



Early Learning and Childcare

Policy and Guidelines for Admission to Nursery Classes and Early Childhood Centres

2026 - 2027

A Perth and Kinross where everyone can live
life well, free from poverty and inequality

**Enabling
children and
young people
achieve full
potential**

Throughout this guidance, the word ‘parent’ should be interpreted as including the child’s carer or legal guardian.

Please note, this information is correct at time of going to print.

Updated information is available from the PKC Early Learning and Childcare Team:

Tel **01738 476200**

Email ELC@PKC.gov.uk

or on the Perth & Kinross Council website www.pkc.gov.uk

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Introduction

These guidelines apply to all admissions for children in PKC (local authority) nursery settings managed by the Education & Learning service.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) is an important stage in a child's development and helps children to learn as they play. A high-quality early learning experience builds on the valuable learning that takes place in and around the home, before children start primary school.

In Scotland, all 3–5-year-olds, and eligible 2-year-olds, are entitled to 1140 hours of funded ELC per year. All funded ELC is based on continuous or developmental learning experiences where qualified staff plan for effective learning and teaching. Settings will follow national guidelines for the education of children aged 2-5 years old that encourage learning through play. Parents are encouraged to make maximum use of this provision.

All providers of government funded ELC are currently inspected by the Care Inspectorate, and Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI), part of Education Scotland and must meet the criteria set out in the National Standard.

All settings managed by Education & Children's Services are non-denominational.

A place in a nursery class does not give priority in gaining a place in the same school when enrolling for primary school.

The adult-child ratio for nursery classes will be a minimum of 1 member of staff to 8 children, and a ratio of 1 member of staff to 5 children where the child is not yet 3 years old.

Only in exceptional circumstances would it be necessary to close a nursery school or class and then only with the approval of the Chief Education Officer of PKC's Education and Learning service. At all times a full service should be provided in line with primary and secondary education.

ELC Communities

In addition to local authority managed nurseries, PKC is currently in partnership with a number of childminders and funded provider settings which provide quality ELC within the private, voluntary and independent sector. The term "*funded provider*" refers to public, private and third-party providers, including childminders, who meet the [National Standard](#) and work in partnership with the local authority to provide ELC places. Local authority settings include Early Childhood Centres which are open

50 weeks per year and a mixture of nursery classes, some of which will open 38 weeks per year in term time, and some 45 weeks per year.

Each setting has been placed into an ELC community. There are 11 ELC communities across PKC. ELC communities were created to support flexibility and choice for parents and although some local authority settings will provide ELC through extended opening hours, 8.00 am - 6.00 pm for 45 weeks or 50 weeks, it is not possible or financially viable to have this option available in every local authority setting. However, each ELC community has at least one local authority ELC provision, which offers extended opening hours. There are also partner provider settings in each community which can often provide additional flexibility and choice.

A full list of communities and providers can be found at [Nursery locations and attendance patterns - Perth & Kinross Council](#). Funded provider settings can be contacted directly for information on how to apply for a funded ELC place.

Parents can apply to any local authority-managed nursery class for their child's funded ELC place through the [PKC website](#).

Local Authority Provision

The following attendance patterns are available within local authority settings.

Options	Weeks per Year	Hours per Week	Sessions	School Holiday Entitlement
Term-time	38	30	9am-3pm x 5 Days	None
Extended year	45	26	8.30am-4.30pm x 2 Days And 8am-1pm or 1pm-6pm x 2 Days	1 week in October 1 week in Spring 3 weeks in Summer
Full Year	50	23	8am-1pm x 3 Days And 8am-12pm x 2 Days	2 weeks in October 2 weeks in Spring 6 weeks in Summer

Funded provider nursery and childminder settings should be contacted directly for information on availability of hours and session times offered, as well as their admissions procedures.

Information regarding school term and holiday dates is available on the Council's website at [School term and holiday dates - Perth & Kinross Council \(pkc.gov.uk\)](https://www.pkc.gov.uk/school-term-and-holiday-dates), or from all schools.

ELC for eligible 2-year-olds (Strong Starts) are also available in several nurseries. Further information on Strong Start provision can be found at [Funded early learning and childcare for 2 year olds \(Strong Starts\) - Perth & Kinross Council](#).

