

WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL - EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE

Free Entitlement (FE) Frequently Asked Questions

Can the hours be split between more than 1 childcare setting (including those in another county)?

It is acceptable to split the hours between a maximum of 2 childcare settings who are registered to receive the funding. Parents must complete a FE Parent Declaration Form at each childcare setting, on which there is a section to show that hours are also claimed at another childcare setting. Some childcare settings may choose to give priority to children that attend for the whole week.

If a childcare setting is only open for 33 weeks a year can the other 5 weeks be claimed at another childcare setting?

No, if a childcare setting claims funding at the start of a term it must be spread equally per week throughout that term (whether standard or stretched), to a maximum of 15 hours per week.

A child is moving to a new childcare setting mid-term. Does the funding follow the child?

Yes, funding should follow the child to the new childcare setting, calculated from the date at which any contractual notice period finishes. The parent should ask the old childcare setting to forward the balance of the funding to the new childcare setting. It is the childcare setting's responsibility to provide a clear statement of admissions (including notice period) and term dates for the year, to parents prior to them securing a place for their child. Parents are expected to honour notice periods agreed to, however there are occasions when this is not in the best interests of the child. If a parent has not kept to a notice period WSCC will acknowledge a notice period of no more than one month relating to transfers of funding.

A child moves into West Sussex mid-term. What happens?

Some Local Authorities have different rules in place regarding transfer of funding. Contact the Family Information Service to discuss the options available. Link: <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=9525>

If a child leaves a childcare setting after headcount but does not attend another for the remainder of a term does the unused funding return to WSCC?

No, the funding remains with the childcare setting and should be used to the benefit of the existing children that are of eligible age, or to help fund a child who started after the headcount day and missed out on funding for that term.

Can childcare settings offer the FE over more than 38 weeks?

Yes, but the weekly amount is reduced in order not to exceed the 570 hours annual allowance. Refer to the Family Information Service leaflet entitled 'Discover Free Entitlement' for examples on stretching the funding. Link: <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=9517>

A child is starting school on a part time basis next term. Can they still receive FE funding at an early years childcare setting?

No, funding cannot be claimed for a child if they attend school, even if they only attend part time. However, in exceptional circumstances, there may be good reason for a child to have a phased entry to school. Please contact the Family Information Service if you think this applies to your child or a child at your childcare setting. Link: <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=9525>

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What if a child misses headcount day or approaches our childcare setting after the start of term?

A child can only be funded if the childcare setting has submitted their details at headcount to WSCC. Disputes should be settled between the childcare setting and the parent. In the week of the headcount it is essential that a child is attending the hours agreed for that term. Failure to attend in the headcount week will result in loss of funding. Parents may inform the childcare setting in advance of a planned holiday during headcount or illness of a child. Childcare settings may ask for exceptional situations to be considered for dispensation after the headcount date by contacting the Family Information Service. Link: <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=9525>

Does a child need to be in attendance for the number of hours claimed by a childcare setting? (includes information on planned holidays)

Yes, the child should attend for the FE that has been claimed. Occasional lateness and planned holidays are acceptable. Two weeks would be a typical family holiday. For longer periods the circumstances of the family would be taken into account eg 4 weeks return to country of origin would not trigger reclaimed funding. Anything longer should not be claimed on headcount and treated as an Exception Request. Childcare settings should make it clear to parents that any holiday taken is 'lost' FE.

Are the FE hours restricted to particular times of day?

Each childcare setting can stipulate where the funded hours fall during the day if they wish. This information must be clearly provided to parents.

Can a childcare setting give priority to children attending full time?

Priority can be given to children who are attending full time but this must be clearly documented in the admissions policy of the childcare setting. The childcare setting is obliged to offer just their timetabled free time only if they do not fill their vacancies with children accessing a full session/day, and they may choose to offer the place on a term by term basis. The parent should consider the educational benefit to the child of attending for a full session in making a decision.

Are children without British citizenship eligible for FE?

Yes, funding of a child is not dependent on citizenship of a parent or child. A child moving to England from another country is entitled to funded nursery education on the same basis as any other child, regardless of whether they have British citizenship.

What form is used by parents and carers to apply for the FE?

Parents should be given a Parent Declaration form by the childcare setting. The form needs to be signed by the childcare setting once they have seen an appropriate ID confirming the child's identity and date of birth. Childcare settings can download the latest form online: <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=29564>

The parent is unable to provide the childcare setting with an acceptable form of proof of ID and date of birth for the child. Can the child still get funding?

The childcare setting will not be able to put the child on headcount as they cannot verify the date of birth. It is the childcare setting's responsibility to communicate this requirement to the parent at the earliest opportunity (point of initial enquiry). The parent should contact the Family Information Service to discuss what other proof of date of birth will be accepted. Link: <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=9525>

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How often does a parent need to fill in a Parental Declaration form?

The parent completes one form for each childcare setting that will provide FE for the child. Additional boxes exist on the form to capture any subsequent changes to addresses, or hours claimed and the parent will be required to sign again.

Is there further information available about how a child's information is stored and used in relation to obtaining the funding?

The Privacy Notice explains how the data is used and shared, and each childcare setting should display (or provide) a copy for parents. The current document is available online. Link: <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=29564>

Do parents need to keep a copy of the Privacy Notice (formerly called the Fair Processing Notice)?

