FEES - FREE KINDER

QUALITY AREA 7 | ELAA VERSION 1.3

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how services comply with the Free Kinder funding requirements.

POLICY STATEMENT

The safety, health, wellbeing, rights and best interests of every child are the paramount consideration and must guide all decisions, actions and practices of educators within the education and care service.

VALUES

Doncaster 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/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 Doncaster 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					
1. Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative *(refer to Definitions)*	R	√	√	√	
2. Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for the payment of fees (if applicable) and the provision of a	R	√			

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	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 (where possible).	R	√			
4.	Ensuring families are informed of the total annual fee amount, including any applicable fees for e.g. excursions and any additional hours	R	√			
5.	Reimbursing families in full for enrolment deposits that have already been paid upon acceptance of enrolment	R	√			
6.	Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted)	R	√			
7.	Providing communication to families explaining their access to one year of three-year-old and one of four-year-old funded kindergarten program	R	√			
8.	Ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service **nominate and document** at which service the child will participate in the funded kindergarten program	R	√		√	
9.	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	√			
10.	Ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted	R	√			
11.	Charging families only for an occasional special event/ excursions that occur outside the normal program/curriculum	R	√	√		
12.	Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is enrolled at the service and recorded on the Arrival system	R	√	√		
13.	Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the Arrival system	R	√	√		
14.	Ensuring that the *Fees - Free Kinder Policy* is readily accessible at the service *(Regulation 171)*	R	√			
15.	Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kinder *(refer to Attachment 1)*	R	√			
16.	Reading the Doncaster Kindergarten Free Kinder information for families *(refer to Attachment 1)*				√	
17.	Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to Doncaster Kindergarten				√	
18.	Complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received	R	√	√	√	
19.	Notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the way in which the fees are	R	√			

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collected *(Regulation 172(2))*, ideally providing one term's notice.					
20. Implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the approved provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative *(refer to Sources)*	R	√	√	√	
21. 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 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 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs.

Free Kinder 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
- offsetting the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for three and four-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service

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: www.legislation.gov.au

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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/Wrap around care: care that is provided by a kindergarten service to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program. Wrap around care fees are not funded by the Victorian Government but may be covered by CCS *(refer to Definitions). (Note: additional hours/wrap-around-care are not provided at Doncaster Kindergarten)*

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) if applicable: 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 (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.

Application fee: A fee of $25 will be charged when families register their child directly with a service (not part of the council's 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 per week (600 per year) and/or wrap around care. (Note: not applicable at Doncaster Kindergarten)

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)
- offsetting the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for 3 and 4-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service.

Funded Kindergarten: For service's that have not opted for Free Kinder, 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.

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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. This deposit will be refunded in the event that you child does not commence at the service. For children that do attend, we will use the kindergarten fee deposit to cover the cost of incursions and excursions held during the course of the year (approximately $25 per term) instead of requesting payment at various intervals during the year. If these funds are not used, any unused balance will be refunded to each family.

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/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): www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: https://www.vic.gov.au/resources-funded-kindergartens
- The constitution of Doncaster 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

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- 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 (2026 & 2027)

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Doncaster Kindergarten on 22 June 2026.

REVIEW DATE: 22/06/2027

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ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDER INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Doncaster Kindergarten 2026

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and three-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.

Operation hours	3YO Red group - Monday and Thursdays 8:30am-4:00pm (15 hours per week) 4YO Blue Group – Tuesdays and Fridays 8:30am-4:00pm (15 hours per week) 4YO Orange Group – Tuesdays and Wednesdays 8:30am-4:00pm (15 hours per week) 4YO Purple Group – Wednesdays and Fridays 8:30am-4:00pm (15 hours per week) (4YO's choose two days out of the three available (Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday) to attend 15 hours per week)
Term 1	27th January 2026 – 2nd April 2026
Term 2	20th April 2026 – 26th June 2026
Term 3	13th July 2026 – 18th September 2026
Term 4	5th October 2026 – 18th December 2026
Planned Closures	Organisational Days: 27th & 28th January 2026 & Friday 18th December 2026 Staff Professional Development Days: Friday 26th June 2026 & Thursday 17th December 2026 Labour Day Public holiday: Monday 9th March 2026 King's Birthday Public holiday: Monday 8th June 2026 Melbourne Cup Day Public holiday: Tuesday 3rd November 2026

2. What Free Kinder means at our service

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

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (15 hours per week) – no parent fee
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee

Doncaster Kindergarten will reimburse families in full for any kindergarten 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. We will use the kindergarten fee deposit to cover the cost of incursions and excursions held during the course of the year ($25 per term) instead of requesting payment at various intervals during the year. If these funds are not used, any unused balance will be refunded to each family.

