

Early learning and childcare

This factsheet explains:

- the services, help and support you can expect to receive if your child has additional support needs and is under 3
- what to expect at pre-school.

What your child is entitled to

Every three- and four-year-old child is entitled to 600 hours of early learning and childcare. This will usually be provided in a local authority or partnership nursery. A partnership nursery is a nursery that provides early learning or childcare in partnership with or on behalf of the local authority.

Local authorities will have their own policy on how this allocation of hours will be provided so you should check with your nursery for local arrangements.

Your child's allocated hours can start in the school term following their third birthday. This means if your child was born between:

- 1st March and 31 August they can start in the Autumn term (usually beginning in August)
- 1 September and 31 December they can start in the Spring term (usually beginning in January)

- 1 January and 28/29 February they can start in the Summer term (usually beginning in April).

Some local authorities may offer a place from a date closer to your child's third birthday, so it is worth checking with your local authority.

Under threes

Two-year-olds who are looked after or have a kinship care order or a parent-appointed guardian are also entitled to 600 hours of provision. Two-year-olds whose parent or carer receives certain benefits are entitled to 600 hours of provision as well. This includes parents or carers who receive:

- Jobseeker's Allowance
- Employment Support Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance
- Child Tax Credit, but not Working Tax Credit, and your annual household income is below the threshold¹.
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Universal Credit.

¹The income thresholds for Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit can vary annually.

If you qualify and want a place for your child, you must self-refer to your local authority. Your child will start nursery from the first term after their second birthday; or, the first term after you start receiving one or more of the benefits listed above.

Once your child has become entitled to childcare hours, they stay entitled even if their parent or carer's situation changes and they are no longer receiving one of the benefits above.

Children under 3 with a disability

Children under 3 who do not fall into the categories above are not entitled to 600 hours of provision. However, children under 3 who have a disability can be eligible for additional support that focuses on their learning. This is based on an assessment of their individual needs. Please see the 'Identifying your child's support needs' section in this factsheet for more information.

Types of provision

Your child can receive funded early learning and childcare in:

- a nursery school or class run by the local authority and usually held in a mainstream primary school or local authority property
- a private nursery run by an individual or company providing early learning and childcare on behalf of the local authority (a partnership nursery)
- a playgroup run by volunteers or a local community group providing early learning and childcare on behalf of the local authority.

There may be other centres working in partnership with the local authority providing early learning and childcare, such as:

- a child and family centre usually run by the social work department
- a children's centre run by the local authority to provide services to help children's health and development
- a nursery class held in a special school providing specialist services to children with additional support needs.

Identifying your child's additional support needs

Children under 3

Local authorities must assess children under the age of 3 who need, or may need, additional support as the result of a disability. Usually a health professional will refer your child to the local authority for assessment, after discussion with you. You also have the right to refer your child for assessment yourself.

If your child does need extra support, the local authority must then provide it, with your agreement. Your child may get support from an education professional (for example a home visiting teacher), a social worker or a health professional (for example a speech and language therapist). The support should help your child get the most from their early learning, and school education when the time comes for them to attend.

After assessment, if your local authority decides your child does not have additional support needs, it should write to you saying why.

Children at pre-school

Local authorities must identify the additional support needs of children whose education they are responsible for. At the pre-school stage, this means children who already attend (or are about to start attending) a local authority or partnership nursery, but not children who go to private nursery. Usually a member of staff will notice if your child needs extra help at pre-school or nursery. Anyone who works with your child may also notice that they are having difficulties with their learning.

You have the right to ask for your child to be assessed at this stage to find out if they have additional support needs. You can do this through the nursery or by contacting your local authority (local authorities are set up differently, so try asking for the Early Years, Pupil Support or Additional Support for Learning department). You may want to talk to the nursery staff, health visitor or GP first about this.

If your child goes to a private nursery but will attend a local authority primary school, the local authority may assess them before they move to primary school.

Planning support for your child

Some children's additional support needs will be identified before they are in pre-school or nursery. If your local authority is aware of your child's additional support needs, it must start to plan the help they need at least six months before the date they are due to start pre-school. This may involve collecting information about your child's needs from you and professionals working with your child.

At least three months before your child starts pre-school, the local authority must send copies of this information, with your consent, to any professionals who will be supporting your child, such as those from health and social work. They must also send you a copy.

The support your child needs should be in place when they start pre-school.

Support your child will receive

The local authority must provide adequate and efficient support to meet your child's needs. The type and amount of support will depend on your child's needs. If the help your child needs is identified or changes while they are at pre-school, the nursery can apply to the local authority for support for learning. Each local authority has a Childcare Partnership which is responsible for creating, supporting and promoting childcare in their area. Your local authority or your child's nursery will be able to give you more details.

People who support your child

When your child is attending pre-school, one or more of the following professionals may support them:

- teachers
- nursery nurses
- additional support for learning workers
- educational psychologists
- health professionals such as speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists.

Named person

You should have one person who acts as a single point of contact to discuss any concerns you have about your child. This person is sometimes called a “named person”. The named person can help your child get the support they need, and give you advice and information. For children under 5, their named person will normally be the health visitor.

