

Policy Title	Fees
Quality Area	7
Category	Mandatory

FEES



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

• how services comply with the Free Kinder initiative.



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Thornbury 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/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.

with management or control Approved provider and persons persons in day-to-day charge Nominated supervisor and Parents/carers students Contractors, volunteers and RESPONSIBILITIES **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 R requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative (refer to Definitions) 2. Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for the payment of fees and the provision of a $\sqrt{}$ R statement of fees charged by the service (Regulation 168), and take reasonable steps to ensure those

	policies and procedures are followed (Regulation 170)					
3.	Ensuring that families are informed of the operating hours including term dates, planned closures and additional hours to account for closures.	R	V			
4.	Ensuring families are informed of the total annual fee amount, including any applicable fees for e.g. excursions and any additional hours	R	V			
5.	Ensuring families are only charged for optional kindergarten programs hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) (refer to Definitions)	R	٧			
6.	Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted) (refer to Attachment 4)	R	V			
7.	Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guidelines (refer to Sources)	R	V			
8.	Providing communication to families explaining their access to one year of three-year-old and one year of Pre-Prep program	R	V			
9.	Ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten/pre prep and a long day care service nominate and document which service the child will participate in the funded kindergarten/pre prep program	R	V		V	
10.	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	V			
11.	Ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted	R	V			
12.	Charging families only for an occasional special event/ excursions that occur outside the normal program/curriculum	R	V	V		
13.	Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system	R	V	V		
14.	Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system	R	V	V		
15.	Ensuring that the Fees – Pre-Prep Policy is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)	R	V			
16.	Providing all parents/carers with information about Free Kinder (refer to Attachment 1)	R	V			

17.	Providing all parents/carers with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (refer to Attachment 2) upon enrolment of their child	R	V			
18.	Providing all parents/carers enrolled in additional hours with an additional hours payment fee agreement (refer to Attachment 3)	R	V			
19.	Informing parents of any action that will be taken if additional hours fees are not paid <i>(refer to Attachment 3)</i>	R	V			
20.	Reading the Thornbury Kindergarten Free Kinder information for families (refer to Attachment 1), the Statement of Additional Hours Fees and Charges (refer to Attachment 2), and the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (refer to Attachment 3)				√	
21.	Signing and complying with the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (refer to Attachment 3)				V	
22.	Ensuring any additional hours fees are collected and receipted	R	√			
23.	Notifying the approved provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of additional hours fees				V	
24.	Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to the Thornbury Kindergarten				V	
25.	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	V	V	V	
26.	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 (Regulation 172(2)), ideally providing one term's notice.	R	V			
27.	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 (refer to Sources)	R	V	V	V	
28.	Informing the approved provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding additional hours fees at the service		V	V		
29.	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 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 Kinder this includes both 3 old kindergarten and Pre-Prep.

Free Kinder supports families to access a funded kindergarten program by:

- providing up to free 30-hours of Pre-Prep 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: <u>www.legislation.gov.au</u>



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.

Additional Hours: care that is provided by a kindergarten service to 3-year-old kindergarten children, and those 4-year-old children not in the DE eligible cohort, outside of the 15 hours per week program.

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 by 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.

Waitlist fee: A fee for when families register their child directly with a service (not part the councils central enrolment scheme). This fee will not be refunded as it is not part of the Free Kinder subsidy, and not related to the fee charged for delivery of the kindergarten program.

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)

Fees: A charge for program hours over and above the 15 funded hours of 3-year-old kindergarten per week (600 per year) and/or wrap around care.

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 up to 30 hours of free Pre-Prep for eligible children from priority cohorts in the year before school
- 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. Funded kindergartens charge fees to help meet the cost of running kindergarten programs. Fees are set by individual kindergartens and depend on things like how many hours children attend and whether there are extra costs such as excursions.

Pre-Prep: Four-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 long-day-care centres. By 2036, children across Victoria will have access to 1,800 hours of funded kindergarten before school, comprising 600 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and 1,200 hours of Pre-Prep.

Pre-Prep priority cohort: From 2026, between 16 and 25 hours of Pre-Prep will be available to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- children from a refugee or asylum seeker background
- children who have had contact with Child Protection
- children who were supported by Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) or Access to Early Learning (AEL) in their Three-Year-Old Kindergarten year.

