

Policy for Admission To Local Authority Nursery Classes

**For admissions from September 2026
onwards**



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

Introduction

There is a countywide admissions policy for community and voluntary controlled nursery schools and classes. This policy was determined by the County Council and is administered by schools. This ensures that admissions are based on common principles. Schools which are their **Own Admission Authority** are not legally obliged, but may choose, to adopt and follow this policy with suitable amendments. There is a separate policy for Freestanding Nursery Schools.

When new children join the nursery class **it is important that parents are made aware that the process of applying for place at a primary school for the reception year is separate to that of applying for a place in a nursery class.** Parents whose children attend the nursery class, particularly from outside the designated area of the primary school, should be reminded that their child is **not guaranteed** a place at the school when s/he reaches the normal school starting age (i.e., the September of the academic year in which the child will be five). They must apply through the normal County Council school admissions procedures.

Parents/carers are entitled to a full-time reception place for the whole of the academic year in which their child becomes 5. Schools will need to consider this carefully in planning the organisation of the foundation stage, both for admissions to their nursery, and for children who may defer entry to reception.

Terminology

Year – refers to the academic year (September to August)

Reception - the year children become 5

Own Admission Authority – e.g. Voluntary Aided, Academy, Studio, Free and Foundation Trust Schools

Looked After Child (LAC)- Children who are looked after by a local authority within the meaning of section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989 at the time of their application. In Oxfordshire we refer to these as 'Children we care for' but the policy follows terminology in the School Admissions Code

Previously Looked After Child (PLAC) – are children who are no longer “looked after” by a LA in England because they are subject to an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order. Evidence of previously looked after status and/or the adoption will be requested. Where such evidence is not available, Oxfordshire County Council will make a pragmatic decision based on the information available so that there is a local consistent approach

Internationally Adopted Previously Looked After Child (IAPLAC) - children who appear (to the admission authority) to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care having being adopted. The 2021 School Admissions Code regards a child as having been in state care outside England if they were in the care of or were accommodated by a public authority, a religious organisation or any other provider of care whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.

Education and Health Care Plan – a plan made by the LA under Section 37 of the Children and Families Act 2014, specifying the special education provision, health and social care required for that child. *Therefore, this is not an oversubscription criterion.*

Siblings/Brother or Sister - For admission purposes for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools a sibling is defined as a brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister, step-brother or step-sister who will be resident at the same address at the time of entry.

Published Admission Number (PAN) – The number of funded places, in part time equivalents (15hrs) agreed each year with the County Council and published in the Council's Pupil Place Plan.

Universal Entitlement – 15 hours per week, term time only or 570 hours a year, to which every child is entitled from the term after their 3rd birthday

Working Parent Entitlement–

- 30 hours per week, term time only or 1,140 hours a year, for 2, 3- and 4-year-olds from working families, according to specific eligibility criteria.
- Information on eligibility is available at www.childcarechoices.gov.uk

Working parent entitlement now extends to children from 9 months of age, however, schools would need to apply for separate Ofsted registration in order to care for children under 2.

Grace period – when a child's eligibility for the working parent entitlement ceases the government allows the funded place to continue for a specified time.

Disadvantaged 2-year-olds (also referred to by DfE as 'Early Learning for 2-year-olds) A targeted offer of 570 hours per year for the most vulnerable 2-year-old children, from the term after their 2nd birthday, with the aim of reducing the pre-school educational gap that can start to occur from this age. Once a funded 'disadvantaged' 2-year-old child starts a funded place eligibility for 15 funded hours continues even if family circumstances change. For further information please see: [Early education funding for 2-year-olds](#)

Eligibility Terms

To access a funded place in any term under the disadvantaged 2-year-old and universal funding streams, children must have reached their 2nd or 3rd birthday (as appropriate) before the start of the term as set out below. These dates are statutory and cannot be varied

Autumn Term: September 1st-December 31st

Spring Term: January 1st-March 31st

Summer Term: April 1st-August 31st

For children eligible for a working parent funded place, please see the section on 'Early funded starts for Just 2's and Just 3's'

Notes for schools

Flexibility and your funded offer. Parents cannot insist on accessing their child's entitlement at any particular provision or in a specific pattern. Schools are encouraged however to consider parental demand when deciding on hours of opening and session times.

Schools may choose to offer only 15-hour nursery places but including 30-hour working parent entitlement places is encouraged and will help to fill places more quickly. You may set a cap on 30 hour funded places. Schools should make clear to parents what options are available regarding the universal and working parent entitlements.

A funded offer must be free of charge to parents and not require take up of any paid services (such as lunch). The [Early education and childcare - GOV.UK](#) DfE statutory guidance (A2.5) states that there should be no artificial breaks in entitlement hours.

Children may become ineligible for the extended, working parent entitlement. Where this happens, there is a **grace period** during which the child may still attend free of charge. When the grace period expires, a 30-hour place should revert to a universal 15-hour place unless the parent/carer is prepared and able to pay for the extended hours and the school agrees to support this. Schools should bear in mind that only funded hours count towards meeting the PAN.

