

Early Years Funding.

Your guide to early years funding entitlements in 2026.



Contents.

Funded hours are changing – Page 2

What is available – Page 3

How do I claim the funded hours? – Page 5

When should I apply? – Page 6

Key things to note – Page 7

Extras and essentials - Page 7

Making the most of funded hours – Page 8

Tax-free Childcare – Page 10

Next steps – Page 12

Our goal is to offer the best in early years care and education for every child in one of our nursery schools. We know that a big consideration of parents choosing us - as well as this quality of care, is cost and value for money, whilst still ensuring your little one can access exceptional onwards education from within the Dukes Education family.

The new support available from the Government, coming in stages from April 2024, helps to make nursery care more accessible for more families, and we would be delighted if you chose from within the Little Dukes family...

Funded hours are changing!

In March 2023, the Government announced plans to increase access to funded childcare hours to include younger children. The phased introduction of this plan begins in April 2024 and carries on through to September 2025:

- From April 2024, children aged two will receive 15 hours of funded childcare.
- From September 2024, children aged nine months will also have access to the 15 hours of funded childcare.
- By September 2025, all eligible children aged from 9 months to school age will receive 30 hours of funded childcare.

What is available?

Between April 2024, and September 2025, new eligibility criteria for Government funded childcare came into effect.

Each new cohort of children were likely eligible for up to 30 hours of funded childcare from the term after they turned two, three, or from September 2025, 9 months old.

April 2024		9 months to 2 years	2 to 3 years	3 to 4 years
Entitlement	All families			15 hours
	Working families		NEW - 15 hours	30 hours
	Families receiving other forms of support		15 hours	

What is available?

September 2024		9 months to 2 years	2 to 3 years	3 to 4 years
Entitlement	All families			15 hours
	Working families	NEW - 15 hours	NEW - 15 hours	30 hours
	Families receiving other forms of support		15 hours	

September 2025		9 months to 2 years	2 to 3 years	3 to 4 years
Entitlement	All families			15 hours
	Working families	NEW - 30 hours	NEW - 30 hours	30 hours
	Families receiving other forms of support		15 hours	

How do I claim the funded hours?

All parents of 3- and 4-year-olds are entitled to the 15 hours funding.

From the term after they turn 3, and until they start school, you can get 570 hours of Government-funded childcare a year. It's known as the 15 hours funding since it relates to 15 hours of funded care a week for 38 weeks of the year (term-time).

How do I get it?

Just contact us and let us know that you want to use your 15 hours funding at your chosen nursery. We will apply for it on your behalf, and you will see the hours used each week on your fee invoice.

For 2-year-olds:

Some parents will be able to apply for 15 hours funding for 2-year-olds. If you are in receipt of certain benefits such as Income Support or Universal Credit, or your child has Disability Living Allowance or an education, health and care (EHC) plan, you may be able to get 15 funded hours for your child.

Speak to your local Council for details of how to apply.

From April 2024...

More parents will be able to apply for 15 hours funding for 2-year-olds.

You may be eligible for 15 hours funding for your 2-year-old if you are working and earning at least the equivalent of 16 hours a week at the national living or minimum wage, but less than £100,000 a year. If you are a couple, then this applies to each of you – if one of you doesn't work, or one of you earns over £100,000, you won't be eligible.

How will I get it?

To find out more about the new funding, please sign up on the [Government Childcare Choices](#) website and speak to your local nursery school about how the hours will be applied to your child's booking pattern each week.

How do I claim the funded hours?

You may be eligible for an additional 15 hours (30 hours funding).

You must be working and earning at least the equivalent of 16 hours a week at the national living or minimum wage, but less than £100,000 a year. If you are a couple, then this applies to each of you – if one of you doesn't work, or one of you earns over £100,000, you won't be eligible.

How do I get it?

You need to apply for the additional 15 funded hours through the Government's website. Applying for additional 15 hours funded childcare usually takes people around 20 minutes. You will need your National Insurance number (or your Unique Taxpayer Reference if you're self-employed).

If you are a couple, you will need this information for each of you. If your application is successful, you'll receive the additional 15 hours funding code. Just send us the code and secure your child's place at your chosen nursery school.



When should I apply?

Your child's birthday	When they can get their hours from	Recommended time to apply
1 September to 31 December	Term starting on or after 1 January	15 October to 30 November
1 January to 31 March	Term starting on or after 1 April	15 January to 28 February
1 April to 31 August	Term starting on or after 1 September	15 June to 31 July



For any questions, please do contact us directly. We would be delighted to help you find the option that is right for you and your child.

