

Sefton Council Getting the Best Start in Life



BEST
START
IN LIFE



Getting the Best Start in Life Sefton



A bit of background information

The Government's Best Start in Life strategy is about helping every child get the best possible start, from pregnancy through their early years. The strategy commits to:

- Improving family services and providing high-quality support from pregnancy to age 5.
- Making early education and childcare easier and more affordable to access.
- Improving quality of education and care in early years settings, childminders and Reception classes.
- Meeting a national ambition that 75% of five-year-olds achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028.

Why is this important?

Families are feeling the strain. Universal supports that once provided connection, reassurance, and guidance have been eroded, and efforts are now underway to restore them as trusted, familiar resources and parents' first port of call.

Parents report growing loneliness and isolation, while professionals face increasing pressures with fewer resources. In this context, models of school readiness, community support and the systems designed to support them, need bringing into 2026.

We know that the first 1,001 days of life are vital for a child's health, learning and happiness. Sefton as a local area is moving forward to a connected, action-focused system.

What does this mean?

This means transparency around the governance, priorities, and practical steps required to ensure every child is ready to learn, every family feels supported, and every setting is empowered to make a difference.

This work focuses on supporting families early, spotting difficulties quickly, and making sure help is easy to find.

It also aims to make sure every family - no matter where they live or what their starting point is - has the same chance to thrive.

Our local Best Start in Life Plan explains how we will work together to support children and families in our community, so every child can grow, learn and reach their full potential.

Getting the Best Start in Life

Sefton



What does that mean for me in Sefton?

Sefton's Best Start in Life Plan is about helping every child grow up safe, happy, and healthy. The early years are crucial, they shape how children learn, build friendships, and feel about themselves. We want children to feel listened to, do well in learning, and be ready for the future.

This plan brings together support for child development, family help, and preparation for school, ensuring every child has a strong foundation. The delivery of this plan will take place over the next three years.

Across Sefton, families, early education providers, health partners, and community groups are already working hard together. But many families face challenges, including isolation, limited local support, and money worries. Services supporting children and families in the early years are also under pressure.

That is why we are focusing on preventing challenges early, working in partnership, and listening to families when designing support. Our single, clear goal is to give every child the best possible start.

By 2029, we want all children in Sefton to start school confident, curious, and ready to learn and for families to feel supported, informed, and empowered to help their children thrive.

A recent survey showed that while most parents feel confident about their own child, many are unsure what "school readiness" really means or where to find clear guidance.

Parents have told us they want straightforward information and easy-to-access support. This plan sets out exactly how we will deliver that, ensuring every family can access the help they need when they need it.

A quick note: When we talk about Sefton in this document, we mean the council, health partners & the community and voluntary sector. It's about all those working with and for families coming together to wrap around the community.

Local context in 2025 - 2026

In Sefton, there are approximately:

- 16,467 children aged 0-5
- 18,553 aged 6-11
- 18,415 aged 12-17
- 5,252 aged 18-19

A total of 58,687 children and young people aged 0-19.

45.8% of children eligible for FSM meet a Good Level of Development

65.2% of children currently meet a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception

73.7% of eligible children in Sefton access their Early Learning for 2 Year old place.

In the 2024/25 academic year, 8,835 pupils in Sefton were identified as having Special Educational Needs.

Of these, Autistic Spectrum Disorder is the most common primary need (2,016 pupils).