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3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Doncaster 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. 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.

5. Refund of fees

The enrolment deposit *(refer to Definitions)* will be fully refunded to families if the child does not commence at the service.

6. 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.

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Free Kinder Information for families - Doncaster Kindergarten 2027

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and three-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.

The Department of Education 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.

Operation hours	Date
Term 1	27th January 2027 – 25th March 2027
Term 2	12th April 2027 – 25th June 2027
Term 3	12th July 2027 – 17th September 2027
Term 4	4th October 2027 – 17th December 2027
Planned Closures	Organisational Days: Wednesday 27th & Thursday 28th January 2027, Monday 12th July 2027 & Friday 17th December 2027 Staff Professional Development Days: Tuesday 13th July & Thursday 17th December 2027 Public holidays: Labour Day Monday 8th March 2027, King's Birthday Monday 14th June 2027 & Melbourne Cup Day Tuesday 2nd November 2027.

2. What Free Kinder means at our service

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

Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (15 hours per week) – no parent fee
Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee

Doncaster Kindergarten will reimburse families in full for any kindergarten fee deposit payments that have already been made upon acceptance of enrolment, excluding any voluntary parent donations/payments that you agree to in writing. We will use the kindergarten fee deposit to cover the cost of onsite education programs and excursions held during the course of the year ($25 per term) instead of requesting payment at various intervals during the year. If these funds are not used, any unused balance will be refunded to each family. If the costs exceed $25 per term, parents will be notified in writing and an invoice will be issued.

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Doncaster 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.
see below:

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Important message from the Doncaster Kindergarten Committee

At Doncaster Kindergarten we run sessional programs with a specific start and finish time which we ask that parents and carers adhere to. When children arrive late at the beginning of their session, this impacts our Teachers' ability to run certain activities while they wait for children to arrive. When children are collected late, this stops the Teachers attending to other duties that they are required to complete at the end of each session. It can also be quite distressing for your child to be the only one left behind. We understand that at times, being late is unavoidable and allowances are made for this.
We would like to bring your attention to an extract from our Fees Policy regarding late collection charges:

Late collection charge:

The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late (3 times or more per term) in collecting their child/children from the service.
In these situations, the following procedures will apply:

- The qualified staff member will discuss with parents/guardians/carer any barriers that may be impacting on their ability to collect their child on time and inform the parents/guardians/carer that if it continues the Committee will be notified and the family will be given a written notice regarding implementation of a late collection charge should it occur a fourth time.
- If after the reminder is issued, the parents/guardians/carer is between 10 and 30 minutes late, a charge of $45.00 for every 15 minutes, or part thereof, from the conclusion of the session will be invoiced by the Committee.

The Committee of Management will have no choice but to impose these penalties if children are regularly collected late. As a matter of respect, please arrive at kinder by no later than the end of the session.
Our session times for each class have been re-published below for your information. If you are not the person who collects your child, please notify the person or people that perform this task for you. We respectfully ask for your co-operation in this matter. If you have any concerns, please raise them with your child's teacher or the Committee.

3-year old groups (15 hours per week)

	Red Group
Monday	8:30am to 4:00pm
Thursday	8:30am to 4:00pm

4-year old groups (15 hours per week)

	Blue Group	Orange Group	Purple Group
Monday	No session	No session	No session
Tuesday	8:30am to 4:00pm	8:30am to 4:00pm	No session
Wednesday	No session	8:30am to 4:00pm	8:30am to 4:00pm
Thursday	No session	No session	No session
Friday	8:30am to 4:00pm	No session	8:30am to 4:00pm

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.

5. Refund of fees

The enrolment deposit will be fully refunded to families if the child does not commence at the service.

6. 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.

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