

WESTON WAY NURSERY SCHOOL CHARGES, REMISSION & REFUND POLICY & PROCEDURE

Introduction

Sections 449-462 of the Education Act 1996 set out the law on charging for school activities in schools maintained by local authorities in England. This complements the information given in "A Guide to the Law for School Governors" (Chapter 23) and accurately reflects the terms of the Education Act 1996. This is also referred to in paragraph 1.82 in the School Admissions Code, and in para 1.97 in the revised School Admissions Code (in force from 10/2/09).

Schools must ensure that they inform parents on low incomes and in receipt of the benefits listed in this Policy of the support available to them when being asked for contributions towards the cost of school visits.

We believe that all our pupils should have an equal opportunity to benefit from school activities and visits (curricular and extra curricular) independent of their parents' financial means. This charging and remissions policy describes how we will do our best to ensure a good range of visits and activities is offered and, at the same time, try to minimise the financial barriers which may prevent some pupils taking full advantage of the opportunities.

This policy complements the school's Equality and Curriculum policies.

Education

The Headteacher, staff and governors will ensure that outings are arranged;

- 1) to enhance children's learning
- 2) to inspire children and offer them new experiences
- 3) for pleasure

Outings are usually offered to children **and** parents. A letter to parents explains the outing and asks for a voluntary contribution to make the trip possible. Where there are not enough voluntary contributions to make the trip/activity possible, and there is no way to make up the shortfall, then it will be cancelled.

School governing bodies and local authorities **cannot** charge for:

- an admission application to any maintained school;
- education provided during school hours (including the supply of any materials, books, instruments or other equipment);
- education provided outside school hours if it is part of the Early Years Curriculum¹, or part of religious education;

Schools and local authorities **can** charge for:

¹ It should be noted that 'part of the Early Years Curriculum' is not restricted to learning outside the classroom experiences and include, for example, activities designed to fulfil requirements under the National Curriculum 'inclusion statement' (e.g. developing teamwork skills).

- any materials, books, instruments, or equipment, where the child's parent wishes him to own them;
- optional extras (see below)

Optional Extras

Charges may be made for some activities that are known as "optional extras". Where an optional extra is being provided, a charge **can** be made for providing materials, books, instruments, or equipment. **Optional extras are:**

- education provided outside of school time that is not:
 - a) part of the Early Years Curriculum;
 - b) part of religious education.
- transport that is not required to take the pupil to school or to other premises where the local authority/governing body have arranged for the pupil to be provided with education

In calculating the cost of optional extras an amount may be included in relation to:

- any materials, books, instruments, or equipment provided in connection with the optional extra;
- non-teaching staff;
- teaching staff engaged under contracts for services purely to provide an optional extra, this includes supply teachers engaged specifically to provide the optional extra

Any charge made in respect of individual pupils must not exceed the actual cost of providing the optional extra activity, divided equally by the number of pupils participating. It must not therefore include an element of subsidy for any other pupils wishing to participate in the activity whose parents are unwilling or unable to pay the full charge.

Furthermore in cases where a small proportion of the activity takes place during school hours the charge cannot include the cost of alternative provision for those pupils who do not wish to participate. Therefore no charge can be made for supply teachers to cover for those teachers who are absent from school accompanying pupils on a visit.

Participation in any optional extra activity will be on the basis of parental choice and a willingness to meet the charges. Parental agreement is therefore a necessary pre-requisite for the provision of an optional extra where charges will be made.

Voluntary Contributions

Nothing in legislation prevents a school governing body or local authority from asking for voluntary contributions for the benefit of the school or any school activities. However, if the activity cannot be funded without voluntary contributions, the governing body or head teacher should make this clear to parents at the outset. The governing body or head teacher **must** also make it clear to parents that there is no obligation to make any contribution.

It is important to note that no child should be excluded from an activity simply because his or her parents are unwilling or unable to pay. If insufficient voluntary contributions are raised to fund a visit, then it must be cancelled. Schools must make sure that they make this clear to parents. If a parent is unwilling or unable to pay, their child must still be given

an equal chance to go on the visit. Schools should make it clear to parents at the outset what their policy for allocating places on school visits will be.

When making requests for voluntary contributions to the school funds, parents must not be made to feel pressurised into paying as it is voluntary and **not compulsory**. Schools should avoid sending colour coded letters to parents as a reminder to make payments into the school or maintenance funds. Schools should also ensure that direct debit or standing order mandates are not sent to parents when requesting for contributions.

Charging and Remissions Policies

No charges can be made unless the governing body of the school or local authority has drawn up a charging policy giving details of the optional extras and a remissions policy. Weston Way Nursery School's Policy is set out below:

Charges

A charge is worked out to:

- 1) cover the cost of the outing as accurately as possible
- 2) allow for supervision of unaccompanied children

'After School Activities' - these are deemed 'additional parental options', over and above what is offered by the school's curriculum and are outside of school hours. Some are run for fundraising purposes (e.g. music club to buy musical instruments for the school), others have been 'bought in' with charges being set by the providers and in these cases, the school does not receive any income or profit from these activities.

Remissions

Within the letter to parents regarding any outings/activities, parents are asked to discuss, confidentially and in private, with the Headteacher or a member of staff any financial difficulties they may envisage. The Nursery would not like any child excluded through a lack of ability by the parents to fund a trip or activity.

The staff and governing body recognise their responsibility to ensure that the offer of activities and educational visits does not place an unnecessary burden on family finances. To this end we will try to adhere to the following guidelines;

- 1) where possible, we shall publish a list of visits (and their approximate cost) in advance
- 2) special arrangements can be made for parents to pay in instalments ahead of the activity or visit taking place
- 3) We acknowledge that offering opportunities on a 'first pay, first served' basis discriminates against pupils from families on lower income and we will avoid that method of selection where at all possible for school visits, however, after school club activities usually have limited spaces available and are offered on this basis. However a priority waiting list is then established to ensure access for all.

