The Duckling Nursery Ltd.

Fees and Funding Policy

Date policy was adopted: 01/04/2025
Date last reviewed: 15/12/2025
Frequency of review: Annually in April

At the Duckling Nursery, we provide high-quality childcare that is compliant with every aspect of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum. We are flexible in what sessions we offer in order to fit in with the busy lives of families. We aim to ensure that our fees are both reasonable and competitive to make childcare as affordable as possible for the families we serve whist maintaining the highest standards of care.

Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE)

The Duckling Nursery is currently registered with Essex County Council to provide Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) of 30 or 15 hours to eligible parents. We encourage all parents to check www.beststartinlife.gov.uk to be certain what funding there are entitled to and to ensure that they are aware of all the ways they can make their childcare costs more affordable, such as registering for tax free childcare.

We ask to see children's birth certificates to confirm a child has reached the eligible age on initial registration for all funded entitlements. We retain paper or digital copies of documentation to enable the Council to carry out audits and fraud investigations. These copies are stored securely and deleted or shredded when there is no longer a good reason to keep the data.

To claim the funding for eligible children, we have to use the Parent/Carer Agreement Form provided by Essex County Council which asks the parent for the necessary information and consents. The form is then signed by the Parent/Carer and Provider.

Due to offering term-time only provision, the funding doesn't need to be stretched across more than 38 weeks. There may be circumstances where there is an extra week at the end of the financial year that cannot be covered by government funding. If this happens, we will use the stretched funding calculator and offer for parents to stretch their funding over that term, pay privately or opt out of the additional week.

We are not permitted to provide Nursery care for children from the term after they turn statutory school age even if they have a Council approved deferral to the following year.

Partnership working

FEEE funding can be taken up at more than one childcare provider. We ask parents to provide accurate information about the number of hours claimed with another childcare provider to ensure that we can claim the maximum entitlement on their behalf. We ask parents for permission to contact their other childcare provider on registration so we can work together to provide the best possible care for their child.

Additional Charges for FEEE funded sessions

The FEEE funding is intended to deliver 15 or 30 hours a week of funded high quality, flexible childcare. The 15 or 30 hours must be accessible free of charge to Parents. **We do not enforce any mandatory charges for Parents** in relation to the funded hours. According to the statutory guidance and Essex County Council local authority, the FEEE funding **does not cover the cost of meals, other consumables, additional hours, or additional services.**

The Provider **can** charge Parents for the following in connection with the funded hours (with the exception of children who are accessing 2-year-old funding for families in receipt of Government Support only) but these charges must be **voluntary** for the Parent:

- **consumables** to be used by the child, such as nappies, wipes, hand towels and sun cream
- **meals and snacks** consumed by the child (based on what we provide per session)
- **extra optional activities** such as events, celebrations, specialist tuition (for example signing classes or specialist sports tuition) or other activities that are not directly related or necessary for the effective delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework*

At the Duckling Nursery, we call the additional voluntary charge the '**duckling difference**' – everything that makes the Duckling Nursery different from other providers – what makes us stand out. The cost of these chargeable extras is published on our website under 'fees and funding'. It is centred around the high-quality provision of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum that we provide for all children. We long to provide all the enhancements listed below for all Ducklings children but they are not covered by funding we receive from the government

*Please see our fees 25/26 Document for a full itemised breakdown of Duckling Difference Costs

The Duckling Difference

We discuss the duckling difference charges with parents prior to taking up their funded places and give **them the opportunity to opt in or out.** If a family chooses to opt out of paying the duckling difference, a personalised plan providing a reasonable alternative must be agreed and signed between the parents and the Duckling Nursery. This is to aim to provide all the enhancements above somehow to every child. The only exception to this is those receiving means tested 2-year-old funding where their funding covers **everything** we offer. Sadly, If not enough parents chose to pay the duckling difference charge, we will have to withdraw from offering FEEE funding in future years or face closure.

* For activities and extra services, participation in any voluntary extra activity is on the basis of parental choice and a willingness to meet the charges. If a parent chooses not to pay the duckling difference for activities, their child will not participate in voluntary activities but will continue to receive provision that complies with the EYFS.

We charge Parents for any additional, private paid hours according to our usual terms and conditions. Taking up private paid hours is not a condition of accessing a funded place.

Invoices

Parents will be invoiced half-termly and fees are due by the final day of the half-term. Parents will be able to see the funded hours invoiced at £0.00 and the additional charge will show as the 'duckling difference' for those parents who have agreed to pay the charge which is worked out per session to ensure this is charged fairly. If a session is only part covered by funded hours and partly privately funded, we adjust the duckling difference charge accordingly.

Parents will be invoiced on the bases of their agreement to opt in or out of the duckling difference charges **prior to the child taking up their funded space**. If circumstances change and the parent would like to change their preference to opt in our out, a meeting must be held with the nursery management and a new agreement made so invoices can be generated accurately and in agreement with the parents and the Duckling Nursery. All invoices must be paid in full according to our terms and conditions in our parent contract. Paying the duckling difference is not a condition of taking up a funded place.

Bank Holidays and In-Service Training (INSET) Days

We are not open on bank holidays so FEEE funded places will not be able to take up entitlement on bank holidays when signing up with the Duckling Nursery. Duckling Difference charges will not be made for bank holidays and INSET days.

At the Duckling Nursery we prioritise continuous professional development for our staff and ensure that they attend regular training events to update their practice and knowledge of legislation relating to early years and childcare. We hold 2 INSET days per year when the Nursery is not open for children. These are detailed on our Term Dates document which is available on Tapestry and our website. Funded places cannot be taken up on these days. Where INSET days are held during term time, any child due to access funded hours on INSET day can request to use the lost hours on another day within the same term that the INSET day takes place whenever possible.

Once per year we have a Duckling Nursery trip where all children and their families are invited to join us for a visit to somewhere such as a farm or country park. On this day, the Nursery won't be open and the charges for joining us on the trip are voluntary for FEEE funded children as it is one of their entitlement days.

Inclusion

At the Duckling Nursery, we promote equality and inclusion, particularly for disadvantaged families in receipt of Government Support, looked after children, children in need and children with disabilities or special educational needs by removing barriers of access to early education and working with Parents to give each child support to fulfil their potential. We ensure owners, and all staff members are aware of their duties in relation to the SEND Code of Practice and the Equality Act 2010.

We access SEND support through our inclusion partner at Essex County Council and our Local Offer and pass any information we can onto parents about what support they might be able to receive too. If a child comes to us with know Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, we will discuss with the parent how we

might be able to support their child at the Duckling Nursery so they can make an informed decision about the best Early Years provision for their child.

If eligible, we will claim SENIF funding from Essex County Council to enhance the support for that child according to the terms and conditions of the SENIF which are set out in Schedule B SENIF Agreement 2025. SENIF is passed to Providers in the form of a 'SEN top up grant' awarded on a case-by-case basis by a panel of the Council's education, inclusion and early years specialists.

If eligible, we will apply for Disability Access Funding (DAF) from the Council in order to DAF to deliver effective support, whilst making information available about our SEND offer to Parents.

Early Year Pupil Premium (EYPP) funding

At The Duckling Nursery, with the permission of parents, we identify the children whose families are accessing Government as part of the process for checking EYPP eligibility. We will use EYPP and any locally available funding streams or support to improve outcomes for this group. We will do this in conjunction with the families once it has been confirmed by Essex County Council that they are eligible.