KINDERGARTEN PAYMENT OF FEES POLICY

Under the Education and Care Services National Regulations [regulation 162 (2)], the approved provider must ensure a comprehensive written fee policy is in place for the payment of fees and clearly communicate this policy with all families at time of enrolment.

Our Service is committed to supporting the Victorian Government's Free Kindergarten initiative as part of the Best Start, Best Life reform.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

QUALITY AREA 7: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP		
7.1	Governance	Governance supports the operation of a quality service
7.1.2	Management Systems	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service that is child safe
7.1.3	Roles and Responsibilities	Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and understood and support effective decision making and operation of the service

EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL REGULATIONS	
168	Education and care services must have policies and procedures
172	Notification of change to policies and procedures

RELATED LEGISLATION

Child Care Subsidy Secretary's Rules 2017	Family Law Act 1975
A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999	Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (No Jab, No Play) Act 2015
Children, Youth and Families Act 2005	Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (MARAM)
Disability Discrimination Act 1992	Children Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005
Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015	
Family Assistance Law- Incorporating all related legislation for Child Care Provider Handbook in Appendix G https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/child-care-provider-handbook	

RELATED POLICIES

CCS Accounts Policy Child Care Subsidy (CCS) Governance Policy Dealing with Complaints Policy	Kindergarten Enrolment Policy Fraud Prevention Policy Governance Policy Orientation of Families Policy

Delivery of children to, and Collection from Education and Care Service Premises	Privacy and Confidentiality Policy

PURPOSE

This policy provides guidelines for the setting, collection and payment of fees for the range of kindergarten programs and high-quality childcare available at our Service. Information to ensure equitable access for all children is provided within this policy including Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and Child Care Subsidy benefits.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, nominated supervisor and other management, educators, families, and children of the Service.

IMPLEMENTATION

Our Service aims to ensure families understand the fee schedule and how *Free Kinder* funding is applied for our kindergarten programs and payment of fees for additional education and care above the 15-hour funded program.

We are committed to meet our obligations to maintain financial integrity and comply with all *Free Kinder* funding and Child Care Subsidy legislative requirements.

We have effective compliance systems in place to ensure all childcare funding is administered appropriately. Our Service ensures the confidentiality and privacy of all personal information provided to the Service about the enrolled child and family and abide by the Victorian Protective Security Standards (VPSS) and Australian Privacy Principles (APP).

FEES/FREE KINDER

- Fees are based on our ability to provide the requirements of the Education and Care National Law and National Regulations, Family Assistance Law, the Australian Taxation Office and guidelines contained in the Child Care Provider Handbook and the Funded Kindergarten Guide.
- Children must only receive funding for *Free Kinder* at one service. If a child attends more than one service that offers a funded kindergarten program (e.g., a sessional service for some days and a long day care service on other days), the family must nominate which service they will receive their funded kindergarten program and therefore their Free Kinder funding.

Integrated Kindergarten

For Integrated Kindergarten (Wrap around long day care attached), families will receive an annual fee offset of up to $2,101 from the Victorian Government. Families are required to pay $138.00per day for the days they are booked into care. The $2,101 will be divided over the 40 school weeks. For each statement received during the 40 school weeks you will receive a fee offset, written on your statement as 'VIC Free Kinder'. Fees are charged for each session of care and vary depending on the age of the child in care, Free Kinder fee offset and the family's eligibility for Child Care Subsidy (CCS). Free Kinder offsets will not impact CCS payments to families for additional education and care provided by our Service. CCS is paid directly to the Service, and this is used as a fee reduction.

Families are required to pay the difference between the fee charged, *Free Kindy* offset fee and the CCS subsidy amount- the 'gap' amount. A dated receipt will be provided for each payment [via email]. Fees are to be paid weekly through a direct debit system. If families wish to pay fees on a fortnightly or monthly basis, it is a requirement that the family pay in advance and are not in arrears. Fees are payable in for every session that a child is enrolled at the Service. This includes pupil free days, sick days, and family holidays but excludes periods when the Service is closed. The Service may be directed to close due to periods of local emergency such as bushfire or flood. If a session of care falls on a public holiday, families are required to pay normal fees. CCS may be paid for sessions that fall on public holidays.

