



From Play to Progress: Strengthening Early Childhood Education in the Cayman Islands

May 2025



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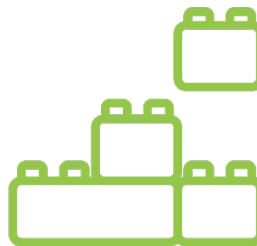
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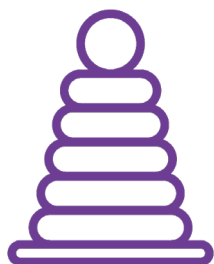
2,200

children were enrolled within the 40+ registered ECE centres across the island as of late 2024



1%

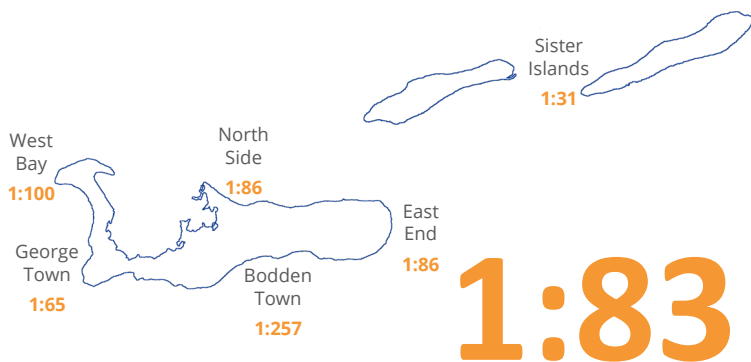
Public spending on ECE appears to represent **approximately 1%** of the Cayman Islands' annual education budget



Overall,

enrolment in ECE in Cayman is approx. 59%, mostly on par with the OECD average of 63%.

Less than Singapore (81%) and Jamaica (91%), but higher than England (41%) and Ontario (58%)



In Cayman, there is an average of 1 ECE centre for every **83** children under five years old

The Cayman Islands

is in the **upper quartile** among comparators for the proportion of children **enrolled in privately operated ECE centres**—at 84%, this is on par with Bermuda (83%) and England (72%), and significantly higher than Ontario (35%) and the OECD average (32%)



6:1

student to teacher ratio (mostly on par with the OECD average of 5:1)



74%

of ECE centres in the Cayman Islands are **privately operated**

84%

of children under five who are enrolled in ECE are attending private centres



ECE Centre Ratings:

Excellent: 5
Good: 12
Satisfactory: 22
Weak: 1



KYD 1,144

The monthly gross cost of ECE for parents in the Cayman Islands appears to be the **highest** among all comparators

Executive Summary



Early childhood is the most crucial developmental phase for children, marked by significant physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth¹. Early childhood education (ECE) is essential in nurturing child development, providing a foundation for lifelong learning, fostering resilience and addressing vulnerabilities to ensure children reach their full potential².

Introduction and Methodology

In August 2024, LIFE Ltd. ("LIFE"), assisted by KPMG, embarked on a comprehensive analysis of ECE in the Cayman Islands. The aim of this analysis was to gain a thorough understanding of the current educational landscape and specific needs associated with ECE in the Cayman Islands and how these compare with other relevant jurisdictions. During the course of this analysis, data was gathered from 43 ECE centres and schools accommodating ECE within the Cayman Islands. This included 30^A of the 32 centres classified under "Early Childhood Reviews" on the Cayman Islands Government's (CIG) Office of Education Standards (OES) website, as well as an additional 10 public centres and one private centre that are classified under "School Reviews" by the OES, though they also provide ECE services via Nursery or Reception classes. In addition to the 41 centres listed on the OES' website, the analysis also considered data released by two newly established ECE centres, which at the time of writing did not have inspection results published on the OES website.

In addition to OES data, data collection also included information sourced from additional CIG reports (for example, reports released by the Economics and Statistics Office (ESO)) or obtained directly from centres where feasible, such as data on annual fees. In some instances, data was not available for all of the ECE centres assessed.

Furthermore, for certain data points, estimates were made based on historical data or other publicly available information. It is also important to note the data included herein has not undergone an audit, or any other type of assurance by LIFE or KPMG.

This local research was followed by an international benchmarking exercise, which focused on gathering relevant ECE data from six comparable jurisdictions (countries or states/provinces) – namely Bermuda, England, Jamaica, Singapore, Ontario (Canada), and Queensland (Australia) – as well as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average where available. The comparator analysis similarly leveraged publicly available information, which was in some instances also not available for all ECE centres within the jurisdiction and/or subject to estimation. Following data collection, interviews were conducted with various stakeholders to provide greater context and insight into the various challenges, progress and practices in ECE both within the Cayman Islands and globally. This report aims to collate the insights gathered from the research, benchmarking exercise, and interviews. All amounts expressed herein are in Cayman Islands dollars (KYD), unless otherwise noted. In addition, for the purposes of contextualising the analysis performed herein, it should be noted that education in the Cayman Islands is compulsory for all children aged five to 17.

A: Please note, while there are 32 ECE centres on the OES website, as of February 2025, only 30 of them were open and providing services to children under five years of age.

Availability and Access

Overall Landscape

Globally, availability and access to ECE varies significantly. This availability and access often appears to be directly correlated with the relative wealth and development of a nation. The percentage of children enrolled in formal ECE programmes ranges from a greater level of access in wealthier and more developed countries, such as Singapore – in which 82% of its population age five and below are enrolled in ECE – to minimal enrolment in many developing countries, bringing the OECD average to 63%³ enrolment. Cultural norms and societal attitudes towards ECE are also a critical influencing factor in access to programmes, their quality and the rate of enrolment of children. Government policies and interventions – including funding allocations, curriculum standards, and teacher qualifications – are other direct and indirect variables shaping availability and access within the ECE landscape^{4,5}.

Interviewees expressed that appreciation for the importance of ECE in the Cayman Islands has improved in the last decades, and the number of centres has likewise grown in recent years. These centres also have a more standardised curriculum than in previous years following the introduction of the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework (CIEYCF) in 2015⁶, which has been recognised by interviewees for its part in the shift to a holistic and play-based approach to ECE provision in the Cayman Islands. As of late 2024, nearly 2,200 children were enrolled within the 40+ registered ECE centres across the islands^B, which are subject to regular oversight and inspection by CIG OES.

On a countrywide basis, there is one ECE centre for every 83 children under five years of age (population). It is important to note that this ratio considers the total number of centres, rather than overall capacity. During the interview process, several stakeholders indicated that ECE capacity is a major concern, which they noted was evident through an increase in applications to public ECE centres and long waitlists in private centres. At the district level, availability varies significantly, correlated in part with the level of economic activity within districts.

For example, the Cayman Islands' capital of George Town (including Camana Bay, Grand Harbour, Red Bay and Prospect) reports one centre for every 65 children, compared to West Bay and Bodden Town – which report one centre for every 100 and 257 children, respectively.

In this regard, despite accounting for approximately 21% and 20% of the population, West Bay and Bodden Town appear considerably underserved – Bodden Town in particular. Interviewees highlighted that this unequal distribution has potentially significant ramifications for parents, ECE centres, and the development of children. They further emphasised that this may be especially true for those families in which there is a single parent or caregiver and/or inflexible working arrangements.



B: Please note this information is based on the most recent OES institution reports. If specific enrolment data on ECE was not provided, information was obtained directly from the schools. All data is as of November 2024.



Overall, enrolment in ECE in the Cayman Islands (estimated at 59%^C) appears mostly on par with the OECD average (63%²) and other comparators assessed. However, some comparator countries, like Singapore (82%, as noted above) and Jamaica (91%), have significantly higher enrolment rates than the Cayman Islands; others have lower rates, such as England (41%) and Ontario (58%). Despite what appears to be favourable enrolment rates relative to similar jurisdictions, interviewees indicated that the capacity for ECE (i.e., the availability of ECE centres and number of spaces per centre) has not kept pace with the rapid population growth in the Cayman Islands. Although there is no publicly available data to directly verify these observations, population estimates suggest that there is some validity to these claims. According to the ESO, the population of children (aged 0-14) in the Cayman Islands has grown by 28% since 2010⁸, while ECE enrolment figures have increased by just 3% on an absolute basis between 2014 and 2023⁹. Granular data is required for more thorough analysis. In addition, all ECE practitioners who were interviewed about the capacity within their centres noted that they had extended waitlists, citing waitlists ranging in size from 30 children to as many as 475 children.

Anecdotally, it is understood that some children are on multiple waitlists, as applications are often made to more than one ECE centre to increase likelihood of acceptance into an ECE programme. Waitlists are particularly evident for the higher-rated centres and often have associated costs, which may further hinder accessibility on the basis of affordability. To address the availability issues, interviewees noted a growing call for more public and private ECE centres to open, while also noting a need to increase the capacity of existing centres where possible. The relatively recent opening of two public nurseries in East End and Cayman Brac, as well as announcements in late 2024 and early 2025 relating to newly established

centres, are important examples of moving towards improved access to ECE centres. Interviews also indicated that, in some cases, children's access to ECE is hindered by a lack of support from their parents or by certain parental perceptions. To maximise impact, interviewees suggested that parental education on early childhood development (including education) and well-being should begin before a child's birth and should be integrated into the broader ecosystem, including pregnancy and early years health.

Interviewees also noted a need for a 'community-based' approach and for wider parental support, particularly for single and/or young parents from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Nurturing Care programme at Tiffany's Preschool was cited by some interviewees as a positive example where disadvantaged parents are supported and upskilled to improve their own lives, enabling them to better support their children.

Finally, interviewees also noted that they sometimes felt the need to 'case make' for ECE. They suggested that comprehensive research may be required to demonstrate the value of investment, both privately and publicly, to improve perceptions of the wider community. Countering a misconception regarding the value of ECE may require the presentation of compelling data and evidence that underscore the pivotal role ECE plays in a child's development and future success. Quantifying the long-term social and economic benefits, also in dollar terms, may allow key policy and decision makers to gain a deeper appreciation of the value of such investments and the positive impact they can have on society as a whole. Several interviewees noted the critical and complementary roles played by education and health in children's early years. In response to this, local interviewees proposed placing early childhood development, which would include ECE, under the umbrella of Health rather than Education.

^C: Please note this information was retrieved from both publicly available data (i.e., OES inspection reports for ECE-only centres) or directly from centres that provide primary school services and thus do not have ECE-specific enrolment data within their OES reports. Please note that, in some instances, schools did not disclose current ECE enrolment and thus the enrolment estimate here could be marginally higher. Where feasible, estimates have been made based on historical or other relevant information.

Importantly, this may allow for general physical health and social-emotional checks to be conducted at the same time, creating a more cohesive, holistic understanding of a child developmental needs and progress.

International ECE experts interviewed echoed that there are significant benefits to integrating health and education under the same 'Early Childhood Development' umbrella, stating that, in terms of best practice, they "could not imagine ECE without integrating health and well-being".

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of integrating the Department of Financial Assistance (formerly the Needs Assessment Unit) into such a process, given that the most vulnerable children and families are typically already under their remit. One international expert interviewed, who has experience working with over 50 Education Ministries across the world, noted that there has been a growing trend in recent years to move towards this more integrated approach to early years development. Within this newer model, education, health and family or social services units are combined under a single umbrella for children in order to avoid the risk of repeating work across multiple ministries. In addition, this approach also helps to avoid children falling through the administrative cracks of a siloed system. Some interviewees noted that there is informal collaboration among agencies or ministries with the Cayman Islands, though formal agreements or a broader strategy for this collaboration were not readily apparent based on stakeholder interviews or publicly available information.

Types of ECE centres

On an absolute basis, preliminary data indicates that approximately 74% (32 of 43) of ECE centres in the Cayman Islands are privately operated, with enrolment data reflecting that approximately 84% (1,770 of 2,114 children) of children under five and enrolled in ECE are attending private centres¹⁰. When enrolment at ECE-only centres (i.e., those standalone centres serving children under five and included under OES' "Early Childhood Reviews" classification) is considered in isolation, this figure increases to 98%. The Cayman Islands is, therefore, in the upper quartile among comparators such as Bermuda (83%)¹¹ and England (72%)¹², and much higher than Ontario (35%)¹³ and the OECD average (32%), for children that are privately educated in early years.

Based on the most recent OES reports, there were higher instances of private ECE centres receiving 'Good' or 'Excellent' OES quality ratings when compared to their public counterparts¹⁴.



Many interviewees agreed that this may create a scenario where advantages are exclusive to those who can afford private education. They stressed the importance that all children – regardless of their family's financial situation – have access to high-quality ECE, particularly in light of studies that demonstrate the broader impact of a strong foundation in ECE¹⁵. Without a 'level playing field', ironically, ECE can perpetuate inequality and limit opportunities for children from low-income families.

Affordability

As important as the physical availability of centres, affordability for parents and/or guardians is also a key factor determining the accessibility to ECE. As indicated above, most ECE learners in the Cayman Islands are enrolled in private ECE centres, where costs^D vary significantly. In absolute terms, and based on publicly available information, the gross cost of ECE in the Cayman Islands appears to be the highest among all comparators at KYD 1,144 per month. When factoring in Government subsidies for eligible families, the Cayman Islands is ranked highest among comparators assessed, followed by Bermuda. According to publicly available data, the average cost of ECE in Bermuda is KYD 1,039 on a gross basis and, following government support, between KYD 295 – KYD 627 (28% - 60% of gross cost) per month^E. In the Cayman Islands, costs with basic Early Childhood Assistance Programme (ECAP) funding would come down to KYD 603 (53% of gross cost) per month or, once maximum government support is obtained, come down to KYD 332 (29% of gross cost) per month.

Further, several other comparators offer subsidies or other incentives that make at least a portion of ECE free of cost – including Queensland (up to 15 free hours a week), England (free for children with parents working in England, up to 30 hours per week), and Singapore (subsidies may reduce net ECE costs borne by parents and/or guardians to between approximately KYD 14 and KYD 268 per month, equivalent to 3%–59% of the gross cost, respectively month^F). The Cayman Islands remains the most expensive among comparators when normalising costs based on each jurisdiction's cost of living. When average monthly ECE costs are considered as a percentage of median gross monthly income, the Cayman Islands has the highest percentage, at 38%, with England following at 34%^G. Other comparators, such as Bermuda (22%), Ontario (8%), and Singapore (14%) had lower percentages.

Analysis performed also indicates a correlation between quality and cost as it relates to private ECE in the Cayman Islands, with the highest rated ECE centres – based upon official OES ratings – being significantly more expensive than their lower-performing counterparts. There has been progress in relation to quality in recent years, with 15 centres (38% of total ECE centres with available OES ratings), trending positively. At the same time, 23 of the 40 centres (approximately 58%) for which OES ratings were available were below the OES quality target of 'good' or 'excellent'. Of the 17 centres (approximately 42%) that did achieve the quality target, two centres are public (Cayman Brac Day Care Centre and Edna M. Moyle Primary School) and the remaining 15 were private centres. Based on information in the public domain or otherwise provided directly by the 15 private centres achieving the quality target, the average cost of the private ECE centres rated 'good' or 'excellent' is KYD 1,358 per month^H.



D: "Cost" here refers to cost to parents, i.e. ECE centre fees.

E: This figure is an average based on publicly available (i.e., online) fee data for ECE centres within Bermuda, and thus may not fully represent the overall average price of ECE in Bermuda. Amounts are expressed in absolute terms, based on foreign exchange rates as of February 17, 2025, and have not been adjusted for cost of living or other factors that may differ among jurisdictions.

F: This figure is an average based on publicly available (i.e., online) fee data for ECE centres within the jurisdictions listed, and thus may not fully represent the overall average price of ECE within the relevant jurisdiction. Amounts are expressed in absolute terms, based on foreign exchange rates as of February 17, 2025, and have not been adjusted for cost of living or other factors that may differ among jurisdictions.

G: Note that the UK Government provides free ECE to families within England, provided parents are resident and working in England and earn between GBP 9,518 and GBP 100,000 annually. For children ages nine months to 2 years, 15 hours of ECE per week is free of cost; for children ages three to four years, 30 hours of ECE per week is free of cost. This may effectively lower the 34% noted above to 0%.

H: Fee data is as of February 26, 2025 and based on information published on the websites of the private ECE centres rated 'good' or 'excellent' at that time, as noted on the OES website. The two public ECE centres rated 'good' or 'excellent' have been excluded from this average; these public centres are free of cost to Caymanian children.

Other factors impacting access and availability to ECE

Of the comparators assessed, legislation governing parental leave in the Cayman Islands provided the lowest level of time and financial compensation for new parents, which can have direct impacts on children. Research, as well as interviews, indicate that parental leave policies play a crucial role in early childhood development, with far-reaching implications on children's cognitive abilities, health outcomes and parent-child relationships^{16,17}, each of which has a direct impact on ECE. As a result, greater allowances for parental leave within the Cayman Islands may also encourage the provision of ECE – and ultimately enhance early childhood development more broadly – among the population.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Workforce

Student-teacher¹ ratios in ECE within the Cayman Islands are relatively consistent with the international comparators. International benchmarking revealed consistency across comparator jurisdictions, all ranging between a student-to-teacher ratio of 5:1 and 6:1, in line with the OECD average of 5:1. With an average ratio of 6:1, Cayman does not deviate significantly from comparators in relation to this particular metric. There is limited to no availability of quality information on the qualifications, experience, or other factors that may contextualise the overall strength of the workforce.

Qualification requirements and availability of professional development

Throughout interviews, the enhanced availability of highly trained staff was noted as one of the most pressing needs for ECE in the Cayman Islands. Many interviewees highlighted high-quality staff as being the foundation of good practice and student learning. Within the Cayman Islands, CIG sets guidelines for staffing qualifications, and University College of the Cayman Islands (UCCI) offers an Early Childhood Diploma and an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education that align with these standards.

However, financial assistance with the cost of these programmes is only available to Caymanian practitioners. Multiple local ECE experts or practitioners mentioned in interviews that many non-Caymanian ECE practitioners cannot afford UCCI's qualifications due to financial constraints, making it challenging for them to meet the minimum ECE qualification standard.

Additionally, some practitioners expressed the belief that the majority of the ECE workforce in the Cayman Islands comprises non-Caymanians. The concern from several of the interviewees is that the monetary barriers for qualifications functionally puts the minimum standard for qualification out of the reach of many of the aspiring Cayman Islands' ECE professionals.

A key recommendation emerging from interviews conducted is the need to carefully balance qualification requirements for ECE professionals with the current context of the Cayman Islands. Interviewees recognised the importance of requirements for staff to be appropriately qualified in order to strengthen quality of education, however they also cautioned against setting requirements too stringent that they become a barrier to recruitment and retention. Unrealistic expectations, particularly given the limited upskilling opportunities available locally, pose a significant challenge for many ECE centres. While the UCCI programme provides a valuable foundation, affordability, especially for non-Caymanian staff, remains a major concern.

Quality

A recent Department of Education Services report identified that only 26% of primary school students within the Cayman Islands met the expected standard for reading, writing, and mathematics in the 2022-23 academic year¹⁸, the most recent period for which a combined score was presented. There does not appear to be a specific data-gathering process in place within the Cayman Islands to measure the correlation between the quality of ECE provided to a child and their subsequent academic performance. Several of the ECE practitioners and experts interviewed – both locally and internationally – noted that focusing on building a strong foundation in students during ECE would likely result in improved performance as they progressed through their academic life.



¹: "Teachers" includes both qualified teachers and teaching assistants.



Within the Cayman Islands, the OES is the department responsible for the inspection of schools or centres administering ECE, and notes that the minimum standard for a centre should be “good”¹⁹. Of the 43 ECE centres within the Cayman Islands, 40 ECE centres have inspection reports published by the OES. Based on the OES centre reports released as of February 2025, the Cayman Islands has five ‘excellent’ centres, 12 ‘good’ centres, 22 ‘satisfactory’ centres, and one ‘weak’ centre. Given the OES requirement, the majority of ECE centres within the Cayman Islands are therefore falling below the quality target²⁰. Based on available data and as previously discussed, the quality of education appears closely correlated to the fees charged, with ‘excellent’ private ECE centres in the Cayman Islands averaging KYD 1,600 monthly, while ‘good’, ‘satisfactory’, and ‘weak’ ECE centres cost on average around KYD 1,237, KYD 886, and KYD 600 respectively^J per month. This disparity suggests a cost barrier to accessing high-quality early childhood education. Furthermore, there appears to be a noticeable gap in quality between public and private ECE centres, as no government school received an excellent rating, and only two achieved a good rating - Cayman Brac Day Care Centre and, more recently, Edna M. Moyle Primary School^{21,22}.

Special Education Needs

Interviewees also noted that the presence of children with special education needs (SEN) in ECE centres has a profound impact on the learning environment, as well as educational experiences of all students. Recent research has shown that the number of students with SEN has increased in countries such as the USA and United Kingdom^{23,24}, with anecdotal evidence provided by ECE practitioners interviewed that the same is also true in the Cayman Islands.

Interviewees noted that this has been especially pronounced in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews conducted with practitioners highlighted greater Government intervention and support for SEN, including the provision of resources with SEN-aligned curricula, as well as the Early Intervention Programme, which have helped teachers to better understand how to meet the needs of children with SEN.

Several interviews with stakeholders identified the need for even greater support for SEN students within ECE centres. Most interviewees indicated many centres are taking in SEN students despite not being properly equipped to address the growing number of students with SEN, nor do the teachers have the time to adequately assist students. Interviewees suggested a need for improvement in the government's current SEN infrastructure, with particular emphasis on the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) system. Interviewees indicated that all ECE centres are required to have either a designated SENCO, which is an individual with a SEN-specific qualification, or a “Designated Lead on SEN”, which can be any staff member, regardless of whether they are a teacher or have any previous knowledge or qualification in SEN. ECE practitioners indicated that many schools are unable to hire qualified SENCOs, resulting in inadequate support for children with SEN. Government intervention may play a role in improving support. Interviewees noted that potential remedies may include the provision of greater support to individual centres in the form of training, subsidising salaries for qualified SENCOs, and/or the establishment of government-led ECE centres specifically for SEN children. Additionally, the government could fund resources to service centres to better support SEN or provide targeted individual support to children, similar to programmes that are managed by the United Kingdom²⁵ and USA²⁶ governments.

J: These figures were sourced directly from the websites of all OES registered ECE centres.

Key takeaways

Overall, there are many consistencies with ECE in the Cayman Islands and comparator jurisdictions or OECD averages. At the same time, it is apparent that challenges present in comparator jurisdictions are likewise present – and in many instances, more pronounced – in the Cayman Islands, perhaps in part due to the country's somewhat unique socioeconomic demographics.

Notable improvements have been made in recent years in availability and access, as well as curriculum and pedagogy. On the availability and access side, Government nurseries in two districts now provide enhanced access to Caymanian children in those locations, while an increase in ECAP funding was likewise well-received by interviewees. From a curriculum and pedagogy perspective, OES inspection results are trending positively, and many centres appear to have embraced a play-based approach to ECE.

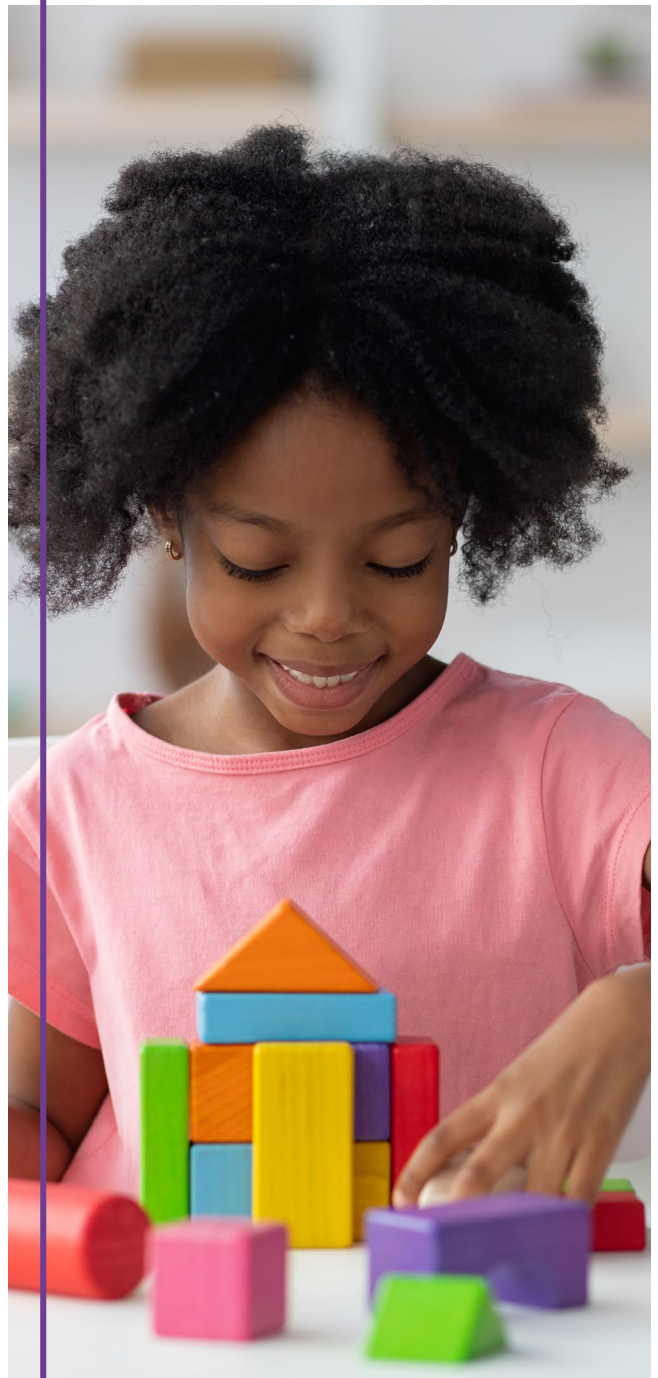
Analysis performed indicates a correlation between ECE centre quality and cost, which interviewees expressed they believe may widen inequalities and ultimately limit opportunities for children from lower or even middle-income families. Beyond cost, challenges to access and availability were also noted in relation to the geographical distribution of centres.

Greater collaboration or integration of stakeholders within education, health, and family or social services was also encouraged by interviewees and experts alike, given the complementary role these agencies play in early childhood development. This may likewise most significantly benefit the Cayman Islands' most vulnerable children and families.

From a centre-specific perspective, challenges were noted in relation to the training and retention of ECE practitioners. Qualification requirements were raised as a particular concern of ECE centres, given the limited availability of low-cost qualification options for non-Caymanian practitioners, which interviewees noted represent the majority.

Emphasis was also placed on uniform curriculum standards to help provide all children with consistent education, as well as a growing focus on improving social and emotional development. Additionally, enhanced training, increased resources, and proactive identification measures within ECE were highlighted in interviews as critical to aid centres with supporting growing SEN.

Given the high-cost environment of the Cayman Islands, many challenges appear directly correlated to funding. Resourcing appears to be the most significant challenge for the Cayman Islands versus its comparators, as public spending on ECE appears to represent approximately 1%^{27,28} of the Cayman Islands' annual education budget; on average, comparators appear to spend 3% to 6%^{29,30,31,32} of their annual education budgets on ECE, with some comparators appearing to spend significantly more.





Introduction

High-quality and inclusive ECE is paramount for not only promoting school-readiness and educational development in children from birth to age five, but it is also critical in building a strong foundation to develop the key social skills children will need for lifelong-wellbeing³³. It is because of this that these early years, also known as the 'formative years', are widely regarded as the most important developmental phase during an individual's lifespan. While this period is one of remarkable physical, cognitive, social and emotional growth, it also a time where children are highly vulnerable to face derailment or delay in their development³⁴.



Studies have shown that provision of high-quality ECE is not only critical to the long-term success and well-being of the child³⁵, but also has wider socio-economic benefits. An increased rate of high-quality ECE enrolment has the potential economic benefit of allowing both parents of young children to participate in the labour force. In addition, enrolment in high-quality ECE in these early years also has the potential to positively impact the future workforce of a country through an improved educational trajectory, allowing children today to potentially access higher skilled jobs in the future³⁶.

LIFE is pleased to release this report as part of its continued mission to improve literacy and ECE support within the Cayman Islands. This report, which analyses the current landscape of ECE within the Cayman Islands, aims to provide further insight into the current state of ECE locally, how this compares to other similar jurisdictions (as defined in "How we gathered our insights" below), and provide examples of better practice in ECE both regionally and globally.

Promoting ECE is more than an investment in children; it is a commitment to a society where every member can contribute to their full potential. It is a path to a flourishing future. In this exploration of ECE in the Cayman Islands, we aim to emphasise the value of early-stage education and stimulate discussions to further enhance this promising educational journey.

How we gathered our insights

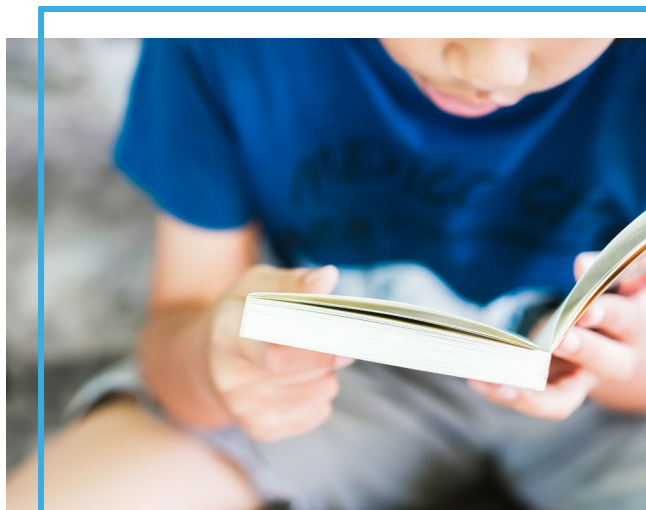
Beginning in August 2024, LIFE – with support from KPMG LLP – embarked on an analysis of ECE within the Cayman Islands. This analysis consisted of two phases:

- a) Preliminary desktop research, which was conducted to enable a greater understanding of the current ECE landscape within the Cayman Islands based on information in the public domain (e.g. data on ECE enrolment, inspection ratings, and costs, among others); and
- b) A series of interviews with local ECE practitioners, government officials, other stakeholders, and both regional and international ECE experts – which were conducted to further contextualise the data collected in the first phase, as well as enable a more thorough and nuanced understanding of progress made and challenges faced in relation to ECE in the Cayman Islands, as well as better practice regionally and globally. To encourage transparency, all interviewees were offered anonymity. Regional and international ECE experts and other stakeholders included university professors and other academics with a history of advising governments on ECE, economists, and representatives from multi-lateral organisations and development banks with regional expertise in the ECE sector.

The preliminary desktop research utilised publicly available information that provided insights into baseline data in relation to ECE as indicated above. During the course of this analysis, data was gathered from 43 ECE centres and schools accommodating ECE within the Cayman Islands. This included 30^K of the 32 centres classified under “Early Childhood Reviews” on CIG’s OES website, as well as an additional 10 public centres and one private centre that are classified under “School Reviews” by the OES, though they also provide ECE services via Nursery or Reception classes. In addition to the 41 centres listed on the OES website, the analysis also considered data released by two newly established ECE centres, which at the time of writing did not have inspection results published on the OES website.

In addition to OES data, data collection also included information sourced from ECE centre websites (e.g. annual fees)^L or other CIG reports (for example, reports released by the Economics Statistics Office (ESO)). In some instances, data was not available for all ECE centres assessed. Furthermore, for certain data points, estimates were made based on historical data or other publicly available information. It is also important to note the data included herein has not undergone an audit, or any other type of assurance, by LIFE or KPMG.

The preliminary desktop research also consisted of an international benchmarking exercise. This exercise involved assessing ECE data from six jurisdictions (countries or states/provinces) that were deemed ‘comparable’ to the Cayman Islands for a variety of reasons. These reasons included historical ties, island settings with similar key industries and other demographics, or countries that were deemed to face similar challenges. These comparators comprise Bermuda, England, Jamaica, Ontario (Canada), Singapore, and Queensland (Australia).



K: Please note, while there are 32 ECE centres on the OES website, as of February 2025, only 30 of them were open and providing services to children under five years of age.

L: In certain instances, where information was not publicly available (e.g. enrolment), centres were also contacted directly to provide data.

The comparator analysis similarly leveraged publicly available information, which was in some instances also not available for all ECE centres within the jurisdiction and/or subject to estimation. This data was benchmarked against the Cayman Islands' data where possible. To further contextualise results, data from the OECD was also utilised. All amounts expressed herein are in Cayman Islands dollars (KYD), unless otherwise noted. In addition, for the purposes of contextualising the analysis performed herein, it should be noted that education in the Cayman Islands is compulsory for all children aged five to 17.

Following the preliminary research, consultations were conducted with 18 ECE practitioners, experts and other key stakeholders. Consultations focused predominantly on the general ECE landscape and trends, challenges or barriers to ECE, access and affordability of ECE, curriculum, and SEN.

This report provides a summary of findings based on the analysis performed as outlined above. Throughout this report, we highlight data from the preliminary desktop research and benchmarking exercise. We also refer to additional insights gained from the interviews. We reflect on where the Cayman Islands sits within the context of its comparators and what lessons may be learned from practices utilised elsewhere.

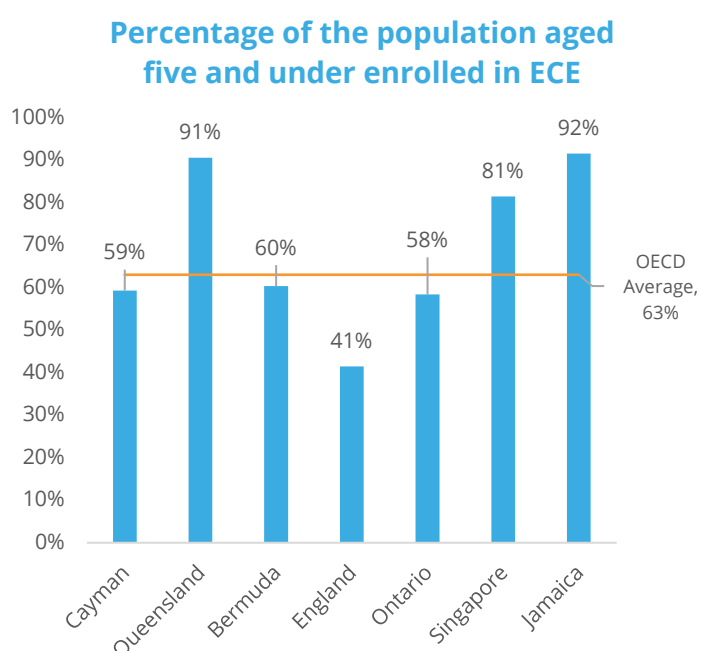


Availability and access: Overall Landscape

Globally, availability and access to ECE varies significantly. This availability and access often appear to be directly correlated with the relative wealth and development of a nation. The percentage of children enrolled in formal ECE programmes ranges from a greater level of access in wealthier and more developed countries, such as Singapore – in which 81% of its population aged five and below are enrolled in ECE – to minimal enrolment in many developing countries, bringing the OECD average to 63%³⁷ enrolment. Cultural norms and societal attitudes towards ECE are also a critical influencing factor in access to programmes, their quality and the rate of enrolment of children. Government policies and interventions – including funding allocations, curriculum standards, and teacher qualifications – are other direct and indirect variables shaping availability and access within the ECE landscape^{38,39}.

Interviewees expressed that appreciation for the importance of ECE in the Cayman Islands has improved in the last decades, and the number of centres has likewise grown in recent years. These centres also have a more standardised curriculum than in previous years following the introduction of the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework in 2015⁴⁰, which has been recognised by interviewees for its part in the shift to a holistic and play-based approach to ECE provision in the Cayman Islands. As of late 2024, nearly 2,200 children were enrolled within the 40+ registered ECE centres across the islands^M, which are subject to regular oversight and inspection by CIG OES.

Figure 1 – Percentage of population (aged five and under) enrolled in ECE across the Cayman Islands and comparators*, along with the OECD average.



*Note: Publicly available enrolment data for England relates to children aged four and under.

Availability and Capacity

On a countrywide basis, there is one ECE centre for every 83 children under five years of age (population). In this sense, Cayman performs better than comparator jurisdictions Queensland (one centre for every 110 children)^N, England (one centre for every 119 children) and Ontario (one centre for every 150 children).

