



Department  
for Education

## Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak – summary of returns to 28 May

### Headline facts and figures

- Last week – 25 to 29 May - would usually have been half term in most settings. As a result, more settings were closed and attendance was lower in those that remained open compared to previous weeks.
- The response rate to the survey of education settings was also lower – 33% on 28 May compared to 70% typically. Attendance data in this release is adjusted to account for non-response and a lower response rate can impact the accuracy of these adjustments. See [Methodology](#) for further detail.
- Last week, the attendance rate amongst pupils in education settings in England was lower than previous weeks. We estimate 1.2% of pupils were in attendance on Thursday 28 May compared to 2.6% on Thursday 21 May.
- Approximately 52% of settings were open on 28 May, a decrease from 80% on 21 May.
- The number of vulnerable children attending an education setting was approximately 33,000 on 28 May, down from 75,000 on 21 May.
- It was estimated that on 28 May, 80,000 children were attending early years settings – about 5% of the number of children who usually attend in term time.

## Contents

Background .....	3
Non-response adjustment.....	4
Summary of data .....	5
Open settings and overall attendance.....	5
Reason for attendance.....	5
Setting types .....	6
Early years settings.....	7
Methodology .....	10
Education settings survey .....	10
Local authority early years survey.....	13
Useful links.....	14

## Background

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the government asked education and childcare settings to close from Friday 20 March 2020 to all children except those of critical workers and those classified as vulnerable.

### Education settings survey

To help understand the impact of this decision, the Department for Education (DfE) established a survey of education settings in England. Settings are asked to report information to DfE each day, including the number of children and staff in attendance if they are open and when they plan to reopen if they are closed.

The response rate to the education settings survey was lower than usual on Friday 1 May. This was because some settings were unable to return data due to technical issues with DfE sign-in, the online system used by education settings to submit attendance data. Response rates on Wednesday 13 and Friday 15 were also slightly lower than usual due to technical issues in accessing the form.

Data to Friday 29 May is available in the accompanying data tables. The narrative in this document focuses on Thursday 28 May to maintain comparability.

### Local authority early years survey

From 6 April 2020, DfE asked local authorities (LAs) to regularly report similar information for childcare settings. The focus of this survey was narrowed to early years settings from 16 April.

### Data coverage

This data release includes data for education settings from 23 March to 29 May and early years settings from 16 April to 28 May. The data will continue to be published on a weekly basis every Tuesday.

# Non-response adjustment

## Education settings survey

The response rate for the education settings survey has been between 30% and 76%, aside from the four bank holidays where response rate was lower, and 1 May when the response rate was affected by technical issues. The response rate, excluding the Easter break and half term, has been stable at around 70%.

Attendance figures in this release are adjusted to account for settings who do not respond to the survey.

The methodology used to make this adjustment was revised after the first full week of reporting. The methodology used between 23 and 27 March 2020 assumed that settings that did not respond were as likely to be open as those that did. Following review of the first week's response patterns, analysts developed a new methodology that no longer made this assumption. Therefore, non-response is accounted for differently from 30 March onwards. See the [Methodology](#) section for further detail about both methodologies.

Figures for 27 March have been calculated using both approaches to demonstrate the impact of this change in methodology (see the [Methodology](#) section). The estimate of the proportion of open settings was most impacted by this change in methodology. More granular information, such as attendance rates of pupils and teachers, saw only minor changes.

The week 25 to 29 May would usually have been half term for many settings and, as seen during the Easter break, the response rate was lower than usual. An average of 29% of settings responded across week, compared to 70% typically. A lower response rate can reduce the accuracy of adjustments for non-response. See the [Methodology](#) section for further detail.

## Local authority early years survey

For the local authority early years survey, figures for the number of settings open and closed and the number of children attending for those LAs which did not respond were estimated based on the proportions reported by LAs which did respond. The national estimate comprises reported figures from LAs which did respond combined with these estimates (see the [Methodology](#) section).

## Summary of data

### Open settings and overall attendance

8,100 education settings provided a response to the survey on 28 May. This represents 33% of all settings. This is lower than the typical response rate of around 70%, which likely reflects that last week would usually have been half term for most settings. As a result, more settings were closed and attendance was lower in those that remained open compared to previous weeks.

The following key findings are adjusted for non-response - note that a lower response rate can impact the accuracy of these adjustments (see [Methodology](#)):

- We estimate 52% of settings were open on 28 May - around 12,800 settings.
- Approximately 115,000 children attended an education setting on 28 May, representing 1.2% of pupils who normally attend. This is a decrease from 21 May, when around 244,000 (2.6%) were in attendance.

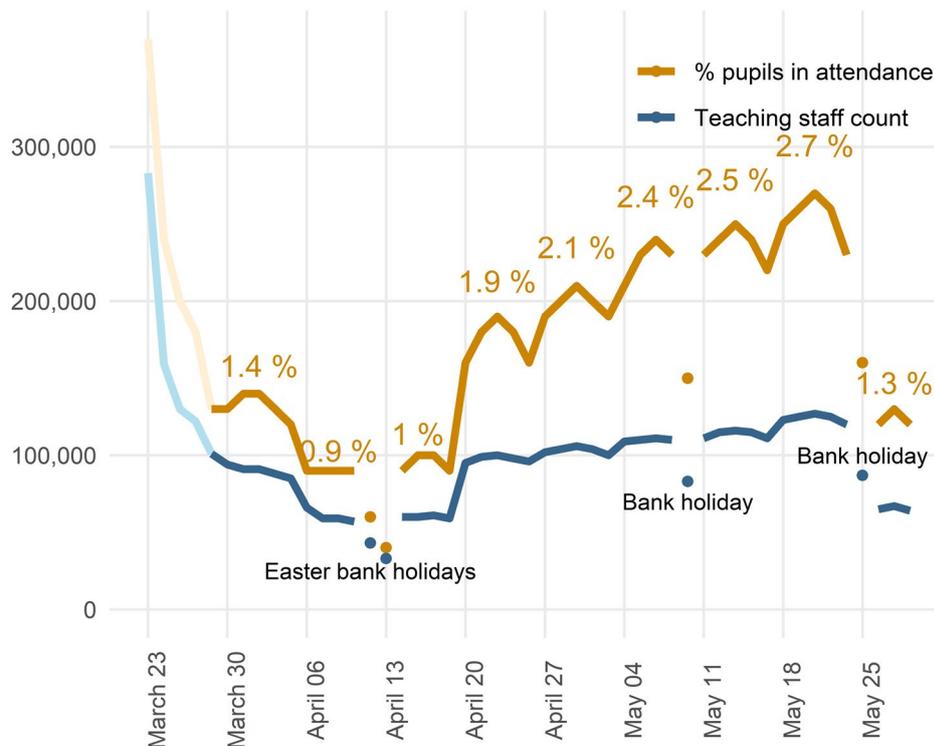


Chart 1: Attendance of pupils and teaching staff in education settings

### Reason for attendance

- 33,000 of the children in attendance on 28 May were classed by settings as vulnerable, down from 75,000 on 21 May. We estimate this represents 7% of all

children and young people classified as 'Children in Need' or who have an Education, Health and Care Plan, down from 15% on 21 May.<sup>1</sup>

- 84,000 of the children in attendance on 28 May were classed by schools as children of critical workers, down from 173,000 on 21 May. We estimate that this represents 3% of all children of critical workers, down 6% on 21 May.

