

Nursery Education Funding (NEF) Information for parents/carers

Providers are required to ensure parents/carers are well informed about the NEF scheme and what they are entitled to. Providers should ensure all parents have access to the following information:

“Did you know that all parents and carers of children aged 3 and 4, can have up to 15 hours of FREE childcare each week, during school term time, regardless of how much money you earn? Childcare fees for up to 15 hours per week for no less than 38 weeks per year will be paid for you at the start of the school term after your child turns 3.”

Leicestershire understands that parents/carers want the best for their children and that the idea of someone else looking after their child, who isn't part of the family or a friend, can be very daunting.

Reassurance can be gleaned by the fact that all childcare providers who offer the free entitlement can only do so by meeting a minimum quality standard. Providers include full day care nurseries, playgroups, some children's centres and accredited childminders, and are generally referred to as 'settings'. Staff are trained and qualified to care for your child, helping them to learn and develop and all settings should be registered with Ofsted.

Many parents/carers will also be reassured to know that children who have experienced childcare will have an easier transition when they move into school. This is because they will already have had opportunities to express themselves and to socialise through a range of creative, physical, emotional and social play opportunities. They will be more confident in interacting with other children and different adults.

So childcare definitely helps to give your child a better start in life, But it can also help you!

With a free childcare place you could:

- go back to work with affordable childcare
- get a break from being a mum, dad or carer for a few hours each day
- Increase your work hours and still afford the childcare
- get help when you're worried about your child's progress
- have trained childcare professionals to talk to
- see your child get used to playing with other children and make friends
- meet other families (especially if you're new to the area)

There is no catch!

The Government funds childcare providers so that all 3 and 4 year olds across the country can have part-time, free early year's childcare and education. It helps them settle into school better.

There are lots of different types of childcare in Leicestershire, but only you can choose the right childcare for you and your child - because you know your child best. Although you have a choice of providers, you may not always be offered the full entitlement at the times you want at the provider of your choice. The Leicestershire Family Information Service is a free and impartial service that can help you choose the right kind of place for your child and provide you with the contact details of settings in your area.

They will help you find out more about day nurseries, accredited childminders, playgroups and children's centres and will be happy to answer any queries you may have about free childcare places or to find you alternative childcare if your current provider can no longer meet your needs. Please contact them on 0116 305 6545

So, what are you entitled to?

All 3 and 4 year olds in Leicestershire are entitled to 15 hours of free early learning and childcare per week, for no fewer than 38 weeks of the year. This equates to 570 hours over the period of a year, to be taken during term times. If you choose a setting that opens for less than 38 weeks per year, then you can still only take 15 hours per week so this will mean that you forfeit some of your entitlement as the remaining hours cannot be taken elsewhere.

The early learning entitlement is often referred to as 'Nursery Education Funding' or 'NEF'. You can access your 15 hours of NEF, but please note the following rules apply:

- you can take no more than 10 hours in any one day
- you can't use less than 2.5 hours in any one day
- you can't access your 15 hours either before 8.00 am or after 6.00 pm
- If you take your full 15 hours, you must take these over at least 3 days per week
- If you only want to take your hours over just two days per week, the maximum number of hours you can take is 12.5
- you can spread your 15 hours free entitlement between a maximum of 2 settings, providing they operate for at least 38 weeks per year. This might be split between two nurseries, or a nursery and a childminder, or a playgroup and a childminder. Leicestershire County Council will determine how your payments are split between the two providers
- your child must be in attendance for all of the funded time claimed for by your early years provider, unless there is a valid reason such as illness or holiday. You may be liable to pay any losses incurred by the provider if your child is consistently not in attendance for funded time

The following is a national birth date eligibility table which will tell you when your child will be able to take up its free place:

| A child born between: | Will be eligible for a free place from: |
|---|--|
| 1 st April and 31 st August | The start of the Autumn Term following their 3rd birthday until statutory school age |
| 1 st September and 31 st December | The start of the Spring Term following their 3rd birthday until statutory school age |
| 1 st January and 31 st March | The start of the Summer Term following their 3rd birthday until statutory school age |

Headcount Dates

In order to access NEF, your child has to be attending a provision before the dates shown in the table below. If your child is not in attendance (due to holidays or sickness etc.) but is registered with the provision and is able to take the place up within two weeks of this date, then you can still receive your free entitlement.

| Term of Funding | Headcount Date |
|------------------|----------------|
| Autumn 2010 term | 16th Sept 2010 |
| Spring 2011 term | 20th Jan 2011 |
| Summer 2011 term | 19th May 2011 |

How will your child's place be paid for?

Your 15 hours is totally free and you should not be asked to pay any costs towards it. However, if you need to use the setting for more than the funded 15 hours, you should agree the charges for these directly with the setting, preferably before you take up your place.