For more information, see **Enquire factsheet: Who provides extra support for children’s learning?**

If help for your child will mean a lot of detailed planning, they may need an individualised educational programme (IEP) or a Child’s Plan. For more information, see **Enquire factsheet: Planning children’s and young people’s learning.**

Children with complex needs

If your child has complex needs that are likely to last for more than a year and they need a high level of support from other agencies as well as education (for example social work or health), they may need a co-ordinated support plan (CSP). This sets out how all the agencies will work together to provide co-ordinated support to your child. For more information, see **The parents’ guide to additional support for learning** and **Enquire factsheet: Co-ordinated support plans.**

Your child may also be referred to a pre-school community assessment team (PRESCAT). The team will co-ordinate all the agencies involved in assessing and providing the help your child needs.

For more information on who may be involved with your child at this stage, please see **Enquire factsheet: Who provides extra support for children’s learning?**

If your child has complex needs, they may get help from a pre-school home visiting teaching service, if this is appropriate and is available in your area. If so, teachers with experience in early childhood development will visit your child at home and help them learn and develop before they go to school. They will also give you advice and support. They can help you find the right early learning placement for your child, and ensure they get the right support.

Early learning placement

If your child has additional support needs, you can ask your local authority for them to attend:

- a school nursery in your local education authority area or partnership nursery school
- a school nursery or partnership nursery outside your own local authority
- the nursery of an independent special school or grant-aided school in Scotland
- a school in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, providing wholly or mainly for children with additional support needs.

Usually, education will be provided in a mainstream nursery or childcare setting. However, in some cases a specialist nursery may be more suitable for a child.

For more information, see **Enquire factsheet: Placing requests.**

In some areas children are expected to attend their local nursery, while in other areas they can apply to any pre-school or nursery. If you want a place at a local authority or partnership nursery, put your child's name on the waiting list as soon as they are 2 years old. (In some areas you should apply directly to the nursery or school, in others you must apply to the local authority. Contact your local authority to find out.)

The local authority may be able to provide a full-time place although this will depend on your child's needs. Full-time places tend to be kept for children with additional support needs or children 'at risk' of developing them. Contact your local authority for more information on full-time places available in your area.

Costs

Some nurseries can provide extra childcare outwith the allocated hours (sometimes called 'wrap-around care'), but you may have to pay for this. However, you may be able to get help with costs and if so, your pre-school, local authority or childcare partnership will tell you how to apply.

If you are working, you may be able to claim some of the costs through working tax credit (see page 6 for details). Some employers also offer employees vouchers to help with childcare costs. Contact your employer to find out more.

Staying in pre-school an extra year

Some children may not be ready to start primary school at the usual stage. If you think your child would benefit from a funded, part-time, early learning place for an extra year, you should discuss this with your child's nursery and local authority. This is called a 'deferred year' and local authorities will have their own policies on this and decide whether to grant it. The decision to allow an extra year at pre-school may be based on a professional assessment, for example by an educational psychologist.

Transport

Funding of transport to and from pre-school will be decided by the local authority and will depend on your child's current and long-term needs.

Moving to primary school

If appropriate and depending on your child's additional support needs, at least 12 months before your child is due to attend primary school the local authority must start to gather information from all those working with your child. At least six months before your child starts at primary school the local authority must send copies of this information, with your consent, to any professionals from other agencies who will be involved in supporting your child at primary school. They must also send you a copy. For more information, see **The parents' guide to additional support for learning.**

Where to get more information

Publications

The parents' guide to additional support for learning (Enquire guide)

Enquire factsheet: Co-ordinated support plans

Enquire factsheet: Planning children's and young people's learning

Enquire factsheet: Placing requests

Enquire factsheet: Transport to school

Enquire factsheet: Who provides extra support for children's learning?

Websites

Information on nurseries and playgroups in your area can be found on the Scottish Family Information Service website
www.scottishfamilies.gov.uk

For further information about early years education, see the Education Scotland website
[www.education.gov.scot/scottish-education-system/Early%20learning%20and%20childcare%20\(ELC\)](http://www.education.gov.scot/scottish-education-system/Early%20learning%20and%20childcare%20(ELC))

Working Tax Credit (WTC)

Further details on WTC and how to apply can be found on
www.gov.uk/topic/benefits-credits/tax-credits or by phoning 0345 300 3900.

ENQUIRE

Helping you understand additional support for learning

Enquire is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. We provide independent and impartial advice to parents and carers, to practitioners in education, social work and health services, and to children and young people themselves.

www.reach.scot offers advice to young people struggling at school. With practical tips on what can help and young people sharing their views and experiences on all sorts of life issues, Reach offers the 'go-to' source of advice to help pupils make the most out of their education.

This factsheet has been awarded the Clear English Standard.



Contact details

Enquire, Children in Scotland, Level 1, Rosebery House,
9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5EZ

Helpline: **0345 123 2303**
(Access to interpreters through Language Line)

Office: 0131 313 8800

Email: info@enquire.org.uk

www.enquire.org.uk

Enquire factsheet: Early learning and childcare

© Enquire March 2019



Enquire is managed by Children in Scotland and funded by the Scottish Government