

Charging Policy

Payment and Non-Payment of Fees

Statement of intent

It is our intention to be sympathetic to the needs of your child/ren when families encounter financial difficulties whilst competently collecting outstanding amounts as they fall due.

Aims

To put in place a competent system for issuing invoices and collecting fees. To ensure that fees are paid promptly, or an agreement is in place if flexibility is needed and that matters are resolved by the end of each term. This will ensure we can maintain the viability of the Pre-school.

We inform parents of this policy on joining the pre-school. We inform parents of any changes in writing or by re-issuing the policy in full. A full copy of this policy is also available on our website.

We review this policy regularly and aim to be fair and consistent when applying charges.

Early Years Funding

The pre-school will inform parents of the availability of two and three year olds funding (working parent entitlements, two year old funding for families in receipt of some form of benefit and 15 hours Universal Entitlement), the hours available at First Steps and the criteria for eligibility. Government funding is intended to cover the cost to deliver 15 hours or 30 hours (where parents are eligible) a week of free, high quality, flexible childcare only. It is not intended to cover the cost of meals, consumables, additional hours or additional services. The pre-school is currently able to offer 21 hours of the 30 hour entitlement.

Funding forms will be issued and claims processed in line with Norfolk County Council guidelines for two year olds, and three & four year olds. Funding forms will usually be issued at the end of the previous term, promptly at the beginning of the new term or alongside new starter documentation and should be returned to the setting as soon as possible for funding to be processed. Eligibility details for funding entitlements must be received in order to process any claims.

Delay may result in sessions attended which are not covered by the entitlement, and therefore subject to a session charge.

Funding forms must be completed in full and signed/dated in order for them to be processed and no parent/carer can claim more than their entitlement. Children claiming funding at more than one setting must not claim more than their total entitlement. If a child moves to another setting and the parent/carer wishes to move their funding claim we co-operate with the onward setting in transferring their entitlement, taking into account the four week notice period.

Funding forms will also include eligibility for Early Years Pupil Premium. These can be returned confidentially.

Invoicing and Charges for Funded Places

The following fees apply when families claim a funded entitlement as part of the childcare arrangement –

May 2024

Review date May 2025

- Additional hours - Additional hours including those not funded by the local authority will be charged at the current hourly rate. The session rates as of September 2024 to July 2025 are – 3 and four year olds £14.65 a session; 2 year olds £15.30 a session.
- Additional services
Charges for additional services such as trips will be agreed in advance with families.
- Cost of meals and snacks
There are no charges for meals or snacks. Families must provide a snack, and a packed lunch if their child attends during lunch.
- Consumable Charge
Items such as nappies, wipes, sun cream and other toiletries such as nappy cream must be provided by parents/carers. A consumable charge may be applied if provided by the setting at the rate of 30p a session.

Other charges –

- Registration Fee – A registration fee of £11.50 is charged once a childcare place has been offered. This is voluntary for those families whose child(ren) only access a funding entitlement.

All fees will be charged unless specific arrangements have been agreed and whilst a childcare contract remains in place. Families wishing to terminate their childcare contract must provide 4 weeks' notice in writing to the supervisor or administrator. Any funding entitlement claimed beyond the notice period is transferrable to your new childcare provider via the local authority where the funding criteria is met. Where a child leaves the setting before the end of the agreed notice period, we will seek authorisation from the local authority to claim any funding applicable to your entitlement up to the end of the notice period, together with any additional fees which formed part of your childcare arrangement (contract).

Our fees are reviewed annually in May, to apply from the Autumn Term. Families will be given at least 6 weeks' notice in writing to inform them of any change, and given the opportunity to discuss their options with the supervisor/administrator.

Where a time lapse has occurred between the point of enquiry and their child's start date, families should check that the information shared about funding and fees remains current so that any applicable charges can be checked / finalised before the childcare arrangement (contract) is formalised.

Should the allocation of funded hours from Norfolk County Council fall short for the term, parents/ carers will be invoiced for the shortfall but we will give the option to withdraw their child for those sessions if they prefer. Any shortfalls will be detailed on the termly invoice.

A deposit will not be charged.

