



Free Kindergarten Fees Policy

Authorised by:	This policy was adopted by the Ripponlea Kindergarten Committee of Management at a committee meeting
Approved date:	16 May 2024
Review date:	May 2025

This policy should be read alongside the Voluntary Contributions Policy.

Purpose

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- the application of surplus funding (if any) within Ripponlea Kindergarten, ensuring it is only used for quality program delivery and for the development of children enrolled in the service
- how services comply with the Free Kinder initiative

Values

Ripponlea Kindergarten is committed to:

- the rights of all children to be safe and to feel safe at all times, including:
 - promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
 - promoting the cultural safety of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - promoting the safety of children with a disability
 - promoting the safety of trans and gender diverse children and their families in ECEC settings
 - ensuring the LGBTQI+ children and their families feel included and safe
- 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
- Being guided by the ethos of our philosophy statement and Service policies.

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 Ripponlea Kindergarten.

Background and legislation

Background

The Best Start, Best Life reform will help all Victorian children 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.

This initiative supports families to access a funded kindergarten program by:

- contributing to the provision of a 15-hour program to four-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service
- contributing to the provision of a 5-to-15-hour program to three-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service (subject to the length of funded program offered).

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

This policy is informed by the following legislation and standards:

- 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

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: www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide
- The constitution of Ripponlea 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
- Voluntary Contributions

Procedures

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 if the child commences in the service, unless agreed to use for voluntary contributions	R	√			
Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted).	R	√			
Ensuring that families are informed of the operating hours including term dates and planned 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	√			
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 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 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	R	√	√		

entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system					
Ensuring that the Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: <i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kindergarten (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	√			
Reading the Ripponlea Kindergarten Free Kindergarten information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)				√	
Complying with the service's <i>Privacy and Confidentiality Policy</i> regarding financial and other information received	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.		√	√		

Attachments

- Attachment 1: Free Kindergarten information for families

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 on our website.

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.vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten. Children that are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) will continue to be enrolled, this ensures 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.

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.

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*)

Free Kindergarten: 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-yearold 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.

Voluntary parent/guardian payment/donation: A voluntary payment/donation to contribute to providing a quality program. Attendance at the service is not conditional on this payment.

Attachment 1

1. General information

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

At the time of writing, this investment will save families up to \$2,563 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

Ripponlea Kindergarten has opted into the Free Kindergarten initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

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

Ripponlea Kindergarten will reimburse families in full for any kindergarten fee deposit (*refer to Definitions*) payments that have already been made upon commencement of enrolment, excluding any voluntary parent donations/payments that you agree to. If your child does not commence kindergarten in this service after enrolment the enrolment deposit will be forfeited.

3. Other charges

Other charges potentially levied by Ripponlea Kindergarten include:

- **Excursion/service event charge:** 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:** The 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. Refund of enrolment deposit

The enrolment deposit (*refer to Definitions*) will be fully refunded to families only when the child commences at the service and if parents do not want to use it for a voluntary contribution. The enrolment deposit will be forfeited if your child does not commence kindergarten in this service after enrolment.

6. 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.