

Fees Policy – Funded (Free) & Unfunded Kinder

QA7 (Mandatory)



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- the application of surplus funding (if any) within Estrella Preschool 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 fees for unfunded kindergarten enrolments.



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Estrella Preschool 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 Estrella Preschool.

RESPONSIBILITIES

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 any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Funding Guidelines (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	√			
Setting and collection of fees for non-funded enrolments.	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 (if any) 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 Fees Policy - Funded (Free) and Unfunded Kinder 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 Unfunded Kindergarten Fees (<i>refer to Attachments 2</i>) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable	R	√			

Reading the Estrella Preschool Funded Free Kindergarten Information or Families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>) and the Statement of Unfunded Kindergarten Fees (<i>refer to Attachments 2</i>)				√	
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 Estrella Preschool				√	
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 fees	R	√	√	√	
Notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the Unfunded Kindergarten Fees 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 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 of the PolicyWorks catalogue.

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.education.vic.gov.au. Children that are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) will continue to be enrolled, this ensure 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.

Excursion/service event charge: An additional charge required to meet the cost of occasional special events or excursions (*refer to Excursions and Service Events Policy*).

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

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.

Unfunded kindergarten fees: a charge that is applicable where a parent/guardian nominates to access their child's funded kindergarten at another service (eg long daycare).

Voluntary parent/guardian contribution/donation: A voluntary contribution/donation for items not directly related to the provision of the children's program. Explicit agreement from a parent is required for any voluntary payments. Attendance at the service is not conditional on this payment.

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 Estrella Preschool

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

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)*).



ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Funded Free Kindergarten Information for Families
- Attachment 2: Statement of Unfunded Kindergarten Fees



AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Estrella Preschool in November 2022.

REVIEW DATE: July 2023

ATTACHMENT 1. FUNDED FREE KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Estrella Preschool 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.

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 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

Estrella Preschool has opted into the Free Kindergarten initiative. Therefore, no compulsory parent fees apply to either our 3 or 4-year-old funded sessional kindergarten programs.

The additional funding provided by the Free Kinder initiative is significantly lower than the 2023 fees proposed by our Committee of Management prior to the introduction of Free Kinder. The Committee of Management hopes to cover this gap in funding through the introduction of Voluntary Parent Contributions.

3. Voluntary Parent/Guardian Contribution

The cost of running Estrella Preschool's high quality education programs is significantly higher than the funding provided by the Victorian Government's Free Kinder initiative. In order to cover this gap, Estrella Preschool is requesting families make a voluntary contribution towards the operating costs of the kindergarten. Contributions can be made upfront at the start of the year, or quarterly at the start of each term. To encourage upfront contributions, Estrella Preschool is asking families for a reduced amount if they make their contribution prior to the start of Term 1.

2023 voluntary contributions are:

3-year-olds: \$220 per term (or \$830 for the full year if paid prior to the start of Term 1)

4-year-olds: \$280 per term (or \$1,070 for the full year if paid prior to the start of Term 1)

All contributions are voluntary and confidential, and no child will be individually disadvantaged by the service if a contribution is not made.

4. Other charges

Other charges levied by Estrella Preschool are:

- **Excursion/service event charge:** At times throughout the year an 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/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. At the discretion of the Committee of Management, a late pickup fee will be incurred by parents/guardians when children are not collected within 15 minutes of the end of the session. From this time the fee will be charged at a rate of \$1 per minute, with a minimum charge of \$15.

5. Fundraising /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.

ATTACHMENT 2. STATEMENT OF UNFUNDED KINDERGARTEN FEES

Estrella Preschool 2023



	3-Year-Olds (Red Group)	4-Year-Olds (Blue, Yellow & Green Groups)
Term 1	\$1,290	\$1,935
Term 2	\$1,290	\$1,935
Term 3	\$1,290	\$1,935
Term 4	\$1,290	\$1,935
Total	\$5,160	\$7,740

1. Payment of fees

Fees will be invoiced to parents/guardians directly and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions. All fees must be received in full prior by the due date on the invoice. For children enrolled after the commencement of a term, a pro rata invoice will be issued and must be paid in full within 7 days of the child's commencement at the service.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Treasurer to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* of the service will be complied with at all times in relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances.

2. Refund of fees

All fee payments are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Committee of Management). There will be no refund of these 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.

In addition, there will be no refund where a family chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

3. 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.

4. Notification of fee changes during the year

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.

5. Late Collection Charge

The approved provider/Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child. At the discretion of the Committee of

Management, a late pickup fee will be incurred by parents/guardians when children are not collected within 15 minutes of the end of the session. From this time the fee will be charged at a rate of \$1 per minute, with a minimum charge of \$15.

6. Unpaid fees

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

- An initial reminder email will be sent to parents/guardians with a specified payment date, and will include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- Where payment is still not received, families will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan.
- Failure to attend the meeting and continued non-payment may result in a second and final 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 email will also include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- 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.