The entitlement place is offered free. Parents will not be charged a "top-up" fee to recoup the difference between the amount received from the Local Authority and the current hourly rate.

All families will be issued an invoice termly, with monthly breakdowns unless the balance equals zero. The payment term is within 30 days if paying termly, or at the end of each month if paying monthly. The balance must be paid by the end of the term the invoice applies to.

The invoice will be itemised to provide clear and transparent information concerning the charges as agreed in the childcare contract. It will allow parents/carers to see that the entitlement is received completely free of charge and understand additional fees that have been applied. Invoices will be issued via email.

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Additional hours over the free entitlements will be charged at the setting's usual sessional/hourly rates. Parents claiming the 30 hour entitlement will be advised that the maximum session length per day is 6 hours, 9am to 3pm (3 hours on Fridays) and that there is no minimum session length. Parents are also advised that should entitlement cease, sessions attended over the 15 hour universal entitlement would need to be paid, or sessions reduced to suit.

The funded entitlements will be delivered consistently so that all children accessing any of them will receive the same quality and access to provision, regardless of whether families opt to pay for optional hours, services, meals or consumables.

Charges for Non-funded Places

Fees for non-funded places, that is children who are not entitled to a free entitlement place will be charged at the current sessional/hourly rates.

Additional charges will be applied as follows;

- Registration fee – one off fee of £11.50 once a childcare place has been taken up.

Methods for Payment for Non-funded Places

- A session invoice will be issued at the start of each term.
- Invoices (and statements) will be issued via email.
- Payment is due monthly or in one payment and must be received by the end of the term the invoice applies to.
- A statement will be sent out where no payments have been received.
- Any outstanding payments remaining at the end of term must be settled within 30 days of the statement date.
- All booked sessions are to be paid for even if the child is unable to attend on the day. Exceptions to this will be a period of 2 weeks pre-arranged holiday (see Notice Periods), serious illness as stated in the Parent Brochure (Communicable Diseases) or an emergency closure of the setting.
- For sessional fees and claiming for childcare vouchers see information on the notice board, setting website or speak to the supervisor.
- Our fees are reviewed annually in May, to apply from the Autumn Term. Parents/carers will be given 6 weeks' notice of any change.
- Extra 'ad hoc' sessions or lunch hours will be charged at the setting's current hourly/sessional rates as applicable.
- Payments should be placed in the fees box or given to Becky Russell and can be made via cheque, cash or BACS. BACS payments are preferred. We also accept Workplace Childcare Vouchers.
- A fee will not be charged in the event of an emergency shutdown such as extreme weather conditions.
- Fees will be charged if a child is unable to attend due to circumstances such as sickness.

Non-Payment of Fees

Unpaid fees have a detrimental effect on the Pre-school and it is not a situation which we will leave unresolved. Therefore if you are, for any reason, unable to pay the fees due, please speak with the Supervisor advising her of your particular circumstances.

In the event of a personal crisis, we will do our best to resolve the situation for both parties. It may be that we could consider the option of instalments or alternative funding, if the circumstances allow, or application to a hardship fund.

However in every event the outcome is that all outstanding fees must be paid.

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- If non-payment persists, the Pre-school has no option other than to suspend the child/ren pending:
 - payment of the outstanding fee due; or
 - payment of any further amounts accumulated due to the provision of a place being held at the Pre-school.
- If this position remains unresolved the child/ren's place(s) will be cancelled and offered elsewhere.
- In the continuous absence of payment in full, action may be pursued through the English legal system.
- The Finance Co-ordinator and Management Team will be kept informed of the position at all times and will be paramount in any decisions or action applied.

Notice periods

First Steps has a four-week notice period for children leaving the setting, or making adjustments to the sessions they have booked. Fees will be charged for that period and any funding will continue to be claimed. However, we take into account family circumstances if shorter notice is given. We ask for all fees to be paid up to the date of departure. A revised invoice will be issued if applicable reflecting the fees chargeable for the remaining period - together with any previously invoiced amounts which remain outstanding.

Notice for 2 week booked holidays: Please inform the setting as soon as you are able, in order for adjustments to be made to the termly invoice, and avoid reissuing of invoices. Notice of less than two weeks may mean fees will still apply.