Key things to note:

Am I eligible?

You, and any partner, must each expect to earn (on average) at least £167 per week (equal to 16 hours at the National Minimum or Living Wage). If you, or your partner, are on maternity, paternity or adoption leave, or you're unable to work because you are disabled or have caring responsibilities, you could still be eligible.

You can't get either 15 or 30 hours childcare if you, or your partner, each individually expect to earn £100,000 adjusted net income or more. Eligible working families can get up to 30 hours childcare. This cannot be used in addition to the 15 hours available for all 3- and 4-year-olds.

When can my child start?

Your child can start in their childcare place the term after they are eligible and have received a valid eligibility code, whichever is later. Term start dates are 1st September, 1st January and 1st April. To keep your 15- or 30-hours childcare place you need to check your details are up to date every 3 months.

Where can I use it?

It's available at participating early years providers, such as; Full day care (e.g. nurseries), schools, childminders, sessional providers (e.g. playgroups), Sure Start Children's Centres, and after school clubs.

Extras and essentials:

What isn't covered?

These childcare offers are not intended to cover the costs of meals, other consumables (such as nappies or sun cream), additional hours or additional activities (such as trips).

Providers may charge a fee for these additions. If you choose to pay for these it is an arrangement between you and the childcare provider, and these fees will be detailed to you before accepting the offer of a place.

To provide the high-quality early years care and education that we are renowned for, our nursery schools will charge an 'Extras and essentials' fee for every funded hour accessed.

This provides many of the things that you love about our nurseries, which are not covered by the Government entitlement.

This fee will be applied to your child's invoice, in line with the Government and Local Authority guidelines on how additional fees should be charged.

Making the most of funded hours:

Our nurseries operate for different weeks per year...

To ensure you can access as many funded hours for your child as possible, we stretch the entitlement to cover the number of weeks per year that they attend.

Whether accessing 15 or 30 funded hours each week, and as each new age group joins the scheme, parents will be able to ‘stretch’ the amount of funding from 38 weeks per year (term-time) to 48 or 52 weeks per year depending on the weeks the nursery is open and their child’s attendance pattern, as long as the yearly total does not exceed 570/1140 hours.

Weeks Open		38 Weeks	48 Weeks	51 Weeks
Entitlement	15 hours	15 hours per week	11.9 hours per week	11.2 hours per week
	30 hours	30 hours per week	23.8 hours per week	22.4 hours per week

We will allocate your child’s funded hours entitlement equally over the number of days they attend our nursery each week.

The hours used will be subject to the ‘Extras and essentials’ fee to cover items above the Government entitlement. These will be shown on your invoice.

Hours above your child’s entitlement will be charged as normal, at the full rate. For details of our fees, please visit our website or contact your chosen nursery school directly.



For questions on the fees you will pay, contact your chosen nursery school for a breakdown of charges.

Making the most of funded hours:

Here are some examples of how your funded hours will be allocated within one of our nursery schools, with Government funding entitlements and ‘Extras and essentials’ (Ee) charges:



Attending 3 days, 8:00am to 6:00pm, 38 weeks of the year – 15 hours funding

5 funded hours	5 funded hours	5 funded hours
Ee x 5	Ee x 5	Ee x 5
5 paid hours	5 paid hours	5 paid hours

Attending 5 days, 8:00am to 6:00pm, 50weeks of the year – 15 Hours funding

2.2 funded hours	2.2 funded hours	2.2 funded hours	2.2 funded hours	2.2 funded hours
Ee x 2.2	Ee x 2.2	Ee x 2.2	Ee x 2.2	Ee x 2.2
7.8 paid hours	7.8 paid hours	7.8 paid hours	7.8 paid hours	7.8 paid hours

***Funded hours ‘stretched’ to cover 50weeks**

Attending 5 days, 8:00am to 6:00pm, 50weeks of the year - 30 hours funding

4.5 funded hours	4.5 funded hours	4.5 funded hours	4.5 funded hours	4.5 funded hours
Ee x 4.5	Ee x 4.5	Ee x 4.5	Ee x 4.5	Ee x 4.5
5.5 paid hours	5.5 paid hours	5.5 paid hours	5.5 paid hours	5.5 paid hours

Tax-free Childcare (TFC):

Can I get TFC?

The rules for TFC are similar to those of the 30 hours funding, for example you (and your partner) need to be working and earning more than national minimum wage but less than £100,000 a year.