Pre-Prep hours for this group of priority cohort children increase to up to 30 hours from 2028...

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.

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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): <u>www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide</u>
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: https://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

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: Free Kinder information for families
- Attachment 2: Statement of additional hours fees
- Attachment 3: Additional hours fee payment agreement
- Attachment 4: Voluntary contributions family letter

AUTHORISATION



This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Thornbury Kindergarten on 22nd November 2025.

REVIEW DATE: 22/11/2025.

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDER 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 Kinder means at our service

Thornbury Kindergarten has opted in to the Free Kinder initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (up to 15 hours per week) no parent fee
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (up to 15 hours per week, and up to 26 hours for children from priority cohorts) - no parent fee

Thornbury Kindergarten will reimburse families in full for any kindergarten/Pre-Prep fee deposit (*refer to Definitions*) payments that have already been made upon acceptance of enrolment, excluding any voluntary parent donations/payments that you agree to in writing.

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 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.

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 this attachment) 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. Other charges

Other charges levied by Thornbury Kindergarten are included on the Statement of Fees and Charges, that will be provided to families upon enrolment.

These include:

- Excursion/service event charge: At times 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 Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a 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 collection charge 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 charge incurred.

5. Additional Hours Fees

Thornbury Kindergarten offers families 7.5 hours above the set 15 hours of kindergarten per week (600 hours per year). The service will introduce an Additional Hours Fee for any hours used beyond the set 15 hours as determined by the program's operational costs

Families have the option of only enrolling for 15 hours of kindergarten and being charged no additional fees.

6. 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.

7. Payment of fees for additional hours

Fees are payable for hours over and above 15 hours of kindergarten per week (600 hours per year).

The Committee of Management will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Fees will be invoiced to parents/carers directly and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions. The first term's fees must be received in full prior to the child commencement of additional hours. For children enrolled after the commencement of a term, a pro rata invoice will be issued and must be paid in full prior to the commencement of the additional hours. Receipts will be provided for all fee payments.

8. Unpaid fees for additional hours

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

- o An initial reminder letter will be sent to parents/carers with a specified payment date.
- Where payment is still not received, families will be informed of the cancellation of the additional hours place.
- Failure to respond to payment request will result in the family receiving notification of cancellation of the additional hours place.
- The 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 in the additional hours group, the parents/carers will be informed immediately.
- No further enrolments of children in the additional hours group from the parents/carers will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

9. Refund of fees

Additional hours 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:

- o a child's short-term illness
- o 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.

10. 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.

11. Notification of fee changes during the year for additional hours

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/carers will be notified one term in advance of any required fee increase.



Funded kindergarten place declaration

Your child can only access a funded kindergarten program and Free Kinder at one service. If you accept a funded kindergarten place at more than one service, you may be required to repay the funding and could lose your child's place in one program.

Please complete the form below and return it to your service. This will confirm where you are claiming your child's funded kindergarten place in 2026.

1.	. Which kindergarten program will your child attend in 2026?			
	☐ Three-Year-Old Kindergarten (they will start school in 2028)			
	☐ Four-Year-Old Kindergarten / Pre-Prep (they will start school in 2027)			
	☐ My child will not be attending kindergarten in 2026 (Sklp sections 2–4 and go straight to section 5			
2.	2. Will your child be attending any other kindergarten or long day care service in 2026?			
	☐ Yes, my child will also attend another s	service		
	□ No, my child will only attend this service	é		
3.	Will your child be receiving their funder Your child can only get kindergarten funder			
	☐ Yes, my child will receive their funde	d kindergarten program at		
	(nominated service name)			
	I confirm that my child will not accept a funded kindergarten place at any other 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 receive their funded kindergarten program at another service.			
4.	Privacy acknowledgement			
	☐ I acknowledge that I have read the Infi understand how my child's information	ormation Sharing statement (page 3) and may be collected and shared.		
	·			
Parent/carer/guardian declaration				
Date:		Signature:		
CI	ilid Name:	Parent/carer/guardian name:		

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

2 | Department of Education

ATTACHMENT 2. STATEMENT OF ADDITIONAL HOURS FEES

[Place on service letterhead]

Thornbury Kindergarten

Fee schedule 2026

Funded sessional kindergarten 15hrs/week at no cost. Additional hours fees as below:

	Additional Hours	Total (\$) per term
Term 1	7.5 hrs/week	\$945
Term 2	7.5 hrs/week	\$945
Term 3	7.5 hrs/week	\$945
Term 4	7.5 hrs/week	\$945
Total	7.5 hrs/week	\$3780

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued 6 weeks prior to commencement and must be paid by the due date.

