



Policy Title	Free Kindergarten Fees
Quality Area	7 – Governance
Category	Mandatory

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- the application of surplus funding within Thornbury Kindergarten ensuring it is only used to ensure the quality of program delivery and development of children enrolled in the service



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 control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other 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 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	√			
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 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/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>) if applicable				√	
Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to the Thornbury 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 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 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.

Administration Fee: A payment to cover administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's enrolment application for a place in a program at the service, if applicable. High priority families (*refer to Definitions*) **should not be charged** any fees or levies, unless it is for outside the funded hours.

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 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.

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*)

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

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.

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 and Training): www.education.vic.gov.au
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au>
- 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

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)*).



ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Free Kindergarten information for families



AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Thornbury Kindergarten on 10 November 2023.

REVIEW DATE: 10 November 2024

ATTACHMENT 1: FREE KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Thornbury Kindergarten 2024

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.

DE 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.

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 (up to 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).

In 2024, your child is enrolled to attend a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten/Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program at Thornbury. 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 2024 kindergarten year, Thornbury Kindergarten will email families a copy of the DE One Funded Kindergarten Place Declaration to complete. Families will be required to sign and return this form to us to confirm their child is receiving their funded kindergarten program in 2024 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.