How do I apply?

If you have checked your eligibility and decided that the TFC scheme is right for you and your family, you can apply in about 20 minutes. You will need your NI number (or if you're self-employed your Unique Taxpayer Reference) and if you have a partner, you'll need theirs too.

Does TFC work with my other benefits?

You can't use TFC if you're already claiming Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, or Universal Credit. So, if you applied for Tax-Free Childcare and were accepted, your Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit would stop at once and you wouldn't be able to receive them again.

What about TFC and Childcare Vouchers?

The TFC scheme was set up by the government to replace the Childcare Vouchers you could get from your employer. If you joined the Childcare Voucher scheme before 2018, you can continue to use it, but you can't use the TFC scheme at the same time.



Tax-free Childcare:

Does Little Dukes accept TFC?

Yes we do! We are a Government-approved provider, and all of our nurseries are registered with Ofsted, inspected by them regularly to ensure we provide the best quality of care and education. Of course, you can also choose to use TFC to pay for a nanny, childminder or playscheme, as long as they are approved by the Government. You can check if a childcare provider is approved at the [Government's childcare webpages](#).

How does it work?

You open an online account through the Government website which you use to pay for your childcare. For every 80p you pay in, the Government will top up an extra 20p. So, for every pound you pay for your childcare, you are getting a 20% contribution from the Government – the equivalent of the tax most people pay.

The Government will top up the account with 20% of childcare costs up to a total of £10,000 covering all of your children, including adopted children, provided they live with you and are under the age of 12 years, (or 17 for children with disabilities).



Deciding which options are right for you and your child?

Visit www.childcarechoices.gov.uk to check entitlements and how to claim.

Next steps:

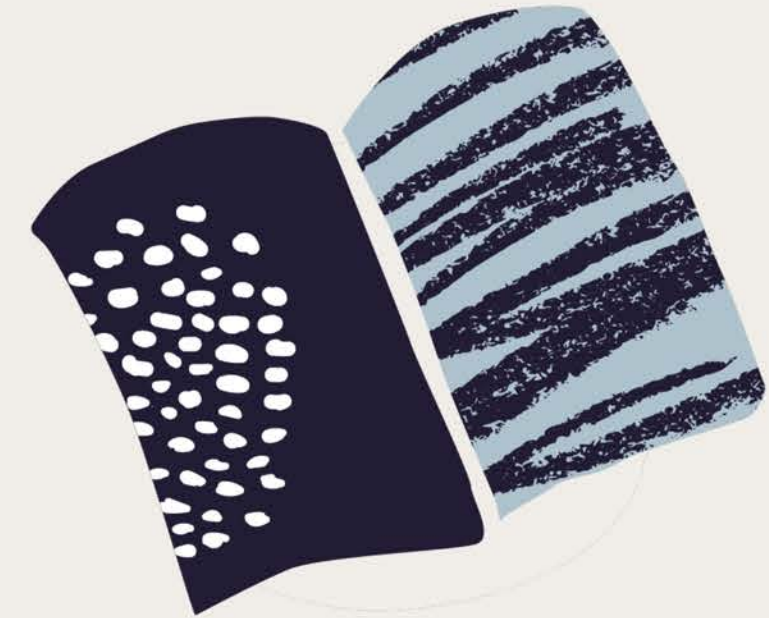
If your child will just be using the 3- and 4-year-old funding entitlement (15 hours Universal), there is nothing else you need to do!

To apply for the additional 15 hours (30 hours total) for 3- and 4-year-olds, check your eligibility at <https://www.gov.uk/check-eligible-free-childcare-if-youre-working> and obtain your unique code. Pass this on to your chosen nursery school before the start of term and they can apply this to your child's fees.

To apply for the 15 hours for 2-year-olds (from April 2024) and 9-month-olds (from September 2024), go to <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/upcoming-changes-to-childcare-support/> to check eligibility and obtain your unique code. Pass this on to your chosen nursery school before the start of term and they can apply this to your child's fees.

Your entitlement for all children aged over 9-months-old will increase to 30 hours, from September 2025. You need to re-apply each term, but your nursery school will remind you to do so.

Contact your chosen nursery school to check availability and fees.



For additional support...

Visit <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk> for all details of eligibility and how to claim.

Contact your Local Authority if you feel your child would benefit from Disability Living Allowance or an education, health and care (EHC) plan, to access additional funding.

Give us a call at the nursery to discuss what your fees would be, and check availability of required sessions.