

Essex County Council

**Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE)
for Nine months up to Four-Year Olds**

Provider Handbook

**Schedule A of the Essex Early Education Funding
Contract**

Revised April 2025

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Disclaimer: Whilst every care has been taken to ensure that the information contained within this Provider Handbook is correct at the time of publication, Essex County Council cannot be held liable for any loss, damage or expense incurred because of information contained in this Provider Handbook

1. Introduction

This Provider Handbook is Schedule A of the Essex Early Education Funding Contract.

This Provider Handbook is a working document that specifies how the Council funds early education for all eligible nine month-, two-, three- and four-year-olds for Providers in the maintained, private, voluntary, and independent (PVI includes Childminders) sectors.

This Provider Handbook builds on the Department for Education (DfE) 'Early Education and Childcare: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities February 2025' and 'Early Years Entitlements: operational guidance for local authorities and providers December 2024'. Copies of both documents are currently available to download from the Related Pages section on the Provider website [Funded early education entitlement for three to four-year-olds](#)

The Essex Early Education Funding Contract forms a legally binding contract between Providers and the Council. The Contract states that Providers delivering funded early education and childcare must abide by the conditions and requirements of the Early Education and Childcare: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and the 'Essex County Council Early Education Funding Contract'. By signing and dating the Contract Declaration Form, the Provider acknowledges that they understand the above-mentioned documents and will meet the requirements therein.

FEEE is at the heart of the Government's vision for all children to have access to high quality early years education. Evidence shows that regular good quality early education has long lasting benefits for all children.

The FEEE for three- and four-year-olds (FEEE3&4) is a universal funded provision for every child from the term following their third birthday up until they reach statutory school age, or they are registered in a maintained school or academy reception class. An additional 15 hours a week of FEEE is available for eligible working parents of three- and four-year-olds.

Children of eligible working parents will also be able to receive up to 15 hours funded childcare per week term time (or up to a maximum of 540 hours if accessing a stretched funding offer) from:

- The term after they turn 9-months-old (FEEE1W)
- The term after they turn 2-years-old (FEEE2W)

From September 2025 this will increase to up to 30 hours funded childcare per week term time (or up to a maximum of 1,140 hours if accessing a stretched offer).

However, only children that are eligible under certain criteria can access the two-year-old funding for families in receipt of Government Support (FEEE2).

Families applying for FEEE2 are eligible for 15 hours of funded early years provision under economic and non-economic criteria. For more information and eligibility criteria visit [Help paying for childcare: Free education and childcare for 2-year-olds - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

This Provider Handbook explains:

- when children become eligible for the FEEE (nine month-, two-, three- and four-year-olds).
- the process for claiming the two-year-old funding for families in receipt of Government Support.
- the process for claiming the universal FEEE funding for three- and four-year-olds.
- the process for claiming the FEEE funding for nine month-, two-, three- and four-year-olds of working parents.

- what may happen if Providers are graded 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' at their Ofsted inspection.
- For children with low level or emerging SEND, please see the process to access SENIF that is set out on the Essex Provider webpages
<https://eycp.essex.gov.uk/funding/funding-to-support-inclusion/>.

The Council is committed to working in close partnership with Providers across all sectors to achieve flexible, high-quality provision which meets the needs of children and promotes parental choice, but balances this with supporting Provider sustainability and a thriving Childcare market. The Council is committed to enabling Parents to be able to access their maximum FEEE funding.

Where Parents are eligible for both FEEE2W and FEEE2, the latter will always be the default funding type applied. This is because families do not need to renew FEEE2 and cannot fall out of eligibility. The Council must fund the first 15 hours as FEEE2 before they fund any working parent hours FEEE2W.

1.1 The DfE Statutory Guidance

The statutory guidance, from the Department for Education, is for English local authorities on discharging their duties pursuant to section 1 and 2 of the Childcare Act 2016 and sections 6, 7, 7A, 9A, 12 and 13 of the Childcare Act 2006. Local authorities must have regard to this guidance when seeking to discharge those duties. They should not depart from it unless they have good reason to do so. Where this guide uses the word 'must', this refers to a local authority's legal obligations set out in legislation or DSG conditions of grant, which a local authority is required to comply with.

2. Eligibility

Outcome: all Eligible Children who have met the eligibility criteria are able to take up a funded place if their Parent wants one. Evidence shows that attending high quality early education has a lasting impact on social and behavioural outcomes. The entitlements make Childcare more affordable for Parents and enables Parents to work or increase their working hours if they wish to do so.

2.1 Eligibility for two-year-old funding for families in receipt of Government Support (FEEE2)

The FEEE2 is not a universal offer, only Eligible Children may access this funding via an application process. Families can apply for funding online, or through a Provider, Family Hub, health visitor or social worker.

To apply online the Parent/carer should go to [Essex Education Portal - Logon](#) and register. They then need to Log in and click on 'Funded Early Education for Two Year Olds' to complete an application. Once the application is submitted, eligibility will be checked and if eligible the applicant will be given a unique reference code and funding start date which they take to a Provider to access the funded place. Parents can forward the email confirmation as proof of eligibility.

An application code from the Council will always begin TYF881. If a Parent provides an application code which differs from this they may have applied for the funding from another LA, in which case the parent will need to reapply on the Essex Education Portal.

Providers and Family Hubs can also apply on behalf of families via the Assisted Application option in the EYCC Provider Portal.

When completing a non-economic application, relevant evidence must be submitted for the application to be approved. If evidence is not submitted a reminder will be sent after seven (7) days. If evidence is still not received after fourteen (14) days, the Council will make contact by telephone where possible. Applications will be rejected after twenty-eight (28) days if appropriate evidence has not been received.

Whether the Family apply directly or via an Assisted Application, all Providers need to submit a Placement Notification for every approved two-year-old funding application before offering a place.

A Placement Notification is submitted in the EYCC Provider Portal and does the following:

- Confirms that the reference code supplied by the Parent/carer is correct and approved.
- Confirms that the reference code does relate to the child in question.
- If the setting does not have an Ofsted inspection rating of Good or Outstanding, it allows the relevant Council Early Years Officers the opportunity to review the placement.
- Assigns the child to the setting, which means the child will appear on the Headcount list for that term automatically.

Please note. If adding children manually and they are not matched to the original child record (due to a mismatch in the details submitted) it will not be identified that the child is approved for funding. This could result in their hours being removed and payment delayed.

Helpful tips. When submitting a Placement Notification, you may receive an error message to advise:

- surname or date of birth does not match the application. If you are certain the details are correct, try removing the forename and adding a space after the surname.
- date of birth is not a recognised date. This is usually due to incompatibility with the browser you are using. Try Google Chrome or Microsoft Edge to resolve the fault.

Applying for FEEE2 if the family are non-EEA citizens who cannot claim Government Support

The Council has adopted an application form for the extended eligibility developed by the DfE for parents to complete along with support workers from Family Hubs or childcare settings. The application form will enable the Council to decide whether the child is eligible and approve an online FEEE2 application as this cannot currently be approved via the Eligibility Checking Service (ECS). Email 2yearold@essex.gov.uk for an application form.

Once the application form has been completed, a FEEE2 application can be submitted online, either by the parents via the Essex Education Portal or by the Provider/Family Hub via the Assisted Application option in the Provider Portal. The “non-economic claim” type should be selected, then the option for “Submit Evidence/ Manual Economic check”. The application form can be attached and submitted for review.

Once the Council have approved the FEEE2 online application the unique reference number will be generated, and the parent can take this to a Provider to access the funded place.

The Council must ensure that two-year-olds who have met any of the eligibility criteria for FEEE2, set out above, continue to receive a place once they have taken it up even if the child ceases to meet these criteria later.

Eligible Children may access a FEEE funded place in the term following their second birthday, see table below.

A child turns 2-years-old between	Will become eligible for a funded place
1 April to 31 August	1 September following a child's second birthday
1 September to 31 December	1 January following a child's second birthday
1 January to 31 March	1 April following a child's second birthday

Providers should request and check the child's birth certificate to confirm their eligibility for the FEEE. The Council may ask to see evidence that the Provider has checked birth certificates therefore it is recommended that Providers make a note of the number.

2.2 Eligibility for three- and four-year-old universal entitlement

All children are eligible from the term following their third birthday up until they reach statutory school age the term after their 5th birthday, or they are registered in a maintained school or academy nursery class, see table below

A child turns 3-years-old between	Will become eligible for a funded place
1 April to 31 August	1 September following a child's third birthday
1 September to 31 December	1 January following a child's third birthday
1 January to 31 March	1 April following a child's third birthday

2.3 Eligibility for the Working Parents entitlements:

Eligible working parents will be able to apply for the Working Parent Entitlement and receive funded childcare from the term after their child turns 9-months-old up until they begin school or become of statutory school age the term after they turn 5.

Parents can find a straightforward explanation of all government Childcare support on the website [Childcare Choices](#).