96.5% of children take up the Healthy Child programme with health visitors

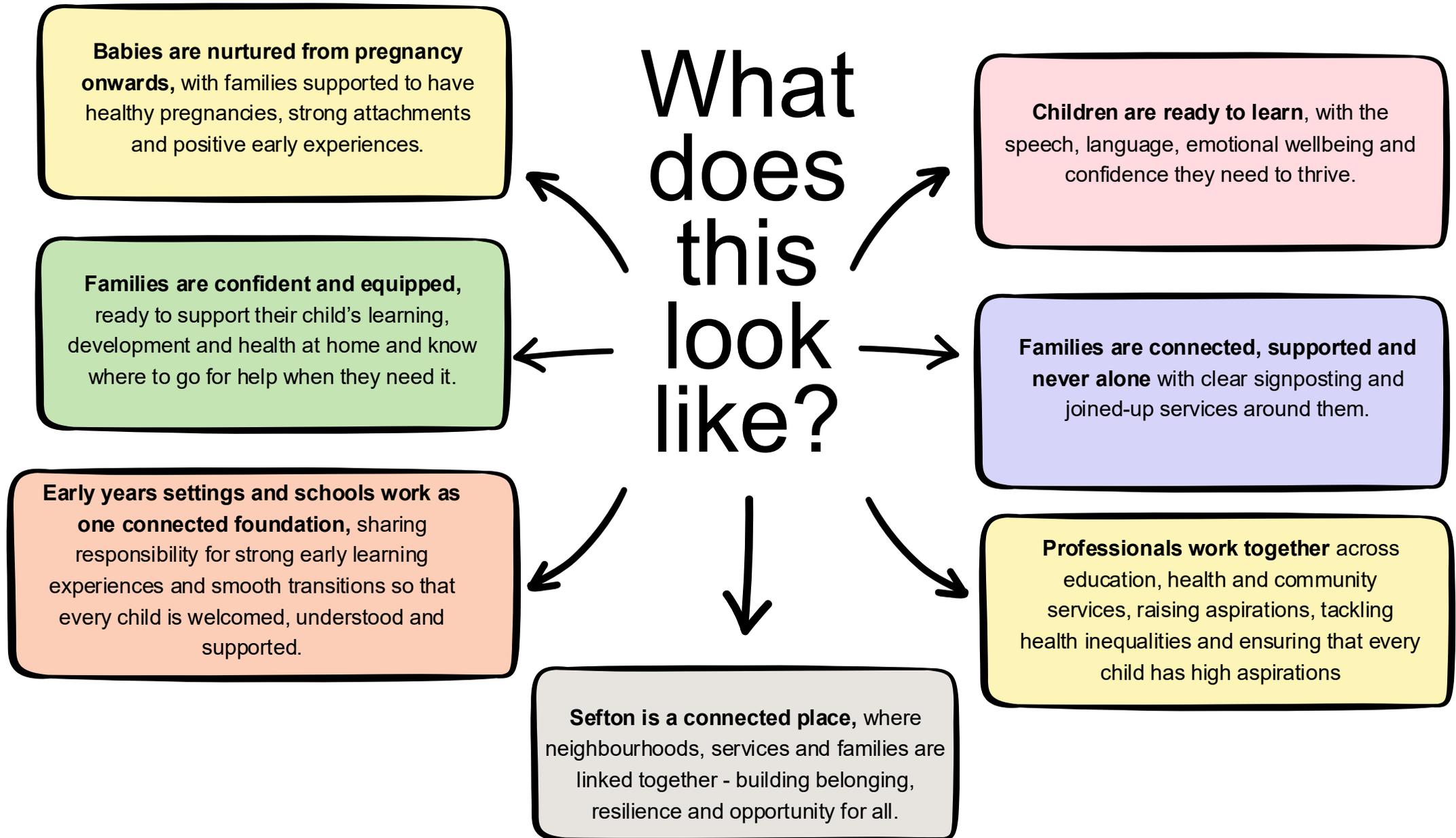
In 2024/25, there were 40,365 children eligible for free school meals in Sefton across all state-funded primary and secondary schools.

In 2025, 19.2% (158) of homeless households had dependent children, including 108 single-parent households.

84.8% of children in Sefton were at or above the expected level in all five areas of development at their 2-2-and-a-half-year check

Our vision in Sefton:

We want every child to have the best possible start in life - from pregnancy and the earliest days, through early years and into school - supported by connected families, communities and professionals who work together to reduce inequalities and raise aspirations.



