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| Policy Title | Fees - Free Kindergarten |
| Quality Area | 7 - Governance |
| Category | Mandatory |

FEES – FREE KINDERGARTEN



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Thornbury 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/carers.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, staff, parents/carers attending Thornbury Kindergarten.

| RESPONSIBILITIES | Approved provider and persons with management or | Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge | Staff | Parents/carers | 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 the Department of Education (DE)’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 | √ | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 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 | √ | | | |
| Providing communication to families explaining their access to one year of three-year-old kindergarten and one year of four-year-old pre-prep program | 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 (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>) | 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 children and families experiencing vulnerability not yet enrolled and/or towards the change management required for preparing for Pre-Prep expansion | R | √ | | | |
| Ensuring any voluntary parent/carer 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 who 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/carers with information about Free Kindergarten (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>) | R | √ | | | |
| Reading the Thornbury Kindergarten Free Kindergarten information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>) | | | | √ | |
| Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to Thornbury Kindergarten (<i>refer to Attachment 1 and 2</i>) | | | | √ | |
| 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 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 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'/carers' 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 (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/carer 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 (ESK): 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 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 and Administration of First Aid Policy*)

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)

High priority families: Families with children who are at risk of abuse or neglect, including Out-of-Home Care; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; Asylum seeker or refugee; eligible for Kindergarten Fee Subsidy; and children with additional needs. Details are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au.

Late collection charge: The Committee of Management/Board reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/carers are frequently late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by the Committee of Management (*refer to Attachment 2*).

Voluntary parent/carer 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.

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/resources-funded-kindergartens
- The constitution of Thornbury 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
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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.
 - 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
 - Attachment 2: Statement of Fees and Charges
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AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Thornbury Kindergarten on 17th September 2024.

REVIEW DATE: 17/09/2025

ATTACHMENT 1: FREE KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Thornbury Kindergarten

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for three-year-old children and Pre-Prep for four-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free as part of the Best Start, Best Life reform.

Free Kinder provides families with a free program in sessional services and a fee offset in long day care services.

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

2. What free kindergarten means at our service.

Thornbury Kindergarten has opted into the Victorian Government's Free Kindergarten initiative. This means there are no mandatory term fees or additional costs for any child:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for Three-year-old children (15 hours per week) – no parent fee.
- Funded sessional kindergarten for Four-year-old children (15 hours per week) – no parent fee.

Your child can only be funded for a kindergarten program place at one service at any one time and only for one year in a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program and one year in a Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program (unless your child is assessed as being eligible for a second year of Four-Year-Old Kindergarten by your child's kindergarten teacher). There is no longer a grace period and any withdrawal from the funded program will have an impact on the child's eligibility to claim funding the following year.

In 2025, your child is enrolled to attend a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten/Four-Year-Old Pre-Prep program at Thornbury Kindergarten. We can only claim kindergarten funding including Free Kinder payments for your child if this is the only Victorian Government funded kindergarten program they are enrolled in.

If your child will be attending another service that offers a Victorian Government funded kindergarten program, including a long day care service, you must tell that service that you are receiving a funded kindergarten place at our service.

3. One Funded Kindergarten Place Form for Families

Before the beginning of the kindergarten year, Thornbury Kindergarten will email families a copy of the DE One Funded Kindergarten Place Declaration (example form attached below) to complete. Families will be required to sign and return this form to us to confirm their child is receiving their funded kindergarten program at Thornbury Kindergarten. We are required, by the Department of Education, to keep a copy of this signed form on your child's record.

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.

Thornbury Kindergarten accepts and welcomes donations from families and community members. These donations contribute towards the enrichment of our community through the education of our children, which focuses on nature-based learning, resilience, connection, and emotional health. Any money donated will go towards expenses such as educational resources, maintenance, staff development and programming.

5. 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.

Funded kindergarten place declaration

The Victorian Government provides funding to kindergarten and long day care services to deliver high-quality kindergarten programs in the two years before school. This helps to ensure all Victorian children get the best start in life.

The Victorian Government also provides Free Kinder funding to your service so that you don't have to pay fees. This means that you will receive a free kindergarten program up to 15 hours per week, and even more in a Pre-Prep program.

Your child can access one funded year in a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program (between 5 and 15 hours per week) and one year in a Four-Year-Old Kindergarten / Pre-Prep program (15 hours per week).

Your child can only access one funded kindergarten program at a time. This means that only one service can claim kindergarten funding for your child so you can receive a Free Kinder program. If you accept a funded kindergarten place at more than one service and both services receive funding, you may be required to repay the funding and may lose your child's place in one program.

Please complete the form below and return it to your service to let them know where you are claiming your child's one funded kindergarten place in 2025.

In 2025, which program will your child be accessing?

- Three-Year-Old Kindergarten (they will start primary school in 2027)
- Four-Year-Old Kindergarten / Pre-Prep (they will start primary school in 2028)

Will your child attend any other kindergarten or long day care services in 2025?

- No, my child will only attend this service
- Yes, my child will also attend another service

Parent/Carer/Guardian declaration

Your child can only access kindergarten funding at one service at a time. Will your child access their funded kindergarten program at this service?

- Yes, my child will access the funded program at this service.**
- I confirm that my child will not accept a funded kindergarten place at any other kindergarten or long day care service.
 - I understand that if I accept a funded kindergarten place at more than one service, I may be required to repay the funding and may lose my child's place in the kindergarten program.
- No, my child will access a funded program somewhere else.**
- If my child attends any other long day care or kindergarten service, I will let them know where my child is receiving their funded kindergarten place.

Date:

Signature:

Child name:

Parent/carers/guardian name:

Once completed, please return this form to your service as soon as possible.

Thornbury Kindergarten

Late collection charge

Parents are requested to contact the kindergarten if they are going to be late collecting their child at the end of a session. If a child has not been collected two staff members will be present at all times. After the first 15 minutes a staff member will try and contact the parents/carers. If they cannot be contacted, the emergency contacts will be called to arrange collection. A late fine will be imposed after the first 15 minutes at the rate of \$5.00 every five minutes. For example, if 20 minutes late expect to pay \$20.00, which includes the first 15 minutes. This fine is used to cover the cost of staff wages. Parents will also be required to fill out a late Pick Up form, which will outline the fine incurred.



8C Newcastle Street, Thornbury, Victoria 3071
 03 9484 1095
www.thornburykindergarten.com.au
 ABN: 72 182 315 364
 ACN: A0005285L

Late Pick Up Form

Day & Date: _____
 Child's Name: _____
 Kinder Group: _____
 Teacher's Name: _____

In regards to late pick-ups, Thornbury Kindergarten Fees Policy states:

Parents are requested to contact the kindergarten if they are going to be late collecting their child. If a child has not been collected two staff members will be present at all times. After the first 15 minutes a staff member will try and contact the parents/guardians. If they cannot be contacted, the emergency contacts will be called to arrange collection.

A late fine will be imposed after the first 15 minutes at the rate of \$5.00 every five minutes. For example, if 20 minutes late expect to pay \$20.00, which includes the first 15 minutes. This fine is used to cover the cost of staff wages. Parents will also be required to fill out a late Pick Up form, which will outline the fine incurred.

Today, your child was collected at _____ (time) which is _____ minutes late.

You are required to pay:

- \$20 15-20 mins late
- \$25 20-25 mins late
- \$30 25-30 mins late
- Later than 30 mins _____ mins late x \$1 per minute rounded to the closest \$5.00

\$ _____ is the total payable

| Amount payable | Paid in Cash | Invoice Required | Parent/Carer Sign | Teacher Sign |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | | | | |