

 News

LONG READ: Nurseries warn they may have to withdraw baby places, as DfE moves to stop use of 'floor beds' for infants

10 July [Safeguarding & Welfare Requirements](#)

Early years providers have warned they may no longer be able to take young babies, due to new DfE guidance, which recommends that floor beds should no longer be used for infants, and should be replaced with cots.



The Dream Coracle by Community Playthings is no longer recommended by the DfE for use with children aged 12 months and under, PHOTO: Community Playthings

Nursery World understands that thousands of early years settings in England currently use floor beds, such as Community Playthings' 'Dream Coracle', and sleep pods for babies, which are sold by a number of early years furniture and resource suppliers.

The Department for Education's (DfE) decision to advise settings against using floor beds for babies aged 12 months and under is based on a future prevention of deaths report relating to a bed nest, which the sector has argued cannot be directly compared to coracles.

Many settings have said if they cannot continue to use floor beds with children 12 months and under, they may not be able to continue to provide places for babies. This is either due to a lack of space within the building for cots, particularly for those that don't have sleep rooms, the practical challenge of lifting an almost one-year-old in and out of a cot and not being able to easily reach them, or because a cot takes away children's independence to go for a nap. Added to this is the financial cost of replacing existing floor beds.

What does the guidance say?

The Department for Education's (DfE) new guidance on safer sleep, due to come into force from September, recommends that babies aged 12 months and under only sleep in furniture that

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meets British Safety Standards, such as a cot, carry cot, Moses basket, or travel cot. The guidance is effective from September, but settings are expected to follow it now.

Last month, the DfE provided further clarification after providers sought guidance on furniture used widely across early years settings, that floor beds, mats and coracles are not recommended for children 12 months old and under.

When pressed for information about why this decision had been made, the DfE referred to a prevention of future deaths report that highlighted the risks of beds with 'partially lowered sides'. The report is in response to the death of a child that suffocated after getting caught on the partially lowered side of a Bednest, a bedside sleeper crib, in 2015.

The DfE also said it had 'been advised [by a 'safe sleep academic'] that the lack of coordination and torso strength in babies under 12 months could mean they get caught on the side if they squirmed or attempted to get out of a bed with a partially lowered side.' See below for the full statement.

Its guidance on safer sleep is expected to be updated accordingly. The DfE will recommend coracles are only used for babies over 12 months.

A source told *Nursery World* that when they asked to see the advice given to the DfE from the safe sleep academic, it directed them to two studies on babies falling asleep on the floor in domestic settings and nothing to do with floor beds.

When *Nursery World* approached the DfE about this, it referred to its statement (see the full statement below)

It comes after Ofsted confirmed last month that it will be focusing more on safer sleep during routine early years inspections.

DfE challenged on stance

Community Playthings, thought to be behind the original design of the coracle bed in 2012, maintains that the furniture is safe for children from six months old. It says it has never heard of any incidents relating to the coracle bed within the 3,000 settings in the UK that use them.

The early years furniture supplier has unsuccessfully challenged the DfE on its stance.

In a statement, Community Playthings said 'Sadly, on 29 June 2026, the Department for Education (DfE) confirmed that coracles (including the Dream Coracle) should not be
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used for babies under 12 months in early years settings. They expect to make this a requirement from September.

'We have provided an abundance of evidence to the DfE about the product's safety – that it meets the relevant parts of the standards, that it has been independently evaluated by three testing houses, and that over 10,000 are in use today without any reported safety incidents. The Dream Coracle also meets the Safer Sleep guidance by providing a flat, firm and waterproof surface.

'Despite this, the DfE has gone ahead with their recommendation. If settings cannot choose to use a safe floor bed, space limitations will probably force many into buying products not designed for use in a nursery. We believe early years professionals should be able to use their own judgement to choose the products that will help facilitate a safe sleep environment.'

Community Playthings said it had asked the DfE to give providers a year to switch from floor beds to cots, as 'expecting compliance in such a short period is unfair', but they disagreed.

It added that its Dream Coracle continues to be safe for use with children from six months, however it has amended its product guidance on its website to reflect that early years settings in England must follow the DfE's guidance.

Community Playthings' Dream Coracle bed was shortlisted for a Nursery World Award in 2012.

CASE STUDY: Gower School, Islington

The Gower School, a Montessori nursery in Islington has called the DfE's decision a 'perplexing' one. It says it moved away from 'babies in rows of cots' in line with good practice to use floor mats and coracles for babies over 20 years ago.

Founder and principal Emma Gowers, who is also chair of Islington Schools Forum, said its baby rooms are already oversubscribed and warned that the new guidance will 'only increase the scarcity of nursery places as settings withdraw or minimise the number of places for under-ones.

'Our baby rooms are already oversubscribed, with parents applying for a place on our waiting list some six to nine months before their child's start date.