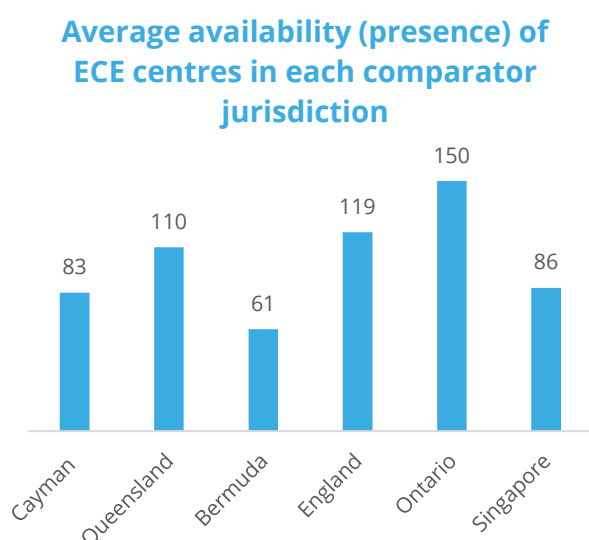
M: Please note this information is based on the most recent OES institution reports. If specific enrolment data on ECE was not provided, information was obtained directly from the schools. All data is as of November 2024.

N: Please note that data obtained for Singapore, England, Queensland, and Ontario was gathered from census data for children aged 0-5, and population data for the Cayman Islands and Bermuda is based on census data gathered for children aged 0-4, based on varying bifurcation levels utilised within the publicly available census data for each jurisdiction.



Bermuda is the only jurisdiction in which the number of children per centre is lower than the Cayman Islands (one for every 61 children)^O. It is important to note that this ratio considers the total number of centres, rather than overall capacity. During the interview process, several stakeholders indicated that ECE capacity is a major concern, which they noted was evident through an increase in applications to public ECE centres and long waitlists in private centres.

Figure 2 – Average availability (presence) of ECE centres in each comparator jurisdiction (based on total population aged five and under versus number of ECE centres).



In the Cayman Islands, an estimated 59%^P of children under five were enrolled in ECE centres, almost the same as a regional comparator – Bermuda – which reported a 60%⁴¹ enrolment. Data indicates that, in England, enrolment in ECE centres is at 41%⁴². Despite what appears to be favourable enrolment rates relative to similar jurisdictions, the Cayman Islands ranks just below the OECD average of 63%⁴³.

Countries such as Singapore and Jamaica have significantly higher rates of enrolment at 81%⁴⁴ and 92%⁴⁵, respectively.

“The biggest limitation is space. Application rates to government schools are up, and more and more children are enrolling in government education due to the increased cost of [private] education. This demand cannot be met due to a lack of physical space.”

Interview quote

Interviewees indicated that the capacity of ECE centres (i.e., the availability of ECE centres and number of spaces per centre) has not kept pace with the rapid population growth in the Cayman Islands. Although there is no publicly available data to directly verify these observations, population estimates suggest that there is some validity to these claims.

O: Please note the number of schools is based on licensed day care centres in Bermuda as of August 2024. Day care centres and providers must be licensed and registered in order to care for children in Bermuda: Childcare regulation programme, Government of Bermuda (2025): [Child Care Regulation Programme](#). Government of Bermuda.

P: Please note this information was retrieved from both publicly available data (i.e., OES inspection reports for ECE-only centres) or directly from centres that provide primary school services and thus do not have ECE-specific enrolment data within their OES reports. Please note that, in some instances, schools did not disclose current ECE enrolment and thus the enrolment estimate here could be marginally higher. Where feasible, estimates have been made based on historical or other relevant information.

According to the ESO, the population of children (aged 0-14) in the Cayman Islands has grown by 28% since 2010⁴⁶, while ECE enrolment figures have increased by just 3% on an absolute basis between 2014 and 2023⁴⁷.

Granular data is required for more thorough analysis. Interviewees highlighted that wait times are a persistent issue, potentially suggesting there is a shortage of ECE centres, as anecdotal evidence points to parents finding it challenging to secure spaces for their children. All ECE practitioners who were interviewed about the capacity within their centres noted that they had extended waitlists. While no formal data is available relating to the capacity of ECE centres within the Cayman Islands, waitlists ranging in size from 30 children to as many as 475 children were cited during interviews. Waitlists are particularly evident for the higher-rated centres, which are in higher demand due to the perception of providing better-quality education as indicated by OES scores. Anecdotally, it is also understood that some children are on multiple waitlists, as applications are often made to more than one ECE centre to increase likelihood of acceptance into an ECE programme. Waitlist places often have non-refundable associated costs, which may further hinder accessibility on the basis of affordability, as discussed in later sections of this report.

“We [the Cayman Islands] are not growing to meet the demands of the growing population.”

Interview quote

To address the availability issues, interviewees noted a growing call for more public and private ECE centres to open. Interviewees noted that focus should also be maintained in increasing the capacity of existing centres where possible. The relatively recent opening of two public nurseries, namely at East End Primary School and Creek & Spot Bay Primary School, as well as newly established centres in West Bay, are important examples of moving towards improved access to ECE centres⁴⁸. Increased efforts towards this goal, including careful planning of additional centres and expanding the capacity of existing ones, may help more children avail of the benefits of ECE, giving them a stronger foundation for future learning.

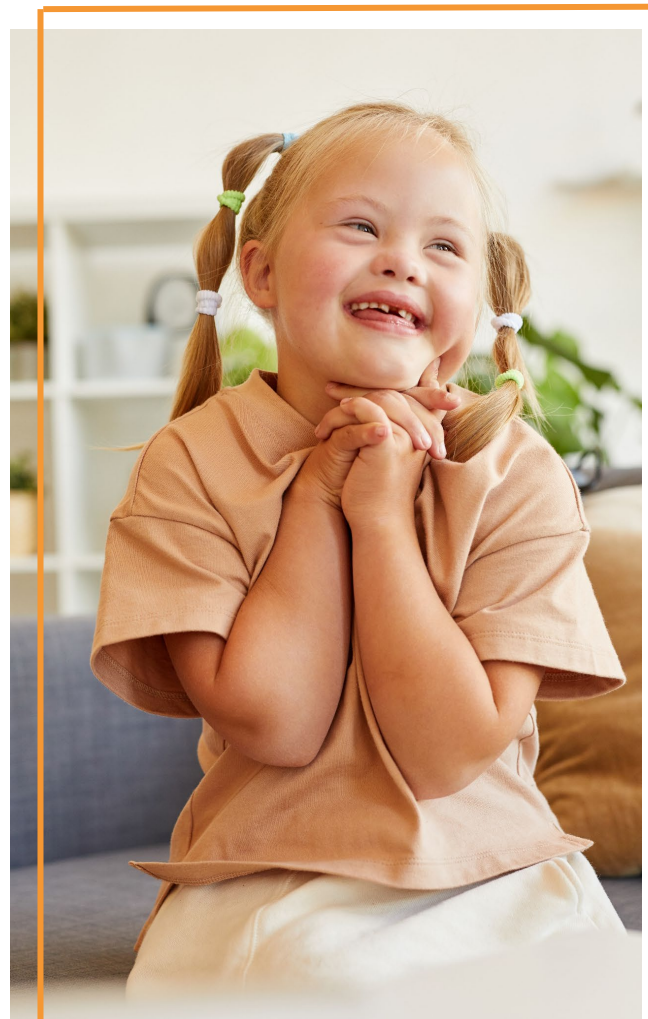
Another option that was suggested by one of the interviewees to increase accessibility was to privatise ECE in its entirety, with Government covering the costs for the attendance of Caymanian citizens, rather than operate

free schooling. A notable economist highlighted that private centres – ECE and more generally – typically receive higher inspection ratings compared to public ones.

This novel approach would enable the private sector to meet the demand for ECE in the Cayman Islands, while CIG could focus on supporting the citizens most in need. Although there are examples in comparator nations or regions where significant investment in private ECE centres has also been provided by other private funders⁴⁹, the implications for access and availability have not yet been fully disclosed. Consequently, this aspect has not been explored further within the limited scope of this report.

“Investment in the younger years is a cost saver in the long run, as it is cheaper to build a good foundation.”

Interview quote

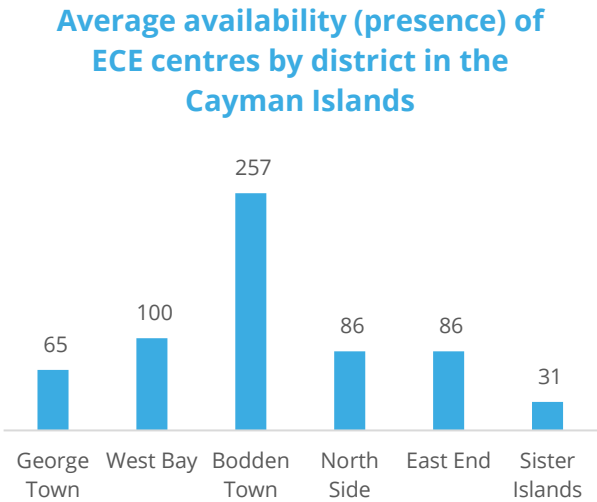


Geographical Disparity

The geographical distribution of ECE centres across the Cayman Islands is uneven, leading to significant variations in availability from district to district. In terms of the ratio of centres to children under five, George Town (including Camana Bay, Grand Harbour, Red Bay, and Prospect) has approximately one centre for every 65 children. In contrast, West Bay and Bodden Town have one centre for every 100 and 257 children, respectively.

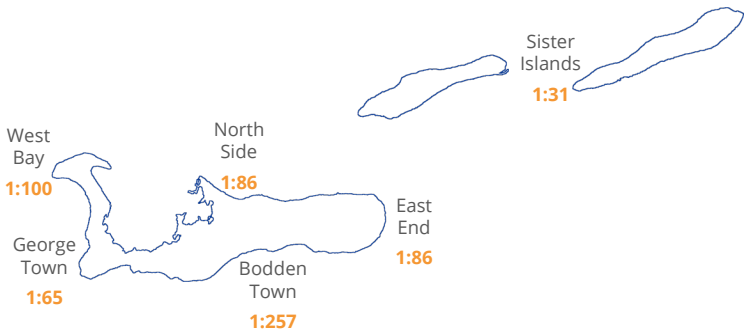
This disparity is somewhat expected, given George Town's status as a major business hub with higher economic activity, although interviewees unanimously agreed that the uneven distribution of ECE centres across the Cayman Islands poses a significant barrier for many families with young children.

Figure 3 – Average availability (presence) of ECE centres by district, expressed as the number of children under five years old (total population) versus ECE centres in each district of the Cayman Islands.



Despite accounting for approximately 21% and 20% of the population, West Bay and Bodden Town appear considerably underserved, with Bodden Town in particular having over triple the number of children compared to available centres than George Town.

Interviewees highlighted that this unequal distribution has potentially significant ramifications for parents, ECE centres, and the development of children. They further emphasised that this may be especially true for those families in which there is a single parent or caregiver and/or inflexible working arrangements.



For parents, interviewees noted the limited supply of centres in certain districts forces them to commute further into the capital to access a greater variety of centres. This not only exacerbates congestion on roadways during peak hours but also creates logistical challenges for parents without reliable transportation, or those with other responsibilities in their home districts.

For ECE centres, interviewees noted the limited supply may lead to overcrowding, making it difficult to provide adequate care and education and placing increased pressure on teachers. Interviewees noted this strain on resources and staff may compromise the quality of education and care provided to children.

For children, interviewees noted these combined challenges result in difficulties accessing ECE, which is crucial for their early development. The unequal distribution of centres and the resulting logistical and educational challenges can hinder their growth and development, impacting their readiness for future learning. In addition, the increased stress from these challenges can indirectly impact children and their environments, negatively affecting them even outside of the school setting.

Some progress has already begun within West Bay where one additional centre is scheduled to open for the 2025-2026 school year. Corresponding developments in the Cayman Islands' eastern districts would provide families with similar opportunities for ECE, bringing benefits to the educational prospects for local children and additional options for working parents. A general suggestion for new centres that are in the stages of planning, whether private or public, is to pay particular attention to the 'underserved' districts as they may hold an opportunity to advance the education of local children.



Barriers to Enrolment

In some cases, as revealed in interviews, children's access to ECE is hindered by a lack of support from their parents or by certain parental perceptions. While interviewees indicated there is a widespread belief in the Cayman Islands that most parents recognise the value of ECE as a tool for social development, they also emphasised the need for enhanced parental education and upskilling initiatives. Educating parents about the benefits of high-quality ECE for their children, particularly in terms of active or more play-based learning styles, is crucial and will be discussed in further detail later in this report. ECE practitioners interviewed highlighted the importance of showing parents how their actions and behaviour can impact their children's development, as many are unaware of the potential harm they may unintentionally cause. They cited examples such as the negative effects of excessive screen time and inconsistent attendance due to parental perception that ECE centres essentially function as a babysitting service. Screen time was noted as an emerging issue that is impacting not only the development of children, but also the ECE system as a whole, as interviewees noted the broader implications on children's ability to focus and interact with peers and teachers. Several interviewees emphasised the need for parental education on the negative effects of screen time.

