



Department  
for Education

# **Early years school-based nursery provision operating outside of the typical model**

**Research report**

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

This report explores school-based nurseries (SBNs) operating outside of the ‘typical’ childcare model for the SBNs sector; specifically SBNs that offer provision to under-3s, out of hours, and out of term provision. The aim is to build an evidence base around the benefits and challenges of these different childcare provision models, and seeks to inform stakeholders such as local authorities about SBN delivery models and rationale for operating in these ways, as well as informing the Department for Education (DfE) about the support and guidance SBNs need to be able to offer non-typical provision.

The report uses data from the 2024 Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers (SCEYP), and findings from 22 qualitative depth interviews with SBNs. Fieldwork for the 2024 SCEYP was conducted from May to July 2024, and fieldwork for the qualitative interviews took place in May and June 2025.

For the purposes of this research, SBNs were defined as nursery provision located on a school site, and used a sample taken from a list of school-based providers that have nursery provision according to DfE's “Get Information About Schools” (GIAS) service. They include maintained nursery schools (MNSs), maintained schools with nursery provision and independent schools with nursery provision.

## Provision for under-3s among SBNs

- All of the SBNs offering provision to under-3s interviewed for this research offered places to 2-year-olds, and a small number to under 2s as well. This provision typically mirrored the provision for older children in terms of operating hours and session structure.
- Most of these SBNs had separate rooms for different age groups, though some mixed age groups during quieter sessions. Places for under-3s were generally fewer than for older children, due to higher staff:child ratios and greater care needs of younger children.
- The main reason for offering provision to under-3s was local parental demand, especially from working families and those with older siblings at the school.
- Benefits of provision for under-3s included: supporting working parents and simplifying drop-off logistics for families with older children; smooth transitions to school for children; earlier identification of and support for children from disadvantaged areas and those with SEND; and supporting continuous intake for the school.

- Staffing for under-3s provision was seen to be a challenge. The higher number of staff required increased recruitment and retention challenges. Fees charged to parents for this age group were higher, reflecting this need for additional staff.
- The main barriers stopping SBNs that do not currently offer provision for under-3s from offering it were: a lack of demand from local parents; inability to adapt the premises; and challenges recruiting staff. All of these factored into a perception from some that this provision would not be financially viable for their setting.
- As such, very few had specific plans to offer provision to under-3s in the future. If they were to, they would welcome additional guidance (on curriculum, staffing and entitlements) and additional funding.

## Out of hours provision among SBNs

- Most SBNs offering out of hours provision (before-school and/or after-school care for children) ran it between 8:00am and 5:00pm, with some extending from 7:30am to 6:00pm. The vast majority of these (88%) offered provision both before and after usual school hours, 3% offered before school hours only, and 9% after school only.
- Delivery models of out of hours provision varied: the majority ran breakfast and/or after school clubs separate from core hours, while others simply extended the regular nursery day. Breakfast and after school clubs often took place in different locations from core provision and were usually open to both nursery and school-aged children, allowing for age group mixing.
- Benefits for children of out of hours provision included access to nutritious meals (via breakfast clubs), opportunities to socialise with older children, and a quieter environment for those with SEND. Other benefits included alleviating childcare stress for parents and enabling SBNs to provide families with additional support and build stronger relationships with them. Few nurseries mentioned financial benefits from providing out of hours care.
- Despite there being enough parental demand to offer out of hours provision, most SBNs reported unfilled places in their out of hours provision, often attributing this to parental demand for this being lower than what they had capacity for. Some attempted to fill these places through marketing, while others reported they were not actively trying to fill those spaces.
- The main reason SBNs gave for offering out of hours provision was demand from working parents locally. Some SBNs offered out of hours provision to remain competitive with other providers or in response to expectations set by multi-academy trusts (MATs).

- Staffing arrangements varied; some SBNs used existing staff, while others hired additional staff, particularly for breakfast clubs. There was a variation in the qualification levels SBNs required staff to have. Recruitment for these roles was challenging due to unattractive hours and split shifts.
- The majority of SBNs charged fees for out of hours provision, usually as separate sessions from core hours, with fees covering staffing and meal costs. Fee structures varied, with some charging per session and others per hour; fees were generally lower than core provision rates.
- Few SBNs had concrete plans to expand out of hours provision, with most citing limited parental demand and financial constraints as barriers.
- For SBNs not offering out of hours provision, their main reason was low parental demand. They also felt there would be significant staffing challenges, and SBNs felt unable to charge fees high enough to cover these costs without burdening parents.
- Few of these SBNs were considering this type of provision in the future. If they were to, they said they would hope for adequate financial support from local authorities to become available. Some also highlighted the need for additional staff training related to meal provision.

## Out of term provision among SBNs

- SBNs provided out of term care either as a continuation of their usual nursery provision during school holidays or as separate holiday clubs/summer schools, the latter usually involving mixing nursery children with school-aged children. Provision was mostly available for all school holidays. Not all families took up this provision, however SBNs were not typically trying to increase take up.
- The primary reason for offering out of term provision was local demand from working parents. SBNs also noted the financial benefit of year-round income, although this was not necessarily large.
- Benefits for children included consistency of care, which was particularly beneficial for those with SEND or from disadvantaged backgrounds. Where provision involved mixing with older children, SBNs also considered this to have benefits for social skill development.
- Families benefited from having childcare available during more times of the year, especially appreciated by those without local family support.
- Out of hours provision was typically delivered by the same staff as term time provision, though proportions varied. Some used temporary staff or wider school staff for holiday clubs.
- SBNs charged the same fees for out of term provision as for term time provision.

- The main reason SBNs gave for not offering out of term provision was lack of parental demand locally. Staffing was also seen to be a barrier, as it would require changes to existing staff contracts and recruitment of additional staff.
- School site closures during holidays posed logistical challenges, including essential services and maintenance work.
- None of the SBNs not currently offering out of term provision had plans to start. As with other provision types, they expressed a need for support from local authorities if they were to do so, including guidance on expectations, staffing ratios, recruitment, and funding.

## Other non-typical provision among SBNs

- Some SBNs offered extracurricular lessons and seasonal forest schools, supported financially by their LA. These extracurricular activities, including language, P E, music, and art classes, were delivered by existing teaching staff and were seen as beneficial for nurturing children's creative skills and development.

## Profile of SBNs operating outside of the typical model

- SBNs were statistically significantly less likely than other providers to offer each of the 3 types of non-typical provision (under-3s, out of hours and out of term provision). Just over a quarter of SBNs offered provision for under-3s (27%), compared to 97% of Group Based Providers (GBPs). Just over a fifth of SBNs offered out of hours provision (22%), compared to 77% of GBPs, and only 6% of SBNs offered out of term provision, compared to 66% of GBPs.
- Out of hours provision amongst SBNs increased from 14% in 2022 to 22% in 2024, but provision for under-3s and out of term provision has remained mostly stable over the same time period. Out of hours provision amongst GBPs increased from 73% in 2022 to 77% in 2024.
- Larger SBNs were significantly more likely to offer non-typical provision; larger GBPs were also more likely to offer non-typical provision
- SBNs offering provision for under-3s were more likely to have at least one child with SEND, though there was no difference for those with a higher proportion of SEND children.
- SBNs in less deprived areas were more likely to offer out of hours and out of term provision. No difference was found for under-3s provision by deprivation. By contrast, GBPs in the most deprived areas were more likely to offer provision for under-3s and out of term provision.

- SBNs offering under-3s provision were more likely to be in the South (excluding London SBNs, who were less likely to offer provision to under-3s), which was also true for GBPs. While SBNs offering out of hours provision were less likely to be in the North, the opposite was true for GBPs (i.e. those offering were more likely to be in the North). No significant regional differences were observed for out of term provision.

## Conclusions

- Demand from working parents was the main driving factor as to whether SBNs offered non-typical provision.
- Our evidence suggests there was limited financial benefit to SBNs offering non-typical provision, however, other benefits of offering non-typical provision surrounded the children and supporting working families.
- Known recruitment and retention challenges of the early years sector become even more challenging in the context of staffing for non-typical provision.<sup>1</sup>
- In addition to staffing, there are other logistical barriers and challenges that SBNs would need to overcome to be able to offer non-typical provision.
- This perception of low financial viability means that support with funding would be desired, which SBNs typically expected should come from local authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> Findings on staff recruitment and retention challenges should be interpreted in line with findings from 2024 SCEYP about staff turnover (8% for SBNs and 16% for GBPs)

## Introduction

This report aims to explore different operating models for school-based nurseries (SBNs), with a specific focus on SBNs who operate outside of the typical model. Specifically, those offering provision to children aged under 3 years old, out of hours provision, and out of term provision.

Backed by over £400 million overall, the Department for Education's School-based Nursery programme aims to create tens of thousands of places in school-based nurseries, helping more families access funded childcare and giving children the best start in life. This research was commissioned to build evidence around the benefits of different operating models for SBNs, and seeks to inform stakeholders such as Local Authorities about SBN delivery models and rationale for operating in these ways, as well as informing the Department for Education (DfE) about the support and guidance SBNs need to be able to offer non-typical provision.

The report uses data from the 2024 Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers<sup>2</sup> and 22 qualitative interviews with school-based nurseries (SBNs). The 2024 SCEYP was conducted between May and July 2024. Fieldwork for the qualitative interviews were conducted in May and June 2025.

For the purposes of this research, SBNs were defined as nursery provision located on a school site. The sample for the SCEYP was taken from a list of school-based providers that have nursery provision, according to DfE's "Get Information About Schools" (GIAS) service. In the quantitative analysis we split these into three types:

- **Maintained nursery schools (MNSs):** These are purpose-built maintained schools specifically for children in their early years and with a qualified teacher present.
- **Maintained schools with nursery classes:** These are other maintained schools, offering nursery provision that also have provision for older children.
- **Independent nurseries:** Non-maintained schools with nursery provision.

This report mainly focuses on three types of non-typical provision:

- **Under-3s provision:** Full day care, fixed sessional care, and/or flexible sessional care for children under the age of 3

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<sup>2</sup> [Childcare and early years provider survey, Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

- Out of hours provision: Before-school and/or after-school care for children in term time, run at least 4 days per week. For the purposes of this research, this was defined as provision before 8:30am and/or after 3:30pm.
- Out of term provision: Holiday activities or childcare for school children during any school holidays, including half terms

## Analysis of 2024 Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers

The Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers (SCEYP) provides snapshot information on childcare and early years provision in England. The survey is undertaken to help the Government understand the profile of the early years sectors and issues that the sector faces, and is used to inform the development of early years and childcare policy. The survey was conducted by IFF Research and London Economics on behalf of the DfE. Main fieldwork for the 2024 SCEYP survey took place between May 8<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> July 2024. The study was undertaken using a ‘webfirst’ design, followed by telephone fieldwork to increase response.

A total of 9,980 SBNs were invited to take part in the 2024 SCEYP, resulting in 1,927 completing the survey (comprising 93 MNSs, 1,692 maintained schools with nursery classes, and 142 independent schools). The total response rate for SBNs was 21%.<sup>3</sup>

For this report a selection of 2024 SCEYP findings were analysed to understand the profile of SBNs who operate outside of the typical model in England and to provide context for the qualitative findings.

The SCEYP findings are based on providers who completed the SCEYP survey, although sometimes findings have a lower base size due to variant modularisation of the questionnaire. This modularisation approach is taken to reduce interview lengths and means that that not every provider receives every question.

Where appropriate, the findings were compared with the comparable data for group-based providers (GBPs), who are childcare providers registered with Ofsted and operating in non-domestic premises (excluding providers solely on the voluntary register), typically in settings like day nurseries.

## Qualitative research

The qualitative findings presented in this report were based on fieldwork conducted between 9<sup>th</sup> May 2025 and 24<sup>th</sup> June 2025, with a focus on SBNs who operate outside of the typical model. Specifically, focus was placed on SBN provision for children aged

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on the methodology of the SCEYP you can refer to the Technical Report: <https://content.explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/api/releases/b5696a56-c8f0-4853-b143-39a2b74482b7/files/8d9c2596-a9f6-4d82-8bf7-963837d794d2>

under 3 years old, out of hours provision, and out of term provision. This qualitative research was conducted by IFF Research. A total of 22 depth interviews were undertaken, all of which were conducted via Microsoft Teams. Interviews lasted around 1 hour and covered whether settings offered provision for under-3s, out of hours care, and out of term care. Where provision was offered, respondents were asked to describe its structure – including age ranges, number of places available, unfilled places and waitlists, staffing, the timing and flexibility of sessions, and demand. Where provision was not offered, respondents were asked the reasons behind this, including any perceived barriers to offering this provision.

Respondents for the qualitative research were selected from 2024 SCEYP survey participants who opted in to additional research, and all were offered a £30 thank you incentive for taking part in the research. Interviews were generally conducted with a senior member of staff at each setting, most commonly with the headteacher or nursery manager. These individuals were well-placed to provide an overview of the nursery’s operations and the strategic decisions shaping its provision.

SBNs for the qualitative research were recruited to include a selection of different types of settings based on the type of provision they offered. The achieved profile of respondents for the qualitative research is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Achieved sample profile for qualitative interviews**

<b>Type of provision</b>	<b>Number of interviews where provision offered</b>	<b>Number of interviews where provision not offered</b>
Provision for under-3s	11	11
Out of hours provision	12	10
Out of term provision	6	16

There was overlap between the different types of provision offered, with some SBNs offering more than one type of provision. Of the SBNs interviewed:

- 4 offered all 3 types of provision;
- 3 SBNs offered provision to under-3s and out of hours provision, but not out of term provision;
- 2 SBNs offered both out of hours provision and out of term provision, but not provision to under-3s;

- 4 SBNs offered provision to under-3s only and 3 offered out of hours provision only;
- 6 SBNs did not offer any of the 3 provision types.

## Provision for under-3s among SBNs

This chapter explores SBN provision for under-3s. Firstly, it outlines the provision currently offered, including the reasons why SBNs choose to offer places for under-3s and the perceived benefits of doing so. It also discusses the key considerations and challenges in offering provision to under-3s, including staffing, fees, physical space, and the impact of the expanded childcare entitlements. Finally, the chapter presents perspectives from SBNs who do not currently offer places for under-3s.

### SBNs offering provision for under-3s

The SCEYP 2024 found that just over a quarter (27%) of SBNs provided care for under-3s, compared to 95% of GBPs and 80% of all providers. Of these, nine in ten (91%) provided care for 2-year-olds only (i.e. and not under 2s) and 8% provided care for 2-year-olds and under 2s.<sup>4</sup>

In the qualitative interviews, 11 SBNs who offered provision for under-3s were interviewed. Of these, all 11 SBNs offered provision to 2-year-olds while 3 also offered provision to under 2s. All the SBNs interviewed who offered care to under-3s also offered care to 3- to 4-year-olds, and most of them also had reception classes based at the school. Provision for under-3s generally followed the same operating hours and days of the week as provision for 3- to 4-year-olds, offering provision Monday-Friday and splitting days into morning and afternoon sessions.

