

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.

Funding available

Child Age	38 week Offering	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

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

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, 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.

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.

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 including 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).

Pricing & Billing Model

Saplings Nursey operates 52 weeks a year

- From 1 April 2026 extended hours charges are calculated across 12 months where there is no change in age band
- From September 2026, all existing and new parents joining on or before 7 September will be offered an ANNUAL quotation for our services.
- Where you opt for a single term option, we calculate one term at a time.
- If you join mid Summer term, you will be offered Summer (single) followed by ANNUAL. If you join mid Autumn, your offer will be Autumn SINGLE, followed by Spring & Summer, thereafter the default will be ANNUAL
- Funded hours are only delivered on days your child is booked to attend and will not be applied to any additional ad hoc days requested
- Extended hours are charged on bank holidays and training days (11 days p.a.)
- Invoices are sent via Tapestry and accounts can be accessed by parents in the App

Additional Charges Explained

We do not charge for the 'extras' outlined below – we take opportunity here to share our insight with you

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.

Please remember that the charges in other settings are 'voluntary' you can opt-out

Other settings apply various conditions for opted out parents such as:

- 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

We have 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** as we primarily provide our services to full day care parents all year round 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.

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 illustrate how we allocate these hours. Term time only, allocated hours remain the same.

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

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.

Claiming Process

To claim Early Years Funding at Saplings you must:

- Complete our **Funding Parent Agreement** (Parts 1 & 2) and the Essex **Parent Agreement Form (PAF)**
- Essex County Council require a copy of your child's birth certificate at the outset
- Please refer to our **Admissions Policy** for guidance on place allocation.

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

Thank you

Linda Davies
Anna Davies Brown
Cheryl Rae

Senior Management Team members