



7 Record keeping procedures

7.5 Fees and Payment

Payment Conditions

The current fees can be found in the information sheets. Fees are reviewed at least annually by the committee and manager. Parents will be given at least half a terms notice in writing of any changes.

- Fees will be payable for any child who is registered to attend a session but who is then unable to attend for any reason. Including, but not limited to, sickness and holidays. Any exceptions or request for exception to this are referred to the committee / manager for consideration.
- Nursery Education Funding can be claimed by Acorn Pre-School & The Mighty Oaks. Parents are responsible for providing funding codes to Acorn Pre-School & The Mighty Oaks and ensuring codes are renewed in advance of the required dates. Should funding claims be denied, parents are responsible for payment of fees for the sessions.
- For late collection of a child, a charge will be made as outlined in the contract and fee schedule.
- For a cheque returned from the bank a charge of £15 will be made.
- Late payment of fees and invoices, without prior arrangement, a charge will be made, in accordance with the fee schedule.
- For continual non supply of nappies and wipes a fee will be applied in accordance with the fee schedule.

Invoices and payment terms

- Fees are paid in advance, invoices are issued at the start of the month and a payment deadline is set, usually 10 days.
- The invoice must be paid in full by the date shown on the invoice.

Sustainability / Consumable Contribution Fee

Government funding is intended to deliver 15 or 30 hours of high quality flexible childcare. It is not intended to cover meals, other consumables, additional hours or services. Therefore we charge a sustainability contribution fee per funded session. This money is spent on consumables such as snack, outside activity groups, malleable materials, cooking ingredients, yoga and will go towards covering the cost of all other activities and resources we use to support your children in our setting.

Sustainability / Consumable contribution fee is for government funded pre-school sessions only and is charges per funded hour in accordance with our fee schedule.

The request for parents to pay a Sustainability / Consumable contribution fee for their child's funded education is to help bridge the gap of the cost for our additional services. Many other settings are following suit in asking parents to pay towards consumables and services, we are all working together with Central Bedfordshire Council to ensure the fees are kept as low as possible.

The current fees can be found in the information sheets.

The Sustainability / Consumable fee is charged for Acorn Pre-School sessions booked and Nursery Education funding is used. It is charges per funded hour. Fees are still payable due to absences for sickness or holidays etc.

Sustainability / Consumable fees are not charged for any Acorn Pre-School sessions which are privately funded and Nursery Education is not used for.

The fees are reviewed at least annually by the committee and manager. Parents will be given at least half a terms notice in writing of any changes.

Fees are charged in accordance with the Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance which states Government funding is intended to deliver 15 or 30 hours a week of free, high quality, flexible childcare. It is not intended to cover the costs of meals, other consumables, additional hours or additional services.

To help parents understand the current crisis in early years the Preschool Learning Alliance has created this interactive article:

<https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/problem-free-childcare-interactive-explainer-parents-and-carers>

Invoices and payment terms

- Invoices will be issued per half term.
- The invoice should be paid in full by the date shown on the invoice.

Payment of non of Sustainability / Consumable Contribution fee

Parents / Carers can make payment the same way as non funded sessions.

Modes of payment for non funded Acorn Pre-School sessions and Mighty Oaks sessions

Parents / Carers may choose from the following modes of payment to settle your invoices.

Paying by bank transfer

- Payment can be made using the bank details in the covering email sending the invoice.
- The child's name should be used as the payment reference.

Childcare Vouchers

We are registered with a large number of Childcare voucher providers but if we are not registered with a provider Parents / Carers are advised to let us know and we will sign up with them. If an employer offers a childcare voucher scheme, these can be used towards payment. The schemes are exempt from PAYE and National Insurance.

- When making a payment a child's name should be used as a reference.

Tax Free Childcare

We are registered to accept payments via the Government Tax Free Childcare Scheme. When making a payment the child's unique reference number allocated by the scheme should be quoted. Parents and Carers are responsible for opening an account and making payments into and from their Childcare account.

30 Hour Funding

We are registered to accept 30 hour funding. Parents and Carers are responsible for making the necessary application for their funding code, renewing their code each term and meeting the eligibility criteria. The code needs to be provided each term on the signed Funding Form and returned signed with all the relevant information completed to enable a claim to be made. Failure to complete the form or renew the code will mean parents / carers are responsible for making payment of the sessions booked / attended. Any claims denied by Central Bedfordshire Council will mean parents / carer are responsible for making payment for the sessions booked / attended.

