

vulnerable children and children of critical worker. Secondary schools are not being asked to invite further year groups to return this term.

Space and safety:

School classes will usually be 15 children and these 'bubbles' or 'pods' need to be in separate rooms. It is recommended that children in early years settings should be in groups of 8 to 16. The number of rooms available and the size of these rooms need to allow a recommended 2 metre distance between children [or to meet usual Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory requirements] so some settings may have reduced the size of 'bubbles' to ensure the best possible safety.

Staffing numbers:

Schools and settings have to work with the numbers of staff they have currently available as some may be shielding, clinically vulnerable or living with those who are in these categories. Staff numbers may also be affected by furlough arrangements and staff well-being, which may mean that schools and settings feel they cannot safely provide care for as many children at the present time.

Shared areas and outdoor spaces:

Distancing should be maintained between 'bubbles' and different settings will have varying availability of toilets, spaces for lunch, and outdoor space for routine use. There may be a need to stagger lunch time, pick-up and drop-off times for parents to ensure safe distances are maintained. Guidance suggests that schools and settings should use outdoor spaces and well ventilated areas for play and learning. Again, this varies between settings and the available space they have which can be accessed by all children.

Requests for places:

Following government guidance, many settings will have asked critical worker parents and those who have children with higher levels of vulnerability to indicate their needs first, to ensure these could be met safely, before offering places to other children. For many settings, these numbers were high. Parents of children in the other priority groups were then asked to confirm their needs, so that settings could plan their provision in the most effective and safe way for both children and staff. They will have looked at requests for places to ensure they can plan their 'bubble' numbers effectively. In some settings, this will have resulted in part-time places being offered if the full range of requests could not be met. Subsequent requests cannot always be accommodated due to the extensive planning and risk assessments that would need to be reviewed, as well as the numbers of staff and space available.

Nursery and after school care:

National guidance suggests that settings do not mix 'bubbles' of children. Some schools have chosen to provide after school care and usually keep the 'bubble' of vulnerable and critical worker children together for their extended school day. They may not have sufficient staffing to offer out-of-school care. Where children usually attend more than one setting across the day, this complementary care may now have been restricted to one provider, as per the government guidance, to prevent the mixing of 'bubbles'.

Other considerations:

New requests for childcare or a school place – if settings have planned and mapped out their provision with a confirmed number of pupils, they may not be able to re-shape their plans for further attendees. This may be due to the above factors and the need to keep 'bubbles' consistent.

Staff sickness – reduced staffing may lead to fewer children being able to attend.

If children or staff become ill:

If children or staff become ill, settings will sometimes need to isolate a 'bubble' and pupils will not be able to attend their setting until a negative test or an isolation period is achieved.

What to do if you can't get a place in your school/setting:

Most settings are building in **review dates** to revise their plans. Your child may be able to return once some of the factors outlined above have altered, or if national guidance is adjusted to allow additional children to attend. Again, each provider will have differing capacity to alter their current arrangements. Many settings will have communicated their current position to their parents. If you are not sure, contact your setting to register your interest, find out their current position and their future review arrangements. If the setting is 'full' according to their risk assessment arrangements and you don't have other childcare options available, you may need to talk to your employer about your options.

Guidance from Citizens Advice <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-citizens-advice-works/media/press-releases/returning-to-work-citizens-advice-outlines-the-top-six-need-to-knows/>

There is very little capacity for alternative placements within a Solihull school.

Alternative childcare settings can be found at <https://socialsolihull.org.uk/localoffer/family-information-service-directory/>. Here you will find lists of childcare providers including childminders who may be able to care for children of all ages. You may also wish to seek summer holiday provision.

Unfortunately most settings will currently have limited places which are likely to be taken by priority groups at present.

If you are struggling to find a childcare provider you can contact the Family Information Service on 0800 389 8667 or familyinfo@solihull.gov.uk.

Contact for schools - please contact your school in the first instance and then the School Education Improvement Service on SEIS@solihull.gov.uk