Please ensure before your child takes up the place, what extras you might get billed for, for example, meals, nappies, wipes, dance or music classes might be classed as extra services and may be charged for. You don't have to accept any of these as a condition of the free place if you don't want them. For example, you can send in a packed lunch or your own nappies and wipes if you prefer.

If you just want the free hours, that's all you need to have. But if you want childcare for more than 15 hours a week, or need childcare during school holidays (many settings stay open) then you will have to pay extra for those times and arrange that with your provider.

You may be in a position where you are using a day nursery or playschool and a childminder, so please ensure you know about all of the additional charges such as the childminder collecting and dropping off your child at nursery, if this is the case. Each setting you talk to should be able to discuss with you what they can offer to meet your needs.

Your child's learning and development

Parents/carers are invaluable in being the child's first educator so it's important that when children attend a setting, that you are confident to leave them in a safe, secure and exciting environment. Presently, your child will follow the Early Years Foundation Stage, which is a play based curriculum. Children will learn how to develop their social skills, physical skills, speaking, listening, reading, writing skills and will learn through mathematical and creative activities. The practitioner at the setting will carefully match your child's learning to an age appropriate level. During the time your child attends, they should be able to experience learning opportunities outdoors too.

What if your child has Special Educational Needs?

If your child has SEN you may be able to access up to an extra 6 hours of NEF per week, if your child attends either Sketchley Hill or Wigston Menphys Centre you should speak to your providers about claiming for this time - or for more information please contact the Family Information Service on 0116 305 6545.

How to arrange your place

Once you have found a place that's right for your child, the childcare provider will ask you to complete a simple form. It's called a Parent's Statement of Undertaking and it's used to confirm when, where and how often your child uses the

childcare and will allow Leicestershire County Council to make the right payments to the childcare setting.

You won't have to manage the money yourself, as it's paid straight to the childcare provider - the 15 hours of NEF you receive should be seen as your **free** hours.

Starting School

When you apply for a school place before your child has reached compulsory school age, you may be offered a place in a nursery or reception class at primary school, when he or she is four years old. This place will be free except for meals and trips.

Once your child is attending school, your childcare provider will no longer be eligible to claim NEF on your behalf.

Legally, your child does not have to start school until he or she is of compulsory school age which is the term after the child turns 5.

From September 2010, Leicestershire will have completed its Common Admissions Policy, whereby all schools will offer a school place from the Autumn Term only, for all children who become four years of age before the beginning of that term.

Parents/carers can delay their 4+ child starting school by up to one term on or after the Autumn Term admission date, but please ensure you read the *Important note on the tables overleaf.

| For those children born between | Leicestershire's school admission date for children aged 4+ | Parent/carers has the option to defer child's place during this term | Compulsory school age (term after child turns 5) |
|--|---|---|--|
| 1st January and 31st March 2006 | Autumn term 2010 | Parents can choose to defer their child's 4+ school place by one term, to the beginning of: • Spring 2011 term | Summer term 2011 |
| <p>*Important Note: To secure a place for your 4+ child to commence school at or following the Autumn term 2010, you needed to have applied for a place prior to 22nd February 2010. For parents of children born between the dates highlighted above it should be noted that if you chose to defer your 4+ place by up to one term after the school admission date, you may risk losing the original offer as we cannot reserve school places. If the school is popular, the place may need to be offered to another child.</p> | | | |
| for those children born between | Leicestershire's school admission date for children aged 4+ | Parent/carers has the option to defer child's place during this term | |
| 1st Sept 2006 to 31 August 2007 | Autumn term 2011 | Parents/carers can choose to take up their child's 4+ school place at the beginning of the Autumn 2011 term, you need to apply for a place prior to 15th January 2011. • compulsory school age | |
| <p>*Important Note: To secure a place for children aged 4+ to commence school at or following the Autumn term 2011, parents need to apply for a place prior to 15th January 2011.</p> <p>Parents/carers of children born within the times highlighted above are able to defer their child's 4+ place as specified and the school place will be held open for them. In addition from Autumn term 2011, parents can request a part time 4+ place for their child, until they reach compulsory school age.</p> <p>All children regardless of when they are born must have take-up the place before Year 1 (i.e. before the summer break to Year 1) otherwise they risk losing the place. This is because a place cannot be held beyond the year it was applied for.</p> <p>The local authority may withdraw the offer of the place if it is not taken up after deferment and may offer the place to another child according to Local Authority priority criteria. Parents should seek advice from the Family Information's Service at the County Council, as this may also have other implications.</p> | | | |

The Government may introduce further changes to the school admissions policy from September 2012 that may impact on the above.

To find out more about Nursery Education Funding, visit www.leics.gov.uk/family or contact the Family Information Service on 0116 305 6545.

Please follow the link to access Leicestershire County Council's Guide to Primary School information for further advice on admissions.