

2026 Policy for delivery of funding

The Early Years Free Entitlement (EYFE) for 9-month plus, 2, 3 and 4-year-olds is central to the Government's vision for ensuring that all children have access to high-quality early years education to help them achieve their full potential.

The Department for Education (DfE) provides the Local Authority (LA) with statutory guidance, namely 'Early Education and Childcare - Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (April 2025)', which outlines how to fulfil the obligations set out in the Childcare Act 2006 and subsequent legislation. It also contains information about eligibility and funding conditions.

The EYFE Provider Declaration Form explains the statutory requirements and the Local Authority's expectations. Pumpkin Patch agrees to comply with these conditions to claim the EYFE for children within their settings.

Eligible 9 months plus (you can apply from when your child is 23 weeks old)

A child is 9 months old on or between	Will become eligible for EYFE at the start of the term beginning on or following	Deadline for applying
1 September to 31 December	Spring Term (January)	31 December
1 January to 31 March	Summer Term (April)	31 March
1 April to 31 August	Autumn Term (September)	31 August

Eligible 2-year-olds

A child born on or between	Will become eligible for EYFE at the start of the term beginning on or following	Deadline for applying
1 September to 31 December	Spring Term (January)	31 December
1 January to 31 March	Summer Term (April)	31 March
1 April to 31 August	Autumn Term (September)	31 August

Eligible 3-year-olds

A child born on or between	Will become eligible for EYFE at the start of the term beginning on or following	Deadline for applying
1 September to 31 December	Spring Term (January)	31 December
1 January to 31 March	Summer Term (April)	31 March
1 April to 31 August	Autumn Term (September)	31 August

When to apply if you're returning to work after maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave

The date you return to work will affect when you can apply for free childcare. If you're on paid annual leave and receiving your salary, this counts as having returned to work.

Date of returning to work; between	Will become eligible for EYFE at the start of the term beginning on or following	When to apply
1 October - 31 January	Spring Term (January)	1 September - 31 December
1 February - 30 April	Summer Term (April)	1 January - 31 March
1 May - 30 September	Autumn Term (September)	1 April - 31 August

Claims will be made on a termly basis as set below, Pumpkin Patch self- stretch the funding across the full year, subject to the termly limit.

Term weeks

Spring	11 weeks
Summer	13 weeks
Autumn	14 weeks

For each eligible child attending on the headcount date (usually the second week of the term):

The LA will fund a maximum of 570 hours per year for 2 Year Olds Early Learning (LA issued) and 3 year olds Universal EYFE.

The LA will fund a total of 1140 hours per year for all eligible working parents of children 9 months+, 2 year olds and 3-4 years olds. Funding starts from the term after the child becomes eligible.

Please refer to the government policy on working parents' funding eligibility and your specific LA for 2 year olds Early Learning (LA issued) funding criteria.

Parents/carers can decide how their child accesses their weekly entitlement, subject to our available sessions.

Please be aware we cannot adjust funding allocation after the headcount date in West Sussex.

EYFE sessions are subject to the following limits:

- a maximum of 15 or 30 hours in one week, dependent on maximum number of hours (over 38 weeks)
- All claims to the LA are self-stretched by Pumpkin Patch over a full academic year with a reduced weekly amount of 11 hours and 10 minutes or 22 hours and 20 minutes, when joining the setting in September (Autumn Term) and dependent on Universal/ Working or Extended.
- If a child commences in the spring or summer term, we can only claim a maximum of number of weeks funding, which will not be enough to stretch over the full terms, this will mean a reduction in funded hours, see example below.

Funding overview for 30 hours (2026-2027)

Term starts	Max. weeks claimed	Max. hours claimed	Weeks to stretch over	Weekly allowance
Autumn term (full academic year)	38 full year	1140	51 full year	22 hours 20 minutes
Spring term	24 11spring weeks / 13 summer weeks	720	34 weeks (jan-end August)	21 hours 10 minutes
Summer term	13	390	20 weeks After easter - end August)	19.5 hours

- Funding will be allocated to any session per their agreed booking plan.

If Pumpkin Patch has planned closures during FE time, these will not be included in the offer. It is parental choice to take holiday and they simply miss out on the funding. Should the setting need to

close in the event of an emergency, Pumpkin Patch will endeavour to make up any loss of EYFE hours wherever possible.

Optional Consumables

Unfortunately, the funding provided to the nursery by the Department of Education does not cover all of our consumables costs. Therefore, funded hours do not include our homemade meals and snacks.

In agreement with families, there will be optional consumables charges to cover the full Pumpkin Patch provision, including snacks and meals. Please refer to your nursery fees to see what these optional charges are based on your child's attendance.

To check your eligibility or to opt out of the optional consumables charges and access funded hours only, please contact the nursery manager, who will be able to discuss alternatives.

We offer alternatives if you are unable to meet these charges. This will include, but is not limited to, providing your own home-cooked meals and snacks. Pumpkin Patch Nurseries are proud of our freshly prepared, highly nutritious meals. By maintaining this approach, we can create a safe, inclusive, and enriching mealtime environment that supports children's well-being and development. If you choose to opt out of the voluntary charges, please note that we cannot permit packed lunches. We encourage you to provide home-prepared hot meals that align with our termly menus (our chef can share recipes and allergen information). However, we are happy to work in partnership with families who wish to bring their own food by agreeing on alternatives that meet the same nutritional criteria and ingredients as our menu.

This decision has been made after careful consideration and is based on several important factors, including nutritional consistency and the independence and learning opportunities our mealtimes provide. Hot meals will undergo a reheating process to above 75°C, which helps reduce harmful bacteria to safer levels for consumption. Additionally, snacks will need to align with our menus as closely as possible.