Parents can check their eligibility using the online childcare calculator [Check what help you could get with childcare costs - GOV.UK](#) and, if eligible, submit an online application. Once signed up, they will receive an 11-digit eligibility code to take to their Provider. The Providers will then check the code in the EYCC Provider Portal. Once the code has been confirmed as eligible and in date, parents can book and secure their childcare placement.

There is also information for parents on the [Essex County Council Family Information Service \(FIS\)](#) webpage.

The following table will confirm the entitlement for each age group:

Age	Funding begins:	Entitlement (Summer-25)	Entitlement (Autumn-25 onwards)
9-months-old (FEEE1W)	Term after the child turns 9-months-old	15 hours x 38 weeks	30 hours x 38 weeks
2-years-old (FEEE2W)	Term after the child turns 2-years-old	15 hours x 38 weeks	30 hours x 38 weeks
3–4-year-olds (EFE)	Term after the child turns 3-years-old	15 hours x 38 weeks*	15 hours x 38 weeks*

* This in in addition to the 15 hours Universal Funding, a total of 30 hours per week.

Once a family is approved for the Working Parent Entitlement, the code will remain the same for the child until they begin school. Parents will be required to continue renewing the code every 3 months (or by the date given to them at the point of application) to ensure they remain eligible.

Parents will need to have registered for the Working Parent Entitlement and have their valid eligibility code before the start of the term to access their funding in that term as follows:

Cut-off Date

31 August

31 December

31 March

Term funding will be paid from

Autumn Term beginning on or after 1st September

Spring Term beginning on or after 1st January

Summer Term beginning on or after 1st April

If a Parent misses this deadline, they will not be able to claim their EFE, FEEE2W or FEEE1W until the next term as the funding cannot be backdated and may have to pay childcare fees if their child starts before this. Please note the Council is unable to override the start date of any applications made after the cut-off date for the term, unless the DfE give specific consent to local authorities in Exceptional Circumstances such as a pandemic. Email earlyyearsdata@essex.gov.uk for advice.

Providers should advise Parents to apply for the eligibility code within the term their child turns 3, 2 or 9 months old and not any earlier.

Grace Period - What happens if a Parent loses eligibility?

- They will receive a “grace period” – this means they will be able to keep their Childcare for a short period with their existing Provider.
- Once the “grace period” has lapsed for EFE, the Parent will still be entitled to the universal 15-hour entitlement for 3- & 4-year-olds.
- Once the “grace period” has lapsed for FEEE2W the Parent may be eligible for FEEE2 for families who receive Government Support or will need to pay for Childcare until eligible again.
- Once the “grace period” has lapsed for FEEE1W, the Parent will not be entitled to any further funding until eligible again so will need to pay for Childcare.
- A child cannot access a new EFE, FEEE2W or FEEE1W place with a new Provider whilst the Parent is in a grace period.

If a Parent falls into their grace period before the child has started an EFE, FEEE2W or FEE1W place, they will not be entitled to take up the place. The DfE will not fund any Working Parent entitlement hours in this instance.

Eligibility for the Working Parent entitlements is determined by the HMRC who have developed and maintain a system where Parents undertake their own eligibility check twice per term. The Parent is assigned a reference number/eligibility code, which is then validated by the local authority through the Provider Portal.

Providers can validate the eligibility codes in the Working Parent Funded Childcare section of the EYCC Provider Portal. It is the Parents' responsibility to re-validate any claim by the date given to them by HMRC. Please ensure you make Parents aware that the review and appeals process, in instances where they disagree with the eligibility outcome, is managed by HMRC and that the Council are not able to override any decisions. Foster Parents, who are unhappy about decisions made by the local authority, should seek resolution through their social worker.

2.4 Extending the Working Parent Entitlements to children in foster care

Children in foster care are also eligible for the Working Parent entitlements, providing the child has attained the relevant age and they meet the following additional criteria:

- That accessing the hours is consistent with the child's care plan, placing the child at the centre of the process and decision making.
- That, in single Parent foster families, the foster Parent engages in paid work outside of their role as a foster Parent but does not need to meet the minimum income requirement.
- And in two Parent foster families, both partners engage in paid work outside of their role as a foster Parent but does not need to meet the minimum income requirement. If one partner is not a foster Parent, then they must be in qualifying paid work and earn a minimum of the equivalent to 16 hours at national minimum/national living wage.

The process for foster carers claiming is different as they do not apply for their code through Childcare Choices, see the 6-step process set out below:

1. The child's social worker sends the Essex information pack, which includes an application form, to the foster carer.
2. The foster carer completes application form and sends back to the child's social worker.
3. The child's social worker endorses application by confirming that it is in best interest of the child and sends it to the local authority designated person at earlyyearsdata@essex.gov.uk.
4. Early Years Data generates a code on ECS and send it to the child's foster carer and social worker.
5. Foster Carer gives the code to their Provider who will validate the code and claim for the Working Family entitlement on the EYCC Provider Portal.
6. Early Years Data will use the ECS report to help identify which of the codes they issued for children in foster care are approaching reconfirmation. At least 4 weeks before the end-date, Early Years Data should initiate the reconfirmation process. Once they have received confirmation from the social worker that the foster Parents are still eligible, they will update the child's ECS record.

2.5 School Deferral

Careful consideration should be given when discussing deferring a child's school place. A child can only continue to attend their early years Provider until they become of compulsory school age – this date cannot be overridden in any circumstance. Once a child reaches statutory school age i.e., the term after they turn 5, they cannot continue to attend their early years Provider / childminder or receive FEEE funding. A school deferral form should be completed and submitted so that funding can be confirmed. A link to the school deferral form can be found here:

<https://eycp.essex.gov.uk/funding/funded-early-education-entitlement/funding-entitlement-offers/school-deferrals/>

2.6 Provider Eligibility

The Council and the DfE stipulate that to offer the Funded Entitlement all Providers (including childminders registered with a childminder agency) must:

- be registered as a Provider of the Early Years Foundation Stage on either the Ofsted Early Years Register or the Childminder Agency's register.
- have an Ofsted judgement of Good, Outstanding or Requires Improvement to offer the FEEE to three- and four-year-olds and working Parent entitlements.
- have a Good or Outstanding to offer the two-year-old funding for families in receipt of Government Support (FEEE2).
- have an Ofsted judgement of effective (Childminder Agency only).
- have a current bank account that they use for their business.
- have a funding Contract with the Council.
- have access to the internet and a business email account.
- meet the independent school standard in relation to the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of pupils.
- actively promote fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- not promote as fact views or theories which are contrary to established scientific or historical evidence and explanations.

In addition, newly registered Providers are eligible to offer the FEEE before their first Ofsted inspection. However, the outcome of their Ofsted inspection will determine whether they can continue offering the FEEE and whether they can offer FEEE2 placements.

Childminders

Early years provision is defined in section 20 of the 2006 Act as the provision of childcare. "Childcare", as defined in section 18 of the 2006 Act, specifically excludes care provided for a child by a Parent, stepparent, foster Parent (or other relative) or by a person who fosters the child privately or has parental responsibility for the child. Early years provision by a childminder, either independently registered with Ofsted or registered with a childminder agency, for a related child does not count as childcare in legal terms. Government funding cannot be claimed by, or spent on, childminders providing childcare for their own child or a related child including stepchildren and step grandchildren etc, even if they are claiming for

other children. See Section 3.6 for further information on the definition of childcare in relation to childminders claiming FEEE funding.

Nannies

Nannies are not able to claim FEEE if they are registered on the Ofsted Voluntary Register. To apply for a FEEE contract a nanny would need to register as a childminder/childcare on domestic premises with Ofsted on the Early Years Register. This does not cover childminders joining the voluntary register.

3. Funded place for nine-months to four-year-olds

Outcome: Eligible children can take up their full FEEE at times that best support their learning and development, and at times which fit with the needs of the Parents to enable them to work or increase their hours of work should they wish to do so. Eligible children should be able to access the maximum number of their FEEE funding hours.

Evidence shows that continuous provision is in the best interests of the child therefore they should be able to take up their funded hours in continuous blocks with no artificial breaks to the entitlement hours. For example, a provider should not offer 10am to midday and 1pm to 3pm as entitlement hours and offer only private paid hours in between.

	Entitlement offer
FEEE3&4 - Universal entitlement	up to 15 hours a week (if the offer is stretched over more than 38 weeks the hours per week are reduced) for all 3- and 4-year-olds
FEEE3&4 - Extended entitlement EFE	up to 15 hours a week in addition to the universal entitlement (if the offer is stretched over more than 38 weeks the hours per week are reduced) for eligible 3- and 4-year-olds
FEEE2	up to 15 hours a week (if the offer is stretched over more than 38 weeks the hours per week are reduced) for eligible 2-year-olds
FEEE1W & FEEE2W	up to 15 hours a week, increasing to 30 hours a week from September 2025 (if the offer is stretched over more than 38 weeks the hours per week are reduced) for eligible 2-year-olds
Length of offer	38 weeks ¹ or up to 52 weeks for a stretched offer (no more than 570 hours per annum or 1140 hour per annum for the extended offer)
Maximum hours per day	10 hours
Number of Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> for FEEE3&4, FEEE2W and FEEE1W, Parents can use their funded entitlement over a maximum of two sites or Providers in a single day the FEEE for eligible two-year-olds (FEEE2) may be accessed at one Provider only
Times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not before 6.00am or after 8.00pm can be delivered at weekends can be delivered outside of maintained school term times

¹ A Provider who is not open for 38 weeks must let Parents know that they will not receive the full entitlement.