Fees are charged for full sessions only (regardless of the actual attendance hours any day).

Casual days may be offered to families if available within the Service's license. Our Service promotes participation of all children, particularly among children who require additional support, such as children with disability and Aboriginal children. Free or low-cost programs are available for eligible children through the Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) program.

Sessional Kindergarten

Sessional kindergarten is free for 3 and 4-year-old children who are enrolled in our 15-hour programs. There is no out of pocket fees to be paid. The Victorian Government will make *Free Kinder* payments to our Service, this equates to $2,693 for sessional kindergarten in fees per year for each child and is calculated and paid pro-rata from a child's funding start date.

ENROLMENT FEE PAYMENT

- Children who are enrolled in our 3 and 4-year-old integrated programs will pay an enrolment fee of $150 and is charged upon confirmation of enrolment.
- This fee must be paid prior to commencement at the Service.

- The enrolment fee will be refunded to families if all accounts are paid in full and no amount is outstanding when the child leaves the Service.
- Sessional Kindergarten no enrolment fee is required.
- Enrolment Fee Payment may be waivered for children who are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK), Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS), Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, Siblings at the service, multiple births and health care card.

PAYMENT OF FEES

- Families are required to pay fees using the Service's direct debit system. The family is required to provide banking Details to facilitate set up of the direct debit account
- Free Kinder fee offset will be clearly indicated on parent statements for integrated Children
- Fees and charges associated with direct debit system are outlined upon enrolment
- A dishonour fee will apply for direct debit transactions where there are insufficient funds to cover the fees
- Families will be issued with a *Statement of Entitlement* on a weekly basis in accordance with the fee payment and Regulatory requirements
- The *Statement of Entitlement* will include Details of the sessions of care provided and the resulting fee reduction amounts
- The *Statement of Entitlement* is generated using our CCS Software which meets all requirements as per Family Assistance Law legislation

FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

Our Service is committed to building supportive and trusting partnerships with families and children. Families experiencing financial difficulties are requested notify management. Affordable and Suitable payment plans can be organised. Management can refer families to Emergency relief at Laverton Community Integrated Services.

Beyond financial help, Laverton Community Children's Centre offers fresh produce and packaged goods frequently that is available for families to access when they need. Families are also directly to access the Emergency Relief program offered by Laverton Community Integrated Services.

Eligible families can apply for Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) through Centrelink for additional fee assistance.

EARLY START KINDERGARTEN (ESK)

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) is a grant funded by the Department of Education that provides eligible three-year-old children with 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten each week led by a qualified Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered early childhood teacher.

This grant is available in both integrated and sessional services and a child can be placed in a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program, a mixed age program or four-year-old program in order to access the full 15 hours per week.

To be eligible for ESK, children must be three years old by 30 April in the year that they are attending the kindergarten program and are:

- from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or
- identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or
- the family has had contact with child protection

Notification of a child's eligibility for ESK can be provided to the service verbally or in writing from a parent or by any professional supporting the family, at any time during the year. Once notified, we will support the enrolment in a funded kindergarten program as soon as possible.
Our service can apply for the ESK grant on a family's behalf and the ESK Grant payment will be made directly to our service.
For eligible children enrolled in the integrated three-year-old kindergarten program, we will deduct the funding from the family's out of pocket fees after CCS and/or Additional CCS has been applied, so that the child can access up to 15 hours of kindergarten per week for free.
Our service will also enrol eligible children who attend the sessional three-year-old kindergarten program. This ensures they have priority of access to a funded kindergarten program. It also means that our service can receive additional funding and support from the Department of Education. These children can access 15 hours of funded three-year-old kindergarten for free.
If you think your child is eligible for ESK, please speak with the Centre Manager.
Children who turn three between 1 January and 30 April have the choice of the year they will start school. Parents and carers will need to determine the year their child will start school to work out which year they will access Early Start Kindergarten. The child could attend school in the year they turn five or six. Parents and carers should therefore discuss their child's eligibility and individual child's needs with management before determining which year they access ESK and accessing the Early Start Kindergarten grant.

