Choosing and working with a wraparound childcare provider

A checklist for schools | Out of School Alliance

Wraparound childcare supports attendance, wellbeing and family life, and most schools will not run it themselves. Choosing a provider well, and setting the arrangement up properly, decides whether it works.

Government guidance sets out what schools should consider but leaves it spread across two documents and does not pull it into one place. This checklist does that, and adds what the guidance does not say: what a good answer sounds like, and what causes problems later.

Use it alongside the two documents named at the end.

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1. Before you decide

Know the deadlines. The right to request process runs to fixed timescales and they are easy to miss.

- Parent requests are logged in writing with the date received
- A decision is given no longer than a term after the process starts
- The decision gives reasons, states how many requests you received, and is published
- Provider requests get an outcome within a month
- Where you reject a provider, you have noted that you need not reconsider them for the same provision for twelve months unless demand changes

The right to request covers children from reception to the end of year 9, and to age 18 for disabled children.

Check the ground before you go further.

- You have spoken to your local authority wraparound lead and know what already exists locally
- You have a needs assessment from the past year, or you have run a whole-school exercise to establish demand
- You know who owns the freehold, and have their agreement in principle
- You have checked whether the agreement needs to be with the landowner directly rather than with you
- You have checked whether Secretary of State consent is needed

Run a fair process.

- Your process for choosing between providers is fair and open to all of them, with criteria agreed with the local authority
- You have published your deadlines and any restrictions on the site

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2. Deciding how to provide it

There are three routes: run it yourself, partner with a provider on your site, or make formal arrangements that point families to provision nearby. All three are legitimate. The right one depends on your intake, your site, and what already exists locally.

What a provider brings

Government guidance lists the benefits of partnering with a private, voluntary or independent provider as specialist childcare expertise, strong safeguarding practice, additional services such as sports or enrichment

activities, reduced administrative burden, opportunities for school staff to take on additional hours, and provision for children with SEND.

Two of those are worth drawing out.

Reduced administrative burden is the Department's own phrase. Registration, ratios, policies, recruitment, employment and inspection sit with the provider rather than with your team.

Partnering does not have to mean fewer hours for your own staff. Providers often employ school staff for the sessions either side of the day, which suits people who want additional hours without a second employer.

If you run it yourself

School-run provision is a legitimate choice and plenty of schools make it work. It is not a lighter option, and the requirements are easy to underestimate.

- You have checked whether you are exempt from Ofsted registration. Exemption depends on meeting all three conditions in sections 34(2) and 53(2) of the Childcare Act 2006: the provision is made at the school as part of the school's activities, it is made by the proprietor or a person employed to work at the school, and at least one of the children is a registered pupil
- You have checked that the space meets the legal definition of school buildings. If it does not, the provision is not treated as made at the school and must register
- If you use agency or contracted staff rather than people employed to work at the school, you have checked whether you still meet the second condition
- If any child is under two and attends for more than two hours a day, you have checked whether registration is required
- You know that exempt provision is covered by your own school inspection rather than inspected separately
- You know that exempt provision must still meet the relevant Childcare Register requirements, and the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements where reception-age children are involved. Exempt from registering is not exempt from the rules
- You have costed it properly: staffing across split shifts, recruitment and vetting, management time, holiday and INSET cover, equipment, insurance, and the weeks when numbers drop

Tax-Free Childcare and school-run provision. Running provision yourself does not cost families their Tax-Free Childcare or the Universal Credit childcare element. Childcare a school provides for its own pupils outside the school day counts as approved childcare, and the school signs up using its DfE number rather than registering separately.

The position is different for an external provider operating on your site. They must be registered with the appropriate regulator before families can use either scheme with them, which is worth establishing early if you are partnering.

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3. Choosing a provider

Government guidance says you may wish to consider a provider's pricing and operating model, sustainability, experience, contract terms, alignment with your outcomes, community engagement, and ability to deliver consistently across term time and the holidays. It does not say what a good answer looks like. These are the questions behind each one.

Registration and regulation

- Ask which Ofsted register they are on and why
- If they are exempt, ask why, and what it means for families wanting to use Tax-Free Childcare

- Ask how EYFS requirements are met for reception-age children
- Ask for their most recent inspection outcome and what they did about it

Safeguarding

- Ask to see their safeguarding policy and their recruitment procedure
  Confirm all staff, paid and volunteer, are vetted before they care for children
- Agree in writing how safeguarding information passes between you in both directions, and who holds it
- Agree what happens when a concern arises about one of their staff, including the route to the Local Authority Designated Officer

Sustainability

A provider that cannot cover its costs will close partway through a year, and your families carry that.

- Ask how their fee model works and what their minimum viable numbers are
- Ask what happens in a term where bookings fall
- Ask how long they have run provision and whether they have closed a setting before, and why

Inclusion

- Ask how they support children with SEND, and what they would need from you to do it
- Ask how they handle a child who needs one-to-one support
- Agree how information about individual children reaches them

Fit with your school

- Ask what they offer across the holidays and on INSET days, and whether that is a commitment or an intention
- Ask how they communicate with parents, and who owns that relationship
- Ask what they will need from your staff week to week

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4. What to put in writing

Guidance says there should be a clear lettings policy, written hire agreements setting out safeguarding expectations and responsibilities, transparent and appropriate hire fees, risk assessments that meet the needs of the children, and confirmation that the provider has appropriate insurance and safeguarding checks.

Make sure the agreement also settles the things that cause disputes.

- Roles and responsibilities, defined rather than assumed
- Notice period, on both sides, and long enough for families to make other arrangements
- What the hire fee covers, and whether it is set to recover your costs or to generate income. A provider priced beyond what the model supports will leave, and you will be starting again
- Whether the fee can change during the agreement, how much notice of a change, and on what basis
- Which spaces, which times, and what happens when the school needs the space back
- Storage, and who owns equipment at the end
- Insurance held by each side. Employer's liability, public liability, buildings, and road traffic cover where relevant
- Safeguarding requirements written into the lease or hire agreement rather than left to good intentions
- What happens at the end of the agreement, including the families already booked in

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5. Once provision is running

- You meet regularly, with a named person on each side
- That meeting covers safeguarding, SEND, behaviour, attendance, incidents and site issues, not just logistics
- The provider has what they need to do the job: indoor and outdoor space, access to resources, somewhere to store things
- Someone holds oversight of insurance and keeps policies current
- You review how well the provision meets parents' needs, and act on it
- Parents know how to raise a concern and with whom

About OOSA

The Out of School Alliance is the national membership body for out of school and wraparound childcare in England. We work with the Department for Education, Ofsted and local authorities on how school-age childcare is delivered.

We support schools running their own provision as well as private, voluntary and independent providers. The Early Years Foundation Stage and Childcare Register requirements apply either way, and so do the policies, ratios, recruitment checks and safeguarding arrangements that sit behind them. Membership gives you those as templates rather than as a project.

If you are weighing up how to provide wraparound childcare at your school, we can talk it through with you. Contact us at info@oosa.co.uk

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Where this comes from

Department for Education, *Responding to requests for wraparound childcare*. First published 15 April 2026, last updated 26 May 2026.

Department for Education, *Delivering school-age childcare provision: non-statutory guidance for schools and trusts*. October 2026.
