

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES

QUALITY AREA 7 | ELAA version 1.0



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- the application of surplus funding within Denzil Don Kindergarten 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 After Kinder Care (AKC) fees.



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Denzil Don Kindergarten 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 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/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 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 After Kinder Care (AKC), and optional kindergarten programs outside of the 15 funded hours per week (<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 will receive funding (ie: the service where the child attends a kindergarten program)	R	√		√	
Ensuring any surplus funding is used to support the quality of 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 3-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 Denzil Don Kindergarten 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 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/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the additional hours fees charged, or the	R	√			

way in which the fees are collected (<i>Regulation 172(2)</i>), ideally providing one term's notice.					
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)

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 on the kindergarten website.

After Kinder Care (AKC) Fees: a fee for accessing the AKC program. AKC is offered to support families requiring extended hours for their child(ren). All families accessing AKC will be invoiced for their child's attendance. Children collected late from their regular kindergarten session will be signed into AKC and invoiced for this time (minimum of 1 hour at the casual rate + \$10 late fee).

Early Start Kindergarten: a funding program that enables 3-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 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.

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

Merchant Fee: 2.2% processing fee charged by credit card providers. The merchant fee is passed on to families.

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.

Waitlist registration fee: a fee charged to place your child on the waitlist for a place in either the 3yo or 4yo program. This fee is non-refundable and is not part of the Free Kindergarten funding.

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



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 Kindergarten information for families
- Attachment 2: Statement of After Kinder Care (AKC) fees



AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Denzil Don Kindergarten on 19/10/2023.

REVIEW DATE: 19 / OCTOBER / 2024

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Denzil Don Kindergarten 2023

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.

DET 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 kindergarten means at our service

Denzil Don Kindergarten has opted into 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 FEE
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - NO FEE

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Denzil Don Kindergarten 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):** 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 approved provider and Committee of Management reserves the right to implement an After Kinder Care (AKC) fee when parents/guardians are late in collecting their child from the service (one reminder will be given but subsequent late pickups will result in the child being signed in to AKC and fees being charged at a minimum of 1 hour).

4. After Kinder Care (AKC) fees

Denzil Don Kindergarten offers extended hours for families requiring additional care for their child(ren). All families choosing to access AKC will be invoiced for their child's attendance, either casually or permanently, depending on the booking type. Children collected late from their regular kindergarten session will be signed into AKC and invoiced for this time (minimum of 1 hour at the casual rate).

5. 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.

6. Payment of fees for After Kinder Care (AKC)

After Kind Care (AKC) is not part of the Free Kindergarten initiative and therefore fees are payable.

Fees will be invoiced to parents/guardians directly and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will include payment instructions.

7. Unpaid fees for After Kinder Care (AKC)

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

- An automated reminder will be sent to parents/guardians at plus one day, plus three days and plus five days.
- Where payment is still not received, families will be emailed and asked when the invoice will be settled.
- Where payment is still not received, families will be phoned and asked when the invoice will be settled, or to establish a payment plan with agreed terms including due date.

- Continued non-payment may result in an email notifying parents/guardians that the child's place at the service may be withdrawn unless payment is made, or a payment plan is entered into within a specified period of time. This letter will also include information on a range of support options available.
- The approved provider/Committee of Management will continue to offer support and will reserve 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/guardians will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing.
- No further enrolments of children from the parents/guardians will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

8. Notification of fee changes during the year for After Kinder Care (AKC)

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.

ATTACHMENT 2. STATEMENT OF AFTER KINDER CARE (AKC) FEES

	Hourly rate	Hourly rate including 2.2% merchant fee
Permanent (termly, paid in advance)	\$20.00	\$20.45
Casual (ad-hoc, invoiced after access)	\$26.00	\$26.60

Payment of fees

Invoices must be paid by the due date on the invoice. All credit/debit card payments will incur a 2.2% merchant fee.

After Kind Care (AKC) late fee

Children collected late from their AKC session will be invoiced for the additional time at the casual rate (\$26/ hour), at a minimum of one hour.

If a child is not collected by 5:30pm, a late collection fee of \$20/ 10 minutes or part thereof will be invoiced.

After Kind Care (AKC) fee for late collection of children from their 3yo or 4yo program

Children collected late from their sessional 3yo or 4yo kindergarten program will be signed in to After Kinder Care (AKC). Families will be invoiced a minimum of one hour at the casual rate PLUS a \$10 administration fee.

One grace reminder will be given to families that are no more than ten minutes late.