More information is available via the Department of Education's website at www.vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten.

DEBT RECOVERY PROCEDURE

- If a family fails to pay the required fees on time, a reminder letter will be issued after **one week** and then again, after **two weeks** if the fees are still outstanding.
- At any time of the debt recovery process the family will be encouraged to enter a debt agreement with the service to repay outstanding fees. A written contract will be provided for the family to sign outlining repayment plan Details. The repayment plan will provide information as to the duration and amount of the repayments as well as steps that will be taken if the repayment plan is not adhered to.
- A child's position will be terminated if payment has not been made after **three weeks**, for which the family will receive a final letter terminating the child's position. At this time the Service will initiate its debt collection process, following privacy and conditional requirements.

LATE FEES

- Our Service is not licensed or insured to have children on the premises after hours. This is a breach in the Education and Care Regulations.
- It is unacceptable to pick children up late from the Service. A late fee will apply where children are not picked up prior to closing time.
- Currently, a fee of $15.00 per 10 minutes block or part thereof will be incurred by the family.
- Late fees will not have Child Care Subsidy or Kindergarten Funding applied
- A review of the child's enrolment will occur where families are consistently late with fee payment.

REFUND OF FEES

Refunds will be deposited to families within 2 weeks if they have been over charged, or are leaving the service with a credit.

CHANGE OF FEES

- Fees are subject to change at any time provided a minimum of 14 days written notice is given to all families.
- CCS hourly rate caps may be increased by the CPI at the commencement of each financial year. Any CCS hourly rate increases are governed by CCS and are automatically adjusted through our CCS Software.

COMPLAINTS RELATING TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF CHILD CARE SUBSIDY

Families who wish to raise concerns regarding the management of Child Care Subsidy should speak with the Nominated Supervisor in the first instance. The Nominated Supervisor will follow the steps as outlined in this policy, including advising the Approved Provider of all grievances.

Families can raise concerns regarding management of the Child Care Subsidy to the Department of Education via their Online contact form. Additionally, information about any potential breach of Child Care Subsidy can be reported anonymously by submitting an online report directly to the Department of Education. For more information visit the Department of Education website: Reporting fraud via a tip-off.

Any misuse or misappropriation of funds will be reported to Victoria Police and a serious incident report will be filed to the Department of Education.

TERMINATION OF ENROLMENT

- Parents are to provide two weeks written notice of their intention to withdraw a child from the Service.
- If termination from the Service is required without notification, families may lose their Child Care Subsidy, resulting in the payment of requirement for full fees to be charged.
- If a child moves to another service during the kindergarten year, funding from Free Kinder will more with the child, with regular payments made to the new service for the remainder of the year.
- In some circumstances CCS may not be paid for sessions if the child has not physically started care.
- Additionally, CCS may not be paid for absences submitted after a child's last physical day of care, unless conditions have been met as specified by Family Assistance Law.

RESPONSIBILITY OF MANAGEMENT

THE APPROVED PROVIDER AND NOMINATED SUPERVISOR WILL:

- provide all families with access to our *Kindergarten Payment of Fees Policy*
- provide information to families of operating hours including term dates, planned closures and additional hours to account for closure [related to funded kindergarten programs]
- review this policy annually and in consultation with families/staff and other stakeholders
- ensure families are aware of payment options and procedures
- directly offset the full Free Kinder payment from the fees of parents with children receiving their funded kindergarten program at the service

- provide families with a parent invoice statement regularly (weekly) that clearly indicates the offset amount (labelled Vic Free Kinder)
- ensure families are not charged for incursions or regular excursions (e.g.; Bush Kinder)
- ensure families are notified of any additional charges – excursions/incursions in writing
- ensure any surplus funding is used to improve the quality of our funded kindergarten program and support engagement of families
- ensure that any funded child is recorded in ARRIVAL
- notify families of any overdue fees
- discuss fee payment with families if required
- provide families with reminder letters as required
- provide at least 14 days written notice to families of any proposed fee increases or the way in which fees are collected via email.
- adhere to the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information
- share or request information with other Information Sharing Entities (ISEs) under legislative principles of Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) or Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS)
- ensure any person with management or control and any person responsible for the day-to-day operation of the service are fit and proper persons to be involved in the administration of Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy (Family Assistance Law)
- ensure background checks, including criminal history checks are carried out for any personnel administering Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy (Family Assistance Law)