Most SBNs interviewed had separate rooms for each age groups, with under 2s, 2-year-olds and 3- to 4-year-olds in separate rooms. However, some SBNs did mix age groups at certain times or in certain spaces – particularly those who offered out of hours provision. This was because generally a smaller number of children were cared for in those sessions, so age groups were mixed to minimise the number of staff needed.

“We've got a room that is just for the 3- and 4-year-olds because the 2-year-olds quite often still put things in their mouth. So if we've got provision out for the older children, they need that space away from the little ones as well. So we are fortunate that we've got good size rooms that one of the rooms can just be for the older children. And likewise, you don't want it to be overwhelming for the 2-year-olds either. So it's quite nice for them as there's two rooms that they can use and they can mix in the outside provision as well.” (Nursery Lead, Offers provision for under-3s)

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<sup>4</sup> Less than 1% reported that their provision for under-3s only included under 2s.

According to the SCEYP 2024, SBNs typically offered fewer places for under-3s than they did for 3- to 4-year-olds. Amongst those that offered places to under-3s, the average number of places offered to 3-4 year-olds was 42.0 compared to 15.1 places for 2-year-olds and 18.5 for under 2s.<sup>5</sup>The main reasoning given for this in the qualitative interviews was due to the staff:child ratios required for under-3s, and because younger children have additional care and supervision needs.

“There [are] more preschoolers than 2-year-olds anyway that are on roll, but on a daily basis we don't want more than 50/50 really [between 2-year-olds and 3- to 4-year-olds], because the 2-year-olds present unique challenges in terms of their level of need and the ratio is 1:5. You know, if one member of staff has taken off to do nappies or, you know, things like that, then it does really alter the provision.” (Headteacher, Offers provision for under-3s)

A small number of SBNs reported having unfilled places for under-3s. This mostly applied to having unfilled places for certain sessions during a week. For example, one SBN reported that they had unfilled places on a Wednesday but were at capacity every other day of the week.

“On a Wednesday, we could take more 2-year-olds because we're not at capacity. For some reason, people don't want to go [to nursery] on Wednesdays. But the rest of the week, we're at capacity.” (Headteacher, Offers provision for under-3s)

A few SBNs mentioned that in addition to unfilled places for quieter sessions, they had waitlists for busier sessions too. These SBNs said that they always offered parents who were on a waiting list access to sessions with unfilled places.

“We have a waiting list and that operates for certain sessions, and there are some parents who have requested more hours, but we can't offer them any at the moment, so they are waiting for September [2025].<sup>6</sup> We will always offer them the sessions we have space, but often they don't want them.” (Headteacher, Offers provision for under-3s)

## Reasons for and benefits of offering provision for under-3s

### Reasons for offering provision for under-3s

The main reason SBNs gave for offering provision to under-3s was demand from parents, which was often stated generally rather than specifying which groups of parents

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that this does not suggest that SBNs provide more places to under 2s than 2-year-olds, because the averages do not include SBNs that offer 0 places to each of these age groups.

<sup>6</sup> The fieldwork for this research took place between May and June 2025.

were seeking provision. A number of providers specifically mentioned demand from local working parents who had children of this age.

“It was parents more than anything, parents came and asked us when are you going to take 2-year-olds, because the school next door to us takes 2-year-olds, but theirs was full.” (Headteacher, Offers provision for under-3s)

Some SBNs noted that they had seen an increase in demand since the rollout of the expanded childcare entitlements. SBNs who cared for under 2s expected demand to increase further from September 2025 with the rollout of the 30-hour working parent entitlement to children aged from 9-months-old.

“Obviously the demand is there from the parents and that's going to increase with the parents getting the 30 hours from September.” (Nursery manager, Offers provision for under-3s)

Other reasons given for offering provision to under-3s included having the space and resources available to offer provision to under-3s or simply that they had always done so.

“We've always offered it. As long as we've been in the nursery, we've already always done 2-year-olds.” (Deputy Head, Offers provision for under-3s)

### **Benefits of offering provision to under-3s**

Most SBNs noted benefits for parents and families, primarily in that it allowed them to go to work. In particular, they noted it was beneficial for parents who had older children already attending the school, as they had already built trust with the setting and they had the added benefit that ‘drop-off’ logistics were more straightforward.

“A few of our families who have got maybe older siblings, it's easier because they've got the school day to go to. They know they're getting it [childcare] in a place that they already trust us to look after their older siblings. We've had only positive comments about it from parents, so I think it's lovely and they're here with the older children and the older children benefit from it as well.” (Headteacher, Offers provision for under-3s)

In terms of benefits of offering the provision, most SBNs identified benefits to children attending the nursery, including a smoother transition to school as the children were familiar with the school environment, routines, and sometimes the staff. These benefits were observed for children of any age attending the nursery, although they were more pronounced for those starting at a younger age:

“If they've attended our nursery, they tend to sit and listen better. They know the expectations. And so, they kind of adapt to the school life far easier than if they've come from elsewhere. They're used to going into the hall for dinner and they're used to the surroundings.” (Nursery Lead, Offers provision for under-3s)

Some SBNs highlighted that caring for under-3s allowed them to start supporting families sooner. This was seen as beneficial for pupils in disadvantaged areas in particular, as SBNs were able to identify and respond to emerging needs, offer support and connect families with additional support sooner. The SBNs thought that this could help improve outcomes for children and families by addressing challenges before they escalate. The 2024 SCEYP data showed that SBNs were more prevalent in the most deprived areas, showing they are in a particularly good place to support these families.<sup>7</sup>

“Historically, because we only ever had disadvantaged 2-year-olds, it had a massive impact on the progress that the children made and the support that we could offer the family because we were getting to know families in need much earlier on and put in a lot more intervention and support. Just a bit of consistency, some of our children are with us for 2-and-a-half years because we take them in the January after they're 2 and then they do 2-and-a-half years before they start school.” (Executive Headteacher, Offers provision for under-3s)

SBNs also perceived that caring for under-3s allowed for earlier identification and intervention for children with SEND, which could improve a child's development, learning and long-term outcomes, and helped families access services and support earlier.

“It allows for early intervention, more opportunities. We have a lot of children with very poor speech and language. So that kind of opportunity to expose them to opportunities [...] it gives those children some positive experiences and first-hand experiences that they may not have access to at home.” (Headteacher, Offers provision for under-3s)

Rather than highlighting specific benefits to SBNs themselves, the benefits mentioned were more focused on supporting families, children, and the school, with few financial benefits identified for SBNs directly.

A few SBNs mentioned that they offered provision to under-3s as a strategy to pre-fill places for older children in the nursery, and subsequently the school, to ensure continuous intake. Continuous intake was important to SBNs as it supported the

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<sup>7</sup> ['Number of providers by deprivation level' for All school-based providers](#)

sustainability of the provision, allowed for more predictable staffing and resource planning, and helped build relationships with families over time.

“Because of the amount of staff that we have with such a big nursery and so many children, the financial side of things doesn't actually benefit us too much. The main thing I think for us is to try and help the school and enable the school to survive [through ensuring continuous intake], that is basically why we have as many children as we do.” (Nursery Manager, Offers provision for under-3s)

## Considerations for SBNs offering provision to under-3s

### Staffing: child ratios, qualifications, and recruitment and retention

In the qualitative interviews, SBNs commented that ratios for under-3s were largely driven by legal guidelines, although some felt that under-3s required more staff per child than outlined in the guidelines due to this age group having higher needs.

“Despite the staff:child ratio being 1:5 for 2-year-olds and 1:8 for 3- to 4-year-olds, you actually couldn't just have 5 2-year-olds and 1 adult. It's a nonsense, because if one of those 2-year-olds needs their nappy changed, you can't take the other 4 into the bathroom and keep an eye on them at the same time. So we like to have a little bit of a buffer, we think of the 2-year-olds needing 0.2 of an adult each.” (Headteacher, Offers provision for under-3s)

Since September 2023 there has been an optional child:staff ratio of 5:1 for two-year-olds. However, the data suggest that most commonly SBNs had a ratio of 4:1. The SCEYP found that around a quarter (24%) reported a ratio of less than 4:1 (i.e. 3:1 or lower), 45% had a ratio of 4:1 and 31% had a ratio of more than 4:1 (i.e. 5:1 or more).<sup>8</sup> The equivalent findings for GBPs were broadly similar, with 20% having a ratio less than 4:1, 51% had a ratio of 4:1 and 29% had a ratio of more than 4:1.

There were several mentions of additional training needs for staff working with under-3s, that were not needed for staff working with older children. Examples mentioned by SBNs included safe sleep, health and safety, and food hygiene training. These were linked to additional provision needed for younger children, such as naps. These training needs were generally seen as practical considerations to factor into the decision to care for under-3s, rather than barriers to offering care for this age group.

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<sup>8</sup> Data on child:staff ratios for under 2s has not been included due to a low base size (n=17)

“To care for the 2-year-olds they have to do safe sleep training [...] which you wouldn't necessarily have to have if you were further up in school because our kids don't really sleep.” (Headteacher, Offers provision for under-3s)

On the other hand, other SBNs mentioned that all staff in the nursery received the same training and were expected to be able to care for all age groups in the setting.

“We try and work as one team. So the staff all have the same level of qualification, the staff access the same training, we have one school development plan that goes right from the babies right up to the 3-4 year-olds.” (Headteacher, Offers provision for under-3s)

Many SBNs mentioned that recruitment and retention difficulties of staff were a challenge in general. They shared that it was particularly difficult for under-3s due to the higher child:staff ratios required for this age group, which meant more staff were needed. As such the challenge was magnified for under-3s.

“So it's just because we need so many staff [to care for under-3s], if you do lose any members of staff, it's harder to recruit for our setting, I think because we offer so much and we have high standards of what we expect, it's hard to get the staff.” (Nursery Manager, Offers provision for under-3s)

## Fees

The SCEYP found that the hourly rate charged by SBNs was generally higher for younger children. As shown in Figure 1, two-thirds (67%) of SBNs charged £7/h and over for under 2s<sup>9</sup> and a third (32%) charged this much for 2-year-olds. Only 22% of SBNs who offered provision to under-3s, and 16% who did not offer provision to under-3s, charged these highest rates for 3-4 year-olds.

As well as tending to charge more for under-3s, SBNs that offered this provision were statistically significantly more likely to charge higher fees for 3- to 4-year-olds than their counterparts that only offered provision to children aged 3 and above. Just over one-in-ten (12%) charged under £4/h for 3- to 4-year-olds compared with 4% of those who did offer provision to under-3s. At the other end of the scale, 41% of SBNs who offered provision to under 2s charged £6/h or more for 3- to 4-year-olds compared with 28% of SBNs who did not offer provision to under-3s.

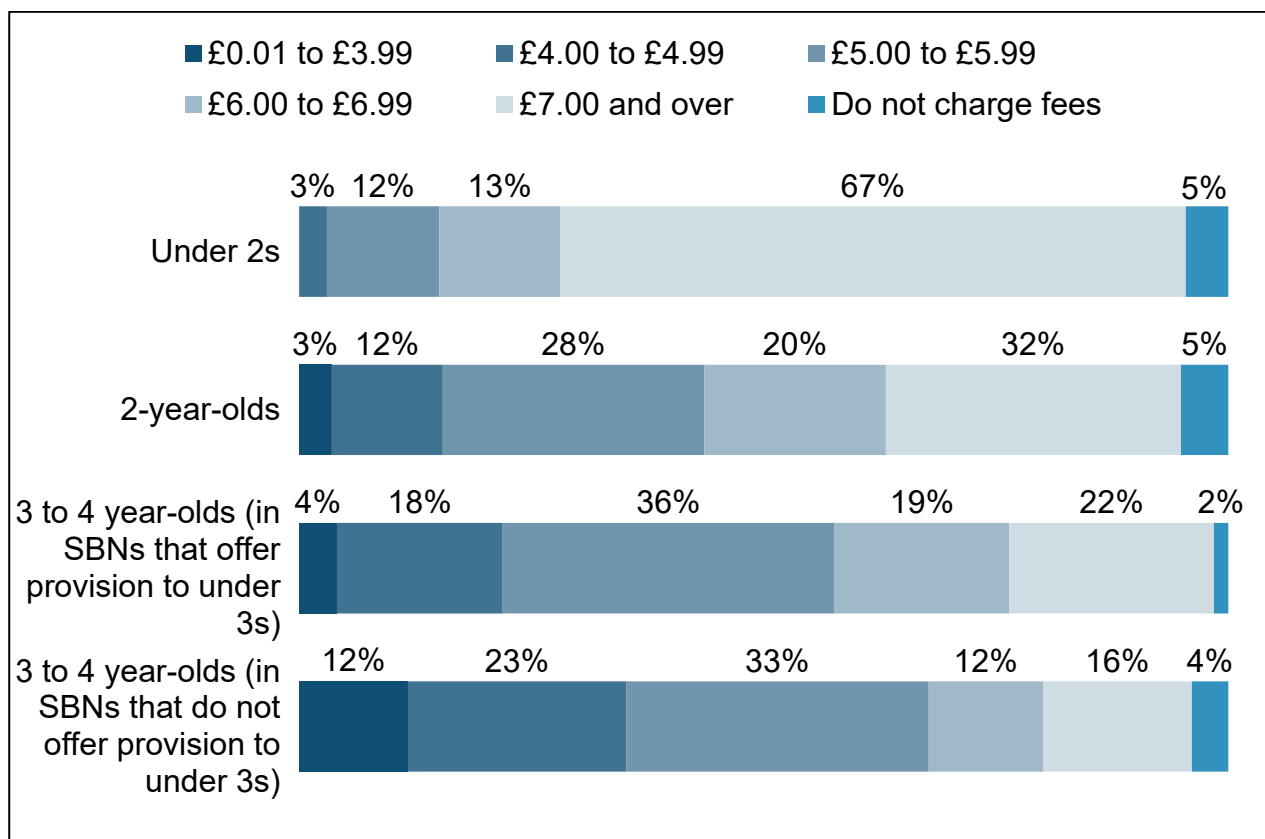
The hourly fees charged, were statistically significantly higher in independent nurseries than MNSs or maintained schools with nursery classes. Nearly two-thirds of independent

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<sup>9</sup> Due to a low base (n=34) findings on fees for under 2s should be treated with caution

nurseries (63%) charge £7/h or more for 3- to 4-year-olds compared with 39% of MNSs and 12% of maintained schools with nursery classes.

