

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES

QUALITY AREA 7 |



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- the application of surplus funding within Gembrook Preschool ensuring it is only used to ensure the quality of program delivery and development of children enrolled in the service
- the setting, payment and collection of (additional hours fees, or long day-care parent fees minus the Free Kindergarten Funding).



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Gembrook Preschool is committed to:

- supporting the Victorian Government’s Free Kindergarten 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 Gembrook Preschool.

| 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 |
|--|--|---|--|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 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 DET’s Free Kindergarten initiative <i>(refer to Definitions)</i> | R | √ | √ | √ | |
| Reimbursing families in full for enrolment deposits that have already been paid upon acceptance of enrolment | R | √ | | | |



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| 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 Funding Guidelines (<i>refer to Sources</i>) | 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 for directly supporting the quality of the teaching and learning in the kindergarten program and/or attendance at the service, including vulnerable children and families not yet enrolled and/or towards the change management required for preparing for three-year-old expansion | 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 | √ | √ | | |
| Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system | R | √ | √ | | |
| Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system | R | √ | √ | | |
| Ensuring that the Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>) | R | √ | | | |
| Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kindergarten (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>) | R | √ | | | |
| Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (<i>refer to Attachments 2</i>) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable | R | √ | | | |
| Providing all parents/guardians with an additional payment fee agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 3</i>), if applicable | R | √ | | | |
| Reading the Gembrook Preschool Free Kindergarten information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>), the Statement of Additional Hours Fees and Charges (<i>refer to Attachments 2</i>), and the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 3</i>) if applicable | | | | √ | |
| Signing and complying with the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 3</i>), if applicable | | | | √ | |
| 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 Gembrook Preschool | | | | √ | |

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| 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 DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (<i>refer to Sources</i>) | R | √ | √ | √ | |
| Informing the approved provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service | | √ | √ | | |
| Referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the approved provider. | | √ | √ | | |

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 Kindergarten, 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 Kindergarten, this includes both 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs.

Free Kindergarten 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 kindergarten 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 Kindergarten 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

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

- Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
- Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au



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.

Approved child care: Approved child care services are services that have Australian Government approval to receive the Child Care Subsidy (*refer to Definitions*) on behalf of eligible parents. Approved child care includes centre-based day care, including long day care and occasional care, family day care, outside school hours care and in-home care.

Child care subsidy (CCS): A Commonwealth Government means tested subsidy to assist eligible families with the cost of child care. Payments are paid directly to approved child care providers. Further information can be found at: www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy

Early Start Kindergarten: A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for up to 15 hours per week. Details are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au. Children that are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) will continue to be enrolled, this ensure that service providers receive all funding entitlements and that these children have access to 15 funded hours of kindergarten across Victoria. ESK enrolments contribute to School Readiness Funding (SRF) calculations for service providers. It also allows the Department to continue to monitor efforts to engage the most vulnerable children in kindergarten across Victoria and provide additional targeted support where required through SRF or Early Childhood LOOKOUT.

Waitlist fee: A fee for when families register their child directly with a service (not part the councils central enrolment scheme). This fee will not be refunded as it is not part of the Free Kindergarten subsidy, and not related to the fee charged for delivery of the kindergarten program.

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 program hours over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 per year) and/or wrap around care.

Free Kindergarten: A Victorian Government initiative providing free kindergarten programs for four-year-old and three-year-old children in funded services

Enrolment deposit: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service. This should not act as a barrier to enrolling for any families. Services must ensure that families understand that the enrolment deposits will only be refunded if the child commences in the service.

Voluntary parent/guardian payment/donation: A voluntary payment/donation for items not directly related to the provision of the children’s program. Explicit and written agreement from a parent is required for any voluntary payments. Attendance at the service is not conditional on this payment.

Wrap around care: care that is provided by a kindergarten service to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program.



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 and Training): www.education.vic.gov.au
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au>
- The constitution of [Service Name]

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
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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)*).
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ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Free Kindergarten information for families
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AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Gembrook Preschool on 9/11/2022.

REVIEW DATE: November 2023

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Gembrook Preschool 2023

1. General information

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

This investment will save families up to \$2,500 for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program.

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

2. What free kindergarten means at our service

Gembrook Preschool has opted in to the Free Kindergarten 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

Gembrook Preschool will reimburse families in full for any kindergarten fee deposit (*refer to Definitions*) payments that have already been made upon acceptance of enrolment, excluding any voluntary parent donations/payments that you agree to in writing.

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Gembrook Preschool are included on the Statement of Fees and Charges, that will be provided to families upon enrolment.

These include:

- **Excursion/service event charge (outside of the 15 hours per week program):** At times throughout the year an additional excursion(s) or event(s) may be arranged where it is considered relevant to the service's program and the children's interests. At this time any additional costs to families are taken into consideration before a decision is made (*refer to Excursions and Service Events Policy*).
- **Late collection charge:** Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by the Committee of Management.

4. Fundraising and voluntary parent payment/donations

While **participation in fundraising/donation is voluntary**, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

5. Subsidies

6. Refund of fees

The enrolment deposit (*refer to Definitions*) will be fully refunded to families only when the child commences at the service. Non-refundable waitlist fees (*refer to Definitions*) paid will be retained.

In any other case, additional hours are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Committee of Management/Board [delete whichever is not applicable]). There will be no refund of these fees in the following circumstances:

- a child's short-term illness
- public holidays
- family holiday during operational times
- closure of the service for one or more days when a qualified educator is absent, and a qualified reliever is not available
- closure of the service for staff training days
- closure of the service due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances.

In addition, there will be no refund where a family chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

7. Support services

Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to family support services. Information on these services may be available from the kindergarten service provider or alternatively families may contact the local council.