

Coalition 'way off track' on pledge to boost child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Nearly 1.3 million children under the age of five in England and Wales are living in areas with insufficient childcare, including a lack of nursery places, new figures reveal.

Jill Rutter, the head of policy and research at the Family and Childcare Trust, warned last night that a "crisis" in affordable childcare is disproportionately hurting poorer families who are attempting to improve their lives. Those children living within local authorities with poor childcare provision represent more than a third of all under-fives in England and Wales.

Ms Rutter added that the trust's figures indicate that leaving childcare largely to the private sector is not working. There are many areas with relatively few young children where nurseries cannot turn a profit, so they set up elsewhere. Around 65 per cent of nurseries are run by the private sector and the situation is particularly acute in local authorities covering the east of England, Wales, the South-east, London and Wales.

"It is working families in deprived areas and in the countryside that are most affected by gaps in provision," said Ms Rutter, who is calling on the Government to punish local authorities that don't meet basic childcare requirements.

"Filling these gaps will need action and funding from the Government, but there is a much bigger cost to the public purse if parents can't work because they can't find childcare.

"This is a crisis in poorer areas, where struggling families are trying to get themselves out of poverty. If local authorities don't provide enough childcare they should be taken to task."

The Family and Childcare Trust figures will be used as part of a submission to a House of Lords inquiry into how childcare policies, including flexible working, can be developed to help families make sure their children are well looked after. In a presentation to the inquiry committee, led by crossbench peer Lord Sutherland of Houndwood, the trust called for a simpler childcare system, with free early education provided during school holidays.

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