Nursery classes in Inch View, Letham, Pitlochry, Luncarty and St Dominic's Primary Schools offer additional childcare provision for children accessing ELC places. Separate guidance on all aspects of childcare provision within Perth and Kinross is available from the Childcare Information Service:

Tel **0345 601 4477**

Email Childcare@pkc.gov.uk

Children who have an ante-preschool ELC place will be entitled to retain their current place and attendance pattern for their pre-school year. Parents should still complete the on-line nursery application form to confirm they wish to remain on this pattern or to apply for a different attendance pattern/setting. Parents wishing to access a different attendance pattern for their child's pre-school year or wishing to access ELC in a different funded provider will also be required to complete an application form.

Should a parent wish to change their child's attendance pattern during the school year they must put through a change request or complete a new application. Where possible these requests will be accommodated by the setting and changes will be made with effect from the start of a new term.

Eligibility for Early Learning and Childcare Places

Below are details of the groups of children eligible for an ELC place.

Please note children who will be 5 years old on, or before, the first day of the start of the school session in August are no longer eligible for ELC and are expected to enter primary education. Parents have a duty to educate their child at primary school or make alternative suitable arrangements for his/her education e.g. home schooling. ELC does not constitute primary schooling. To register your child for school, please visit [School enrolment - Perth & Kinross Council](#).

Additional Year of Funded ELC

Parents of children who will be 5 years old between the school commencement date in August, and 28 February 2027 have the right to choose for their child to have an additional year of funded ELC. This is also known as a deferral to primary one. Children in this age group are eligible for an ELC place at the beginning of the school session in August 2026 and will be considered to be in their pre-school year. Guidance on accessing an additional year of ELC can be found at [Funded early learning and childcare for 3-5 year olds - Perth & Kinross Council](#).

Pre-school Year

All children in their preschool year are eligible for an ELC place from August 2026.

Ante Pre-school Year

Children born between 1 March 2023 and 28 February 2024 are eligible for an ELC place in school session 2026/27 as outlined below.

Children Born Between	Nursery Session Start Date
1 March 2023 and 31 August 2023	Start of school session in August 2026, or on 3 rd birthday if child's birthday is after the start the school session and before 1 September
1 September 2023 and 31 December 2023	w/c 7 January 2027
1 January 2024 and 28 February 2024	From 12 April 2027

The cut-off date for all three-year-old children accessing an ELC place in school session 2026 - 2027 is 28 February 2027. Children who will be 3 years old after this date will not be eligible for an ELC funded place until the start of the next school session (August 2027).

Strong Start Places

A number of nurseries and childminders offer Early Learning and Childcare places of up to 1140 hours to children who are 2 years of age. These are known as Strong Start places and will be offered to eligible children in line with Scottish Government criteria and delivered in line with the arrangements for children aged 3 to 5 years old.

To find out if your child may be eligible for a Strong Start place, please review the eligibility criteria at [Funded early learning and childcare for 2 year olds \(Strong Starts\) - Perth & Kinross Council](#).

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For information on which ELC settings offer Strong Start places in your community, please visit [Nursery locations and attendance patterns - Perth & Kinross Council](#).

Making an Application for an ELC place

For funded provider nurseries and childminders, please contact the setting directly for information on how to apply. Direct links to contact information for each setting can be found at [Nursery locations and attendance patterns - Perth & Kinross Council](#).

Applications for ELC spaces in local authority settings can be done online at [Register for a local authority nursery place for school year - Perth & Kinross Council](#).

Parents will be asked to indicate on the form their first, second and third choice of placement. When applying for a place parents should include information regarding any issues which may affect their child at nursery, e.g. toileting, special dietary requirements or medical issues.

Allocation priorities for all local authority ELC applications can be found in appendix 1.

Following registration, an email will be sent advising parents that a place has been allocated for their child according to the timeline summary (found in the next section of this document). Parents are required to advise if they wish to take up the offer of a place within one week of receipt of the email to confirm the place.

