



Department  
for Education

## Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak – summary of returns to 22 May

### Headline facts and figures

- Last week, the attendance rate amongst pupils in education settings in England continued to gradually increase, with 2.6% of pupils in attendance on Thursday 21 May compared to 2.4% on Thursday 14 May.
- Around 80% of settings were open on 21 May, the same as the week before.
- The number of vulnerable children attending an education setting was higher than last week, with 75,000 vulnerable children in attendance on 21 May, up from 73,000 on 14 May.
- It was estimated that on 21 May, 88,000 children were attending early years childcare – about 5% of the number of children who usually attend childcare in term time.

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## Background

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

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

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

This data release includes data for education settings from 23 March to 21 May and early years settings from 16 April to 21 May. The data will continue to be published weekly every Tuesday.

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

The narrative in this document focuses on Thursday 21 May. Data to Friday 22 May is available in the accompanying data tables.

## Non-response adjustment

The response rate for the education settings survey has been between 52% and 76%, aside from the three bank holidays where response rate was lower and 1 May when the response rate was affected by technical issues. The response rate since the Easter break has remained stable at around 70%.

These statistics are adjusted to account for settings who do not respond to the survey. The methodology used to make this adjustment was revised after the first full week of reporting.

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

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

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

## Summary of data

### Open settings and overall attendance

17,100 education settings provided a response to the survey on 21 May. This represents 69% of all settings. The following key findings are adjusted for non-response (see [Methodology](#)):

- 80% of settings were open on 21 May - around 19,800 settings. This has been broadly stable for five weeks, since the end of the Easter break.
- Approximately 244,000 children attended an education setting on 21 May, representing 2.6% of pupils who normally attend. This is a slight increase on 14 May, when approximately 231,000 (2.4%) were in attendance.

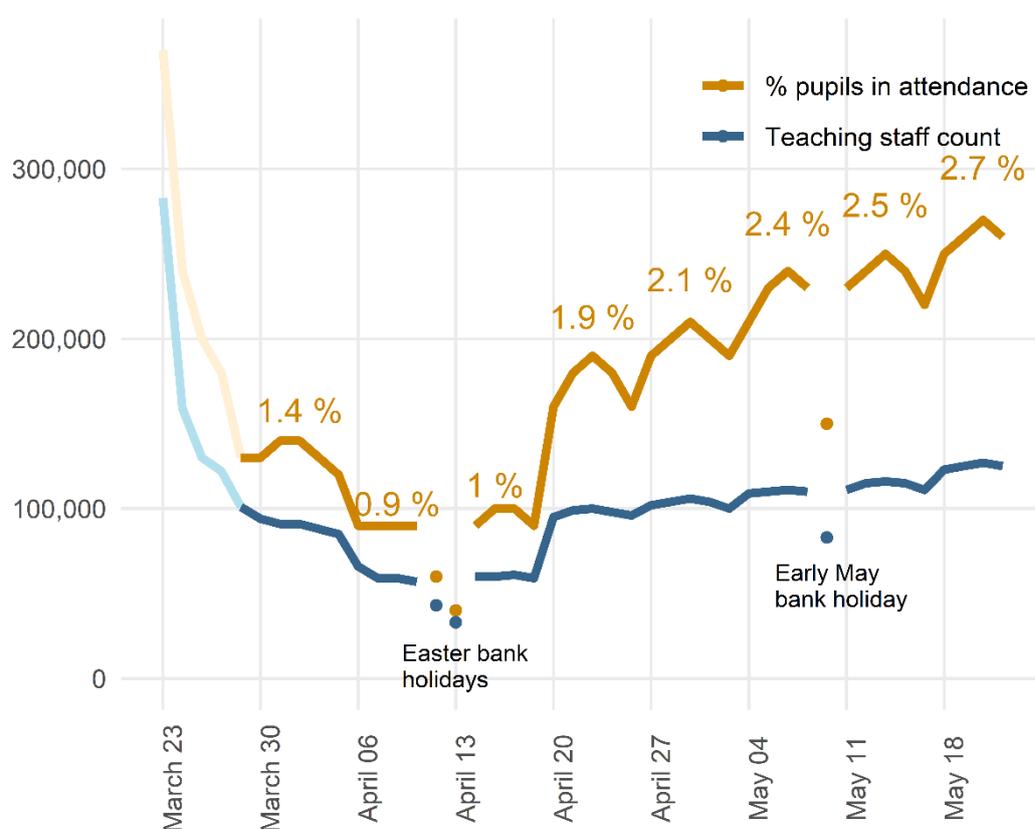


Chart 1: Attendance of pupils and teaching staff in education settings

### Reason for attendance

- 75,000 of the children in attendance on 21 May were classed by schools as vulnerable, up from 73,000 on 14 May. We estimate this represents 15% of all children and young people classified as 'Children in Need' or who have an Education, Health and Care Plan, up from 14% on 14 May.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is an estimate based on the 2019 Children in Need census and January 2019 school census and we are working with education settings and local authorities to improve our understanding of the

- 173,000 of the children in attendance on 21 May were classed by schools as children of critical workers, up from 162,000 on 14 May. We estimate that this represents 6% of all children of critical workers, up from 5% on 14 May.