3.1 The Parent/Carer Agreement Form

It is the responsibility of the Provider to explain to Parents about the Funded Early Education Entitlement and to inform Parents that a claim has been made on their behalf.

All Providers must complete the annual Parent/Carer Agreement Form (PAF) each term with all Parents/carers. This termly requirement remains in place even where a Provider is offering a stretched FEEE offer. The PAF can be returned electronically or completed by hand and can be pre-populated with information, if it is made clear to the Parent that they should read and understand the pre-populated information prior to signing the form. If the PAF cannot be signed immediately on completion, due to Exceptional Circumstances such as a pandemic, then the form can be completed and sent by email to confirm details, and the Provider must ensure this is signed as soon as is practically possible. The PAF is retained by the Provider and must be made available to officers from the Council to view if requested. Parents must complete and sign the relevant section of the PAF each term for the following reasons:

- Completing and signing the PAF confirms the contractual agreement between the Provider and the Parent for the duration of the term.
- The PAF records the number hours/weeks of FEEE for the duration of the term.
- It informs the Parent that if they decide to move their child after Headcount, they may be liable to pay full fees at the new Provider*.
- For the FEEE3&4, FEE2W and FEEE1W it records whether Parents are accessing funding over one or two Providers to prevent double claims being made.
- It informs Parents of how hours can be taken.
- It informs Parents that additional voluntary charges can be applied for consumables, meals & snacks and optional activities with the Parent's agreement to pay.
- It informs Parents about the restrictions of amending hours in a term.
- It informs Parents what happens if their child starts school.

*except in the circumstance that the Parent has given a notice period during the preceding term that continues past the Headcount Day, in which case the Provider should: -

- not make a claim on the Forecast Headcount
- only add the child to the Actual Headcount with the correct end date
- not claim funding for the whole term

If a Parent gives notice at or before actual Headcount, Providers **must** only claim the relevant number of weeks the child will be attending for the term (this can include your usual notice period. A maximum of 6 weeks funding can be included if your usual notice period is more than 6 weeks). A child should be attending at actual Headcount to submit a claim for the term.

For further details about funding claims when notice has been given by a Parent, please see page 27.

Where Providers are stretching the funding, we have produced a stretched funding calculator. To ensure Providers and Parents are both clear on the funded hours needed per week to stretch the funding, where the Provider offers to stretch the funding, a Stretched Funding Template can be completed with the PAF, using the Stretched Funding Calculator found here:

<https://eycp.essex.gov.uk/funding/funded-early-education-entitlement/parent-carer-agreement-forms/>

The PAF should be signed by a person who has the authority on behalf of the setting to sign financial documentation.

3.2 Flexibility for all entitlements

Flexibility is not about just offering longer hours, but also about offering different patterns or models of flexibility at the provision. A flexible offer should be meaningful and useful for Parents, promote child development to improve the wellbeing of young children and be workable for Providers.

Providers delivering the FEEE flexibly must ensure that the entitlement is offered to Parents in a way which meets their needs and gives them real choices about how they access a funded place. It is important to offer enough flexibility to meet the requirements of Parents who work, particularly those that work part time.

If it meets their needs, Parents accessing the FEEE3&4, FEEE2W and FEEE1W can split their entitlement between two Providers. If they decide to split their funding, they must complete a PAF for each provision on a termly basis.

Providers do have the option to operate a 'sole provision policy', provided they are offering a minimum of 15 hours entitlement to a child but should consider whether this would meet parental demand. If a Provider does decide to implement a 'sole provision policy' they must inform Parents that this is their policy, and that they must access their first 15 hours entitlement at the setting, at the time they complete the PAF.

A Provider who wishes to offer a 'stretched' FEEE place (taking fewer hours per week over more weeks of the year) should discuss this option with an Early Years and Childcare Business Management Consultant to ensure that there is Provider capacity, enough parental demand and that this is implemented correctly. Please see point 5.7 on page 27 for more information on how to stretch FEEE and how to claim the correct FEEE hours for a stretched place on the EYCC Provider Portal.

Providers may choose to deliver the FEEE places in line with the maintained schools term times but there is no requirement to do this.

3.3 Delivery and Additional charges

Government funding is intended to deliver 15 or 30 hours a week of funded, high quality, flexible childcare. The 15 or 30 hours must be able to be accessed free of charge to parents. Government funding is not intended to cover the costs of meals, other consumables, additional hours or additional services.

An early years Provider **must not** charge parents for the following in connection with the entitlement hours:

- apply any mandatory charges for parents in relation to the entitlement funded hours.
- charge for any part of the funded hours or 'top up fees' (the difference between what a Provider would normally charge and what the Provider receives from the Council).
- the supply or use of any materials, including but not limited to, craft materials, crayons, paper, books, instruments, toys or other equipment or learning resources that are necessary for the effective delivery of childcare
- business running costs, including but not limited to, rent, staff wages, cleaning materials, insurance or utility bills such as energy, gas or water
- registration fees as a condition of taking up a child's entitlement place
- non-refundable deposits as a condition of taking up a child's entitlement place.
- general charges, including but not limited to, non-itemised enrichment charges, sustainability charges, business continuity charges, enhanced rations, hourly rates or any other supplementary charges on top of the funded hours

Providers can charge parents for the following extras in connection with the free hours, but these charges **must be voluntary** for the parent:

- consumables to be used by the child, such as nappies or sun cream
- meals and snacks consumed by the child
- extra optional activities such as events, celebrations, specialist tuition (for example music classes or foreign languages) or other activities that are not directly related or necessary for the effective delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework.
- charge parents for any additional, private paid hours according to their usual terms and conditions provided taking up private paid hours is not a condition of accessing a free place.

To ensure Parents can make informed decisions on their choice of Childcare, Providers should publish the cost of the voluntary chargeable extras on their website or if they do not have a website, on the local authority Family Information Services website by at the latest January 2026. These should be clear, up to date and easily accessible to Parents. For each setting the Provider should set out clearly the amounts charged for each of the chargeable items mentioned above as well as the pattern of hours that the entitlements can be taken up.

Providers should ensure that children can take up their entitlement hours in continuous blocks if they wish to, and there should be no artificial breaks in the entitlement hours. For example, a Provider should not offer 10am to midday and 1pm to 3pm as entitlement hours and offer only private paid only between midday and 1pm.

It is the responsibility of the Provider to ensure a Parent fully understands the offer and any financial commitments prior to their child taking up their place.

The Council recommend Providers have a FEEE policy for Parents which includes all of this information to enable Parents to make an informed decision on whether the funded hours meet their needs prior to them signing up to access a funded place. There is a DfE template of how to set out these costs that Providers can use if they wish to. The Provider should ensure this is fully implemented by January 2026 at the latest. If the Provider is caring for ten or fewer children, the Provider is exempt from this requirement

Lunch

- The lunch time can be included as part of the funded hours.
- Any charge for the lunch must be agreed with Parents in advance.
- Parents may be given the option of providing a packed lunch if this is more affordable for them, and in line with the Providers own policy.

Fees and charges

- Information must be given to a Parent that clearly shows that they have received their child's full funded place with no charge, there should be no monetary value attached to the hours that are FEEE funded via the Council.
- Any charge for meals & snacks, consumables or additional activities **must** be voluntary for the Parent. Where Parents are unable or unwilling to pay for these voluntary charges, Providers are responsible for setting their own policy on how to respond. Providers must offer reasonable alternatives to the voluntary charges that allows a parent to access the entitlement hours for free. This could include options to waive the cost of meals & snacks, consumables and additional activities or allowing Parents to supply their own meals & snacks for their child.

- Where the Parent agrees to pay any voluntary charges, these charges must be agreed in writing with the Parent prior to placement start date and / or the costs being incurred
- Whilst the rates which a Provider charges for additional hours outside of a child's FEEE place are a private matter between the Provider and the Parent, these must, however, be in line with any discounted rates which are applied to non-funded weekly, sessional, or hourly charges and Parents should not be charged a higher hourly rate than would usually be charged for any additional hours accessed over and above the funded hours.
- If a child is accessing funded hours, any agreed additional service costs must not be more than the cost of an equivalent paid for place.
- Where a child is only accessing funded hours, it is not necessary to provide an invoice. However, Providers must inform Parents that an application for funding has been made on their behalf and ensure they complete a PAF.

