

# Nursery admissions review

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## Context

When Solihull succeeded in opening a nursery unit in every infant and primary school a system to coordinate admissions was efficient and effective, when children were attending for 12.5, and then 15 hours per week.

Coordinated admission with an annual September intake no longer meets the needs of families or schools. This is as a result of national policy changes and the enhanced package of early education entitlements now available to parents. The vast range of early education and childcare provision available to parents, many of whom are working, means that the majority of school nurseries are no longer full to capacity.

These changes allow schools the opportunity to develop a more flexible offer for families. For example, admitting children from the first term after their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday for a funded place or offer 30 hours of provision, which will help ensure flexibility and the future viability of the nursery.

The variety of options on offer in Solihull mean that it will no longer be practical, or in the best interests of parents, for the council to coordinate the admissions process.

Solihull Schools Strategic Accountability Board requested that officers attend each of the five collaborative groups to discuss the challenges.

The general consensus from schools who attended the collaborative meetings was that the existing nursery admissions process does not work for parents or schools. Many schools are already offering a range of options from babies; 30 hours; 2.5 days or the standard 2.5 hour daily sessions.

Nationally, there is no statutory duty for local authorities to coordinate admissions to nursery. The School Admissions Code does not apply to early years settings. The vast majority of schools in other local authority areas have always managed their own admissions.

## Cessation of coordinated nursery admissions service by the LA

The conclusion of the reviews is that the LA will no longer offer a coordinated nursery admissions process. The service will be met in part for the 2019 intake and pass wholly to schools for the 2020 intake.

## **2019 nursery intake - transition period**

School admissions will provide information to parents and an online application process. The closing date will be 1 December 2018.

The process of coordination between schools will operate as usual.

Places will be offered to parents on 31 January 2019.

School admissions will receive acceptances and declines of places for the normal 2 week period.

### **New for 2019 - after offer day:**

Schools will be given their list of those who have accepted or been offered a place.

Schools will need to chase those who have not accepted their place.

Schools with a waiting list will:

- Manage their own waiting list
- Offer places at their own pace
- Hold vacancies if they wish
- Accept late applications and add them to the waiting list

Schools with no waiting list or vacancies have the options to:

- Cap their admission number
- Reorganise staffing
- Change their offer to a more flexible option
- Offer 30 hours

### **New for 2020**

Schools will manage their own nursery admissions process.

Schools should keep their up to date nursery offer on their website.

The local authority will help and support schools with advice and guidance.

The LA will continue to send a mailshot to the parents of children who appear on the health authority data collection.

The LA will provide an admissions policy template for guidance and answers to any questions raised.

Family Information Service will signpost parents to what's on offer at their preferred school and how to apply.

## Advice and information for schools

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Give parents clear and concise information - they need to know what's on offer, what they may have to pay for and how and when to apply, for example:

### What are you offering for children and parents?

Start with a welcoming statement which should include the following:

- Your admissions policy including how places will be offered.
- The age range you cater for and any age restrictions you have (eg breakfast club is just for reception age children upwards, not nursery age children).
- Opening hours and days / session times (eg Monday to Friday 8am-5.30pm or 9am-12 noon)
- Are you open term-time only or are you open all year round.
- Costs - if offering additional hours or services (eg the cost per additional hour, costs for specific sessions such as lunch time, before school session, after school session, early start, late finish). (See page 13 of [Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance.](#))
- How many children you can offer a place to in each session or day. (Capacity information is useful to manage a parent's expectations.)
- Current school Ofsted grade – maybe add a hyperlink.
- Clear contact details of how to make a general enquiry, how to book a visit to look round and how to apply.

### How to promote your provision

Make sure any information you put together is clear and transparent and easy for parents to understand, particularly around the hours you are offering, what you are charging for and your admissions policy for offering places.

Publish your nursery information clearly on your school website. For example, maybe on an extra tab called admissions to nursery, or a link to the information directly from the homepage. (Doing this will save you lots of additional phone calls and emails!)

If you will be charging for anything including taking a refundable deposit, you will need to ensure you are following the charging advice in the [statutory guidance](#) regarding this. If you need to set up anything new around payments and charging you can speak Linda Sheridan in to the Schools Finance Team on 0121 704 6617.

You will have to admit children according to capacity and accommodate children within safe ratios so make this clear to parents.

## **How to claim**

You receive a termly claim information pack from Family Information Service that contains all the information you need regarding claiming early education funding which includes:

- Termly dates for how to offer your places – number of hours and weeks available.
- Eligible date of birth ranges for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.
- Calendar dates for when you need to input your child data onto the provider portal (headcount day) and for when you will receive your payments.
- The funding rates including rates for Early Years Pupil Premium, Disability Access Funding and Inclusion / High Needs Funding.
- How to validate 30-hours codes for parents taking up the extended hours.
- How to claim for children who are early leavers or late starters.
- Parental declaration forms for you to ask all parents with children taking up a place to complete. (the data gathered on the forms is for you to use to input to the provider portal).
- Important notes – showing any changes or new documents / guidance you need to be aware of regarding early education funding.
- Contact details for support and advice from Family Information Service.

## **Schools wishing to continue with 15 hours over 5 sessions - September start**

Those schools who wish to continue with their existing offer will still need to manage their own admissions process but there will be no change to the way funding is claimed.

## **Free hours**

Whatever sessions or hours you decide to make available as free must be offered clearly and consistently in order to be fair to all parents – hence the need for an admissions policy. For example, it would be unfair to offer one parent the free hours before and after school, whilst another parent could not

You cannot set conditions on the free hours, eg parents can only have their free hours if they buy lunch, or parents can only have their free hours if they buy additional hours.

## **Notice periods**

You will want to ask parents to make a commitment to a period of time. You can set your own contractual notice period. You will need to consider allowing a parent to break their contract if there are extenuating circumstances.

## **Eligibility for 2 year-old funding**

If you wish to offer a 2 year funded place you will first need to check that the child is eligible and has been approved, as families have to meet a benefits criteria to be entitled. The parent should be able to show you their approval letter / email or, if not,

you can contact Family Information Service who can verify if they have been approved.

### **Eligibility for 30 hours extended childcare**

If you wish to offer the extended hours to a parent (additional 15 hours childcare) then the parent will need to provide you with an 11 digit code, their NI number and date of birth which you can use to validate whether they have eligibility for the coming term. (you can do this on the provider portal). If their code is valid it will provide you with a validity start and end date and a grace period end date and you can offer a place. If the code isn't valid or the parent doesn't have a code then they will need to apply for a code via [www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk). You cannot offer a grant-funded 30-hours place unless you are provided with a valid 30-hour code. Parents will need to reconfirm their eligibility for 30 hours extended childcare every 3 months and will be prompted to do so by HMRC.

If a parent becomes ineligible they will go into a grace period where they continue to be eligible for a limited period. If they reach the end of their grace period and their circumstances haven't changed then their code will become invalid and they will no longer be able to access the extended hours. They will still be able to access the universal 15 hours as this is available to all age-eligible children.

Parents will set a pattern of attendance in headcount week and as per the provider agreement this cannot be changed until the following term.

### **Deposits**

The guidance does allow for a deposit to be charged to secure a place. Schools thinking of charging a deposit should take the following points into consideration.

- On taking up a place the deposit must be refunded as soon as possible, and at least within 2 weeks.
- Experience indicates deposits are in the range of £35-£100. Have regard to your local area.
- Consider not charging the full deposit in exceptional circumstances.
- Consider a full refund of the deposit in exceptional circumstances.
- Think about how taking a deposit fits with the acceptance of a place.

### **Administration of deposits**

You need to devise your own policy. Here are things to consider:

- Parents will not be set up on ParentPay so you will have to pay the deposit into your school fund bank account.
- You must provide the parent with a receipt.
- You must keep accurate records of income and refunds.
- Refunds can be repaid by cheque from the school fund account.
- State what you will do with non-refunded deposits.

## **Registration fees**

You cannot charge a registration fee as a condition of taking up a free place.

## **Sibling discounts**

Explain your sibling discount if you choose to offer it.

## **Tax free childcare**

This is for paid childcare – not free hours. If you are registered with HMRC to be paid in this way, include your unique reference number so parents know they can pay you using this method. Link to [www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk) for eligibility checking.

## **Invoicing frequency; weekly, monthly**

Explain frequency of invoicing and expected payment terms. Invoice should specify a time period and outline items and services with charges as well as services or hours that are free of charge, for example - 15 hours universal entitlement £0.

## **Bank Holidays**

Bank holidays are not funded by SMBC (EEF). When the free hours fall on a bank holiday, the parent will lose these hours: you do not need to offer these funded hours on a different day as this is parental choice. Explain your arrangements for paid-for hours which fall on bank holidays.

## **Sickness and holidays**

Explain your arrangements for sickness absence and holidays? Signpost parents to days when the setting is closed.

## **Late collections**

Explain your policy and charges should a child be picked up later than agreed in their contract.

## **Free school meals**

Eligible children who meet the benefits criteria and take their free universal 15 hours over 2.5 days are entitled to a free meal on 2 days. Eligible children who take their universal free hours over 5 mornings or 5 afternoons are not entitled to free school meals.

## Questions and answers

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**Q Is the rate for extended hours different from the rate for universal hours?**

A No. The rate is £3.90 per hour for universal and extended hours.

**Q How does school receive funding for nursery children?**

A Funding is based on termly headcount claimed through the provider portal and paid termly.

