

FEE POLICY

Free Kindergarten

Quality Area 7 | ELAA Version 1.5

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how services comply with the Free Kinder funding requirements.

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

St John's Kindergarten is committed to:

- supporting the Victorian Government's Free Kinder initiative
- increasing access to quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children
- ensuring there are no financial barriers for families wishing to access an early childhood program for their child/children
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, parents/guardians attending St John's Kindergarten.



RESPONSIBILITIES

Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
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R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted

Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	R	√	√	√
Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for the payment of fees (if applicable) and the provision of a statement of fees charged by the service (<i>Regulation 168</i>), and take reasonable steps to ensure those policies and procedures are followed (<i>Regulation 170</i>)	R	√		
Ensuring that families are informed of the operating hours including term dates, planned closures and additional hours to account for closures.	R	√		
Ensuring families are informed of the total annual fee amount, including any applicable fees for e.g. excursions and any additional hours	R	√		
Reimbursing families in full for enrolment deposits that have already been paid upon acceptance of enrolment	R	√		
Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted)	R	√		

Ensuring families are only charged for optional kindergarten programs hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or "wrap around" care (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	R	√			
Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guidelines (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	√			
Providing communication to families explaining their access to one year of three-year-old and one of four-year-old funded kindergarten program	R	√			
Ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service nominate and document which service the child will participate in the funded kindergarten program	R	√		√	
Ensuring that any surplus funding is used in line with acceptable uses of kindergarten funding, including to promote increased participation and/or enhance program quality	R	√			
Ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted	R	√			
Charging families only for an occasional special event/ excursions that occur outside the normal program/curriculum	R	√	√		
Collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation	R	√		√	

regarding those with entitlement to concessions (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)					
Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the Arrival system	R	√			
Ensuring that the <i>Fees - Free Kinder Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kinder (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges to families that have opted in to the additional hours/wrap around care upon enrolment of their child, if applicable NOTE: parents must also be advised that enrolling for hours over 15 is optional and families can choose to only enrol for 15 hours and receive this program at no cost.	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with an additional hours payment fee agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 2</i>), if applicable	R	√			
Informing parents of any action that will be taken if additional hours fees are not paid	R	√			
Reading the St Johns Kindergarten Free Kinder information for families (<i>refer to</i>				√	

Attachment 1), the Statement of Additional Hours Fees and Charges and the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (refer to Attachments 2) if applicable					
Signing and complying with the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (refer to Attachments 2), if applicable				√	
Ensuring any additional hours fees are collected and receipted	R	√			
Notifying the approved provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of additional hours fees				√	
Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to the St John's Kindergarten				√	
Complying with the service's <i>Privacy and Confidentiality Policy</i> regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of additional hours fees	R	√	√	√	
Notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the additional hours fees charged, or the way in which the fees are collected (<i>Regulation 172(2)</i>), ideally providing one term's notice.	R	√			
Implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the approved provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative (refer to Sources)	R	√	√	√	
Informing the approved provider of any		√	√		

complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding additional hours fees at the service					
Referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the approved provider.		√	√		

PROCEDURES



For parents who collect their child late from Kindergarten will be charged a late fee.



BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

The Best Start, Best Life reform will help all Victorian children dream even bigger through increased access to quality early childhood education and care. A critical part of the reform is Free Kinder, which will support access to two years of high-quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children. All families with a child enrolled in a funded kindergarten program are eligible for Free Kinder this includes both 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs.

Free Kinder supports families to access a funded kindergarten program by:

- providing a free 15-hour program to four-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service
- providing a free 5-to-15-hour program to three-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service (subject to the length of funded program offered)
- offsetting the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for three and four-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service

Free kinder supports every Victorian child to get the best start in life no matter where they live. Research shows that play-based learning is a powerful way to support children's learning and development. Two years of early learning is a crucial part of their educational journey, these benefits last into the school years and beyond.

Regulation 168(2) (n) of the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 requires that funded services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. Any voluntary parent donations and/or fundraising must comply with the Free Kinder subsidy guidelines and be responsive to the local community.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- National Quality Standard



DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms e.g. Approved provider, Nominated supervisor, Notifiable complaints, Serious incidents, Duty of care, etc. refer to the Definitions file of the PolicyWorks catalogue.

Children/families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage (in relation to this policy): children are vulnerable if the capacity of parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long-term development and wellbeing is limited. Some factors which may contribute to a child experiencing vulnerability include: a child with a disability; living in a family with a low income, or one which is experiencing problems with housing, domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health; known to child protection; in statutory out-of-home care; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, having a culturally and linguistically diverse background; having a young or sole parent, or a parent with a disability (adapted from the Kindergarten Funding Guide)

Concession: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. This includes one of the following:

- a Commonwealth Health Care Card
- a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card
- a Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card or White Card
- Multiple Births (triplets of more)

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK): provides eligible children with 15 hours of free kindergarten each week led by a qualified Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered teacher. ESK is available to children who are at least three years old by 30 April in the year they are enrolled to attend the program and are:

- from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or
- the family have had contact with child protection.

These children can also access free year-before-school kindergarten through the ESK Extension Grant regardless of whether they have accessed ESK in the previous year.

Early Start Kindergarten extension grants: provides a free or low cost year-before-school kindergarten program for children:

- not eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- who participated in Access to Early Learning in the previous year or are from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or the family have had contact with child protection.
- A child is not required to access ESK in the previous year to access the ESK extension grant.

Free Kinder: A Victorian Government Best Start, Best Life initiative providing Free Kinder programs for four-year-old and three-year-old children in funded services, that have opted into the initiative.