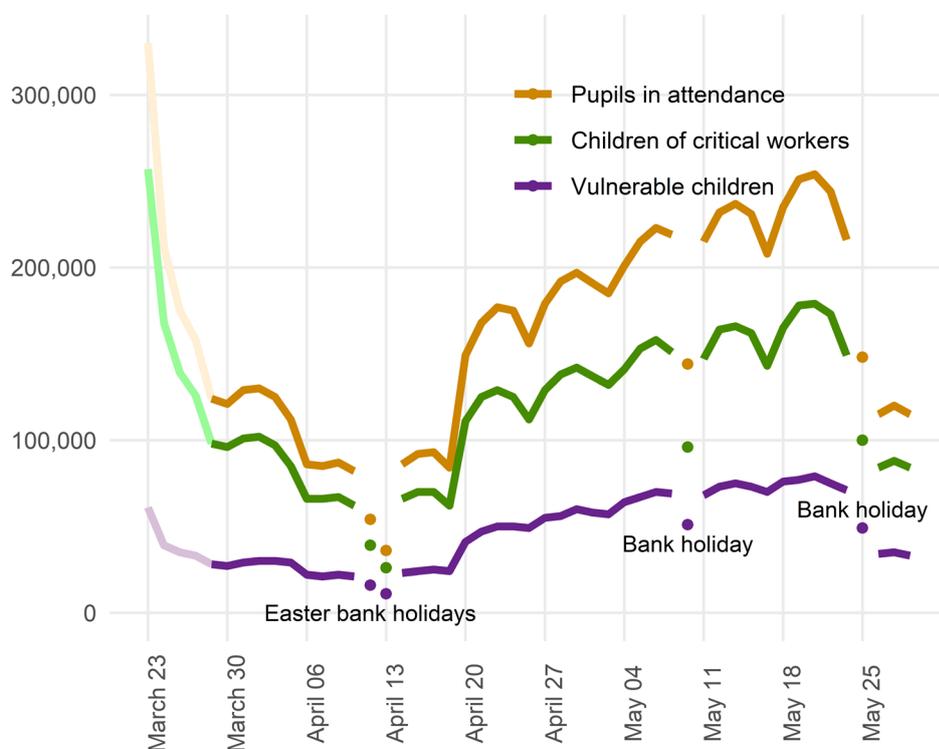


Chart 2: Attendance of children classed as vulnerable and children of critical workers in education settings

- These children were cared for by 64,000 teaching staff and 48,000 non-teaching staff. The number of teachers in attendance decreased compared to 21 May, when 125,000 were in attendance.

## Setting types

- Attendance in special schools (incl. residential special schools) was higher than overall attendance on 28 May, at around 3% compared to 1% overall.

<sup>1</sup> This is an estimate based on the 2019 Children in Need census and January 2019 school census and we are working with education settings and local authorities to improve our understanding of the total number of vulnerable children for whom continued attendance at education settings would be beneficial and appropriate. This is in recognition of the fact that attendance may not be appropriate for some children, including because of health considerations and risks, and that many children with EHC plans may be able to have their needs met safely in the home environment. Full guidance on the definition of vulnerable children and options for continued attendance can be found [here](#).

- Attendance in alternative provision (AP) settings was also higher than overall attendance on 28 May, at between 2-4%.<sup>2</sup>
- Attendance at further education settings was low, reflecting the age group of the students.
- Attendance in primary settings was 2%, higher than attendance in secondary settings, at <0.5%.

Table 1: Response rate, % open and % attendance on 28 May by setting type.<sup>3</sup>

Setting type	Response rate	Open	Pupil attendance
State-funded nursery	21%	41%	3%
State-funded primary	36%	53%	2%
State-funded secondary	40%	60%	<0.5%
Special	25%	48%	3%
Independent school	10%	40%	1%
Alternative provision	17%	40%	2-4%
Further education <sup>4</sup>	15%	28%	<0.5%
Special post 16 institution	21%	49%	20%
Total	33%	52%	1%

## Early years settings

- The response rate to the local authority early years survey was 89%, with 134 out of 151 LAs submitting data by 6pm on 28 May.
- An estimated 24,000 settings are open. This represents 35% of all settings, with 57% closed and 8% unknown.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A range is given to better communicate the uncertainty of attendance in AP settings. Pupils on the roll at these settings will often be enrolled in other settings as well. The upper value uses the total number of pupils who are solely or mainly registered in AP settings as the denominator, while the lower value also includes pupils with subsidiary registration in the denominator.

<sup>3</sup> The following should be noted when considering the setting type breakdowns:

- The response rate varies across setting types and so some are more sensitive to the non-response methodology than others.
- Whilst the methodology for estimating non-response does make some consideration of type of setting (e.g. special schools are assumed the special school attendance rather than an overall attendance rate), the proportion of non-responders who are assumed open is the same across all establishment types. Anecdotally we expect this might not hold true in practice, for example, closed independent schools may be less likely to return data. See the [Methodology](#) section for further information on the sensitivity of this assumption.

<sup>4</sup> Not all further education (FE) settings are included in the data collection. The education settings survey includes data from general FE colleges, sixth form colleges and specialist FE colleges.

