

FREE KINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN FEES

QUALITY AREA 7 - MANDATORY | HOME ROAD KINDERGARTEN



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs in both three and four year old kindergarten
- the application of surplus funding within Home Road 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 fees for four year old kindergarten children who are enrolled in the Bush/Beach Kinder program. Note: the fees for three year old kindergarten children are free as the additional hours are covered under the 15 hours of Free Kinder Funding for this age group.



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Home Road Kindergarten acknowledges the Boonwurrung people of the Kulin nation as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which the kindergarten is located and pays respect to elders past, present and emerging.

Home Road Kindergarten is committed to being an inclusive learning environment that:

- welcomes, supports and celebrates all children and families
- Respects the rights of the child and values diversity
- Values the contribution of Aboriginal children, children from culturally linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with a disability
- Has zero tolerance of discrimination
- Maintains a duty of care (*refer to Definitions*) towards all children at the service
- Is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all staff and the members of our service and community.

Home Road 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 Home Road 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 Centre Manager, the Committee of Management, 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 optional kindergarten programs hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year). At Home Road Kindergarten fees are charged for four year old kindergarten children who enrol and participate in Bush/Beach Kinder as an additional program.	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	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 vulnerable children and families not yet enrolled and/or towards the change management required for preparing for three-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 and Kindergarten Fees 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 of four year old program children with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (<i>refer to Attachments 2</i>) upon enrolment of their child into Bush/Beach Kinder.	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with an additional payment fee agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 3</i>), if applicable	R	√			
Reading the Home Road 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 Home Road 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 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 Committee of Management 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 Victorian Government introduced the Best Start, Best Life reform to increase access to quality early childhood education and care. The Free Kindergarten part of the reform provides 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)
- offsetting the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for three and four-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service

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.

Approved child care: Approved child care services are services that have Australian Government approval to receive the Child Care Subsidy (*refer to Definitions*) on behalf of eligible parents. Approved child care includes centre-based day care, including long day care and occasional care, family day care, outside school hours care and in-home care.

Child care subsidy (CCS): A Commonwealth Government means tested subsidy to assist eligible families with the cost of child care. Payments are paid directly to approved child care providers. Further information can be found at: www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy

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*)

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

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.

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.



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 Home Road Kindergarten

RELATED POLICIES

- Complaints and Grievances
- 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 Kindergarten information for families (both three and four year old programs)
- Attachment 2: Statement of additional hours – Bush/Beach Kinder
- Attachment 3: Additional hours – Bush/Beach Kinder

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Home Road Kindergarten on 13 December 2022.



REVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 2023

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Home Road Kindergarten for the 2023 Fee Paying Year.

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

Home Road Kindergarten has opted in to 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 parent fee

Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Home Road 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):** 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 when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by the Committee of Management

4. Additional hours

Home Road Kindergarten offers families the option for some children to participate in 4 hours of Bush/Beach Kinder which is in addition to the 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) funded for the four year old kindergarten program. The additional hours fee for Bush/Beach Kinder is determined by the hourly program rate based on the scheduled 2023 fee. Note: The children from the three year old program do not pay additional fees when participating in Bush/Beach kinder due to the additional hours being covered within the 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) funded for three year old kindergarten.

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. Unpaid fees for extended hours for Bush/Beach Kinder

If fees are not paid by the due date and the parents/guardians have not communicated the reasons for late or non-payment of fees, the following procedures will be implemented:

- A first reminder notice will be sent via email from our Bookkeeper advising fees are overdue, giving seven (7) days for payment. A copy of this notice will be kept on file.
- If payment has not been received by the specified date or no contact has been made with the Bookkeeper, Manager or Committee Members, the parents/guardians will be sent a second reminder via email from our Bookkeeper requesting immediate payment of fees.
- If payment of fees is still not received after the second reminder, either the Treasurer or President will email the parent/guardian requesting payment within two (2) days.

- If payment is not received within two (2) days, the Treasurer or President will telephone the parent/guardian to discuss payment or to arrange a meeting to develop an agreed payment plan. Notes of contact/conversation will be kept on file.
- If a meeting is arranged, the President or Treasurer can elect to invite a member of the Executive to assist. Minutes of this meeting will be kept on file. If a payment plan is agreed on, both parties will sign the agreed plan and a copy will be given to the parents/guardians and placed on file.
- If the parents/guardians fail to attend the meeting or make a payment, a final email will be issued requesting full payment within seven (7) days. The email will notify the family that if payment is not received, the child's place in the Bush/Beach Kinder program may be cancelled.
- If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the Centre, the parents/guardians will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing.
- The Treasurer/Bookkeeper and any Committee Members involved will ensure the Privacy and Confidentiality Policy of the Centre is complied with in relation to the family's financial/personal situation and staff will not be involved in any stage of this process. Staff may be consulted on a child's attendance rates and any other information required.
- The Approved Provider reserves the right to take action to recover debts owing to the centre. This can include the engagement of debt collectors. Using a debt collector will be considered as a final option after attempts to implement other payment procedures have been offered.

The Centre wishes to reiterate that if a family is experiencing any form of financial difficulty in meeting their Bush/Beach kinder fees obligations, then please do not hesitate to make contact and communicate this to us. There are various forms of assistance available, for example, reasonable instalment plans, or time extensions under certain circumstances.

7. Refund of fees

Additional hours fees for Bush/Beach Kinder 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.

8. 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.

9. Notification of fee changes during the year for extended 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/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 ADDITIONAL HOURS FEES

Home Road Kindergarten

Fee schedule 2023

Bush/Beach Kinder Fees for Four Year Old Kindergarten participants.

Hours: 4 hours per week

	Additional Hours	Cost per term
Term 1	4 hours per week	\$442
Term 2	4 hours per week	\$442
Term 3	4 hours per week	\$442
Term 4	4 hours per week	\$442
Total		\$1768

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued approximately 1 month before the term commences and must be paid by the due date.

Late collection charge

The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child (*refer to Free Kindergarten Information for Families*).

ATTACHMENT 3. BUSH/BEACH KINDER ADDITIONAL HOURS FEE PAYMENT AGREEMENT

Home Road Kindergarten

Bush/Beach Kinder 2023

Fee payment contract

Please complete this form and return to Home Road Kindergarten by commencement of Term 1 2023

Child's full name:

Parent's/guardian's full name:

- I/we acknowledge that the four-year-old 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) funded kindergarten program is fully funded by the state government, with the balance of additional hours over and above for enrolment in Bush/Beach Kinder coming from fees paid by parents/guardians.
- I/we agree to pay any additional fees for services above the 600 hours by the due date on the invoice.
- I/we understand that fees for additional hours each term are non-refundable.
- I/we acknowledge that if fees for additional hours are not paid by the due date, the Committee of Management has the right to implement the late payment of fees procedures, as outlined in the Free Kindergarten Information for Families, which could result in the withdrawal of my/our child's place at Bush/Beach Kinder
- I/we agree that if my/our financial circumstances change and I/we am/are unable to pay as agreed, I/we will immediately notify the Bookkeeper or Centre Manager to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service's Free Kindergarten Information for Families, which outlines the procedure for payment of fees.

Signature (parent/guardian):

Date:

Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with the Home Road Kindergarten Free Kindergarten and Kindergarten Fees Policy.