

Parents struggling to get 30-hour codes validated ^[1]

New DfE figures show that over two-thirds of local authorities have validated fewer 30-hour codes than the national average.

Author: Morton, Katy

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EXCERPTS

The latest **statistics** ^[3] on take-up of the 30 hours for the spring term (1 January-31 March) show that 329,195 codes were issued for the spring term. Of these, 307,165 (93 per cent) were validated by childcare providers and local authorities, and 294,000 (89 per cent) had secured a place, leaving 13,165 of those eligible without a place.

A breakdown of the statistics by local authority show that 63 out of 152 councils validated fewer codes issued to parents in their area than the national average (93 per cent).

The local authorities that had validated the fewest codes as a percentage of those issued are Barking & Dagenham (80 per cent), Merton (81 per cent), Walsall (81 per cent) and Manchester (81 per cent).

While the numbers with a validated code and without a place have fallen since the autumn term, from 22,102 to 13,165, over two-thirds (68) of local authorities have fewer children in a 30 hours place as a percentage of codes issued than the national average (89 per cent).

Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance, said, 'Unfortunately, nearly two terms into the roll-out of 30 hours, each release of Government statistics only serves to make the issues with the policy more apparent. Both terms now have begun with figures showing parents struggling to have their codes validated in time and then, later in the term, another release showing improvement nationally is being hamstrung by huge variations of take up locally. That is what today's figures show: well over two-thirds of the local authorities who provided data have validated fewer eligibility codes than the national average, and some of them are a long way behind.

'Despite this well-worn narrative, ministers continue to be in complete denial of the problems inherent in the policy, often blaming local authorities and providers in areas where parents have been unable to take up places. They know the simple truth is that current funding levels are preventing parents accessing truly "free" childcare and putting providers off offering 30 hours. Only the Government are in a position to fix this, and if ministers are serious about delivering affordable childcare for parents they must act now to make the policy sustainable by ensuring it is properly funded.'

The DfE statistics also show 353,045 codes have been issued for the summer term (1 April 2018 – 31 August 2018) so far. Of the issued codes, 256,237 - 73per cent - have been validated. Parents have until the 31 March to apply for a code.

Minister for Children and Families, Nadhim Zahawi, said, 'Today's figures show that 294,000 children are now benefiting from a 30 hours free childcare place, saving hardworking parents money on their childcare bills and giving them extra cash in their pockets.

'We are making excellent progress in our mission to help as many families as possible access high-quality and affordable early education and childcare. We want every child, to get the best start in life so it's great news that so many are taking advantage of the 30 hours free childcare offer.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

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