To maximise impact, interviewees suggested that parental education on early childhood development (including education) and well-being should begin before a child's birth and should be integrated into the broader ecosystem, including pregnancy and early years health. International ECE experts interviewed noted the successful application of similar programmes in neighbouring Caribbean islands, specifically Jamaica,

where parental education and involvement was a particular area of Government and stakeholder focus for parents of young children.

More broadly, interviewees noted a need for a 'community-based' approach and for wider parental support, particularly for single and/or young parents from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Nurturing Care programme at Tiffany's Preschool was cited by some interviewees as a positive example where disadvantaged parents are supported and upskilled to improve their own lives, enabling them to better support their children.

Across ECE in the Cayman Islands, it has been noted by interviewees that parental involvement is an area for development for the islands. While some interviewees acknowledged there are several factors for lack of involvement such as working long hours, the economic environment, or both parents working, they agreed that there is a need for more education on the importance of parental involvement and community in early years development.

“There are a lot of resources for parents, but parents might not know that [these resources are] there or that [they are] free.”

Interview quote



Other Perceptions and Considerations

Interviewees noted that, in some instances, they feel the need to 'case make' for ECE and suggested that comprehensive research may be required to demonstrate the value of investment, both privately and publicly, to improve perceptions of the wider community. Countering a misconception regarding the value of ECE may require the presentation of compelling data and evidence that underscore the pivotal role ECE plays in a child's development and future success. For example, intervention programmes in Jamaica - focusing on nutrition and the quality of mother-child interactions - have demonstrated the measurable and dramatic benefits to education, earnings, livelihoods and lower incidences of criminal activities or divorce, 30 years following the initial intervention⁵⁰. In light of this, by quantifying the long-term social and economic benefits, also in dollar terms, key policy and decision makers can gain a deeper appreciation of the value of such investments and the positive impact they can have on society as a whole.

Interviewees also noted challenges with the collection and analysis of pertinent data. This was identified as an area in need of improvement across the Cayman Islands, and interviewees indicated that this may be of particular priority and importance in demonstrating the imperative of early childhood support. Several interviewees expressed that the existing process of gathering and consolidating information from various government departments appears disjointed and that there was not ready access to historical or recent data that may be relevant to their work, hampering the ability to make well-informed decisions. Enhancing data quality and availability may require greater coordination and information-sharing among the various government agencies responsible for early childhood development. Interviewees noted that, while this may initially be burdensome, it may ultimately result in cost savings by streamlining information-gathering and identifying developmental issues earlier on, enabling more timely intervention.

To better centralise these efforts within the Cayman Islands' existing government structures, several local interviewees proposed placing early childhood development, which would include ECE, under the umbrella of Health rather than Education. A key potential benefit to this would be to allow for general physical health and social-emotional checks to be conducted at the same time, creating a more cohesive, holistic understanding of a child developmental needs and progress.

Within local interviews, there were examples shared where children in Cayman were identified as having developmental delays by health professionals; however, this information was not shared with the children's schools – or the Ministry of Education more broadly – resulting in these children often falling behind as the school and ECE practitioner responsible for the child did not have a complete picture of the child's unique challenges. International ECE experts interviewed echoed that there are significant benefits to integrating health and education under the same 'Early Childhood Development' umbrella, stating that, in terms of best practice, they “could not imagine ECE without integrating health and well-being”.

An alternative approach identified through desktop research involves adopting a whole-of-government strategy. This encourages different ministries to collaborate, share resources, and align their policies and programmes, leading to more coherent and comprehensive ECE services. An example of enhanced collaboration can be found in Canada. The EarlyON Child and Family Centres result from the collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. These centres provide a range of services, including early learning programmes, parenting support, and health services⁵¹.

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of integrating the Department of Financial Assistance (formerly the Needs Assessment Unit) into such a process, given that the most vulnerable children and families are typically already under their remit. One international expert interviewed, who has experience working with over 50 Education Ministries across the world, noted that there has been a growing trend in recent years to move towards this more integrated approach to early years development, where education, health and family or social services units are combined under a single umbrella for children in order to avoid the risk of not only repeating work across multiple ministries, but also to avoid children falling through the administrative cracks of a siloed system. Some interviewees noted that there is informal collaboration among agencies or ministries within the Cayman Islands, though formal agreements or a broader strategy for this collaboration were not readily apparent based on stakeholder interviews or publicly available information.

“More cohesion between government departments is needed. Education, Health, etc., are all working in silos and there is no [apparent] system in place to track families across different departments.”

Interview quote

Regional ECE experts noted a similar recognition across the Caribbean and highlighted that the island of Grenada is currently in the process of creating what was described as an integrated ECE strategy and corresponding framework. The framework, which is being created as a collaborative effort between several stakeholders including the Grenada Government as well as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), is still in its developmental stage. According to the expert interviewed, the framework is due to be piloted in the coming two to three years. Once released, this integrated framework would be the first of its kind across the Caribbean and may indicate that the global trend of a more integrated approach to ECE is gaining momentum closer to home.

Within the context of the Cayman Islands, fostering a more cohesive governance structure in such a way may facilitate enhanced investment decision-making when it comes to ECE and early childhood development more broadly.

These efforts to provide a stronger foundation in the early lives of children may offset the need for later investments in the same cohort, 10-15 years later, as indicated by interviewees and supported by several studies^{52,53}.

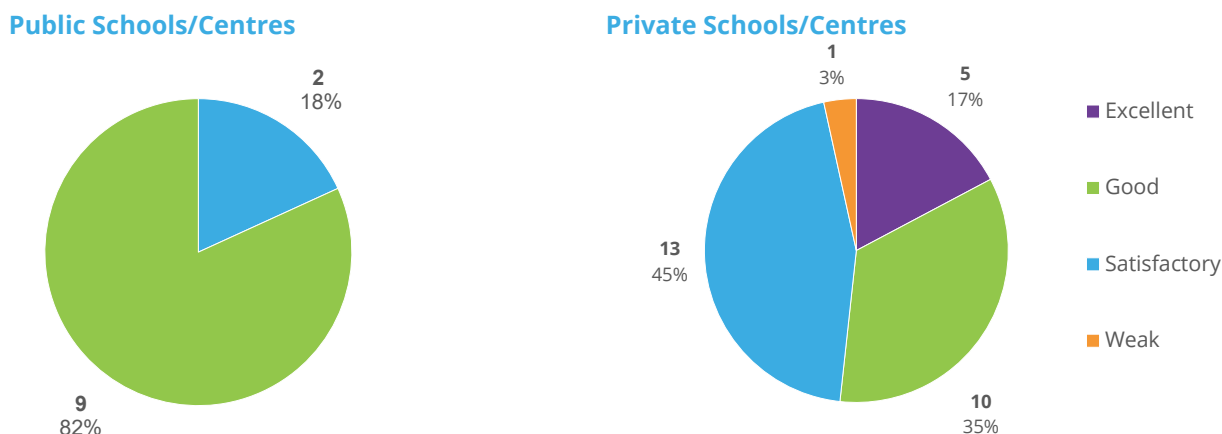
Availability and access: Types of ECE Centres

On an absolute basis, preliminary data indicates that approximately 74% (32 of 43) of ECE centres in the Cayman Islands are privately operated, with enrolment data reflecting that 84% (1,770 of 2,114) of children under five and enrolled in ECE are attending private centres⁵⁴.

When enrolment at ECE-only centres (i.e., those standalone centres serving children under five and included under OES' "Early Childhood Reviews" classification) is considered in isolation, this figure increases to 98%. The Cayman Islands is therefore in the upper quartile among comparators such as Bermuda (83%)⁵⁵ and England (72.4%)⁵⁶, and much higher than the OECD average (32%), for children that are privately educated in early years.

A higher level of private education may offer certain benefits, such as numerous but smaller class sizes, more individualised attention, and access to specialised programmes and resources that would ultimately benefit children. This is indicated by the higher instances of private ECE centres receiving 'Good' or 'Excellent' OES quality ratings⁵⁷. Many interviewees agreed that this may create a scenario where advantages are exclusive to those who can afford private education. They stressed the importance that all children – regardless of their family's financial situation – have access to high-quality ECE, particularly in light of studies that demonstrate the broader impact of a strong foundation in ECE⁵⁸. Without a 'level playing field', ironically, ECE can perpetuate inequality and limit opportunities for children from low-income families.

Figure 4 – OES ratings (most recent as of February 2025) for public ECE schools/centres and private ECE schools/centres.



**Note: Publicly available enrolment data for England relates to children aged four and under.*

“ECE should level the playing field. In the Cayman Islands, it does not; it actually makes it worse. In other jurisdictions, [ECE] is used as a leveller as all children have the same opportunity to access. In Cayman, the divide is [widened] from day one.”

Interview quote

Availability and access: Affordability^Q



Interviewees highlighted the significant cost disparity between ECE centres in the Cayman Islands. Government-operated centres provide care at no cost for Caymanians; the cost of private centres ranges significantly and may be burdensome for families. Before any Government support, the average monthly cost of private ECE in the Cayman Islands is KYD 1,144^R, making it the highest among comparator jurisdictions. Bermuda is the next most expensive comparator, with average monthly fees equivalent to KYD 1,039 before considering any support offered by the Bermuda Government. Besides Bermuda, the closest comparator is England, where monthly ECE costs approximate KYD 923^S. However, 15-30 hours of education per week is free in the latter for parents currently employed within England that earn below GBP 100,000 annually⁶⁰. Across the Cayman Islands and comparator jurisdiction, government support in the form

of subsidies often reduces the cost of ECE for certain demographics, as discussed in further detail in the “Government Support” sub-section of this report.

Before any Government support is considered, cost in the Cayman Islands is significantly higher than other regions such as Ontario, Canada (KYD 293)⁶¹, Singapore (KYD 454)⁶², and Queensland, Australia, where free kindergarten is available for 15 hours per week over 40 weeks⁶³. Furthermore, when average monthly ECE costs are considered as a percentage of median gross monthly income, the Cayman Islands has the highest percentage, at 38%, with England following at 34%⁵. Other comparators, such as Bermuda (22%), Ontario (8%), and Singapore (14%) had lower percentages.

Q: Unless otherwise noted, costs noted herein are averages based on publicly available (i.e., online) fee data for ECE centres within the jurisdictions listed and thus may not fully represent the overall average price of ECE within the relevant jurisdiction. Amounts are expressed in Cayman Islands dollars (KYD) on absolute terms, based on foreign exchange rates as of February 17, 2025, and have not been adjusted for cost of living or other factors that may differ among jurisdictions.

R: This figure was gathered from the websites of individual private schools, and an average cost was subsequently calculated.

S: Note that the UK Government provides free ECE to families within England, provided parents are resident and working in England and earn between GBP 9,518 and 100,000 annually. For children ages nine months to two years, 15 hours of ECE per week is free of cost; for children ages three to four years, 30 hours of ECE per week is free of cost. This may effectively reduce the 34% noted here to 0%.



The cost difference between government and private ECE centres can be a barrier for families who can't afford private fees, and unequal access to quality ECE may affect children's development and future opportunities.

Interviewees suggested that the current system within the Cayman Islands may exacerbate inequalities, with wealthier children receiving a higher quality of education than their less fortunate peers. Financial challenges were highlighted as being direct (i.e. the cost of the centres) as well as indirect (e.g. the cost of transporting children to centres, particularly for parents with inflexible working arrangements).

Some interviewees also noted that some Caymanian families struggle with the administrative requirement for proving citizenship, due to not possessing the necessary birth certificates for their children to prove citizenship by descent (e.g. birth certificates of grandparents or great-grandparents). Interviewees noted that this may result in significant spending on official paperwork or tests required to access their rights to educational support as Caymanians, further exacerbating inequalities.

Moreover, interviewees noted that the disparity in costs can increase the gap in resources and quality of education between certain private centres. With higher fees, some private centres may have the capacity to provide smaller class sizes, experienced staff, and enhanced learning resources imported from overseas. In contrast, budget-constrained lower-cost centres may face limitations in offering the same level of resources and quality, and may face fierce competition from higher-cost private or Government centres that are likewise able to offer more attractive salaries to teachers. While the research undertaken for this report could not substantiate all insights, interviews indicated that staff and resource shortages within lower-cost centres across

the islands have also negatively impacted the experience of teachers in these schools, potentially risking the educational services being provided. These issues may be addressed through increased or targeted subsidies. For example, by implementing a subsidy program that provides direct financial assistance to lower-cost private centres, specifically earmarked for teacher salaries, resource procurement, or infrastructure improvements⁶⁴. This would aim to allow these centres to compete more effectively, attract and retain qualified staff, and enhance the quality of their educational offerings, thereby mitigating the resource and quality gap observed.