<sup>5</sup> Due to rounding, these do not always sum to 100%.

- The volume and proportions of early years childcare settings which are closed has remained broadly stable between 16 April and 28 May. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of early years settings identified as open during this time period, and a corresponding decrease in those with unknown status.

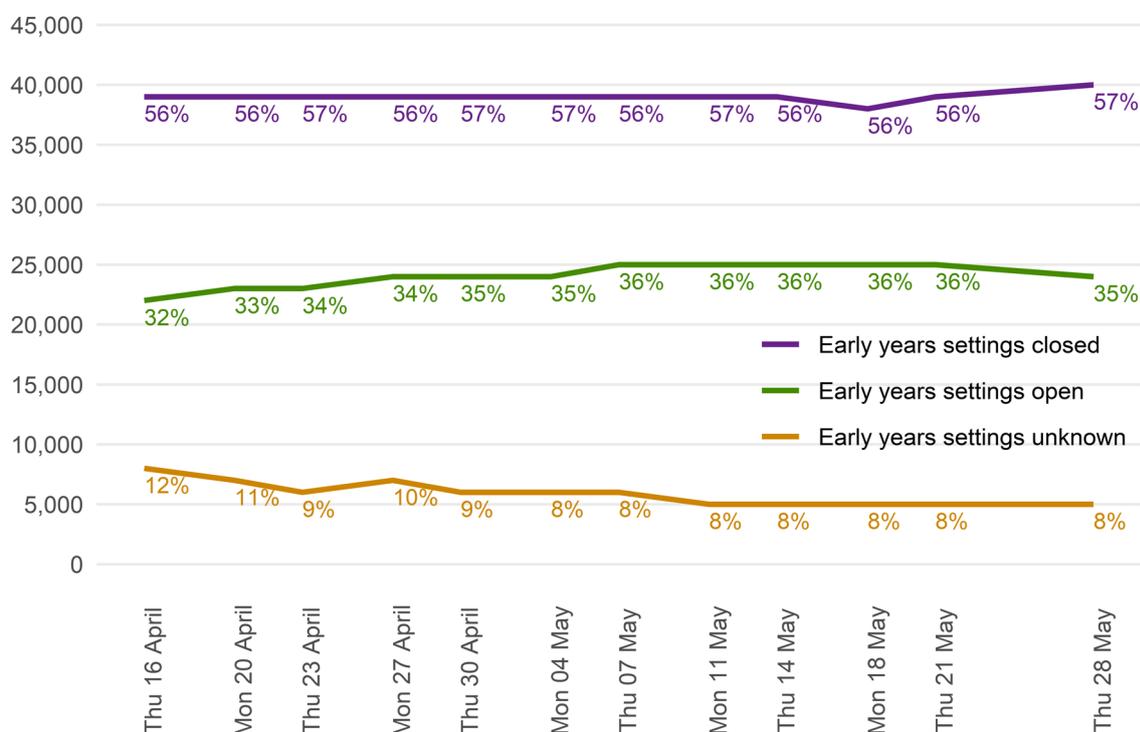


Chart 3: Status of early years settings<sup>6</sup>

- We estimate 80,000 children were attending early years settings on 28 May, a slight decrease from 88,000 on 21 May. This represents approximately 5% of the number of children who usually attend in term time<sup>7</sup>.
- This decrease is likely to have been because last week was half term, and some settings, particularly those that are school-based, will have been closed. This may also have reduced demand for childcare.
- The 80,000 children attending consists of an estimated 71,000 children of critical workers and 9,000 who are vulnerable children. We estimate this represents approximately 7% of children of critical workers<sup>8</sup> aged 0 to 4 year olds, and 9% of 0 to 4 year olds classified as 'Children in Need' or who have an Education, Health and Care Plan.<sup>9</sup>
- The number of children of critical workers and vulnerable children attending an early years setting both decreased between 21 May and 28 May. There was a larger relative decrease in attendance among vulnerable children than children

<sup>6</sup> There was no collection on Monday 25 May due to it being a bank holiday.

<sup>7</sup> The number of children in term time was estimated using outputs from the [Childcare and early years survey of parents: 2019](#) and [ONS National Population Projections: 2018 based](#).

<sup>8</sup> Based on DfE analysis of Labour Force Survey data.