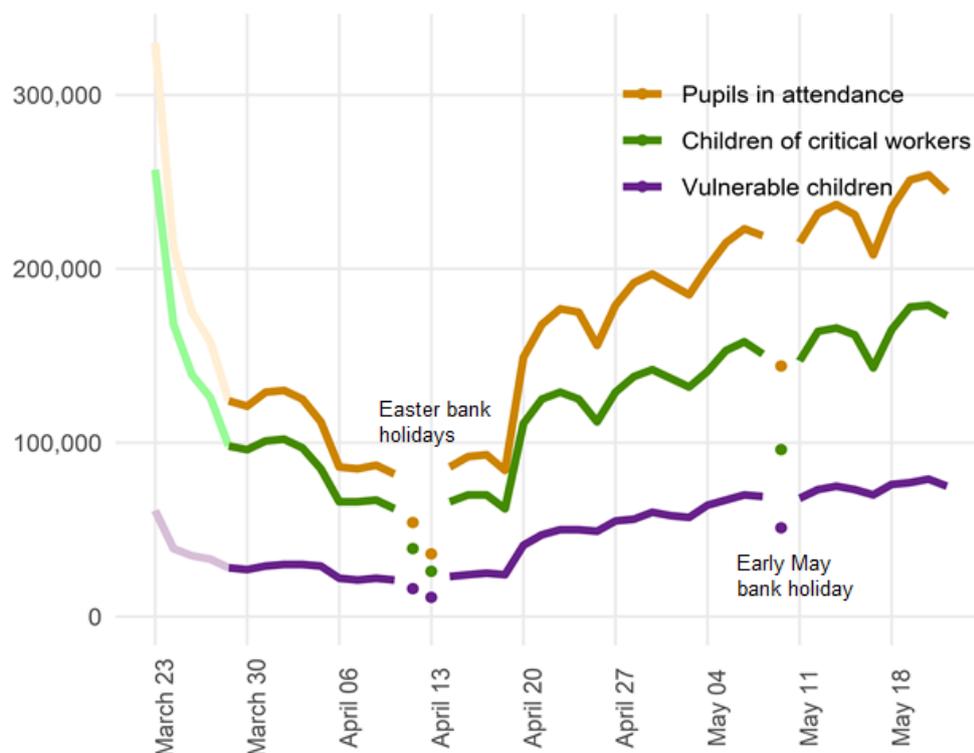


Chart 2: Attendance of vulnerable children and children of critical workers in education settings

- These children were cared for by 125,000 teaching staff and 87,000 non-teaching staff. The number of teachers in attendance has increased compared to 14 May, when 115,000 were in attendance.

## Setting types

- Attendance in special schools (incl. residential special schools) was higher than overall attendance on 21 May, at around 8% compared to 3% overall.
- Attendance in alternative provision (AP) was also higher than overall attendance on 21 May, at between 6-10%.<sup>2</sup>

total number of vulnerable children for whom continued attendance at education settings would be beneficial and appropriate. This is in recognition of the fact that attendance may not be appropriate for some children, including because of health considerations and risks, and that many children with EHC plans may be able to have their needs met safely in the home environment. Full guidance on the definition of vulnerable children and options for continued attendance can be found [here](#).

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

- Attendance at further education settings was low, reflecting the age group of the students.
- Attendance in primary settings was 4%, higher than attendance in secondary settings, at 1%.

Table 1: Response rate, % open and % attendance on 21 May by setting type<sup>3</sup>.

Setting type	Response rate	Open	Pupil attendance
State-funded nursery	54%	69%	5%
State-funded primary	73%	83%	4%
State-funded secondary	75%	85%	1%
Special	71%	83%	8%
Independent school	41%	62%	3%
Alternative provision	65%	74%	6-10%
Further education <sup>4</sup>	24%	39%	<0.5%
Special post 16 institution	49%	68%	42%
Total	69%	80%	3%

## Early years settings

- The response rate to the local authority early years survey was 88%, with 133 out of 151 LAs submitting data by 6pm on 21 May.
- An estimated 25,000 settings are open. This represents 36% of all settings, with 56% closed and 8% unknown.<sup>5</sup>

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

The response rate varies across setting types and so some are more sensitive to the non-response methodology than others.