Funded 2-Year-Olds

There are two entitlement streams – Disadvantaged and working parent.

For 2-year-olds accessing up to 30 hours from the working parent entitlement, this funding will cease at the end of the grace period if the family circumstances have changed. Schools should make this possibility clear when offering working parent childcare places. There are circumstances where 2-year-olds are eligible under both disadvantaged and working parent criteria. Schools should claim the first 15 hours under the disadvantaged criteria in this instance as the place can then be guaranteed to continue at 15 funded hours a week should they cease to qualify under the working parent heading.

All new schools now include 2,3- and 4-year-olds in their formal age range. There is much to be gained in terms of children's outcomes if disadvantaged 2-year-olds take up a place in good quality provision.

If schools with a 3+ age range would like to start admitting 2-year-olds onto the school roll, there is DfE statutory guidance to follow, including consultation with relevant parties. Please contact the Principal Officer (Early years organisation) for more information on this.

Schools which have an age range starting at 2 will have a PAN including that age range. They should decide whether places for 2-year-olds are capped within the PAN, and if so, publicise this to parents e.g., on the school website. For further information on funded 2-year-olds please see <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/children-and-families/early-years-education/free-education-2-year-olds>)

Fee-paid sessions

Schools may find having some fee-paying places or sessions offers greater viability especially in quieter terms. Non-funded children (in any age group) should not be placed on the school roll or be included on the schools' census or funding portal return. They should be recorded as a 'guest' on the MIS. Fee paid sessions do not count towards the Published Admission Number.

Early funded starts for 'Just 2's' and 'Just 3's' (working parent entitlement)

Depending on whether your school has a formal age range of 2+ or 3+, you may be able to start children on or after their 2nd or 3rd birthday. Schools should request permission to claim for this specific age group for the first time by contacting earlyeducation@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

Schools should bear in mind that admitting children at 'Just 2' or 'Just 3' can only be funded where the family has a valid working parent entitlement code. Places during the term in which the child turns 2 or 3 would in that term be paid at the higher rate for the younger cohort (i.e. 9-23 month or 2-year-old, respectively).

Just 2 or Just 3 children may be placed on the school roll. Schools should ensure that early starts do not bypass the nursery admissions policy e.g. by giving the final available place as an early start to a child in a working parent family, where they would not have been entitled to that place (using this policy's oversubscription criteria) when using the normal term starts.

Please do not admit or place children on roll before their 2nd birthday (school age range 2+) or 3rd birthday (school age range 3+) as this has legal implications.

Allocating Places and Oversubscription

Schools may find it helpful to set a cut-off date each term for applications to start nursery the following term. This helps with administration particularly when places are likely to be oversubscribed.

If oversubscribed, please allocate places strictly in line with the criteria listed at point 16 of the policy. You may need to request home to school distance measuring, in which case please allow sufficient time for this to be done. Detail on how to request measuring from County Hall staff is on the Intranet at [Nursery to Home Distance Measuring](#).

Schools can also use the arrangements detailed under the measuring process note to check whether individual children qualify under point 16.3 – eligibility for a funded disadvantaged 2 place - at the time of application. Eligible families may be able to provide you with a '**TYE reference number**.' To check for eligibility please mention you need this when you send your data across.

POLICY FOR NURSERY ADMISSIONS IN COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS IN OXFORDSHIRE

(Nursery Classes)

1. The County Council has devolved rather than delegated the administration of admissions to nursery classes. Therefore, in the event of a complaint the final responsibility and decision for admissions to voluntary controlled and community schools rests with the County Council.
2. **The designated area** (catchment) of each nursery class should be set out clearly on a map and be available for parents to see on request. It should also be made available electronically. The catchment area for the nursery will usually be the same as for the primary school.
3. Schools must agree a **published admission number** for the nursery with the County Council before the start of the academic year. Published admission numbers will be stated in part time equivalent (p.t.e.) places. One p.t.e place is 15 hours per week, term time only, or 570 hours a year if the place is delivered flexibly.
4. Schools must offer nursery places at least up to the published admission number. Where a school offers working parent entitlement places within their nursery provision, a 30-hour place is deemed to represent 2 p.t.e. places.
5. Schools must not operate the nursery with empty places in any term if they have eligible children on the continued interest list.

The exception is where a set limit within the published admission number has been advertised for places for funded 2-year-olds or 30 hours, and those places have been filled. A school would not then be obliged to admit e.g., an eligible funded 2 to an unfilled universal entitlement place.

6. The minimum **universal entitlement** to funded nursery education is 15 hours per week, or 570 hours per year, from the term after the child's third birthday.
7. Where capacity against the published admission number exists, places should always be offered for at least 15 hours a week (or 570 hours a year if a stretched offer).
8. Schools are permitted to agree take up of fewer hours to meet parental request but are not obliged to. Places will be funded on actual take up of hours. Schools may set a minimum take up requirement when offering places.
9. Schools may also offer the **working parent entitlement** of up to 30 hours per week (term time only) or 1,140 hours per year if stretched throughout the year. This should be decided in advance of the academic year and

publicised to parents/carers on the school website. Schools are not obliged to offer the working parent entitlement.