No, the parent should be provided with a copy to view before signing the Parent Declaration form. The childcare setting can choose to provide a copy for the parent to keep if they wish. The current document is available online. Link: <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=29564>

Does a parent need a copy of the WSCC Discover Free Entitlement leaflet?

Yes, a leaflet should be provided to each parent (whose child will be accessing FE) by the childcare setting. Copies of the leaflet are available on request from the FIS. Link: <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=9517>

Do childcare settings have to use the WSCC parent declaration form?

Yes, unless WSCC ratify use of a childcare setting's own form.

If a childcare setting has an INSET day/Emergency closure does the parent lose the FE time?

INSET days are over and above the 38 weeks entitlement. As such if the childcare setting has an INSET day that causes loss of FE time for a child then they should offer additional hours to compensate. (If they can not offer additional hours they should be planning their INSET days outside of delivery periods. If they can offer alternatives it's up to them and their parents how many they arrange). In the case of Emergency Closures (eg for bad weather) then funding for 1 or 2 days closure is not recovered by WSCC. Parents should refer to the setting's own policies.

How much is the FE worth in money, and should this be shown as a deduction on a parent's bill?

The FE is not a monetary value to be taken off a childcare setting's bill, but a grant in terms of free time. The childcare setting claims the grant on behalf of the parent and funding is paid directly to the childcare setting from the Local Authority. There should be no charge for any FE hours at a childcare setting. Childcare settings can charge for any additional time that the child attends. Each childcare setting should provide clear invoices to parents. Further information and a sample invoice are available online. Link: <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=29642>

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How should a childcare setting show the FE on invoices to parents?

Childcare settings should provide clear, written information about any fees or charges for additional services, or additional time taken over and above the FE. Parents cannot be charged for any part of the minimum funded entitlement either directly or indirectly. Any fees charged for additional time must be at the standard rate of the childcare setting and should not be more than those charged to parents whose children do not access a free place. Further information and a sample invoice are available online. Link: <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=29642>

Can a childcare setting charge for snacks, drinks, paints etc during FE time?

No, these must be included. Proper meals can be charged for. FE sessions may include lunch provision, if the childcare setting chooses, provided this is incorporated into the EYFS delivery. The meal itself and the cost of the meal is an additional service. Parents should be given the option of providing a healthy packed lunch if this would be more affordable.

Can a childcare setting charge for additional services and activities during the free hours?

Childcare settings can charge for additional services but parents should not be required or expected to take them up in order to access a free place. Additional services are primarily time outside of the FE session, proper meal eg lunch (not snacks); activities or sessions outside of core EYFS eg swimming, dancing, foreign languages. Parents should be advised by the provider of any additional costs and an explanation of what they are for, before the child takes up the place. Childcare settings should provide an itemised bill stating clearly what is being paid for and what has been received free. Parents should not be required to purchase additional services in order to access the FE.

Can a childcare setting charge in full for hours taken by a child, and provide a refund of FE at a later date?

No, hours must be free at the point of access.

Can childcare settings offer less than 15 hours FE but still charge for additional hours?

If the childcare setting offers FE over 38 weeks or less, and is open for 15 hours or more per week, then they must offer the full 15 hours of FE. Additional time over and above FE can be charged for. However, if they offer FE stretched over 39+ weeks the entitlement will be less per week but they can only charge for the additional hours over and above FE. Childcare settings can still choose the times during which FE is made available but are responsible for ensuring parents are fully informed prior to admission.

How should admission policies be set out to explain to parents how FE works?

The admission policy should set out the childcare setting's priorities for admission. Childcare settings can refer to the policy if a parent challenges a decision not to give admission. "FE sessions only" must be included in the list of priorities.

How and where the areas of deprivation are identified?

The rationale behind the Deprivation Supplement is to recognise the additional costs associated with the potential learning and development needs of children from more disadvantaged backgrounds. The Deprivation Supplement is a mandatory supplement as part of the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF) used to make the FE payments, and is calculated based on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) for individuals' post codes. These values are set by central government for each area. 3% of the total budget is allocated and this is distributed to approximately a quarter of all children receiving FE. The value for each childcare setting could change depending on the mix of children.

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How should deposits, admin fees, registration fees and invoicing be administered?

Parents should not be required to pay a registration fee, deposit or admin fee for accessing their FE only. Invoices should be clear and transparent ie showing number of FE hours at no cost and other non-FE hours or services itemised clearly.

Can all childcare settings enter FE data online (estimate and headcount)?

For the latest information please check our website <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/ecportal>

Who handles queries on the FE in West Sussex?

Childcare settings should refer to the contact details section at the back of the Registration Document in order to contact the most appropriate staff. Parents should contact the Family Information Service (FIS) <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=9525>

CHILDMINDER SPECIFIC FAQs

What happens when a Childminder is sick during FE time and is unable to offer care to a child receiving funding?

If it is just a few days sickness then the Childminder would be expected to make up for the FE time missed. If however, sickness was for a substantial period of time then they would either need to pay the funding back to the local authority in full or source alternative care for the child. If they found alternative care then we would expect funding to be passed onto the other childcare setting for those hours.

What happens if a Childminder and/or parent wants to take a holiday within the FE time?

If the Childminder takes holiday they would be expected to make up for the FE time missed. If, however, the child is on holiday they will simply miss out on the funding. This would be parental choice but the Childminder would need to explain this to any parent thinking of taking holiday at these times. This is exactly the same as it would work for a child going to a nursery or pre-school.