

Introduction of Early Education and Childcare Entitlements at St Joan of Arc Catholic Nursery School

Eligibility for the extended free childcare entitlement

The current entitlement

All 3 and 4 year olds will continue to be eligible for 15 hours per week of free early education for 38 weeks of the year. This is a universal entitlement for all children. The new entitlement is an extension of the current entitlement and provides an additional 15 hours of free childcare for children that are eligible. For those that are not entitled to the additional 15 hours of free childcare, charges can be found on page 3 of this document.

Definition of qualifying children for the new entitlement

The new entitlement to 30 hours free childcare is intended to support working parents with the cost of childcare and enable them, where they wish, to return to work or to work additional hours.

The additional 15 hours will be available to families where both parents are working (or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family), and each parent earns, on average, a weekly minimum equivalent to 16 hours at national minimum wage (NMW) or national living wage (NLW), and less than £100,000 per year¹. Working will include employed and self-employed persons. Parents do not necessarily need to actually work 16 hours a week, but rather their earnings must reflect at least 16 hours of work at NMW or NLW, which is £107 a week at the current NMW rate. This includes those parents on zero contract hours who meet the criteria.

Families where one parent does not work (or neither parent works) will usually not be eligible for these additional hours. However, the government intends to make provision to support families where one parent is in receipt of benefits relating to caring responsibilities or a disability and the other parent is working.

The additional entitlement will be available in the following circumstances:

- both parents are employed but one or both parents is temporarily away from the workplace on parental, maternity or paternity leave
- both parents are employed but one or both parents is temporarily away from the workplace on statutory sick pay;
- one parent is employed and one parent has substantial caring responsibilities based on specific benefits received for caring; or
- one parent is employed and one parent is disabled or incapacitated based on receipt of specific benefits.

¹The minimum amount will always be judged against the lowest hourly rate that a person of the parent's age could legally be paid.

Checking eligibility

The Secretary of State confirmed at Second Reading in the House of Commons that parents will be able to apply for both Tax-Free Childcare and the 30 hour entitlement through a joint application system being developed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). A joint online application system will provide a simple and straightforward way for working parents to access the schemes and will avoid the need to provide the same information twice. The government amendment tabled will place a function on HMRC to provide an eligibility checking service for the Department.

Grace period

The government believes it is right to ensure that there will be a short grace period for families whose circumstances change. This will give parents the opportunity to regain employment and will also give providers certainty that if they offer a place under the new entitlement they will not have to fill that place immediately if a parent's circumstances change.

Training and education

The new entitlement is to support parents to take up work or increase their working hours. Parents who are studying will not qualify for the new entitlement, unless they meet the criteria outlined above. Parents who are under the age of 20 and are studying a publicly funded course are eligible for the Care to Learn Scheme, which provides vital financial support for childcare costs of up to £175 per child per week. For parents over the age of 20, Discretionary Learner Support and Childcare Grants may also be available depending on the nature of the education and training that parents participate in.

Provision available at St Joan of Arc Catholic Nursery School

1. Places will be offered in accordance with the nursery admission's policy and will comprise of the following:
 - 30 hours of free nursery education for those parents who qualify under the working parent entitlements
 - 15 hours of free nursery education plus 15 hours of paid education for parents who do not qualify under the working parent entitlements (totaling 30 hours), but who enter into a paid contract agreement with the nursery
 - 15 hours of free education – comprising of the following hours –
 - Monday/ Tuesday all day and Wednesday morning, or
 - Wednesday afternoon, Thursday and Friday all day
2. A summary of the paid contract agreement is:
 - charges will be per half term – paid in full in advance
 - fees are not refundable for absences or change of circumstances
 - full details are available in the school's Charging Policy

The charges for the **2026-27** academic year are as follows:

Term	TOTAL
Autumn 1	£1,425
Autumn 2	£1,313
Spring 1	£1,088
Spring 2	£900
Summer 1	£1,275
Summer 2	£1,125

For further information on available entitlements, please visit the 'Best Start in Life' government website at www.beststartinlife.gov.uk