

The Early Years Pupil Premium

A practice review of awareness, use, and decision-making in settings






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About the researchers

The Early Years Pupil Premium practice review was independently delivered by IFF Research. IFF Research is a social and market research agency based in the United Kingdom, and was established in 1965. The research team comprised of Jacquie Collins and Yasmin White who led the practice review, Caitlin Webb who managed the review day to day, and Aisling O’Connell, Oona Miller, and Yesmine Abdelkefi who supported with the day-to-day running of the project.

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Executive summary

This practice review looked at how early years settings understand and use Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP). The review focused on five research questions (RQs), exploring how settings identify eligible children and claim EYPP, how the funding is used, how spending decisions are made, and how settings record and monitor its effectiveness. It also explored potential barriers to the uptake of EYPP and whether practice has changed since the April 2025 uplift in funding.

The review used a mixed methods approach, including:

- An online survey of 524 individuals based in early years settings, including group-based providers, school-based providers, and childminders. This was carried out between September and October 2025 and targeted those based in settings more likely to be in receipt of EYPP.
- 18 in depth interviews with survey participants who had agreed to be recontacted. These were carried out between October and November 2025. The interviews were targeted at those who made decisions about EYPP funding in their setting, and they were asked to answer on behalf of their setting.



In this report, those completing the survey are referred to as 'survey respondents', while those who took part in the qualitative interviews are referred to as 'interview participants'.

Key findings

RQ1. How aware are early years setting leaders of EYPP, and what is their understanding of its purpose and value?

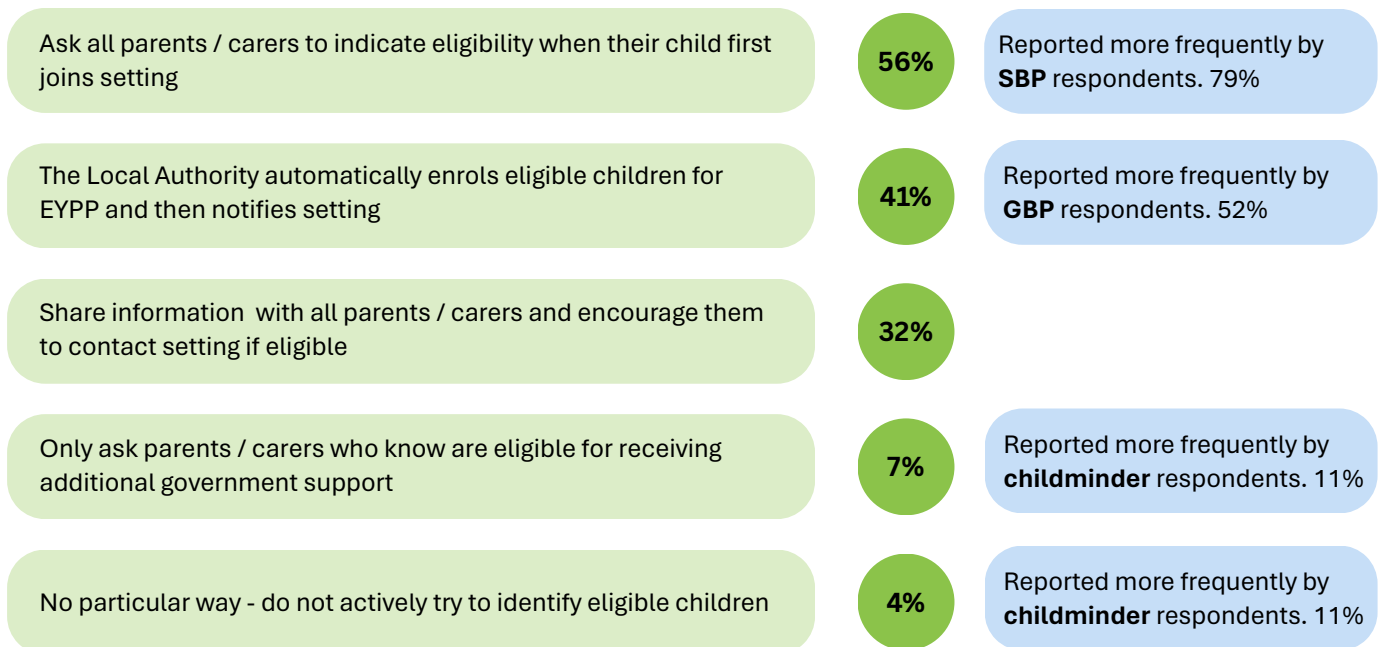
- Awareness of EYPP was very high among those responding to the survey (95%). All leaders in school-based or group-based settings were aware of EYPP (100%), compared with slightly lower awareness among childminders (89%). Interviews suggested that leaders in larger settings, or those connected to wider professional networks, benefited from embedded institutional knowledge of funding streams. Childminders interviewed, however, reported that they relied more on information they sought out themselves.
- While overall awareness of EYPP was high among survey respondents (95%), awareness of the recent funding uplift was lower. Around half (56%) of those already aware of EYPP were also aware of the April 2025 increase in funding.
- The majority (71%) of those in the survey aware of EYPP had also applied for the funding. Nearly all leaders in school-based and group-based settings had done so (95% and 90%, respectively), compared with considerably fewer childminders (38%).
- Interview participants described the purpose of EYPP as funding to support socio-economically disadvantaged children, suggesting a shared understanding of the policy's aims.



RQ2. What reported behaviours are there in relation to claiming EYPP within early years settings?

- Survey respondents most commonly reported that they identified children who may be eligible for by gathering information from parents or carers during the child’s enrolment, although many interpreted this process as being automated (see **Figure 1**).
- Two-fifths (41%) of survey respondents said that their local authority automatically enrolls eligible children for EYPP (see Figure 1). However, qualitative interviews found there was some variation in how interview participants understood ‘automatic enrolment’, with some describing ‘ticking a box’ on a funding form to indicate parental consent to check for eligibility and entering national insurance numbers, constituting an opt-in system, meaning this survey finding should be treated with caution.

Figure 1: The processes settings use to identify which children are potentially eligible for EYPP.



Source: ‘Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey’, B5. Multiple choice question. Base: All aware of EYPP (n=504); SBPs (n=92); GBPs (n=239); childminders (n=169).

- Interview participants typically found the process of determining eligibility and applying for EYPP straightforward to administer. Some noted that as completing funding forms was a compulsory part of enrolment processes for families, it was easy for them to collect the required information from families and did not create much additional work for staff. In other instances, however, some felt applying was not simply a procedural task, but that it placed an onus on parents or carers to disclose personal information. Some described concerns that parents or carers may have been hesitant to do this due to stigma or privacy concerns, delaying or even preventing application altogether. There were also interview participants who reported that their local authorities had more complex processes for checking eligibility and applying, which created further barriers.

- Once eligibility had been confirmed, interview participants said that they typically received EYPP as part of routine funding cycles, usually in monthly or termly instalments, and always in arrears. Local authorities communicated eligibility and funding amounts through funding portals, although sometimes the amount allocated was not clearly linked to specific children. Participants reported that this made it difficult – particularly for smaller settings - - to know how much funding they would receive and plan spending effectively.

RQ3. How do setting leaders make decisions about the use of EYPP funding, including planning processes, influences on spending, sources of information used, and the role of local authority activity?

- Survey respondents from school-based settings had mixed approaches to planning EYPP spending. Similar proportions reported that it was planned as part of their setting’s wider overall strategy (45%) as that it was planned separately (44%). In contrast, most respondents from group-based settings (73%) reported that their EYPP spending was planned separately from wider budget decisions. Only 8% said it formed part of their setting’s wider strategy, while 15% said decisions were made on an ad hoc basis.^[1]
- Decision-making was usually led by senior staff. In the survey, 70% of respondents from school-based settings said the headteacher led decisions, while 89% of those in group-based settings reported that decisions were made by the setting manager. Other staff were also sometimes involved. Respondents from group-based settings were more likely than those from school-based settings to report involvement from a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) (59% vs 29%), a nursery/early years practitioner (43% vs 14%), or the setting deputy manager/deputy headteacher (42% vs. 14%). Some interview participants based in smaller settings, particularly small group-based settings and childminders, also reported involving parents in decisions about how EYPP was spent.
- When deciding how to allocate EYPP funding, interview participants explained how they balanced the needs of the eligible child(ren) with those of the wider cohort. Children’s individual basic needs [HC7] [RE8] – such as coats for winter, or beds for the home - were typically prioritised where participants noticed they were not being met.
- Survey respondents most commonly reported using child observations and data on children’s progress and development when deciding how to spend EYPP (78%), usually alongside other sources of information. Smaller proportions also reported drawing on research evidence about effective practice (29%), the EEF website/resources (24%), local authority advisors (24%), and Department for Education guidance (24%).

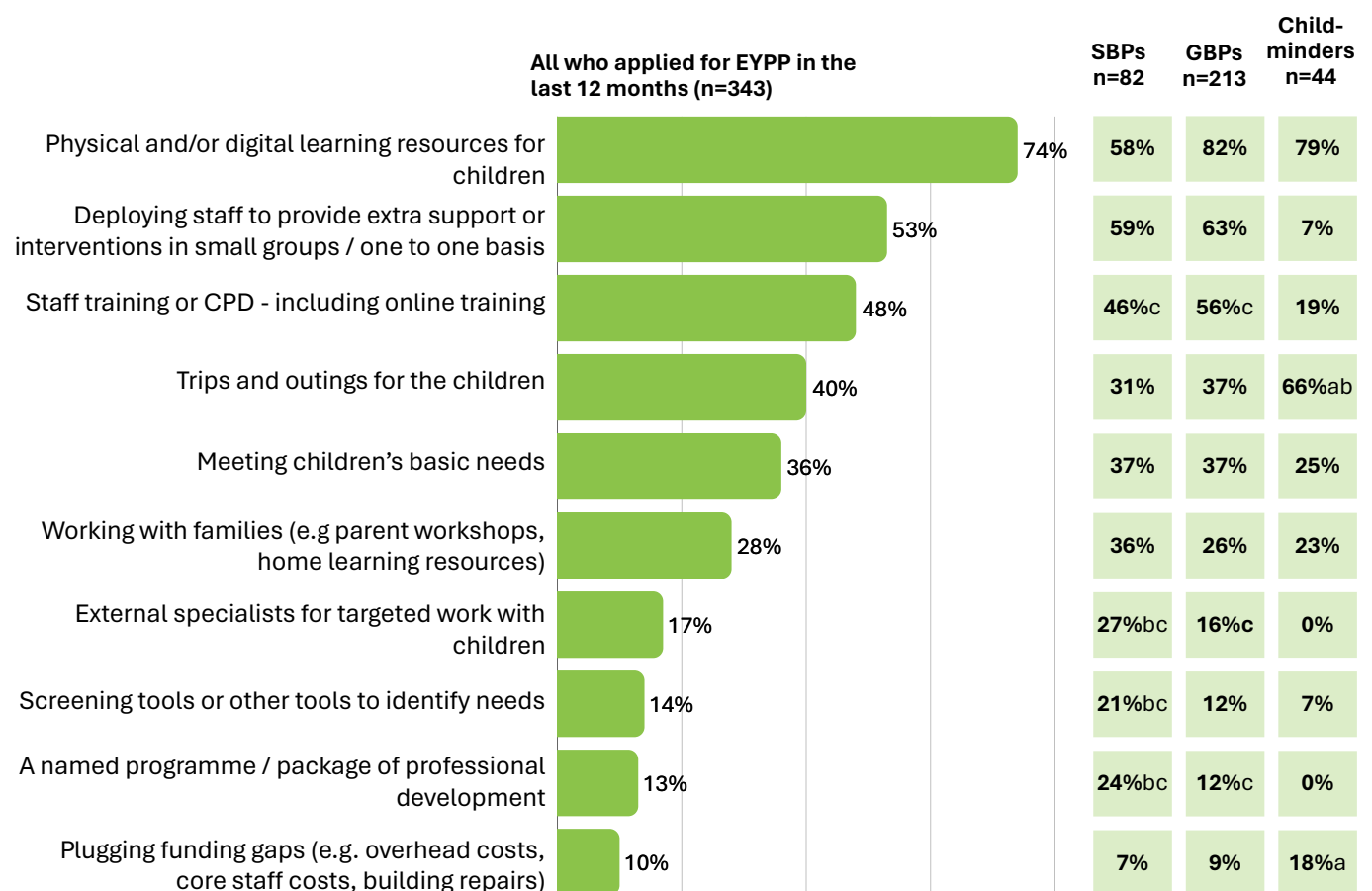


[1] This question was not asked of childminders

RQ4. How is EYPP funding used in practice, including the types of activities funded and the approaches taken to track or evaluate impact?

- Many people in the survey reported that their setting used EYPP to fund physical or digital resources (74%), staff deployment (53%), and professional development (48%). However, spending patterns varied by setting type. Those in school-based and group-based settings were more likely than childminders to use funding for extra support interventions or professional development (see **Figure 2**). Those in school-based settings were also more likely than others to use the funding for external specialists, screening tools, and professional packages. Childminders were more likely to spend their EYPP on trips, outings, and essential operational needs. Investment in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was widely valued by interview participants, although some from smaller settings raised concerns about feasibility given limited funding.

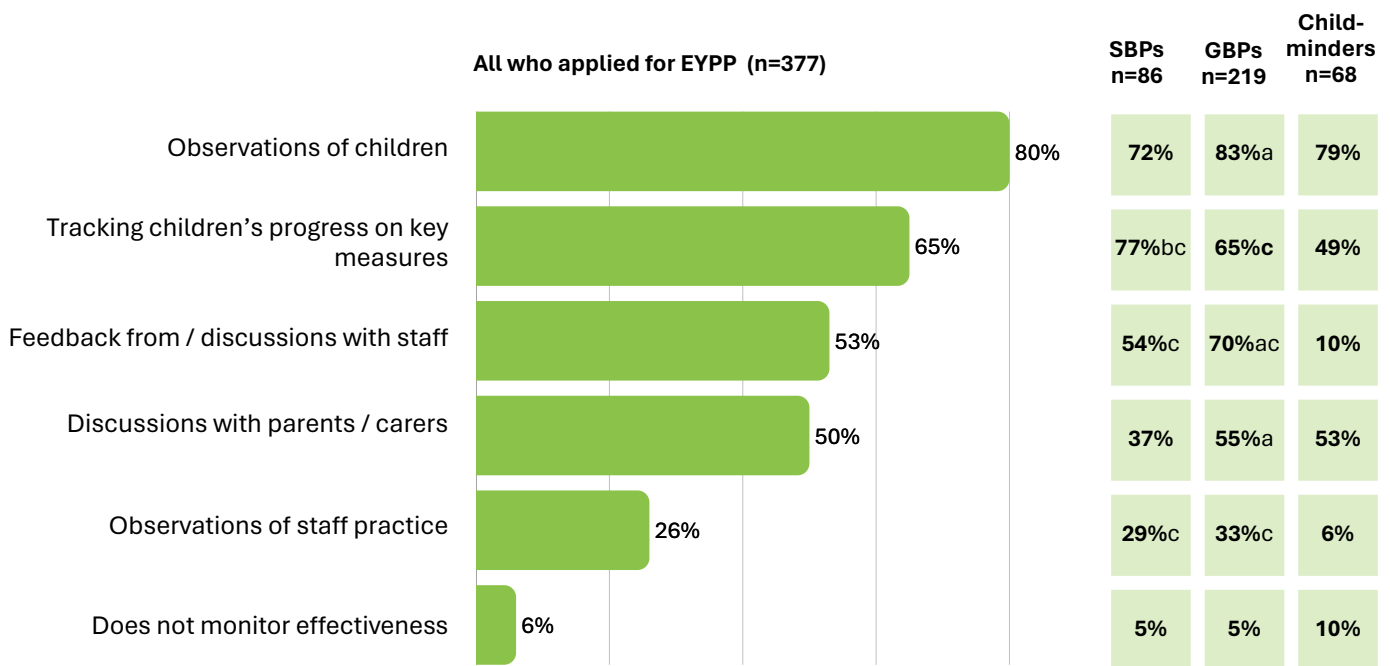
Figure 2: What EYPP has been spent on (or planned to be spent on)



Source: 'Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey', D1. Multiple choice question. Base: All who applied in past 12 months. Superscript letters indicate statistically significant differences between subgroups: a denotes a significantly higher figure from SBPs; b from GBPs; and c from childminders. Answer labels have been shortened against the questionnaire.

- The EEF Guide to the Early Years Pupil Premium (EEF, 2025) provides a structured framework for EYPP spend, advocating for a ‘balanced approach’.^[2] When this approach was described in interviews, participants generally welcomed it, however, some questioned the practical feasibility of spending in some of the ways the guidance recommended. Others reported discomfort with the idea that EYPP funding should be used on activities that did not involve direct work with children.
- Nearly all (92%) survey respondents who had applied for EYPP funding reported that they monitored the effectiveness of their EYPP funding in some way. The most commonly reported methods were observing children, tracking progress on key measures, and having discussions with staff, or with parents/carers (see **Figure 3**). Reported practices for recording and monitoring EYPP spend varied somewhat by setting type. In particular, those from school-based settings were more likely than others to report that they tracked children’s progress on key measures, whereas those from group-based settings were more likely than others to use feedback from and discussions with staff.