	Child accessing FEEE2 hours only	Child accessing FEEE2 hours and paying for private hours	Child accessing FEEE3&4, FEEE2W and FEEE1W hours only	Child accessing FEEE3&4, FEEE2W and FEEE1W hours and paying for private hours
**Registration / Admin Fee	Must not charge	*Could be charged for private hours only	Must not charge	Could be charged for private hours only
Deposit – refundable	Must not charge - (Essex requirement, FEEE2 based on financial criteria. Deposit could be a barrier to Parents accessing funding.	*Could be charged up to a maximum of one week's charges	Could be charged up to a maximum of one week's charges	Could be charged up to a maximum of one week's charges
Voluntary contribution	Could ask for any voluntary contributions for snack etc. but these must not be a mandatory charge	Could ask for any voluntary contributions for snack etc. but these must not be a mandatory charge	Could ask for any voluntary contributions for snack etc. but these must not be a mandatory charge	Could ask for any voluntary contributions for snack etc. but these must not be a mandatory charge
***Consumable charge	Must be voluntary	Must be voluntary	Must be voluntary	Must be voluntary

*The Council would encourage Providers to take the Parents financial circumstances into account and refrain from charging Registration/Admin fees and deposit for FEEE2 children when paying for private hours, where doing so causes a financial pressure and / or means the Parent cannot afford to access the place.

**If a child attends an early years Provider before being eligible for the funded hours a Registration/Admin fee can be charged.

***Consumables can include sun cream, nappies, snacks, meals, trips, specialist tuition, uniform, and extra curricula activities. Consumables must be relevant to the age and development stage of a child; therefore, consideration must be given to items included in the consumable charge as to whether a child would be accessing or using the item, Providers must **not** include general business operating costs to deliver the EYFS e.g., paper, paint, photocopying, cleaning and utilities.

Invoicing - See Appendix A – Invoices and Appendix B – Invoice checklist

All invoices to Parents must be clear and transparent so they can clearly understand what has been charged for. They should include the Providers full details and be clearly itemised and broken down as follows:

- number of free entitlement hours showing as zero cost and that all hours have been passed onto the Parent
- additional private paid hours and cost per hour/session/day
- food charges, cost per meal and how many
- non-food consumable charge, cost per charge and how many
- activities charges, cost per charge and how many

If you choose to issue equal monthly invoices, be aware this may have a financial impact on the setting and must be fully explained to the Parent.

Fully itemised invoices must be in place for Parents no later than January 2026.

3.4 Providers not delivering the full FEEE

Some Providers are not able to open for 15 hours a week or the full 38 weeks of the year. In a situation where a child attends two Providers; for example, one Provider offered 33 weeks and the other 38 weeks, the Council will not fund the five weeks' difference. Parents/Carers are asked to confirm that they are aware of this on the PAF.

Bank holidays

If a Parent has requested to access their funded entitlement place where a bank holiday falls, then the Provider should inform the Parent before they sign the PAF that they will not be able to access their entitlement on bank holidays. Therefore, they will not receive their full entitlement where there are bank holidays within the funded weeks as these days cannot be taken with another Provider. Providers should not charge for consumables for bank holidays if they are not open.

The Council do not require Providers to offer alternative days but would expect them to do so if they have the capacity. If Providers do not have capacity to offer an alternative day, they will still be able to claim the funded entitlement for children who would normally be attending had it not been a bank holiday as they will still incur costs, such as staff wages, even though they are not open. Where a Provider is open and offering funded sessions on a Bank Holiday, they must ensure they do not apply additional charges to cover any additional costs of opening on a Bank Holiday.

Training days

Providers can claim FEEE for up 1 day per term when they are open to carry out staff training. Where possible these days should be taken outside of the funded sessions, or alternative hours offered if a setting has availability. Some settings cannot accommodate this as they are not open longer than the funded weeks or do not have availability. If this is the case the Provider should make Parents aware before they sign the PAF that they will lose a day of FEEE per term and will not receive any refund for this day as there is no cash value to the FEEE funding. Providers should not charge for consumables on for training days if they are not open. Providers should also give a minimum of a half term's notice to Parents of any planned closures.

3.5 Providers delivering the funding for two-year-olds of families in receipt of Government Support (FEEE2)

Where a child is accessing the FEEE2, they may only attend one Provider. The access and delivery of Childcare for two-year-olds should be offered in the same way as the other entitlements with the exception to split hours between two Providers.

There is still an expectation that FEEE2 children stay at one setting for the duration of the funding. If a child does move Providers, the new Provider is required to submit a Placement Notification to add the child to their setting. The old Provider must add an end date at the next available headcount task. The Council are unable to insist a child remains at a setting if a Parent wants to move their child, however funding can be transferred at the discretion of the first Provider.

3.6 Childminders offering FEEE to related children

The definition of 'childcare' in the Childcare Act 2006 excludes care provided for a child by Parents or any other relatives. In England, the Government has interpreted this to mean that childminders cannot offer a FEEE funded place to any related children, whom they may already be looking after. This is for all of the funded entitlements; FEEE3&4 universal & EFE, FEEE2, FEEE2W and FEEE1W.

The Childcare Act 2006 Section 18 definition of childcare says the following: -

“Childcare” does not include care provided for a child by—

- (a) a Parent or stepparent of the child.
- (b) a person with parental responsibility for the child.
- (c) a relative* of the child.
- (d) a person who is a local authority foster Parent in relation to the child.
- (e) a person who is a foster Parent with whom the child has been placed by a voluntary organisation.
- (f) a person who fosters the child privately.

*in relation to a child, means a grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother or sister, whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership.

Childminders should use this definition to inform them whether they are able to offer a FEEE funded place to a child from within their extended Family.

3.7 Cross Border Funding

The DfE's Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance January 2024 states that local authorities should fund all Eligible Children attending Providers within their borders including children who live in neighbouring authorities. Essentially the Council will fund all Eligible Children that a Provider claims for regardless of which local authority the child resides in.

For children in receipt of two-year-old funding for families who received Government Support (FEEE2), whose families choose to access their entitlement outside the boundaries of the 'host' authority or move between local authority areas during their period of entitlement, the following will apply:

- Looked after two-year-olds - The (host) local authority responsible for the care of a two-year-old (under section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989) will pay for the early education entitlement.

3.8 Partnership Working

Providers should work closely in partnership with Parents /carers and other EYCC Providers to improve provision and outcomes for children in their setting. Providers should discuss and agree with Parents/carers how a child's overall care will work in practice when their funded entitlement is split across different EYCC Providers to ensure a smooth transition for the child.

4. Quality

Outcome: All Eligible Children can take up their entitlement to funded early education in a high-quality setting. Evidence shows that higher quality provision has greater developmental benefits for children, particularly for the most disadvantaged children leading to better outcomes.

It is the Government's intention that, as far as possible, funded places for FEEE2 children are delivered by Providers who have achieved an overall rating of 'outstanding' or 'good' in their most recent Ofsted inspection report.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework is mandatory for all early years Providers in England. The EYFS sets the standards that all early years Providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. Ofsted and inspectorates of independent schools have regard to the EYFS in carrying out inspections and report on the quality and standards of provision.

The Council recognises that the provision of care and education for the youngest children is offered in a wide range of schools/provisions across the maintained, private, voluntary, independent sectors including childminders. The Council welcomes this diversity and will work in partnership with all Providers to ensure that high quality inclusive provision is maintained and offered to all children and their families whichever provision they attend.

4.1 Securing and improving quality

All early years Providers who deliver the FEEE must:

- deliver the full Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).
- be registered with Ofsted as an early years Provider or are a school taking children aged three and over and therefore exempt from registration with Ofsted as early years Providers, or a childminder registered with a childminder agency which is itself registered with Ofsted on the early years register.
- submit to an inspection by Ofsted.
- maintain records about children receiving the FEEE and make that information available to ECC, as the local authority, and Ofsted on request.
- actively promote fundamental British values and not promote views or theories as fact which are contrary to established scientific or historical evidence and explanations.
- meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- keep children safe.