Nursery Education Funding

From April 2024 working parents of 2 year olds will be entitled to claim 15 hours funded Nursery Education Funding. Parents must provide their unique funding code and complete a funding form. Failure to complete the form and provide a valid code, will mean parents / carers are responsible for making payment of the sessions booked / attended. From September 2024 15 hours of funded childcare will be extended to all children from 9 months. Acorn Pre-School & The Mighty Oaks can only accept children from age 2. We provide parents / carers with a funding form for completion and signature. Failure to complete the form, will mean parents / carers are responsible for making payment of the sessions booked / attended.

Parents / carers are responsible for completing the relevant applications to obtain funding codes and renewing codes.

Funding is paid by Central Bedfordshire Council for up to 38 weeks per year. Funding can be claimed in termly blocks. Central Bedfordshire Council split the funding across the 3 terms (Autumn term – 14 weeks, Spring term – 12 weeks

and Summer term – 12 weeks). If a term is longer than the funded weeks, to attend for any additional time for weeks, these sessions must be paid for by parents / carers at the rate detailed in the fee schedule.

Childcare Grants / Bursaries

Some parents / carers may be eligible for Childcare Grants or Bursaries, in which case Acorn Pre-School & The Mighty Oaks will work with the relevant organisation to obtain payment / contribution to fees. Parents / carers are responsible for making payment of the sessions booked / attended that are not covered by childcare grants / bursaries. Parents / carers are responsible for approving any submissions on time to prevent delays in payment.

Paying by cash

- Payment by cash may be accepted if an arrangement is made in advance. All cash should be in a sealed envelope marked with 'Fees' and the child's name and the amount of cash contained within. The envelope should be handed directly to a member of staff.

Invoice Disputes

Should an invoice be disputed or queried, the Administrator is the first port of call. If a parent / carer does not feel their query has been addressed, they should follow the complaints procedure outlining the reason for dispute.

In the eventuality that payments are not received as outlined in the contract and by the required date, Acorn Pre-School & The Mighty Oaks will follow the procedure outlined to secure payment.

Late payments

Parents / carers are encouraged to speak to the Manager or Administrator if they will have any difficulties in paying their invoice. The sooner we hear about the situation the easier it is to find a solution.

In the eventuality that payments are not received Acorn Pre-School and The Mighty Oaks will engage the following procedure to secure payment:

- **Stage 1:**
A REMINDER email will be sent asking for payment, this will include a copy of any outstanding invoices and give a deadline for payment or contact details for a person to contact to discuss payment being made.
- **Stage 2:**
If no response is received, we will attempt to make contact either in person or by telephone to discuss payment being made. If we are unable to speak with you a message will be left, if available requesting a telephone call and a date and time given for a response. If we are unable to leave a message, one further attempted telephone call will be made.
- **Stage 3:**
If there is no response to stage 2, a late payment charge will be made in accordance with the fee schedule. The late payment charge will request payment of the overdue invoice and the late payment charge by a given date, usually 3 days.
- **Stage 4:**
If no response or payment is received following stage 3 then the child's place will be withdrawn immediately and the child will no longer be accepted at Acorn Pre-School & the Mighty Oaks. This exclusion will remain in place until settlement of the outstanding fees or at the discretion of the Manager / Chairperson. Re-admission of the child to the setting will be subject to session availability.
- **Stage 5:**
If fees are not paid within one week then the judicial system to recover any outstanding amounts due to us will be used, at this point the debt will attract any additional interest and costs accrued.

Payment difficulties

If Parents or Carers experience any problems in meeting the payments, they must contact the Administrator to avoid the recovery procedure being followed and their child's place being withdrawn. They may be required to outline the problems in writing. The matter will be dealt with confidentially.

In this eventuality and upon receipt of such a letter, the administrator, the manager, the chairperson and / or the treasurer will meet to discuss the case and formulate an appropriate response. Should they consider the claim to be valid, support may be provided which could involve deferred payment or payment over a longer period of time. Any such decisions will be made on a case by case basis. Parents and carers should not have any expectations in terms of the response they might receive. We, may also, with the consent of parents / carer, be able to seek professional and/or financial support to help them.

You may be entitled to childcare tax credits, which could assist with up to 70% of the cost of the fees. To find out if you qualify, call the Tax Credit Office on 0845 300 3900, or visit www.taxcredits.hmrc.gov.uk

Childcare Information Service - This service may be able to provide support for families and advice on paying for childcare. You can contact them on 0845 0454014

Cancellation/Termination of sessions

In the event of a parent/carer withdrawing a child half a terms (6 school weeks) written notice is required. Fees for the notice period are still payable even in the event of a Parent / Carers withdrawing a child immediately.

Unless there are agreed exceptional circumstances, payment must be made. If exceptional circumstances are agreed, we will write to confirm that no payment is due.

