

Discover...

# Free Entitlement (Early Years Provision)

A guide for  
parents and carers  
by the Family  
Information Service



west  
sussex  
county  
council

[www.westsussex.gov.uk/family](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/family)

# Free Entitlement (Early Years Provision)

## Q. What is Free Entitlement (FE), early years provision?

A. FE is 570 hours per year of flexible early education and care. This is for a maximum of 15 hours per week over a minimum of 38 weeks per year.

## Q. What are the benefits of early education for my child?

A. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is how the Government and early years staff describe the time in your child's life between birth and age 5. Children in the EYFS learn by playing and exploring, being active, and through creative thinking which takes place indoors and out. Research shows that attending good quality early education and care can improve a child's learning and development. It also helps equip children with the skills needed for when they go to school, supporting them to do well in the longer term.

## Q. Who is FE for and when is my child eligible?

A. It is for all 3 and 4 year old children attending a childcare setting in West Sussex regardless of disability, additional needs or citizenship. In addition, some 2 year olds can access funding if the family meet certain eligibility criteria. To check 2 year old eligibility please visit our website, or contact us.

### DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY FOR THE FREE ENTITLEMENT

A child born between:	Will be eligible for the Free Entitlement from:
1 April and 31 August	1 September following their 3rd birthday (or 2nd birthday if eligible) until statutory school age.
1 September and 31 December	1 January following their 3rd birthday (or 2nd birthday if eligible) until statutory school age.
1 January and 31 March	1 April following their 3rd birthday (or 2nd birthday if eligible) until statutory school age.

## Q. What does FE cost?

A. The 570 hours per year is free. However, you may be charged by the setting for additional time or services. For example, if the FE is offered by the setting through the lunch period, you may be charged for meals. (Settings should allow you to provide a healthy packed lunch as an alternative.) Details of additional services and charges should be included within the setting's admissions/pricing policy.

### **Q. What type of setting can I access this from?**

- a day nursery, nursery class/school, pre-school or playgroup that is part of the scheme
- an independent school that is part of the scheme
- a childminder who has been approved to be part of the scheme

Those offering places for 2 year old funded children must be eligible and registered with the West Sussex County Council 2 Year Old scheme in order to do so. We can provide you with a list of settings at which you can access the funding. Please contact us for more information and ask for the FIS Specialist Team.

### **Q. How does FE work?**

- A. Contact us to find details of local settings that offer FE places. Visit some settings then choose your preferred one. (Different settings may offer the FE in different ways and at different times.) Accept a place, if available, and agree the terms and conditions. Please note that not all settings may be able to deliver your preferred requirements, but this may be achieved by using more than one setting.

### **Q. How often should my child attend?**

- A. As a parent, you know your child best and should discuss your child's needs with the setting to help you decide. A regular pattern of attendance is important to ensure your child's continued development.

Therefore, a consistent pattern is suggested such as:

- Every morning
- Every afternoon
- 2.5 days per week which are the same days each week

It can be hard to balance your own needs, especially for working parents, with those of your child. However, you should aim to use your chosen setting for as long as possible, avoiding the need to move your child every few months or term.

### **Q. How many FE hours can be taken in a day?**

- A. This will depend on the admissions policy of your chosen setting. However, the setting is required to work within the following limits:

- Maximum of 10 hours in one day
- Minimum of 2.5 hours in one day
- Between the hours of 7am and 7pm
- 15 hours over a minimum of 2 days

Claims can be made in half hourly increments.



## Q. What is Flexibility?

- A. Think of the entitlement as 570 hours and this cannot be exceeded. These hours can be stretched across the whole year dependent on the setting you choose. For example, not all settings will be able to stretch the FE over more than 38 weeks.

Weeks per year	Hours per week	Minimum number of days	Total hours across the year
38	15	2	570
45	12.5	2	562.5 *
51	11	2	561 *

\* The remainder of hours cannot be claimed

## Q. How do I get FE?

- A. In order to receive FE, parents of 3 and 4 year olds will be asked by the setting to sign a declaration and show proof of date of birth for their child.

Parents who receive certain income-based benefits or credits may be eligible for the entitlement for 2 year olds. To check eligibility for 2 year olds and to find out how to claim please visit our website or contact us.

## Q. What is headcount day?

- A. The headcount day is usually at the beginning of term when the setting confirms all FE children attending their setting to the local authority. All children claiming FE during that term should be registered at the setting by the Headcount Day. If your child starts after this date, FE cannot be claimed for 3 and 4 year olds until the following term (unless in exceptional circumstances).

## Q. Can I use FE at more than one setting?

- A. Yes. You can split the FE hours across more than one setting per week but no more than two. When completing the declaration form for each setting you must say if you intend to split the FE across two settings.

## Q. What if my child moves settings during a term?

- A. Any unused funding should follow your child to the new setting. You should ask the current setting to forward the balance of the funding to the new setting. You should ensure that you comply with any contractual notice period.



**Q. Why is the setting's admissions policy important and what does it mean for me?**

A. It is important to understand the admissions policy. It should show clearly the settings policy in offering the FE and any potential obligations, financial or otherwise, over and above the FE. You should understand all the policies of a setting before agreeing to the terms and conditions and signing a contract. Please note that not all settings may be able to deliver your preferred requirements, but this may be possible using more than one setting. If you have any queries regarding the policy, discuss this with the setting before signing a contract. For further help and support contact us.

**Q. If a setting is open for less than 38 weeks per year, can the remaining hours be claimed at another setting?**

A. No

Weeks per year	Hours per week	Minimum number of days	Total hours across the year
36	15	2	540
37	15	2	555
38	15	2	570

**Q. I don't understand the invoice from my child's setting, what should I do?**

A. In the first instance you should contact your setting to discuss your query. If you still require further assistance contact us.

**Q. Will it affect any benefits or Tax Credits I am receiving?**

A. It shouldn't affect any benefits that you receive. However, if you are eligible for the Childcare Element of Working Tax Credit, any reduction in childcare fees will affect the amount you receive from Tax Credits. If you have any queries contact Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs on 0845 300 3900 or online at [www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits)

**Q. What happens when my child goes to school?**

A. Legally all children must start in full-time education, usually in school, in the term after they become 5. When you take up a place in a West Sussex County Council school Reception Class, whether on a full or part-time basis, the FE will cease. For further information about applying for a school place please visit [www.westsussex.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/admissions) or call 0845 075 1007.

**Q. Where can I go for extra help and support?**

A. Please contact us.

# Contact Us

You can contact the Family Information Service for further information and guidance about your family's needs.



## Internet

[www.westsussex.gov.uk/family](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/family)



## Post

West Sussex Family Information Service  
Early Childhood Service  
St James Campus, St James Road, Chichester,  
West Sussex PO19 7HA



## Telephone

01243 777807



## Email

[family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk)

## Opening hours

Monday – Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm

If you have any difficulties or feedback regarding this leaflet please call the Family Information Service on 01243 777807.

We are able to supply you with a copy of this leaflet in a version most appropriate to your needs, for example audio, braille, large print or in another language.



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