

# FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES

QUALITY AREA 7 | Version 1



## PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how services comply with the Free Kinder initiative.



## POLICY STATEMENT

### VALUES

Prom Coast Centres for Children 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 Prom Coast Centres for Children.

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	√	√	√	
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	√			
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	√			
Ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service <b>nominate and document</b> 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 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	√			
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  <b>NOTE:</b> parents should 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 payment fee agreement ( <i>refer to Attachments 3</i> ), if applicable	R	√			
Reading the Prom Coast Centres for Children 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				√	

Informing parents of any action that will be taken if fees are not paid	R	√			
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 Prom Coast Centres for Children				√	
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 15-hour program to three-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service
- 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](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au)
- Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: [www.legislation.gov.au](http://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](http://www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy)

**Early Start Kindergarten:** A funding program that provides eligible children 15 hours of free or low cost kindergarten program each week for two years before starting school. To be eligible a child must be 3 by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten and be from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or the family has had contact with child protection. Details are available at: [www.vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten](http://www.vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten) If a child is eligible for ESK, they should be enrolled in ESK, even where Free Kinder and/or 15 hours per week of funded three-year old kindergarten is offered. This ensures eligible children have priority access to 15 hours of funded kindergarten provided by an early childhood teacher and that service providers receive additional funding and support. 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.

**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 extended care.

**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.

**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 2032, 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.

**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.

**Extended care:** care that is provided by sessional kindergarten service at Toora, Fish Creek and Welshpool to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program. Extended care is not eligible for any commonwealth or state funding subsidies. The program is funded by parent fees and is subsidised by Prom Coast Centres for Children.

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## 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](http://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide)
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: [www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide](http://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide)

### 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 Prom Coast Centres for Children on 17<sup>th</sup> of July 2023.

**REVIEW DATE:** December 2023

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## ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Prom Coast Centres for Children 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.

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

Prom Coast Centres for Children 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
- Kindergarten in long day care for 3 and 4-year-old children – parent fee will be reduced by the Free Kindergarten Funding

### 3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Prom Coast Centres for Children 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:** 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. Subsidies

#### 5.1 Child Care Subsidy (CCS): Foster Early Learning

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is an Australian Government subsidy that can assist eligible families with the costs of childcare at an approved child care provider. Prom Coast Centres for Children is an approved care provider.

Approved child care are providers that meet certain standards and requirements, and are approved by the Australian Government. Approved child care providers must:

- hold the required approvals or licences to provide child care in the state or territory that the service/s operate in
- ensure the provider and any individual who is or will be a Person with Management or Control of the Provider is fit and a proper person to administer the CCS (requirements set out in Section 194E of A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999.
- be financially viable and is likely to remain so
- ensure that required fit and proper checks are carried out for each Person with Management or Control of the Provider, Persons with Responsibility for Day-to-Day Operation of the Service and In-Home Foster and Family Day Care Educators

The amount of subsidy received is determined by the circumstances of the applicant's including the family income, the hourly rate cap and the hours of activity undertaken by the parents. Further information for parents can be found here: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/child-care-subsidy>

Long day care providers that offer funded kindergarten as part of the long day care program are required to directly offset the full payment of the Free Kindergarten initiative from parents' out of pocket fees (after CCS is applied). Fee reductions will be made proportionally across the year to families' bills, i.e. fortnightly or monthly. Only children receiving a funded kindergarten place at Foster Early Learning, led by a qualified teacher, are eligible under this initiative.

Exclusions and exceptions: Not available for providers that primarily provide an early educational program to children in the year that is two years before grade one of school (preschool or kindergarten).

## **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.

## **7. Notification of fee changes during the year for extended care**

Fees set for the year would only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if attendance rates fall below the budget 'break even' point. Parents/guardians will be notified one term in advance of any required fee increase and will be offered the option to request a payment plan