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Administration

Setting up and running school-based childcare provision can involve a number of different administrative functions – from processing bookings and payments to administering a voucher scheme, and from dealing with parents’ enquiries to reviewing policies and procedures.

The types of administration tasks involved in a childcare provision, and who deals with these, will depend on a number of factors (size of school, staffing, childcare model used, etc).

Here are some ways in which schools and other childcare providers across England have been dealing with administration in their school-based childcare provision.



Use existing school staff

If your school runs its own childcare provision, consider building the administration function into existing school staff roles (eg rework job descriptions of administration staff so that they handle bookings, payments, enquiries).

If you commission a small third-party provider (eg sole trader) to run your childcare, consider providing some administrative support for the service.

It is vital that, whoever is responsible for dealing with administration (eg face-to-face, email and phone enquiries) is well informed about your childcare service, professional and helpful.

It might be useful to prepare FAQs, so you can be sure that the same information is given to all parents (eg about payment terms and conditions).

To reduce the time admin staff spend on responding to the same requests for information again and again, you could put FAQs and other key information (eg booking forms, policy documents) on your website, as well as producing hard copies for parents to pick up from a prominent place (eg in the reception area).

Hand over admin tasks

Schools that commission a third-party provider to manage their childcare provision may not find that their administrative burden increases at all.

Many private childcare providers will take over all the administrative work required to run a provision effectively (eg bookings and payments, enquiries, policies).

At Elm Wood Primary School in London, the after-school club is run by an external provider, while the breakfast club is run by internal staff.

For a flat fee to the school, the external provider (Fit For Sport) has adapted its own system for use by the school. This ensures that families only have to use one system for all their childcare provision.



Childcare space at Elm Wood Primary School, London

Use online tools

There are numerous tools and software available for childcare providers (Childcare Manager, ChildCare Sage, ParentPay etc).

Depending on the package, these can reduce the work and time involved in administration, so that you can spend more time on childcare, by:

- handling online bookings and payments
- generating invoices and statements
- maintaining registers, pick-up and drop-off lists
- keeping data backed up and secure
- managing staff rotas and staff:child ratios
- reporting on different aspects of your business (eg finance)

- helping you communicate with parents (eg automatic payment/meeting reminders, sharing information about a child).

Redriff Primary School in London wanted the new provision to have one clear fee structure for its breakfast, after-school and holiday provision, and for parents to pay in advance for their childcare.

ParentPay was already successfully being used to collect fees and it was decided that this should continue. However, once an external provider was selected to run their provision, the school chose to use their dedicated online payment and booking system instead.

Marketing

There are numerous admin tasks (and costs) associated with marketing a childcare provision (eg photocopying and distributing flyers, placing adverts in the paper, organising open days for parents).

You may find that you can reduce your administrative burden by:

- 'tagging on' to existing school events (eg making one presentation about your provision at a parents' evening, rather than arranging to see lots of people separately)
- using the school's existing communications network (eg asking the school to put information in its next newsletter or e-newsletter, rather than producing numerous flyers to distribute)
- using social media (Facebook, Twitter).

Online surveys

Although it's important that childcare providers regularly audit parents' ongoing childcare needs and evaluate their service, it can be very time-consuming for admin staff to develop questionnaires, distribute them, key in information, and analyse responses.

You could save time, and money, by using free online survey software. This can enable you to quickly set up and share a survey, export data and run reports.



Pupils with a teacher at The Ferns Academy, Bolton

The Ferns Academy in Bolton used the free version of the online tool SurveyGizmo to gather information from the different stakeholders and to run reports.

The responses revealed that parents, staff and children were keen for the Ferns to offer wraparound childcare on their own site. Around two-thirds of parents said they would use an after-school club, for instance. Most of the parents that completed the survey were obviously looking for childcare that is both affordable and flexible.

Develop clear policies

Whether a school runs childcare on its own premises or commissions an outside provider, it will need to develop a comprehensive range of childcare policies and procedures.

The Out of School Alliance offers reasonably-priced start-up packs and basic administration forms too.

The local authority can provide assistance with a variety of administrative functions (eg registering your provision, commissioning a provider, developing policies and procedures, working towards a quality kitemark).

Work with the school

Working in partnership with the school can help a private provider to cut down on their administrative work, as well as enabling the club to work more effectively.

A club in Devon, for instance, has developed a good relationship with the school, from whom they rent facilities.

As well as allowing the club to rent rooms in its main building, the school also allows the club to use the outside grounds, including the environmental area, and rooms within a different building on the same site.

The school secretary also distributes leaflets and surveys to parents on behalf of the club, the school advertises the club on its website and in its newsletters, and new parents are taken to view the childcare provision on open days/school visits.

Further information

- Family Action was funded 2013-15 by the Department for Education (DfE) to support schools to develop wraparound and childcare provision. Find out more about the project, and download a wide range of free resources from: www.learning-exchange.org.uk

- Our Learning Exchange Facebook page gives links to events, suppliers, equipment, training and venues that might be of interest to school-based childcare providers: www.facebook.com/pages/Learning-Exchange/904749822892733?sk=timeline

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