Refunds

The charges made to parents for all school trips are set as closely as possible to the anticipated expenditure. However, if it were found that a profit was made from a trip (of £1

per head and over), parents will be offered a refund. This is to be clearly set out in a letter to parents after all monies have been banked and expenditure paid out.

The remissions policy sets out any circumstances in which the school or local authority propose to remit (wholly or partly) any charge which would otherwise be payable to them in accordance with their charging policy. For example, a school may decide to provide an Italian language evening class as an optional extra. The governing body may decide to reduce the cost for those children whose parents are in receipt of certain benefits.

Education partly during school hours

Where an activity takes place partly during and partly outside school hours, there is a basis for determining whether it is deemed to take place either inside or outside school hours. However, a charge can only be made for the activity outside school hours if it is not part of the Early Years Curriculum and not part of religious education.

Extended Provision

Extended provision is offered in addition to the nursery entitlement. It has been set up for parents who wish to take advantage of paying for their children to stay at the nursery for extra hours between 8.00am and 5.00pm. The provision is self funding and therefore must cover the costs of staff payroll and expenses incurred in running the facility. Should there be a surplus, the Governors and Headteacher are authorised to offer limited free places to those children whose parents cannot afford to pay.

All extended provision is to be paid in advance, following issue of a school invoice and are payable during periods of absence either through illness or holiday. If fees are not forthcoming the fee collection procedure (as contained in the Extended Provision Fees Policy) is implemented.

Questions and Answers

Q What is a charging policy?

A Under the charging provisions set out in legislation, governing bodies and local authorities of maintained schools may choose to charge for certain defined activities, but only if they have first drawn-up charging and remissions policies. These policies should be made available to parents on request.

Q Can governing bodies charge for educating children in maintained schools?

A. **The** local authority or governing body cannot charge for education that takes place in school hours. Nor can they charge for activities that take place outside school hours if these are part of the Early Years Curriculum or part of religious education. They can charge for permitted 'optional extras', provided they have drawn up a statement of general policy on charging and given details of 'optional extras' they intend to charge for. The governing body's policy does not have to be the same as the local authority's policy, as long as it meets the requirements of the law.

Q Can a school charge for an activity that takes place out of school hours?

A. This kind of activity is often referred to as an 'optional extra'. Where an optional extra

is being provided, a charge can be made for providing materials, books, instruments, or equipment. See guidance on optional extras.

The actual charge for the optional extra cannot exceed the actual cost of the provision. Schools cannot and must not make a profit from charging for optional extras. Participation in any optional extra activity will be on the basis of parental choice and a willingness to meet the charges. Parental agreement is therefore a necessary pre-requisite for the provision of an optional extra where charges will be made.

Q Can a school ask parents for voluntary contributions?

A Schools may invite parents and others to make voluntary contributions to make school funds go further. All requests to parents for voluntary contributions must make it quite clear that the contributions would be voluntary. It should be remembered that education provided during school hours must be free. This includes materials, equipment, and transport provided in school hours by the local authority or by the school to carry pupils between the school and an activity. Governing bodies should also clearly explain that children of parents who do not contribute will not be treated any differently, and that the activity might be cancelled if insufficient contributions are received.

Q The school has sent letters out to parents asking for contributions towards a school visit, do parents have to pay?

A Head teachers or governing bodies may ask parents for voluntary contributions towards the cost of:

- any activity which takes place during school hours; school equipment and school funds generally.

Children of parents who are unable, or unwilling, to contribute may not be discriminated against. However, if insufficient voluntary contributions are received to cover the cost of the visit, or activity, and there is no alternative method to make up the shortfall, then the school should cancel the activity/visit. It would be advisable to make parents aware of a possible cancellation to the activity/visit if insufficient voluntary contributions are received from the outset.

Q What happens if the school is not able to raise enough voluntary contributions to cover costs?

A Where there are not enough voluntary contributions, and there is no way to make up the shortfall, for example school funds and/or fundraising activities, then it must be cancelled. The possibility of the activity/visit being cancelled due to a shortfall in contributions should be made clear in the information sent to parents.

Q What if a parent is unable, or unwilling to make a voluntary contribution? How does this affect their child(ren)?

A The school cannot exclude a child from taking part in an activity that is part of the Early Years Curriculum purely on the grounds that you, the parent or carer, cannot make, or refuses to make a contribution. This can clearly place schools in some difficulty on occasions where a number of parents/carers might be in such a position. The school then

has to decide whether they can cover the costs of such activity from within the budget or by fundraising, or whether the activity has to be cancelled.

Q What support can a school offer a parent/carer who has difficulty making a financial contribution?

A Schools must ensure that parents in receipt of Income Support, Income Based Jobseekers Allowance, support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, Child Tax Credit, provided that Working Tax Credit is not also received and the family's income (as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs) does not exceed £15,575 (Financial Year 2008/09). Some schools also have funds available to enable families in financial difficulty to send their children on visits/activities. Parents should be encouraged to speak to the head teacher in order to establish if such funding arrangements exist.

Q Can the school charge for something like cooking ingredients or materials needed for other lessons?

A The school can make a charge to cover the costs of materials/ingredients for subjects such as baking where parents have indicated in advance that they would like their child to bring home the finished product.

Q. Can a school ask for a direct debit to the school fund?

A. No. A school may ask for voluntary contributions, as long as it is clear that they are voluntary, but we are clear that state education should be free and we have no intention of changing this policy. We will not tolerate this when it is brought to our notice. No contributions may be sought as part of the admissions process.

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