Figure 3: Practices for monitoring effectiveness of EYPP spending



Source: ‘Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey’, E5. Base: All who applied. Superscript letters indicate statistically significant differences between subgroups: ^a denotes a significantly higher figure from SBPs, ^b from GBPs, and ^c from childminders. Around 2% answered ‘don’t know’ to this question

- Interview participants from smaller settings, including childminders, reported that they were less likely to record EYPP spend separately from other costs. This was often due to limited administrative capacity, unclear funding information from their local authorities, or a view that the funding amount was too small to justify detailed tracking.

^[2] The EEF guidance (EEF, 2025) advocates for a ‘balanced approach’ that encourages settings to consider three key areas of spend: professional development to improve the overall quality of education; tailored support for individual children, and planning; and covering the costs of planning, delivering, and monitoring an EYPP strategy.

RQ5. What barriers exist to the uptake of EYPP, and what are setting leaders' views on the policy in general, including recommendations for improvement?

- Around one in five (19%) survey respondents thought that they could be working with children who could be eligible for EYPP funding but for whom they had not made a claim.
- When funding had not been applied for, respondents most often cited practical barriers. This included parents or carers being unwilling to share personal information required to confirm eligibility (cited by 38% of settings who said they had eligible children for the funding but had not made a claim), parents or carers not wanting an application submitted (17%), and uncertainty over children's eligibility (17%). Those in school-based settings were particularly likely to report that parents or carers were unwilling to share the personal information required to confirm eligibility (59%). Childminders were more likely to say they were unsure what information was required from parents or carers to support the application (21%).
- Interview participants consistently felt that their EYPP funding had a positive impact and enabled their settings to provide additional experiences and resources for socio-economically disadvantaged children that would otherwise not be available. They welcomed the April 2025 uplift, although some noted that the amount of money was still insufficient to fund evidence-informed programmes or professional development at the level they would have liked, or that rising costs meant the uplift had limited practical impact.
- Some interview participants reported that the way EYPP was delivered—typically in arrears, in small instalments, and bundled with other funding streams—limited their ability to forward plan spend, make effective plans for spending EYPP, and reduced the perceived value of formal monitoring. They suggested that clearer guidance on the purpose and use of EYPP, greater transparency around funding allocations, and greater financial stability could support more strategic use of the funding.



Conclusions

The early years settings involved in this research appear committed to using their EYPP funding to improve children's outcomes and recognise the value of the policy. However, participants also described structural and practical factors that may limit more strategic use of the funding.

School-based and group-based settings were more likely to report using their EYPP in ways that aligned with the EEF's balanced approach, including investing in evidence-informed programmes, professional development, and specialist support that aimed to improve quality of practice. By contrast, childminders and those in smaller settings more often described using the funding to meet immediate needs, such as purchasing resources, clothing, or funding trips.

Some interview participants also reported that felt that planning how to spend EYPP is difficult because the funding is delivered in arrears, in small instalments, and is not clearly separated from other funding streams. This made it difficult- especially for smaller providers- to predict how much EYPP they would receive or to commit to longer term interventions. They also said that there is very little guidance, especially from local authorities, so they tended to rely on their own knowledge of children's needs rather than taking a more strategic approach to improve quality of practice.

Taken together, these findings highlight several opportunities for policymakers, sectorsupport organisations, and early years networks to strengthen the conditions that enable settings to make full and effective use of EYPP. They provide a starting point for understanding the operational context in which settings make decisions about their use of EYPP, and where targeted action could have the greatest impact. Further research would help strengthen and deepen these findings, providing a more robust evidence base to guide future policy and sectorlevel support.

A note on methodological limitations

It should be noted that the use of targeted sampling and self-selection in completing the survey means findings are not representative of all early years settings, particularly regarding EYPP awareness as familiarity with the EEF might mean they are more likely to be aware of EYPP and relevant resources. The number of qualitative interviews was relatively small, so some experiences may not be captured.

The review relies on self-reported information rather than independent observation. As such, findings may be subject to social desirability bias and should be used with caution. Further research would help strengthen and deepen these findings to provide a more robust evidence base for future policy and sector level support.



Introduction

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) is a targeted funding stream, which aims to ‘improve the educational outcomes of socio-economically disadvantaged children who are eligible for free early years entitlements in an early years setting’ (DfE, 2025a). While the policy initially focused on disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds attending funded early years education settings, EYPP has expanded over time (DfE, 2025b). From 2024, eligibility was extended to include younger children aged nine months to two years who access funded entitlements, and in April 2025 the Department for Education (DfE) increased EYPP funding by 45% to a maximum of £570 per child per year (DfE, 2024). The EEF guidance (EEF, 2025) to the EYPP, provides advice for setting leaders on how to develop and implement an effective strategy for spending EYPP.^[3]

EYPP is part of the wider early years funding and entitlement system, which includes funded entitlement hours such as universal 15 hours for three- and four-year-olds, 15 hours for two year olds in Families in Receipt of Additional Support (FRAS), and Working Parent Entitlements for eligible families for children aged nine months to four years old (DfE, 2025a). The funding is delivered to early years providers via local authorities, based on the number of eligible children they have. Children are eligible for EYPP if they receive at least one hour of funded early years provision and their parent/carer receives one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support.
- Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance.
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance.
- Support under part six of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (1999, c. 33).
- The guaranteed element of Pension Credit.
- Universal Credit, if the parent or carer’s annual net household income is less than £7,400, not including any benefits.



[3] More information and guidance on how to build an EYPP strategy can be found on the EEF website [here](#) (EEF, 2025).

Research objectives and questions

This practice review was designed to understand current approaches to the use of EYPP among early years settings. It aimed to explore what EYPP is typically spent on, how decisions around spend are made, and how, if at all, spend and effectiveness are recorded and monitored. As a secondary consideration, the review explored any reported changes in practice following the 2025 uplift and the publication of updated guidance from DfE and the EEF. The findings are intended to inform ongoing work to support early years settings to adopt high quality and evidence-informed EYPP spending approaches, as well as future EYPP policy development.

This practice review was guided by the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1.** How aware are early years setting leaders of EYPP, and what is their understanding of its purpose and value?
- RQ2.** What reported behaviours are there in relation to claiming EYPP within early years settings?
- RQ3.** How do setting leaders make decisions about the use of EYPP funding, including planning processes, influences on spending, sources of information used, and the role of local authority activity?
- RQ4.** How is EYPP funding used in practice, including the types of activities funded and the approaches taken to track or evaluate impact?
- RQ5.** What barriers exist to the uptake of EYPP, and what are setting leaders' views on the policy in general, including recommendations for improvement?



Definitions

- **EYPP:** EYPP is additional funding paid to early years providers in England for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, intended to support children's learning and development and improve educational outcomes.
- **Group-Based Provider (GBP):** GBPs are early years settings that are part of the private, voluntary, or independent sector, such as a nursery, preschool, or playgroup.
- **School-Based Provider (SBP):** SBPs are early years settings that are maintained by schools, such as a maintained nursery school or a nursery class within a primary school.
- **Multi-Academy Trust (MAT):** MATs are academy trusts that operate more than one academy school. An academy trust is a charitable company that runs state-funded schools under a funding agreement with DfE.
- **Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO):** SENCOs are responsible for leading their setting's provision for Special Educational Needs (SEN) and the support offered to children with SEN.
- **Continuing Professional Development (CPD):** CPD refers to the ongoing learning and training activities that professionals take part in to build their skills and improve their practice.



Practice review team: IFF Research

- **Jacquie Collins, Research Director:** Co-led the practice review, with overall responsibility, covering design and analysis.
- **Yasmin White, Associate Research Director:** Co-led the practice review, with responsibility for analysis, and reporting deliverables.
- **Caitlin Webb, Senior Research Manager:** Project manager for the practice review with day-to-day responsibility delivery including research tool design, fieldwork, analysis, and reporting outputs.
- **Aisling O’Connell, Senior Research Executive:** Supported with the delivery of the qualitative fieldwork, analysis, and reporting outputs.
- **Oona Miller, Senior Research Executive:** Supported with the delivery of the quantitative fieldwork, analysis, and reporting outputs.
- **Yesmine Abdelkefi, Research Executive:** Supported the team across all elements of the project.



Methods

The study ran from September 2025 to November 2025 and adopted a two-stage mixed-methods design, informed by the Theoretical Domains Framework (TDF).^[4] An online survey was conducted with individuals responsible for financial decision-making in early years settings. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 18 leaders who agreed in the survey to be recontacted for further research. A summary of the methods used can be found in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Summary of methods used

| Approach | Sample size | Fieldwork dates |
|---|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| Online survey of setting managers, early years leaders, and childminders | n=524 | 30 September 2025 to 24 October 2025 |
| Qualitative, in-depth interviews with setting managers, early years leaders, and childminders | n=18 | 27 October 2025 and 14 November 2025 |

Online survey

The online survey ran between 30 September and 24 October 2025 and targeted setting managers, early years leaders, and childminders. It included questions about their awareness of EYPP, how many children in their setting were eligible for EYPP, whether they had received EYPP, how they used the funding, and whether they recorded how it was spent or monitored its effectiveness. The survey included a mix of single choice and multiple choice questions. The survey took around ten minutes to complete, and, at the end, survey respondents were asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow-up in-depth interview.

A mixed approach to sampling was adopted to ensure variation in key setting characteristics, including setting type (SBPs, GBPs, and childminders), level of disadvantage using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), derived from the setting's postcode, and geographical location. Contact details for GBPs and childminders were compiled through web-scraping of local authority websites. Local authorities with high levels of deprivation were targeted to ensure the survey reached the settings most likely to have accessed EYPP. In total, 6,000 settings were invited to take part this way, including 2,701 GBPs and 3,299 childminders. SBPs in the most deprived areas^[5] were sampled using DfE's Get Information About Schools database. To achieve regional coverage, all SBPs in the South East and South West were invited to take part, and additional SBPs were randomly selected from the same deprivation quintile across the other regions. In total, 2,000 SBPs were sampled via this method. These direct approaches generated 254 responses, giving a response rate of 4.2%. An open survey link was also shared through the EEF networks and newsletters to extend reach across the sector, which generated an additional 270 responses.

Overall, 524 responses were achieved for the survey. These included survey respondents from a range of setting types and areas with differing deprivation levels, as shown by Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4. There were four survey respondents whose setting type was unknown, therefore, in some cases, base sizes for the three providers types included in charts do not sum to the base size of 'all'.

^[4] The TDF is a behavioural science framework used to identify factors influencing behaviour and inform intervention design

^[5] Level of deprivation was defined using the IDACI. Those deemed to be the 'most deprived' were those in the top quintile of IDACI rankings..

Table 2: Summary of responses by setting type

| Setting type | Number of responses | Proportion of total responses | Proportion of total population [a] |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| SBP | 92 | 18% | 18% |
| GBP | 240 | 46% | 40% |
| Childminder | 188 | 36% | 42% |
| Other | 4 | <1% | N/A |

[a] Total population proportions have been taken from the latest DfE childcare and early years provider survey figures published in December 2025. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/childcare-and-early-years-provider-survey/2025>.

N/A=not applicable.

Table 3: Summary of responses by IDACI band

| Setting type | Number of responses | Proportion of total responses | Proportion of total population [a] |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Most deprived | 115 | 22% | 29% |
| Deprived | 82 | 16% | 19% |
| Average | 83 | 16% | 17% |
| Less Deprived | 84 | 16% | 15% |
| Least deprived | 65 | 12% | 15% |
| Unknown [b] | 95 | 18% | N/A |

[a] Total population proportions have been taken from the latest DfE childcare and early years provider survey figures published in December 2025. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/childcare-and-early-years-provider-survey/2025>.

[b] Level of deprivation was unknown for settings who declined to provide their postcode or who gave an incomplete or incorrect postcode.

N/A=not applicable.

Table 4: Summary of responses by sample source

| Respondent source | Number of responses | Proportion of total responses |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| IFF sample | 254 | 48% |
| The EEF early years newsletter | 24 | 5% |
| EEF Exchange panel members [6] | 0 | 0% |
| Foundation Years newsletter [7] | 185 | 35% |
| Early years stronger practice hubs [8] | 53 | 10% |
| The EEF EYPP guide page (EEF, 2025)/ EEF's socials | 8 | 2% |

[6] The Exchange is a virtual community of educators run by the EEF. Members are invited to contribute their perspectives via polls, focus groups and interviews.

[7] Foundation Years is funded by the Department for Education and delivered by Begin Bright, a global provider of early years education services.

[8] Stronger practice hubs support early years settings and childminders in their area to adopt evidence-based practice improvements.



Qualitative interviews

Following the online survey, the in-depth, one to one interviews with early years setting leaders and childminders were conducted between 27 October 2025 and 14 November 2025. Interview participants were recruited from survey respondents who had consented to being recontacted about follow-up research. Interviews were conducted online and lasted around 45–60 minutes. They focused on participants' experiences of determining children's eligibility for EYPP, receiving EYPP, and making decisions related to EYPP spend. They also asked participants to reflect on the effectiveness of EYPP and recommendations for improving the funding.

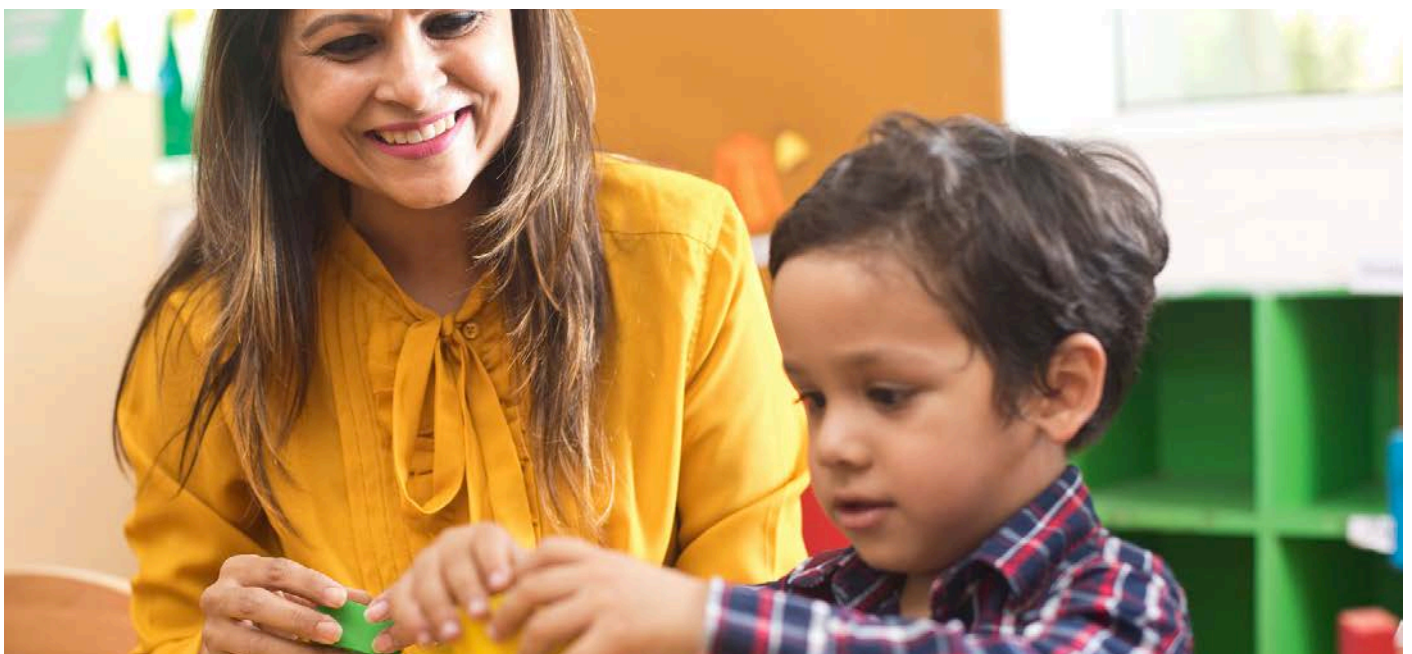
A total of 18 in-depth interviews were completed. Those interviewed worked in a range of setting types and sizes and included a mix of those who had reported in the survey that they used EYPP solely to support eligible children and those who used EYPP to support eligible children and others in their setting (**Table 5**).

Table 5: Summary of responses by setting type and EYPP use

| Setting type | Those who use EYPP only to support the eligible child | Those who use EYPP to support the eligible child and other children |
|---------------|---|---|
| Large GBP [a] | 3 | 3 |
| Small GBP [b] | 2 | 2 |
| SBP | 1 | 3 |
| Childminder | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 8 | 10 |

[a] large GBP has more than 30 registered places.

[b] A small GBP has less than 30 registered places.



Analysis

Responses from the surveys were aggregated, tabulated, and broken down according to a range of setting characteristics. Any open-text responses in the survey were analysed using a general inductive approach. Weighting was applied to the survey data to account for variance in setting type (SBPs, GBPs, and childminders), region (North, Midlands, South) and deprivation.^[9] Throughout this report, differences between subgroups are only referenced where statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

A deductive approach was taken to the analysis of qualitative interviews. Interview transcripts were thematically analysed based on the RQs and inductive codes were generated during analysis when unexpected themes emerged. Interviews were summarised with verbatim quotes and reflections, enabling comparison of experiences and exploration of subgroup differences by setting type and size.

