

1st Step Pre-school Ltd: Admissions, Fees, Attendance & Settling Policy

Our Commitment

At 1st Step Pre-school Ltd, we are committed to providing fair, inclusive and high-quality early years education. This policy explains how children are enrolled, how fees and attendance are managed and how we support children and families during the settling-in process.

Our goal is to ensure every family understands what to expect when joining our setting and that children feel safe, secure, and ready to learn.

Admissions

- **Initial Visit** – Parents are invited to tour the pre-school, meet the team and ask questions.
- **Offer of a Place** – If a space is available, families receive a welcome pack with:
 - Registration information
 - Emergency contact details
 - Government funding forms (where eligible)

We welcome all children regardless of background or location.

Fees & Payment Terms

- Fees are payable monthly in advance, by the 1st of each month.
- Accepted payment methods: standing order, childcare vouchers, Tax-Free Childcare, or cash.
- Fees remain payable during:
 - Child sickness (please see our Children's Illness, Infection & Medication Policy for exclusion guidance)
 - Family holidays
- No refunds are given for non-attendance.
- There is no charge for bank holidays or pre-school closure days.

Temporary Closure

1st Step Pre-school Ltd, reserves the right to close any of its settings at any time, without prior notice, if the quality of care cannot be maintained or circumstances make it necessary. We will always try to avoid closures wherever possible, provide as much notice as we can and arrange alternatives where available; however, this cannot always be guaranteed.

Attendance & Absence

Regular and punctual attendance helps children fully benefit from our curriculum and supports safeguarding.

Parental Responsibilities

Parents/carers must:

- Provide accurate and up-to-date contact details (including two primary emergency contacts and two secondary contacts).
- Inform the pre-school setting directly (not the main office) by phone or text at least 15 minutes before their scheduled arrival if their child will be absent, stating the reason and expected return date.
- Report absence daily unless otherwise agreed.
- Notify the setting in advance of planned holidays or absences.
- Ensure children arrive and are collected on time at the start and end of sessions.

Types of Absence

- *Authorised* – illness, medical appointments, religious observance, or pre-agreed holiday.
- *Unauthorised* – no explanation given, vague/insufficient reason, or absence without agreement.
- Persistent absence (15%+) will be reviewed and may result in a meeting with the Lead Practitioner.

Unexplained Absence Procedure

- 15 minutes after the agreed start time, staff will attempt to contact the parent/carer.
- If unsuccessful, emergency contacts will be called (in order listed on the registration form).
- If still no contact is made, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will be informed.
 - Safeguarding procedures may include referral to Children's Social Care and/or a police welfare check.

Drop-Off & Collection

- Parents/carers must hand their child directly to a member of staff. Children must not be left unattended at the entrance.
- Children will not be accepted if they are asleep on arrival.
- Only authorised adults listed on the child's registration form may collect. If someone different is collecting:
 - Parents must inform the pre-school in advance, providing the person's name, a password and (if required) a photograph.
 - ID will be checked if necessary.

Late/Uncollected Children

- Parents should inform the pre-school if delayed.
- If a child is not collected within 15 minutes: staff will attempt to contact parents/carers.
- If no contact is made after 30 minutes, the DSL will be informed and Children's Social Care may be contacted.
- A written record will be kept and repeated incidents monitored.

Settling-In

We understand that starting pre-school is a big step. Our approach is flexible and based on each child's needs.

- **Settling Sessions** – Before the start date, children are invited for two free, one-hour sessions. Parents may stay for the first five minutes of the first session to meet the child's key worker.
- **Gradual Separation** – Some children settle quickly; others need more time – both are completely normal. If a child remains very distressed during their initial settling sessions, we will not move straight to full days, as this would be unfair on the child. Instead, we will work closely with parents to agree a phased approach, gradually building up session length until the child is comfortable and confident. On drop off, parents are encouraged to say a short, positive goodbye to support independence.
- **Supporting Routines** – We aim to follow home routines for meals, naps, and comfort where possible. Familiar comfort items (toy/blanket) are welcome. Our Safer Eating and Safer Sleeping policies must be always adhered to ensure the children's safety.
- **Communication** – Parents may call or message the pre-school for updates during early sessions (please contact the setting directly, not the central office). Daily feedback is provided at handover, with ongoing updates via communication books and Tapestry.

Changes to Hours and Termination of Place

- We require a minimum of four weeks' written notice for any changes to your child's contracted hours (whether an increase or reduction) and for termination of a place. These four weeks must be paid in full, even if your child does not attend during this period.
- Once agreed, your child's schedule is fixed: all contracted hours must be paid for whether attended or not.
- Additional hours can be requested and will be charged accordingly, subject to availability and staff-to-child ratios.
- Days cannot be swapped or changed free of charge; any changes will be counted as additional hours and billed at the standard rate.

Lost or Missing Child

Preventative measures are always in place, including secure premises, risk assessments, staff ratios and supervision.

- **If a Child Goes Missing On-Site:**
 - Alert the Lead Practitioner.
 - Check registers and confirm collection status.
 - Search the premises and secure all exits.
 - If not found within 10 minutes:
 - Call 999 and report the child missing.
 - Contact parents/carers.
 - Inform the DSL.
 - Ofsted will be notified as soon as reasonably practicable.
- **If a Child Goes Missing During an Outing**
 - Immediate headcount: staff search the area.
 - Venue staff and police are informed straight away.
 - Parents/carers and the DSL are contacted.
 - A senior staff member remains on site to liaise with emergency services.
 - Ofsted will be notified promptly.
- **After the Incident**
 - Parents will be informed and offered support.
 - A full incident report and internal investigation will be completed.
 - Ofsted, the Local Authority, and insurers will be updated as necessary.
 - Emotional support will be provided for children, families, and staff.