

CASE STUDY

The earlier we look, the more we can do

How linked data in Bradford shows the way to school readiness



THE CHALLENGE

One in three children in England starts school without the development they need to learn effectively. The government has committed to changing this, setting a target of 75% of five-year-olds reaching a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028.

The question facing commissioners and local leaders is: **which children need support, and how do we find them early enough to help?**

WHAT BORN IN BRADFORD DID

As part of this national effort, Born in Bradford - a world-leading research programme - researched, **for the first time, the use of the routine two-year developmental check (ASQ-3) to predict school readiness.**

WHAT THIS MEANS

ASQ-3 can be more than a monitoring tool. It can be one key point for a targeted pathway to school readiness.

Where a child is not meeting milestones at two, there is now **strong evidence to justify connecting them to early intervention** - whether through Family Hubs, early education settings, parenting programmes, or speech and language support - well before they start school.

WHAT WAS FOUND

Children who met developmental milestones at age two had **more than three times the odds** of being school-ready at age five.

Boys and children living in deprived areas had **60% lower odds** of being school-ready at five.

Children from South Asian backgrounds were less likely to meet milestones at age two and children from White Other ethnicities were least likely to do so at age five, highlighting that **no single approach will reach all vulnerable groups.**

Our findings reinforced the **importance of intervention during the first 1,001 days** which is a critical period when children's brains are developing the fastest.

3

60%

1001
DAYS

Source: The association between the Ages and Stages Questionnaire 3 assessment at age 2 and the Early Years Foundation Stage at age 5: A longitudinal observational study using routine data
J Dickerson, Y Xu, R Shore, H.C. Henderson, D Lee, K Bennett, P Degnan, K Sohal, M Mon Williams, J Wright, K.E. Mooney
medRxiv 2026.02.27.26347090; doi:
<https://doi.org/10.64898/2026.02.27.26347090>
Note: This study is a preprint and has not yet been certified by peer review.