Findings from both strands were triangulated and the TDF was used to inform the overarching analytical approach. The TDF provides a structured way to explore the behavioural drivers of practice, including knowledge, beliefs, motivations, and environmental factors, and was used in this study to examine how settings' understanding and perceptions of EYPP relate to their behaviours around claiming, planning, and spending the funding.



Methodological considerations

There are a few limitations of this practice review to note. First, the targeted sampling approaches and self-selection biases for the quantitative research mean that findings are not representative of the entire population of early years settings and caution must be used when interpreting the findings. This is particularly true of summary statistics related to awareness as settings who chose to take part in the research were probably more likely to already be aware of EYPP. Second, due to the design and nature of the practice review, the desired number of completes for both the quantitative research and the qualitative research were relatively small. This was particularly the case for the qualitative interviews, which means the findings may not capture the full range of experiences across the sector. That said, the findings captured across both the quantitative and qualitative research were sufficient to respond to the RQs. The study also relies on self-reported information, which reflects settings' perceptions and experiences rather than independent observation.

[9] Population targets used to weight the data are included in Appendix A.

Findings

Awareness of EYPP

Awareness of EYPP was very high among those responding to the survey, although was slightly lower for survey respondents who were childminders than for those in SBPs or GBPs. In interviews, participants from larger settings, particularly SBPs and those with access to professional networks reported they benefited from embedded institutional knowledge of funding streams, while childminders relied more on self-directed information seeking. Awareness of the April 2024 uplift was notably lower, and where it was recognised, it was generally viewed as modest and insufficient to alter established approaches to spending.

On the whole, participants interviewed, understood EYPP as funding to support socio-economically disadvantaged children. Of those surveyed, most who were aware of EYPP had applied for the funding. When funding had not been applied for, this was often reported to be because of practical barriers, including parents not sharing required information, parents not wanting an application submitted, and uncertainty over children's eligibility. Childminders particularly were less sure about the information required from parents/carers to support the application.



Awareness of EYPP

Reported awareness of EYPP was very high among survey respondents. Nearly all (95%) reported that they were aware of EYPP funding, with universal (100%) awareness for survey respondents based in SBPs and GBPs. Awareness was slightly lower among childminder survey respondents, at 89%. As noted in the methodological considerations above, this could be due to survey respondents with higher awareness of EYPP being more likely to take part in this survey. However, the May 2025 Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers (SCEYP) Pulse survey, commissioned by DfE and conducted by IFF Research, surveyed a fully representative sample of early years settings and found awareness of EYPP was similarly high at 92%. The Pulse survey found awareness of EYPP to be high across setting types, with 93% of SBP survey respondents, 95% of GBP survey respondents, and 90% of childminder survey respondents answering that they were aware.

How survey respondents became aware of EYPP differed by setting type, reflecting differences in organisational capacity and structures, and professional networks. Those interviewed frequently became aware of EYPP through their local authority, word of mouth, or their personal/professional contacts. In this sense, interview participants based in SBPs often described awareness of EYPP as embedded within institutional practice. For example, one interview participant based in an SBP recalled becoming aware of EYPP because they were already aware of the schools Pupil Premium. They described knowledge of funding streams as a standard part of business as usual and explained that it was part of their organisational culture, passed on through leadership roles and staff handovers.

Prior to being the CEO [chief executive officer], I've been the head of one of the primary schools for 20 years [...] I'm on schools' forum as well [...] so I'm aware of funding and how funding gets allocated. (SBP, IDACI band 'most deprived', not part of a MAT)

Interview participants based at GBPs also tended to access information through structured channels, particularly local authority funding portals and peer networks. Awareness was also commonly formed through informal professional interactions, such as SENCO meetings or conversations with other settings.

The SENCO of the setting at the time directed me into the field of it really, because I had a lot of children that needed that bridge in the learning gaps of Pupil Premium. (Large GBP, IDACI band 'average', not part of a chain)

In contrast, childminder interview participants described finding information about EYPP independently, most often through their own research on local authority websites rather than through direct communication or networks. This suggests that lower awareness reported by childminder interview participants may be linked to greater reliance on self-directed information seeking, compared to the more embedded and networked routes described by interview participants based at SBPs and GBPs.

Yeah, on the local authority [website] for the free early education funding [...]. I thought, I wonder what PP [Pupil Premium] is? So, I looked it up and it says Pupil Premium. (Childminder, IDACI band 'least deprived', part of an agency)

Awareness of EYPP was generally accompanied by a good understanding of its purpose. Interview participants described the funding as intended to support eligible 'disadvantaged children', with a focus on narrowing developmental or educational gaps that are associated with childhood disadvantage. This understanding was consistent across interview participants from different setting types.

It's for disadvantaged families...it's to bridge that educational gap where they may be failing or they may be dropping behind in their developmental levels. And it's to help put resources in place or extra training for staff to bring that child back to where we expect children to be working at a particular age. (Large SBP, IDACI band 'average', not part of a MAT)

Despite high-reported awareness of EYPP overall, reported awareness of the April 2025 uplift to EYPP funding was considerably lower. Just over half of survey respondents aware of EYPP (56%) were aware of the funding uplift prior to completing the survey. Awareness, again, varied by setting type: survey respondents based at GBPs recorded the highest level of awareness of the funding uplift (73%); followed by those based at SBPs (60%); while childminder survey respondents were the least aware (35%) of the funding uplift.

Awareness of the April 2025 uplift to EYPP funding did not necessarily translate into expectations of meaningful change. Across interviews, interview participants commonly framed the uplift as modest when broken down per child and insufficient to alter established approaches to spending. Furthermore, while additional funding was generally welcomed, it was often described as being absorbed by rising operational costs rather than enabling new forms of support. These interview participants emphasised that the uplift of £570 per eligible child per year did not change how they made decisions about EYPP.

Overall, it didn't make a massive difference. So, for example, for the child that we've got this year, I think we're going to get about 370 for her. It doesn't break the bank, but it's enough to buy a few good things for her. It hasn't changed how you'd spend it either because it's not significant enough. (SBP, IDACI band 'least deprived', part of a MAT)

Barriers to applying for EYPP funding

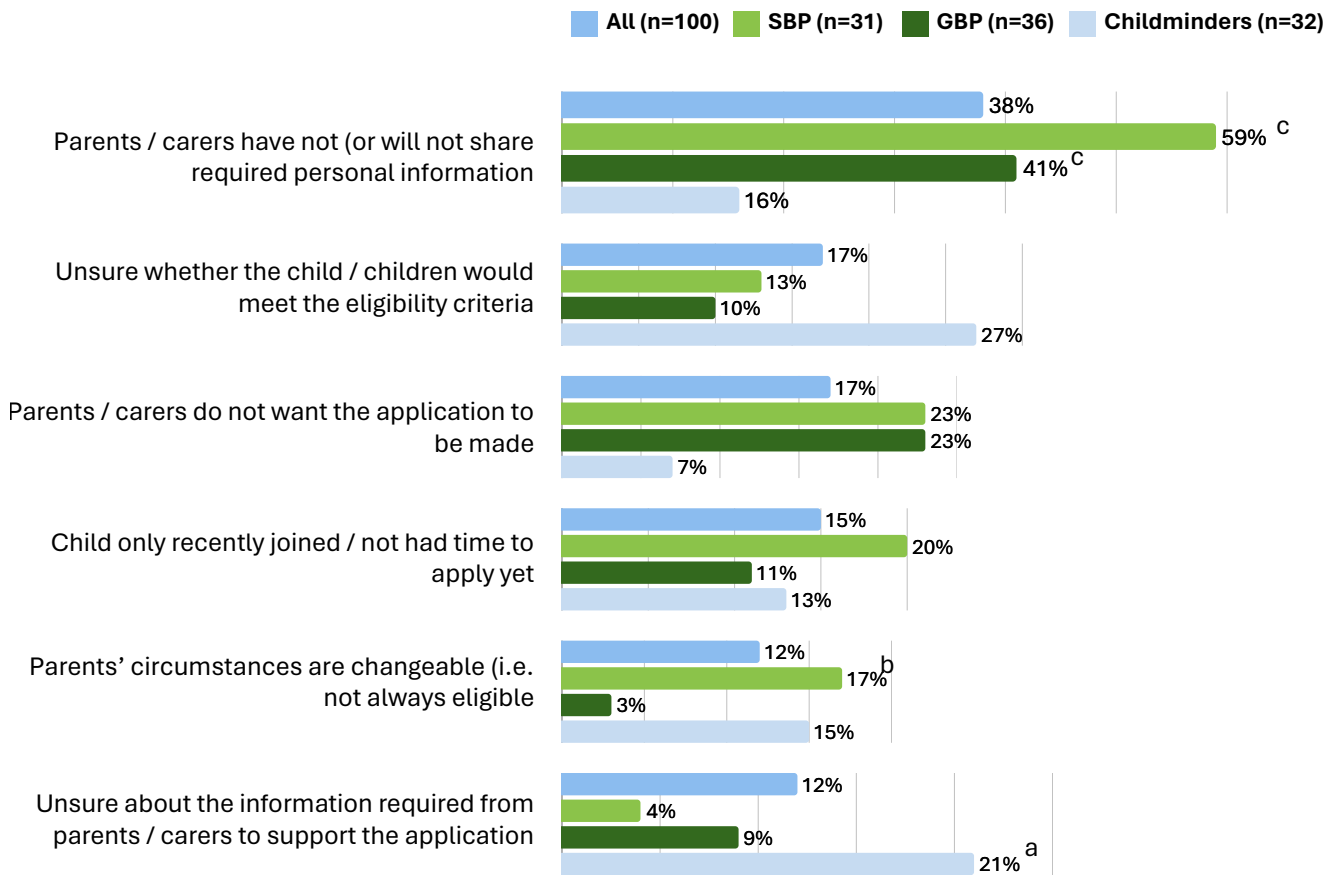
Of those surveyed who were aware of EYPP, the majority (71%) had applied for the funding at some point. Survey respondents' application rates differed substantially by setting type. Nearly all survey respondents based at SBPs and GBPs had applied (95% and 90%, respectively), whereas far fewer childminder survey respondents had done so (38%). Similarly, survey respondents from settings with 21–50 children or 51 or more children were most likely to apply for EYPP (90% and 92%, respectively), compared with those based at settings with fewer children (58% of those with 6–20 children, and 36% of those with fewer than five children). These patterns should be understood in light of the strong relationship between setting type and size, with SBPs and GBPs generally having larger cohorts of children than childminders.

Around one in five (19%) survey respondents, that had children registered at their setting who they thought could be eligible for EYPP, reported that they had not applied to receive EYPP. This was most pronounced among survey respondents based at SBPs, where 35% with at least one potentially eligible child had not applied, compared with 17% of childminder survey respondents and 14% of those based at GBPs. Survey respondents based at settings that were part of a group operating multiple nurseries, a MAT, or registered with a childminding agency, were also more likely not to have applied for one or more children, compared to standalone settings (29% vs 17%, respectively).

Survey respondents based at settings with potentially eligible children, but had not applied for EYPP, most commonly reported this was because parents/carers had not (or would not) share the required personal information (38%), as shown in **Figure 4**. Other reasons included parents not wanting the application to be made (17%) and uncertainty about whether the child met the eligibility criteria (17%). These patterns differed by setting type. Survey respondents based at SBPs were particularly likely not to have applied due to parents' unwillingness to share information (59%), whereas childminder survey respondents were more likely than other settings to report uncertainty about the required information (21% vs 4% for survey respondents based at SBPs and 9% for survey respondents based at GBPs). Finally, survey respondents based at GBPs were less likely than average to mention being affected by changeable parental circumstances (3% vs 17% for survey respondents based at SBPs) as the reason for not applying for EYPP funding for children they suspected were eligible for the funding.



Figure 4: Why survey respondent has not applied for EYPP funding for eligible child(ren), by setting type



Source: 'Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey'; C1. Multiple choice question. Base: All with eligible or potentially eligible children. Superscript letters indicate statistically significant differences between subgroups: a denotes a significantly higher figure from SBPs; b from GBPs; and c from childminders.



Determining eligibility and receiving EYPP

Survey respondents most commonly reported identifying children who may be eligible for EYPP by gathering information from parents/carers during the child's enrolment at the setting, although many said it was done automatically. In interviews, interview participants described having to simply 'tick a box' on the local authority funding portal to indicate that a child might be eligible and that parents/carers had consented for eligibility to be checked. Local authorities used this information to determine eligibility and release funding. Interview participants generally found this system straightforward and easy to administer, however, they noted that it was dependent on families having positive and trusting relationships with their childcare provider.

Some interview participants reported that their local authorities had more complex processes in place that required settings to spend more time gathering information from parents/carers and filling in a funding application form. These interview participants found the administration process harder and worried that systems were too reliant on parents/carers disclosing sensitive information, which could lead to children not receiving the funding they are eligible for.

Once eligibility was established, interview participants typically received EYPP as part of routine funding cycles, in monthly or termly instalments, and in arrears. Local authorities communicated eligibility and funding amounts through funding portals, however, sometimes the amount allocated was not well demarcated or not linked to specific children. This made it difficult for interview participants, particularly those in smaller settings, to know how much funding they would receive, making it hard to plan EYPP spending effectively.



Determining eligibility and applying for EYPP

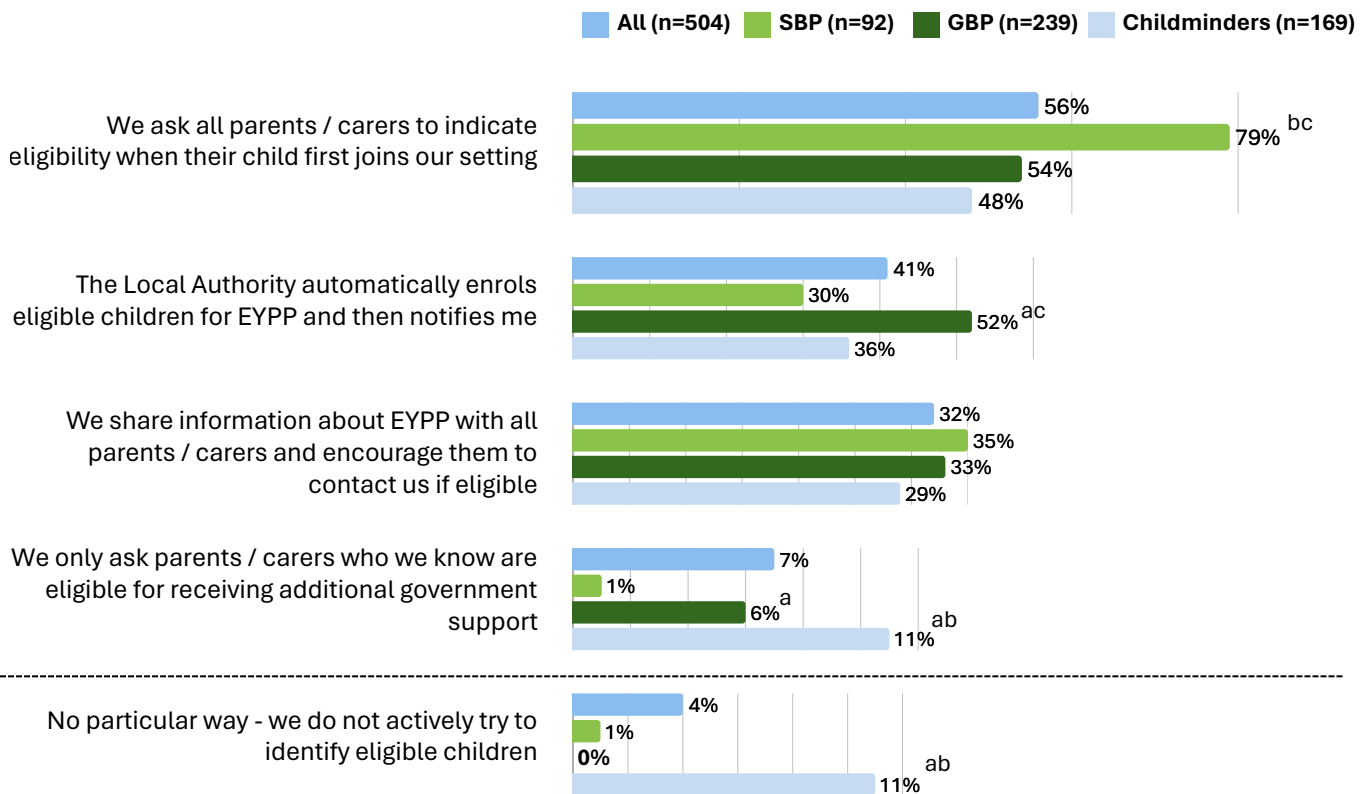
The vast majority (94%) of survey respondents who had prior awareness of EYPP sought to identify, which children at their setting were potentially eligible for EYPP in some way. Only 4% did not seek to identify eligible children at all. The most common way survey respondents reported trying to identify eligibility was by requesting information from parents/carers at the enrolment stage—over half (56%) reported this. The second most common way survey respondents reported eligibility was determined was through automatic enrolment by the local authority (41%). However, qualitative interviews found there was some variation in how interview participants understood ‘automatic enrolment’, with some describing ‘ticking a box’ on a funding form to indicate parental consent to check for eligibility, constituting an opt-in system, meaning this survey finding should be treated with caution. Sharing information with parents/carers about EYPP and encouraging them to contact the setting if they thought they were eligible (32%) was the third most common reported method of eligibility identification. Almost a third (31%) of survey respondents said they used more than one of these three methods to identify children.