Understanding our targets in Sefton



71.7%

of children will reach a GLD by 2028



89.7 %

of eligible children will take up the offer of early learning for 2 year olds



1000

Children 0-5 will access the BSIL offer through hubs or outreach



50.3%

of children who are eligible for Free School Meals will reach a GLD by 2028

Here, we have set out clear targets to help us understand how well we are supporting children and families in our community.

These targets include wider measures of children's progress and wellbeing, such as the Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of Reception. They help us see how children are developing overall and whether they are ready for the next stage of learning.

Other targets link to different areas of child development, giving us a more detailed view of the key skills and experiences that help children thrive.

Together, they help us stay focused on what matters most: supporting children to grow, learn and flourish.

We will use these targets to guide our work, celebrate progress, and identify where extra support may be needed.



84.7%

of children will achieve expected levels in physical development



70.5%

of children will achieve expected levels in literacy



79.5%

of children will achieve expected levels in communication & language



83.1%

of children will achieve expected levels in personal, social and emotional development

Priority 1:

Families get high quality information from pregnancy, with every touchpoint acting as a two-way knowledge opportunity.



This is important because

Families who understand their choices, what to expect, and where to get help are better able to support their baby's early development and wellbeing from the start.

Priority 2:

Transitions between settings and services are positive, with the right information shared at the right time



This is important because

Smooth transitions help children and families feel secure, reduce stress, and ensure continuity of care and learning.

The things we're doing to make this happen



- Promote a “no wrong door” approach to accessing support.
- Equip professionals to recognise risk, need, and family strengths.
- Ensure clear referral and escalation routes.
- Give good quality information from trusted sources.
- Build stronger relationships between organisations so they know where to signpost families to.

The things we're doing to make this happen



- Agree clear protocols for information sharing between maternity, health partners, early years, and education settings.
- Use transition planning conversations with families well in advance of moves.
- Support settings to prepare children emotionally and practically for change.

How will we know that things are different?



- Families report feeling well informed and confident during pregnancy.
- Increased engagement with early help and parenting information.
- Evidence that information is shared consistently across services (e.g. in settings, playgroups, hubs)
- Sessions in BSIL hubs will be well attended.

How will we know that things are different?



- Fewer families report negative experiences during transitions.
- Transition information is completed and shared on time.
- Children show improved adjustment when moving between services.

Key stakeholders and how they will work together



- Early Years team, midwifery and maternity services, health visiting teams, early years providers, family hubs, and community organisations.
- Partners will co-design information, share resources through agreed channels, and use routine contacts with families to reinforce consistent messages.

Key stakeholders and how they will work together



- Early Years team, health partners, early years settings, schools, and family hubs.
- Professionals will follow shared transition pathways, hold joint planning meetings where needed, and ensure families are central to decision-making.

Priority 3:

When families have contact with professionals, they get the support they need



This is important because

Every contact is an opportunity to identify strengths, address challenges early, and prevent problems from escalating.

The things we're doing to make this happen



- Provide consistent, accessible information during antenatal appointments, digital contact, and community outreach.
- Train professionals to use conversations as opportunities to listen as well as share guidance.
- Develop appropriate and easy-to-understand resources e.g. 6 steps to success and Thrive by five.



How will we know that things are different?

- Faster access to appropriate support.
- Higher satisfaction with professional contact.
- Earlier identification of additional needs.



Key stakeholders and how they will work together

- Frontline practitioners across health partners, education, social care, and voluntary and community sector organisations.
- Teams will understand referral processes, communicate outcomes of contacts, and work collaboratively around family needs.

Priority 4:

Professionals across Sefton work together as a team to do what's best for families



This is important because

Joined-up working reduces duplication, improves decision-making, and ensures families receive coherent support.

The things we're doing to make this happen



- Develop shared principles and pathways across services.
- Promote multi-agency meetings and information sharing where appropriate.
- Invest in relationship-building and joint training.
- Develop a streamlined assessment for the Early Years which identifies needs at an earlier point.



