

Admissions and Payment Policy



Policy statement

- It is our intention to make Little Fishes accessible to children and families from all sections of the local community. We are committed to being as inclusive as possible regarding admissions to Little Fishes, in line with our Diversity Equity and Inclusion Policy. We also strive to be a provider of funded childcare without it impacting the quality of our provision.
- We aim to ensure that all sections of our community have access to Little Fishes through open, fair and clearly communicated procedures.
- We aim to ensure that Little Fishes is not exposed to unnecessary financial or reputational risk through late payments or confusion about procedures for fees and payments.

Aims of this policy

- This policy outlines our approach to preschool admissions and payment of fees, our admissions criteria and how we operate in an inclusive manner.

Applying for a place

- We encourage families to visit Little Fishes before applying for a place but such a visit is not compulsory.
- There is no charge for applying for a place at Little Fishes. Application forms should be completed via our website, but can be provided in hard copy if necessary. You will receive an email in response, which will either offer you a place or state a date when confirmation of a place will be made, usually a term before the child is due to start.
- Once a place is offered, a deposit of £20 for every day's place per week is required to confirm acceptance of the place unless starting immediately. This will be deducted from the first term's fees, but is non-refundable if the place is not taken up.
- Before the child starts, registration forms need to be completed giving details of the child, contact details and various consents.

Admissions criteria

- Children may start at Little Fishes once they are at least two years old and may stay until the end of the term in which they are five. Little Fishes will endeavour to offer a place to all children meeting these criteria who need one, subject to the space and staffing requirements set out in the [Early Years Foundation Stage](#).
- Our main intake is at the start of the autumn term, but we will admit children at other times in the autumn and spring terms if places are available. We may also accept children at the start of the summer term, but this is considered on a case by case basis and is not normally available for two-year-olds.

- Places are normally offered on a first come first served basis, subject to availability and the age criteria above. However, if demand for the next academic year appears to be likely to exceed the number of places available, we may wait to allocate places until the prior 31 December and again at 31 March, and then prioritise:
 - three and four year olds
 - children who have special educational needs,
 - those who already have a sibling attending Little Fishes, or
 - families moving into the area.

Exceptions to the criteria may be made at the Little Fishes Management Group's discretion.

- Our afternoon sessions (which most families combine with a morning session) are normally only for children aged three or above. Any exceptions would depend on our assessment of whether a younger child was developmentally ready for a session aimed at older children. In practice, this means we often accept some children who are nearly three but do not often accept younger children.
- In exceptional circumstances such as a pandemic, it may be necessary to introduce a temporary cap on numbers to ensure that safety is prioritised. If this is the case, places may be allocated following government criteria rather than our usual admissions criteria.

How we make Little Fishes accessible to the community

- Little Fishes advertises through its website, the Childcare Information Service and other places accessible to the local community.
- We ensure that Little Fishes is accessible and welcoming to families and children from all sections of the local community regardless of race, sex, family structure, religion or belief, social background or language. As far as possible, we also make Little Fishes accessible to those with special educational needs and other disabilities.
- We describe Little Fishes and its practices in terms of how it treats individuals, regardless of their sex, special educational needs, disabilities, background, religion, ethnicity, or proficiency in spoken English, but having regard to their needs arising from any of these characteristics. Our communications and practices make it clear that we welcome fathers, mothers and other carers. In particular, we describe how our practices enable children and carers with disabilities to take part in the life of Little Fishes. Our policies are all available on our website, including our Diversity Equity and Inclusion Policy.
- Children will attend the same sessions each week, but we are flexible about chosen attendance patterns in terms of days and sessions, to accommodate the needs of individual children and families, providing these do not disrupt the pattern of continuity in Little Fishes that provides stability for all the children. We recommend that children attend for at least two mornings per week, as it helps them settle in sooner and we believe this gives them a better sense of belonging to Little Fishes. Requests for changes to the days or number of days your child attends should be emailed to the Administrator, who will confirm by email whether the change is possible. (Half a term's notice or payment in lieu of fees is required for reducing days unless otherwise agreed.)
- We have no restrictions on the proportion of children who are funded by local government. Where children are eligible for funding, our Administrator will explain the process to parents or carers.
- We have a clear pricing structure with no hidden costs:

- Our session fees are shown on our website. They are reviewed annually, with parents notified at least three months in advance of any change to occur from September.
- Uniform is optional (and secondhand uniform is often available at a lower cost).
- Lunch (if attending Lunch Club) is provided by parents, as are nappies, wipes, nappy bags and a fold-away changing mat for children not yet toilet-trained.
- Little Fishes provides milk and water for the children to drink.
- Parents are asked to contribute snacks weekly to be shared at snack-time.
- Whilst most of our outings are local and free (such as a walk to the postbox), we occasionally organise an outing for the older children which parents will be asked to contribute to. The outing is not mandatory but cannot go ahead without donations from parents.
- Fees cannot be refunded for absence (or sessions swapped on an ad hoc basis) unless a child is ill for over two weeks, in which case a 50% refund will be given until the child is well enough to return.