Please note that we require at least one month's notice to process your request. This allows us to update our records, adjust invoices, and ensure the nursery is fully prepared for any changes related to your child's care. If you choose to provide your own items before the notice period expires, the relevant charges will still apply.

If you have planned annual leave and your child will not be attending you can choose to opt out of consumables charges for up to four weeks, we will need written confirmation of this request one month in advance and this will need to be taken in full week blocks; this is due to admin on our nursery management system. This will be shown as a credit on your invoice.

Children who meet the following criteria, subject to available spaces, may be allocated a space to include consumables with no additional voluntary charge request.

Criteria A – Looked after children (children who are cared for by the local authority)

Criteria B – A child in receipt of confirmed DAF funding (Disability Access Fund)

Criteria C – A child in receipt of confirmed Deprivation and Early Years Pupil

Premium Funding (EYPP)

Criteria – D child in receipt of confirmed Deprivation Funding

Criteria E – A child in receipt of confirmed Early Years Pupil Premium Funding (EYPP)

Criteria F- A child in receipt of the SEN Inclusion Fund (SENIF)

There will be:

- No registration/administration fee, payment upfront or non-refundable deposits;
- No requirement for a child to access additional hours on top of the free hours;
- All additional hours outside of the EYFE entitlement are charged at our normal hourly rate for that session and include consumables.

All spaces are subject to availability.

Attendance

A child may move provider at any point during a term; however, parents/carers should ensure they have complied with Pumpkin Patch's notice period (unless leaving before Headcount Day). If moving provider within LA, the funding must follow the child, with no deductions. If a child attended elsewhere between the start of term and before Headcount Day, funding for the time attended must be passed on to the previous provider or arrangements made with the LA.

Attendance will be closely monitored. We ask parents to inform the nursery prior to their children taking holidays or days off, and all incidents of sickness absence should be reported to the nursery. If a child has not arrived at nursery within one hour of their normal start time, the parents will be contacted to ensure the child is safe and healthy. We will work with our families to ensure children access their hours.

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)

Children who meet the eligibility criteria will attract additional funding to the hourly base rate. EYPP, alongside any other available funding, will support the delivery of interventions that improve outcomes for our disadvantaged children. To claim EYPP funding, Pumpkin Patch will gather the required information from parents and record it on the Parent Declaration form for submission with Headcount.

Disability Access Fund (DAF)

The Disability Access Fund (DAF) is a new funding entitlement which aids access to early years places by, for example, supporting providers in making adjustments to their settings. Children will be eligible for DAF if the child receives Child Disability Living Allowance.

Inclusion and Supporting Children with SEND

The EYFS provides an inclusive framework that supports the individual needs of all children. Pumpkin Patch will ensure that no child is refused admission when space is available.

Each Pumpkin Patch Nursery has a SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) who works alongside the Manager, who takes responsibility for developing and implementing inclusive policies within the nurseries and ensuring that all members of staff understand their responsibilities in planning to meet each child's individual needs (see Inclusion Policy)

Pumpkin Patch monitors the progress of all children, identifies children not making progress, and implements strategies and support to enable all children to reach their full potential. We ensure that vulnerable children and families can access the services that can support their needs, for example, referrals to health professionals or setting up an Early Help Plan.

Safeguarding

Pumpkin Patch meets all the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the current EYFS. (See Safeguarding Policy)

Declaration Forms

Parents who wish to claim the EYFE must complete a Parent declaration and have started the child (unless on short-term sick or planned holiday) with the provider no later than Headcount Day.

Early Learning 2-year-olds can start at any point in the term. For eligible 9-month-olds, 2-year-olds, 3 and 4-year-olds (Universal / Working parents and Extended FE), only in exceptional circumstances may claims be accepted for EYFE after this date, for example:

- Moving from outside of County after headcount
- Missed headcount due to serious illness
- Children from traveller communities
- Children with an additional need whose start with a provider has been supported by a professional such as a GP, Portage, Speech and Language, Health Visitor etc.
- Children Looked After (foster care etc.)
- Asylum seekers/refugees
- Ethnic minorities, English not first language
- Child of a parent who is in a women's refuge or part of a Witness Protection Programme
- Other vulnerable children

Grace Periods

The grace period enables parents to retain their childcare place until the end of the term if they become ineligible for the Working Parent or Extended EYFE. If they are over 3 years old, they would still be eligible for Universal EYFE.

Parents reconfirm their eligibility around every three months. The 'validity start date' is when the parent has applied and been issued a code. The 'validity end date' is the parent's 'deadline' for reconfirming. Their 'grace period' date is the last date they should receive the Working Parent / Extended EYFE. A child cannot start at a new provider during their grace period. The LA will automatically assign grace period end dates to every eligibility code and inform providers which children are in their grace period via the Online Provider Portal (OPP)

Audit Requirements and Compliance

Providers will usually be given notice of any audit

LA will carry out a sample check by requesting copies of Parent Declaration Forms and registers to check against Headcount claims. This may be by visit or by requesting submission of paper copies.

They may also require policies relating to admissions, fees etc.

Pumpkin Patch will retain all documentation related to the EYFE places for the current year, plus two years for audit purposes. All Parent Declarations (including signed confirmation that the original of each child's birth certificate or valid passport was seen by the provider representative making the return), attendance registers, estimates and final headcount claims for the current year plus two years.

All or part of the payment may be reduced, suspended, withheld or reclaimed if it becomes evident that:

- There is a failure to comply with any obligations under this form of agreement;
- False, inaccurate or misleading information is provided;
- The organisation has been, or is about to be, dissolved;
- The provider is not meeting the needs of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities;

- The provider is not promoting fundamental British values;