Late collection charge

The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a 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 collection charge 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 charge incurred.

ATTACHMENT 3. ADDITIONAL HOURS FEE PAYMENT AGREEMENT

[Place on service letterhead]

Thornbury Kindergarten	
Fee payment contract 2026	
Please complete this form and return to Thornbury Kindergarten by	/ [<mark>Date</mark>]
Child's full name:	
Parent's/carer's full name:	
 I/we acknowledge that the 15 hours per week (600 hours per the state government, with the balance of additional hours. I/we agree to pay any additional fees for services above the I/we understand that fees for additional hours each term at I/we acknowledge that if fees for additional hours are not implement withdrawal of my/our child's place in the additional life agree that if my/our financial circumstances change at immediately notify Thornbury Kindergarten. I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the secont outlines the procedure for payment of fees. 	s over and above coming from fees paid by parents/cared e 600 hours by the due date on the invoice. are non-refundable. paid by the due date, the Committee of Management will ional hours group. and I/we am/are unable to pay as agreed, I/we will
Signature (parent/carer):	Date:
Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance	with the Thornbury Kindergarten Fees Policy.

ATTACHMENT 4. VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS FAMILY LETTER

Dear Thornbury Kindergarten Families,

Page **12** of **14** Fees | November 25

8C Newcastle St, Thornbury, Vic 3071

Email: director@thornburykinder.com

As you may knowy out kindergariter is proud to participate in the Government Free Kinder Program,

which helps make early childhood education more accessible for all families. We wholeheartedly support this initiative and are grateful for the funding it provides.

However, we want to be transparent with you: the government funding does not fully cover the actual costs of running our kindergarten. This includes essential expenses such as:

- Maintaining high educator-to-child ratios
- Providing quality learning materials and resources
- Supporting inclusive programs and additional needs
- Maintaining our facilities and outdoor spaces
- Offering enriching experiences like incursions and excursions

To continue delivering the high-quality early learning environment your children deserve, we rely on the generous support of our community. We are kindly asking families who are in a position to do so to consider making a yearly **voluntary contribution** to help bridge the funding gap. We have included a breakdown of the various costs the kinder incurs that is above the funding provided by the free kinder initiative. Every contribution, no matter the size, makes a meaningful difference and goes directly toward enhancing your child's experience at kinder.

If you would like to make a contribution, you can do so via our website:

https://www.thornburykindergarten.com.au/donations

We understand that every family's circumstances are different. While some may choose to contribute more and others less, we welcome all levels of support. Regardless of any financial contribution, every child will receive the same high standard of education and care.

We deeply appreciate your ongoing support and partnership. Together, we can ensure our kindergarten remains a vibrant, nurturing, and inspiring place for every child to learn and grow.



Thornbury Kindergarten 8C Newcastle St, Thornbury, Vic 3071 Phy (03) 9/9/ 1005

Email: director@thornburykinder.com Web: www.thornburykindergarten.com.au

"Exceeding" Offerings	\$330	We offer above ratio staff for all of our offsite programs (bush kinder and out and about). We also fund all of our incursions and excursions that all groups in the kinder participate in. The free kinder funding does not cover this additional cost to the kinder
Services/Memberships	\$45	Includes access to online platforms for managing our enrolments and finances and membership to the Early Leaning Association of Australia
Operational Costs	\$125	Includes regular cleaning of the kinder and general building upkeep and maintenance that is not covered by the lease with the City of Darebin
General Stationery and Educational Resources	\$80	Covers costs related to providing educational supplies and general stationery that cannot be sourced through low costs means.
Total annual contribution	\$580	

https://www.thornburykindergarten.com.au/donations

We accept credit card payments via **Square**:



Or Bank transfer:

Name: Thornbury Kindergarten Inc

BSB: 704 191

Account: 385173415

Transaction description: "PC <child's name>"

You will receive receipt of your donation.

Thank you for your support.

Regards,

Thornbury Kindergarten Treasurer

treasurer@thornburykinder.com