



Free early education FOR 3 AND 4 YEAR OLDS

What is the free early education entitlement?

Every child aged three and four years old is entitled to receive a maximum of 15 hours of free early education per week, until they reach compulsory school age (the term following their fifth birthday).

Early education benefits children's social, physical and mental development while also helping them to prepare for school. Evidence shows that regular, good quality early education has lasting benefits for all children.

Each child is entitled to receive a maximum of 15 hours per week, over no fewer than 38 weeks per year (totalling 570 hours per year). The entitlement can be taken over a minimum of two and a half hours per day or no more than ten hours per day, between the hours of 7am and 7pm.

You should discuss with the participating provider of your choice the hours they can offer and how you can access them.



When can my child access the free early education entitlement?

The table below shows when your child will become eligible:

If your child is born between:	They are eligible for a free place from:
1 April and 31 August	First September following their third birthday until statutory school age
1 September and 31 December	First January following their third birthday until statutory school age
1 January and 31 March	First April following their third birthday until statutory school age

Where can my child access a free early education place?

Free early education can be provided by:

- Day nurseries
- Pre schools or playgroups
- Independent schools
- Children's centres
- Maintained nursery schools and classes

All private, voluntary and independent providers of early education must be registered on the Southwark Directory of Providers, however the free entitlement does not offer a guarantee of a place at your preferred provider.

How can I be sure about the quality of an early education provider?

All providers of early education must meet the following criteria:

- Be a maintained school in the local authority or registered by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and inspected for the childcare and education they provide on a regular basis
- Be included in the Southwark Directory of Providers
- All staff are checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service
- Meet the learning and development and welfare requirements of the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage

You can view the Ofsted inspection report of an early education provider on Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports

Who pays for the free early education entitlement?

Registered providers claim the cost of the entitlement directly from Southwark Council. There is no money passed to parents/carers.

Will parents be charged for the free early education entitlement?

Providers cannot charge parents for any part of the 15 hours free entitlement. Providers who charge for goods or services such as registration, lunch or uniform fees cannot do so as a condition of a child accessing their free entitlement.

Will the free early education entitlement funding affect my tax or benefits?

The free entitlement does not affect benefits received. However, the funding does mean that your childcare costs will be lower, so if you are claiming the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit, you should only claim for the childcare fees you are paying.



What if my child attends for longer than the hours of the free entitlement?

If you choose for your child to attend for longer than the length of the funded entitlement, you will be expected to pay for this additional time.

Can I use more than one early education provider?

It is possible to split your place between two private, voluntary and independent providers as long as the total number of free hours does not exceed the entitlement. However, this option is only available if the provider is able to accommodate you in this way. You will also need to inform both providers of where you have taken up a split place.

Can my child access the free entitlement if they have just moved to England from another country?

Children moving to England from other countries are entitled to access the free early education entitlement on the same basis as any other child, regardless of whether they have British citizenship.

How do I apply for the free early education entitlement?

Your early education provider can apply for the free early education entitlement funding on your behalf directly from us. There are no forms to complete, however you will be expected to verify that your child has received their free entitlement.



Contact us

If you would like a list of free early education providers, or you have any questions about the free entitlement you can contact us by phone on **0800 694 0171**, or by emailing **earlylearninginfo@southwark.gov.uk**

You can also contact us if you are not happy about the way your child has received their free entitlement. We would encourage you to raise any concerns you have with the early education provider in the first instance, however, if you are still not able to resolve your concern, or are not happy with the way it has been dealt with, please let us know.