10. **Admissions are three times a year**, for as long as places are available. Funding and entitlement are based on a three-term year, with children starting in September, January and April.
11. Children are entitled to a place from the first day of term and offers of a place must always give this as an option even if the school offers 'staggered starts' or induction periods to help children settle in. Staggered starts should not be arranged over more than a week or two.
12. Parents will be notified that a place is available for their child no later than half a term in advance. Schools may set and advertise a termly deadline for considering applications for admission in the following term.
13. Schools may choose to allow parents to split their child's free entitlement (where offered) with another provider but are not obliged to.
14. **Flexibility** Schools may offer their nursery places in several ways. These include half or full day sessions, extended sessions covering lunchtimes, or a stretched offer (fewer hours per week but including weeks during school holidays). Funded places must always be available free of charge, without obligation to buy extra hours or services.

Where the working parent entitlement is available through hours in out of school clubs, or in partnership with other providers, the school must make clear which element is the universal entitlement and will therefore be guaranteed to continue should the child **cease** to be eligible for the working parent entitlement.

15. The school website should state the opening times of the nursery and set out its educational aims and provision. The website should also set out the Published Admission Number as agreed by the County Council, and the County Council's policy for allocating nursery places when more applications are received than there are places available, as stated in this document (paragraph 16).
16. When more applications are received than there are places available, the following County Council criteria must be applied. These closely follow the admissions criteria for entry to Community and Voluntary Controlled (County) primary schools. Headteachers should apply the criteria by considering all eligible children from each priority category in turn until all the available places have been allocated. **Other criteria (such as date of birth) cannot be used.**

Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan in which the school is named in Section 1 must always be admitted.

16.1 Children who are “Looked After” (LAC) by a Local Authority ; “Previously Looked After” (PLAC), or “Internationally Adopted Previously Looked After Children” (IAPLAC).

16.2 Disabled children who need to be admitted to a school on the grounds of physical accessibility. The definition of disability is that contained within the Equality Act 2010.

16.3 Children who have taken up, or are eligible for, a disadvantaged 2-year-old place at the time of application.

16.4 Children who live in the designated catchment area. If there are more applicants than places in this category, priority will be given in the following descending order:

- Those children who, at the time of entry, have a sibling attending the nursery or the primary school to which the nursery is attached.
- Those children who live closest to the school by the straight-line distance as calculated by Oxfordshire County Council.

16.5 Children living outside the designated area who have a sibling attending either the nursery or the main school at the time of entry. If there are more applicants than places in this category, priority will be given within this group to children who live closest to the school by the straight-line distance as calculated by Oxfordshire County Council.

16.6 Children who attend day care or a voluntary or private sector pre-school on site at the school. If there are more applicants than places in this category, priority will be given within this group to children who live closest to the school by the straight-line distance as calculated by Oxfordshire County Council.

16.7 Those children who do not meet any of the above criteria. Priority for any remaining places will be given to those who live closest to the school by the straight-line distance as calculated by Oxfordshire County Council.

Schools can seek advice and assistance from the Admissions & Transport Services Manager in applying these criteria.

17. If there are more children than places, any child who is not offered a place can only be reconsidered and admitted at a later point if the parents have put the child’s name on the school’s continued interest list.

18. Once a child is admitted to the nursery, the child is entitled to remain in a universal part time place in the nursery class until the term after s/he becomes five* **However this may not be the most appropriate place for the child if all his/her peers have taken up their reception place in a separate class within the school or another primary school.**

*N.B. In the case of a summer born child, parents must either take up the school reception place by the April before the child's fifth birthday; or else need to re-apply through the next admission round for a place to start in the September, usually as a year one child. See the Primary School admissions policy for more detail on deferring entry.

19. A universal entitlement nursery place should cease no later than the term after the child's fifth birthday, that is, when they are of statutory school age.
20. Where a family ceases to be eligible for the working parent entitlement, the place should return to the universal entitlement level (for children age 3+) when the grace period expires, unless the parent/carer is prepared and able to pay for the extended hours. Schools should explain this possibility in writing when offering a working parent entitlement place.
Parents/Carers must be allowed to keep their child in their universal entitlement place even if they cease to qualify for the working parent entitlement.
21. Any complaint about the operation of this admissions policy, for example in the case of a child who has been refused admission, should be directed to the Head of the school in the first instance, and then to the Admissions and Transport Services Manager if for a Community or Controlled school. For Aided schools, the complaint should be directed to the Head of the school and then to the School Governors, as they have the ultimate decision regarding admissions to these schools.
22. There is no statutory right of appeal.

Contact details

Admissions & Transport Services Manager
admissions.schools@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Principal Officer (Early Years Organisation)

Tel 07733 001503 e-mail: school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk

(for initial advice regarding the application of this policy, and for requests for [Home to School Distance Measuring](#)).