The ways survey respondents reported how their setting sought to identify eligible children differed between setting types, as shown in Figure 5. Those based at SBPs were more likely than average to say they asked parents/carers to indicate eligibility at enrolment (79% vs 54% of those at GBPs and 48% of childminder survey respondents), while survey respondents based at GBPs were most likely to report automatic enrolment by their local authority (52% vs 30% of those at SBPs and 36% of childminders). Different likelihoods of reporting auto-enrolment supports the findings from the qualitative interviews that survey respondents had not necessarily experienced true auto-enrolment, which would occur irrespective of type of setting and be on an opt-out basis. The term ‘auto-enrolment’ is often used to describe a process wherein local authorities link data about parents/carers’ benefits status to their child’s pupil record to determine a child’s eligibility for additional funding, with no requirement for administration by the education setting or parents/carers.^[10] Current examples include auto-enrolment systems piloted for school-age children eligible for free school meals (FSM) (Parente, 2024).^[11]



^[10] Survey respondents were not provided with a definition of auto-enrolment, which potentially produced misunderstanding.

^[11] Food sustainability charity Sustain discussed systems for opt-out automatic enrolment processes administered by local authorities regarding FSM (Parente, 2024). Available at: www.sustainweb.org/blogs/mar24-fsm-automatic-enrolment/.



Source: 'Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey', B5. Multiple choice question. Base: All aware of EYPP. Superscript letters indicate statistically significant differences between subgroups: a denotes a significantly higher figure from SBPs; b from GBPs; and c from childminders.

A small proportion of survey respondents (7%) said their setting only asked for information from parents/carers who they are already aware were eligible for receiving additional government support. This was slightly higher among childminder survey respondents (11%), however, some childminder interview participants emphasised that the nature of their work allows them to get to know families well, and they use this context to broach what could be sensitive conversations with parents/carers about EYPP eligibility.

“
And then I tell them about the Pupil Premium, that it would...be an additional charge to me to help me close the gap. If I felt that they needed that or, you know, if parents are struggling. I mean, I can tell with a lot of the children anyway, I normally do a home visit. (Childminder, IDACI band 'least deprived', part of an agency)

Notably, there was no statistically significant relationship between setting size (the number of children registered at a setting) and the methods survey respondents reported they used to identify children, although an indicative finding points to larger settings more often having formalised processes in place for checking EYPP eligibility (such as parents/carers indicating eligibility at enrolment and auto-enrolment by the local authority). This likely reflects the differences between SBPs, GBPs, and childminders explored above.

In practice, interview participants most commonly spoke about opt-in systems set-up by their local authority where the setting had to collect national insurance numbers and establish consent from parents/carers for the local authority to check EYPP eligibility. They shared this information with the local authority on standard parental declaration forms^[12] completed as part of a child's enrolment at their setting.

Some interview participants explained that, in their setting, these forms also required parents/carers to disclose whether they were in receipt of certain benefits (e.g. Universal Credit) on the list of EYPP eligibility criteria. Local authorities used these data, in conjunction with information settings provided about funded hours, to determine which children would receive EYPP, and how much.

Interview participants described how, as their setting already collected this information from parents via standard enrolment processes, this process entailed little more than 'ticking a box' on a form. They therefore, felt this process was effectively 'automatic', despite them having to collect key information on the local authority's behalf.

[The children] automatically appear now once we've ticked on the main portal and we have checked if they want to claim if they're eligible, so now it automatically appears without us having to manually do the process. (Large GBP, IDACI band 'less deprived', not part of a chain)

Many interview participants elaborated that they only needed to establish consent from parents/carers through their enrolment procedure to allow the local authority to identify eligible children and allocate funding, and they did not need to formally determine eligibility themselves. This process of identifying who was eligible was coupled with the process of applying for the funding itself. Interview participants described that they, or whichever staff member at their setting was responsible for recording funding data, found information about which children would receive EYPP on the same funding portal where data about funded hours was communicated.

So, when parents start with me, I have it in my contract permission to check for EYPP funding when we do the funding. And we fill it in on the online system. There's just a checkbox that you can tick. And then once you get the funding, they let you know if you've got EYPP or not. (Childminder, IDACI band 'most deprived', not part of an agency)

^[12] Parental declaration forms are the documents parents/carers are required to complete and return to their early years setting (or submit directly to a local authority) if their child receives funded hours (i.e. they are claiming early years entitlements).

In some cases, interview participants reported that their setting provided information to parents/carers about EYPP, including its eligibility criteria, in order to explain why they were requesting personal information and to encourage parents/carers to give consent. The scale of this varied from providing guidance documents and online information, to offering one to one conversations with families about how the setting would benefit if they provided their data and consent. Some reported that they shared information about EYPP and other entitlements regularly, in case family circumstances changed and they became eligible for it after enrolment.



We do it as standard when we enrol, but [...] we always put out that information that you might not have been eligible for it at the beginning, but circumstances change and to always say to staff if it's something that could be applied for. (Large GBP, IDACI band 'average', not part of a chain)

Perspectives on EYPP eligibility and application processes

Interview participants interviewed, typically found the process of determining eligibility and applying for EYPP straightforward to administer. Some noted that as completing funding forms was a compulsory part of enrolment processes for families, it was easy for them to collect the required information from families and did not create much additional work for staff. In other instances, however, interview participants felt applying was not simply a procedural task, but that it placed an onus on parents/carers to disclose personal information. Some described concerns that parents/carers may have been hesitant to do this due to stigma or privacy concerns, delaying or even preventing application altogether. These interview participants felt there was a risk they could have had children registered with them who were entitled to EYPP, but for whom they did not receive funding, limiting their knowledge about which children required additional support.



When we get a new child or the necessary paperwork goes out to the parents, including a letter explaining what EYPP is, and if they get any support etcetera, are they happy to write that information down? Some do and some don't. So obviously, if I don't get any information from the parents, I can't include it. And therefore, we wouldn't actually get help. (Small GBP, IDACI band 'average', not part of a MAT)

This highlights the importance of the settings' role in building trust and relationships with families for EYPP to encourage EYPP take up, particularly in contexts where families' willingness to engage with the system is critical.



It's based on what families want to disclose [...] We probably could have a lot more families who would be eligible but they just don't apply for it because it has to be driven by them. (SBP, IDACI band 'less deprived', part of a MAT)

There were interview participants who reported that their local authorities had more complex processes for checking eligibility and applying, which created further barriers. Some interview participants reported that parents/carers had to return much more extensive forms, separately to standard funding forms. Those based at SBPs and GBPs who were running settings across multiple local authorities (i.e. SBPs part of a MAT or GBPs part of a chain operating multiple nurseries) had experienced different systems simultaneously. Interview participants reflected that where their setting had to rely more on parents/carers submitting large amounts of information to them, or the local authority, it was more important that parents/carers had good awareness of how EYPP would benefit their child, and that they had the personal capacity and willingness to complete the necessary forms. As one interview participant based at an SBP identified, it can be hard to engage eligible families who may also be facing other challenges.

“
So, one local authority is easy and another local authority is much harder because the parent has to log in and do it for themselves which makes it a little bit more challenging [...] sometimes the families who are likely to be entitled to it are facing lots of challenges in their life and their day, so us asking them to log in and do something [...] when then [...] their child's going to feel the benefit but they're not necessarily going to get cash in their hand [...] it's quite a hard sell sometimes. (SBP, IDACI band 'least deprived', part of a MAT).

Despite this, several interview participants agreed that their setting's local authority had made improvements over time, which made it easier for them to collect the necessary data for identifying eligible children and receiving EYPP.

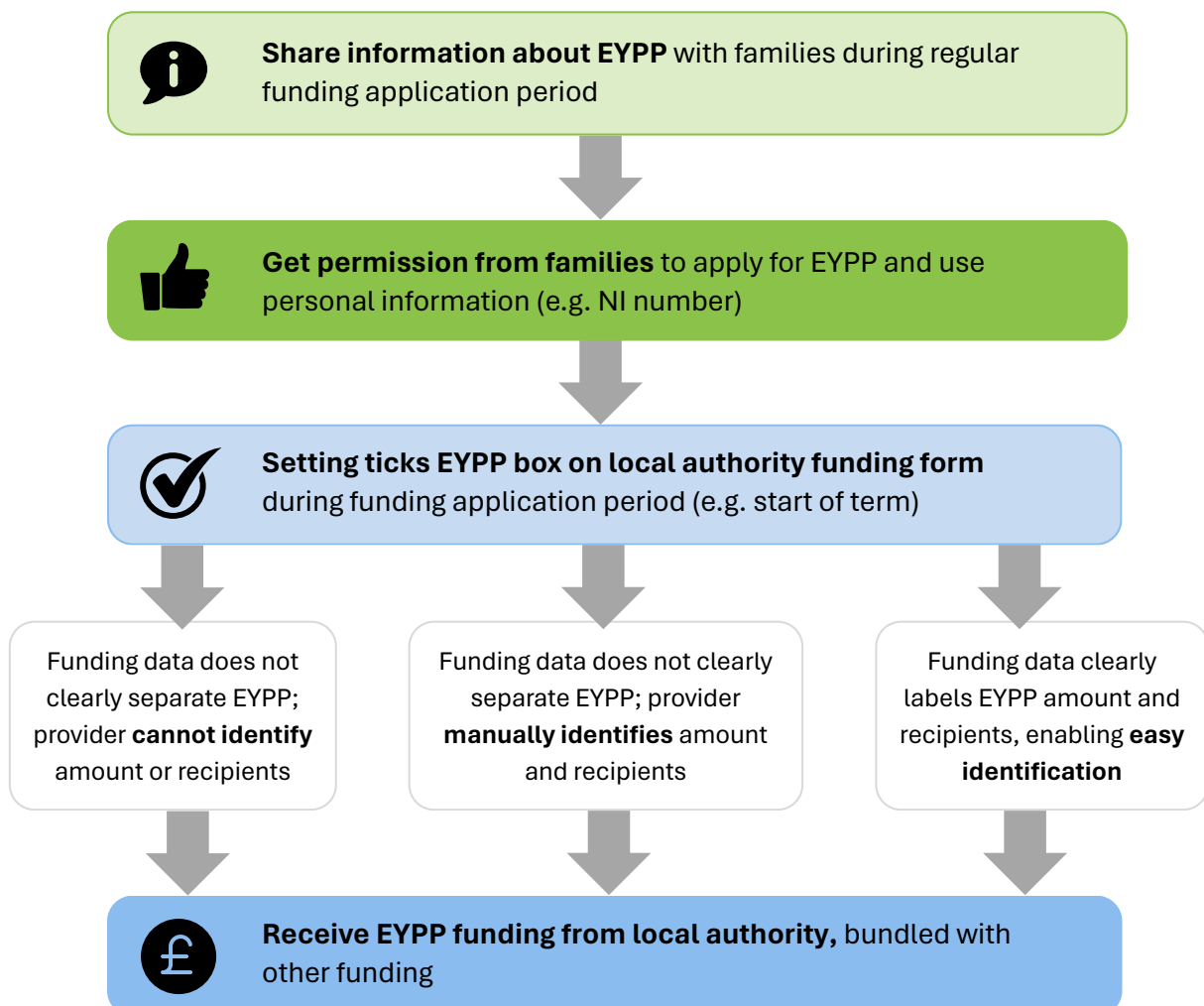


Receiving EYPP funding

All interview participants interviewed, reported that their setting received EYPP from their local authority at the same time as their other entitlement funding, though there was variation in how clearly they felt local authorities labelled EYPP funds. Interview participants reported it was typically delivered in monthly or termly instalments and paid in arrears. They found this presented some difficulties for the monitoring and planning of EYPP spend (as explored in the section ‘Spend decision-making processes’ below).

The process most interview participants reported, from collecting information for determining EYPP eligibility to receipt of funding, can be summarised in the typical user journey outlined in **Figure 6**.

Figure 6: Typical interview participant user journey when applying for and receiving EYPP



Some interview participants explained that the information their setting received about which children in their setting were receiving EYPP, and how much they were receiving, was communicated clearly through the local authority funding portal. For example, they said there was an EYPP marker and specific budget line against the names of recipients in their funding breakdown, distinguished from other funding sources. Interview participants viewed this positively, saying they were able to find out which children in their setting they would need to support and the resources they had available to do so with little effort. This in turn had positive implications for their ability to plan EYPP spend (more detail on this can be found in the section ‘Spend decision-making processes’ below).



I get a statement showing who's funded and what age groups get what. And then it has a whole section of it that just says all these children get early years pupil premium, so we can print that off, identify those children and then work with the settings to find out how we're going to spend it so it's very easy. (Large GBP, IDACI band 'most deprived', part of a chain)

We have other like inclusion fundings and whatnots as well, but this one is marked well as far as I know, as the EYPP funding is kept entirely separate for a particular child, so it goes in their own...little account bit and that gets spent purely on that EYPP for that particular child. (Large GBP, IDACI band 'average', not part of a chain)

In contrast, however, many interview participants described systems where insufficient labelling by the local authority meant EYPP amounts were not disaggregated on funding portals. Therefore, they found it unclear in their settings how much funding children were each receiving from EYPP, compared to other funding streams. In more extreme cases, interview participants reported that local authorities did not indicate, which children would receive EYPP at all, only that the setting would be in receipt of EYPP funds.

Some interview participants interviewed had used staff resource to distinguish funding manually so they could use that data for their setting's planning, and in some cases even had to manually compare funding amounts for different children to identify who they were receiving EYPP for. Others reported there was not time to do this in their setting and did not view it as a viable use of staff resource. This led to challenges in respect of ringfencing EYPP, tracking spend, or monitoring effectiveness.



It doesn't separate out the payment of what the EYPP is. For me to actually work out what amount of EYPP I got, I'd have to compare that child to a child that doesn't get it but does the same number of sessions that another child does, and I'd have to see what the difference is. (Small GBP, IDACI band 'average', not part of a chain)

How EYPP funding is used by settings

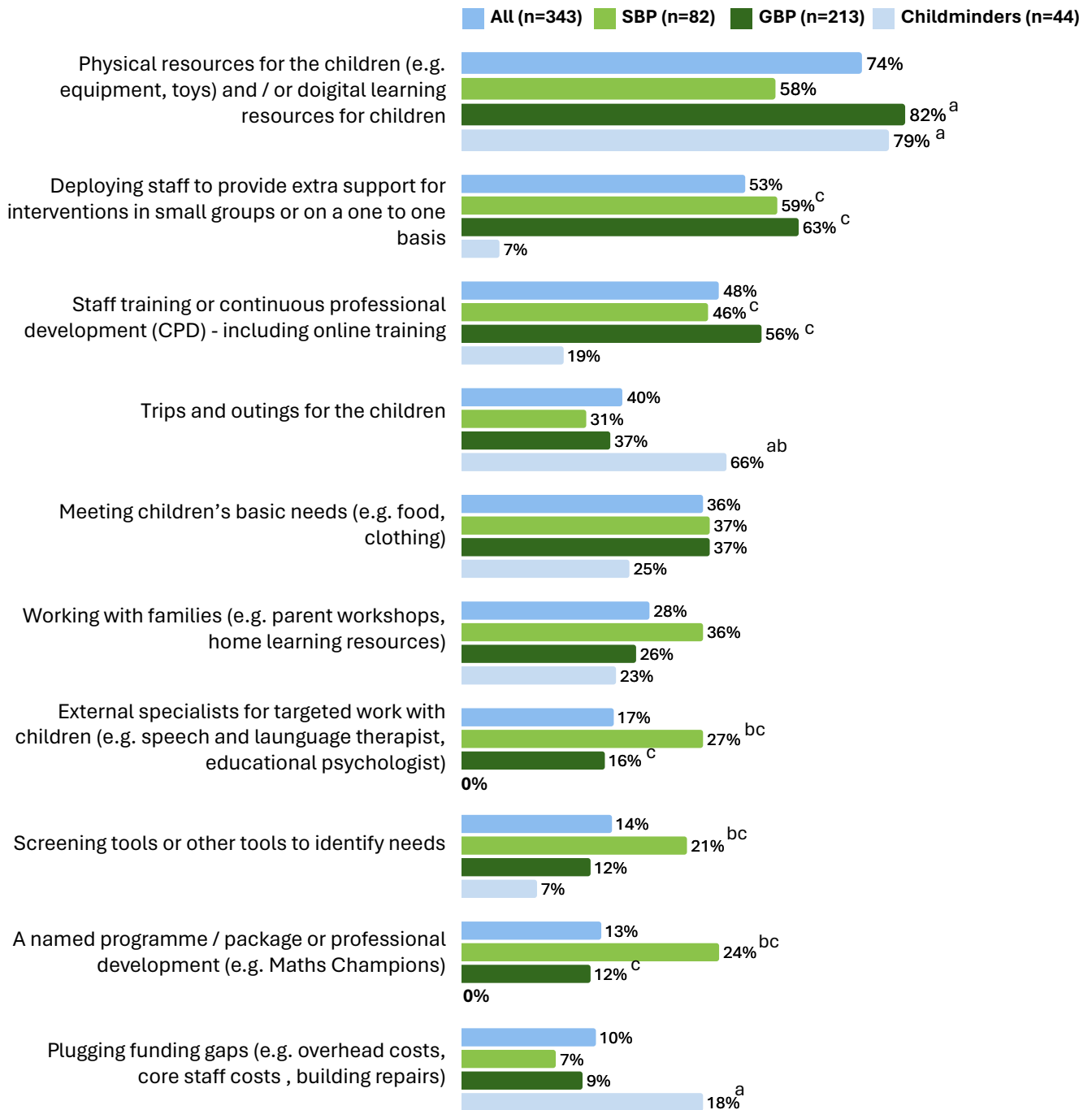
Overall, most interview participants reported that their setting used EYPP for physical or digital resources, staff deployment to support children, and/or professional development. These findings were mirrored by the survey findings, which also showed that patterns varied by setting type. Survey respondents in SBP settings were more likely than survey respondents in GBP settings and childminder settings to use funding for physical and/or digital resources. Survey respondents in SBP and GBP settings were more likely than survey respondents in childminder settings to use funding for extra support interventions or professional development. Survey respondents in SBP settings were also more likely than others to use the funding for external specialists, screening tools, and professional packages. Survey respondents in childminder settings were more likely to spend EYPP on trips, outings, and essential operational needs. Investment in CPD was widely valued, though interview participants interviewed from smaller settings raised concerns about feasibility given limited funding.