Split Funded Places

Perth & Kinross Council recognises that families have a variety of needs and preferences for accessing ELC. Parents, therefore, can apply for a place in more than one setting. The allocation of split funded places will be dependent on both settings being able to offer the hours requested. Children are entitled to 1140 hours of ELC each year. Parents are asked to indicate on their application form whether they wish to take up their child's entitlement as a split placement, e.g. some sessions within local authority nurseries and some sessions within partner provider settings and/or with childminders. This flexibility helps to meet the needs of parents who work or study.

If a parent is seeking a split funded place, they will be required to complete an application form for each establishment they are seeking a place within. For split funded places between two or more local authority settings, funding must follow the same type of placement, e.g. term time, extended year or full year. Split funded places with funded providers, however, do not have to match the funding of any additional places and can provide additional flexibility.

Parents should be aware that although every effort will be made to meet their needs, there is no guarantee that it will be possible to offer split funded places in every case.

The allocation of a split funded place will be dependent upon establishments being able to offer the hours requested and availability.

Timeline Summary

w/c 5 January 2026	Initial registration commences for ELC places. <i>This will include new applications, applications for changes to pattern of attendance and declarations for retained places.</i>
28 February 2026	Initial registration closes: any applications received after this date will not be included in the Initial Allocation of places.
w/c 16 March 2026	Initial ballot, if required, for any category.
w/c 23 March 2026	Initial allocation of places for all categories (not cross-boundary).
w/c 1 March 2026	Second registration phase opens.
17 April 2026	Second registration phase closes: any applications received after this date will not be included in the Second Allocation of places.
30 April 2026	Second allocation of places for all categories (not cross-boundary). <i>School allocation of places for primary and secondary placement requests also take place.</i>
w/c 1 June 2026	Allocation of cross-boundary places and late registrations.

Applications will continue to be accepted for ELC places all year for session 2026/27 beyond the above timeline and processed according to current procedures.

Ballot or In-house Draw for the Initial Allocation of ELC Places

All ELC applications are processed according to the priority admissions categories detailed in appendix 1. Although we will aim to offer families their preferred ELC setting and attendance pattern, this is not always possible. Parents are encouraged to indicate on the form their first, second and third choice of placement to support the offer of an alternative place if their first choice is unavailable.

During the first phase of applications, if it is not possible to allocate the requested pattern of attendance for all children within any of the priority categories at a particular ELC setting, then an in-house draw will take place for all the children in that priority category to support fairness. If this becomes necessary all parents will be advised via email, and wherever possible invited to attend the in-house draw which will be held by the setting. A summary of the process is outlined in appendix 2 of this document.

Allocation of Places

ELC offer emails will be sent out to parents according to the timeline summary. The offer email also notifies parents that the child will not be enrolled into the place until the offer is formally accepted.

Parents are required to advise of their decision within one week from receipt of the communication to avoid disappointment should the place be offered to another child waiting for a place. In such circumstances every effort will be made to contact parents before withdrawing an offer of a place.

Withdrawal of Early Learning and Childcare Places

Nursery places may be withdrawn in exceptional circumstances (where the parent has not complied with the conditions they agreed when accepting the place). For example:

- a parent has accepted a term time place of 5 days per week and the child has been absent every Friday for no valid reason - the Friday may be withdrawn;
- a child has not attended nursery at all for a period of 3 weeks without a valid reason - the child's nursery place may be withdrawn.

Places will only be withdrawn with the approval of the Quality Improvement Officer of PKC's Early Learning and Childcare service. If there are other children awaiting a place, then children who are not attending on a regular basis without good reason may have their place withdrawn.

In such circumstances every effort will be made to contact parents before formally terminating the placement.

In addition, ELC settings are compelled to adhere to procedures within the nursery absence policy for any child who is unexpectedly absent. As the wellbeing and safety of all children is of paramount importance, the school will also implement Child Protection procedures if that is thought to be appropriate on an individual basis.

Support for Children and Families Places

Support for Children and Families places will be given priority in accordance with the priority admission categories in appendix 1. This will enable children who have been granted a Support for Children and Families place to attend a local authority nursery, as part of a wider plan of support to best meet their needs or the needs of their family.

