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Document.	0003	Billing Policy	
Revision	17	Approved By	Katy Taylor
		Approval Date	24/10/2023

Scope

This policy applies to all provision for early years aged children, and also – where appropriate – to before and after school provision and walking bus provided by Duchy Pre-school and Playgroup for primary school aged children attending The Duchy School in Bowley Meadow.

Intention

The billing policy is designed to ensure that the preschool remains sustainable for future generations of children from Bradninch and surrounding areas. Even though we are a Registered Charity and provide services on a “not-for-profit” basis for the benefit of local families, we must still ensure that we recoup the cost of providing sessions.

Chargeable sessions.

Parents will normally be charged for all sessions which do not form part of their free entitlement (Early Years Funding).

In the case of sessions provided for primary school age children (“before and after school club”), we will charge a fee per session which will include the cost of providing a safe and healthy “walking bus” to and from the Duchy School in Bowley Meadow. Before and after school club sessions will normally be booked for a term.

Because sessions must be staffed for their entirety based on sessions booked, fees for chargeable sessions booked will be payable even if a child does not attend for whatever reason or does not attend for a complete session. However, please see the section “Emergency Days” below.

Billing and credit control process.

The Duchy Pre-school & Playgroup recognises the value and importance of the timely issuing of bills, receipt of payment and following up on non-payers. Our procedure to ensure this is as follows.

1. A bill will be issued for each term at the beginning of term or as soon as possible after the Local Education Authority’s ‘Head Count’ is confirmed. It will allow 21 days for payment. There is an option to speak to the Business Manager or Chairman if parents are having particular problems paying, at which time a different payment plan may be agreed.
2. If payment is received a receipt will be issued on request.
3. In the absence of a specific agreement, if payment is not received or contact made within 21 days, the bill will be reissued with a 7 day notice period.
4. A reminder of this procedure will be sent, highlighting that children may be suspended from sessions or lunch clubs that are self-funded (i.e. that are not paid by the Local Education Authority Early Years Grant) if payment is not received by the 7 day notice period.
5. **However, no child will be excluded from their free statutory sessions.**
6. If payment is not received, the Chair of the Committee will be notified by the Business Manager and the Chair will discuss any extenuating circumstances with the Managing Supervisor and decide whether to pursue the debt as follows:
 - a. If there are known extenuating circumstances then the Chair will write to the parent suggesting a payment schedule to settle the debt at 20% per week. 7 days will be allowed for the parent to agree to this before the Chair proceeds to step 6.b.
 - b. If there are no known extenuating circumstances the Chair will issue a ‘Letter Before Action’ giving 7 days to pay after which Court proceedings will commence.
7. If the parent agrees to a payment plan as set out in 6.a. then the bill will be reissued with

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- revised payment terms for the full amount
8. Should no response of any kind be received from the parent within 7 days, the Chair will begin court proceedings against the parent without further notice. If the parent does respond but does not send full payment of the amount, or does not adequately justify non-payment and agree to a payment plan, or fails to comply with an agreed payment plan, then this will also result in the Chair taking court action against the parent.
 9. In the event that court action becomes necessary, Playgroup will seek to recover the cost of the court action in addition to the original bill.

Notice Periods

Changes to sessions/Cancelling sessions.

Where a parent has to make a permanent change to the number of sessions attended by their child, a 4 week notice period will apply and as a result has overpaid for the term, the overpayment will be credited to their account and offset against invoices for subsequent terms. Where the child leaves at the end of the current term, or where for other reasons the amount in credit exceeds the amount that is likely to be billed in future, a refund will be given.

However, where a child is taken out of an individual session (due to vacation illness etc.) on a temporary basis no refund can be given and the session will still be chargeable. You must provide an absence note (this can be in the form of an email or a note on Famly) for booked sessions which your child does not attend. If no absence note is provided, then Devon County Council reserve the right to claw back funding for free entitlement sessions. In this event we will charge parents for sessions which are consequently no longer funded.

Covid related absences

If your child is absent as they have tested positive for Covid or has covid symptoms, this will be treated as a usual sickness, no refund can be given and the session will still be chargeable.

Leaving a funded place/fee paying place

Where a parent/carer has decided to leave a funded place (Early Years Funding), or a fee paying place a period of 4 weeks notice will apply.

If a parent/carer leaves a provider, without giving notice they will forfeit 4 weeks of entitlement funding and must pay to attend another provider.

School children – Duchy School Clubs

We understand that children may be offered opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities run by the Duchy School.

If a child is offered a place in one of Duchy School's extra-curricular clubs, we are unable to offer a refund or transfer the booking to another session.