Looked-after children

- A “looked-after child” is a child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours, whether through being taken into care by the local authority, or being accommodated by them through a voluntary care arrangement. This includes such children living with foster parents or a relative, in a residential children's home or other residential settings, or placed back home with their natural parents.
- Where a looked-after child has been placed with a foster carer or been adopted, the child should have been with the foster carer(s) or adoptive parent(s) for:
 - at least two months for two-year olds, and
 - at least one month for three- and four-year-olds,
 and show signs of having formed a secure attachment to the carer.
- The placement in Little Fishes for a looked-after child in foster or other potentially short-term care will last a minimum of:
 - three months for two-year olds, and
 - six weeks for three- and four-year-olds.
- We will always offer ‘stay and play’ provision for a child who is two to five years old who is still settling with their foster carer, or who is only temporarily being looked after.
- Where a child who normally attends our setting is taken into care and is cared for by a local foster carer, we will continue to offer the placement for the child.

Payment of fees

Invoices

- Where children are not eligible for funding or attend for more hours than paid for by their funding, the Pre-School Administrator sends invoices to parents by email at the start of each half-term (or later if the child starts Little Fishes at a later date).
- All fees are due by the date stated on the invoice, the “Due Date”, which is normally in week two or three of the half-term, unless an alternative payment plan has been agreed in writing.
- Fees should be paid by bank transfer or childcare vouchers where possible, as cash and cheques lead to extra expense to Little Fishes which may lead to higher parental fees.

- If payments are not received by the Due Date, Little Fishes will follow the Late Payment Procedure set out in the Appendix.

Alternative payment plans


- If parents/carers have any difficulty in paying fees, it is essential that they notify the Pre-School Administrator straight away.
- We are happy to meet with parents/carers in genuine financial difficulty to discuss a payment plan, such as payments in instalments. This is at the discretion of Little Fishes and will be wholly dependent upon the individual circumstances.
- All enquiries regarding financial matters will be treated in the strictest confidence with full details only shared by the Pre-School Administrator with the Pre-School Manager, whilst anonymous details may be shared with the Little Fishes Management Group (“LFMG”).

Termination of agreement

- Parents/carers are required to give half a term’s notice in writing to end or amend their childcare agreement with Little Fishes (although this can be waived if the request is for an increase in hours that we are able to fulfil sooner).
- If less notice is given, fees may therefore be charged beyond the dates of attendance.

Refund of fees

- Fees are not refunded for any days missed due to illness, holidays or other absence, except for illness lasting longer than two weeks, when we will refund half the fees for the third weeks of illness and later.
- In the event of a child being withdrawn completely due to long-term illness, Little Fishes may use its discretion to give a greater refund.
- In the event that Little Fishes must close due to issues beyond our control such as extreme weather or government policy, refunds will not normally be given, to ensure that we can continue to pay our staff.

<i>This policy was adopted by:</i>	Little Fishes Pre-school on 24 December 2024
<i>next review date:</i>	July 2025
<i>Signed on behalf of the provider by</i>	 Alison Carr, Chair of Little Fishes Management Group

Appendix 1: Late Payment Procedure

- If payment has not been received by the Due Date and an alternative payment plan has not been agreed, the Administrator will contact the parent/carer with a copy invoice to remind them of the outstanding fee and a reminder that a late administration fee will be paid if not paid within 7 days of the Due Date. If payment is subsequently received within 7 days of the Due Date, no further action will be taken.
- If the fees are still unpaid 7 days after the Due Date and an alternative payment plan has not been agreed then a formal written reminder will be issued, together with a copy of this Policy. Late payments of over 7 days will incur a Late Payment Administration Fee of £10, and further Late Payment Administration Fees of £5 will be incurred every 14 days until the payment is made.
- If the fees are still unpaid three weeks after the Due Date and an alternative payment plan has not been agreed then a final written reminder will be issued. Little Fishes reserves the right to suspend the provision of chargeable childcare if a parent/carer has failed to pay any fees due within four weeks of the Due Date, although such action will only be taken with the agreement of the Pre-School Manager (or the Deputy Manager if the Manager is not available) and the Chair of LFMG (or two other members of LFMG if the Chair is unavailable). Therefore the final written reminder will include notification of the amount owed, including accumulated Late Payment Administration Fees of £15 and further Late Payment Administration Fees if the debt continues to be unpaid, and notification of any intention to suspend chargeable childcare and the dates at which this would come into effect should the debt remain unpaid. If payment (including payment of the Late Payment Administration Fees) is received within five weeks of the Due Date, no further action will be taken.
- If a final written reminder has had to be sent to a parent/carer, Little Fishes may request that future invoices are settled before the start of half-term or another agreed date.
- Following these measures, if the debt is still not fully recovered, Little Fishes has the right to begin legal proceedings to reclaim the fees through the UK courts.