Studies in similar jurisdictions echo the sentiments shared during the interviews and have likewise highlighted the impact of high ECE costs on families and children⁶⁵. These findings underscore the critical role of affordability and accessibility in shaping children's early learning experiences and long-term outcomes. Ensuring equitable access to high-quality, reasonably priced ECE is paramount for promoting the well-rounded development of all children, regardless of their family's financial circumstances.

“Every district needs high quality ECE at an affordable price.”

Interview quote



Government Support

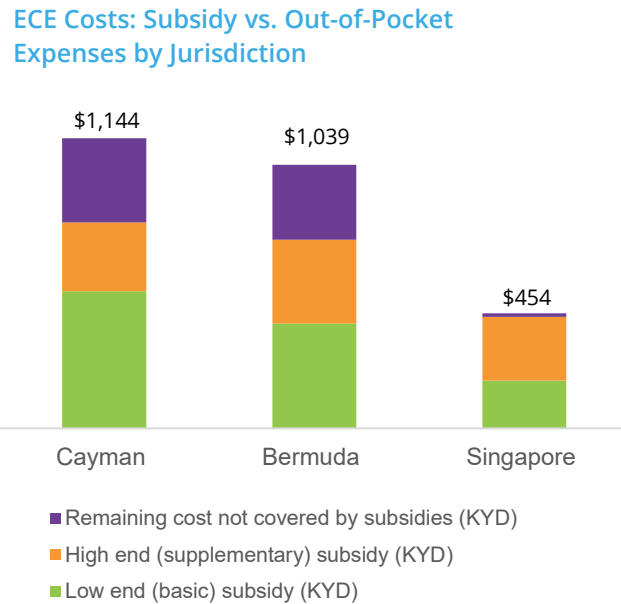
All jurisdictions assessed, including the Cayman Islands, provide government assistance for ECE. CIG offers the ECAP, which provides funding for children over three years old based on parental income and number of dependents.

When benchmarked to similar jurisdictions and in relative terms, government support in the Cayman Islands is somewhat comparable to Bermuda and higher than Singapore. In contrast, Queensland and England have a different approach, providing support to children of taxpaying citizens – equating to no cost for 15 to 30 hours of ECE per week, subject to certain income thresholds as noted in the introductory paragraph to this sub-section⁶⁶.

Within the Cayman Islands, ECAP funding provides both 'basic' (KYD 541/month effective January 2025; previously KYD 350/month) and 'supplementary' (KYD 812/month effective January 2025; previously KYD 500/month)⁶⁷ funding to parents with children over the age of three years old. This subsidy would represent 47% of the average gross cost at the basic level of ECAP, and 71% at the supplementary level. In contrast, Bermuda and Singapore offer support in the ranges of KYD 413-744⁶⁸ (40-72% of average gross cost) and KYD 188-440⁶⁹ (41-97% of average gross cost), respectively. Prior to 2025, the ECAP rarely covered the full cost of private centres. Data collected indicated that, as of December 2024, the cost of all private ECE centres exceeded the amount of the ECAP provision. However, in January 2025, CIG increased its ECAP support. Interviewees welcomed this news, noting that this increase – particularly for those receiving supplementary funding – will likely make a material

difference for families, as the ECAP will now cover the fees of 11 different private ECE centres in the Cayman Islands^T. The enhanced access to higher cost private ECE centres may help to 'normalise' enrolment and thus may also help to improve the student-teacher ratios in a number of lower cost ECE centres – which interviewees noted saw high enrolment given financial constraints of parents – ultimately reducing the pressure on those teachers and providing children with a more favourable learning environment.

Figure 5 – The cost of ECE covered by the low and high-end subsidies within the Cayman Islands, Bermuda, and Singapore expressed in KYD. Please note the subsidies provided within England and Queensland come in the form of a set number of free hours a week rather than a dollar amount. Additionally, in Ontario, funding is provided directly to the centres to allow for lowered rates, rather than to families. Average total cost (pre-subsidy) of private centres within these jurisdictions is shown on the top of each column above.



T: Please note this figure is based on costs of centres as of February 28, 2025.

While there was praise for increases in ECAP funding, interviewees indicated that challenges persist, both in terms of access to ECAP as well as the fact that the ECAP funding does not offer any financial support for the associated but indirect costs of ECE, such as transport to and from school. Interviewees mentioned that the ECAP application process was burdensome, making it hard for some families to get financial assistance. In recognition of this, interviewees suggested that ECAP administrators should reassess the current process to enhance access for disadvantaged populations, helping to ensure that those in greatest need are not inadvertently excluded.

One such example is the electronic method for submitting application forms, which interviewees noted should take account for the limited access, if any, to electronic devices for some individuals. Other interviewees noted that ECAP administrators do indeed offer additional support for families to apply for ECAP funding, as staff members from the Government's Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Unit occasionally visit district libraries to assist families with the application process and have also assisted applicants that visit the Government Administration Building. However, broad sentiment from interviewees indicated there appears to be little knowledge of this additional support.

As a result, enhanced awareness-creation efforts may prove useful in ensuring families across the Cayman Islands understand the support available to them. Several interviewees also suggested that supplemental and more targeted walk-in clinics in other community locations, where the ECAP process and form are explained to those in need, could help to encourage access by key demographics. However, interviewees also acknowledged this may prove challenging from a resource-perspective, given that this assistance is currently provided by the ECCE Unit, which has only four full-time team members responsible for ECAP and other ECE support within the Cayman Islands.

There are multiple ways to consider resource allocation within the ECE space. One such approach is ECE funding as a proportion of a government's total education budget. When comparing ECE budget allocations among comparator jurisdictions, it appears that the Cayman Islands allocates a smaller percentage of its total education budget to ECE. Based on publicly available information, Queensland, Jamaica, Bermuda, and England appear to allocate between 3% and 6%^{70,71,72,73} of their total education budget toward ECE, with Singapore and Ontario appearing to allocate as much as 14%^{74,75}.

In contrast, ECE appears to represent approximately 1%^{76,77} of the most recent education budget within the Cayman Islands, with the majority of the allocation comprised of ECAP funding.

“Cost is a big issue, and while ECAP does provide help, the price of ECE is out of reach for a lot of parents.”

Interview quote



Availability and access: Other factors impacting access and availability to ECE



Parental leave policy

Of the comparators assessed, the Cayman Islands provided the lowest level of time and financial compensation for new parents, which can have direct impacts on children. Research, as well as interviews, indicate that parental leave policies play a crucial role in early childhood development, with far-reaching implications on children's cognitive abilities, health outcomes and parent-child relationships^{78,79}, each of which has a direct impact on ECE.

Under current legislation in the Cayman Islands, women are entitled to 12 weeks of maternal leave and receive full pay for the first 20 working days, followed by half pay for the next 20 days⁸⁰. Nine weeks of leave are also permitted for adoption. Together, this time aims to allow mothers with financial support during the crucial early weeks following birth or adoption of a child. Conversely, in England, new mothers are provided with 52 weeks of maternity leave, with varying rates of pay⁸¹.

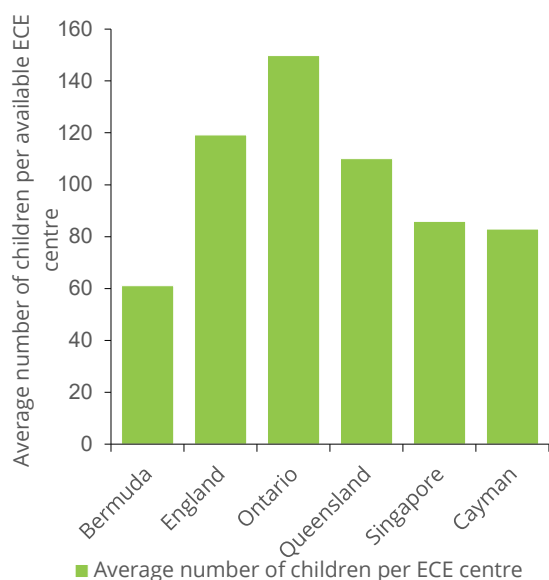
Although this allows for a substantial period for mothers to care for their newborns, the fixed pay may not fully compensate for higher-earning individuals. Canada provides 15 weeks of maternity leave at 55% pay or up to CAD 668 per week, followed by parental leave of either 52 weeks (standard) or 78 weeks (extended)⁸², offering flexibility but posing financial challenges for some families in higher cost of living areas. Meanwhile, Bermuda offers new mothers 13 weeks of maternity leave, with eight weeks paid and four weeks unpaid, along with five paid days of paternity leave to support the involvement of fathers in childcare responsibilities⁸³.

Based on the research referenced above, greater allowances for parental leave within the Cayman Islands may also encourage the provision of ECE – and ultimately enhance early childhood development more broadly – among the population.

Curriculum and pedagogy: Workforce

Benchmarking to comparator jurisdictions revealed that the Cayman Islands has a student-teaching staff ratio of 6:1, on par with the OECD average of 6:1 as well as comparator jurisdictions assessed, where the ratio fell between 5:1 and 6:1. These ratios include both qualified teachers and teaching assistants, for whom qualification requirements often do not apply.

Figure 6 - The average number of children per available ECE centre* in each comparator jurisdiction.



*Please note this data refers to the number of ECE centres versus the population of ECE-aged children, not the number of enrolled students.

Although there is limited information publicly available relating to the number and availability of qualified teachers in the Cayman Islands, several interviewees highlighted challenges in maintaining qualified teachers – and even teaching assistants – within ECE centres. Interviewees indicated that the level of teacher compensation within private ECE centres – particularly those that are mid- or lower-cost – is often lower than

Government primary schools. Based on publicly available data, a private ECE centre with a higher OES rating could offer a top-end gross compensation for a qualified teacher of around KYD 45,000 per year. Anecdotally, we understand that gross compensation at lower-cost private ECE centres is significantly lower, ranging between approximately KYD 14,500 and approximately KYD 23,000 per year. In contrast, an assistant teaching role at a public primary school, which does not require a formal teaching qualification, might have a top-end gross compensation of KYD 49,000 per year, with free healthcare and pension in addition to this as is standard practice among the Cayman Islands Civil Service^U.

Salaries for qualified teachers within Government schools are KYD 60,000 per year or higher, following Government changes to teacher compensation in recent years⁸⁴. Furthermore, government statistics indicate that mean education salaries are 6% lower than the national average across all industries⁸⁵, though nuanced data between public and private institutions is limited. Anecdotal evidence suggests the salary differences are driving qualified teachers out of the space to pursue higher-paying jobs in other industries altogether. Interviewees also suggested that low earning potential is making it difficult to attract local talent to pursue a career in ECE (despite the scholarship opportunities offered by the Government and local campaigns), as well as entice foreign-qualified teachers to relocate.

“There are not enough qualified teachers in the Cayman Islands.”

Interview quote

U: Please note this is based on publicly available online job application postings as of February 27, 2025 and may not be fully representative of all teaching salaries.

Early childhood educators within the Cayman Islands appear genuinely committed to professional development, a sentiment echoed by many interviewees. CIG provide a scholarship (KYD 35,000 per annum) with a higher threshold than overseas undergraduate scholarships (KYD 30,000 per annum), to those looking to study education at the post-secondary level⁸⁶.

It was also noted by an interviewee that the Ministry of Education has made an effort to present teaching as a viable career option for Caymanians and targeted individuals looking for a career change. In addition, UCCI has established two ECE programmes. Given the demonstrated interest, expanding programme offerings or available spaces may be warranted. Critically, accessibility should be prioritised.

Interviewees highlighted the challenges faced by many non-Caymanian educators, specifically the cost of programmes and scheduling conflicts, with many classes offered during standard working hours. This scheduling makes it difficult for educators to upskill while remaining employed. One suggested solution included the creation of short courses offered by technical training providers, which focus on providing a base qualification to ECE practitioners.



Curriculum and pedagogy: Qualification requirements and availability of professional development



Throughout interviews, the enhanced availability of highly trained staff was noted as one of the most pressing needs for ECE in the Cayman Islands. Many interviewees highlighted high-quality staff as being the foundation of good practice and student learning. Both local and international ECE experts shared several examples of better practices from various countries.

“High quality staff are the foundation of good practice.”

Interview quote

Jamaica's approach to ECE practitioner qualification was highlighted as being an effective approach with potential applicability for the Cayman Islands. Jamaica's Early Childhood Commission, which oversees ECE in Jamaica, has a set of 12 operational standards that are required to be met by ECE centres⁸⁷. The first of these 12 standards is “staffing,” which stipulates the need for an ECE centre's staff to have or acquire the “characteristics, training, knowledge, skills, and attitude to help children achieve their full potential⁸⁸.” In addition to establishing clear standards for staff qualifications, Jamaica's approach includes providing financial and logistical support to ECE practitioners to help them attain and maintain the necessary qualifications. Interviewees noted that this support system ensures that teachers have the resources and assistance they need to meet these standards successfully, though acknowledged the differences in teacher demographics, as many teachers in Jamaica may be citizens.

At a high level, the system in the Cayman Islands seems comparable to Jamaica's, with CIG setting guidelines for staffing qualifications and UCCI offering an Early Childhood Diploma and an associate's degree in early childhood that align with these standards as detailed above. However, the Cayman Islands' model falls short compared to Jamaica's in terms of the accessibility of these qualifications. According to an interviewee with over a decade of experience in the Jamaican ECE sector, teachers in Jamaica receive these qualifications at no cost, while in the Cayman Islands, UCCI's degrees are only available with financial assistance to Caymanian practitioners.

Multiple local ECE experts mentioned in interviews that many non-Caymanian ECE practitioners cannot afford UCCI's qualifications due to financial constraints, making it challenging for them to meet the minimum ECE



qualification standard. Additionally, some practitioners expressed the belief that the majority of the ECE workforce in the Cayman Islands is comprised of non-Caymanians. The concern from several of the interviewees is this monetary barrier functionally puts the minimum standard for qualification out with the reach of many of the Cayman Islands' ECE professionals.

A key recommendation emerging from interviews conducted is the need to carefully balance qualification requirements for ECE professionals with the current context of the Cayman Islands.

Interviewees recognised the importance of requirements for staff to be appropriately qualified in order to strengthen quality of education, however they also cautioned against setting requirements too stringent that they become a barrier to recruitment and retention.

Unrealistic expectations, particularly given the limited upskilling opportunities available locally, pose a significant challenge for many schools. While the UCCI programme provides a valuable foundation, affordability, especially for non-Caymanian staff, remains a major concern.

“[Stringent qualification requirements] for staffing will make hiring especially difficult.”

Interview quote

Curriculum and pedagogy: Quality

A recent CIG Department of Education Services report identified that only 26% of primary school students within the Cayman Islands met the expected standard for reading, writing and mathematics in the 2022-23 academic year⁸⁹, the most recent period for which a combined score was presented. While there does not appear to be a specific data-gathering process in place within the Cayman Islands to measure the correlation between the quality of ECE provided to a child and their academic performance, several of the ECE practitioners and experts interviewed – both locally and internationally – noted that focusing on building a strong foundation in students during ECE would likely result in improved performance as they progressed through their academic life.

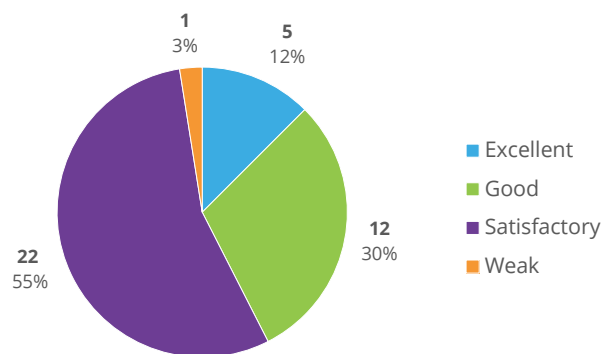
Several ECE experts went as far as to note that they believe there is a correlation between a child receiving low-quality ECE and underperformance in primary education, with another recent Department of Education Services report echoing this sentiment.⁹⁰ Furthermore, some experts stated that improved academic performance at the primary and secondary level could be seen in the Cayman Islands if there was a greater focus on children's education needs during their early years.

Within the Cayman Islands, the OES is the department responsible for the inspection of schools and ECE. The remit of the OES is to promote the raising of standards of achievement in education centres through rigorous, independent inspections.

To this end, OES notes that the minimum standard for a centre should be “good”⁹¹. Of the 43 ECE centres, 40 ECE centres have inspection reports published by the OES. Based on the OES centre reports released as of February 2025, the Cayman Islands has five ‘excellent’ centres, 12 ‘good’ centres, 22 ‘satisfactory’ centres, and one ‘weak’ centre. Given the OES requirement, the majority of ECE centres within the Cayman Islands are therefore falling below the quality target⁹². Historical data shows that 14 centres are improving, 24 centres are maintaining their status, and two centres are declining 30. Despite the concern for the two declining centres, the overall trend is positive.

Figure 7 – The most recent (as of February 2025) ratings for ECE centres or schools, as released by the OES.

ECE Centre Ratings per the OES (as of February 2025)





As detailed elsewhere in this report, a disparity in the quality of education was noted when comparing the cost of ECE centres, notwithstanding the positive trend overall. Based on available data, the quality of education appears closely correlated to the fees charged, with ‘excellent’ private ECE centres in the Cayman Islands averaging KYD 1,600 monthly, while ‘good’, ‘satisfactory’, and ‘weak’ ECE centres cost on average around KYD 1,237, KYD 886, and KYD 600 respectively^V per month. This disparity suggests a cost barrier to accessing high-quality early childhood education. Furthermore, this study highlighted a noticeable gap in quality between public and private ECE centres, as no government school received an excellent rating, and only two achieved a good rating - Cayman Brac Day Care Centre and, more recently, Edna M. Moyle Primary School^{93,94}.

“Higher-cost schools have higher-paid staff and more expensive resources, which helps them have a higher rating.”

Interview quote

To address the inconsistent quality of ECE centres, local government stakeholders may wish to consider some, or all, of the proposed suggestions collected from interviews for how the accessibility and affordability of high-quality ECE for all families can be prioritised:

Increase the size and equity of the public ECE system:

Several interview participants suggested that the government should support the establishment of a public ECE system beyond the existing Reception classes (which is not mandatory and accessible only to Caymanian children aged four and older⁹⁵), ensuring that every district has at least one government ECE centre.

Notably, the Cayman Brac Day Care Centre was highlighted by several ECE experts or practitioners as an example of a successful and high-quality public ECE centre. The establishment of free, high-quality, government ECE centres in every district would have the potential to increase access to quality ECE for many families by providing improved enrolment opportunities in every district.

Increase or redirect funding directly to existing ECE centres:

Providing more financial support to existing public and private ECE centres was suggested as a key way to help improve the quality of ECE within the Cayman Islands. Many of the ECE practitioners or experts interviewed suggested that the provision of funding directly to the schools, rather than just to the families via ECAP, would allow ECE centres to invest in more qualified, higher quality teaching staff as well as improved resources, which would lead to an improved quality of ECE provision. Given potential constraints within the public budget, funding may need to be redirected from other ministries or planned government projects, depending on priorities within the public system.

^V: These figures were sourced directly from the websites of all OES registered ECE centres.

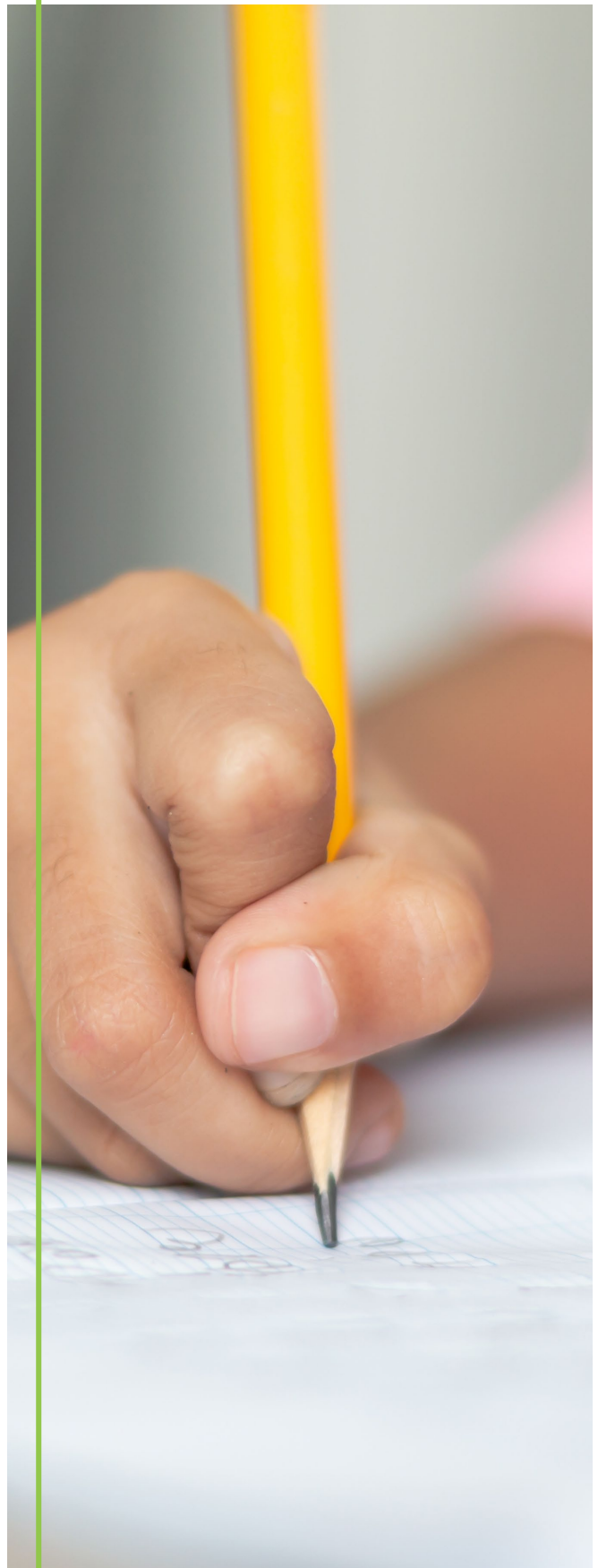
Allow for private sector-led ECE with enhanced subsidised support for low-income families:

Alternatively, one international expert suggested, given the current ECE landscape is one heavily driven by the private sector, converting all centres to private institutions may reduce the associated costs of running public centres. Government savings may then be redirected through offers of additional subsidies or vouchers to assist Caymanian families in enrolling their children in private centres. This approach has been particularly successful in Australia, with Queensland serving as a comparative state for this study. In Australia, ECE and care are primarily delivered by private providers and services within the states and territories and are subsidised by the Australian Government⁹⁶. Services provided by private institutions in Queensland specifically account for 99% of children aged four and under⁹⁷.

These measures are particularly important in an environment of increasing living costs, as emphasised by stakeholders during discussions.

“While the Government is helping the children, they also need to support the [ECE centres]. The [centres] need to be able to pay more to keep good staff. [We need] more help with training and salaries, [among other aspects].”

Interview quote



Curriculum and pedagogy: Curriculum

Internationally, ECE is often guided by a holistic and play-based curriculum that emphasises the overall development of young children. Most countries recognise the significance of providing a balanced approach to learning that incorporates both structured and unstructured activities. Play-based learning forms the cornerstone of these curricula, as it allows children to explore, experiment, and learn through hands-on experiences and social interactions. This approach highlights the importance of nurturing creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills in young learners. Moreover, international ECE curricula typically encompass a wide range of developmental areas, including cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and language development. The balanced approach values both child-directed exploration and adult-guided instruction, creating a dynamic educational environment for young children.

Within the Cayman Islands, the existing ECE framework, published by CIG, sets standards, guidelines, and best practices for high-quality education and care of young children. This framework emphasises holistic development, inclusive environments, and professional development for educators. It also serves as a regulatory tool to ensure compliance with quality standards. The ECE framework is guided by both leading research and international better practice and focuses on encouraging a holistic and play-based approach. However, the framework itself is not prescriptive, allowing for ECE centres to utilise additional curricula and programmes that are available to them. This non-prescriptive approach to the framework is something that was noted by the OES as being intentional, as the belief is that every school has a unique set of circumstances and a general, prescriptive framework would fail to capture the nuanced approach required.