<sup>9</sup> 0 to 4 year olds excluding those in Reception classes. See footnote 1 and methodology section regarding vulnerable children.

of critical workers. This is possibly the result of proportionately more vulnerable children attending school-based settings and this being impacted by half term closures.

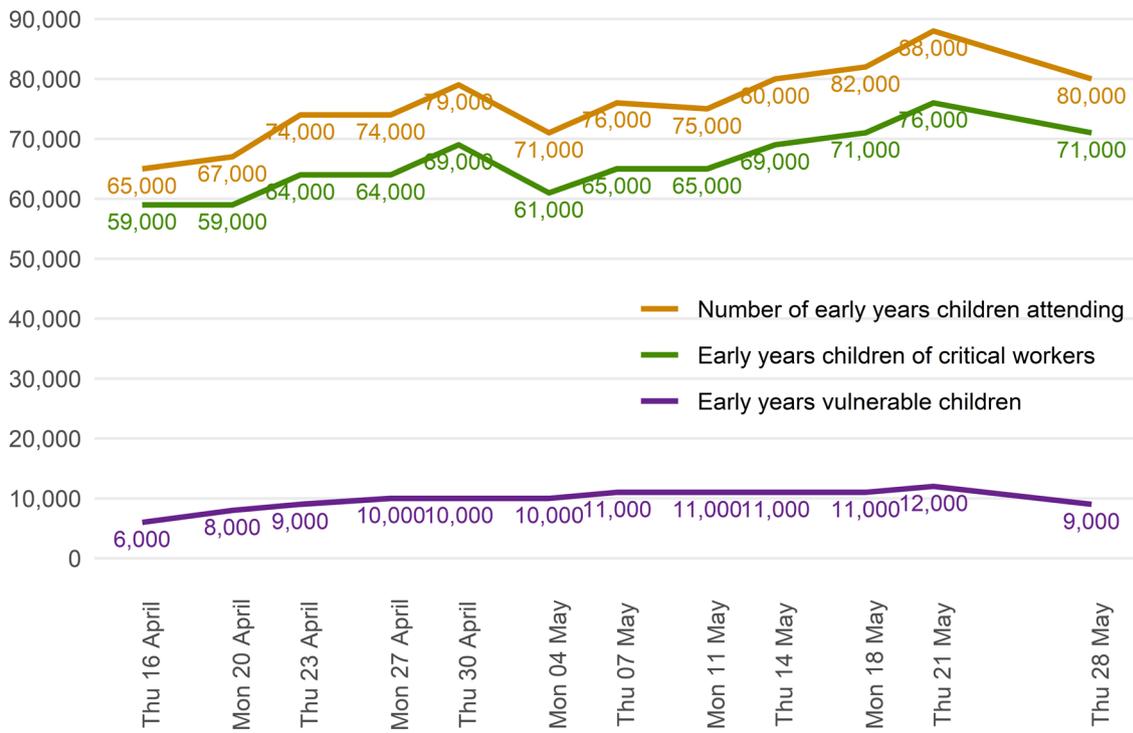


Chart 4: Attendance of children of critical workers and children classed as vulnerable in early years settings<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> There was no collection on Monday 25 May due to it being a bank holiday.

## Methodology

These statistics have been produced quickly in response to developing world events. The Office for Statistics Regulation, on behalf of the UK Statistics Authority, has reviewed them against several key aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics and regards them as consistent with the Code's pillars of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value.

### Education settings survey

Details of the data requested and how it is collected is available at the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance recording for education settings](#) webpage. The following education settings were asked to complete the form:

- academies (including free schools and studio schools)
- local authority maintained schools
- local authority nursery schools
- independent schools
- non-maintained special schools
- pupil referral units
- university technical colleges
- FE colleges and sixth form colleges
- special post-16 institutions or specialist colleges

### Validation of submitted data

There are currently no automatic validations on the data submitted by settings. However, checks are carried out to ensure that no setting is double counted (if they submit data more than once per day the latest submission is used). Manual checks are applied to the data during data processing. Comparisons are made to other reported data and information obtained by discussions with schools and local authorities to provide reassurance that the data is a fair reflection of the national picture.