How will we know that things are different?

- Professionals report stronger partnership working.
- Reduced duplication of assessments or contacts.
- Families experience more coordinated support.



Key stakeholders and how they will work together

- Local authority services, health partners, schools, early years providers, and voluntary sector organisations.
- Partners will participate in multi-agency forums, share data within governance agreements, and contribute to joint workforce development.

Priority 5:

Families are supported to build strong, nurturing relationships that promote early child development



This is important because

Secure, responsive relationships in early life are one of the strongest foundations for lifelong health, learning, and emotional wellbeing.

Priority 6:

Families are supported to access the right help early to promote wellbeing and reduce inequalities



This is important because

Early support can prevent difficulties from worsening and helps reduce gaps in outcomes between different groups.

The things we're doing to make this happen



- Promote evidence-based parenting and bonding support from pregnancy onwards.
- Embed messages about responsive caregiving across services.
- Increase access to community and peer-support opportunities.
- Have community champions for peer support.

The things we're doing to make this happen



- Strengthen early help pathways and community-based support.
- Target outreach to families who may face barriers to accessing services.
- Monitor equity of access and outcomes.
- Strengthen support in the areas of greatest need.

How will we know that things are different?



- More families access relationship-focused support.
- Improved early child development indicators.
- Parents report greater confidence in supporting their child's growth.

How will we know that things are different?



- Increased uptake of early help services by under-represented groups.
- Reduced inequalities in early childhood outcomes.
- More families accessing support before crises occur.

Key stakeholders and how they will work together



- Health visitors, maternity teams, early help services, children's centres, and community organisations.
- Services will align parenting programmes, share referral routes, and promote peer networks.

Key stakeholders and how they will work together



- Public health services, social care, community and faith organisations, education providers and Adult and Community Learning.
- Partners will use data to identify inequality gaps, coordinate outreach, and design culturally responsive support.

Priority 7:

Ensure sufficient, high-quality childcare that meets the needs of children, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)



This is important because

Access to suitable childcare supports children's early development, enables parents and carers to work or study, and ensures children with SEND can participate fully in their communities.



The things we're doing to make this happen

- Assess current and future childcare supply to identify gaps in availability, quality, and accessibility.
- Work with providers to build confidence and capacity to support children with SEND.
- Promote inclusive practice and reasonable adjustments within early years settings.
- Share information with families about childcare options, support available, and funding pathways.



How will we know that things are different?

- Increased availability of childcare places that meet local demand.
- More children with SEND accessing and sustaining appropriate childcare.
- Families report that they can find and use childcare that meets their needs.



Key stakeholders and how they will work together

- Early years providers, local authority childcare commissioning teams, SEND services, health partners, and parent/carer representatives.
- Partners will jointly review sufficiency data, support workforce development, and work with families to understand lived experience and barriers to access.



Wrapping up the priorities

These priority areas show our shared commitment to giving every child the best possible start in life by supporting strong early relationships, improving access to help, and tackling inequalities.

The plan focuses on making every interaction with families meaningful, smoothing the journey through services, and ensuring professionals work together as one team around each child and family.

By partnering with families, communities, and services, we aim to create the conditions for all children to grow, learn, and thrive.

The building blocks of our work

Giving children the best start in life means looking beyond individual services or programmes.

Some of the most important factors in a child's early years, like health, safety, and emotional wellbeing touch everything we do.

These are the building blocks that support all of our work with children and families.

By keeping these building blocks at the heart of our approach, we aim to create the right conditions for children and families to thrive, now and in the years ahead.