Referrals for Support for Children and Families places can be made based on individual educational or social need by the relevant agencies. Such agencies

wishing to submit a referral to the panel should do so according to correct formal procedures. The parent's permission must be obtained prior to a referral being submitted.

On making referrals to the panel, agencies should take cognisance of the following statement in Section 93(4) of the Children Act (Scotland) 1995. The Act refers to a child in need as being in need of care and attention because

- *the child is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development unless these services are provided by the Local Authority;*
- *the child's health or development is likely significantly to be impaired or further impaired unless such services are so provided;*
- *the child is disabled*
- *the child is affected adversely by the disability of any other person in his/her family;*

In addition, priority places for children should consider factors in the Code of Practice for the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Acts 2004 and 2009:

- *family and individual circumstances, e.g. disrupted home life, parental health problems;*
- *disability or health, e.g. motor or sensory impairment, learning difficulties;*
- *social and emotional, e.g. behavioural difficulties;*
- *families for whom English is an additional language and where this is causing significant communications difficulties for the child.*

The Support for Children and Families panel normally sits three times per year. Support for Children and Families places will be allocated by the panel based on the referral form and after discussion with the appropriate senior management and other relevant agencies.

It should be noted that once initial allocations have been made, any subsequent referrals and allocations will be dealt with timeously using the same procedures.

Early Learning and Childcare Provision at Fairview School

Fairview School is a school for children with long-term complex and multiple support needs. It can accept children from the age of three years. Admission is based on a multi-disciplinary assessment. The entitlement of 1140 hours will be delivered in a term time model (30 hours each week). Please talk to agencies

involved in your child's care initially about whether Fairview is a suitable choice of ELC setting for your child.

Appendix 1 - Priority Admissions Categories

1. Retained Places

From the new session, preschool children and children accessing an additional year of ELC will be prioritised for retaining their place under the attendance pattern and ELC setting they currently access. Parents are requested to submit an application to confirm that they want to continue with the current place.

An application must also be submitted by parents to inform of their preference to make a change to their child's current attendance pattern or ELC setting for the next session. **These changes will be considered within the categories below for all pre-school children.**

2. Support for Children and Families Places

Support for Children and Families places that have been approved by the panel will be allocated to children ahead of the categories below in order to best provide support that meets the needs of identified children and families.

3. Priority Categories for PKC Children Residing Within the ELC Community

- 3.1 Pre-school children (including children deferring entry to primary 1).
- 3.2 Ante pre-school children eligible to start in August
- 3.3 Ante pre-school children eligible to start in January
- 3.4 Ante pre-school children eligible to start in April

4. Priority Categories for PKC Children Residing Outside the ELC Community

- 4.1 Pre-school children (including children deferring entry to primary 1).
- 4.2 Ante pre-school children eligible to start in August
- 4.3 Ante pre-school children eligible to start in January
- 4.4 Ante pre-school children eligible to start in April

5. Children Residing Outside PKC (Cross-Boundary Places)

Once the above has been allocated, unfilled places would be available for children residing outside PKC under the following priorities:

- 5.1 Pre-school children
- 5.2 Ante pre-school children

Appendix 2 - Summary of Ballot and In-House Draw Guidelines for the Allocation of ELC Places

The following outlines key points in the ballot procedures:

- If demand exceeds the available number of places for attendance pattern or ELC place in a particular setting, each space will be allocated within each of the priority categories until they are unable to be distributed fairly within a category. At this stage, an in-house draw or ballot should be conducted according to the guidelines. The same process will apply to any priority category.
- Ballots are held on the same week across the Council.
- Parents should be notified by email in advance of ballot/in-house draw procedures, with the date of the ballot/in-house draw and should be invited to attend by the school.
- Headteachers should ensure that members of the ballot panel are familiar with all procedures.
- The school should be clear as to how many available spaces they have before any ballot takes place.
- All eligible children should be placed in the ballot/in-house draw.
- Once slips have been drawn, they should be retained for future reference.
- Schools will notify the Applications team with the outcome of the ballot or draw, and they will offer ELC spaces accordingly, or support with alternative ELC provision for families who did get allocated a place.

There are alternative procedures for balloting twins, triplets etc. Parents should be made aware of these before balloting taking place.