**Q Will schools receive reimbursement for administering nursery admissions?**

A No. Administration of nursery admissions is a non-statutory process and there is no separate budget that could be apportioned. If you operate separate accounts for the nursery you may allocate costs to the nursery facility.

**Q Can I admit nursery children earlier without changing my age-range?**

A All schools are registered to take children from the age of 3 years old. This means there are no implications for taking 3 year olds at the beginning of the term after their third birthday and offering up to 2 additional terms of nursery education.

**Q What do I need to do if I want to lower the age range of my school to admit 2 year-olds or younger?**

A The process required to change the age range of a school differs depending on the type of provision that is being created and the type of school that is proposing to make the change. If you are considering making a change of this nature please contact Ann Pearson, Team Leader School Place Planning by email at [annpearson@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:annpearson@solihull.gov.uk) for specific advice for your school.

**Q Does the school or the PVI claim the universal hours?**

A Where the parent has specified on their parental declaration form that they are also attending another childcare provider (dual attending) then the school or academy will claim the universal hours.

**Q How do schools manage home visits and integration?**

A Most children have already had experience in nursery or provision which means that home visits and slow integration are now much less relevant. Parents expect children to start at the beginning of term in September and a slow start can represent a barrier to a parent accepting a place in a school. A significant number of children are accessing their extended hours so may be

dual attending with a private provider and a staggered start at school nursery could impact on this routine

**Q What information is available to support a remodelling of our nursery provision?**

A Here is a link to some useful information  
<https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/resources-professionals>

**Q Do children go on school roll or early years census?**

A Children who are on the roll of the school must be entered onto your SIMS (or similar) system and counted on school census. Children on the roll of other provision (not school led) go on the early years' census.

**Q Can I put all the children on the school roll regardless of which setting they attend on my school site?**

A No. If you have a separate Ofsted registered PVI provider on your school site then these children cannot go on the school roll.

If you run the nursery as part of the school governance and are registered under one Ofsted number, it is possible to admit the children on roll as SIMS has the functionality to records children from birth upwards. If the children are under the age of three this might require a change to the age range for your provision which is a statutory process.

The benefits of having all children registered on roll means that school can utilise SIMS to monitor and record information about children on roll such as attendance, behaviour and performance.

If the children are on your roll then data on funded hours, hours at setting and pupil premiums will be submitted each term via the school census (attendance data is not collected for these children). EIMS can support schools who would like to add these children to the school roll on SIMS. This can be access by logging a service desk call.

**Q If including nursery children, who attend governor-run provision, on the school roll increases the size of the school, who decides if the school's band changes?**

A Governors decide whether to seek a recalculation of the banding based on the information found in the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document which describes the cohorts of pupils and how they should weight the pupil numbers. This is normally undertaken when there is a significant change to school numbers such as a new form entry.



**Q How can schools get information about children who are eligible for 2 year-old funding?**

A The council receives lists from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and sends communication to families to encourage applications. Under the terms and conditions of the information released from DWP the council is not permitted to share details of families with schools or providers.

**Q Can the council share the health data with schools to help with marketing?**

A Under the terms of the data sharing agreement with the health authority the council is not permitted to give this information to schools. The council will continue to send a mailshot to all parents of children in the cohort.

**Q How can families looking for early education find out what is available?**

A The best option is to ensure that your offer is clearly visible and up-to-date on your website. Make sure that it is easy to find from the home page. You can send a hyperlink to the family information service and we will publish this. The family information service will direct parents to schools and admissions will tell parents about catchment areas. Catchment areas are available on the council's website.

**Q What will the council do to support schools to manage their own admissions?**

A The council will:

- Provide templates for an admissions policy, application form etc.
- Suggest a termly admissions process for schools to follow if they wish, with closing dates and offer dates for applicants.
- Continue to send a mailshot to parents in the cohort.
- Offer support and training for school administration staff.
- Explore linking nursery admissions record keeping to SIMS.

## Contact details

School Admissions	Lois Brough	<a href="mailto:lbrough@solihull.gov.uk">lbrough@solihull.gov.uk</a> 0121 704 8285
School Place Planning	Ann Pearson	<a href="mailto:annpearson@solihull.gov.uk">annpearson@solihull.gov.uk</a> 0121 704 6702
Family Information Service	Rosie Ratcliffe Tom Cure	<a href="mailto:sschinfo@solihull.gov.uk">sschinfo@solihull.gov.uk</a> 0800 389 8667
School Finance	Linda Sheridan	<a href="mailto:lsherdan@solihull.gov.uk">lsherdan@solihull.gov.uk</a> 0121 704 6617
EIMS	Kate Sirrett	<a href="mailto:edims@solihull.gov.uk">edims@solihull.gov.uk</a> 0121 704 6246
School Improvement	Lisa Morris	<a href="mailto:lmorris@solihull.gov.uk">lmorris@solihull.gov.uk</a> 0121 704 6150