The Council will:

- fund places for nine months to two-year-olds of Working Parents, two-year-olds whose family is in receipt of Government Support and three- & four-year-old children at any Provider judged 'met', 'good' or 'outstanding' on the EYR, or at any childminder registered with a childminder agency judged 'effective' by Ofsted if a Parent wants their child to take up their early education place at that Provider and the Provider is willing to accept the local authority funding.
- fund places for nine months to two-year-olds of Working Parents and three- & four-year-old children at any Provider judged 'requires improvement' by Ofsted or at any childminder registered with a childminder agency judged 'effective' by Ofsted if a Parent wants their child to take up their early education place at that Provider and the Provider is willing to accept the local authority funding.
- not undertake a local authority assessment of the quality of the Provider but rely solely on the Ofsted inspection judgement of the Provider as the benchmark of quality.
- fund places for nine months to two-year-olds of Working Parents, two-year-olds whose families receive Government Support) and three- & four-year-old children at new Providers registered with Ofsted until the Provider's first full Ofsted inspection judgement is published or at a childminder registered with an agency until the agency's first full Ofsted inspection judgement is published, if a Parent wants their child to take up their early education place at that Provider and the Provider is willing to accept the local authority funding.
- fund Providers with exemptions from the EYFS if a Parent wants their child to take up their early education place at an exempt Provider and the Provider is willing to accept the local authority funding.
- consider funding places at Providers who do not meet the quality standards set out above to ensure sufficiency of early education places.
- not fund Providers if they do not actively promote fundamental British values or if they promote as evidence-based views or theories as fact which are contrary to established scientific or historical evidence and explanations.
- only fund places for two-year-old children, in receipt of FEEE2, in 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' Providers where there is not enough accessible 'good' or 'outstanding' provision or where a placement with the Provider has been approved.
- reserve the right to secure alternative provision and withdraw funding from a Provider (other than a local authority-maintained school), as soon as is practicable, when Ofsted publish an inspection judgement of the Provider of 'inadequate' or second ineffective judgement for a childminder agency.
- consider funding childminders who are part of a childminder agency following a second ineffective judgement if the agency has assessed them as being of acceptable quality and Ofsted has not identified any concerns about the childminder agency's assessment arrangements.
- not withdraw funding from Providers or from childminders registered with an agency until the Provider's or childminder agency's Ofsted inspection judgement is published.
- not fund childminders registered with a childminder agency where the agency has indicated to the local authority that the childminder is not of the appropriate quality unless it is necessary to do so to ensure sufficiency of accessible places or support parental choice.

- consider any information published by Ofsted about a Provider or childminder agency including the recent history about childcare provision by a particular Provider or agency or childcare provision at a particular address. For example, where the Council has concerns that a Provider judged “inadequate” by Ofsted may have re-registered their setting with Ofsted to avoid making the quality improvements identified by Ofsted.
- take appropriate action to improve the quality of provision at a local authority-maintained school which has been judged by Ofsted to require significant improvement or has been placed in special measures.
- review FEEE funding if a Provider is suspended during the term. FEEE funding will be considered on a case-by-case basis for the weeks the Provider is closed. If a child attends an alternative Provider, funding must be transferred to the new Provider for the relevant number of weeks/hours the child attends the new Provider.

4.2 Exemption from the Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is mandatory for all early years Providers, maintained, non-maintained and independent schools and all early years Providers on the Early Years Register.

- The EYFS exemptions arrangements introduces a route for good quality independent schools, as well as maintaining a more streamlined 'established principles' route.
- The Childcare Act 2006 does not allow for any exemptions from the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the EYFS.

The Council will:

- fund Providers who have exemptions from the EYFS Learning and Development requirements if a Parent wants their child to attend that Provider.
- fund Providers for children who have exemptions from the EYFS Learning and Development requirements.

The exemptions from the Learning and Development requirements can be downloaded from [Early years foundation stage - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-exemptions)

4.3 Providers with a Requires Improvement or Inadequate Ofsted judgement

Following a ‘Requires Improvement’ or an ‘Inadequate’ judgement for a Provider providing FEEE, the Council will allocate someone from the local Early Years team. to:

- work in collaboration with the Provider to compile an intervention plan.
- ensure key actions are clearly identified to raise the quality of provision.
- establish clearly defined timescales for improvements to be made by the Provider.
- maintain regular liaison with the Provider to ensure progress remains on track.
- monitor the impact and effectiveness of improvements made to the provision within a clearly defined timescale.
- co-ordinate any further support required such as in-house training, signpost to CPD opportunities.
- report back to the Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency & Sustainability Manager on the progress made at the end of intervention period.

The Early Education and Childcare: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities January 2024 states that the Local Authority must ‘...secure alternative provision and withdraw funding from a Provider (other than a Local Authority maintained school), as soon as is practicable, when Ofsted publish an inspection judgement of the Provider of ‘inadequate’ or an inspection judgement of a childminder agency of ‘ineffective’. Therefore:

- following an ‘Inadequate’ or ‘Requires Improvement’ Ofsted judgement, any further places for FEEE2 children will be subject to approval.
- decisions about the next steps for each individual early years Provider, following an ‘Inadequate’ Ofsted judgement, including withdrawal of funding will be made on a case-by-case scenario by the Council’s Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency & Sustainability Manager.
- the Council will issue a letter to the setting outlining any decision made about suspension of funding and any subsequent interventions/actions to be taken, including relevant timescales.
- applications for individual children who are eligible for FEEE2, whose Parents wish them to attend a Requires Improvement or Inadequate Ofsted judged Provider, will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Council’s Early Years & Childcare Sufficiency & Sustainability Manager.
- If a Provider does not apply the correct end date for a child after an agreed notice period, the Council reserves the right to override the end date on the EYCC Provider Portal

4.4 Integrated Reviews for FEEE2 children

Providers should make all reasonable efforts to ensure an integrated review is undertaken for all FEEE2 children attending their setting in liaison with the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service (Family Hubs). Support can be accessed from the Early Years and Childcare team by emailing FEEEQueries@essex.gov.uk

5. Funding FEEE places

Outcome: Fair and transparent funding which supports a diverse range of Providers to deliver funded places on a sustainable basis and encourages existing Providers to expand and new Providers to enter the childcare market. This diversity enables Parents to choose a Provider that best meets the needs of their child and Family and enables them to access their child’s maximum entitlement.

5.1 FEEE funding for nine months-, two-, three- and four-year-olds:

The entitlement is divided into three terms ranging from eleven to fourteen weeks which mirror the school terms, 38 weeks in total.

Entitlement	FEEE hours over a financial year
FEEE3&4 universal (all children) – 15 hours per week	570 hours
FEEE3&4 EFE (if eligible) – 15 hours per week	Additional 570 hours = a total of 1140 hours
FEEE2 (if eligible) – 15 hours per week	570 hours

FEEE2W (if eligible) – 15 hours per week*	570 hours
FEEE1W (if eligible)– 15 hours per week*	570 hours

*Increasing to 30 hours per week, 1,140 hours per annum from September 2025

The Council will fund Providers to offer a minimum of 33 weeks per financial year up to a maximum of 52 (stretched offer). Please see section 5.7 for more information on how to stretch FEEE and claim on the EYCC Provider Portal.

Please note: Providers must only claim hours that children are attending their provision. For example, Providers must not claim 15 hours per week when children are only attending 14 hours. If a Parent has signed the PAF that states, their child will receive 15 hours per week this must be honoured. Claiming for more hours than a child attends is a breach of Contract.

However, this is not the case if you are stretching FEEE over more than 38 weeks. For example, if you are stretching FEEE over 50 weeks the entitlement is reduced to an average of 11.4 hours per week over a financial year, but you will need to claim the maximum FEEE hours available for the relevant term, e.g., in summer term 2025 15 hours per week for 13 weeks. You will not be claiming more hours than the child attends as you will be claiming for the number of hours that the child is accessing over a longer period than the funded weeks during the relevant term. This approach is required due to the EYCC Provider Portal only allowing for termly submissions please see point 5.7 for more information.

See the table below for a breakdown of the maximum number of hours that can be claimed in the 2025/26 contractual year:

Term	Inclusive term dates	Duration of FEEE	Equivalent in hours
Summer 2025	21/04/2025 - 22/07/2025	13 weeks	13 weeks x 15 hours = 195 hours 13 weeks x 30 hours = 390 hours
Autumn 2025	01/09/2025 – 12/12/2025 or 08/09/2025 - 19/12/2025	14 weeks	14 weeks x 15 hours = 210 hours 14 weeks x 30 hours = 420 hours
Spring 2026	05/01/2026 - 27/03/2026	11 weeks	11 weeks x 15 hours = 165 hours 11 weeks x 30 hours = 330 hours

NB: If the offer is fewer than 38 weeks the Provider must make it clear to Parents in writing before, they accept a place as to how many weeks are offered and that if the Parent requires more weeks or hours then they should seek an alternative place.

5.2 FEEE Funding Rates

The table below outlines the hourly rates that the Council pays Providers for FEEE entitlements.

Provider classification	FEEE3&4 (15 hours & EFE)	*FEEE2	FEEE2W	FEEE1W
Maintained nursery school	£5.54	£8.16	£7.96	£10.92
**Maintained nursery school supplement	£5.27	n/a	n/a	n/a
Maintained school and academy nursery class	£5.54	£8.16	£7.96	£10.92
Childminder/CMA	£5.54	£8.16	£7.96	£10.92
Day nurseries & independent schools	£5.54	£8.16	£7.96	£10.92
Pre-schools	£5.54	£8.16	£7.96	£10.92

* FEEE2 includes a 20p per hour deprivation supplement.

** Separate supplement paid only to Maintained Nursery Schools - in Essex this is Tanglewood and Woodcroft Maintained Nursery Schools

FEEE 3&4 Deprivation supplement - paid at 10p / 20p/ 30p per funded hour for each Eligible Child whose postcode is within the 30% / 20% / 10% IDACI wards. This funding is added automatically to the Actual Headcount payments where children you are claiming FEEE3&4 for live in an eligible postcode.