**Figure 1: Hourly fees charged by child age**



*What is the average hourly fee that your nursery charge for childcare for children under 2 years old/2-year-olds/children aged 3-4 years old? Base: SBNs that charge fees for nursery and offer childcare to children aged under 2 (34). **Due to low base these findings should be treated with caution**; SBNs who charge fees for nursery and offer childcare to 2-year-olds (432); SBNs who charge fees for nursery and offer childcare to 3- to 4-year-olds and cares for under-3s (410); SBNs who charge fees for nursery and offer childcare to 3- to 4-year-olds and do not care for under-3s (1,042)*

While overall GBPs charged higher fees for every age group, they also followed the same pattern of fees being lower for 3- to 4-year-olds than 2-year-olds or under 2s, and the GBPs that offered provision to under-3s also charged more on average for 3- to 4-year-olds than the GBPs that did not offer provision for under-3s.

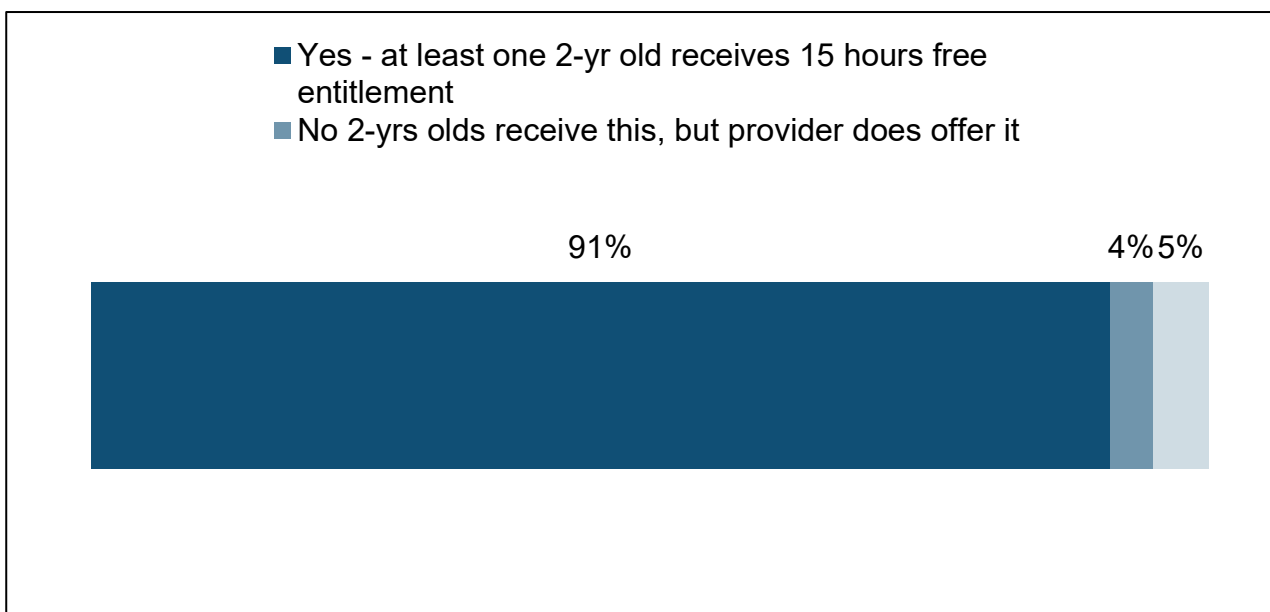
### Expanded childcare entitlements

It is important to note that the SCEYP data was collected between May and July 2024 and therefore is not fully reflective of current figures in the sector relating to the expanded childcare entitlements. In particular, the survey was carried out before the September 2024 rollout of the uplifted funding rates to include the 15-hour working parent entitlement

for children from the age of 9 months old, and therefore does not capture SBN responses relating to this age group.

As shown in Figure 2, the 2024 SCEYP found that there was a high uptake of the 15 hours entitlements for 2-year-olds (including both the disadvantage and working parent entitlements). Nine in ten (91%) SBNs that cared for 2-year-olds reported that at least one 2-year-old in their setting received one of these entitlements. Only 4% who offered entitlements said that it was not being taken up, and 5% reported that they did not offer any entitlement funded places for 2-year-olds. The uptake was much higher in MNSs, where 99% reported that at least one 2-year-old received one of these entitlements.

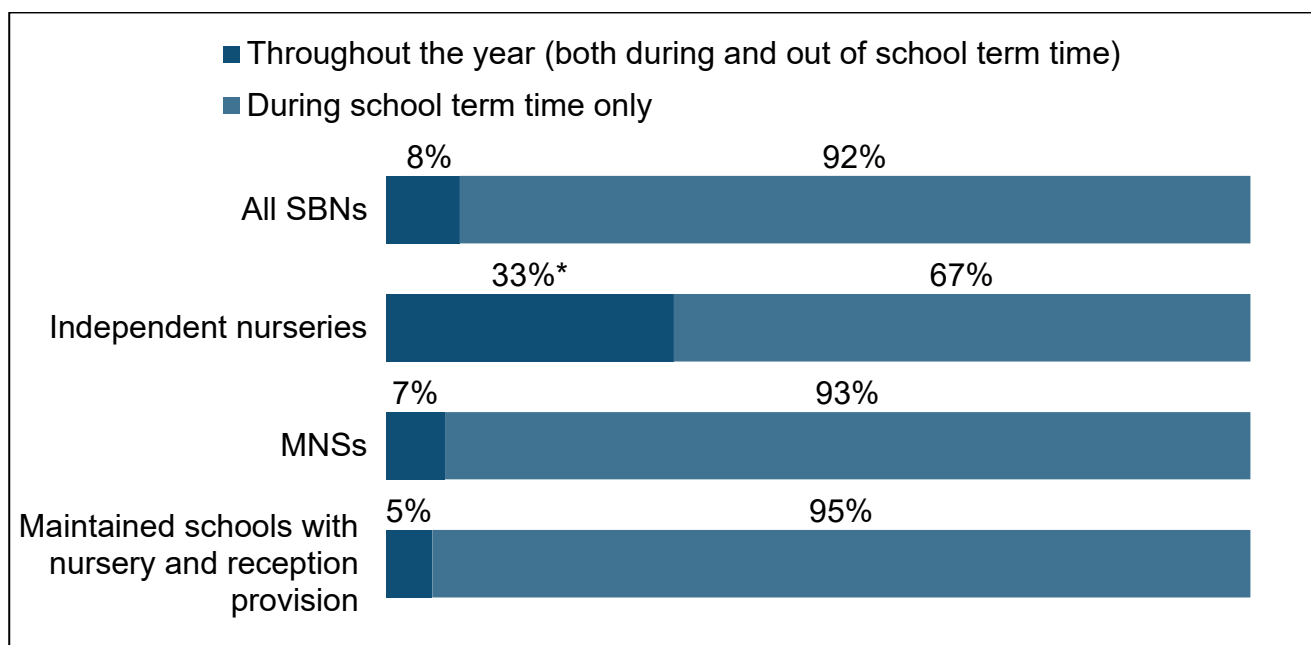
**Figure 2: Uptake of 15-hour funded entitlement**



*How many, if any, of the 2-year-olds attending your nursery receive Government-funded hours under the 15 hours Free Entitlement? SBNs who care for 2-year-olds(n=492)*

Figure 3 shows when 15 hours of funded entitlement could be used through the year. Just under one-in-ten (8%) SBNs allowed it to be used through the year during and out of term time. This mostly reflected the fact that many were not open out of term, but there was still a sizeable proportion of SBNs that did offer out of term care that restricted use of the entitlements to term time only (23%). Independent nurseries were more likely than maintained SBNs to allow entitlement to be used this way, with a third (33%) allowing provision to be used all year round.

**Figure 3 When offering 15 hours funded entitlement for 2-year-olds**

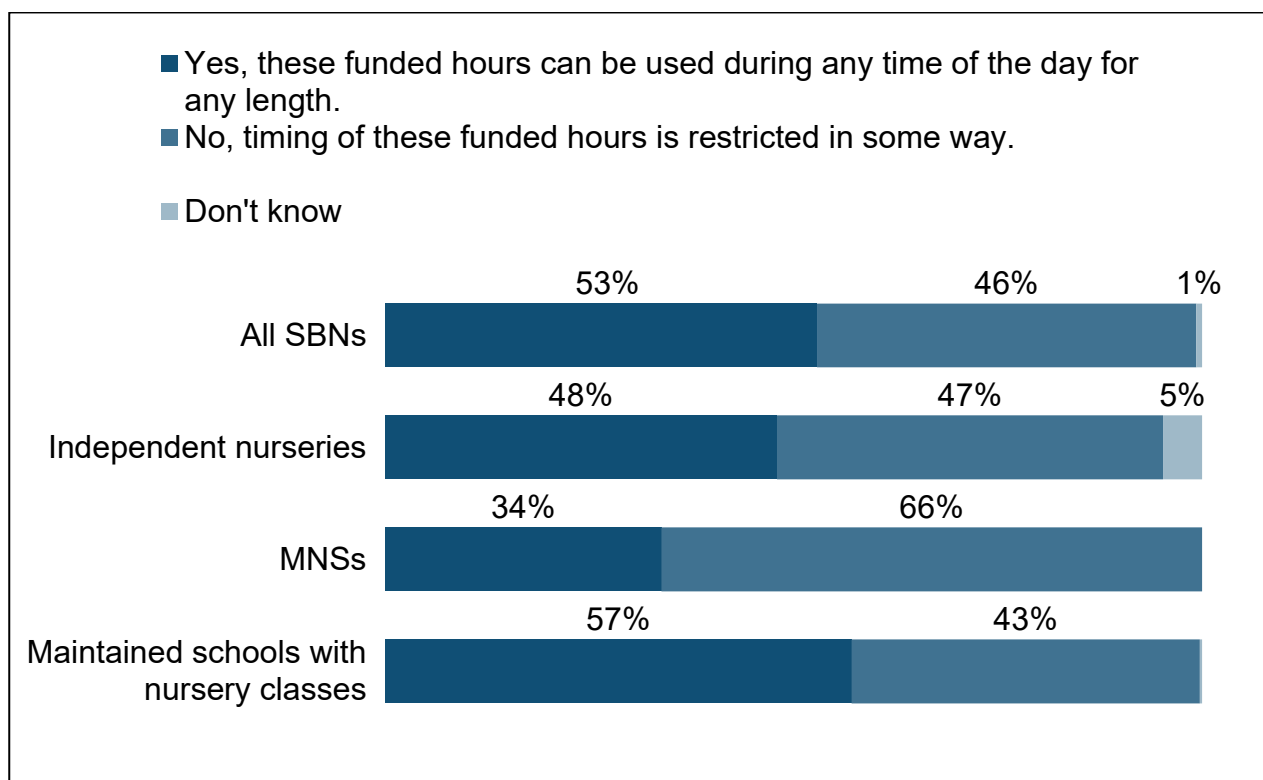


*Can parents use these funded hours... Base: At least one 2-year-old in receipt of 15 hours Free Entitlement, and provider offers care during term time only, or term time and school holidays (n=419)*

Just over half of SBNs imposed restrictions on what times of the day the 15 hours of free entitlement provision could be used (53%). As shown in Figure 4, MNSs were more likely than other SBNs to impose restrictions (34%).

According to the qualitative interviews, these restrictions were imposed to help spread the use of provision and reduce the risk of popular times, typically Tuesday to Thursday, being oversubscribed. Limiting the offer to less popular sessions increased the likelihood of parents opting for these sessions so that they could make the most of the entitlement.

**Figure 4: Restrictions on offering 15 hours funded entitlement for 2-year-olds**



*As long as places are available, can parents use these funded hours at any time of the day that you normally provide childcare? Base: At least one 2-year-old in receipt of 15 hours Free Entitlement, and provider offers care during term time only, or term time and school holidays (n=419)*

The picture for GBPs regarding the 15 hours funded entitlement was somewhat different than for SBNs. GBPs were statistically significantly more likely to have at least one 2-year-old receiving it (96%), and were much more likely to offer its use throughout the whole year (51%) with no restriction as to when they could be used (64%).

### **SBNs not offering provision to under-3s**

Eleven of the SBNs selected for interview did not offer provision to under-3s and never had done so. The main reasons given for not offering places to under-3s were it not being financially viable and their premises not being suitable, with these two reasons often being linked.

One of the reasons that these SBNs perceived that it would not be financially viable was due to a lack of demand in the local area. They believed that there were not enough families that would take up the places for them to be able cover the costs of running the provision.

“It's never been requested by families or the wider community. We have 4 private nurseries within a 5-minute drive. [...] I don't think it's something that our community needs or our families would need.” (Headteacher, Does not offer provision to under-3s)

A frequent barrier to SBNs offering provision to under-3s was the lack of space and it not being possible to adapt or expand the site. This was particularly the case for SBNs based in older buildings.

“We can't extend the nursery because it's small and old. The only way we could do it is if we brought it into the school and allocated a couple of classrooms but at the moment we can't do that.” (Office manager, Does not offer provision to under-3s)

Where it would be possible to expand the space, SBNs reported that making the space suitable for under-3s represented a great expense and was a concern. For instance, SBNs mentioned that under-3s required specific adaptations such as safe sleeping areas, nappy changing facilities, and age-appropriate resources. Limited space, budget constraints, and the need to balance the needs of under-3s as well as 3- to 4-year-olds made these adaptations difficult to implement for some SBNs.

Similarly to SBNs who offer care for under-3s, SBNs who do not offer provision to this age group mentioned that hiring the staff needed to care for under-3s was a challenge – especially as the ratios for younger children were higher compared to 3-4 year-olds, which meant a higher number of staff would be required.

“So obviously 2-year-olds need a bigger floor space area,<sup>10</sup> which we don't have. We'd also require more staff, more specialist facilities, such as nappy changing [...] [we wouldn't] be able to afford to staff it with the ratios required.” (Business Manager, Does not offer provision to under-3s)

Few SBNs had firm plans to offer provision to under-3s in the future, although some were open to the idea. However, reflecting the barriers noted above, they felt quite a lot would need to change to make that possible, including expanding their premises and making it suitable for younger children, hiring new staff, and an increase in demand from parents in the local area.

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<sup>10</sup> Space requirements for each age group: Under 2s: 3.5m sq per child; 2 year olds: 2.5m sq per child; 3-5 year olds: 2.3m sq per child

“We are thinking of doing under 2s but at the moment we are just looking into that because [we need to think about] the staffing, the capacity, if there's enough room and things like that and you'll need changing facilities [...] We're at maximum capacity now so if we take any more in you've got to have more staff.” (Office manager, Does not offer provision to under-3s)

“This is just not something that's happened, but there's lots of conversations about it happening. So it's not something we're ruling out. It's a possibility for the future. And if there's demand there, then we will. We're in an area with quite a few day nurseries, we're only a school-based nursery. [...] But yeah, I think it will be in our future.” (Headteacher, Does not offer provision to under-3s)

In addition to this, SBNs shared that they would need guidance and funding from the DfE and their local authority (LA) to make this change. This included guidance about the curriculum, as well as staffing and recruitment to meet the specific needs of younger children. One SBN also required guidance on how to prioritise between children eligible for the disadvantaged entitlement and those qualifying through the working parent entitlement.

