

Information for Parents

Early Education for 3 and 4-year-olds

*Universal entitlement (15 hours) and
Extended entitlement (30 hours)*



All 3 and 4-year-olds are entitled to a total of 15 hours of free early education and childcare for 38 weeks a year. This adds up to 570 hours per year. This is known as the **universal entitlement** (15 hours).

Some 3 and 4-year-olds whose parents are working may be eligible for an extra 15 hours a week - a total of 30 hours for 38 weeks or 1,140 hours per year. This is known as the **extended entitlement** (30 hours).

To find out if you are eligible for the extended entitlement and to apply, please visit www.childcarechoices.gov.uk If you are eligible, you will be provided with a unique reference code.

How will early education benefit my child?

There is evidence that if a child attends a high quality early education provider it benefits their:

- social skills
- physical skills
- thinking skills
- communication skills

And helps them prepare for school.

When can my child get a free place?

Universal entitlement - your child becomes eligible from the relevant date after their third birthday:

Child born	Will be eligible
1 January and 31 March	1 April
1 April and 31 August	1 September
1 September and 31 December	1 January

Extended entitlement: as well as your child meeting the age criteria for eligibility (see above), you will also need to have completed your application in the term before your child can take up the additional hours.

For example, if your child's date of birth is 15 January, they are eligible from 1 April and you must have received your unique reference code by 31 March. You can apply via www.childcarechoices.gov.uk

How are the free hours provided?

Free early education and childcare hours can be offered between 6am and 8pm, but not for more than 10 hours in any one day. You can use your hours all year round and, if offered, at the weekend. You can also use more than one childcare provider, although your child cannot attend providers at more than two sites in one day.

Childcare providers are encouraged to offer places flexibly and they must publish the days and times that they deliver free hours. Some childcare providers offer free hours over more than 38 week, so parents would get fewer hours each week over more weeks of the year.

Being entitled to free childcare doesn't guarantee that you can get a place with a particular childcare provider or that you can get any particular pattern of hours. If the hours on offer do not suit, you can try another childcare provider.

Where can my child get a free place?

Merton's primary school nursery classes

For community school nursery classes, apply via School Admissions. Visit www.merton.gov.uk/nurseryplace to find out more. For voluntary-aided school nursery classes, contact the school directly for application arrangements and deadlines.

Some schools offer both the universal and extended entitlements at their school or work in partnership with a local childcare provider to offer this.

Private Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers

Private, voluntary and Independent childcare providers also offer the universal entitlement and many offer the extended entitlement.

For further information or to find a provider, visit the Merton Family Services Directory at www.merton.gov.uk/fsd

Select the option for Childcare and Education, enter your postcode and search. You can then filter the results to find providers offering free early education and childcare.

How are the free hours paid for?

Early education is funded by Government and is therefore free to parents. You should not expect to pay the difference between the provider's usual rate and the rate at which the government funds them for the free hours.

You may be asked to pay for additional services over and above free early education such as meals, snacks, nappies, sun cream, day trips, activities such as yoga or music classes and for any additional hours. Providers must publish these additional charges for prospective parents.

You may be asked for a deposit to secure your child's place. This must be returned to you in full as soon as possible after your child starts taking up their free hours.

How do I make a complaint?

If you are unhappy that your child may not be receiving their free early education place in the way described in this leaflet, please check the published complaints procedure at www.merton.gov.uk/fsd.

What if I have further questions?

You can find a list of Frequently Asked Questions and answers about early education at www.merton.gov.uk/fsd

Contact us

fsd@merton.gov.uk

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