FEEE 3&4 Teachers Pay and Pensions Grant (TPPG) - paid to eligible schools at 31p per funded hour. This funding is calculated based on the number of 3- and 4-year-olds accessing their entitlement in eligible schools.

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) is additional funding for early years settings to improve the provision for Eligible Children. This means that for low-income families, Providers are entitled to receive additional funding of £1.00 per hour for all children accessing up to 15 hours funded entitlement for FEEE1W, FEEE2W, FEEE2 and FEEE3&4. EYPP is not payable for the FEEE3&4 EFE. To benefit from this additional funding, we would encourage Providers to check with Parents accessing the FEEE whether they meet the criteria for EYPP: [Get extra funding for your early years provider - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk). It is important to stress to Parents that no other Parents will know they have been assessed and it will not affect any other benefits they may be claiming as this is purely additional funding for Providers to support children receiving the FEEE.

If a Parent confirms they are eligible for EYPP, they will need to enter their details on the PAF. These details will then be entered on the 'Parent/Guardian Details' tab of the child record on the EYCC Provider Portal at Headcount.

Further information about the EYPP and how to claim it can be accessed here: [Early years pupil premium](#)

5.3 FEEE Funding paid via Childminding Agencies:

All the funding paid to Childminders registered with an agency to deliver funded places must be paid to the Childminders or Providers. The Council should ensure that none of the funding from the FEEE, EYPP and DAF paid to childminders or Providers is retained by the agency.

5.4 Funding children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) –

If a child with SEND is not accessing their full FEEE, the Council will not provide funding equivalent to the child taking up a full place (up to the maximum hours), enabling 'surplus' funding to be used to support the child.

Providers will only be able to claim FEEE for the hours the child attends, if they need additional support to include the child in all FEEE activities they may apply for Special Education Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF). Where SENIF is paid for FEEE hours attended, only FEEE hours claimed through either the actual headcount or the amendment headcount tasks will be eligible. For more information, please email EY.resourcepanel@essex.gov.uk. Please refer to Schedule B for more information on SENIF.

5.5 Disability Access Fund

The Council will fund all early years settings providing a place for each child eligible for the Disability Access Fund (DAF) in Essex Local Authority at the fixed annual rate of £938 per eligible child.

The DAF is payable as a lump sum once a year per eligible child for all of the entitlements. If a child eligible for the DAF is splitting their funded entitlement across two or more Providers, Parents should nominate the main setting which will receive the DAF for the child, the DAF is paid to one setting only.

If a child receiving DAF moves from one setting to another within a financial year, the new setting is not eligible to receive DAF funding for this child within the same financial year. DAF funding received by the original setting will not be recouped.

In cases where a child who lives in one local authority area attends a Provider in a different local authority, the Provider's local authority is responsible for funding the DAF for the child and eligibility checking.

All early years Providers who are eligible to receive FEEE funding are also eligible to receive the DAF.

The process for Providers to claim is as follows:

- Parents of children qualifying for Disability Living Allowance will be required to provide the setting with evidence of the entitlement. Providers will need to take a copy of any documentation that evidences eligibility.
- Provider is required to supply a copy of the evidence and details of the child qualifying. Please follow the instructions available here [Disability access fund](#)
- A payment will then be made to that Provider for their annual payment.
- The Parent will be required to provide evidence on an annual basis – payment in any further financial years will not be automatic. The process will need to be followed every financial year that the child qualifies for additional payment.

5.6 Headcount (Term dates & Payment dates)

The Headcount Date is set on specific dates in the school term to ensure that all Providers are open. The FEEE can be used in any consecutive block within the term. We recommend that Providers follow the school term when setting the dates for the FEEE timeframe.

Childcare accessed outside of this grant funded period can be charged at any pre-agreed fees/rates unless the Provider is stretching the FEEE. If this is the case, then Providers can only charge for hours accessed beyond the universal entitlement 570 or extended entitlement 1140 yearly maximum set out on a termly basis.

All Headcount Data must be submitted in hours by the Headcount submission dates each term as follows:

Term	Funding Dates	Funded Weeks	Headcount Day
Summer 2025	21/04/2025 - 22/07/2025	13	01/05/2025
Autumn 2025	01/09/2025 – 12/12/2025 or 08/09/2025 - 19/12/2025	14	11/09/2025
Spring 2026	05/01/2026 - 27/03/2026	11	15/01/2026*

*Subject to change depending on Early Years Census Day.

Headcount task and payment dates are as follows for: Preschools, Maintained Nursery Schools & Maintained/Academy Nursery classes.

Term	Headcount Task	Headcount collection dates	Payment date
Summer 2025	Forecast	17/03/2025 - 21/03/2025	First 2 Weeks of Term
Summer 2025	Actual	28/04/2025 - 07/05/2025	16/06/2025
Summer 2025	Amendment	23/06/2025 - 02/07/2025	End of Term
Autumn 2025	Forecast	07/07/2025 - 11/07/2025	First 2 Weeks of Term
Autumn 2025	Actual	08/09/2025 - 17/09/2025	30/10/2025
Autumn 2025	Amendment	17/11/2025 - 26/11/2025	End of Term
Spring 2025/26	Forecast	08/12/2025 - 12/12/2025	First 2 Weeks of Term
Spring 2025/26	Actual	12/01/2026 - 21/01/2026	04/03/2026
Spring 2025/26	Amendment	23/02/2026 - 04/03/2026	End of Term

For Preschools, Maintained Nursery Schools & Maintained/Academy Nursery classes the interim payment of 50% is made at the beginning of each term, based on the Forecast Headcount that is completed towards the end of the previous term. The payment of the remaining balance after the Actual Headcount submission will be made within 6 weeks of the Actual Headcount task deadline date by BACS or Journal transfer. The Council endeavour to make payments as quickly as possible after Headcount day, but Providers should not rely on receiving these sooner than 7 weeks after the Headcount day as this is the contracted payment timescale the Council commits too.

Business Management Consultant will be notified of any requests for early payment of FEEE funding and will contact the Provider to offer support and guidance with cashflow and business models. Acceptance of this offer of support will be mandatory for Preschools, Maintained Nursery Schools & Maintained/Academy Nursery classes requesting early FEEE payments.

Headcount task and payment dates are as follows for: Childminders, Childminder Agencies and Day Nurseries.

Term	Headcount Task	Headcount Collection Dates	Payment Month	Payment Breakdown	Payment Date
Summer 2025	Forecast	17/03/2025 - 21/03/2025	April	25% of Forecast Hours	11/04/2025
			May	25% of Forecast Hours	13/05/2025
	Actual	28/04/2025 - 07/05/2025	June	33% of remaining balance after Forecast payments	13/06/2025
			July	33% of remaining balance after Forecast payments	11/07/2025
			August	33% of remaining balance after Forecast payments	13/08/2025
	Amendment	23/06/2025 - 02/07/2025	-	Any additional hours added after Actual	by 31/08/2025
Autumn 2025	Forecast	07/07/2025 - 11/07/2025	September	25% of Forecast Hours	12/09/2025
			October	25% of Forecast Hours	13/10/2025
	Actual	08/09/2025 - 17/09/2025	November	50% of remaining balance after Forecast payments	13/11/2025
			December	50% of remaining balance after Forecast payments	12/12/2025
	Amendment	17/11/2025 - 26/11/2025	-	Any additional hours added after Actual	by 31/12/2025
Spring 2025/26	Forecast	08/12/2025 - 12/12/2025	January	25% of Forecast Hours	13/01/2026
			February	25% of Forecast Hours	13/02/2026
	Actual	12/01/2026 - 21/01/2026	March	100% of remaining balance after Forecast payments	13/03/2026
	Amendment	23/02/2026 - 04/03/2026	-	Any additional hours added after Actual	by 31/03/2026

For Childminders, Childminder Agencies and Day Nurseries payments are made monthly as detailed above. Please note there is no availability to request early payment of FEEE funding with monthly payments.

IMPORTANT: For any Childminders, Childminder Agencies and Day Nurseries who do not submit a Forecast Headcount task the first payment made will be in the 3rd month of that term.

All Providers should use the amendment Headcount for any late claims for children that start after the Actual Headcount of the term.

The dates above are subject to change as there may be a cause to delay the Headcount tasks subject to any issues with the previous payment process. Data will only be accepted electronically via the EYCC Provider Portal. Details of how this must be completed will be advised prior to each Headcount. Please note that to run the forecast headcount before the end of term, late claims now finish 3 weeks before the end of the funding term. Providers will not be able to make a late claim for children that start in the last 3 weeks of term.

NB: Completion of Headcount Data and the Early Years Census (or School Census in the case of Maintained Primary Schools with Designated Nursery Classes and Maintained Nursery Schools) is a statutory requirement that all Providers must complete. It is essential to submit accurate data in the correct format to avoid delays in payment.

For all purposes the Council will fund children from the first week (where there are three or more days in that week) following the start of the Essex maintained school term.