“There's quite a lot of information on the DfE website, but I've always thought it would be useful if, I don't know if there was some sort of advisor or contact that you could have and literally talk things through.” (Business Manager, Does not offer provision to under-3s)

“If the DfE wants us to take these children in then they've got they've really got to help us with funding.” (Office Manager, Does not offer provision to under-3s)

## Out of hours provision among SBNs

This chapter explores out of hours school-based nursery provision. Firstly, it outlines the types of out of hours provisions currently offered, including why SBN providers choose to offer out of hours provisions and the perceived benefits of doing so. It also discusses the key considerations in offering out of hours provisions including staffing, fees and future plans. Finally, the chapter presents findings from SBN providers who do not currently offer out of hours provisions.

### SBNs offering out of hours provision

The SCEYP found that nearly three in ten (28%) SBNs offered out of hours provision. The vast majority of these (88%) offered provision both before and after usual school hours, 3% offered before school hours only, and 9% after school only.

All 12 of the SBNs in the qualitative interviews that offered this provision had been doing so for a substantial period of time, sometimes since the SBN's inception. Most offered out of hours provision that operated from 8:00am to 5:00pm, with a few offering provision between 7:30am to 6:00pm. The core hours of these SBNs ranged from 8:45am to 3:30pm, similar to SBNs that did not offer out of hours provision.

How this out of hours provision was delivered varied to some extent among SBNs. The majority delivered this provision through breakfast and/or after school clubs, which were separate to the main day. This was usually delivered by the main school or sometimes the SBN itself. However some SBNs delivered this provision simply through having a longer day of their usual care.

Breakfast and after school clubs often took place in a different location to the core hours. SBNs explained that breakfast clubs were delivered in different classrooms, halls or in one case, outdoors. These breakfast and after school clubs were run in conjunction with the main school, meaning they were open to school-aged children too. This gave nursery children the opportunity to mix with older children.

Most of the SBNs offering out of hours provision reported that they had unfilled places for the provision, with some citing low levels of parental demand as a reason for this. Some SBNs described that they have advertised for these unfilled places through marketing on social media forums/groups like Facebook and school newsletters and leaflets. However, some SBNs expressed they were not actively trying to fill those spaces, with activity limited to simply making parents aware that it was available.

## Reasons for and benefits of offering out of hours provision

### Reasons for offering out of hours provision

Similarly to under-3s provision, the main reason SBNs gave for offering out of hours provision was to accommodate the demand from parents who worked outside of traditional school hours. One SBN described that they considered out of hours provision a necessity given the current social and economic landscape in which both parents typically worked.

“We just need it nowadays, don't you? Everybody's got to work and it's better for the children to stay in school and be picked up safer and it's better for the parents that they're here” (School Business Manager, Offers out of hours provision)

Other reasons SBNs offered out of hours provision was to keep up with competitor providers. For some SBNs, out of hours provision was considered an important factor to attract enough families and therefore maintain business viability. One SBN noted that out of hours provision was so common in their area, they were of the perception that it had become expected that they would offer it.

“The county does it so there's definitely [an expectation] you just have to do this, you have to change up your provision. We haven't had a huge uptake, so it almost showing willing that you're doing it. I think we'd probably have about 4 or 5 children [in our out of hours care] but that does make a difference financially” (Head teacher, Offers out of hours provision)

Some SBNs that were part of multi-academy trusts (MATs) offered out of hours provision because this was what was done across the whole MAT.

### Benefits of offering out of hours provision

As SBNs explained, not all children attended out of hours provision. Both SBNs that offered longer nursery days and those that operated a breakfast and afterschool club mentioned that this produced a quieter environment and was considered a particular benefit for children with SEND as it provided the conditions for them to adjust to their surroundings outside of the home.

Regarding benefits for families, this was closely associated with working parents as the out of hours provision alleviated the stress of making other arrangements for their children while they work; or indeed gave them the opportunity to work at all. It also provided additional opportunities for SBNs to have more contact with families in disadvantaged areas. Through increased contact, SBNs were able to get a better understanding of what support families in disadvantaged areas might need.

“It’s enabled us to say we’re worried about that family, and take them aside and say have you got what you need and then we might give them some...support and [put] things in place” (Head teacher, Offers out of hours provision)

Some SBNs note that extending the time spent with the children in their care, through the out of hours provision, helped them build stronger relationships with all the children and their families (not just ones in disadvantaged areas). Many SBNs considered this a benefit for the nurseries themselves.

“It’s been absolutely instrumental in getting to know families, breaking down barriers, sorting out issues, making good connections, building relationships and linking parents from different countries or getting parents to support those in need” (Head teacher, Offers out of hours provision)

Other than this, similar to under-3s provision, there were not many specific benefits for the nurseries themselves, with little mention of financial benefits.

Some of the benefits of the out of hours provision varied according to the way the provision was delivered. Regarding breakfast clubs, many of the SBNs offering this provision saw it as a way for children to receive nutritious meals, which was particularly important for children from disadvantaged areas. For after school provision, the opportunity to socialise with school aged children through extra-curricular activities was considered to be a benefit. One SBN with a high proportion of children with English as an additional language expressed that this provision type created more opportunities for children to practice their English with peers and older children. Another benefit of after school clubs was they provided a safe space after school, particularly for families that require extra support. There were no specific benefits mentioned for delivering a longer day of usual care, beyond the benefits mentioned above.

## **Considerations for SBNs offering out of hours provision**

### **Staffing**

Staffing for out of hours provision varied between SBNs: some out of hours provision was run by existing core hours staff while others employed additional staff. For SBNs that used existing staff, additional training or qualifications were not required, with the exception of staff that handled food who were required to hold a food hygiene qualification.

In terms of the specific staff present, there was a variation in the requirements SBNs had for who needed to be present. Some mentioned ensuring there would always be a qualified teacher, sometimes specifying an Early Years specific qualification, while others used teaching assistants (specifying teaching assistants would have at least a Level 2

qualification). Occasionally, culinary staff ran the breakfast clubs with teaching staff present to support.

There was also variation in how SBNs organised their staff to cover all the hours of provision. Approaches taken included: having specific staff that worked different shifts (for example that started and ended earlier or later); specific staff working long days but only 4 days per week; using rotas so that the 'additional' hours would be spread across all staff; and employing external staff.

SBNs employed external staff when it was not possible for their existing staff to take on the additional responsibility. However, whether using existing or additional staff, this presented some challenges in covering costs and recruitment.

“Staffing is quite hard budget-wise and we do a big food order that’s all easy, it’s just really well established now but staffing of it in the past, recruiting the right people has been quite hard because nobody really wants the job” (Head teacher, Offers out of hours provision)

## **Fees**

The majority of SBNs charged a fee for their out of hours provision, while one SBN offered the provision for free. Breakfast and/or after school clubs fees were treated entirely separately, as they were offered as separate sessions to core hour provision. The fees covered the costs of staff and meals provided. The way fees were applied varied, with some SBNs charging by the session whilst others charged by the hour. Fees for out of hours provisions were not the same as core hour provision rates for most SBNs. One SBN accounted this to the fact that the ratio of teacher to children was different during out of hours provision for 3- to 4-year-olds than it is for under-3s. As under-3s did not utilise the provision, it mainly catered to 3- to 4-year-olds and thus the ratio for this age group was solely implemented. As a result, costs to cover staff were lower. Fees for breakfast and after school club provisions ranged from £2 to £6 per session.<sup>11</sup>

## **Future plans**

When asked about future plans to expand places for out of hours provision, only one SBN expressed concrete plans. Few SBNs expressed interest in expansion, however, they cited potential financial implications as a barrier to expansion. Others explained their hesitation to expand due to limited demand from parents. In the case of the SBN that had firm plans to increase the number of places, this was because of a decision by their MAT to generally expand nursery provision, and the recent win of local grants had supported their ability to expand.

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<sup>11</sup>Only a small number of SBNs shared details of their fees, so this finding should be treated with caution

## SBNs not offering out of hours provision

Conversely to reasons for offering the provision, one of the main reasons SBNs gave for not offering out of hours provision was due to a lack of demand from parents. They mentioned that many parents were either not working or did not work outside of the core hours, therefore, did not feel a need for this provision type. Additionally, these SBNs perceived that parents would not be able to afford the additional hours, particularly those with low income. This links with the finding in Chapter 7 that SBNs in the most deprived areas were less likely to offer this provision.

Having the required staffing levels was also a notable reason that raised challenges for many of these SBNs and prevented them from seeing out of hours provision as financially viable. They felt it was difficult to recruit staff that would be willing and able to work the earlier and/or later hours. Also these SBNs felt it would not be possible to recoup the additional costs for staff. One SBN stated that to increase the fees to a level that would cover for the costs of staff would put a strain on parents.

“It’s a struggle to hang on to good staff who only want to work an hour and half in the morning or do split shifts. So staffing is the main issue and also you can’t always charge what you want to charge because it’s too much for parents to pay” (School Business Manager, Does not offer out of hours provision)

In addition to staffing costs, some SBNs mentioned other financial implications of out of hour provision leading them to feel this type of provision was not financially viable. According to these SBNs, the disparity between the costs of providing staff, meals and equipment, would not be profitable.

“I can’t see a nursery breaking even, I think nurseries really struggle...We don’t see that it brings in a significant amount of money to our school or nursery setting.”- (Deputy Head, Does not offer out of hours provision)

Other reasons mentioned included that the school had other priorities, so this was simply not something that was currently under consideration.

Overall, few of the SBNs interviewed were open to the idea of offering out of hours provision. Those that would consider it expressed the need for financial support to cover the costs of facilities, meals and staff because these could not be covered within current budgets (even when taking into account the additional income). Regarding staff, one SBN explained that they are unable to cover costs specifically for staff:child ratios for under-3s. When asked where such support should come from, the majority felt that

should come from their LA. Other SBNs also highlighted the need for support to train staff for the provision of meals.

## Out of term provision among SBNs

This chapter focusses on provision amongst SBNs outside of normal term time, i.e. in the school holidays. It follows the same structure as previous chapters, starting with the SBNs that are offering it: their reasons for and benefits of doing so, and key considerations of doing so. It then moves on to SBNs that are not offering it, looking at the barriers stopping them, any future plans, and support they would welcome if they were to start offering out of term provision.

### SBNs offering out of term provision

The 2024 SCEYP survey found that 6% of SBNs offered out of term provision, so it is something that is relatively rare for existing SBNs to do.

In the qualitative interviews, SBNs explained that they offered this provision in one of two ways (although one SBN offered both): a simple continuation of their usual provision in the school holidays; or separate provision in the form of holiday clubs/summer school. In cases of the latter this was generally part of the same provision available for school-aged children run by the school, and would take place in the main school, and would involve nursery children mixing with the school-aged children.

Those offering out of term provision as part of their usual provision offered it to all children at the nursery, although not all families took up the offer. This did not necessarily mean the SBNs viewed these as 'unfilled places' for this provision. For example, the desire of staff to take this period as holiday would balance out the reduced demand.

Where the out of term provision was separate from the usual provision (e.g. holiday club or summer school), SBNs mentioned that there would be fewer places available compared to their term time provision. The number of places available was usually decided on a combination of factors, such as parent demand, staff availability, and capacity of the space used for the provision.

Most made the provision available for all of the school holidays (aside from closure around bank holidays), although for some their offer was limited to the summer and Easter holidays only.

### Reasons for and benefits of offering out of term provision

#### Reasons for offering out of term provision

Similar to the other provision types, the primary reason SBNs gave for offering out of term provision was due to demand from working parents. In addition to this perceived demand, one SBN noted that their competitors offered out of term provision so they did too, suggesting that at least in this case they felt there was a risk parents would not choose their nursery if they did not offer it.

A couple of SBNs also mentioned child safeguarding being a motivation for out of term provision, to ensure families could access support all year round.

### **Benefits of offering out of term provision**

Some SBNs that offered out of term provision noted that there was a financial benefit to offering out of term provision. Specifically, this was due to them having 'year-round' income, which helped with financial stability. The financial benefit was not necessarily seen to be large, but it was enough to make a difference.

“A bit of financial benefit as well...[fees] all through the holidays, which helps us out. So we get 12 months' worth of [fees]. So that's good”  
(School Business Manager, Offers out of term provision)

In terms of other benefits to the SBNs themselves, one noted that it was beneficial for their staff who wanted to be working during the holidays (presumably, in turn making them a more appealing employer for these staff). However, they also noted that not all their staff wanted to work in the school holidays, as those with school-aged children themselves preferred only to work in term time. In practice, these preferences balanced out because fewer children continued attending in the school holidays, so they were able to sufficiently staff the out of term provision with staff able to work at those times.

Many of the SBNs that offered out of term provision felt that the consistency of being in the setting for the school holidays was a key benefit to the child. They considered that for this young age group there was a benefit to being in a familiar place with familiar staff, as opposed to attending some other form of childcare. These consistency benefits were reported even when the provision was different to term time (e.g. only some nursery staff, taking place in a different part of the school), because it was still much less disruptive than not attending at all. Additionally, it was felt the school holidays, particularly the longer summer holidays, also caused disruption to children. This meant that where children were not attending during the school holidays, they needed some time to settle back into the nursery when returning from a holiday period.

“I think it really benefits the children having the same known place to go for their holiday provision as well in terms of their wellbeing and their development” (Head teacher, Offers out of term provision)

These consistency benefits were often reported as being particularly beneficial for children with SEND, who found changes to routine more challenging, or children from disadvantaged areas, who SBNs appreciated having the additional time to provide support to.

Additionally, one SBN that provided holiday clubs that involved mixing with school-aged children felt there was a benefit to this mixing in respect of improving social skills and independence.

Most SBNs offering out of term provision generally recognised that the provision supported working families, as children could be provided for across more times of the year. This was particularly valuable for those without wider family in the area and who they could reach out to as alternative childcare.

## **Considerations for SBNs offering out of term provision**

### **Staffing**

In the qualitative research, nearly all of the SBNs that offered out of term provision reported that the same staff delivered it as the standard term time provision. The proportion of core nursery staff delivering it varied however, from as little as one member of staff to all of their term time staff. Where there were smaller proportions of staff, this was holiday club provision which would also be staffed by those from the wider school. One SBN mentioned that in addition to their term time staff, they would be more likely to use temporary staff for their out of term provision to cover for staff that were not working in the school holidays (either due to their contracts being term time only, or taking annual leave at that time).

None of the SBNs reported that they have any additional considerations, such as specific training, qualifications, or staff:child ratios, for staffing their out of term provision.

### **Fees**

All of the SBNs in the qualitative research charged the same fee for their out of term provision as for their term time provision.

### **Future plans**

None of the SBNs in the qualitative research offering out of term provision mentioned any explicit plans for expanding this provision. One mentioned that they were in their first year, so were seeing how that went before deciding on the future of it. Further to this, one SBN felt that parent demand for out of term provision had fallen since the COVID-19 pandemic due to parents being able to work more flexibly, in turn allowing them to take on more childcare themselves (although this SBN did not feel this point influenced what they were specifically offering).

## SBNs not offering out of term provision

The primary reason that SBNs gave for not offering out of term provision was because they were of the view that it would not be financially viable for them because of a lack of demand from local parents. These SBNs noted that parents either did not work or had other family members that were able to care for their children during the school holidays. Others noted that there were enough other options in their local area for holiday childcare that parents had no need to send their children to nursery in that time (it is likely that these SBNs were envisioning offering holiday club style provision, rather than continuing their usual provision in the holidays). One SBN explained that they had previously offered out of term provision for nursery children, but the uptake was not high enough to be financially viable so they decided to stop offering it.

“A lot of our parents don't work it's not like the we've got [demand for provision at] holiday times or you know the parents have got so many days holiday to take so when children are off of school a lot of parents will take that time off so they don't need child care during that time”  
(Office Manager, Does not offer out of term provision)

It was also clear in many interviews that offering provision during the school holidays represented a large shift that would involve a lot of complex factors for them to consider. These included staffing and implications of the closure of the main school, each of which are discussed below. Alongside the lack of demand from parents, altogether this meant that they felt that out of term provision was not a good investment option for them. In addition to the core reasons for not offering out of term provision, these SBNs noted perceived barriers. The main factor that SBNs raised as an added complication to offering out of term provision was staffing. Current staff were all hired on the basis of having school holidays off, and it would therefore represent a large undertaking to ensure staffing for any out of term provision. For example, establishing which existing staff would be willing and able, amending contracts, hiring new staff where needed.

“Because we're currently in that very school structured system, again, the ratio, the rotas for staff or term, paying them back on holidays periods, it may be a barrier to the operation of our normal 39 weeks a year provision” (Head teacher, Does not offer out of term provision)

“It would be difficult to get staff on board who would work during the school holidays” (Nursery Lead, Does not offer out of term provision)

A few SBNs not offering out of term provision noted barriers associated with the main school site being closed over the holidays. For example, there was a lot of essential services that were organised centrally by the school which would not be available during the school holidays. This covered a variety of aspects, including electricity and water

being switched off, cleaners, and rubbish collection. All of these are aspects were things that the nursery would need to arrange to be reinstated for them for the holidays, with this a challenge as they were not currently involved in decision making on these elements. A couple of SBNs mentioned a similar barrier in that schools often arranged for repairs or upkeep work to school buildings and facilities to take place during the school holidays. It was hard for them to identify other times that this type of work could take place, and they felt it would be difficult for them to be open while maintenance work was ongoing.

“In the holidays that's the time that our site manager gets to do jobs like painting, maintenance for the building, getting things sorted... It's sort of our time to get school up to scratch and get all the little jobs that you want doing, and getting your contractors in if you've got anything to sort out. Like this summer with we're having a new fire alarm, so things like that will be a difficulty” (Office Manager, Does not offer out of term provision)

None of the SBNs not currently offering out of term provision had plans to start offering. However, when asked what would need to be in place for them to do so staffing was the most commonly raised aspect. These SBNs recognised that they would need to recruit additional staff, and raised concerns that this would be difficult.

A few mentioned that if they were to start offering out of term provision, they would want to be able to turn to their LA for support and guidance. They raised a variety of things, including clarity on LA expectations for what out of term provision would be like, clarity on staffing ratio requirements (in the case of mixing with school-aged children), support with recruiting staff, clarity on how existing funding would work with year-round provision, and additional funding to help make it financially viable.

## Other non-typical provision among SBNs

Although the main focus of this research was the 3 types of non-typical provision already covered, where time allowed there was a discussion of any other types of 'non-typical' provision offered by SBNs. A few of the SBNs interviewed offered what might be considered 'non-typical' provision, and this included extracurricular lessons and seasonal forest school. The SBNs that offered this type of non-typical provision had financial support from their LA to do so.

The subjects covered in extracurricular lessons includes language classes in Mandarin and Spanish, P E, music and art classes. These lessons were delivered by existing teaching staff. These SBNs felt that these extracurricular activities had notable positive impacts in nurturing children's creative skills and development. A few SBNs ran a seasonal forest school in which teaching was delivered outdoors. When asked about the benefits of forest schools, SBNs mentioned that the children developed physical skills, emotional regulation and built knowledge of the physical environment.

"Spending time in nature is a huge one, there's physical development and the physical skills they develop when they're out there; there's problem solving, there's emotional regulation. It really helps with children where we find that some of their behaviours are more challenging, its calming for them when they're out there" (Deputy Head/Senior Office Manager, Offers other non-typical provision)

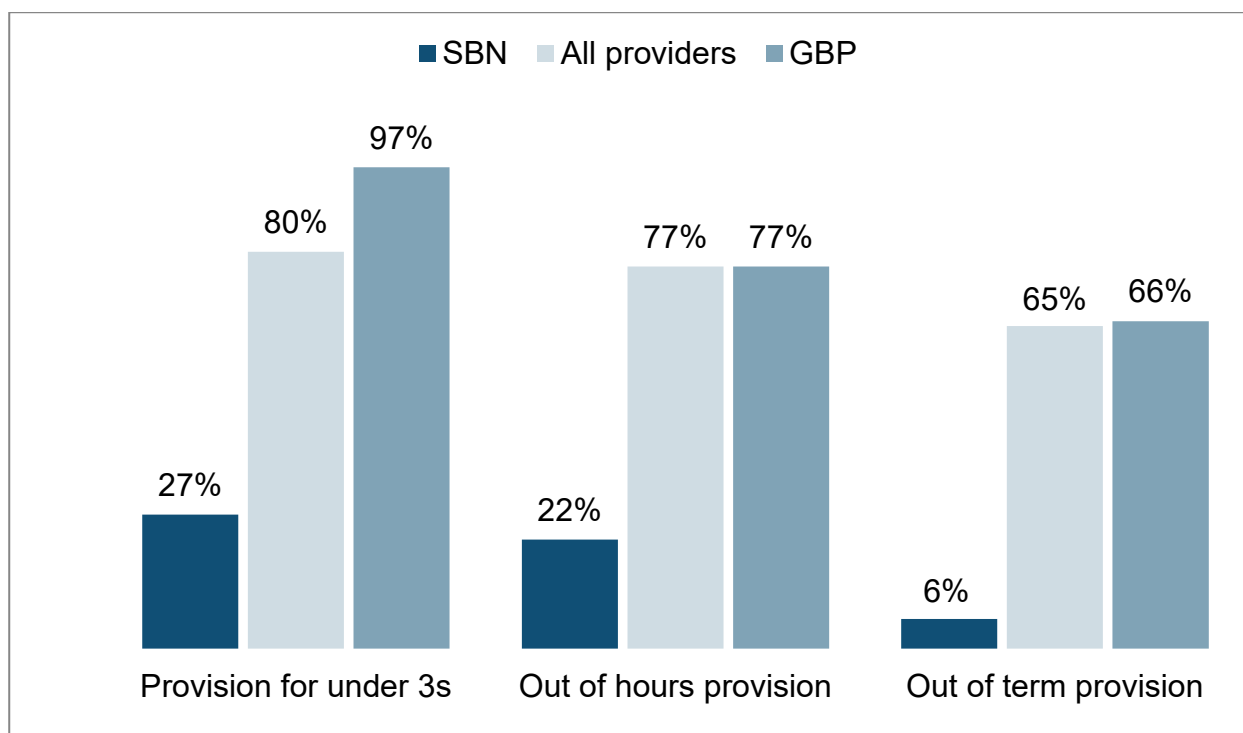
## Profile of SBNs that operate outside of the typical model

This chapter presents findings from the SCEYP 2024 and shows the extent to which providers are offering non-typical provision, and any trends in characteristics of these SBNs.

### Proportion of SBNs that offer non-typical provision

Figure 5 shows the proportion of SBNs that offer the 3 types of provision focused on for this research, compared with the proportion of all providers (including group-based providers (GBPs) and childminders); and the proportion of GBPs.

**Figure 5: Proportion of providers that offer under-3s, out of hours and out of term provision**



*Provision for under-3s: Of the children you currently have registered, how many are under 2 / 2 years old? Base: All providers (12,013); SBNs (1,898), GBPs (5,273); Out of hours provision: What time did your provision start on that reference day?/ What time did your provision end on that reference day? Base: Providers asked relevant survey variant (3,534); SBNs (837), GBPs (1,976); Out of term provision: Does your nursery normally care for children during term-time, school holidays, or both?; Out of term provision Base: All providers that completed the core survey (8,106); SBNs (1,702), GBPs (5,040).*

Overall, SBNs were much less likely to offer all of the non-typical provision, compared to all providers (which includes GBPs and childminders as well as SBNs) and GBPs. Just

over a quarter of SBNs offered provision for under-3s (27%) and just over a fifth out of hours provision (22%). Fewer, just 6%, offered out of term provision. In contrast nearly all GBPs (97%) offered provision for under-3s, most GBPs (77%) offered out of hours provision and around two-thirds (66%) offered out of term provision. GBPs that were run for a profit (as opposed to voluntary or LA maintained GBPs) were more likely to offer all of the types of provision: 98% offered provision for under-3s, 90% offered out of hours provision, and 82% offered out of term provision.

There were also some differences by the type of SBN offering each type of provision. Maintained nursery schools (MNSs) were the most likely to offer provision for under-3s (86%). Independent nurseries were most likely to offer out of hours provision (79%) and offer out of term provision (35%). Maintained schools with nursery classes were the least likely to offer all 3 types of provision: only 23% offered provision to under-3s; 15% out of hours; and 3% out of term.

As the table below shows there was some crossover in the SBNs offering each type of provision, but only very minimal offering all three.

**Table 2 Crossover in SBNs offering each type of provision**

Types of provision	Percentage of SBNs that offer
All three	2%
under-3s and out of hours	12%
under-3s and out of term	4%
Out of hours and out of term	5%

*Provision for under-3s: Of the children you currently have registered, how many are under 2 / 2 years old? Base: All SBNs (1,898); Out of hours provision: What time did your provision start on that reference day?/ What time did your provision end on that reference day? Base: SBNs asked relevant variant (837); Out of term provision: Does your nursery normally care for children during term-time, school holidays, or both?; Base: All SBNs (1,702).*

## Time series of proportion offering non-typical provision

Figure 6 shows the time series for SBNs and GBPs offering the three types of provision in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Provision for under-3s<sup>12</sup> amongst SBNs has risen very slightly,

<sup>12</sup> For context, the expanded entitlements for under-3s was introduced in three phases:

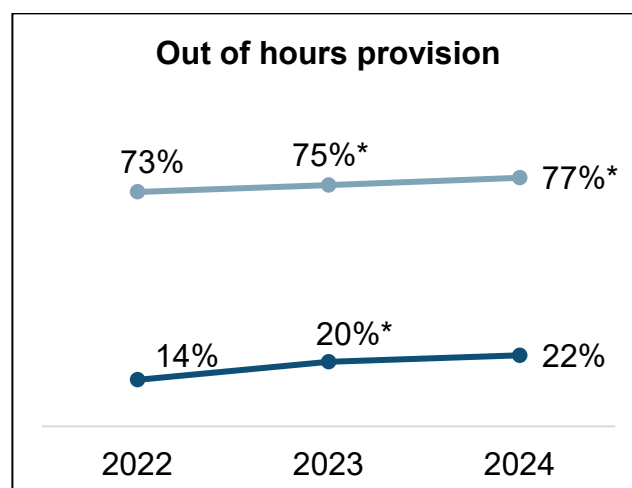
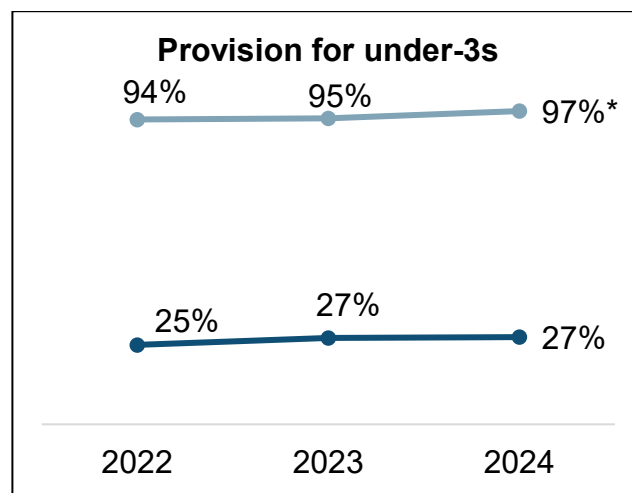
- April 2024 – 15 hours funded childcare for 2-year-olds (before the start of SCEYP 2024 fieldwork).
- September 2024 – 15 hours funded childcare from 9 months old up to age 3 (after SCEYP 2024 fieldwork).
- September 2025 – 30 hours funded childcare from 9 months old up to age 3 (after SCEYP 2024 fieldwork).

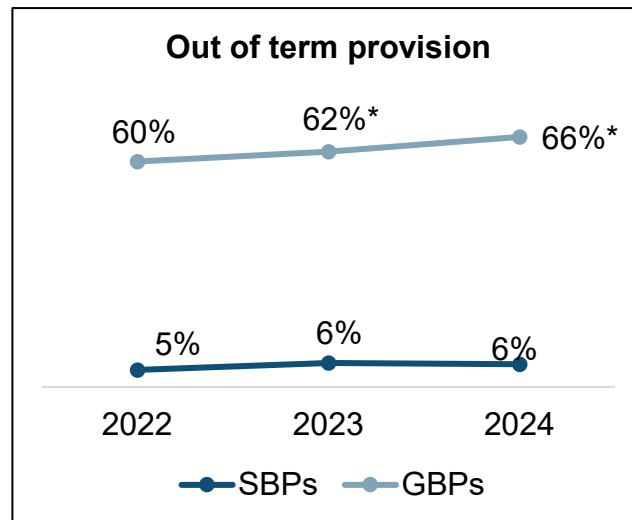
but not statistically significantly, from 25% to 27%. The vast majority of GBPs offered provision to under-3s across all three years, but this has seen a statistically significant rise from 94% in 2023 to 97% in 2024.

Out of hours provision among SBNs rose significantly from 14% in 2022 to 20% in 2023, with a smaller (non-significant) rise to 22% in 2024. GBPs saw a small yet statistically significant rise from 73% to 77% in the time period.

Out of term provision amongst SBNs has remained stable (staying at 5-6% across 2022-2024), whereas GBP out of term provision rose steadily from 60% in 2022 to 66% in 2024.

**Figure 6: Proportion of providers that offer under-3s, out of hours and out of term provision**





*Provision for under-3s: Of the children you currently have registered, how many are under 2 / 2 years old? Base: SBNs (2022:2,435, 2023:2,037, 2024:1,898), GBPs (2022:5,865, 2023:5,130, 2024:5,273); Out of hours provision: What time did your provision start on that reference day?/ What time did your provision end on that reference day? Base: SBNs (2022:2,307, 2023:1,955, 2024:1,927), GBPs 2022:5,650, 2023:5,000, 2024: 5,357); Out of term provision: Does your nursery normally care for children during term-time, school holidays, or both?; Out of term provision Base: SBNs (2022:2,434, 2023:2,037, 2024:1,702), GBPs (2022:5,865, 2023:5,130, 2024:5,040).*

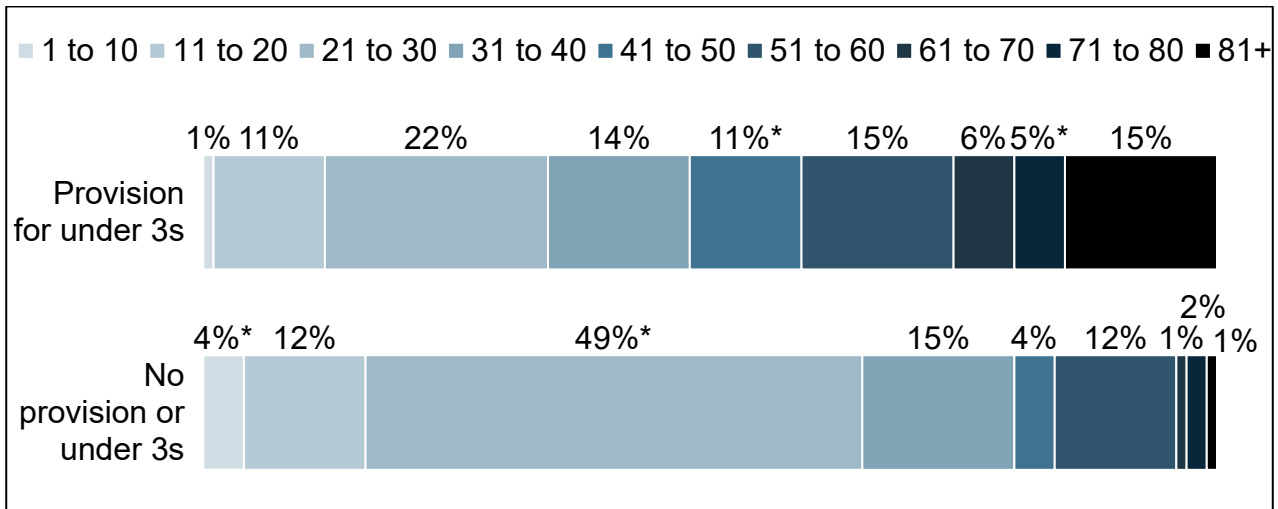
## Profile of those offering non-typical provision by size of SBN

The rest of this chapter highlights statistically significant differences between SBNs that do and do not offer each provision type.

Figure 7 shows the profile of SBNs that provided provision for under-3s in the 2024 SCEYP against those who did not, based on the number of children looked after. Those offering provision for under-3s were statistically significantly more likely to be larger SBNs; 15% of SBNs that offered provision to under-3s cared for over 80 children, compared to only 1% that did not offer provision to under-3s.

At the lower size end of the scale, only a third of SBNs that offered provision to under-3s had 30 or fewer children compared to two-thirds of SBNs that did not offer provision to under-3s (4% 1 to 10 children, 12% 11 to 20, 49% 21 to 30). There is potentially a natural relationship between these aspects, given that the number of children looked after by an SBN would increase with the additional age groups. However, it is at such scale that it suggests that larger SBNs are more likely to include under-3s in their provision, i.e. the difference is more than would be expected for additional classes.

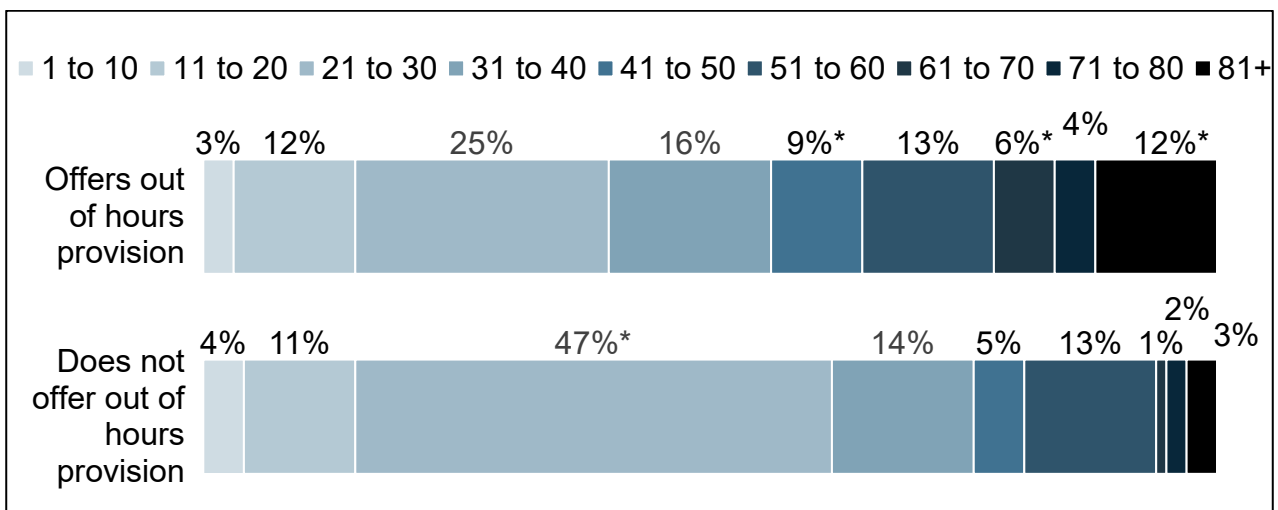
**Figure 7: Size profile of SBNs that do and do not offer provision for under-3s**



*How many children are you allowed to look after in your nursery at any one time? Base: SBNs that cares for under-3s (496); SBNs that do not care for under-3s (1288). \*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision*

Again, SBNs offering out of hours provision were more likely to be larger, with 12% of those offering looking after more than 80 children, compared to only 3% of those not offering out of hours provision having the highest numbers of children. However, those offering and not offering out of hours provision were equally likely to be the smallest SBNs, looking after 20 or fewer children (although those not offering out of hours provision were more likely to look after 21 to 30 children).

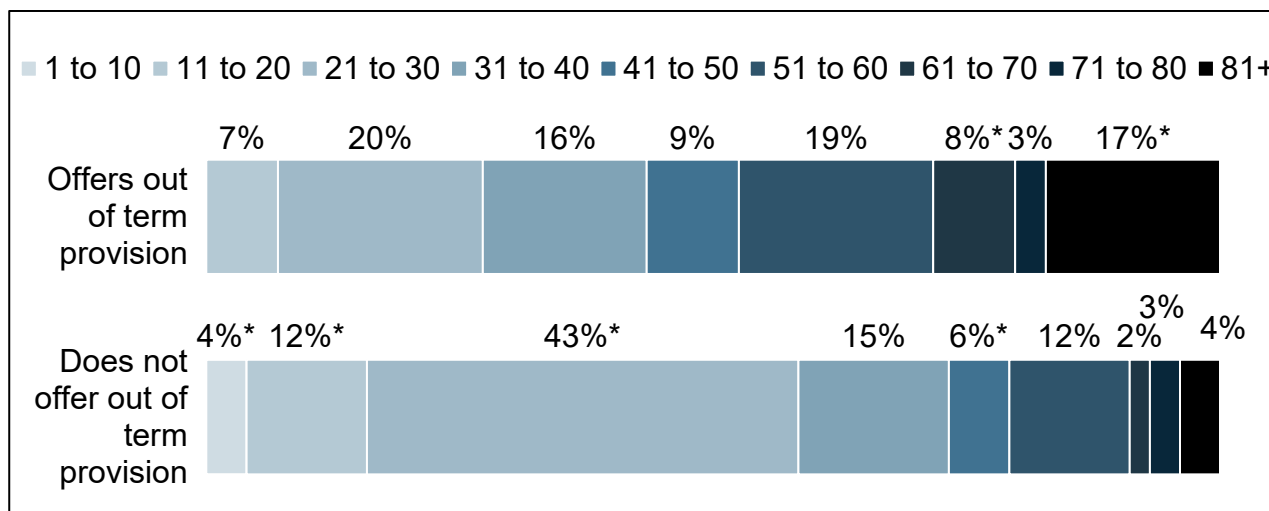
**Figure 8: Size profile of SBNs that do and do not offer out of hours provision**



*How many children are you allowed to look after in your nursery at any one time? Base: SBNs that offer out of hours provision (168); SBNs that do not offer out of hours provision (615). \*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision*

SBNs who offered out-of-term provision were also likely to be larger providers (Figure 9). For example, nearly a fifth (17%) cared for more than 80 children at any one time compared to only 4% of those that did not offer out of term provision.

**Figure 9: Size profile of SBNs that do and do not offer out of term provision**



How many children are you allowed to look after in your nursery at any one time? Base: SBNs that offer out of term provision (85); SBNs that do not offer out of hours provision (1,510).

\*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision

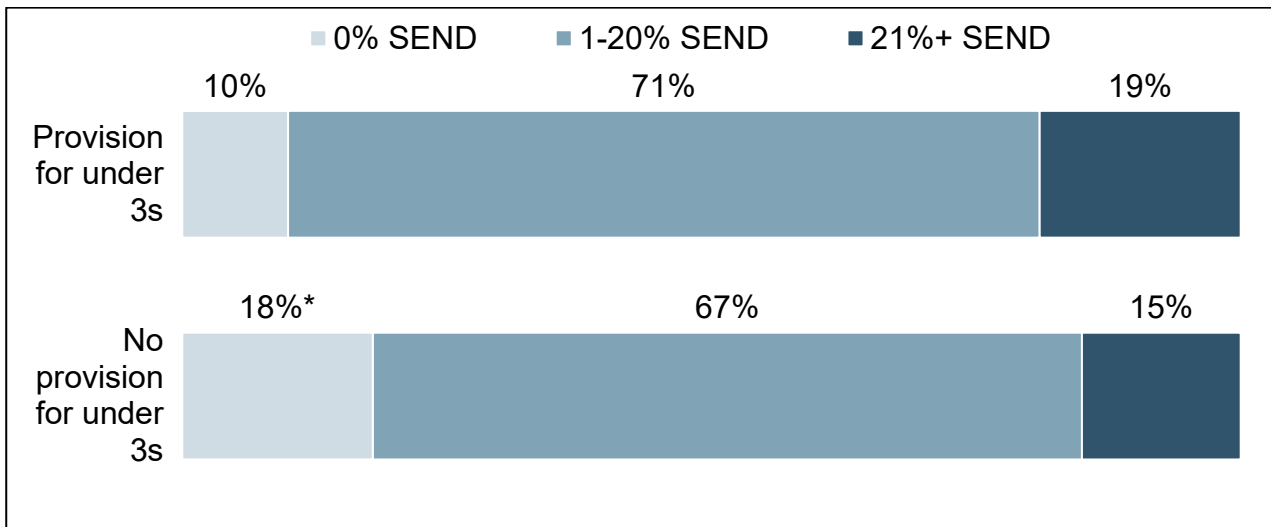
## Comparison to GBP profile

The same patterns were observed for GBPs, with GBPs offering each type of provision being statistically significantly more likely to have a larger number of children that they cared for, compared to those that did not offer each provision type.

## Profile of those offering non-typical provision by proportion of SEND children

SBNs that offered provision for under-3s were more likely to have children with SEND: nine-in-ten (90%) of these SBNs reported that at least one of their children had SEND, compared to eight-in-ten (82%) of those without provision for under-3s (Figure 10). That said, there was no difference for those with a higher proportion of SEND children, both SBNs that did and did not offer provision to under-3s were similarly likely to have more than 20% children with SEND.

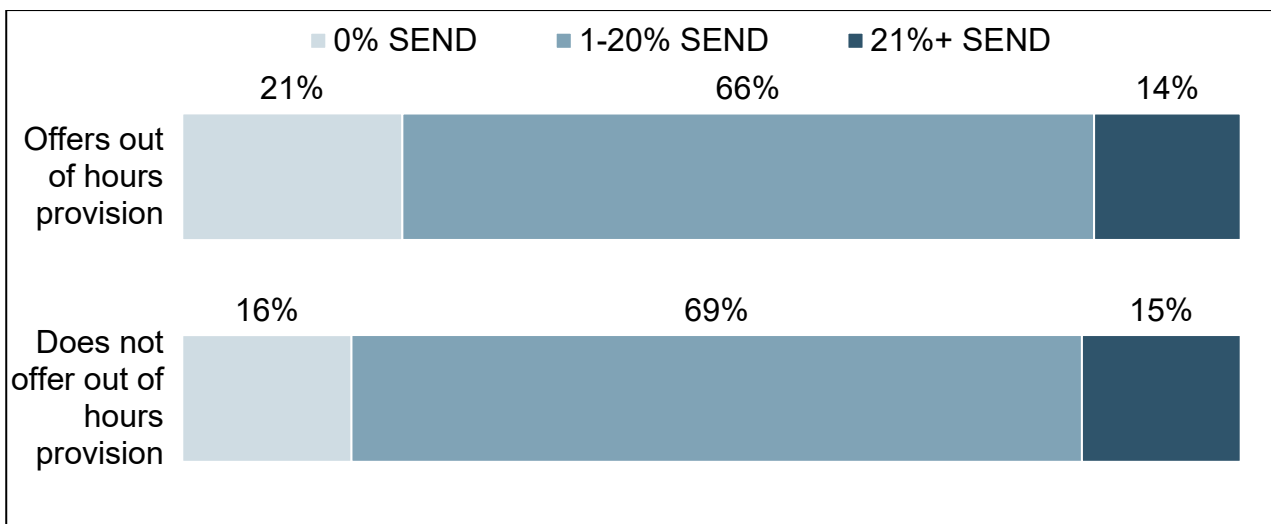
**Figure 10: Proportion of children with SEND in SBNs that do and do not offer provision for under-3s**



*How many children in your nursery have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities? Base: SBNs that cares for under-3s (442); SBNs that do not care for under-3s (1,094); excluding Don't know/Prefer not to say. \*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision*

For SBNs that did and did not offer out of hours provision, there was no clear difference in their respective profiles according to the proportion of children with SEND, with the proportions for each being statistically similar (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Proportion of children with SEND in SBNs that do and do not offer out of hours provision**

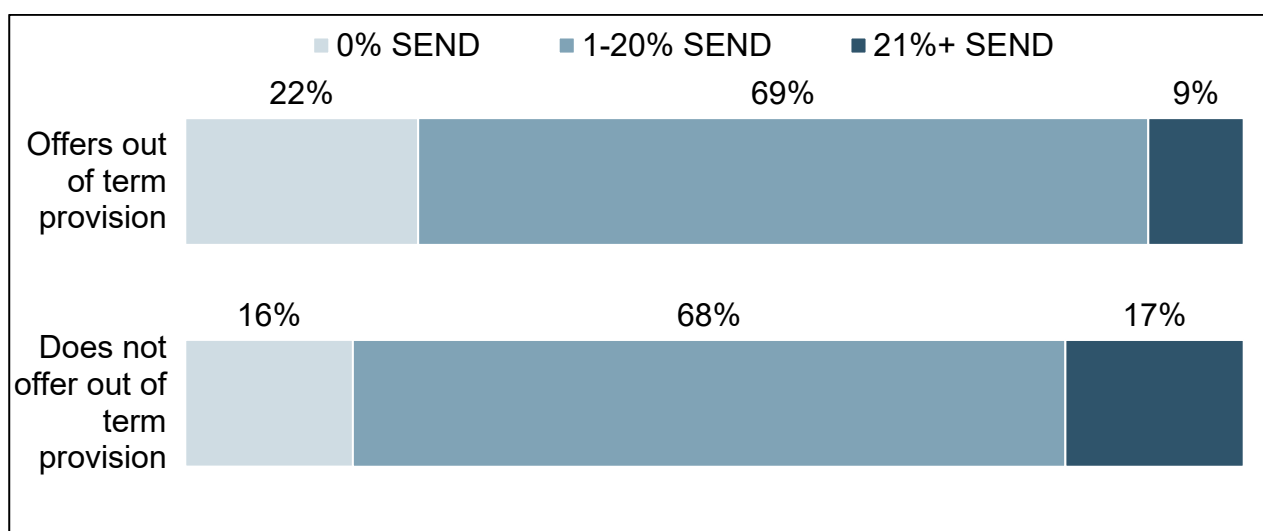


*How many children in your nursery have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities? Base: SBNs that offer out of hours provision (168); SBNs that do not offer out of hours provision (599);*

excluding Don't know/Prefer not to say. \*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision

There was, however, an indicative but not statistically significant, difference in profiles for out-of-term provision, with SBNs who offered this provision having a lower proportion of children with SEND. Twenty-two percent of these SBNs did not have any children with SEND, higher than the 16% that did not offer this provision (Figure 12). At the other end of the scale SBNs that offered out of term provision were also less likely to have a high proportion of children with SEND (9% had 21+% of their children with SEND vs. 17% of those who did not offer out of term provision).

**Figure 12: Proportion of children with SEND in SBNs that do and do not offer provision for under-3s**



How many children in your nursery have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities? Base: SBNs that offer out of term provision (81); SBNs that do not offer out of term provision (1,459); excluding Don't know/Prefer not to say. \*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision

## Comparison to GBP profile

The same patterns in profiles did not hold for GBPs, although it was not possible to replicate the analysis for out of hours provision:

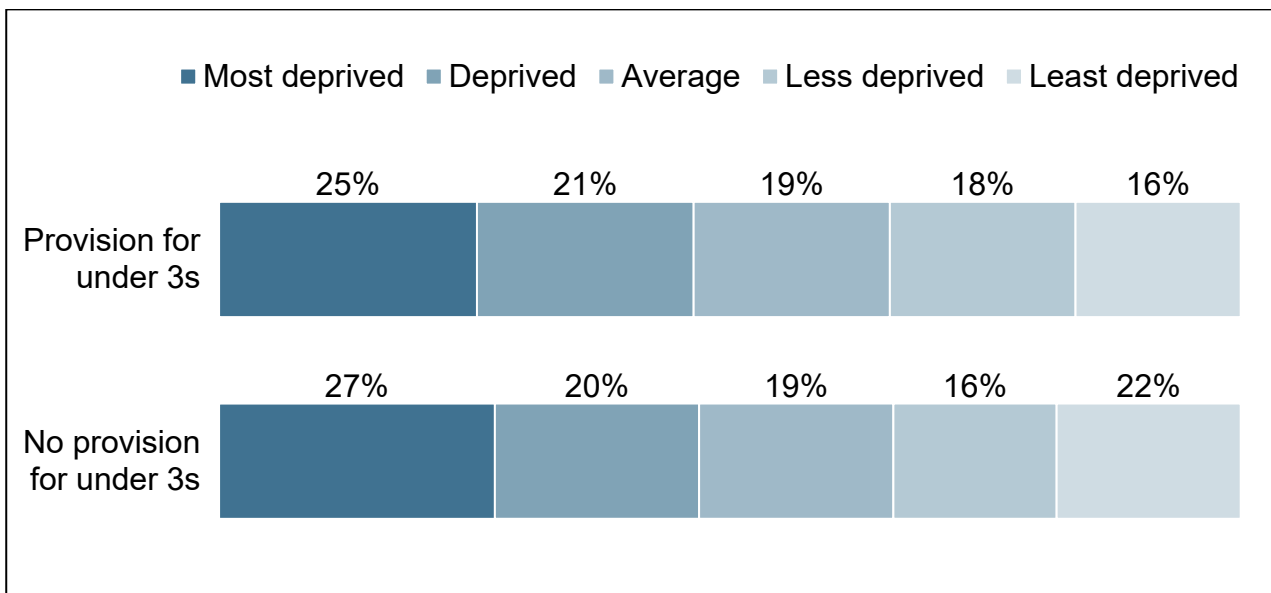
- Offering provision to under-3s: no difference in profiles, i.e. GBPs with provision for under-3s were not more or less likely to have a higher or lower proportion of children with SEND than GBPs not offering provision to under-3s
- Offering out of hours provision: data not available due to questions on number of SEND children and hours open being asked to different survey variants of GBPs

- Offering out of term provision: GBPs that offered out of term provision were statistically significantly less likely to care for a high proportion of SEND children (6% had 21+% of children with SEND, compared to 19% of those that did not offer out of term provision). However, the trend of data for SBNs did show a similar pattern but it was not statistically significant.

## Profile of those offering non-typical provision by level of deprivation

Figure 13 shows the profile of SBNs that did and did not offer provision to under-3s by level of deprivation. There were no differences in the likelihood of SBNs to offer provision to under-3s to be more or less deprived, with the profiles being broadly consistent.

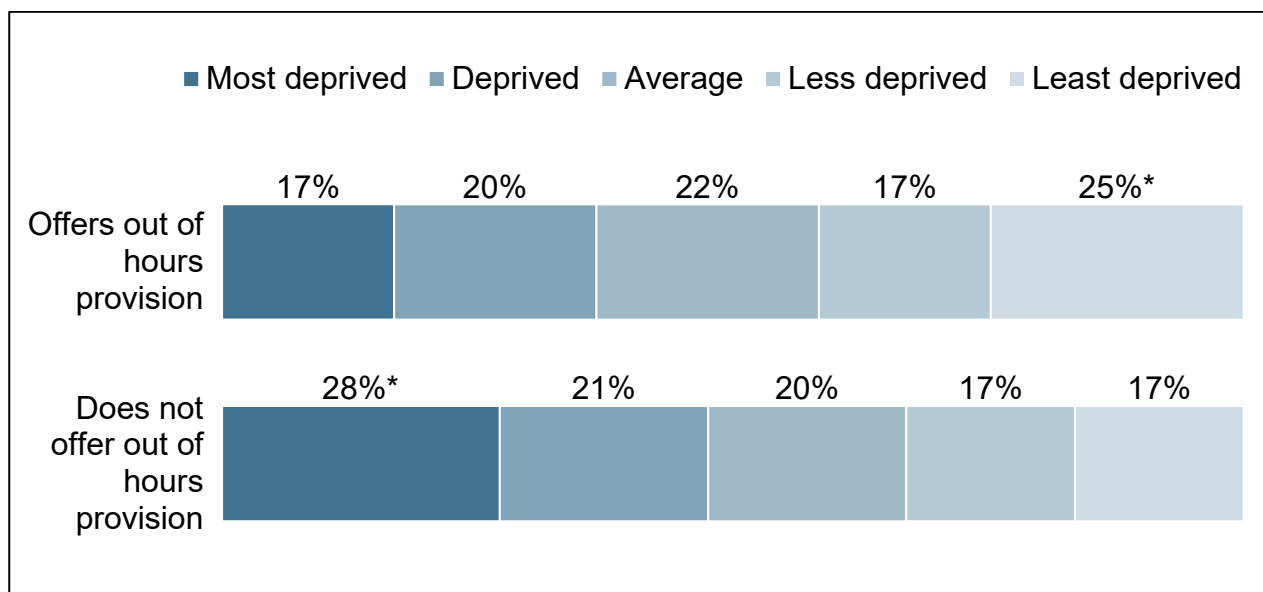
**Figure 13: Deprivation band of SBNs that do and do not offer provision for under-3s**



*Level of deprivation taken from DfE and Ofsted data Base: SBNs that cares for under-3s (496); SBNs that do not care for under-3s (1288). \*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision*

As shown in Figure 14, SBNs that offered out of hours provision were more likely to be in the least deprived areas (25% vs. 17% of those that did not offer it). Conversely, they were less likely to be in the most deprived areas (17% vs. 28%).

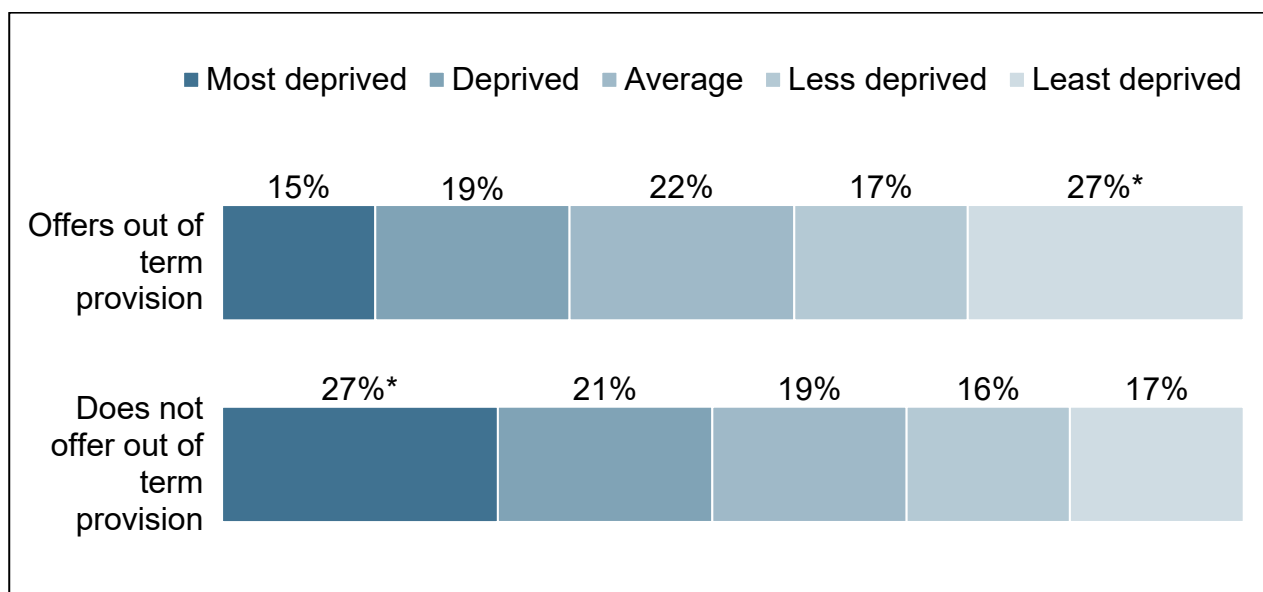
**Figure 14: Deprivation band of SBNs that do and do not offer out of hours provision**



Level of deprivation taken from DfE and Ofsted data Base: SBNs that offer out of hours provision (168); SBNs that do not offer out of hours provision (615). \*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision

There was a similar pattern for SBNs offering out of term provision. Those offering it were more likely to be in the least deprived areas (27% vs. 17% of those not offering), and less likely to be in the most deprived areas (15% vs. 27%).

**Figure 15: Deprivation band of SBNs that do and do not offer out of term provision**



*Level of deprivation taken from DfE and Ofsted data Base: SBNs that offer out of term provision (85); SBNs that do not offer out of hours provision (1,510). \*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision*

## **Comparison to GBP profile**

The deprivation profiles of GBPs offering each type of provision showed different patterns to SBNs:

- Offering provision to under-3s: GBPs offering this were statistically significantly more likely to be in the most deprived areas (16% vs. 8% of those not offering) and statistically significantly less likely to be in the least deprived areas (23% vs. 31%).
- Offering out of hours provision: there were no differences in profiles for GBPs.
- Offering out of term provision: GBPs showed the opposite pattern to SBNs, with those offering out of term provision being statistically significantly more likely to be in the most deprived areas (17% vs. 13% of those not offering).

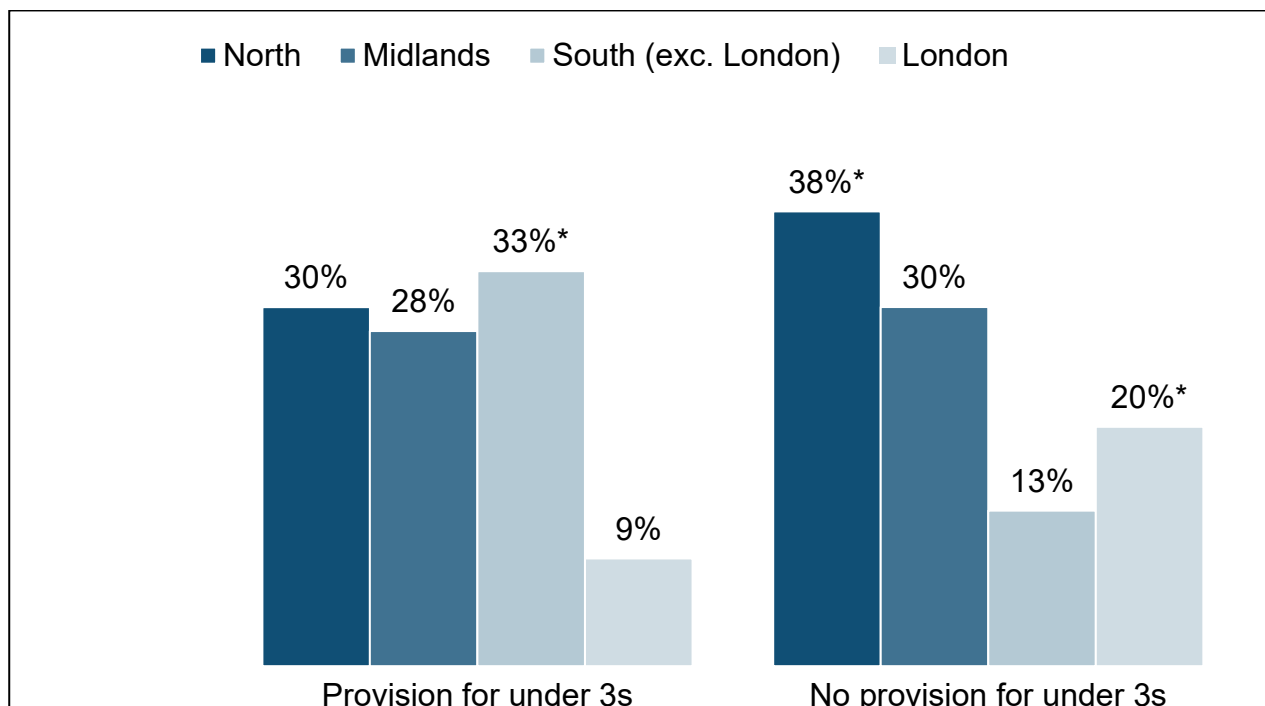
## **Profile of those offering non-typical provision by region**

Figures 16 to 18 show the profile of SBNs that did and did not offer each provision type by whether they were located in the North, Midlands, South of England (excluding London), or London. London was split out from the South of England because analysis showed there was a different pattern in London than the rest of the South.

SBNs that offered provision to under-3s were more likely to be located in the South (excluding London) compared to those who did not (33% vs. 20%). However, London showed the opposite pattern (9% of those that offered this provision were in London vs. 20% that did not). SBNs that offered out-of-hour provision were less likely to be based in the North (31% vs. 37%).

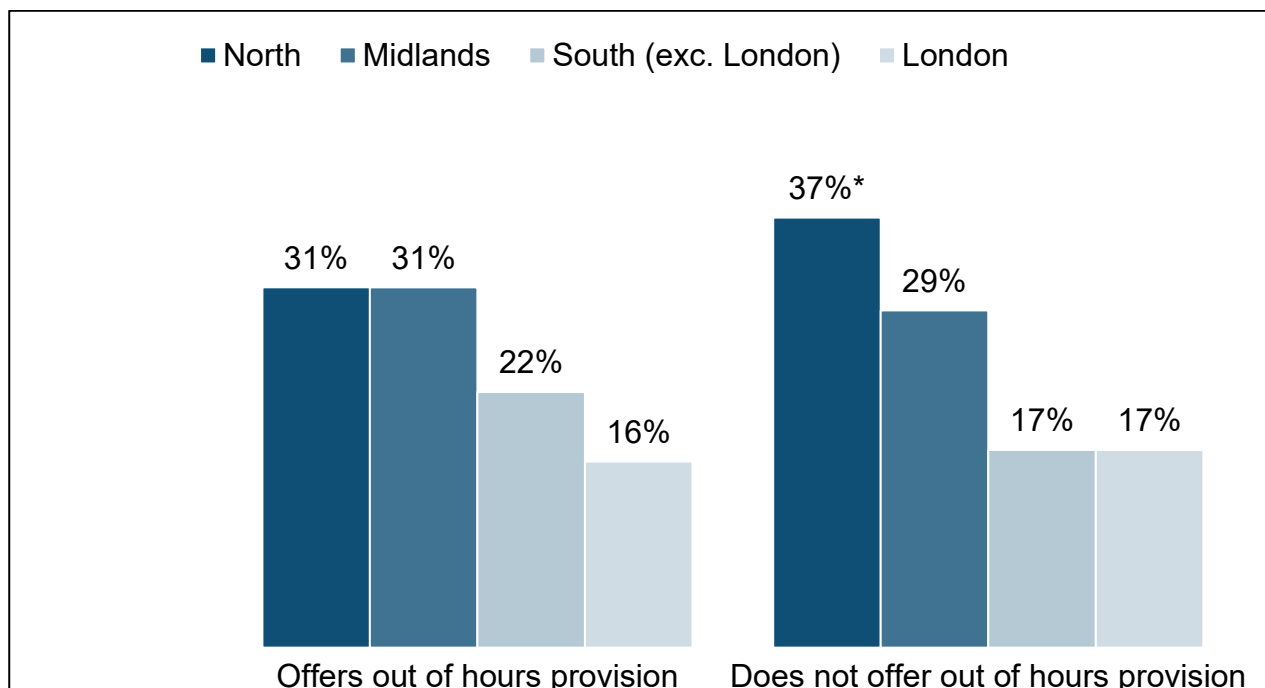
There were no differences by region for those offering and not offering out of term provision.

**Figure 16: Region of SBNs that do and do not offer provision for under-3s**



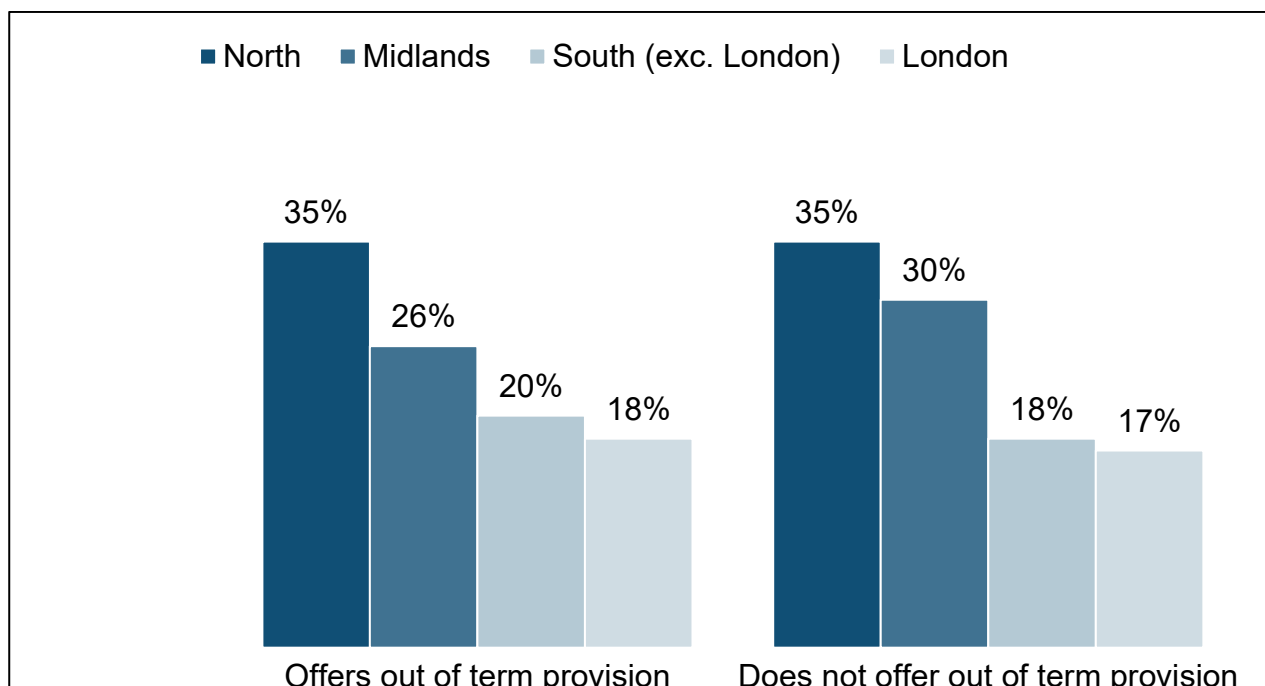
Region taken from DfE and Ofsted data Base: SBNs that cares for under-3s (496); SBNs that do not care for under-3s (1288). \*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision

**Figure 17: Region of SBNs that do and do not offer out of hours provision**



Region taken from DfE and Ofsted data Base: SBNs that offer out of hours provision (168); SBNs that do not offer out of hours provision (615). \*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision

**Figure 18: Region of SBNs that do and do not offer out of term provision**



Region taken from DfE and Ofsted data Base: SBNs that offer out of term provision (85); SBNs that do not offer out of hours provision (1,510). \*Indicates percentage that is significantly higher for those that do/not offer provision

## Comparison to GBP profile

The GBP profiles for region sometimes matched the SBN patterns, and sometimes did not:

- Offering provision to under-3s: the profile differences was different to SBNs, with those offering provision to under-3s being statistically significantly more likely to be in London (18% vs. 12% of those not offering).
- Offering out of hours provision: GBPs showed the opposite pattern to SBNs, in that GBPs offering out of hours provision were statistically significantly more likely to be in the North (26% vs. 14%). GBPs offering out of hours provision were less likely to be in the South (excluding London) (27% vs. 39%).
- Offering out of term provision: Unlike SBNs, there were differences in the region profiles for GBPs. GBPs offering out of term provision were statistically significantly more likely to be in the North (27% vs. 17% not offering) and statistically significantly less likely to be in the South (excluding London) (26% vs. 37%).

## Conclusions

**Parent demand was the main driving factor as to whether SBNs offered non-typical provision.** The existence, or not, was the primary reason SBNs gave for offering, or not offering, all of the 3 types of provision covered by this research. Needing to work and not having alternative childcare options (such as family), was the source of that demand. For many SBNs currently not offering this provision, to them it made little sense considering the demand was not there. This is reflected in the analysis that showed that SBNs in less deprived areas were more likely to offer out of hours and out of term provision, in that in these areas parents would be more likely to be in work. For out of hours and out of term provision, SBNs occasionally referenced the other providers in the area were doing so and they needed to do it to “keep up”. SBN’s response to local demand does suggest that those not currently offering non-typical provision would be persuaded to if they felt sufficiently reassured of the demand.

**Non-typical provision was seen to support working parents, and to have benefits for children.** All 3 types of provision were identified as benefiting parents in that it allowed them to work. There were also benefits of the provision being on the site of a school if they had older children attending. Precise benefits for children varied depending on how the provision was delivered. For example, where it involved mixing with older children this was considered to be a benefit. There were also specific benefits for children with SEND and children from disadvantaged areas. Despite these benefits, it was not always the case that SBNs with higher proportions of SEND or in the most deprived areas were more likely to offer non-typical provision. In contrast, SBNs in the least deprived areas were more likely to offer out of hours and out of term provision, likely reflecting the working status of and therefore demand from the parents.

**Our evidence suggests there was limited financial benefit to SBNs offering non-typical provision.** With the exception of out of term provision (where consistency of income was identified), SBNs did not identify financial benefits. The additional costs (particularly staffing costs), plus the low parental demand, meant that those not offering this provision mostly felt it would not be financially viable for them to do so. It is worth noting that those working in SBNs are not typically motivated by financial benefits but rather are motivated to provide what families need where it is financially viable to do so.

**Known recruitment and retention challenges of the early years sector become more challenging in the context of staffing for non-typical provision.** The increased staffing requirement was a challenge for SBNs offering this provision, and represented a major barrier to those not currently offering it. For under-3s, the main challenge was

simply needing a higher number of staff. While for out of hours and out of term, there was the additional challenge of finding staff willing to work at those times.<sup>13</sup>

**In addition to staffing, there are other logistical barriers and challenges that SBNs would need to overcome.** For under-3s, this was typically linked to not having sufficient or suitable space for the additional children, especially considering their additional needs. Sometimes SBNs felt it would not be possible to expand or adapt the space, while others had concerns about the expense required. For out of hours and out of term, there would likely need to be changes to staff contracts and rotas, and discussions with the school to ensure key services and utilities would be available. Those in the SBN were often not the key decision makers, with school or MAT leaders having ultimate control of priorities meaning that school and MAT leaders would need to agree offering the non-typical provision was worth overcoming the barriers for.

**This perception of low financial viability among some SBNs means that support with funding would be desired.** SBNs were not keen to expand their provision themselves, but to be encouraged to do so they would need to be reassured that they would be supported financially. This is linked to SBNs view that the demand from parents was not there, so they would not be able to make enough money from it to cover the investment needed to offer the provision. SBNs tended to specifically reference LA funding, but centralised funding or grants (such as the School-Based Nursery Capital Grant) could also be used to provide financial support to either make necessary changes to the site or towards staff recruitment costs.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, it is likely that SBNs not currently offering non-typical provision would need an external push for them to do so, because it is not something that it is currently a priority for some SBNs. This external push would likely need to reassure them of financial viability, either through proof of local demand and/or through funding or grants to support SBNs to make the necessary changes. Additionally, any funding or grants made available, whether local or national, would likely need to be explicitly tied to non-typical provision for it to be used as such. They would also welcome clear guidance on what would be required of them in terms of delivery and staffing requirements.

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<sup>13</sup> Findings on staff recruitment and retention challenges should be interpreted in line with findings from 2024 SCEYP about staff turnover (8% for SBNs and 16% for GBPs)

<sup>14</sup> [School-based Nursery Capital Grant 2027-2030](#)

## Appendix A: Glossary and acronyms

**Group-based providers (GBPs):** Childcare providers registered with Ofsted and operating in non-domestic premises (excluding providers solely on the voluntary register), typically in settings like day nurseries

**Local authority:** An administrative body in local government responsible for providing local public services and facilities. Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Childcare Act 2006 to ensure there is sufficient childcare available for families in their area, including supporting the establishment of new SBNs where needed, distributing early years entitlement funding, and providing training, advice and support to providers.

**Multi-academy trust (MAT):** An academy trust that oversees and manages a group of academies

**Maintained nursery school (MNS):** Purpose-built maintained schools specifically for children in their early years and with a qualified teacher present

**Out of hours provision:** Before-school and/or after-school care for children in term time, run at least 4 days per week. For the purposes of this research, this was defined as provision before 8:30am and/or after 3:30pm

**Out of term provision:** Holiday activities or childcare for school children during any school holidays, including half terms

**Other non-typical provision:** Non-typical provision outside of provision for under-3s, out of hours and out of term provision, such as extracurricular activities

**School-based nursery (SBN):** Nursery provision located on a school site

**Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND):** In this research, specifically children who have learning difficulties or disabilities

**Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers (SCEYP):** annual survey to provide snapshot information on childcare and early years provision in England, to help the Government understand the profile of the early years sectors and issues that the sector faces.

**Under-3s provision:** Full day care, fixed sessional care, and/or flexible sessional care for children under the age of 3



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