeing by helping families build strong, loving relationships from the start. This includes sharing simple tools like Five to Thrive, encouraging dads to get involved, and making it easier for families with young children to access mental health and emotional support when they need it.

More Accessible Early Education:
Boost funded childcare participation, especially for two-year-olds, and expand spaces where demand is highest.

Improve Early Years Quality
Investing in people.
Preparing children for school.



What this means for a child:
'I can access my funded hours at nursery of my parents/carers' choosing.'



What this means for a child:
'I am confident, independent and ready to start school'. 'I can follow instructions, communicate my needs and ask for help'. 'I am curious, interested and ready to learn.'

Moving forward, together we will ...

14. Increase the number of families accessing childcare funding, with a focus on Early Learning for two-year-olds, so that more families access childcare through their two-year-olds entitlement and Early Years Pupil Premium.

15. Increase availability of childcare, especially in areas where there aren't enough childcare places for young children, like Belmore, Pinkwell and Yeading.

16. Increase in children with SEND accessing childcare, ensuring they can access their full funded entitlement.

17. Boost early language and mathematical skills, so that children develop strong speaking, listening, and reading skills, enjoy books, and are prepared for school and are meeting expected levels in maths and early language by age five.

18. Develop a borough-wide transition strategy, to help children move smoothly from early years to school and make the experience positive.

19. Develop leadership and excellence in our workforce so children learn and develop language through everyday interactions.

20. Ensure high quality provision, ensuring children are in safe, caring places, getting help quickly when needed, and are included in high-quality activities.

Moving forward

The DfE has confirmed funding for Hillingdon to launch Best Start Family Hubs, supporting parenting and home learning as part of the national Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life strategy.

Funding has also been secured to expand childcare spaces for children younger than three. School-based nurseries are eligible to apply directly to the DfE for capital grants to develop provisions for children aged three and under, with support available from the local authority.

Delivery of Hillingdon's Best Start in Life Strategy will be managed through the delivery group made up of the local authority, health services, early years providers, voluntary and community groups, and parents. They will monitor progress, make sure goals are met, and use feedback from families to make improvements. Progress will be tracked using key indicators, especially children's development and closing achievement gaps. Regular reviews will help keep the strategy up to date, so every child in Hillingdon gets the best start in life.