

Funding Policy

Early Years Education Funding is government-funded childcare support offered for 38 weeks of the year. This can be delivered in full over 38 weeks or stretched over additional weeks, with a maximum of 10 hours per day claimable.

1. Funding available

Child Age	38 week offer	Eligibility
2 years	15 hours	Families receiving Government support
3 - 4 years	15 hours	All Parents
From 9 months - 4 years	30 hours	Eligible Working Families

2. Eligibility Criteria

If your child is born between:	They are eligible for a place from:
1 April and 31 August	1 September after reaching 9mths*, second or third birthday until statutory school age of 5
1 September and 31 December	1 January after reaching 9mths*, second or third birthday until statutory school age of 5
1 January and 31 March	1 April after reaching 9mths*, second or third birthday until statutory school age of 5

*Check government eligibility criteria regarding when you return to work

3. Our Approach to Funding

The government provides funding for 15 or 30 hours per week for only 38 weeks of the year. This equates to:

- **570 hours** per year (for 15-hour funding)
- **1,140 hours** per year (for 30-hour funding)

Since we operate 52 weeks per year, we stretch this funding across the full year, term or terms to which they apply, meaning the weekly funded hours are lower than the stated 15 or 30 hours. We commonly refer to these as the "15 or 30 hour offer", the actual weekly hours are reduced when stretched and the number of funded hours per day varies by attendance pattern. These adjusted hours are all outlined within the Pricelists for each term combination.

4. Eligibility & Code Requirements

Eligibility for working parent entitlement must be confirmed through HMRC, and a valid eligibility code must be provided. Codes must be renewed every three months. Codes can only be applied from the term after your child's qualifying birthday or after they have reached 9 months.

5. Headcount Dates

Term Start Date	Funded Dates	Funded Weeks	Headcount Day
Summer 2026	13/04 - 17/07	13	23/04/2026
Autumn 2026	07/09 - 18/12	14	10/09/2026
Spring 2027	04/01 - 26/03	11	21/01/2027

You cannot amend your funded hours (increase or decrease) after Headcount Date.

(Please refer to 7.g and 7.h below)

6. Transparency of Charges

Since April 2025, all providers must clearly show how funded hours are delivered and what additional charges apply. To comply with this, we have:

- broken down our pricing to include a cost per day for chargeable hours
- sessions that allow you to attend at no cost, in patterns that we plan for efficiency
- created flexible, fully inclusive offers where you choose the hours of attendance based on your working pattern. The daily charge for extended hours beyond the funded hours are clearly stated in our pricelists and offered on a term by term basis, two term + one term basis or 3 terms over an annual option.

If you're not eligible for funding, private fees are available at **competitive daily rates** - you can find these in our published Private Fees (website and Tapestry App).

7. Pricing & Charging Model

Saplings Nursey operates 52 weeks a year

- From September 2026, we will revert to funding allocated over an academic year that is unaffected by age band changes.
- We offer ANNUAL or SINGLE term offers for our services. Please refer to our Funding Terms & Agreement for the details.
- You are advised to **arrange your start date** in relation to the term you wish funding to commence. It is always advisable to **choose a start date during the few days before** the commencement of each term.
- Funded hours are only delivered on days your child is booked to attend and will not be applied to any additional extra sessions requested

- e. Extended hours are charged on bank holidays and training days (11 days p.a.)
- f. Invoices are sent via Tapestry and can be accessed by parents in the App
- g. Reducing either hours per week or funded hours can only be granted on an advanced TERM basis, once the term has begun, the hours cannot change.
- h. We require half a term's notice to alter hours and funding for the next term.

8. Additional Charges Explained

We do not charge for the 'extras' (outlined below) but we take this opportunity to share what is likely to apply in another setting

Consumables according to government descriptions include but are not limited to:

- tissues, cotton wool, nappy cream, nappies, nappy bags, cooking materials, science/project kits, seasonal resources, bedding, blankets, face cloths, yoga mats, and downloadable learning journals

Activities include but are not limited to:

- Enrichment sessions e.g. yoga, drama, football, music, specialist visitors, Spanish, dance); seasonal events / events for parents in person or online meetings, training sessions for parents; trips out; gifts e.g. for Mother's Day, Fathers Day, Easter, Christmas); festivals & celebrations resources e.g. Diwali, Chinese New Year, Christmas; gardening & growing, Forest School activities / nature nursery sessions (for over 2s)

Food

- Everyday: Breakfast, morning & afternoon snacks, 2 course hot lunch; special food for seasonal, cultural events, food tasting and celebrations.

Charges in other settings are 'voluntary' you can opt-out

Other settings will apply various conditions for opted out parents

- Your child may be excluded from certain activities and resources if you choose not to pay for them, this includes strict policies regarding home provided food, consumables and extra curricular activities or events.
- They will declare that the core Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision will always be provided at no cost, ensuring no compromise to their basic education. This means your child will be excluded from the opted-out activities or service provisions if you choose to 'opt-out'.

We struggle to align ourselves with the **opted out principle** in relation to inclusive practice. We remain fully inclusive, 'chargeable extras' are an integral part of our service

9. Two Funding Models

All-Inclusive Extended Pattern over 52 weeks where you only pay for extended hours after funded hours are removed - these are optional and can be suited to your circumstances from the outset, or term by term in the event financial or personal circumstances change.

All-Inclusive Term Time Pattern over 38 weeks where no additional charges apply unless you choose to add hours.

Places are limited for the term time pattern as we primarily provide our services to parents who require our services all year round and who will book a long way in advance. Nevertheless, we usually have up to 8 places available in preschool and up to 4 places for 2 year olds eligible for Early Learning at 2 years of age.

We encourage prompt enquiries the term before your child is eligible for a funded only place, as sessions can fill up quickly. These sessions cannot be booked any earlier.

10. Termly Funding Allocations

Essex calculates funding differently each term, meaning the **number of funded hours varies per term**. The Termly Funding Allocation tables in Saplings Funding Agreement 2026/2027 (the full version is provided to you when you have a confirmed booking) illustrate how we allocate these hours. Term time only, allocated hours remain as 15 or 30 hours regardless of the term.

For extended hours options, the number of funded hours your child receives will depend on:

- Which term they start funding
- The hours per day you choose - we offer 10, 9, 8 and 7 hour days in 2026/2027
- How many terms remain in the academic year

11. Attendance Monitoring & Responsible Use of Funds

We are required to ensure that government funding is used as intended and in full:

Where you attend for term time funded only hours:

- You must ensure that you do not arrive late or collect early with any frequency
- Your attendance should not drop below an acceptable level

We may have funded hours removed in these instances and so may need to apply additional hourly charges in the event we experience any removal of funding. Please let us know when

your child will not be attending, including your reason and we will work with you to maintain a reasonable balance in regard to absence levels to avoid this situation.

12. Claiming Process

To claim Early Years Funding at Saplings you must:

- Obtain an eligibility code from HMRC
- Complete our **Funding Parent Agreement** (Parts 1 & 2) and the Essex **Parent Agreement Form (PAF once a year)**
- Essex County Council require a copy of your **child's birth certificate** at the outset
- Refer to our **Admissions Policy** for guidance on place allocation.

13. Final Notes

Once you can confirm your child is eligible for funding, we will support you in accessing the right pattern for your needs.

We reserve the right to revise our offers in line with government guidance and funding changes as the academic year progresses, but parents will always be given 2 month's notice of any significant changes impacting the next funding period.

We aim to be fully transparent, fair and affordable while supporting high-quality childcare for every family. We remain committed to a fully inclusive service for all parents.

Thank you

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Senior Management Team members