

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Choosing Pre-School Education for Your 3 or 4 year old

Since April 2002, Local Authorities have had a duty to secure a funded part-time pre-school education place for every 3 and 4 year old whose parents wish it. The Scottish Executive wants to ensure that children can enjoy learning before school.

Benefits:

- Funded pre-school education will give your child the chance to learn and play with friends
- Research has shown that good quality pre-school education helps children's development
- You can arrange childcare to fit around your free part-time place

Who can get a funded pre-school education place?

You are entitled to a funded part-time place for your child, broadly speaking, from the beginning of the school term starting after their third birthday, in accordance with guidance issued by the Scottish Executive. The exact date when children become eligible is set down in legislation – it is explained further on the Parentzone website (www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk). Ask your local Childcare Information Service (www.scottishchildcare.gov.uk) where your child can access a place locally.

Pre-school education can be provided by:

- A local authority nursery school
- A nursery class in a primary school
- A local authority or private day nursery
- An independent school nursery
- A playgroup
- A registered childminder

Do all childcare services offer funded pre-school education places?

No. Local authorities are in charge of commissioning places and centres must be working in partnership with them. You can check which services provide part-time places with your local Childcare Information Service or you can ask your childcare provider. You may need to look at what is available in your area and decide what service might best suit your child's needs. In some parts of the country pre-school education will be available in Gaelic.

How is the pre-school education place paid for?

If your childcare provider provides funded places, they will receive funding from the Local Authority enabling them to offer you a free part-time place. Your early education provider or Childcare Information Service should be able to give you more information about fees which may be charged for childcare before or after this free place.

What does registration and inspection mean for centres providing pre-school education?

Centres providing pre-school education places must be registered with the Care Commission and receive a regular joint inspection by the Care Commission and HM Inspectorate of Education. The staff will follow national guidelines for the education of children aged 3 - 5 years that encourage learning through play, and the service must meet the National Care Standards for Early Education and Childcare up to the Age of 16, laid down by the Scottish Executive.

You can ask to see the provider's latest inspection reports, or check the following websites:

www.carecommission.com Care Commission Website

www.hmie.gov.uk HM Inspectorate of Education Website

Numbers of staff vary in the different services but there should be at least one member of staff for every 10 children.

What time will the part-time place be available?

The entitlement is for 475 hours per year. This is usually delivered daily as a 2 ½ hour session, during the morning or afternoon, during school term times. You may be able to get a different pattern of sessions to suit your child or your pattern of work.

For example you might want two sessions a day for two days and then one session on another day. If you want a different pattern you should discuss this with your local authority. If you work or have other commitments, which mean your child needs more time at the centre, then you may want to pay for more hours there. You could also pay for a childminder to drop off or pick up your child.

How do I find a pre-school education place for my child?

Ask your local Childcare Information Service for more information (www.scottishchildcare.gov.uk). They will help you find out about your local options and they will also help you if you need extra childcare to match your working hours.

Information is also usually available through local authority websites.

Starting school

Children become eligible to start primary school in the August when they will be between 4 ½ and 5 ½ years old. Parents have the right to defer their child's entry to primary school provided that the child is still 5 years old when he or she starts school.

Parents of children with birthdays in January or February, who choose to defer their child's entry to primary school, are entitled to continue to receive a free, part-time pre-school place for an additional year. The children will start school the August after their fifth birthday. However, children with September to December birthdays will only be able to access an extra year of free pre-school education at the discretion of their local authorities. If you wish to defer your child's entry to primary school you should discuss this with your local authority's education department. Further information on entitlement to pre-school education and starting school are available on the Parentzone website (www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk).

Finding out more

Ask your local Childcare Information Service if you need to know:

- About funded pre-school education places for your three or four year old
- Which services are registered to provide free places
- Advice on combining services to benefit your child and match your working hours