Free Kinder supports families to access a funded kindergarten program by:



- providing a free 15-hour program to 4-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service
- providing a free 5 to 15-hour program to 3-year old children enrolled at a sessional service (subject to the length of funded program offered)
- offsetting the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for 3 and 4-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service.

Funded Kindergarten: The Victorian Government provides funding to support children to access a high-quality kindergarten program in the two years before they start school. The funding is a contribution towards meeting the cost of the kindergarten program. Funded kindergartens charge fees to help meet the cost of running kindergarten programs. Fees are set by individual kindergartens and depend on things like how many hours children attend and whether there are extra costs such as excursions.

High priority children: as defined in the Kindergarten Guide this includes:

- Children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- A child or parent holds a Commonwealth Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card, Veteran's Affairs Card, or multiple birth children (triplets, quadruplets)
- Children with additional needs, defined as children who:
 - with an identified specific disability or developmental delay
 - who require additional assistance to fully participate in the kindergarten program
 - who require a combination of services which are

Kindergarten Registration fee: A payment to cover administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's enrolment application for a place in a program at the service, if applicable. High priority families (*refer to Definitions*) **should not be charged** any fees or levies, unless it is for outside the funded hours

Pre-Prep: Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will gradually transition to Pre-Prep over the next decade from 2025. Funded kindergarten hours will double from 15 to up to 30 hours a week. Pre-Prep will be delivered through sessional kindergartens and long-day-care centres. By 2036, children across Victoria will have access to 1,800 hours of funded kindergarten before school, comprising 600 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and 1,200 hours of Pre-Prep.

Pre-Prep priority cohort: From 2026, between 16 and 25 hours of Pre-Prep will be available to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- children from a refugee or asylum seeker background
- children who have had contact with Child Protection
- children who were supported by Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) or Access to Early Learning (AEL) in their Three-Year-Old Kindergarten year.

Pre-Prep hours for this group of priority cohort children increase to up to 30 hours from **2028**.

Excursion/service event charge: An additional charge required to meet the cost of special events or excursions that occur in response to emerging children's program needs. Events that are planned ahead and are included as an expenditure item in the service's budget do not incur this additional charge (*refer to Excursions and Service Events Policy*).

Fees: A charge for a place within a program at the service.



Kindergarten fee deposit: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service. This is deducted from term fees. This deposit should not act as a barrier for enrolment of vulnerable families

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A state government subsidy paid in addition to per capita grants to subsidise the costs of parent fees and enable eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten for 15 hours free of charge or at low cost (The Kindergarten Funding Guide (*refer to Sources*))

Late collection charge: A charge that may be imposed by the approved provider when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program (*refer to Attachment 1*)

Wrap around care: care that is provided by a kindergarten service to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program. Wrap around care fees are not funded by the Victorian Government but may be covered by CCS (*refer to Definitions*).



SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- Best Start Best Life: <https://www.vic.gov.au/give-your-child-the-best-start-in-life>
- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education): www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: <https://www.vic.gov.au/resources-funded-kindergartens>
- The constitution of St John's Kindergarten

RELATED POLICIES

- Compliments and Complaints
- Delivery and Collection of Children
- Enrolment and Orientation
- Excursions and Service Events
- Governance and Management of the Service
- Inclusion and Equity
- Privacy and Confidentiality

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the approved provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness, particularly in relation to affordability, flexibility of payment options and procedures for the collection of fees
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation and government policy, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk (*Regulation 172 (2)*).

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Free Kinder information for families





- Attachment 2: Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (Late Fee)

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of St Johns Kindergarten in August 2025.

REVIEW DATE: February 2027 (to be reviewed in conjunction with the Enrolment and Orientation Policy)

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDER INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

St Johns Kindergarten [Year]

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free as part of the Best Start, Best Life reform.

Free Kinder provides families with a free program in sessional services and a fee offset in long day care services.

DE also provides funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, Asylum seeker and refugee children and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

Program	Three year old program	Four year old program
Operation hours	[Days and times]	[Days and times]
Term dates	Victoria School dates	Victoria School dates
Planned Closures	Public Holidays (Vic) and School Holidays (Vic)	Public Holidays (Vic) and School Holidays (Vic)

2. What Free Kinder means at our service

St John's Kindergarten has opted into the Free Kinder initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (up to 15 hours per week) – no parent fee
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee

Late collection charge

The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child (*refer to Additional Hours Fee Payments (Late Fee)*).



ATTACHMENT 2. ADDITIONAL HOURS FEE PAYMENT AGREEMENT (LATE FEE)

[Year]

Please complete this form and return to St John's Kindergarten by **[Date]**

Late Fee payment contract

Child's full name:

Parent's/guardian's full name:

- I/we acknowledge that the three-year-old 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) funded kindergarten program is fully funded by the state government, with the balance of additional hours (late fee hours) the responsibility of the parents/guardians.
- I/we acknowledge that the four-year-old 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) funded kindergarten program is fully funded by the state government, with the balance of additional hours (late fee hours) the responsibility of the parents/guardians.
- I/we agree to pay any additional fees for services above the 600 hours by the due date on the invoice.
- I/we acknowledge that the late fee chargers for St John's Kindergarten is \$1 per minute for the first 10 minutes, and \$2 per minute for every minute after the first 10 minutes.
 - Example:
 - 10 minutes late will incur a charge of \$10.
 - 30 minutes late will incur a charge of \$50
- I/we acknowledge that if fees for additional hours (late fees included) are not paid by the due date, the Committee of Management will be notified and a late payment of fees procedures will be implemented.
- I/we agree that if my/our financial circumstances change and I/we am/are unable to pay as agreed, I/we will immediately notify the Director of St John's Kindergarten to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have read the service's Fee Policy, which is available via the St John's website.

Signature (parent/guardian):

Date: