

Education & Learning
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Dear Parents and Carers,

It is a few weeks since I wrote to you to explain Devon's response to the Government's plans for a wider opening of early years provision. Much has changed since then, and I thought an update on the current situation might be helpful.

In planning the return, providers and parents acted with great care, recognising the importance of provision for children, educationally and socially and for working parents, while also making sure that it was as safe as possible. Across Devon the return to early years settings has gone very well; children and families have been happy and so have staff.

As of the 18th of June, 53% of early years providers in Devon were open to critical workers children, vulnerable children and where possible, to other children that need a place. When broken down this was made up of:

- 36% of childminders
- 52% of preschools and nurseries
- 95% of early years provision in schools

Currently 21% of all children who are registered with a setting (open or closed) are attending. However, whilst the number of new cases of Covid-19 in Devon, per head of population, is significantly lower than the national average the Government is recommending that children should attend just one setting wherever possible. This is so that children do not mix with more children than necessary.

Risk Assessments.

Parents will continue to find that the offer available in each provision is different as it is based on their risk assessment and the needs of the community they serve. For example, if there are a lot of parents who are critical workers it may not be possible to open to more children.

This is because, in line with government guidelines, the settings capacity has reduced as they are now only allowed a maximum of 16 children in each group: these groups are known as bubbles. The bubbles need be kept apart from each

other and so providers' risk assessments have determined the maximum number of bubbles in their setting.

As more children return, some settings may have reached the limits of the physical space available for the bubbles to be maintained safely, others may have reached their maximum staffing capacity.

The Government's priority list places vulnerable children and those of critical workers at the top, followed by children starting school and then younger children. It is possible that some settings could reach capacity with these children alone and no longer be able to make an offer to more children.

We appreciate that this might be frustrating for some families, and potentially very difficult. If you need support, please talk first to your setting to explain the circumstances.

Devon's settings will continue to do everything possible to meet parents' needs, Government guidelines and public health requirements. We also want to do everything we can to support families during what is an extraordinarily challenging time for everyone and will continue to work with early years and childcare providers to help find solutions, but we cannot ask settings to take additional children if it is unsafe for them to do so.

We will see some restrictions being lifted after July 4th and are hopeful that there will be enough provision for all the families that need childcare.

Summer Holiday Childcare

On June 23rd the Prime Minister announced that 'wrap-around care for school age children and formal childcare will restart over the summer.' This will come as a huge relief to many families and we encourage parents to contact providers to book a place now. Places will be confirmed once the government has published its guidance for providers after July 4th.

Finding Childcare

To find childcare at the times when you need it please visit [Pinpoint](#) to see what is available. If you cannot find the childcare you need please complete the [Unable to Find Childcare Form](#) and return it to us. We can arrange for one of our team to contact you to help. Updated information on those settings that will be open in the Summer holidays will be posted on the Devon County Council website when available.

Funding

If you have changed your pattern of attendance this term and are no longer sharing funded hours or have moved settings, please advise all providers so the correct claim can be made.

If you find that your personal circumstances have changed and you are in receipt of certain benefits you can [check whether you are eligible](#) for a **funded two-year old** place. If your child will be attending a school nursery you can check whether they can have a **free school meal** too.

Parents who will not meet the minimum income threshold (16 hours per week at National Minimum/Living Wage) due to lower earnings as a direct result of coronavirus (COVID-19) will be treated as meeting that test during the outbreak. This will apply only to parents who need to apply for, or reconfirm with HMRC, their **30 hours and Tax-Free Childcare** place during the outbreak this year.

We encourage all eligible parents to continue to apply for, and reconfirm, their 30 hours and Tax-Free Childcare entitlement, even if childcare settings are closed or children are not attending. This will ensure a smooth transition back into childcare when possible.

Devon will be funding 30-hour codes where children were ordinarily eligible and expecting to take up a 30 hours childcare place between 1 April 2020 and 31 August 2020 but had missed the reconfirmation or application deadline of 31 March 2020. This will enable children to take up their places in the summer term where there is capacity for providers to take them on. Providers will need you to confirm that your child did turn 3 before 1 April 2020 to ensure they are eligible for a 30 hours place in the summer term.

Starting School

The transition into school is a significant point in a parent and child's life. Some children may have missed time that they would have ordinarily spent in a setting preparing for the move into school. Early years providers and schools are doing their best to ensure that there will be a smooth transition for children that are due to start school in September.

They are supported by advisers so that they can give individual children the support that they need to make the move into school as straightforward as possible. You can find more [information about starting school](#) on the Devon County Council website.

Please don't hesitate to talk to your childcare provider about any concerns you may have.

With very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Dawn Stabb
Head of Education & Learning