If you wish to cancel your bookings due to your child taking up a place at a Duchy School club, a minimum of one week's notice is required. In this case, a refund will be issued.

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We are unable to hold or reserve places in our before or after school clubs while a child attends an external activity. Bookings will need to be made as normal and are subject to availability.

If we are operating a waiting list for our before or after school clubs, and a child is withdrawn from their booking (either permanently or temporarily), their space will be offered to the next child on the waiting list.

If a parent later wishes to re-book a cancelled space, this will be subject to availability at the time of the request and cannot be guaranteed.

You do have the option of keeping the booked space – in this instance your child remains on our register for those sessions, and normal fees will continue to apply while they attend the Duchy club.

Persistent late payers.

Where a parent has a history of poor paying, the parent¹ shall be placed onto “pro forma” terms. This means that sessions taken by any child of whom they are a parent, and which are not funded by Early Years Entitlement, shall be paid for strictly in advance of the child being left for the session.

For the purposes of the definition of “persistent late payer” this shall automatically include

- any parent against whom we have had to resort to court action, and
- any parent to whom we have had to send more than one “final letter prior to court action” unless there are extenuating circumstances.

Other poor payers shall only be placed on pro forma with the agreement of the trustees.

Fines for late collection.

Several problems are created when parents are persistently late collecting their child(ren) at the end of a session.

- Staff are occupied with childcare, and are unable to complete cleaning and tidying tasks.
- Staff are late leaving to collect their own children.
- There is a potential risk that a follow on session may exceed the Ofsted registered limit for the setting.
- There is a risk that we may exceed the terms of our insurance, which only allows for *occasional* lateness.

In order to deter lateness, and recover some of the costs involved, parents who are persistently late collecting their child will be fined.

The fine will be £10 per child for the third and all subsequent times that the parent/carer is more than 5 minutes late arriving to collect their child in any one term.

In the event that there is a follow-on session, the child will be entered onto the register for the session.

¹ For the purpose of definition, “parent” shall include any person having legal parental responsibility for the child who was resident with the child at the time that the debt was incurred.

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In the absence of a specific agreement or extenuating circumstances, it will be presumed that the child has attended the following session each time the parent is 10 or more minutes late collecting the child and we will charge for the full session. We will also refer to the process laid out in our Non-collection of Children policy (Policy 0016).

For the avoidance of dispute, lateness will always be determined by the clock in the main play room at the setting.

Emergency days

Emergency days are defined by Devon County Council as closure days for public holidays and other reasons where, unlike normal Bank Holidays, we are not expected to offer alternative days to comply with the Provider Agreement for Early Years Entitlement Funding. Where children's attendance on an Emergency day would normally be parent funded, we will not charge parents for that day.

In the event of a planned closure due to staff training we will offer alternative sessions.

Children attending primary school settling in sessions, where they would otherwise be attending pre-school, will still be in the care of playgroup and these sessions will be chargeable as normal.

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Responsibility for periodic review	Finance Sub-committee
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Document History

Rev	Changes	Date	Approval
00	Previous changes incorporated for AGM	17/05/10	AGM
01	Added Persistent Late Payers paragraph	09/07/10	Committee
02	Added Fines for Late Collection and changed "Administrator" to "Business Manager"	07/04/11	Committee
03	Addition of clarification of fees for Emergency Days.	03/10/11	Committee
04	Review and re-approval for AGM	15/11/11	AGM
05	Clarification of charges, and reference to before and after school sessions.	17/11/13	Committee (not issued)
06	Addition of scope statement	02/01/14	PNW
07	Removal of definitions of chargeable sessions contingent on implementation of Provider Portal	05/03/15	
08	Removal of 'Business Manager' replaced with Administrator changed late pick up time from more than 10 mins late to more than 5 mins late – added £10 charge per child. Removal of 2 week grace period for non payment of invoice Point 4 – Billing and credit control process - Removal the sentence 'if their parent is a term or more overdue with any payment'	28/02/19	
09	Added 'Leaving a funded place' 4 weeks notice period will apply	26/11/20	KH
10	Removal of Administrator and replaced with Business Manager	18/3/21	KH
11	Added Covid related absences	31/1/22	KH
12	Removed section relating to asking parents to keep children at home if household member has covid	4/4/22	KH
14	Reviewed – added 4 weeks notice to leave a fee paying place	2/11/23	KH
15	Reviewed	23/10/24	KH
16	Added section – School children – Duchy School clubs	1/9/25	KH
17	Amended notice period to 4 weeks for a permanent change to a number of sessions	10/02/26	KH

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