'From speaking with other nursery heads, I also know this to be true throughout the nursery sector. The recent DfE guidance will only increase the scarcity of nursery places as nursery heads across the country withdraw or minimise the number of under-ones places they can practically offer', she explained.

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Gowers went on to say, 'Space is central to the concern. Solid-built floor cots such as the Dream Coracle are stackable up to six high for storage and take up far less floor space, whereas raised cots require permanent floor space, or if a travel cot, require far more floor space when set up.

'With such little time given to nurseries to switch from coracles to cots, not to mention the imminent difficulties regarding space, the result is that families with babies will watch their childcare options evaporate before their eyes. Across our sector, nurseries will simply not be able to accommodate as many places due to these stricter guidelines.'

She went on to say that it will be families most affected by the guidance.

'We support any measure that keeps children safer, but this decision has been made without consulting nursery providers who will have to deliver the provision, and without proper transition.'

CASE STUDY: Acorn Early Years

Acorn Early Years, winner of the *Nursery World* Nursery Group of the Year Award in 2024, said it has no intention of buying cots for its younger children, arguing that it has used the coracles for years and has received outstanding grades from Ofsted and most recently 'strong standard' while using them.

Chief executive Zoe Raven said, 'The speed of implementation of this directive is astonishing. The DfE have said that they're acting following a prevention of future deaths notice from the coroner in the Bednest case – which was in 2015. Having waited 11 years to act, they now want all settings to suddenly invest in alternative sleeping arrangements within just a few weeks!

'We have had numerous Ofsted inspections, including outstanding judgements and the new 'Strong Standard' and yet from the 1 September we may be deemed to be breaching the requirements overnight if we don't invest in cots that we don't want!'

'I have no intention of buying a load of cots (and certainly not carry cots, travel cots or moses baskets).

'I'm keeping my fingers firmly crossed that common sense will prevail.

'Meanwhile, if anyone knows who at the DfE is responsible for this nonsensical directive, please ask them to come and see for themselves how well our current sleeping arrangements work!'

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Similarly, a children's centre has said they have changed both their baby rooms to use the Dream Coracles and there is no longer space for cots.

DfE statement

'The Department received numerous requests for guidance from the sector in relation to floor beds, which include coracles and sleep pods, with rigid or semi rigid sides.

The Department has sought expert advice from a safe sleep academic in order to provide guidance to settings. Taking this advice into account, the Department recommends that floor beds for children are only used by early years providers for babies aged over 12 months. This is due to safety concerns associated with babies aged up to 12 months.

‘The risks presented by beds with partially lowered sides have been highlighted in a prevention of future deaths report related to a bedside sleeper crib where a child suffocated after getting caught on the partially lowered side. The Department has been advised that the lack of coordination and torso strength in babies under 12 months could mean they get caught on the side if they squirmed or attempted to get out of a bed with a partially lowered side.

'We must ensure that the safety of our youngest children is put first. A cot, carry cot, Moses basket or travel cot that fully meets British Safety Standards and is used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions

- Do you use floor beams or other sleep guidance? Please let us know how you were impacted by the new media channels or by emailing news.nw@markaller.com

Katy Mor



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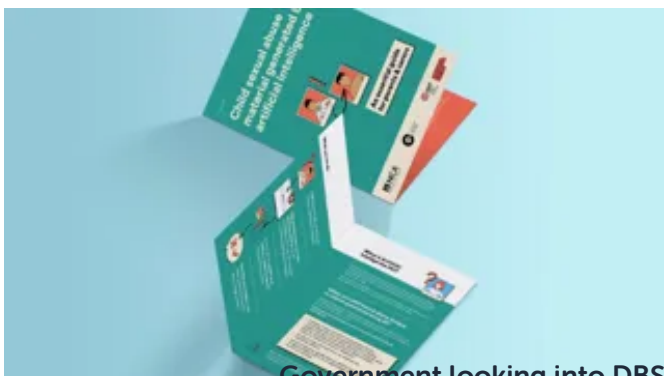
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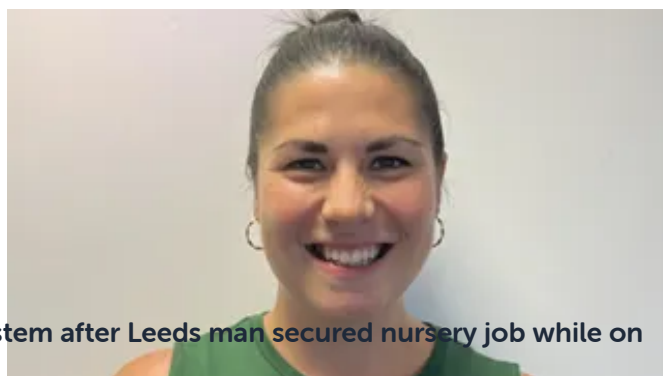


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