Workforce development and capacity

Parental and infant mental health and emotional wellbeing

Voice of the child, family participation, and co-production

Safeguarding and early protection from harm

Healthy development foundations

Data, intelligence, and performance governance

Housing, poverty, and wider social determinants

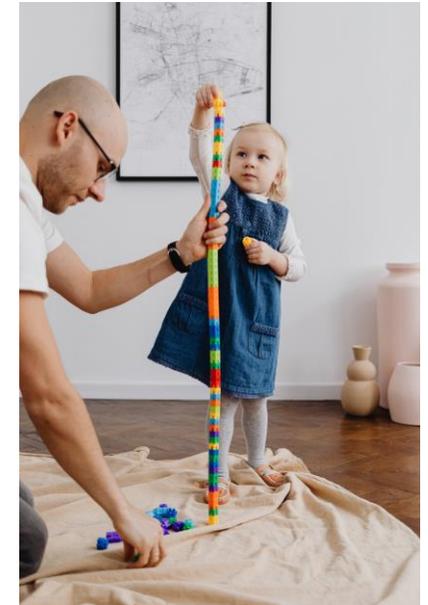
Sefton's enablers

Enablers are the people, programmes, and services that help families give children the best start in life. They are here to support you as a parent or carer and to help your child grow, learn, and feel confident.

This includes things like local groups, parenting programmes, family hubs, and trained staff who work with families. They provide practical ideas, friendly advice, and opportunities to connect with other families.

Enablers are designed to help you turn everyday moments into learning opportunities, support your child's development, and access the right help when you need it.

In short, they are the support around you in Sefton that helps you and your child flourish.



Sefton's enablers - Programmes

PEEP Learning Together is a programme that helps parents and carers support their child's learning at home.

It shows simple ways to turn everyday moments - like talking, playing, sharing books or cooking - into fun learning time. This helps children grow in confidence, learn to talk and listen well, and feel ready for school.

The programme is led by trained staff who work with families in places like nurseries, family hubs and other early years settings.

Any parent, carer or caregiver can access the Learning Together Programme.

Sefton are expanding its offer so you'll be able to take part sessions in a venue that's close to home.

The Adult and Community Learning Sefton are offering accreditation to parents & carers through the PEEP learning together programme.

The Nurturing Programme is a course for parents that helps build strong, healthy family relationships.

It focuses on what families are already doing well and works in partnership with parents and carers. It helps parents grow their emotional strength, focusing on four simple "building blocks" of nurturing parenting: understanding yourself, having realistic expectations of children, showing empathy, and using kind, positive discipline.

These skills help children feel safe, understood and loved.

Any parent, carer or caregiver can access The Nurturing Programme.

This is a new programme to Sefton. Some of our neighbours already have this programme in place and families report good things about it.

Once it's up and running, we'll make sure it's well advertised.

Sefton's enablers – Family Hubs

Best Start in Life Family Hubs

In Sefton, we're starting off with a Best Start in Life Hub in Netherton. We've picked this area as a starting point because of the great community assets, while also looking at strengthening the existing offer across our other hubs over time.

Best Start Family Hubs give a welcoming front door for families from pregnancy through early childhood. They bring together services, support, and trusted relationships in one connected network, making it easier for families to access the right help at the right time.

Family Hubs are built on the principle that every contact counts. Whether families are seeking advice during pregnancy, support with infant feeding, parenting guidance, help with childcare, or early years provision, they can access coordinated, high-quality support through a clear and joined-up pathway.

What it means for me

The Best Start in Life offer is being developed, and we need input from families to make sure it's right.

We'll be releasing a timetable of activities taking place across Sefton. We need to know whether there's anything that you think is missing or things that you think are brilliant. Follow [Sefton's Family Hubs page on Instagram](#).

Across the next year, we'll be creating Best Start in Life Hubs in Talbot Street and Marie Clarke.

Sefton's enablers - Projects

Lifelong Learners is a project that Sefton has created themselves. It's delivered in early years settings by trained staff.

It focuses on helping children to develop strong habits of mind so that they can discover, think, create, solve problems and self-regulate.

It also helps staff to think about how they're supporting children in the context of today's world.



Training for Lifelong Learners is being rolled out across settings in Sefton.

We're looking at how we can spread the messaging from Lifelong Learners to families and community organisations in Sefton.

Moving the Box helps teachers in early years make sure all children get the right support to learn and grow well.