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

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

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

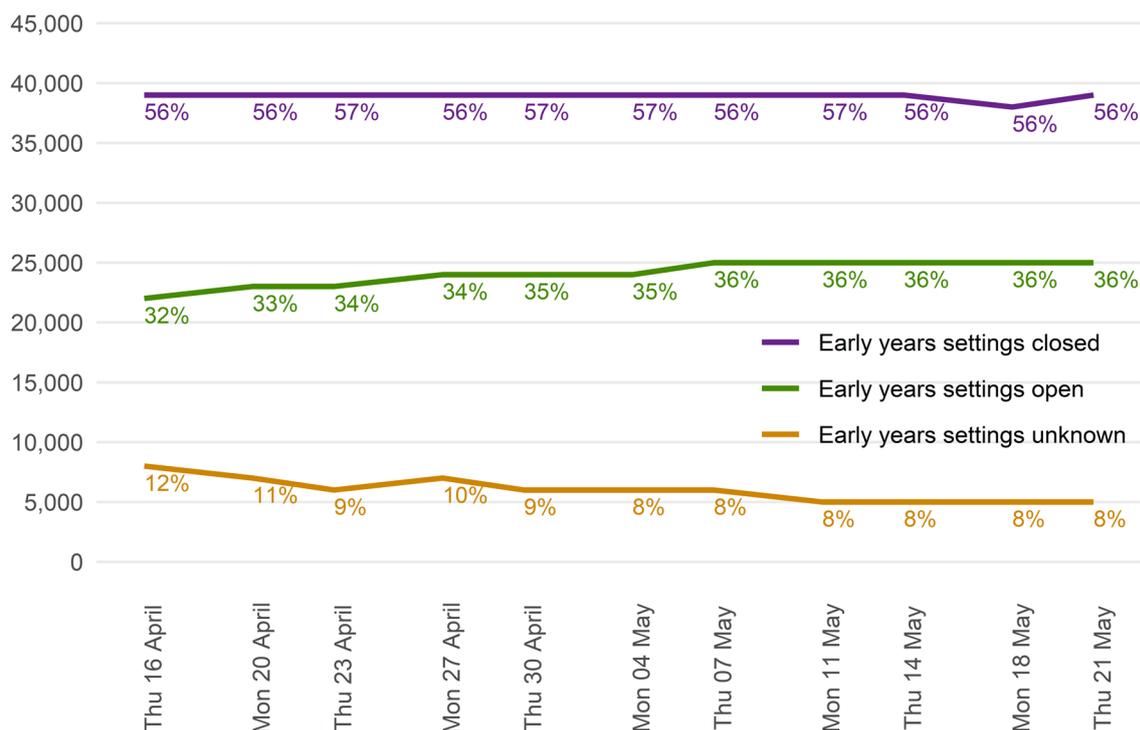


Chart 3: Status of early years settings

- The volume and proportions of early years childcare settings which are closed has remained broadly stable between 16 April and 21 May. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of early years settings identified as open during this time period, and a corresponding decrease in those with unknown status.
- We estimate 88,000 children are currently attending early years childcare settings, an increase from 71,000 on 4 May. This represents approximately 5% of the number of children who usually attend childcare in term time<sup>6</sup>.
- This consists of an estimated 76,000 children of critical workers and 12,000 who are vulnerable children. We estimate this represents approximately 7% of children of critical workers<sup>7</sup> aged 0 to 4 year-old, and 12% of 0 to 4 year olds classified as 'Children in Need' or who have an Education, Health and Care Plan.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The number of children in term time was estimated using outputs from the [Childcare and early years survey of parents: 2019](#) and [ONS National Population Projections: 2018 based](#).

<sup>7</sup> Based on DfE analysis of Labour Force Survey data.

<sup>8</sup> 0 to 4 year olds excluding those in Reception classes. See footnote 1 and methodology section regarding vulnerable children.