Four-year-olds starting school and registered in a maintained school or academy reception class children are not eligible for FEEE funding.

FEEE funding will be payable to a Provider if the following conditions are met:

- The children included in the Headcount are registered and attending the provision on the day of the Headcount.
- Any children included in the Headcount who are ill or otherwise absent during that week, must be genuinely expected to take their place during that term.
- If a child joins after Headcount Date a late claim can be submitted provided the conditions in the Contract are applied and they have not claimed FEEE at any other provision within Essex for that term.
- Where children access their place intermittently e.g., transient families such as traveller children or refugee children, it is the local authority's policy to fund for the duration of the term.
- Parents cannot amend the number of funded hours they wish their child to take after Headcount Day. The PAF that was signed at the beginning of the term between the Provider and the Parent clearly indicates this. Increased hours can only be made on a termly basis.
- Providers are required to add, amend, and delete data to their Provider record on the EYCC Provider Portal
- Providers are required to update EYCC Provider Portal each term to ensure accuracy. This includes prompt notification of changes to the funding contact at the provision or any change to bank account details. This also provides up-to-date childcare sufficiency information which is a requirement of the FEEE funding contract.
- Providers registered to deliver FEEE with the Council must agree to admit, at any reasonable time, authorised officers of the Council or their agents. Failure to admit staff or regularly cancelling pre-agreed appointments may also lead to the withdrawal of the FEEE Contract.

If a child moves part way through a term, it is at the discretion of the Provider where the child is attending on Headcount Day whether funding can be transferred. In these instances, the Council expects the funding to be paid forward by **BACS transfer between the two Providers** and adjustments **should not** be made via the amendment Headcount.

Where notice has been given, please use the following as guidance for what can/cannot be claimed on the Headcount:

Notice Given before/after Headcount Day	Child in attendance on Headcount Day	Child attending another setting on Headcount Day	Claim
Before	Yes	No	Add leave date to Actual Headcount. Only claim notice period, not full term
Before	No	No	Unable to claim funding. Invoice Parent for notice period

Before	No	Yes	Unable to claim funding. Invoice Parent for notice period, or speak with parent/other setting to determine if funding can be released for notice
Before - in previous term	Yes	No	Add leave date to Actual Headcount. Only claim notice period, not full term
After	Yes	No	Able to claim funding for full term
After	No	Yes	Unable to claim funding. Invoice Parent for notice period, or speak with Parent/other setting to determine if funding can be released for notice
After	No	No	Unable to claim funding. Invoice Parent for notice period, or if Parent re-joins later, add child to the Amendment Headcount.

If a child moves to Essex part way through a term from another local authority, the previous Provider should be contacted to see if the funding can be transferred. If this is not possible, funding can be applied for at amendment Headcount.

A Headcount Demonstration will be held via Microsoft Teams twice a term. The dates scheduled for the next year are as follows:

Term	Date / Time	Link to Join Teams Meeting
Summer 25	Thursday, 24 th April 18:00 – 20:00	Click here to join the meeting
Summer 25	Tuesday, 29 th April 10:00 – 12:00	Click here to join the meeting
Autumn 25	Tuesday, 9 th September 10:00 - 12:00	Click here to join the meeting
Autumn 25	Thursday, 11 th September 18:00 - 20:00	Click here to join the meeting
Spring 26	Tuesday, 13 th January 10:00 - 12:00	Click here to join the meeting
Spring 26	Thursday, 15 th January 18:00 - 20:00	Click here to join the meeting

5.7 Stretching the FEEE

Stretching the FEEE means that the weekly entitlement is reduced to allow for hours to be taken over more weeks, but the entitlement for the whole financial year remains the same, 570 for universal and 570 for the extended, if eligible. Therefore, if you are open for 50 weeks the entitlement would be reduced to an average of 11.4 hours per week for universal and 11.4 for extended, if eligible, a total of up to 22.8 hours per week averaged out over the financial year.

To calculate the correct entitlement each term you need to divide the number of weeks you are offering the FEEE into the 3 terms making sure that you consider the number of available funded weeks in each term as these vary and you will need to pass on the correct number of funded hours to the Parent. To determine the entitlement for each term the calculation required is 'the number of funded hours available in the term divided by the number of weeks you are stretching the FEEE in that term'. The example sets out the number of weeks in each

term if the entitlement is stretched over 48 weeks. Therefore, for summer 2025 the sum is $195/19 = 10.26$ hours, this is the Parent's weekly entitlement. However, at the headcount you will need to claim 15 hours per week over 13 weeks.

To ensure Providers and Parents are both clear on the funded hours needed per week to stretch the funding, a Stretched Funding Calculator can be found here <https://eycp.essex.gov.uk/funding/funded-early-education-entitlement/parent-carer-agreement-forms/>

Stretching over 48 weeks

	Date stretched term ends	Weeks in each term	Stretched weekly entitlement	Funded weeks in term	Number of FEEE hours
Summer 2025	30 Aug 2025	19	10.26	13	195
Autumn 2025	26 th Dec 2025	17	12.35	14	210
Spring 2026	27 th March 2026	12	13.75	11	165
	Total per year	48		38	570

Where you are stretching the offer, and the Parent is accessing their maximum entitlement you need to ensure you claim for the maximum hours per week allowed for the funded weeks even though the child may be attending fewer hours per week. You will not be claiming more hours than the child attends because you are stretching the offer and will be claiming for the number of hours that the child is accessing over a longer period than the funded weeks.

5.8 Changes in situation

Temporary closures

If a provision closes during a term the Provider should inform the Council within 72 hours to let them know the reason for the closure. In an emergency or Exceptional Circumstances such as bad weather, temporary premises, national pandemic or health and safety issues where closure may be short term, such situations will be looked upon sympathetically and case by case. The Council will decide whether any funding will be required to be repaid. If children must attend another Provider during the temporary closure, the Council will expect the funding to follow the child.

Providers closing part way through a term

If a Provider closes and ceases to trade, they should inform Early Years and Childcare at earlyyearsdata@essex.gov.uk immediately to let them know the date of closure and the reason. Under the terms of the Contract with the local authority the Provider is expected to give at least 6 weeks' notice and repay any monies due to the Council.

Where a Provider ceases to trade, any funding that is over paid will be required to be repaid within 30 days of notification. The Council has a process for managing overpayments where consideration will be made to the value of the debt, whether the company is still trading and still at the registered address, and whether there is a Parent company. A legal process will follow to recover the debt.

Change of ownership

If a Provider sells or buys a business, they should inform Early Years and Childcare by emailing earlyyearsdata@essex.gov.uk and request the link to seller and buyer change of ownership form.

Change in Ofsted registration number

A new Early Education Funding contract will need to be signed, and a new Provider Portal account may need to be set up if Ofsted issue a new EY registration number. Email earlyyearsdata@essex.gov.uk to request a new contract. You may be able to retain your existing Provider Portal account if the named person is still in place.

Child's non-attendance

If a child is absent from the setting for more than 4 weeks, please inform the funding team at FEEEQueries@essex.gov.uk. The Council will decide on a case-by-case basis whether any repayment of FEEE will be required.

5.9 Overpayment of FEEE funding

Once amendment Headcount has been finalised if any Providers have been overpaid funding for the term, they will be notified by the Council. If funding is claimed the following term the overpayment will be deducted from funding due for the term. If funding is not claimed the following term, an invoice will be raised for repayment of amount within 30 days. Overpayments must be repaid by the end of the relevant financial year.

6. Data Collections

6.1 Childcare Sufficiency

All Providers offering the FEEE funding are required to submit a termly return of Childcare Sufficiency information to the Council via the EYCC Provider Portal, or by whatever format requested by the Council. This is to ensure Provider record details are kept up to date on a termly basis by completing the occupancy and places data return. The Council reserves the right to withhold FEEE payments where Childcare Sufficiency information has not been submitted within the required timeline.

6.2 FEEE Audit

The Council will undertake FEEE audit checks with Providers throughout the year. Providers will be expected to complete the FEEE audit on request from the Council. A visit may be required to discuss any concerns highlighted. Failure to respond to a FEEE audit request or actions could lead to the Council withholding FEEE payments until audit and actions have been completed. The Council will maintain a risk register of Providers to check for compliance.

6.3 Better Start

Providers are required to submit termly development progress data for children accessing FEEE2 and FEEE2W funding on the Provider Portal using the Better Start tab. Failure to submit progress data could lead to the Council withholding FEEE payments.

6.4 Early Years Census

During the Spring term any Providers with funded children will be required to submit the Early Years Census. This data will be collected via the Self Update section of the Provider Portal.

6.5 Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)

For children who have deferred their school place and will be going into Year 1 when they leave after the summer term, the EYFSP must be completed and submitted when requested.

7. Help with queries

It is the responsibility of the Provider to ensure that all supporting information and guidance is given and explained to Parents/Carers before committing to accessing a place. Parent/Carer Agreement Forms will be checked as part of any future audit checks.

