

FEES - FREE KINDER

QUALITY AREA 7 | ELAA VERSION 1.1



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how services comply with the Free Kinder initiative.



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Denzil Don 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(ren)
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/carers.

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/carers attending Denzil Don 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
R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted					
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/carers, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE’s Free Kinder initiative (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	R	√	√	√	
Ensuring 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 After Kinder Care (AKC) hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) (<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 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 family 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 <i>Fees-Free Kinder Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/carers 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 (<i>refer to Attachments 2</i>) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable.	R	√			
Providing all parents/carers with an additional fee payment fee agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 3</i>), if applicable	R	√			
Informing parents of any action that will be taken if fees are not paid	R	√			
Reading the Denzil Don Kindergarten Free Kinder 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				√	

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 Denzil Don 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/carers 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/carers, the approved provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder 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		√	√		

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 Kindergarten, 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).

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

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 refer to the Definitions file of the kindergarten website.

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK): funding to provide eligible children 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten per week for two years before starting school. To be eligible a child must turn three 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 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 3-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.

Waitlist Registration fee: a fee charged to place your child on the kindergarten waitlist. This fee is non-refundable and is not part of the Free Kinder subsidy.

After Kinder Care fee: a charge for program hours over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 per year).

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).

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. The Free Kinder initiative subsidises the fees normally charged to families of children attending a funded kindergarten program.

Pre-Prep: 4-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 childcare centres. By 2032, children across Victoria will have access to 1,800 hours of funded kindergarten before school, comprising 600 hours of 3-year-old Kindergarten and 1,200 hours of Pre-Prep.

Voluntary family 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.

After Kinder Care (AKC): care that is provided by a kindergarten service to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program. AKC is not funded by the Victorian Government or the childcare subsidy (*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: www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide
- The constitution of Denzil Don 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

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.
-

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Denzil Don Kindergarten on 21/08/2023.

REVIEW DATE: 21 / AUGUST / 2025



ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDER INFORMATION FOR 2024 FAMILIES

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for 4-year-old and eligible 3-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.

DE also provides funding to assist eligible 3-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

2. What Free Kinder means at our service

Denzil Don Kindergarten has opted into the Free Kinder initiative. Applicable family fees are as follows:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (up to 15 hours per week) – NO FEE
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - NO FEE

3. After Kinder Care (AKC)

Denzil Don Kindergarten offers After Kinder Care (AKC) to support families requiring longer hours for their child. AKC fees are charged to all families accessing this service. AKC is offered after all but one kindergarten session (Monday after Orange Group) until 5:30 pm.

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. Payment of fees for After Kinder Care (AKC)

AKC fees will be invoiced to families directly and must be paid by the date on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions. Permanent AKC fees (termly bookings) must be received in full prior to the first session of the term.

6. Unpaid fees for After Kinder Care (AKC)

If fees are not paid by the due date, the following steps will be taken.

- An automatic reminder will be sent to families as follows; one day late, three days late.
- Where payment is still not received, the centre coordinator will email the family requesting payment to be made as soon as possible.
- Continued non-payment may result in a phone or in-person meeting with the centre coordinator. If this meeting does not result in invoice payment, the matter will be escalated to the Committee of Management.
- The Committee of Management reserves the right to employ the services of a debt collector.
- If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the parents/carers will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing.
- No further enrolments from the family will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

7. Refund of fees

After Kinder Care (AKC) fees are non-refundable. This means there will be no refund of 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.