### Response rate and non-response methodology

The response rate has been between 30% to 76%, aside from the four bank holidays where response rate was closer to 20% and on 1 May when the response rate was affected by technical issues. Response rates on 13 and 15 May were also slightly lower than usual due to technical issues in accessing the survey.

In order to get a full national picture, a grossing methodology was devised. During the first week (Monday 23 March to Friday 27 March), it was assumed that non-responding settings were as likely to be open or closed as those that provided a return. After a full week of returns, we analysed return patterns and developed a new methodology as follows:

- Any setting reporting to be open or closed on the day of collection is recorded as such.
- Settings also report whether they plan to be open the next day. If they have not provided a return on the day of collection, we consider their most recent return:
  - If these settings had reported that they planned to close, they are assumed to be closed.
  - If these settings' most recent return was the previous day and they reported that they planned to open, it is assumed they have remained open.
  - If these settings most recent return was prior to the previous day and they reported that they planned to open, it is assumed that 50% have remained open.
- For settings that have never responded, it is assumed 50% have remained open.
- Attendance rates are calculated for each individual setting type and use 2019/20 census returns to calculate proportions of all pupils on roll. This is likely to over-estimate attendance in cases where settings are caring for pupils from other settings. This practice may have increased during the Easter break. Analysis of returns suggested the likely effect of this was less than 0.1%.
- When calculating attendance rates for non-responding settings that are assumed open, similar rates are assumed as responding open settings.

The assumption of 50% having remained open was arrived at by choosing a random sample of 50 settings and determining that approximately half had closed via school websites and local authority announcements. Adjusting this assumption by  $\pm 10\%$  changes the estimated open settings by around 1%, whilst it has a negligible effect on the low attendance rate. Additional assumption checking was carried out to better understand the impact of varying the 50% assumption for each setting type. Applying a 10% change to each setting type changes the estimated open rates by between 0 and 3 percentage points, with independent schools most impacted. The impact on estimated attendance rates by setting type was negligible.

The main difference this methodology change made was to better understand the proportion of settings that were open. We also improved the denominator used for further education colleges, this has driven the majority of the decrease in attendance rate. More granular information, such as attendance rates of pupils and teachers saw only minor changes (see table below).

Table 2. Comparison of figures on Friday 27 March using the previous and revised methodologies.

	<b>Previous methodology</b>	<b>Revised methodology</b>
Number of open establishments	23,700	20,000
Proportion of open establishments	96%	81%
Number of pupils attending	140,000	124,000
Proportion of pupils attending	1.6%	1.3%

	Previous methodology	Revised methodology
Teaching Staff	115,000	101,000
Support Staff	92,000	80,000

The week 25 to 29 May would usually have been half term for many settings and the response rate was lower than usual. Although there was also a decrease between 6 and 14 April (Easter break for most schools), the response rate was on average 20 percentage points lower in half term week than during the Easter break period. There are several reasons why a setting might not respond during a holiday – for example, the setting could be closed or they could be open but the person who normally completes the survey is not working.

A lower response rate can reduce the accuracy of the adjustments for non-response. As set out above, whether a non-responding school is assumed to be open or closed is dependent on whether they report they plan to be open the next day on their most recent return. The estimates for 25 to 29 May appear higher than expected given the response rate. We suspect that some settings may be responding to this question in respect to the next working day after a holiday.

To assess the impact of this, we recalculated headline figures for 25 and 26 May (response rates 12% and 36% respectively) as follows:

- 1) Assume settings meeting the following criteria were closed on 25 May:
  - responded on Thursday 21 and Friday 22 May that they were open;
  - reported on Friday 22 May that they would be open the next working day; and
  - did not respond on Monday 25 May.

Our current non-response methodology would assume these settings were all open.
- 2) Assume settings meeting the following criteria were closed on 26 May:
  - responded on Thursday 21 and Friday 22 May that they were open;
  - reported on Friday 22 May that they would be open the next working day; and
  - did not respond on Monday 25 or Tuesday 26 May.

Our current non-response methodology would assume that half of these settings were open.