EDUCATORS AND OTHER STAFF WILL:

- read and adhere to the *Kindergarten Payment of Fees Policy*
- advise the Nominated Supervisor or management of any concerns or complaints regarding the management of Child Care Subsidy or kindergarten funding subsidy or grants raised by families

RESPONSIBILITY OF FAMILIES

- read and adhere to the *Kindergarten Payment of Fees Policy*
- provide the Service with the correct enrolment details to facilitate the *Free Kinder Funding* and Child Care Subsidy (CCS), if required, including:
    - Centrelink Reference Numbers for child and CCS claimant
    - Date of Birth for child and CCS claimant
- provide proof of their child's immunisation status as per No Jab No Play legislation
- nominate and document which service their child will participate in to receive Free Kinder funding

- ensure payment of additional fees as per policy
- notify the approved provider/nominated supervisor if experiencing any payment difficulties
- notify Centrelink of any changes that may affect their CCS entitlement
- confirm their child's enrolment through the parents myGov account.

MONITORING, REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF POLICY

- Ongoing review and evaluation of this policy will support the continuing development of the Service.
- Evaluation will involve all stakeholders
- The policy will be reviewed to reflect compliance with all related legislation, research and best practice.
- The development of a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) will form part of the reflection procedure.

DEFINITIONS

Child Care Subsidy	A Commonwealth Government means tested subsidy to assist families with childcare fees at approved education and care services. Payment is made directly to approved childcare providers. Eligible families can receive CCS under Family Assistance Law. [Child Care Subsidy]
Early Start Kindergarten	Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) is a grant funded by the Department of Education that provides eligible three-year-old children with 15 hours of free or low cost kindergarten each week led by a qualified Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered early childhood teacher.
Enrolment fee	This fee is charged only to Integrated Kindergarten children. It is a once of fee that is refunded when the child leaves the service. Sessional kindergarten children do not pay an enrolment fee.
Excursion/event fee	An additional fee charged to cover the costs for participation in a planned excursion where fees are required to cover transportation, entry fees or other related costs. (See: Excursion/Incursion Policy)
Fees	Fees charged for program hours over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 per year).
Free Kindergarten	Free Kinder is an initiative by the Victorian Government to support families access up to 15 hours of free kindergarten for three-year-old and four-year-old children in a funded service.

Statement of entitlement	A statement provided to parents eligible for CCS each fortnight DEailing sessions of care provided and the resulting fee reduction amounts, including the Free Kinder offset fees.

SOURCE

Australian Government Department of Education. Child Care Provider Handbook Child Care Provider Handbook
Australian Government Services Australia. (2024). Child Care Subsidy.
Department of Education. (2023). *The Kindergarten Funding Guide*.
Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. (Amended 2023).
Education and Care Services National Regulations. (2011). (Amended 2023).

REVIEW

POLICY CREATED BY:	Krystle Hills	Centre Manager	15/03/2026
POLICY REVIEWED	March 2026	NEXT REVIEW DATE	March 2027
MODIFICATIONS	• annual policy maintenance • sources checked and repaired as required		
POLICY REVIEWED	PREVIOUS MODIFICATIONS		NEXT REVIEW DATE
August 2024	• Added Integrated and sessional headings under free kinder/fees. Clarified the information under those headings. • Removed Enrolment application fee and kindergarten fee deposit from the definitions. • Changed the definition of Enrolment fee • Added enrolment fee waivers for ACCS, Aboriginal and/or Torres strait islanders, siblings at the service, multiple births and health care card • Updated the ESK definition and added an ESK section with further explanation.		August 2025
January 2024	• Policy re-written to adhere to *Free Kinder* funding guidelines (2023) • hyperlinks checked		January 2025