Many of the practitioners interviewed suggested that the shift in curriculum to a more holistic approach and a greater emphasis on play-based exploratory learning has been positive, although met with some resistance from

some parents and teachers. Interviewees believed this was attributable to the historic and cultural background of the Cayman Islands' population, with some parents or teachers still believing that traditional education focused on desk-based learning is the most beneficial option for children. Some interviewees suggest that, like other countries with similar histories and cultural beliefs, ECE in the Cayman Islands is sometimes focused on grades rather than emotional development, leading to a mismatch between what children need and what they are provided. Multiple interviewees noted a greater need for support in addressing parent and teacher misunderstanding with respect to education techniques, through workshops or similar awareness building exercises.

“A more prescriptive curriculum will relieve the pressure from the teachers who don’t have to start everything from scratch.”

Interview quote



Interviews conducted with ECE practitioners suggest mixed sentiment on the sufficiency of the guidance provided within the ECE framework. It was also evident, based on interviews, that the ECE framework is not used to the same extent by every school. Private centres with higher costs often reported supplementing the framework with other curricula that demanded a greater level of resources than lower-cost centres could regularly afford. These higher cost centres had positive views on the more relaxed approach of the framework, which they perceived as having less “red tape”, and which allows centres the freedom to teach as they please.

However, other centres indicated that they would benefit from a more prescriptive approach being employed by the Government. Such an approach – for example, issuing monthly lesson themes – may be useful in assisting teachers to develop teaching plans that would otherwise be required to be designed from scratch. Interviewees suggested that these may be stored centrally and available online to each centre. Similar practice has been adopted in Jamaica, for example, in which the Jamaican Government’s Early Childhood Commission provides online access to a ‘Learning Through Play Curricula’⁹⁸. Some interviewees indicated that, ultimately, this would likely relieve the pressure on teachers and allow for more focus to be on the critical education of children.

“Regarding play-based learning, there is some friction with some parents who want the ABC’s and 123’s. There is also pushback from teachers too; there are some teachers who are not wanting to move to the ‘new wave’.”

Interview quote



Curriculum and pedagogy: Special Education Needs (SEN)

Interviewees also noted that the presence of children with SEN in ECE centres has a profound impact on the learning environment, as well as educational experiences of all students. Recent research has shown that the number of students with SEN has increased in countries such as the USA and United Kingdom^{99,100}, with anecdotal evidence provided by ECE practitioners interviewed that the same is also true in the Cayman Islands. Interviewees noted that this has been especially pronounced in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. Many local practitioners noted a change in culture in terms of greater parental willingness to accept a SEN diagnosis. Interviewees indicated that the perceived stigma and shame had been significantly reduced over the past decade through greater levels of awareness and advocacy.

Interviews conducted with practitioners highlighted greater Government intervention and support for SEN, including the provision of resources with SEN-aligned curricula, as well as the Early Intervention Programme, which have helped teachers to better understand how to meet the needs of children with SEN.

Several interviews with stakeholders identified the need for even greater support for SEN students within ECE centres. Most interviewees indicated many centres are taking in SEN students despite not being properly equipped to address the growing number of students with SEN, nor do the teachers have the time to adequately assist students. Interviewees suggested a need for improvement in the government's current SEN infrastructure, with particular emphasis on the SENCO system.

Interviewees indicated that all ECE centres are required to have either a designated SENCO, which is an individual with a SEN-specific qualification, or a "Designated Lead on SEN", which can be any staff member, regardless of whether they are a teacher or have any previous knowledge or qualification in SEN.

Based on the interviews conducted, there appeared to be a lack of understanding within the ECE community as to the difference between the two designations, with several interviewees suggesting most practitioners use the two terms interchangeably.

Furthermore, it was noted that, in some instances, the designated SENCO or designated lead for SEN for certain ECE centres was a non-teaching support staff member, such as the receptionist. ECE practitioners indicated that many schools are unable to hire qualified SENCOs, resulting in inadequate support for children with SEN. Government intervention may play a role in improving support. Interviewees noted that potential remedies may be include the provision of greater support to individual centres in the form of training, subsidising salaries for qualified SENCOs, and/or the establishment of government-led ECE centres specifically for SEN children. Additionally, the government could fund resources to service centres to better support SEN or provide targeted individual support to children, similar to programmes that are managed by the United Kingdom¹⁰¹ and USA¹⁰² governments.





“Every school needs a designated SENCO that can do the job. At present, the designated SENCO is not able to do enough, they often have other roles, like being a receptionist.”

Interview quote

SEN Identification

Interviewees also noted that the presence of children with SEN in ECE centres has a profound impact on the learning environment, as well as educational experiences of all students. Recent research has shown that the number of students with SEN has increased in countries such as the USA and United Kingdom^{23,24}, with anecdotal evidence provided by ECE practitioners interviewed that the same is also true in the Cayman Islands.

Interviewees agreed that there was a need to better identify early signs of developmental or SEN issues within ECE centres. While one interviewee acknowledged that the Cayman Islands is ahead of other jurisdictions in terms of SEN identification, delayed identification was cited by other interviewees as a leading cause of future challenges in skill development and reaching milestones at the appropriate stages.

It was also noted by an interviewee that SEN assessments are very costly, making it difficult for low-income families to afford the assessments.

“Cayman has a strong tradition of identifying SEN early, a strength for Cayman when compared to other regional countries.”

Interview quote

Interviews proposed the need for change in the structure of SEN identification within the Cayman Islands, which is reliant on a diagnosis by CIG’s Early Intervention Programme (EIP). One practitioner interviewed noted that the EIP team is tightly resourced and often follows a calendar aligned with the school year. This results in pauses in SEN evaluations and identification over the summer and Christmas holidays, creating a backlog of children waiting to be assessed for potential SEN. Another interviewee highlighted the challenge posed by the growing population, as it hinders the EIP team’s ability to maintain the same level of support for SEN children. Other interviewees suggested an overhauled national approach, in which SEN is viewed through a health lens, which they suggested may entail establishing an ECE clinic within the Cayman Islands Health Services Authority (HSA) to allow the HSA to screen children for SEN via health checks, reducing the strain on the EIP team and leading to more timely diagnosis and intervention. This echoes other sentiment on the need for an integrated approach to education and health more broadly.

Key takeaways



Overall, there are many consistencies with ECE in the Cayman Islands and comparator jurisdictions or OECD averages. At the same time, it is apparent that challenges present in comparator jurisdictions are likewise present – and in many instances, more pronounced – in the Cayman Islands, perhaps in part due to the Cayman Islands’ somewhat unique socioeconomic demographics.

Notable improvements have been made in recent years in availability and access, as well as curriculum and pedagogy. On the availability and access side, Government Nurseries in two districts now provide enhanced access to Caymanian children in those locations, while an increase in ECAP funding was likewise well-received by interviewees.

From a curriculum and pedagogy perspective, OES inspection results are trending positively, and many centres appear to have embraced a play-based approach to ECE.

Analysis performed indicates a correlation between ECE centre quality and cost, which interviewees expressed they believe may widen inequalities and ultimately limit opportunities for children from lower or even middle-income families. Beyond cost, challenges to access and availability were also noted in relation to the geographical distribution of centres. This is particularly true in Bodden Town, which has seen significant population growth in recent years. Regardless of district or cost, there also appears to be greater demand for ECE than supply within the Cayman Islands, given the extended waitlists cited by interviewees. Interviews undertaken as part of this analysis indicate that additional ECE centres at a lower cost and/or with greater subsidies may help to remedy these challenges.



Greater collaboration or integration of stakeholders within education, health, and family or social services was also encouraged by interviewees and experts alike, given the complementary role these agencies play in early childhood development. This may likewise most significantly benefit the Cayman Islands' most vulnerable children and families.

From a centre-specific perspective, challenges were noted in relation to the training and retention of ECE practitioners. Qualification requirements were raised as a particular concern of ECE centres, given the limited availability of low-cost qualification options for non-Caymanian practitioners, which interviewees noted represent the majority.

Emphasis was also placed on uniform curriculum standards to help provide all children with consistent education, as well as a growing focus on improving social and emotional development. Additionally, enhanced training, increased resources, and proactive identification measures within ECE were highlighted in interviews as critical to aid centres with supporting growing SEN.

Given the high-cost environment of the Cayman Islands, many challenges appear directly correlated to funding. Resourcing appears to be the most significant challenge for the Cayman Islands versus its comparators, as public spending on ECE appears to represent approximately 1%^{103,104} of the Cayman Islands' annual education budget; on average, comparators appear to spend 3% to 6%^{105,106,107,108} of their annual education budgets on ECE, with some comparators appearing to spend significantly more.

Key terms

Availability	The presence and adequacy of formalised educational institutions, such as preschools and daycare centres, within the country to meet the needs of young children.
Accessibility	The ease of reaching and utilising ECE facilities, considering aspects like geographical proximity, transportation options, and accommodations for children with special needs.
Affordability	The cost of accessing ECE services in relation to the financial capacities of families, considering tuition fees, associated expenses, subsidies, financial aid programmes, and other factors.
Capacity	The number of students for whom an ECE centre or school can provide.
Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework (CIEYCF)	A tool for practitioners to use to develop programmes that meet the needs of the infants, toddlers, and young children in their care.
ECE Centre	A school-based or otherwise institutionalised care and learning for a group of young children ¹⁰⁹ . In this report, an ECE centre is defined as school-based care for children aged six weeks to five years old.
Early Intervention Programme (EIP)	A programme operated by CIG that provides free treatment for Caymanian and expatriate children from birth to age five who might experience various developmental delays ¹¹⁰ .
Early Childhood Education (ECE)	Early childhood education provides learning and educational activities with a holistic approach to support children's early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and introduce young children to organised instruction outside of the family context to develop some of the skills needed for academic readiness and to prepare them for entry into primary education ¹¹¹ .
Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Unit	A unit established by the Cayman Islands Ministry of Education with the goal of ensuring all children have access to high-quality early childhood care and education.
Early Childhood Assistance Programme (ECAP)	Funding to assist children who are three years old before September 1 of the academic year with access to attendance at registered early childhood provision.
Economics and Statistics Office (ESO)	The Cayman Islands' Economics and Statistics Office (ESO) is a department of the Government of the Cayman Islands and is made up of two technically independent units: the statistics unit and the economics unit ¹¹² .
Enrolment	Individuals officially registered in a given education programme, or stage or module thereof, regardless of age ¹¹³ .
Government school	A school principally funded, and managed, by the Government.
Health Services Authority (HSA)	Healthcare organisation in the Cayman Islands.
KYD	Cayman Islands Dollar. The official currency of the Cayman Islands, abbreviated as KYD.
Nursery	Recently introduced by the Cayman Islands Government in two public schools, nurseries accept Caymanian children between three and four years of age.

Key terms

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	A forum and knowledge hub for data, analysis and best practices in public policy.
Office of Education Standards (OES)	The Office of Education Standards is the department responsible for the inspection of schools and Early Childhood Care and Education Centres in the Cayman Islands.
Play-based learning	A learning approach that provides opportunities for children to actively and imaginatively engage with people, objects and the environment ¹¹⁴ .
Private school	A school wholly funded and managed from resources other than those of the Government.
Quality of Education	The standard of education provided by early childhood centres, including curriculum, staff qualifications, facilities, resources, and overall compliance with educational standards and best practices.
Reception	This term refers to the first year of formal schooling for children, typically aged between four and five years old. In Government schools within the Cayman Islands, students must be four years old for enrolment. Enrolment is only available to Caymanian children, for which Reception is free of cost.
Socioeconomic demographics	The statistical characterisation of a population based on a combination of social and economic factors. These typically includes attributes such as income level, education level, occupation, employment status, and social class, among others.
Special Education Needs (SEN)	Special education needs: an expression used to refer to special needs (the needs of people with particular disabilities or problems) relating to education ¹¹⁵ .
Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO)	An individual with responsibility for the children in a school who have special needs (i.e., who need special help because of a learning difficulty, illness, or condition that makes it difficult for them to learn in the way that other people do or do the things that other people do) ¹¹⁶ .
Student-teaching staff ratio	The ratio of children to teaching staff, obtained by dividing the number of full-time equivalent children at a given level of education by the number of full-time equivalent “teachers” at that level and in similar types of institutions. In the context of this report, student-teacher ratios include what is classified as assistant teachers per OES.
The Cayman Islands Government (CIG)	The central authority responsible for the governance and administration of the Cayman Islands.
Underserved	Not provided with enough help or services to meet needs.
University College of the Cayman Islands (UCCI)	A tertiary educational institution in the Cayman Islands.
United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)	United Nations agency for children ¹¹⁷ .

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