What EYPP is most commonly spent on

Most survey respondents (74%) reported spending or planning to spend EYPP on physical resources such as equipment and toys, and/or on digital learning resources, as shown in Figure 7. Just over half (53%) reported using the funding to deploy staff to provide additional support or interventions, either in small groups or on a one to one basis, while just under half (48%) reported spending EYPP on staff training or CPD, including online training. These spending patterns, however, differed markedly by setting type, highlighting variation in how EYPP is operationalised.



Figure 7: What setting has spent or plans to spend EYPP funding on, by setting type



Source: 'Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey', D1. Multiple choice question. Base: All who applied in past 12 months. Superscript letters indicate statistically significant differences between subgroups: a denotes a significantly higher figure from SBPs; b from GBPs; and c from childminders.

Among survey respondents based at SBPs, the most common area of EYPP spend was deploying staff to provide support or interventions on a one to one or group basis (59%), physical or digital resources (58%), and staff training or CPD (46%). Those based at SBPs were more likely than survey respondents at GBPs and childminder survey respondents to deploy external specialists for targeted support, such as speech and language therapists or educational psychologists (27% vs 16% vs 0%, respectively).

Our biggest spend recently [...] was for training for practitioners across the sites around sensory processing. So that will benefit more than just the children who are entitled to the EYPP. (SBP, IDACI band 'least deprived', part of a MAT)

Survey respondents based at GBPs most commonly reported spending EYPP on physical or digital resources (82%). Interview participants from GBPs cited a wide range of resources their setting had purchased, including those aimed at supporting children with additional learning needs or from non-English speaking backgrounds to support their learning outcomes, resources to support learning where they knew EYPP-eligible children could not access these at home (e.g. storybooks), or play equipment they felt would support the quality of their learning environment.

We've got children that have got low social skills and they like things like [for example] the hairdresser's set or the vet set or animals. So, they've got sets for those children to encourage them to play with their peers. (Small GBP, IDACI band 'most deprived', part of a chain)

However, a majority of survey respondents based at GBPs also used EYPP funds to improve staffing and professional development: 63% spent on deploying staff to provide additional support or interventions in small groups or on a 1:1 basis, and 56% on investing in CPD (Figure 7). Interview participants from GBPs interviewed described using EYPP to support staff deployment, for example, by paying to provide one to one support to specific children with existing trained staff, or funding specialist roles such as SENCO time. They had also used funding for child-specific interventions, including bringing in external specialists (such as speech and language therapists), as well as for broader operational needs such as purchasing learning resources or maintaining the nursery environment, and freeing up staff time to allow them to go on training or pursue professional development independently.

[For] those children that we think that might be struggling with speech and language, we've used some of the money to do intervention with them. So we've detailed a member of staff to do an hour every couple of weeks. (Large GBP, IDACI band 'less deprived', not part of a chain)

So sometimes it can be just a case of giving a member of staff that time to go and do more research so they can help and get more training to support these children as well. (Small GBP, IDACI band 'deprived', not part of a chain)

Childminder survey respondents displayed a different spending profile (**Figure 7**). While surveyed childminders were similar to survey respondents based at GBPs in that most (79%) spent some funding on physical resources, they differed to those based at GBPs and SBPs in that they were much more likely to spend EYPP on trips and outings for children (66% vs 37% for survey respondents based at GBPs and 31% for survey respondents based at SBPs) and on plugging funding gaps, such as core staffing costs, overheads or building-related expenses (18% vs 7% for survey respondents based at SBPs). Childminder survey respondents were also the least likely to report spending EYPP on deploying staff for additional support (7%) or on staff training or CPD (19%) (**Figure 7**).

So the trips, like I said, are a big part of it [...] We've been to RSPB [Royal Society for the Protection of Birds] Bird Sanctuary, a zoo, a local place with like a butterfly house and things. So lots of different trips out. (Childminder, IDACI band 'most deprived', not part of an agency)

Beyond what EYPP was spent on, survey respondents also differed in how widely they targeted the funding at their setting. Most survey respondents (62%) reported using EYPP to support both eligible children and other children in the setting, while just over a third (37%) used it exclusively for EYPP-eligible children. Settings in deprived areas were more likely to report using EYPP for both eligible children and the wider setting (71% compared with 56% in non-deprived areas). This may suggest that in more deprived contexts, EYPP could be more often conceptualised as a resource to support the quality of the teaching and learning environment, rather than as funding that can be isolated to individual children. However, it may also reflect improved capacity to spend on the setting as a whole in deprived areas as the quantity of funding received through EYPP would be necessarily higher due to a greater number of eligible children in the setting.

Our biggest spend recently [...] was for training for practitioners across the sites around sensory processing, so that will benefit more than just the children who are entitled to the EYPP. (SBP, IDACI band 'least deprived', part of a MAT)



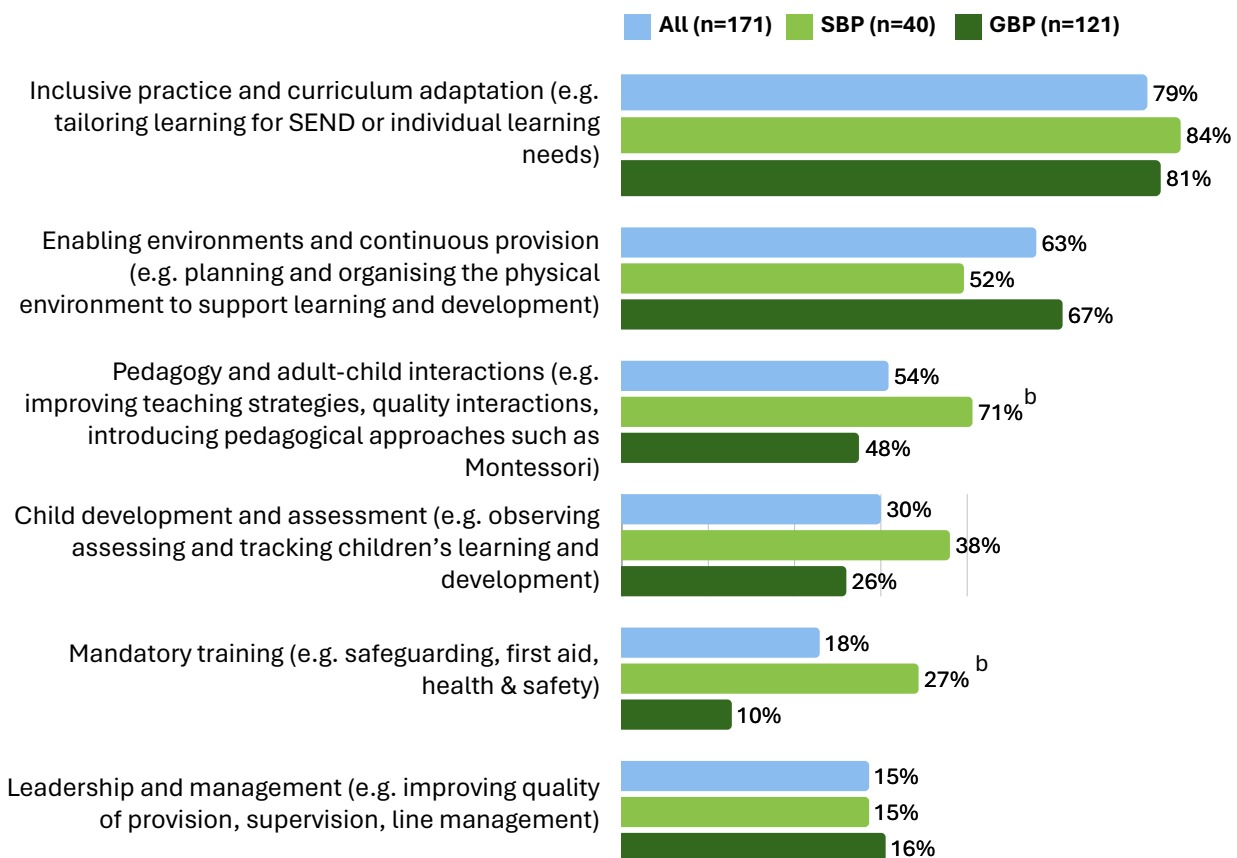
EYPP spending on CPD

Nearly half (48%) of those who had applied for EYPP funding reported spending their funding on staff training or CPD. Of these, many reported accessing CPD focused on:

- Inclusive practice and curriculum adaptation such as tailoring learning for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or individual learning needs (79%).
- Enabling environments and continuous provision such as planning and organising the physical environment to support learning and development (63%).
- Pedagogy and adult–child interactions (e.g. improving teaching strategies, quality interactions, introducing pedagogical approaches such as Montessori) (54%).

As shown in **Figure 8**, survey respondents based at SBPs who used EYPP for staff training or CPD were more likely to spend EYPP on pedagogy and adult–child interactions (71% compared with 48% of those based at GBPs) and those based at GBPs were the least likely to spend on mandatory training such as safeguarding, first aid, or health and safety (10% compared with 27% of those based at SBPs).

Figure 8: How reported EYPP spend on training or professional development is used to support staff, by setting type



Source: 'Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey', D2. Multiple choice question. Base: All who use EYPP for staff training/CPD. Results for childminders have been suppressed in this chart due to low base size (n=8). Superscript letters indicate statistically significant differences between subgroups: a denotes a significantly higher figure from SBPs; b from GBPs; and c from childminders.

Interview participants interviewed, generally regarded CPD as a worthwhile priority for EYPP funding, recognising its potential to benefit both individual children and the wider setting. Interview participants described CPD as a mechanism for ensuring staff remained skilled and confident, thereby improving the quality of teaching and adult-child interactions. This perception was reported consistently across setting types, with interview participants emphasising that well-trained staff could respond more effectively to the developmental and learning needs of socio-economically disadvantaged children.



There are sometimes some courses that I see and I think, yes, this is really good. This is really helpful within the setting...It will help the staff obviously increase their professional development. And it's also going to help us be able to do what we do better. (Childminder, IDACI band 'deprived', not part of an agency)

More specifically, some interview participants emphasised the importance of structured, evidence-informed programmes, for example, programmes accessed through or funded by Stronger Practice Hubs. Programmes cited by interview participants were said to focus on supporting children with specific developmental needs, such as speech and language, or social-emotional regulation. Interview participants based at SBPs reported that EYPP funding allowed them to participate in these initiatives, covering both staff training and the resources required to deliver interventions effectively.



[EYPP] would pay for staff to go on to that training [Early Years Talk Boost] and for the resources to do that, because that specifically deals with children who are struggling with their speech and language. (SBP, IDACI band 'less deprived', part of a MAT)



In contrast, some interview participants expressed concerns about the sustainability of CPD investments. Funding staff development using EYPP was sometimes viewed as less effective if staff turnover was high, as the knowledge and skills gained would leave with departing staff. Others suggested that CPD could be more appropriately funded through other sources, to ensure continuity and alignment with broader organisational strategies.

Responses to the EEF's 'balanced approach' to EYPP

The EEF guidance (EEF, 2025) provides a structured framework for EYPP spend, advocating for a 'balanced approach' that encourages settings to consider three key areas of spend: professional development to improve the overall quality of education; tailored support for individual children; and covering the costs of planning, delivering, and monitoring an EYPP strategy.

In the interviews, this approach was described to interview participants, who were asked to share their thoughts on the approach, whether it aligns with their own prioritisation of EYPP spending and what barriers there may be to spending in this way. Interview participants generally had a positive response to this approach. Positive reactions often reflected priorities that interview participants had already articulated in relation to the importance of spending EYPP on CPD. Indeed, interview participants saw it as validating their belief that improving staff skills and practice was central to improving outcomes for disadvantaged children.

Absolutely, well again professional development is crucial [...] It's really important, I think, to get staffing up to date with everything that's going on at the moment. And we endeavour to do that as much as possible. So yes, that's crucial. (Small GBP, IDACI band 'average', not part of a chain)

Some interview participants welcomed the EEF guidance (EEF, 2025) because they felt it articulated a clear expectation that EYPP funding should be used in ways that were accountable to children's outcomes. However, other interview participants, particularly from smaller settings with very few EYPP-eligible children, questioned the practical feasibility of spending in some of the ways the guidance recommended. These interview participants did not dispute the value of CPD but, instead, emphasised that the (low) scale of funding they received limited what could realistically be achieved. For interview participants whose settings had only one or two eligible children, the total EYPP allocation was often seen as being too low to support activities such as CPD or targeted interventions. At the same time, developing a strategy for planning, delivering, and monitoring EYPP use was viewed by interview participants from smaller settings as requiring time and resource that were difficult to spare.

And then if they're going to use that money to put together a strategy, then that's a big chunk of that money gone. And then you've got nothing left (...) Do you know what I mean? If you've got lots of children, it depends on how many you have on your percentage. (Small GBP, IDACI band 'most deprived', part of a MAT)

Some interview participants expressed more critical views in relation to spending some EYPP funding on planning, delivering, and monitoring of EYPP use. These accounts reflected discomfort with the idea that EYPP funding, or time, should be used to support activities perceived as administrative or removed from direct work with children. For example, one interview participant based at a GBP was concerned that prioritising strategic or administrative activity could legitimise the use of EYPP to cover routine costs, rather than enhancing provision for children.

The third one about the administration, you know, it's a waste of time if that's okay...I want to spend my time and money getting stuff for the children and enhancing it for them. I don't want to spend time or money on assessing the impact of it or administration...it's done dynamically within the setting. (Large GBP, IDACI band unknown, not part of a chain)

This perspective reflected a moral distinction between using the funding for direct versus indirect interventions, with EYPP positioned as 'children's money' that should be protected from being absorbed into operational activity. This point is explored further in the remaining chapters of the report.



Spend decision-making processes

Most commonly, survey respondents reported that they planned EYPP spending separately from wider overall strategy and budgeting decisions, though approaches varied by setting type and context. The majority of survey respondents based in GBPs reported discussing EYPP spend separately from broader strategic planning, while those in SBPs gave more mixed responses, with equal proportions stating that EYPP spending was considered as part of the wider overall strategy as saying it was planned through separate EYPP focused spending decisions.

When deciding how to spend EYPP, interview participants reported balancing the needs of the eligible child(ren) with those of the wider cohort. Children's individual basic needs were typically prioritised where participants noticed they were not being met, while cohort-level needs often guided decisions around spend on training and CPD. Decision-making was usually reported to be led by senior staff, though levels of collaboration differed. Those based in GBPs said their settings tended to involve a wider range of staff in decisions, whereas those in SBPs reported favouring more centralised processes led by the headteacher. Those in some smaller settings, primarily small GBPs and childminders, reported that informal discussions with parents sometimes fed into decisions.

Survey respondents reported using a broad range of information and guidance to inform their spending decisions. Most interview participants and survey respondents reported that their settings relied on day-to-day observations of children and data. Some reported that their settings used research evidence, the EEF resources, local authority guidance, and peer networks, with patterns of use varying by setting type.

