

# One in 10 nursery schools in England face closure within months

Survey finds maintained nursery schools, which often target children from difficult backgrounds, face 'death by a thousand cuts' as funding crisis hits



Children at Homerton Children's Centre, Cambridge. Maintained nursery schools are facing a funding crisis, says a new survey. Photograph: Graeme Robertson for the Guardian

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Nursery schools in England are facing “death by a thousand cuts” with more than one in 10 facing closure within the next few months, according to a new survey..

There are only 400 maintained nursery schools left in the country, offering high-quality early years education targeted at vulnerable children from difficult and deprived backgrounds.

Research for an all-party parliamentary group has found that 45 of those believe they will be forced to close by July, and almost 67% say they will be unsustainable once transitional funding provided by the government to ease the crisis finishes at the end of this parliament.

Nursery schools are widely acknowledged to be a “jewel in the crown” of England’s education system, offering high quality education for the youngest children and the best outcomes for those from challenging or deprived backgrounds - 97% are rated either good or outstanding by schools watchdog Ofsted.

Campaigners fear, however, that many will be forced to close as local authorities look for savings to meet unprecedented budget cuts and the government’s new early years funding formula - which comes into force in April to support the 30-hour free childcare offer to working parents - reduces nursery school income further.

Following an outcry from the sector, the government has found an additional £56m in transitional funding for the next three years to try to ease the crisis. It is also carrying out a consultation to try to find a longer-term solution to funding.

But some nursery schools fear they will not survive that long and are worried about the long-term sustainability of the sector. Labour MP Lucy Powell, who chairs the all-party parliamentary group on nursery schools, said: “Nursery schools are the jewel in the social mobility crown, they are the most effective institutions to narrow the attainment gap. Yet now they face death by a thousand cuts.

“These findings offer a stark warning to government of the threat these outstanding providers face from a toxic mix of reduced funding through the national early years funding formula and drastic cuts to local authority budgets.”

Powell welcomed the transitional funding provided to nursery schools by government and the ongoing consultation. She added: “However, unless we urgently have a clear signal, matched by the necessary resources, that no nursery schools should close we will lose these valuable institutions and vulnerable children and families will pay the price.”

The survey of nursery schools, which had a 75% response rate, was carried out on behalf of the all-party parliamentary group and presented at a meeting of the group on Tuesday. Addressing the meeting, Caroline Dinenage, minister for women, equalities and early years, said the government was spending an unprecedented £6bn a year on early years education and childcare.

She acknowledged the contribution of nursery schools and pledged to listen to nursery school headteachers’ concerns. “We will do everything we can to support those of you who are facing challenges at this time.

“We know that the first few months and the first few years of a child’s life are absolutely critical to shaping their future development. Maintained nursery schools make a massive contribution to the early years sector.”

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