It focuses on equity - giving each child what they need to succeed - not just the same thing for everyone.

It's about helping schools to become even better at what they do, improving how they work with young children and understand how children learn best. This is done with strong learning plans, sharing ideas and learning from each other about what works best.



The 'Moving the Box' project will be rolled out to all maintained Local Authority schools by 2028, in areas of high deprivation and will include both nursery schools and reception classes

Sefton's Enablers

The healthy child programme already has good take up in Sefton- it's a real strength. The health visiting team has recently put in place a 3 year check where families can engage with the service for additional support, where needed.

Families get a leaflet outlining the offer as well as some information that will be useful for getting the most out of learning at home and in the community.

The Six Steps to Success guidance has been developed by a multi-agency team and consulted with families to give clear, accessible and easy to apply guidance on child development at different stages.

We've developed Six Steps to Success to support children to build a strong foundation before starting school. These steps cover key areas of development and ensure children are truly 'ready to learn' and thrive from day one.

Thrive before Five was created to help parents and carers support their child's learning and development through fun, low-cost activities.

It shares exciting ideas that families can try at home, in the garden, or out and about in the community in Sefton.

Each activity is designed to help children build important skills while having fun - whether that's exploring nature, cooking together, getting creative with art, or trying something new.

Sefton are going to be starting annual transition events for families where families can find out the best ways to prepare for this exciting stage of development!

For more information, follow [Sefton Early Years on Instagram](#)

Sefton's Enablers

Speech and Language Therapy services in Sefton help children develop their talking, listening and communication skills from an early age. They offer support to families and early years practitioners through advice lines, visits, and training, helping the adults around each child feel confident in supporting their communication. This can make a big difference to how children express themselves, understand others, and feel ready to learn.

This service is continuing to grow and improve support so more families can access help earlier. This includes promoting advice lines more widely, offering more support to early years settings, and continuing to develop training so everyone supporting children is giving consistent, high-quality support. The aim is to make sure every child in Sefton can get the help they need, when they need it.

For more information about the support available in Sefton, you can speak to a Speech and Language Therapist on 0151 282 4973 or email earlyyearsadvice@sefton.nhs.uk.



There are many brilliant **Early Education and Childcare Providers** in Sefton who provide caring, engaging environments where children can learn and thrive. Their dedication makes a real difference to young children and their families every day.

At the same time, work is ongoing to make sure all children have access to the same high-quality experiences, with a focus on improving consistency across different settings so every child gets the best possible start.

For more information about the settings available in Sefton, go to [Sefton Council's website](#).

Where we want to innovate

Understanding need early: We want to develop a new, more joined-up way of checking in on how children are growing and learning - one that's designed around what works best for families in our area.

We're exploring a holistic review that brings health partners and early education together in a review which looks at a child's development over time.

The aim is to identify any additional support needs as early as possible, celebrate strengths, and make sure everyone is working together to support children to feel confident, happy, and ready to learn.

Best Start in Life quality mark: We're introducing a Quality Mark to help make sure that every session families attend - whether it's in a community group, health setting, or local authority-led service - supports children's early learning in a consistent and meaningful way.

Groups will sign up to the shared principles, helping to build strong foundations for communication, confidence, and curiosity.

Using a clear and supportive monitoring approach, we'll track progress, celebrate good practice, and recognise the fantastic work happening across our local services.

Best Start in Life Champions: People who can share simple, practical messages to support children's early development.

Through a scalable training model, we'll equip champions across the area - from community groups to frontline services - with the knowledge and tools to talk to families about early learning in clear, relatable ways.

Training will follow a shared approach so families receive consistent, high-quality messages wherever they go. Champions will also join a supportive peer network with mentoring, shared learning, and ongoing development opportunities.

High quality communication and engagement: We'll use podcasts and digital media to share key messages, practical tips, and real stories with families.

Information will be made accessible in different formats - including translated materials, audio, and video - so it meets diverse needs. We will also build feedback loops to ensure family views help shape future communications and services.