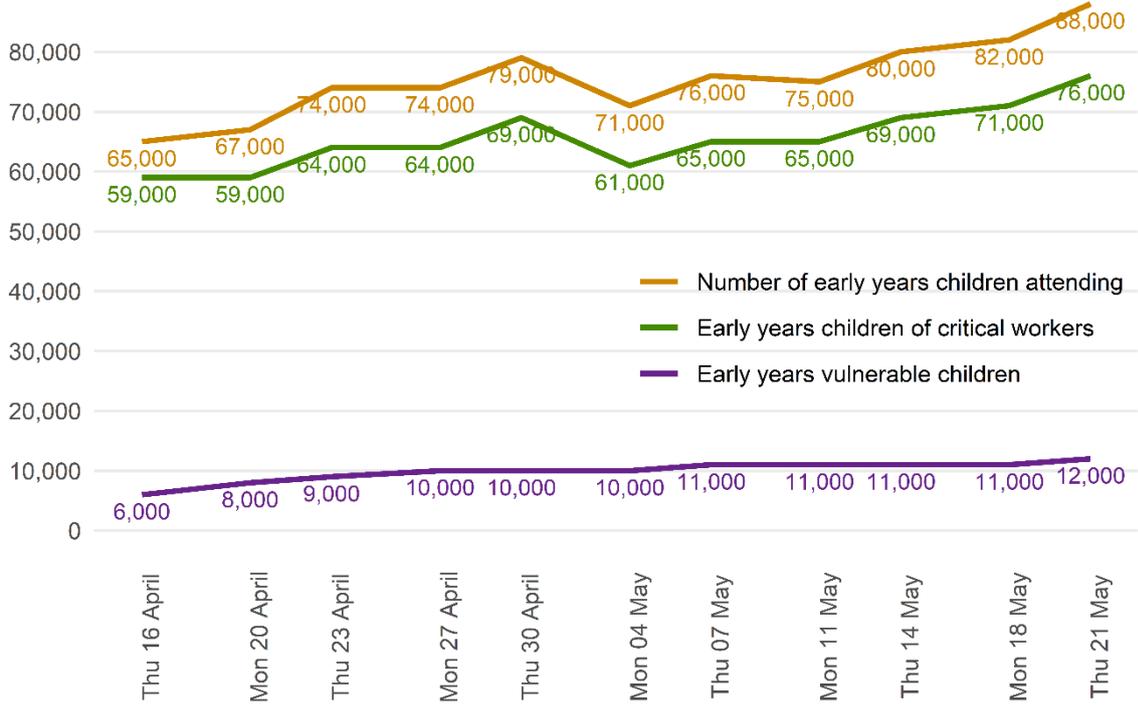


Chart 4: Attendance of children of critical workers and children classed as vulnerable in early years settings

- The number of children, both children of critical workers and vulnerable children, attending an early years childcare setting increased between 16 April and 21 May.

## Methodology

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

### Education settings survey

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

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

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

The response rate has been between 52% to 76%, aside from the three bank holidays where response rate was closer to 20% and on 1 May when the response rate was affected by technical issues. Response rates on Wednesday 13 and Friday 15 were also slightly lower than usual due to technical issues in accessing the survey.

In order to get a full national picture, a grossing methodology was devised. During the first week (Monday 23 March to Friday 27 March), it was assumed that nonresponding settings are as likely to be open or closed as those that provided a return. After a full week of returns, we have been able to analyse return patterns and have developed our methodology which is now as follows:

- Any setting reporting to be open or closed on the day of collection is recorded as such.

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

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

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

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

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Previous methodology</b>	<b>Revised methodology</b>
Number of open establishments	23,700	20,000
Proportion of open establishments	96%	81%
Number of pupils attending	140,000	124,000
Proportion of pupils attending	1.6%	1.3%
Number of teaching Staff	115,000	101,000

Measure	Previous methodology	Revised methodology
Number of support Staff	92,000	80,000

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

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

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

## Early years survey

LAs are asked to complete an online survey from the DfE on provision in EY settings twice weekly (by 6pm on a Monday and Thursday). Each data point represents the most recent data submitted by an LA up until 6pm on any given day. Where no data has been submitted by an LA since Thursday 16 April then an estimate is produced. Basic validity checks of LA data returns were conducted and checks were carried out to ensure that no LA was double-counted. Comparisons were made to other reported data to provide reassurance that the data is a fair reflection of the national picture.

The response rate by LAs to the survey on Thursday 21 May at 6pm was 88%. The data returned was then “grossed up” based on either data previously submitted or data the Department for Education already holds to estimate the total numbers of open settings and children attending those settings:

- The total national numbers of settings, vulnerable children and children of critical workers were estimated from a combination of data including Ofsted data and DfE data, and then broken down to LA level. For LAs which have responded previously we carry forward their data submitted up to one week previously. For LAs never responding, or not responding in the past week, we estimate proxy figures for the number of settings open and closed and the number of children attending. These estimates are based on the proportions of settings open and closed and children attending reported by LAs who did respond. A national estimate is arrived by combining the reported and estimated figures.

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

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

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

## Useful links

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

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