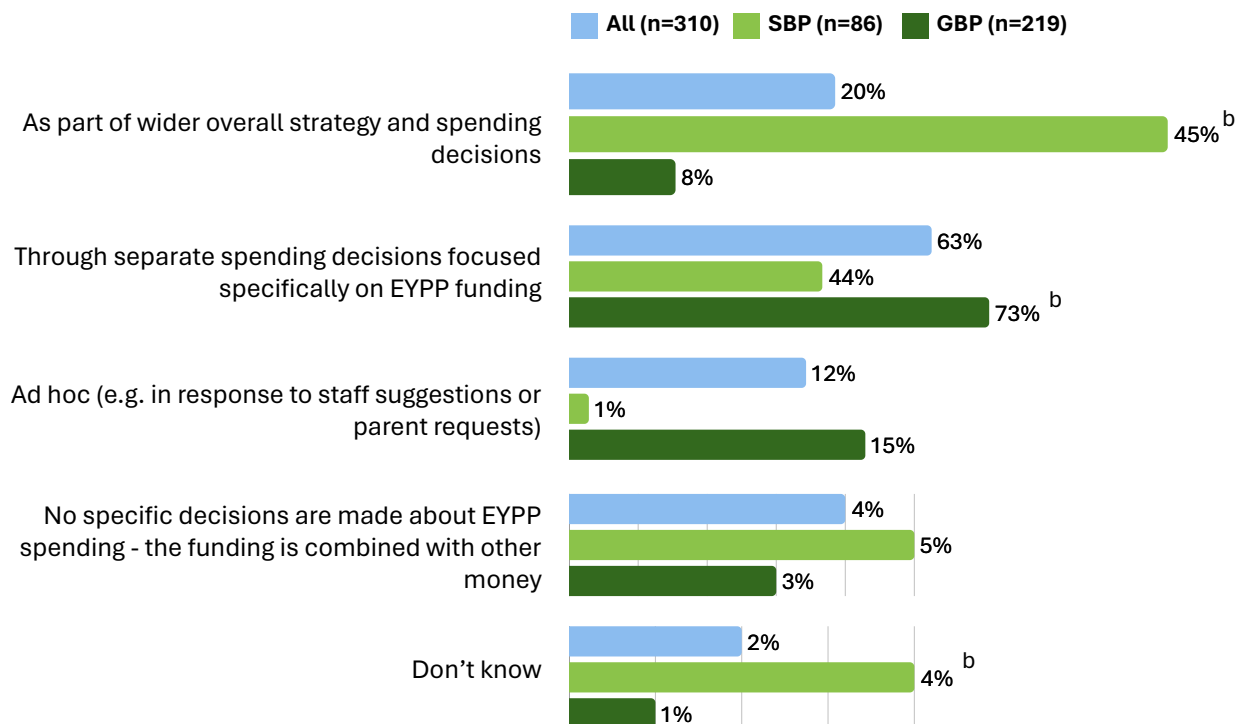


How EYPP spend is planned

Approach to EYPP planning

Many survey respondents reported that their setting planned their EYPP spending separately from wider strategy/budgeting decisions. This approach was reported by nearly two-thirds (63%) of survey respondents (Figure 9). Conversely, a fifth (20%) reported that they combined decisions around EYPP spending with wider overall strategy and spending decisions. It was relatively uncommon for survey respondents to report that their settings planned spending in an ad hoc manner, for example, in response to staff suggestions or parent requests, with 12% of settings taking this approach. Very few survey respondents reported that their setting combined EYPP funding with other money, without making EYPP-specific decisions (4%).

Figure 9: How EYPP spending is planned for, by SBPs and GBPs



Source: 'Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey', E2. Single choice question. Base: All who ever applied for funding excluding childminders. Superscript letters indicate statistically significant differences between subgroups: a denotes a significantly higher figure from SBPs; b from GBPs; and c from childminders.

Approaches to planning EYPP spending differed considerably by setting type. As shown by Figure 9, survey respondents based in GBPs tended to favour making decisions about EYPP spending separately from their wider strategy and spending decisions (73% vs 44% of SBPs).^[13] While those based in SBPs reported taking a mixture of approaches, they were much more likely than those in GBPs to report that their setting embedded EYPP planning into wider overall strategy and spending decisions (45% vs 8%, respectively). In contrast, those in GBPs were more likely than those in SBPs to report that their setting planned spending in an ad hoc manner, for example, in response to staff suggestions or parent requests—15% of those in GBPs reported doing so, compared with only 1% of those in SBPs.

[13] Childminders were not asked E2 as they typically hold sole responsibility over decision-making.

Impact of EYPP funding delivery on planning

Decision-making processes were often impacted by the way that funding was delivered, as noted earlier in this report. Delivery in arrears meant that interview participants often reported that their settings could not forward plan EYPP spending. Instead, interview participants reported that their settings paid for resources, CPD, and other EYPP spend upfront using available funds and topped up budgets once EYPP funding was received. For example, one interview participant working in a charity-run setting explained that they paid a yoga practitioner to visit the setting at the start of the term and then had to wait for the EYPP funding to arrive to replenish their budget, which they found challenging.

Interview participants from smaller settings particularly emphasised the challenges of funding delivery in arrears. Because EYPP eligibility is tied to the individual child and not the setting, if children left their setting midway through the term, the setting would not receive the full EYPP funding they had initially expected. Interview participants reported this made them less able to commit spend ahead of receiving payments.

For interview participants based at larger settings, such as large GBPs and SBPs, overall income from EYPP was considered more predictable. Some said that the information their setting received about eligibility was sufficient to estimate income from EYPP for the forthcoming period, meaning receiving the funds in arrears was less problematic.

It doesn't really matter because if you know you're getting it it's in the budget [...] so then it's in the budget when we plan at the beginning of the year. (SBP, IDACI band 'most deprived', not part of a MAT)

While some interview participants noted that their settings were able to use data to manually identify the amount of EYPP received, both overall and per eligible child, others were not able to do this, or could only partially do this. This posed an additional challenge to effective planning, as some settings needed to work on approximations or estimations when planning spend. In some cases, interview participants recognised that they may be able to decipher this using their administrative data, but this would be challenging and they were not able to find time to do so alongside running a busy setting. Equally, they could not afford to pay an administrator for this task. These interview participants often viewed this as an inhibitor to spending effectively.

I know I get EYPP, but do I know exactly how much I'm getting? No. Would it be a good idea to put it on the form? Yes, that would be lovely. And then I'd know that Fred gets £50 for the Winter Term. Then I'd know, 'Okay, well, I've got an extra £50. Is there something that Fred would actually benefit from that I haven't got at the moment?' And I could actually do it. (Small GBP, IDACI band 'average', not part of a channing of the year. (SBP, IDACI band 'most deprived', not part of a MAT)

Some interview participants described how receiving EYPP funding in instalments, rather than a lump-sum payment, made it difficult to spend on longer-term, more expensive investments and instead limited them to making smaller, ad hoc purchases.

The only thing I would think is give it as a lump sum rather than it spread out into the three terms because you can just do a lot more with it, can't you? (Large GBP, IDACI band 'deprived', part of a chain)

Approaches to addressing individual and cohort-level needs

Interview participants described how decision-makers at their setting balanced the needs of individual eligible children with the needs of the wider cohort when making decisions around EYPP spending. In interviews, participants reported that settings often directed funding according to the needs of individual eligible children in the first instance. Some relayed feeling guided by a sense of moral duty to spend EYPP in a way that directly benefited the eligible child, and felt this was the most responsible way to make spending decisions.

The importance of prioritising individual needs when making spending decisions was particularly prevalent in cases where interview participants perceived one or more children at their setting to be facing immediate hardship, with basic needs not met. When interview participants reported their settings had used funding to meet basic needs by purchasing items like winter coats or, in one instance, a bed for a child who did not have one at home, this was seen as a necessary step to address children's immediate well-being. In interviews, participants suggested that without these basic needs being met, children would not be able to learn or engage effectively. Where a basic need had not been met, interview participants typically did not feel it was appropriate to look to the needs of the wider cohort when making spending decisions. Sometimes, this meant that indirect interventions to benefit the whole cohort, such as training and CPD to improve staff practice, were deprioritised.

We always think about Maslow's hierarchy of needs—have they got a safe, happy home, have they got enough food and drink, have they got access to XYZ? [...] We'll always look at those things first and see if there's any gaps that we can plug, fill, refer to before we look at attainment in the setting. If the child is not sleeping well at night because they are still in a cot or still have a dummy, or all of those different things, they're probably not going to be able to achieve at preschool. (SBP, IDACI band 'least deprived', part of a MAT)

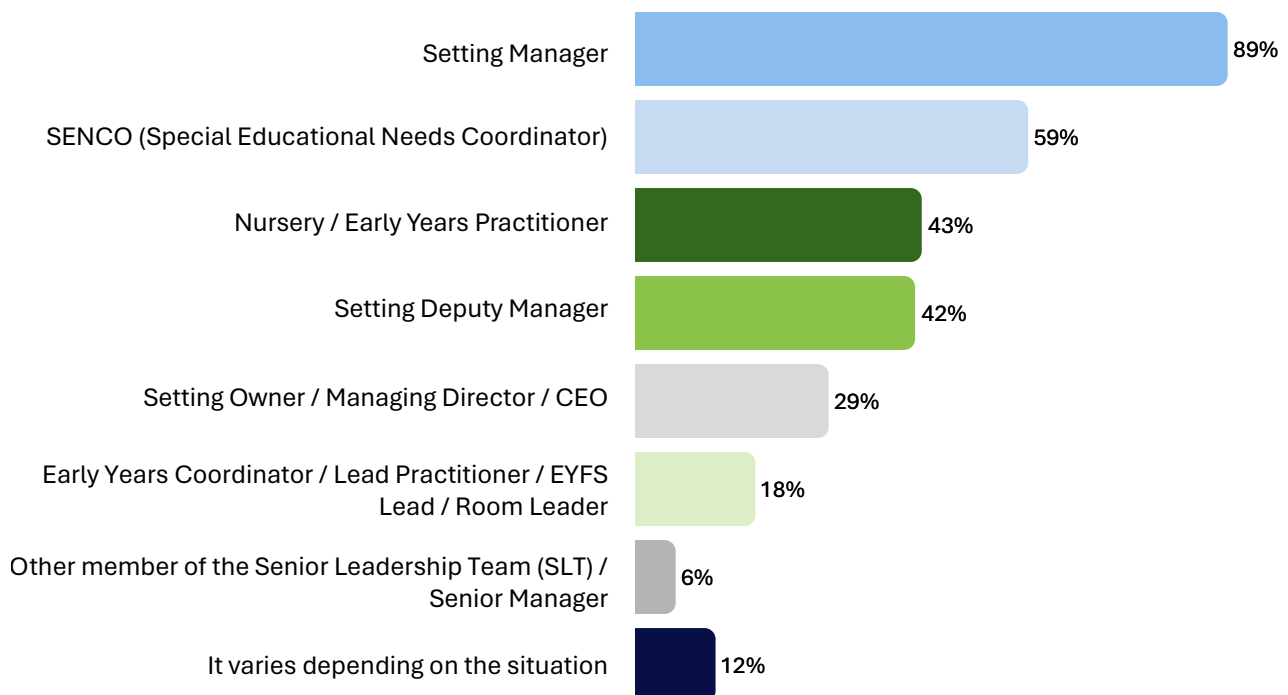
In other instances, interview participants reported prioritising the needs of the cohort as a whole when a shared area of need had been identified. When cohort-level needs were prioritised, this often guided decisions around training and CPD spend. For example, several interview participants reported that, together with their colleagues, they had identified that the speech and language or behavioural skills of entire cohorts were poor and invested in training to address these needs. In such cases, interview participants reported that settings typically assessed these areas as the highest priority for EYPP funding. Interview participants recognised that targeting cohort-level needs not only addressed the broader group but also directly supported the eligible children within it.

Parties involved in decision-making

Survey respondents reported a high level of senior involvement in decisions about how EYPP was spent. Nine in ten (89%) survey respondents based in GBPs reported that setting managers typically made EYPP spending decisions at their settings (**Figure 10**), and 70% of those in SBPs reported that headteachers held this responsibility (**Figure 11**).^[14]

Aside from their setting manager, those based in GBPs reported involvement in EYPP decisions across a broad range of roles. As shown below, six in ten (59%) survey respondents in GBPs reported that their SENCO typically was involved in decisions about EYPP. It was also relatively common for nursery/early years practitioners (43%) and setting deputy managers (42%) to be involved. Three in ten (29%) survey respondents based in GBPs reported involvement from their setting owner/managing director/CEO.

Figure 10: Parties responsible for EYPP spending decisions at GBPs

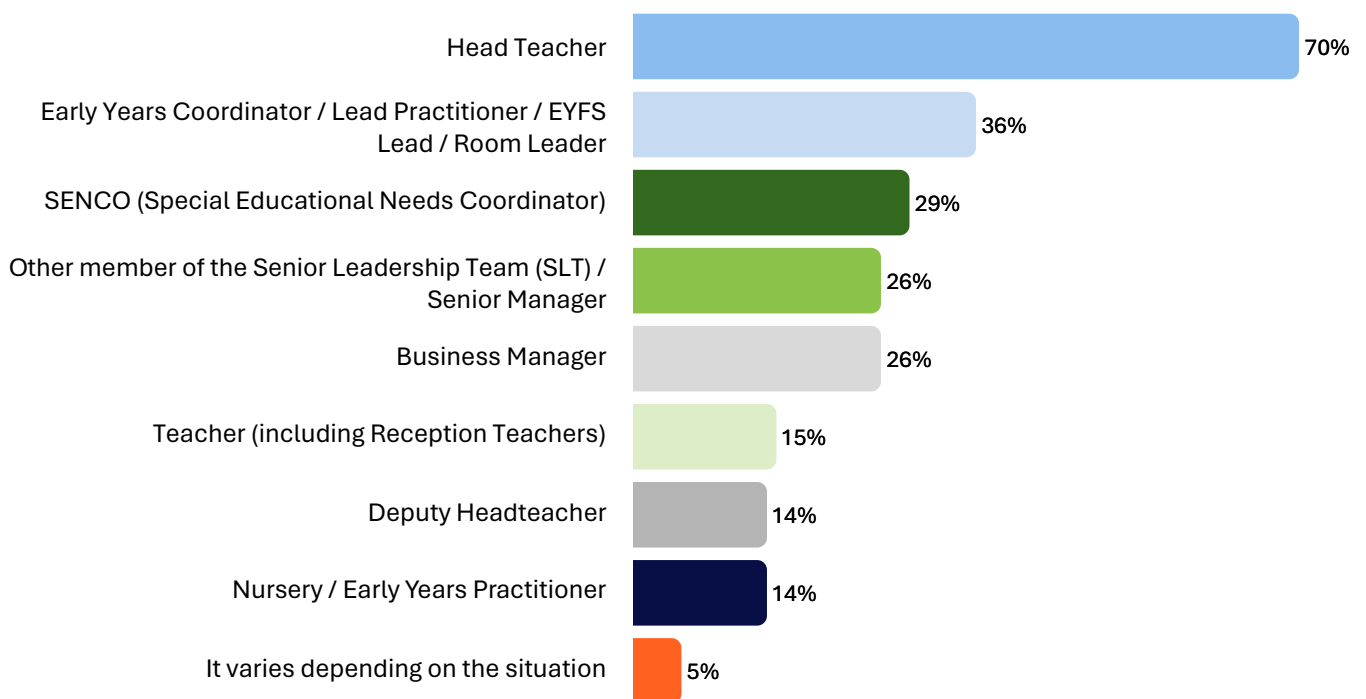


Source: 'Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey', E1. Multiple choice question. Base: GBPs who ever applied for funding (n=219). Parties reported by <5% not charted.

[14] Childminders were not asked E1 as they typically hold sole responsibility over decision-making.

For SBPs, EYPP decision-making appeared to be more centralised with headteachers; involvement of secondary parties was reported less frequently by survey respondents in SBPs than by those in GBPs. After headteachers, early years coordinators/lead practitioners/EYFS leads/room leaders were the most commonly reported parties involved in decisions (36%). Just over a quarter of survey respondents based in SBPs reported involvement from their SENCO (29%), and around a quarter mentioned another member of the senior leadership team/senior manager (26%) or their setting’s business manager (26%). Notably, those in SBPs were far less likely than those in GBPs to report that their SENCO made decisions about how EYPP was spent in their setting (29% vs 59%, respectively).

Figure 11: Parties responsible for EYPP spending decisions at SBPs



Source: ‘Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey’, E1. Multiple choice question. Base: SBPs who ever applied for funding (n=86). Parties reported by <5% not charted.



Some interview participants based in smaller settings, primarily GBPs and childminders, reported parental involvement in EYPP spending decisions. Parental involvement in decisions was usually reported to be informal and non-direct. Interview participants often described knowing children’s families well, through home visits prior to enrolling and frequent conversations with parents at drop-off and pick-up. Through these interactions, interview participants described building an in-depth understanding of children’s home lives and needs, which they had used to inform spending decisions. For example, one interview participant working in a GBP identified through informal conversations with parents that a number of eligible children had never been to the seaside, despite living very nearby. This interview participant identified this as an opportunity to provide these children with experiences that their peers had already had and the setting used EYPP to fund a trip to the seaside.

When interviewed, a small number of childminder interview participants reported that they specifically explained to parents that they were receiving EYPP on behalf of their child and asked for their input into spending decisions. They explained that they felt it was appropriate to keep parents informed and were conscious that they would not have received the funding if not for parents’ socio-economic positions. One childminder described offering parents the option to use EYPP to cover food, nappies, and wipes so that parents did not need to pay the usual fees the childminder charged for these.



