

# Using the Age-Two Developmental Check to Predict School Readiness

## Insights to Inform Policy

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## Background & Context

The government has committed to 75% of five-year-olds in England achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028, up from 67.7% today. Every local authority is now developing a Best Start plan to achieve this.

As part of this national effort, Born in Bradford – a world-leading research programme – conducts a longitudinal study that tests, for the first time, if the use of the routine two-year developmental check (ASQ-3) can predict school readiness at age 5.

## The Challenge

A key question for commissioners and system leaders is: how do we identify the children who need support early enough to make a difference?

## What This Research Tells Us

Analysing longitudinal data from over 47,000 children longitudinally, the study found that:

- Children who achieved a Good Level of Development on the ASQ-3 at age two had more than three times the odds of being school-ready at age five.
- Boys and children living in the most deprived areas were significantly less likely to reach expected development at both ages, with children in the most deprived quintile having 60% lower likelihood of achieving a GLD at age five compared to the least deprived.
- Children from South Asian backgrounds were least likely to meet expected development at age two; White Other ethnicities children were least likely to do so at age five.
- Many children have already fallen behind by age 2, showing 22%, or 1 in 5 children at risk of poor development at age 2, reinforcing the importance of intervention during the first 1,001 days

# Policy Implications

The ASQ-3 is already a universal tool delivered through the Healthy Child Programme. This evidence suggests it has the potential to function not just as a population-level monitoring measure, but as an early identification tool enabling a flag of children at age two who are at risk of not being school-ready, and to connect them to targeted support before they start school.

This has direct relevance for Best Start in Life local plans. Local authorities designing early identification pathways now have a stronger evidence base for investing in:

- maximising uptake of the two-year review (currently missed by around 1 in 4 families nationally, and as many as 1 in 2 in some areas)
- health visitors to be connected with family hubs and have clear referral pathways to support children who are not achieving a GLD
- commissioning evidence-based interventions for children identified as at risk at age two

## A Note on Evidence Quality

This study is currently a preprint and has not yet been certified by peer review.

The data used in this study is a part of the Connected Bradford dataset – one of the most comprehensive linked health and education datasets in England. This study involves collaborations with the Bradford HDRC and the University of York.



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**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  
JDickerson, YXu, RShore, H.C.Henderson, DLee, KBennett, PDegnan, KSohal, M MonWilliams, JWright, K.E.Mooney  
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