This adjusted methodology assumes the worst case – that all settings meeting the above criteria are closed. Therefore the true figures are thought to lie between those using the current methodology and the adjusted worst-case (see Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of reported and adjusted figures for 25 and 26 May

	Monday 25 May		Tuesday 26 May	
	Current methodology	Adjusted worst case	Current methodology	Adjusted worst case
% settings open	60%	23%	52%	42%

	Monday 25 May		Tuesday 26 May	
% pupils in attendance	1.6%	0.4%	1.2%	1.0%

### Data for vulnerable children and children of critical workers

Schools are asked to provide a count of the number of children of critical workers and the number of vulnerable children. Schools are also asked to provide a breakdown of both these figures for pupils with an EHC Plan and those with a social worker. Some schools have been providing a count of critical workers with either EHC Plans or a social worker but not including these in their respective counts for vulnerable children. Therefore, our estimate of the number of vulnerable children may be an undercount. The data suggests the effect of this is c5%.

The proportion of vulnerable children in attendance is based on an estimate of the total number of pupils who are either classed as Children in Need or have an education, health and care plan. This is derived from the Children in Need and School Censuses. This is an estimate and we are working with local authorities and schools to improve our understanding of vulnerable children attending education settings in recognition that attendance may not be appropriate for some children, including because of health considerations and risks.

The proportion of children of critical workers in attendance is based on an estimate of the number of pupils who have a critical worker parent derived from the Labour Force Survey.

### Local authority early years survey

LAs are asked to complete an online survey from the DfE on provision in early years settings twice weekly (by 6pm on a Monday and Thursday). Each data point represents the most recent data submitted by an LA up until 6pm on any given day. Where no data has been submitted by an LA since Thursday 16 April then an estimate is produced.

### Validation of submitted data

Basic validity checks of LA data returns were conducted and checks were carried out to ensure that no LA was double-counted. Comparisons were made to other reported data to provide reassurance that the data is a fair reflection of the national picture.

### Response rate and non-response methodology

The response rate by LAs to the survey on Thursday 28 May at 6pm was 89%. The data returned was then “grossed up” based on either data previously submitted or data the Department for Education already holds to estimate the total numbers of open settings and children attending those settings:

- The total national numbers of early years settings, vulnerable children and children of critical workers were estimated from a combination of data including Ofsted data and DfE data, and then broken down to LA level. For LAs which have responded previously we carry forward their data submitted up to one week previously. For LAs never responding, or not responding in the past week, we estimate proxy figures for the number of settings open and closed and the

number of children attending. These estimates are based on the proportions of settings open and closed and children attending reported by LAs who did respond. A national estimate is arrived by combining the reported and estimated figures.

- Where the LA reported on fewer providers than in the DfE estimate, the providers for which no information was submitted have been assumed to be in the 'unknown' category.
- The take-up percentages are calculated using estimates of the number of providers in an LA and the estimated number of children in a childcare place in term time.
- This approach assumes no non-response bias from LAs not submitted data.
- The sum of the estimates for open and closed providers is not the total number of providers nationally, as the status of some providers is unknown.
- The estimation methodology will be refined as more data is collected.

### **Overlap between education settings and local authority early year surveys**

Because the LA survey covered school-based early years settings, there is likely to be a very small degree of overlap between the early years data collection and the schools attendance data which includes school-based nurseries. We do not have enough detailed data to assess the size of this overlap during the current Covid-19 outbreak, but for context, around a third of children who were in a funded childcare place in January 2019 were taking their place at a school-based provider. Children currently attending school-based early years settings will be counted in both collections.

### **Methodology for estimating total number of early years providers**

Following the publication on 21 April, DfE has improved its methodology for estimating the total national number of EY providers in England. This has resulted in fewer settings overall with unknown status, which has in turn decreased the percentage of settings with 'unknown' status. As a result, the percentage of open and closed settings have both increased compared with using the previous methodology. Using the previous approach, 26% settings were estimated to be open, 45% were closed and 30% unknown on 16 April. The new methodology changes these figures to 32%, 56% and 12% respectively. The number of providers estimated to be open is unaffected by this methodological change. The time series has been created using the new methodology only.

### **Useful links**

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance recording for educational settings](#)
- [Supporting vulnerable children and young people during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak - actions for educational providers and other partners](#)
- [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus outbreak](#)
- The [Prime Minister's speech](#) regarding closing education settings

- Latest published information on [school and pupil numbers](#)

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