[I say to parents] ‘Would you like me to use that towards the extra cost, or would you prefer me to use it towards the resources and trips?’ and kind of give them that option. I’ve only ever had one parent take me up on it for their pay for food. Generally, they can manage that. (Childminder, IDACI band ‘most deprived’, not part of an agency)

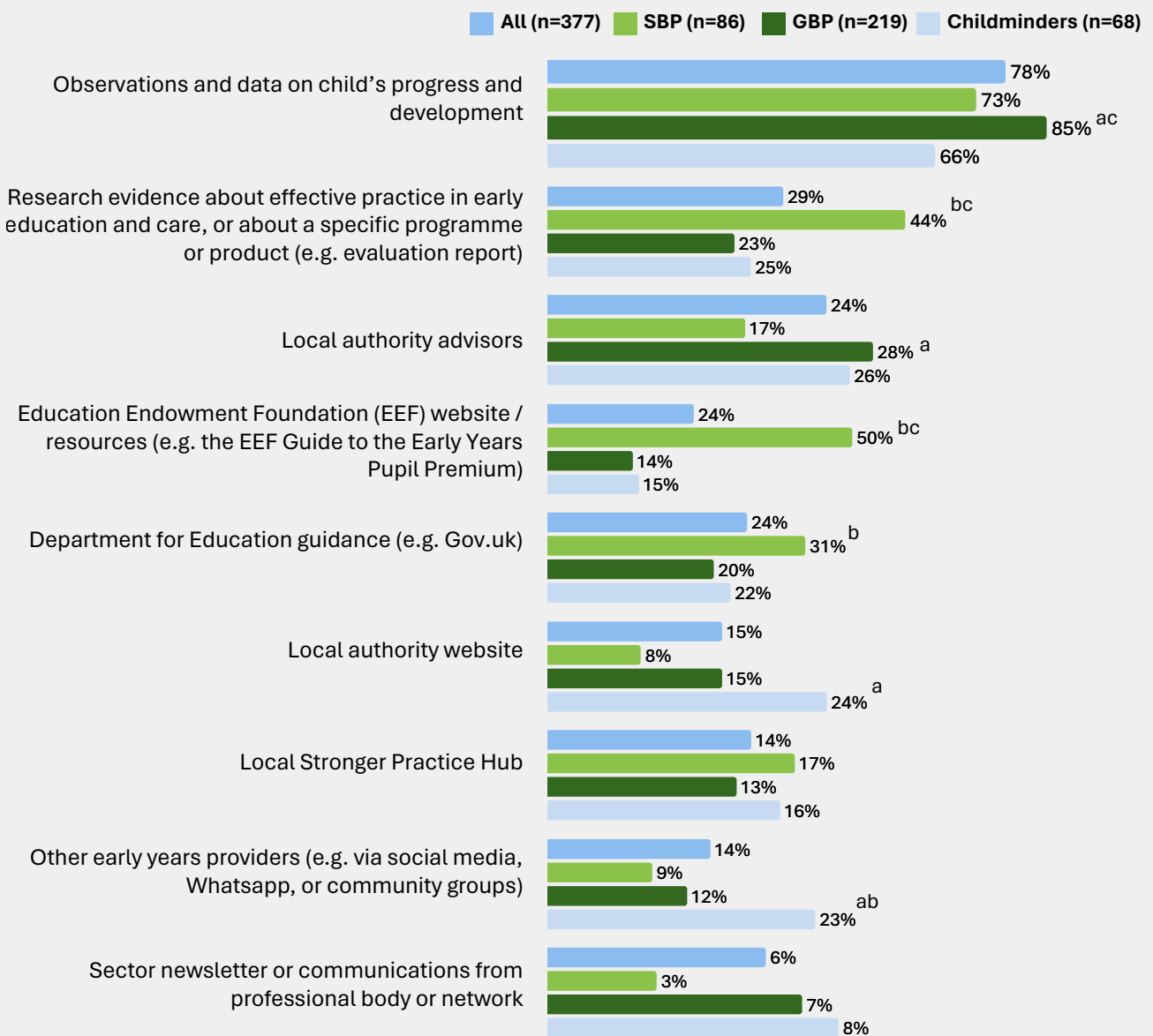
Decisions about EYPP spending were typically reported to be made within settings, with low involvement from trusts, chains, or childminding agencies. Under a tenth (8%) of survey respondents in GBPs in chains reported involvement from their area or regional manager in EYPP decisions, and only 1% of those in SBPs in MATs said their MAT leader was involved. In interviews, interview participants very rarely mentioned the involvement of a trust, chain, or agency when describing decision-making processes. One interview participant based in an SBP, worked across several preschools in a trust and held decision-making responsibilities, but emphasised that staff members based at each setting had high levels of input into decisions.



Sources of information consulted when making decisions on spend

Figure 12 illustrates the various sources of information and guidance that survey respondents reported consulting when considering how to spend EYPP. Survey respondents reported that their setting drew on a broad range of sources to guide spending decisions, including their own observations and data on children’s progress and development, evidence-informed resources, and advice from local authorities and professional networks.

Figure 12: Sources of support and information used when making EYPP spending decisions, by setting type



Source: ‘Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey’, E3. Multiple choice question. Base: All who ever applied for funding. Superscript letters indicate statistically significant differences between subgroups: a denotes a significantly higher figure from SBPs; b from GBPs; and c from childminders. Sources reported by <5% not charted.

Use of observations and data

When considering how to spend EYPP, survey respondents most commonly reported that their setting based decisions on observations and data on children's progress and outcomes. As shown in **Figure 12**, just over three-quarters (78%) of survey respondents reported using observations and data to guide EYPP spending decisions. While this was the most commonly reported source of guidance across all setting types, survey respondents in GBPs were especially likely to say they had used observations and data (85% vs 73% of survey respondents based in SBPs and 66% of childminder survey respondents).

In interviews, participants emphasised there was a continuous dialogue between frontline staff who observed children day to day and setting leaders who had responsibility for EYPP spending decisions. Due to the nature of their position as leaders, many of those interviewed spent less time with eligible children at their setting than other staff members. These participants often described trusting frontline staff and key workers to understand what might be in the best interests of the children they work closely with day to day. As such, their feedback was considered a valuable means of identifying children's needs and informing spending decisions accordingly. Interview participants reported that, following observations, frontline staff shared insights about children's progress and flagged if they had identified a need that might be addressed using EYPP.

We talk to the key person of those [eligible] children and find out, because they know them the best, what they feel that they would benefit from. Is there anything really specific that they feel they could benefit from? (Large GBP, IDACI band 'less deprived', not part of a chain)

Interview participants also reported that staff used observations to reflect on the effectiveness of EYPP spending and adapt their spending approach iteratively. For example, one interview participant based in a GBP described purchasing some resources for outdoor play to facilitate emotion coaching for a child, but said they noticed that the approach was overwhelming for the child. Instead, they bought games for the child to facilitate focus and observed an improvement in their emotional regulation.

You can see it in terms of the outcomes of the children, the speech and language skills of the children developing, the behaviour strategies of children developing. (SBP, IDACI band 'most deprived', not part of a MAT)

Some of it is trial and error. We'll buy resources and actually it doesn't quite work out how we want it to, so we'll look at something different. (Large GBP, IDACI band unknown, not part of a chain)

Use of research and evidence-informed resources

Some survey respondents reported using research-backed sources of information and guidance when making EYPP spending decisions. Around three in ten (29%) reported that their setting consulted research evidence about effective practice in early education and care, or about a specific programme or product. A quarter (24%) reported turning to the EEF resources, such as the EEF's guide to EYPP (EEF, 2025).

Survey respondents based in SBPs were significantly more likely than those in GBPs and childminder survey respondents to indicate that they used research evidence about effective practice (44% vs 23% and 25%, respectively). They were also much more likely than those in GBPs and childminder survey respondents to report consulting the EEF resources (50% vs 14% and 15%). In qualitative interviews, one participant based in an SBP referenced consulting the EEF's guide to schools Pupil Premium when considering how to spend EYPP funding (EEF, 2025). There was a sense from qualitative interviews that evidence-informed resources were a natural port of call for decision-maker interview participants in SBPs, and several interview participants indicated strong awareness of the EEF resources.

If you know that speech language communication is the need, or behaviour support, you then look at what evidence-based research is out there, what projects are out there which actually show there's an impact. That's where the EEF comes in because they are quality assuring projects for us. So, once you've identified the project, you look at how much it costs and you plan accordingly. (SBP, IDACI band 'most deprived', not part of a MAT)

Survey respondents in settings that were part of a MAT, chain, or childminding agency were also more likely to report referring to the EEF resources when considering EYPP spending (32% vs 21% of settings that were not part of a group), and less likely to use observations (65% vs 82%). Qualitative findings suggest that this was particularly the case for interview participants based in SBPs in MATs, more so than interview participants based in GBPs or childminder interview participants who were part of chains or agencies. One interview participant working in an SBP explained that in their setting's case, being part of a large trust with a research school provided access to a wide bank of resources and extensive information-sharing about research, training opportunities, and examples of best practice across the trust.^[15] While not necessarily the case for all SBPs in trusts, some settings may have access to resources, which mean they are more aware of evidence-informed resources.

We have a research school within our trust, so we as staff are always being exposed to new research and new areas, something that is research-based that we believe will have some impact. (SBP, IDACI band 'less deprived', part of a MAT)

[15] A Research School is an educational institution designated to lead the development and sharing of evidence-informed teaching practices within its region, supporting other schools to use research to improve classroom practice and pupil outcomes.

Interview findings also suggested that group status affected the way that settings made decisions around EYPP spending. Some interview participants based in settings that were part of groups pooled their EYPP funding and, in doing so, were able to purchase training or programmes that were less affordable for settings operating independently. One interview participant based in an SBP worked across a trust and described how several settings pooled EYPP funding to jointly fund training on sensory processing needs. By sharing funding in this way, they increased the purchasing power of EYPP and funded provision that would not have been affordable for each setting individually.

I go in every two weeks into these schools and I'm hearing people say the same thing —'Oh, we've got this child with this, we've got this child with that.' We came up with a bit of an idea that if everybody was happy to chip in a bit of their pot, you know, the smaller sites only paid £45, the bigger sites paid more. It was an absolute bargain to access two hours' worth of CPD. [...] The idea came out of using Pupil Premium, we didn't have enough, but actually, by the time we'd put everybody's pieces together, we did. (SBP, IDACI band 'least deprived', part of a MAT)



[16] It is worth noting that the DfE does not produce guidance about EYPP directly intended for settings. However, the DfE does produce guidance for school leaders about schools Pupil Premium.

Use of central and local government advice, peer networks, and social media

It was also relatively common for survey respondents to report that their setting consulted various central or local government advice, peer networks, and social media. DfE guidance (24%) and local authority advisors (24%) were each reported to have been consulted by a quarter of survey respondents. Survey respondents also reported that their settings sought advice from their local authority website (15%) or local Stronger Practice Hub (14%). Around a seventh (14%) of survey respondents reported sourcing guidance from other settings using social media, WhatsApp, or community groups.

There were some differences in use of central and local government advice by setting type, grouping, and location. Survey respondents based in SBPs were more likely than those in GBPs to consult DfE guidance [16] when making EYPP spending decisions (31% vs 20%), as were survey respondents in settings that were part of a MAT, chain, or agency (32% vs 20% of those not in a group). Those based in GBPs were more likely than those in SBPs to report consulting local authority advisors (28% vs 17%). Survey respondents in settings based in the North were more likely than those in the South to use their local Stronger Practice Hub as a source of guidance (22% vs 10%).



Childminder survey respondents were more likely than other settings to report consulting their local authority website when making spending decisions (24% vs 8% of survey respondents based in SBPs and 15% of survey respondents based in GBPs). They were also much more likely than those in SBPs or GBPs to report turning to other early years providers for advice about EYPP spending (23% vs 9% and 12%, respectively). Some childminder interview participants reported that turning to their local authority website and other childminders was a natural first port of call, in the same way that turning to evidence-informed guidance was an instinctive step for many SBPs. Childminder interview participants often seemed less aware of the EEF resources and other research evidence about effective practice.



I have a really good network. We have a local network of childminders, so often that sort of thing does get discussed at childminder meetings and on our Facebook group. Then I do childminding Facebook groups as well, where people share things that they found useful for different children or different needs. I get a lot of ideas that way. (Childminder, most deprived, not part of an agency)

Perceived effectiveness of EYPP

Nearly all survey respondents reported monitoring the effectiveness of their EYPP funding in some way. The most commonly reported ways of doing this was through observations of children, tracking progress on key measures, discussions with staff, and discussions with parents/carers. However, practices for recording and monitoring EYPP spend varied by setting type. In interviews, childminders and participants from smaller settings tended not to keep a specific record of EYPP spending, separately to other costs. This was often due to limited administrative capacity, unclear funding information from local authorities or perceptions that the funding amount was too small to justify detailed tracking.

Interview participants consistently felt that EYPP had a positive impact—particularly following the April 2025 uplift. For many, it allowed their setting to broaden the support they offered beyond basic resources to include enriching activities that could enhance children’s learning and development. However, many also noted that the amount of money they received was not enough to spend on evidence-informed programmes and CPD as they would have liked. The way that EYPP was delivered—typically in arrears, in small instalments and bundled with other funding streams—also limited settings ability to forward plan EYPP spending approaches and reduced the perceived value of formal monitoring.

Interview participants suggested the effectiveness of EYPP funding may be improved by raising awareness of EYPP, streamlining the application process, increasing available funding, improving administrative processes, and providing clearer guidance to support effective use of EYPP.



Recording and monitoring practices

Spend monitoring

Three-quarters (75%) of survey respondents in settings that had applied for EYPP reported that they kept a specific record or log of how the EYPP funding was spent. Most (59%) reported recording all of their EYPP spend and 16% reported recording at least some of their spend. Around a fifth (22%) said that they did not specifically record which spend came from the EYPP funding. There were some marked differences by setting type, with childminders less likely than other survey respondents to report recording which of their spending came from EYPP funding. Nearly half (47%) of childminders reported that they did not specifically record which spending came from EYPP, compared with 17% of survey respondents in SBPs and 15% of those in GBPs.

Interview participants based in SBPs and larger GBPs often described having existing funding monitoring processes in place. They were used to tracking spend for various funding streams and were in the habit of doing this, regardless of whether or not it was a requirement of the funder. Some interview participants in SBPs reported that their setting had adapted their Pupil Premium processes to include EYPP and spend was tracked as part of their wider Pupil Premium strategy. For some interview participants based in SBPs that were part of a larger trust, it was reported that spend was tracked at the trust level by the lead for early years/nurseries. Some reported keeping records just in case the local authority audited them or the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) asked about it in an inspection. They acknowledged that there were no official requirements for them to do this, but they felt it was best practice, nonetheless



[Ofsted are] not quizzing you, they're just asking and then it's nice to be able to say, oh yes, look, I can show you what we've spent it on this year. (Large GBP, IDACI band 'most deprived', part of a chain)

Childminders and smaller settings tended not to record EYPP spending separately to other costs. In some cases, this was because their local authority did not provide them with a breakdown of exactly how much of the funding they received was for EYPP and how much was allocated to each child. For these settings, interview participants reported that recording spend would have to first involve taking the time to work out how much EYPP they were actually receiving before they could start to track spending against it. Without the administration support and systems to easily do this, this would increase the burden for smaller settings. That said, many interview participants said they would be happy to record spend if this information was provided by the local authority.

Some other interview participants felt that the amount of EYPP funding their setting received was too small to warrant tracking. For them, the additional administrative burden and time required for monitoring and tracking was not a worthwhile use of time, and would add pressures on already busy setting leaders. Some felt this stance of not tracking the spend was a reasonable approach to take, as tracking was not required by the local authority.



The local authority and officer don't require me to, so it's that extra admin. (Childminder, IDACI band 'deprived', not part of an agency)

Some interview participants based in smaller settings, especially childminders, felt that tracking their spend would not add value for them as they were confident that all of the EYPP funding they received was being spent on the children that needed it. In many cases, they reported that their setting was supplementing EYPP funding with their own money or other funding streams and therefore, attributing this spend specifically to EYPP did not feel necessary.