The Council will give the appropriate help and support to Providers where this is required. Please note all queries should be made by email to the relevant mailbox as set out below. In all cases, the needs and best interests of the child should be paramount.

FEEEQueries@essex.gov.uk – Early Years and Childcare

For queries relating to the FEEE contract or Provider Handbook

2yearold@essex.gov.uk – Data Collection and Maintenance Team

For queries relating to:

- FEEE2 applications
- payments for two-year-olds
- Better Start data submissions

earlyyearsdata@essex.gov.uk – Data Collection and Maintenance Team

For queries relating to:

- the EYCC Provider Portal (including log in/password queries)
- headcount, late claims, and Early Years Census submissions
- working Parent entitlements (FEEE2W, FEEE1W & 30-hour codes)
- the registration of provisions, updating of bank account and contact details

BMC@essex.gov.uk - EYCC Business Management Consultants (BMC)

For information, advice and guidance for Providers in starting, managing, expanding, and sustaining a quality childcare business

CCDL@essex.gov.uk – Children Community Development Leads (CCDL)

For queries on the development of sufficient FEEE places and Childcare Sufficiency.

workforcedevelopment@essex.gov.uk - EYCC Workforce Development Team

For queries relating to workforce development and training

Ey.resourcepanel@essex.gov.uk – Early Years Resource Panel

For queries relating to SENIF

Compliments and Complaints visit Essex County Council website via

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/complaints>

Appendix A – Invoice example:

Provider Logo
 Provider name
 Provider address line 1
 Provider address line 2
 Provider postcode

Ofsted EY Number:

Parent name
 Parent address line 1
 Parent address line 2
 Parent postcode

Invoice Date
 Invoice number/reference

Invoice for [INSERT CHILD NAME] for [INSERT TIME PERIOD e.g., term] Attendance pattern [INSERT HOURS / SESSIONS / DAYS] This example: Monday, Thursday, Friday mornings 9-12. Tuesday and Wednesday all day 9-3		
Item	Breakdown	Cost
Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) hours	12 x Monday to Friday Mornings (9am to 12noon) 15 hours per week for 12-week term	0
Additional sessions / hours	12 x Tuesday afternoon £12 (1pm to 3pm at £6 per hour)	£144
	12 x Wednesday afternoon £12 (1pm to 3pm at £6 per hour)	£144
Additional costs	12 x Tuesday lunch club £6	£72
	12 x Wednesday lunch club £6	£72
Total amount due		£432

Payment terms
Payment is due on first day of the term [INSERT DATE]
Payment can be paid in two equal instalments of £216 on [insert date] and [insert date]
Payment to be made by Standing Order or Bank Transfer Bank account name Bank sort code Bank account number

Appendix B

Chargeable extras template: how to set out costs on your website

[Opening text for providers to give information about the services that they offer]

Description	Unit	Unit price	Line total
Free entitlement hours –xxx hours per week (most not have a charge). [enter number of free hours per week, explain any stretched offer provided]	Weekly	Free	Free
Additional hours purchased – xxx hours per week [enter number of hours per week]	Weekly		£
Meals/snacks [Explain how many meals are provided and the type of meals]	Daily / Weekly / Per meal		£
Consumables (for example, nappies and sun cream) [Provide details of the charges made for consumables and <u>itemised</u> details of what these charges relate to.]			£
Additional voluntary services (for example, trips, forest school sessions or foreign language lessons) [Provide details of the charges made for additional services and itemised details of what these charges relate to.]	Ad Hoc		£
		Total	£

[If you allow Tax Free Childcare or Universal Credit Childcare to claim back some of the costs, explain how this works in your setting here]

If you do not wish to pay for specific consumables, for example because you wish to provide your own, please make your nursery aware so next steps can be discussed.

Appendix C - Invoice checklist

This document has been created as a checklist of questions you may wish to consider when reviewing your fee structures and invoices.

Invoice Details - does the invoice...

- state the word 'invoice'?
- state the name of the child and Parents/carers?
- Is the invoice addressed to the Parent(s)?
- state the date of payment?
- state the method of payment (e.g., BACS, cash, cheque)?
- state the period the invoice covers (e.g., monthly, termly)?
- have an invoice number?
- contain your business name, address, contact details and Ofsted registration number?
- state pattern of attendance?
- do the charges on the invoice match what is stated in the fee information?
- match your Parent/Provider agreement, for example the PAF?
- match the funding that you have claimed or was paid by the local authority?
- show that registration fees/deposits have been refunded?
- show that any applicable discounts have been applied properly?
- show where other voucher schemes have been applied e.g., Tax-Free Childcare?

Hours - does the invoice...

- state the number of funded hours the Parent/child received?
- state the number of private hours the Parent/child received?
- provide detail on when and how the funded hours have been applied (e.g. dates/days, hours accessed)?
- state the number of contracted hours in the invoicing period?
- clearly distinguish between funded and non-funded hours?

Charges - does the invoice...

- show the Parent has received the entitlement hours completely free of charge?
- show that the funded hours are not delivered as a monetary subsidy?
- show that the LA funding rate has not been deducted from the funded hours?
- state the hourly rate for private hours?
- show you have not charged a top-up fee?
- show that the Parent has been charged for additional hours?
- show that the hourly rate for private hours on top of the funded hours are not charged at a higher rate than the standard rate for session/day?
- show that the Parent has been charged for each additional service, consumables, food and/or event and state the rate for each one?
- show an itemised list of additional services, consumables, food and/or event? If not is there a separate list available?
- state the total amount to be paid?

Other

- is the invoice clear and transparent?
- is the invoice easy for a Parent(s) to understand?
- where there is information for more than one child, is this provided separately?
- voluntary contributions can be included on an invoice, so long as parents have agreed to pay them for the FEEE hours claimed each term.

Appendix D – FEEE information for Parents

This document has been created as a point for consideration to include in the information given to Parents regarding your childcare service.

Does the FEEE information...

- include your details – name, address, phone number etc.?
- state your daily and annual (i.e., term-time only) opening times?
- contain your Ofsted registration number?
- clearly state the hour/sessions/days that the funded entitlement can be taken?
- provide details about the entitlements and financial support available including signposting?
- provide details about Parent(s) eligibility?
- provide details about the application process for the funded entitlement?
- contain details about additional funding such as EYPP or the DAF?
- provide details on what happens if a Parent falls into arrears?
- provide details on discounts available to the Parents (e.g., sibling discount, etc.)?
- state how often it will be reviewed?
- provide details on any notice periods that Parents need to be aware of?
- provide details about the complaints procedure?
- is the fee information clear, transparent and easy for Parents to understand?

Delivery Model - Does the information...

- specify the options available for accessing the funded entitlements?
- specify if there are a minimum number of hours/sessions/days that the entitlement can be taken?
- provide details on the timings of the sessions?
- state how many funded weeks there are per term?
- state whether the funded entitlement can be used term time only, stretched or both?
- provide details of your stretched offer (if applicable)?
 - provide an explanation on how the stretched hour works, including an example?
 - clarify how many hours the stretched offer equates to each week
 - state how many weeks the funded hours are stretched over?
 - provide details on the cycle for the stretched offer (e.g. does it run from April to March?)

- explain how Parents can use any outstanding hours when accessing the stretched entitlement?
- do the hours/sessions available to Parents include the lunch hour?
- clearly distinguish between entitlement hours and chargeable hours?
- provide a policy for closures (such as bank holidays) where Parents are not able to access their entitlement hours?
- Is the delivery model sufficiently flexible for Parents to take up their entitlement hours?

Costs (including additional costs) - Does the information...

- make it clear what Parents are being charged for?
- state the charges per hour/session/day?
- make it clear that there is no cost to the hours delivered as part of the entitlement?
- state the funding is not to be used as a subsidy?
- state that Parents must not pay the difference between the funding you receive from the LA and your standard rate?
- clearly define the different rates you charge (e.g., based on age range, for full-time/part-time attendance)?
- is it clear which voluntary charges apply to the entitlement?
- clearly state the rate charged for additional hours outside of the entitlement?
- clearly state what each voluntary additional/consumable charge is for and how much it is?
- set out a clear policy for Parents who are unwilling or unable to pay voluntary charges?
- explain how the entitlement hours are funded (i.e., through the local authority) based on headcount?
- does the fee information explain what would happen if a child were to move settings during a term?

Deposits & Registration/Admin Fees - does the information...

- specify how much deposit a Parent must pay and when this is refunded when accessing the early years entitlement?
- specify how much a registration/admin fee is for a Parent?
- Inform Parents FEEE2 children must not be charged a deposit or registration/admin fee?

Other Documents

- does the information provided in the fee structure correspond to the Parent contract?
- does the Parent contract include details about additional services offered?
- does the Parent contract include details about data sharing?
- is the Parent agreement form (PAF) signed by both the Parent/carer and the Provider?
- do Parents have access to the FEEE Guide for Parents?
- do you have the voluntary contributions listed and costs detailed on your website or on the LA Family Information Service website?