These materials will be coproduced with families, for families.

Measuring the impact

We want to make sure the Best Start in Life Strategy is making a real difference for children and families. To do this, we will regularly review what is working well and where improvements are needed.

We will use a combination of data, feedback from families and professionals, and examples from practice to understand the impact of our work. This helps us improve services, use resources effectively and be open about the progress we are making.

To keep ourselves accountable, we have a strong governance structure in place where impact, feedback and outcomes will be reported on a regular basis.

For who?	What success looks like	How we'll measure it
For children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More children are developing well in the early years and are ready to learn.• Children develop strong speech, language and communication skills.• Children with additional needs are identified early and receive the right support.• More children from disadvantaged groups are ready to learn.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The number of children reaching a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception• Children's speech, language and communication development in the early years will be improved• Children with additional needs are identified and supported early, measured through early years assessments and timely referrals to appropriate support services.• Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) outcomes, with a focus on narrowing gaps for vulnerable children and those with SEND.• Reduction in inequalities, tracked through locality data, deprivation indicators, and engagement with seldom-heard families.

Impact measures

For families

What success looks like

- Families feel confident supporting their child's learning and development.
- Families know where to go for help and can access support easily.
- Families of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) feel listened to and involved in decisions.

How we'll measure it

- How many families take up funded early education places, particularly among disadvantaged groups.
- How many families are accessing early help and family support services
- Feedback from parents and carers about their experiences of support
- Feedback from interventions

For professionals

What success looks like

- Staff across services have the skills and confidence to support all children.
- Early years settings provide high-quality care and education.

How we'll measure it

- Training and development of the early years workforce, measured through staff retention and recruitment rates, and feedback on skills and confidence.
- Quality improvement data from visits, audits, moderation activity and Ofsted outcomes

For the wider system

What success looks like

- Early years services work well together to support children and families.
- Children are identified for support early
- Better long term outcomes for children and their families

How we'll measure it

- Identification of support earlier meaning less children go to school with unidentified support needs
- Consistency of information sharing, referrals, and joint working measured through feedback, referral data, and evidence of joined-up working across services.
- Health indicators such as immunisation rates, dental health, breastfeeding prevalence, and child development outcomes at 2–2½ years.
- School attendance and transition data, particularly for vulnerable groups and children with SEND.

Governance- how we're keeping accountable

System leadership	Health & Wellbeing Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Receives updates to feed into the wider system• Aligns with wider health & wellbeing strategy
Strategic oversight	Children & Young People's Partnership Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic oversight of Best Start in Life• Receives progress and impact reporting• Escalation route for major issues & strategic decisions
Programme delivery	Best Start in Life Steering Group Membership including: Parents & Carers, Early Years team, Public health, Health partners, Education, Early Help, VCSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drive delivery of the BSIL strategy<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinate partners• Track progress and impact• Resolve delivery barriers
Practice and learning	Communities of Practice e.g. Early Years Advocates, Ready to Learn practitioners, Family Hub practitioner meet ups, VCSE forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share learning• Test approaches• Surface delivery issues
Engagement	Information sharing through established forums e.g. Schools Forum, Sefton Association of Primary Headteachers, Early Help Partnership Board, Every Child Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share progress• Gather feedback• Maintain alignment

Wrapping up

This Best Start in Life plan links with other local plans and priorities that support children and families across Sefton. Some of the key documents can be seen below.

By working closely together across services, we can make sure families receive joined-up support and that help is easy to access.

We will measure the impact of this work alongside other local strategies so we can track progress, stay accountable, and make sure we are truly improving outcomes for children and families.

Our shared aim is to give every child in Sefton the best possible start in life.



Links to related strategies

[Children and young people's plan 2025-2030](#)

[Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025](#)
(updated version pending)

[Healthy Start Programme Sefton](#)

[Transformation Programme plan 2024-2027](#)

[Child Poverty Strategy 2022-2030](#)