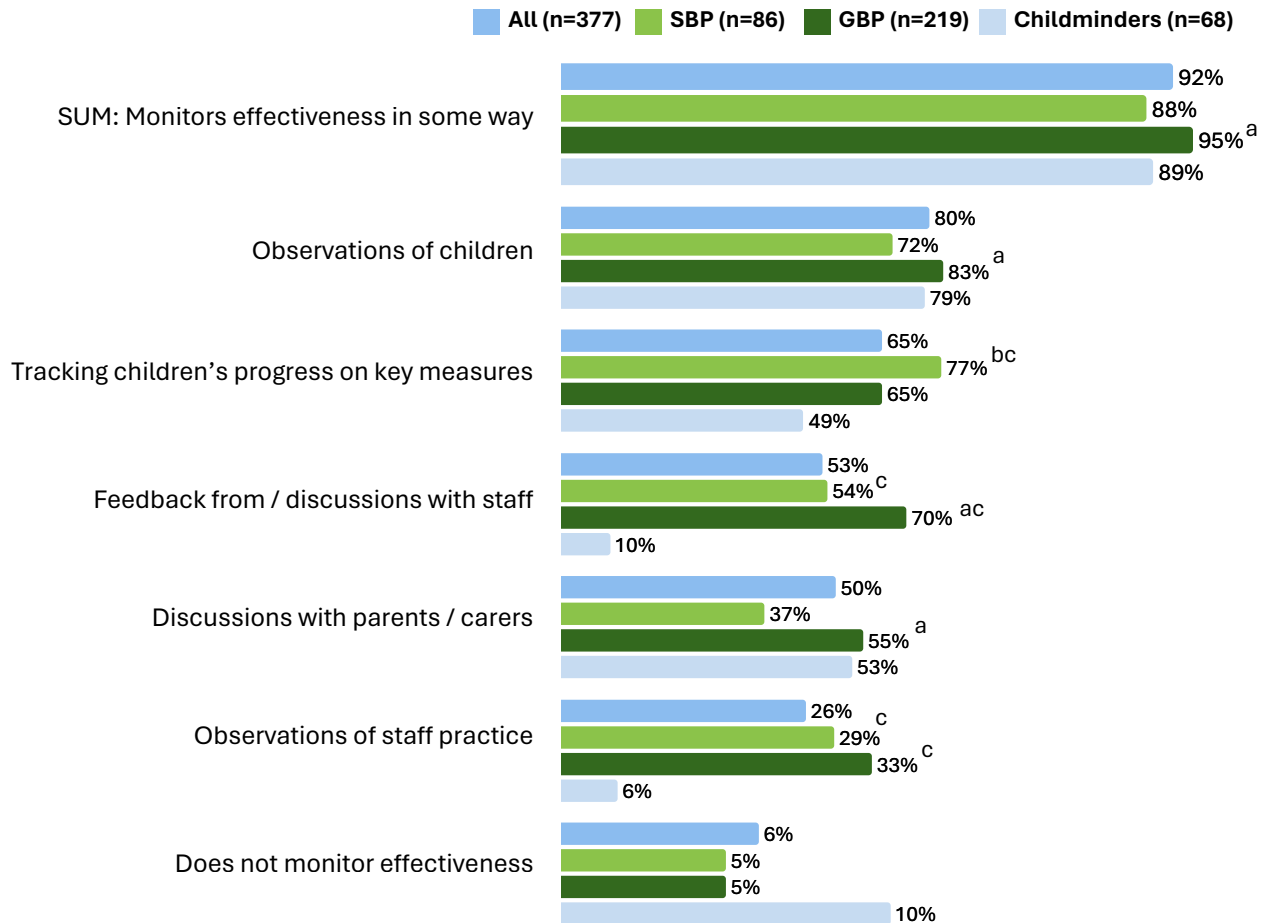
I probably should know exactly how much EYPP money I'm using, but believe me, whatever spare money I have, I spend on the children. So therefore, the EYPP money is being spent specifically on the children. (Small GBP, IDACI band 'average', not part of a chain)

Some interview participants based in childminders and smaller GBP settings who did record their EYPP spend explained that this was part of general spend monitoring and accounting processes. This meant that, in practice, EYPP funding was often aggregated with other funding streams and spend was tracked at a high level but not necessarily attributed to EYPP specifically.



Effectiveness monitoring

Figure 13: How, if at all, survey respondents monitor the effectiveness of EYPP spending, by setting type



Source: 'Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) survey', E5. Multiple choice question. Base: All who have ever applied for funding. Superscript letters indicate statistically significant differences between subgroups: a denotes a significantly higher figure from SBPs; and c from childminders. Around 2% gave a 'don't know' answer.

Nearly all (92%) survey respondents reported that their setting monitored the effectiveness of their EYPP funding (Figure 13), though survey respondents in GBPs were slightly more likely than average to say their setting monitored effectiveness (95%). The most commonly reported ways to monitor effectiveness were observations of children (80%), tracking children's progress on key measures (65%), feedback from and discussions with staff (53%), and discussions with parents/carers (50%).

There were some differences in how effectiveness was monitored by setting type (Figure 13). Survey respondents in SBPs were more likely than those in GBPs and childminder survey respondents to report tracking children's progress on key measures (77% vs 65% vs 49%). They were also less likely than those in GBPs to report observing children (72% vs 83%) or using discussions with parents/carers to monitor effectiveness (37% vs 55%).

Survey respondents based in GBPs were more likely than those in SBPs and childminder survey respondents to report using feedback from and discussions with staff to monitor effectiveness (70% vs 54% vs 10%). Survey respondents in GBPs were also more likely than those in SBPs to monitor effectiveness through discussions with parents/carers (55% vs 37%) (**Figure 13**).

Meanwhile, childminders were less likely than those in other settings to report tracking children's progress on key measures (49% vs 77% of survey respondents based in SBPs and 65% of survey respondents based in GBPs) or to report relying on feedback from staff to monitor effectiveness (10% vs 54% of survey respondents based in SBPs and 70% of survey respondents based in GBPs) (**Figure 13**). This latter point likely reflects the fact that they are more likely to be working alone and directly with the children themselves.

Survey respondents based in settings that were not part of a group operating multiple nurseries, a MAT, or registered with a childminding agency, were more likely to report using observations of children to monitor effectiveness than those that were (84% vs 66%), although there were no differences in their use of methods across the other measures. This may suggest that these settings have more formal processes in place for monitoring effectiveness of funding.

There was some variation in approach to monitoring the effectiveness of EYPP spending depending on how survey respondents reported their setting used EYPP funding. Respondents who reported that their setting spent EYPP on training and CPD **[17]** were more likely than those who did not use funding for this to report monitoring effectiveness by observing staff practice (42% vs 11%) and using feedback from/discussions with staff (66% vs 49%). Respondents who reported that their setting spent EYPP on uses relating to staff resource **[18]** were more likely to report monitoring effectiveness using feedback from/discussions with staff than those who did not (66% vs 45%).



[17] For the purpose of this analysis, the proportion spending on training and CPD included survey respondents who answered that their setting used EYPP to fund 'Staff training or continuous professional development (CPD) – including online training' and/or 'A named programme/package of professional development e.g. Maths Champions'.

[18] The proportion spending on uses relating to staff resource included survey respondents who answered that their setting used EYPP to fund 'Deploying staff to provide extra support or interventions in small groups or on a 1:1 basis', 'External specialists for targeted work with children (e.g. speech and language therapist, educational psychologist)', and/or 'To support the delivery of additional hours of care'. The analysis did not include survey respondents who used EYPP to cover core staff costs.

Relatedly, in interviews, interview participants based in SBPs and larger GBPs commonly reported monitoring effectiveness as part of wider assessment and monitoring processes. For example, one interview participant in a GBP interviewed reported that their setting had built an assessment of EYPP funding effectiveness into the children's targeted plans that were reviewed every six weeks as standard. Another interview participant in an SBP said their setting monitored effectiveness at the end of term regular assessment points. In these cases, the children often had specific development goals and the effectiveness of EYPP spending was measured according to whether progress had been seen against these goals.

Many interview participants who reported that their setting was not monitoring effectiveness of their spend, said it would be good to be able to monitor what works well but as noted earlier, they also commented that the amount of funding they received through EYPP did not justify the administrative burden of doing this.



It would be nice to follow it through to say, right, okay, we've spent this money on this. What impact has it had? Has it filled the learning gap for this child? What impact has it had on the other children? But it's a lot of work for a small amount of money. (Large GBP, IDACI band 'deprived', part of a chain)

Others who reported that their setting had spent EYPP funding on experiences for the children that they otherwise would not have been able to afford, thought that it was difficult to measure impact. They felt that seeing the children enjoy themselves was enough evidence of the effectiveness of the funding.



His key worker went with the family...and took him to the zoo and he had the most amazing day. How do you quantify that in an outcome? It's like, well, it just speaks for itself really, doesn't it? (Large GBP, IDACI band 'most deprived', part of a chain)



Perceptions of the effectiveness of EYPP

In interviews, participants were asked to share their perceptions of the effectiveness of EYPP in improving outcomes for socio-economically disadvantaged children. It is important to note that the purpose of this practice review is not to make definitive judgements about the effectiveness of EYPP, and the below analysis reflects participants' perceptions only.

Interview participants tended to feel that EYPP funding made a positive difference, particularly since the April 2025 uplift. They felt the funding enabled their setting to provide additional experiences and resources for socio-economically disadvantaged children who otherwise would not have access to them. This, in these interview participants' view, meant EYPP was an effective means of improving outcomes for socio-economically disadvantaged children. For many, it allowed their setting to broaden the support they offered beyond basic resources to include enriching activities that could enhance children's learning and development.

Several interview participants emphasised that EYPP funding was effective in helping them deliver targeted support and interventions for the children who needed it most. For some, this meant being able to involve more adults in the children's learning or offer additional interventions that would otherwise have been unaffordable.

Again, just like I said before, I think it is really effective because it's allowing those most disadvantaged children to have more support, have more interventions, have more adults in some cases involved in their learning. (SBP, IDACI band 'less deprived', part of a MAT)

However, some interview participants expressed concerns about the scale of the funding and how it is delivered. While the uplift was welcomed, as discussed earlier in this report, the way the funding is delivered—in small instalments, spread out across the year—means that the amount received per child still felt relatively small and difficult to invest in anything long-term. For some, this limited the extent of what their setting could achieve, with interview participants describing the funding as helpful for purchasing a few resources rather than driving significant change. A number of interview participants suggested that a further increase would be necessary to enable them to offer more substantial support.

When you look at the way that that's broken up, obviously the funding is then given to us on a monthly basis, so that's 12 months of the year. It actually equates to not very much. (Childminder, IDACI band 'deprived', not part of an agency)

Interview participants' suggested improvements to EYPP

Interview participants were asked to reflect on potential improvements to EYPP and the way it is delivered. Below is a summary of the key themes emerging from these discussions.

Improved awareness of EYPP

Some interview participants highlighted that awareness of EYPP is often low among parents and some settings, particularly childminders. They suggested that local authorities should take a more proactive role in promoting EYPP through established networks.

Streamlined application process

Others took a different view, and felt that making the application process automatic for eligible children, rather than requiring parents and settings to apply, would circumvent this issue. They expected this might reduce the administrative burden of settings, and ensure children receive the funding they are entitled to.

I think it should be if the child is under that criteria and can get it for the setting, then it should automatically be put on without having to apply, because I didn't know about it. (Childminder, IDACI band 'least deprived', part of an agency)

Increased funding

Interview participants often felt that while EYPP funding was helpful, the amount was not sufficient to meet the higher prevalence of need emerging in cohorts over time. These interview participants commonly suggested that around double the amount of funding would be required to allow them to use the funding effectively. Despite this, many interview participants agreed that any level of increase in funding would be welcomed.

Any extra money comes in handy, you know, if they could up it even more, [the impact] would be even greater. (Small GBP, IDACI band 'most deprived', part of a MAT)

Improved administration processes

Interview participants sometimes expressed frustration about not knowing which children receive EYPP or the exact amount allocated. This lack of clarity made it harder for their setting to plan spending effectively or tailor resources to individual children. Some felt that clearer communication from local authorities, including itemised payment breakdowns, would improve their setting's ability to plan and monitor EYPP spend.

The timing of payments was also a recurring concern. Interview participants often said their settings received funding late in the term but some suggested that payments should be made at the start of the term to allow for active planning and timely implementation.

Additionally, interview participants tended to want more advanced notice of how much funding they could expect to receive to support with their planning. Without this, spending decisions were often reactive rather than strategic. Many interview participants wanted to see lump-sum payments introduced rather than termly instalments, which would allow their settings to invest in projects with long-term benefits, such as outdoor learning environments, rather than making ad hoc purchases. Interview participants felt this would make it easier and more worthwhile to monitor the effectiveness and impact of their spending on the children.

It would then be a considerable amount of money. And then you can't just spend that willy-nilly. You would have to then justify where it is going and what impact has it had. You're not going to sit and evaluate the impact £200 has had. You are going to evaluate the impact £1,500 has had. (Large GBP, IDACI band 'deprived', part of a chain)

Some interview participants highlighted that, because EYPP funding is attached to the eligibility of individual children, it created uncertainty for settings when children left unexpectedly. Interview participants felt that introducing guaranteed termly amounts, regardless of mid-term departures, would help them with long-term planning and lead to greater financial security.

Guidance on how to use EYPP

Finally, some interview participants felt there was a lack of clear guidance on what EYPP can and cannot be spent on. Interview participants often worried about using funds incorrectly and wanted practical tools to support their decision-making and reduce inconsistencies across settings. Suggestions included:

- Local authority guidance on spending.
- A central 'crib sheet' or booklet with examples of effective spending.
- A named contact or support team for quick advice.
- Networking opportunities to share best practice.



Discussion

This practice review looked at how early years settings understand and use EYPP. Overall, awareness of EYPP was very high among those responding to the survey, particularly among leaders in SBPs and GBP settings. Similarly, interview participants understood the purpose of EYPP and knew that it aimed to improve the educational outcomes of socio-economically disadvantaged children. There was also a clear recognition that EYPP has the potential to make a meaningful difference to children's educational outcomes, and they welcomed the uplift, which was introduced in April 2025.

Survey respondents most commonly reported spending EYPP on physical resources or digital learning resources for children, however, SBPs and GBPs were more likely than childminders to use EYPP in ways that reflect the EEF's 'balanced approach'. For example, survey respondents based in SBPs were more likely to spend on evidence-informed programmes, and external specialists for targeted work with children. In addition, both survey respondents based in SBPs and GBP settings were more likely to spend this funding on the deployment of staff to provide extra support or interventions, and staff training, or CPD. In contrast, childminder survey respondents and childminder and smaller GBP interview participants reported that they were more likely to spend EYPP on immediate, one-off needs such as trips, outings, and essential resources. Some interview participants reported that while they welcomed the 'balanced approach' set out in the EEF guidance (EEF, 2025), they questioned the practical feasibility of spending in these ways. This was particularly the case among participants whose settings had only one or two eligible children, who viewed the total EYPP allocation as being too low to support activities such as CPD or targeted interventions.

Equal proportions of survey respondents in SBP settings reported that EYPP spending decisions were part of the wider overall strategy and that it was planned through separate decisions specifically for EYPP. In contrast, the majority of those in GBP settings reported that the EYPP spending was planned separately from wider budget decisions. When deciding how to spend EYPP, interview participants explained how they balanced the needs of the eligible child(ren) with those of the wider cohort. Individual basic needs, particularly where children were facing immediate hardship, were typically prioritised. Some interview participants reflected that there was a moral distinction between using the funding for direct versus indirect interventions, with EYPP positioned as 'children's money' that should be protected from being absorbed into operational activity.



A central challenge is the delivery mechanism through which EYPP reaches settings. Receiving the funding in arrears, in small instalments, and bundled together with other funding streams—often without clear demarcation—made it difficult for many interview participants to identify how much EYPP they would receive and when. In the qualitative interviews, smaller settings in particular, noted that working out per-child funding per term could be time-consuming and, in some cases, not realistically achievable alongside other responsibilities. This reduced settings' ability to engage in forward planning, ultimately limiting their confidence to invest in longer-term initiatives such as evidence-based programmes or high-quality CPD. As a result, many settings defaulted to short-term, ad hoc spending because this was more practical within the constraints of unpredictable and opaque funding.

There was also evidence that information about EYPP and guidance on how to spend it was not always easy for settings to locate or access. Many interview participants in interviews reported having accessed very limited guidance on how the funding was intended to be used, what they were expected to record, or how effectiveness might be evidenced. Childminder interview participants appeared to rely heavily on their local authority's website, which was often sparse or not sufficiently clear about EYPP's purpose. Although settings are not required to record their spending or monitor its impact formally, this lack of guidance meant that decisions were frequently based on practitioners' existing knowledge of children's needs rather than on an understanding that the funding could also be used for strategic or longer-term initiatives. To strengthen the effectiveness of EYPP, individuals in early years settings suggested they would benefit from clearer information on the purpose and use of the funding, improved transparency around funding allocations, and greater financial stability to support confident investment in evidence-informed and longer-term approaches.

Taken together, these findings highlight several opportunities for policymakers, sector-support organisations, and early years networks to strengthen the conditions that enable settings to make full and effective use of EYPP. They provide a starting point for understanding the operational context in which settings make decisions about their use of EYPP, and where targeted action could have the greatest impact. Further research would help strengthen and deepen these findings, providing a more robust evidence base to guide future policy and sector-level support.

Further information and guidance on EYPP can be found in the EEF's guide to EYPP [here](#) (EEF, 2025).



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Appendix A: Weighting approach

As noted in the 'Methods' section of this report, weighting was applied to the survey data to account for variance in setting type (SBPs, GBPs, and childminders), region (North, Midlands, South), and deprivation.

The data was weighted to align with the following population proportions:

Appendix A Table 1: Weighting by setting type

| Setting type | Population proportion | Survey proportion |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| SBP | 18.47% | 17.69% |
| GBP | 39.93% | 46.15% |
| Childminder | 41.60% | 36.15% |

Appendix A Table 2: Weighting by region

| Region | Population proportion | Survey proportion |
|---------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| North | 26.13% | 27.29% |
| Midland | 29.12% | 33.97% |
| South | 44.74% | 38.74% |

Appendix A Table 3: Weighting by deprivation

| Deprivation | Population proportion | Survey proportion |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Not deprived | 43.10% | 28.44% |
| Other | 56.99% | 71.56% |

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