Children in receipt of Nursery Education Funding - In the event of a parent/carer withdrawing a child half a terms (6 school weeks) written notice is required. In the event of a Parent / Carers withdrawing a child immediately, Nursery Education Funding will be withdrawn immediately and the Parent / Carer will be responsible for payment of the fees for the 6 school weeks notice period.

Parents / Carers requests to swap sessions on a one-off basis will be considered. Acorn Pre-School & The Mighty Oaks will look at each request on a case-by-case basis and take into account the availability of sessions, staffing arrangements and the ability to meet the child's individual needs.

Parents / Carers with a permanent booking wanting to cancel a session or several sessions on an ad-hoc basis will be required to make payment of the sessions booked to ensure their booking is maintained. Parents / Carers will be offered the opportunity to move to a shift booking but if they wish to ensure availability of set sessions they must book and will be invoiced for these sessions.

Parents / Carers wishing to cancel ad hoc booked session, will be required to make payment of the session(s). Unless there are agreed exceptional circumstances, payment must be made. If exceptional circumstances are agreed, we will write to confirm that no payment is due.

Forced Closure of Acorn Pre-School & The Mighty Oaks

In some extreme circumstances Acorn Pre-School & The Mighty Oaks may be forced to close unexpectedly at short notice. If Acorn Pre-School & The Mighty Oaks and Shefford Lower School are both closed due to circumstances beyond their control e.g. snow closure, we will credit the cost of any sessions affected after 3 days in accordance with Central Bedfordshire Council guidance. If the Lower School is closed but Acorn Pre-School & the Mighty Oaks are able to open e.g. heating failure at the school, no credit will be issued.

Financial Hardship

We recognise that for a whole variety of reasons you might find yourself in times of genuine financial hardship and unable to pay our invoices. Our hardship policy is in place to help and support you. We will try and find workable solutions to help you that are fair, equitable, effective and lasting for both you and us. We understand that there can be times when families, through no fault of their own, may be struggling to pay their child care costs. This Financial Hardship Policy outlines the approach we will adopt in dealing with families who are experiencing hardship. If you are in a situation of genuine financial hardship and cannot pay your child care bill please contact us urgently so that we can do our best to help you.

Financial hardship is where:

1. Where you tell us you are experiencing difficulty paying your bill.
2. Where your payment history suggests difficulties with payments.

We will treat you with courtesy and respect. We understand that if you are faced with financial stress things need to be managed both with timelines (to prevent further escalation of the situation) and with sensitivity. We will ensure that you are informed of your rights and obligations under the terms of your contract, including your rights and obligations under this hardship policy, in relation to:

1. Additional time to pay.
2. Instalment plans.
3. Government programs if applicable.
4. Payment options.

Families are able to contact us at any time if they are experiencing temporary or more permanent financial hardship, resulting in non-payment of our invoices. We will make every effort to assist you in such circumstances. Please call contact us urgently so that we can do our best to help you.

Families should contact us as early as possible to alert us to potential hardship issues. We issue invoices monthly. We welcome early approaches by families experiencing financial hardship so that this policy can be implemented. There are several actions which can be taken to assist with the costs.

Additional time to pay

An extension of time to pay your bill may be arranged, at our discretion, for some or all the amount owed. Our management team is responsible and are authorised to make this decision. All discussions with you will be confidential.

Instalment plans

If you would like to make payments in advance of your next invoice we can easily arrange this for you. We can also provide you with the facility to pay amounts in arrears on an agreed instalment plan. In agreeing an instalment plan with you, we will agree the period of the plan, the amount of the instalments (reflecting your needs and your capacity to pay), the number of instalments, and details of the method of instalment calculation. We will review progress on your plan and agree with you any plan changes to adjust for circumstances.

Sustainability Contributoion Charges

Children receiving Early Years Pupil Premium(EYPP) and / or Central Bedfordshire Council 2 years funding receive a discounted rate for sustainability funding. This is noted in the bottom of an invoice as an EYPP or funding sustainability credit.

Alternatives to paying Sustainability Contribution Charges

The sustainability contribution charges forms part of our parent / carer contract which parents / carers sign and agree to when accepting a space / sessions at Acorn Pre-School & The Mighty Oaks. The charge covers items funding does not cover but that we are required to provide which include items such as healthy snacks, wipes, suncream, Tapestry learning journal, hygiene items, craft items, baking, trips, outings, yoga and specialist wellbeing sessions.

If families are experiencing difficulties we will work with families to find a solution. Each situation is different and therefore solutions may vary. Solutions agreed may include a reduction in the amount paid and families providing snacks, wipes and suncream, non payment and families providing all items from home, families paying on an adhoc basis for some items when needed or activities planned.

We would remind all families if you they find themselves in financial difficulty and cannot pay their invoice, to contact us for assistance as soon as possible.