



EARLY START KINDERGARTEN (ESK) ENROLMENT POLICY

Our Service is committed to supporting the Victorian Government’s Free Kindergarten initiative as part of the *Best Start, Best Life* reform. We aim to identify children that require additional support and seek assistance through a range of initiatives to ensure inclusion of vulnerable children into our programs. This policy provides guidelines for eligible children for enrolment through the Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) funding in our quality kindergarten program to ensure compliance with legislative and Department of Education requirements.

Our Service is committed to being a Child Safe Organisation with a zero tolerance for child abuse. At all times we act in accordance with the Victorian Child Safe Standards and related legislation.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

| QUALITY AREA 1: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND PRACTICE | | |
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| 1.1 | Program | The educational program enhances each child’s learning and development |

| QUALITY AREA 2: CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND SAFETY | | |
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| 2.2.3 | Child Protection | Management, educators and staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities to identify and respond to every child at risk of abuse or neglect. |

| QUALITY AREA 6: COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS | | |
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| 6.1 | Supportive relationships with families | Respectful relationships with families are developed and maintained and families are supported in their parenting role. |
| 6.1.1 | Engagement with the service | Families are supported from enrolment to be involved in their service and contribute to service decisions. |

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| 6.1.2 | Parent views are respected | The expertise, culture, values and beliefs of families are respected, and families share in decision-making about their child's learning and wellbeing. |
| 6.1.3 | Families are supported | Current information is available to families about the service and relevant community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing. |
| 6.2 | Collaborative partnerships | Collaborative partnerships enhance children's inclusion, learning and wellbeing. |
| 6.2.3 | Community and engagement | The service builds relationships and engages with its community. |

| EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL REGULATIONS | |
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| 73 | Educational program |
| 74 | Documenting of child assessments or evaluations for delivery of educational program |
| 75 | Information about educational program to be kept available |
| 84 | Awareness of child protection law |
| 89 | Educators must be working directly with children to be included in ratios |
| 90 | Medical conditions policy |
| 92 | Medication record |
| 93 | Administration of medication |
| 97 | Emergency and evacuation procedures |
| 99 | Children leaving the education and care service premises |
| 160 | Child enrolment records to be kept by approved provider and family day care educator |
| 161 | Authorisations to be kept in enrolment record |
| 162 | Health information to be kept in enrolment record |
| 168 | Education and care service must have policies and procedures |
| 177 | Prescribed enrolment and other documents to be kept by approved provider |
| 181 | Confidentiality of records kept by approved provider |

RELATED LEGISLATION

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| Child Care Subsidy Secretary's Rules 2017 | Family Law Act 1975 |
| A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999 | Working with Children Act 2005 (VIC) |
| Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 | Children Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 |

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| Disability Discrimination Act 1992 | Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (No Jab, No Play) Act 2015 |
| Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015 | Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (MARAM) |

RELATED POLICIES

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| Acceptance and Refusal Authorisation Policy | Free Kindergarten Enrolment Policy (VIC services) |
| Additional Needs Policy | Immunisation Policy |
| Anti-Bias and Inclusion Policy | Kindergarten (VIC) Payment of Fees Policy |
| Children’s Belongings Policy | Orientation of Families Policy |
| Child Safe Environment Policy | Privacy and Confidentiality Policy |
| Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy | Record Keeping and Retention Policy |
| Dealing with Infectious Disease Policy | Sun Safe Policy |
| Delivery of children to, and Collection from | Supervision Policy |
| Education and Care Service Premises | Staffing Arrangements Policy |
| Educational Program Policy | Transition to School Policy |
| Emergency Evacuation Policy | Withdrawal of a Child Policy |
| Family Communication Policy | |

PURPOSE

We aim to ensure children and families receive informative and reliable information about enrolment in Early Start Kindergarten.

SCOPE

This policy applies to management, the approved provider, nominated supervisor, educators, families, and children of the Service.

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy is to be read in conjunction with our *Free Kindergarten Enrolment Policy*.

Our Service meets the requirements of the Victoria Government to provide *Free Kindergarten* as part of the Best Start, Best Life reform. Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) funding is provided to our Service to support eligible children access for up to 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten per week for 2 years. Our Service will ensure all requirements of our Service Agreement with the Department of Education are met at all times.

EARLY START KINDERGARTEN (ESK)

All children are eligible for Free Kinder funding however, we also enrol eligible children in Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) as these enrolments contribute to *School Readiness Funding* (SFR) and other additional targeted support from the Department of Education. ESK provides up to 15 funded hours of free or low-cost kindergarten each week led by an Early Childhood Teacher within a kindergarten program. To be eligible for ESK, children must be three **years old by 30 April** in the year they are attending the kindergarten program **and**:

- are from a refugee or asylum seeker background *or*,
- are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, *or*,
- have had contact with Child Protection.

ESK REQUIREMENTS

Our Service will ensure the Kindergarten Program is led by a qualified and registered Early Childhood Teacher (ECT), operates for a minimum 15 hours per week across 40 weeks of the year and aligns with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLF). Our Service will remove financial barriers for families eligible for ESK funding, ensuring access to 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten program each week. Funds from the ESK funding grant will be used to cover families' 'gap fee' payments following the calculation of Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) (if applicable). These funds may be allocated to enhance the program and provide resources to support individual children's needs following payments contributed to parent fees.

Our Service will apply for ESK funding grants through the Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS) once an eligible child is enrolled. Evidence of a child's eligibility for ESK funding will be maintained on individual Enrolment Forms and recorded in the KIM system. Attendance records, including hours of kindergarten program attended, absences and the reason for absences, will be accurately maintained and recorded in the KIM system. Children will be enrolled and removed from the KIM system in accordance with our Service's procedures.

ESK FUNDING GRANT

When the ESK grant exceeds the program fee, any additional funds remaining may be allocated to:

- reduce fees for additional hours of childcare required to access 15 hours of free kindergarten or other costs (if applicable)
- enhance the program and provide resources to support individual children's needs, including the following:

- specific resources, e.g. Culturally diverse books and equipment
- additional educators to assist in reducing child to staff ratios
- out of pocket costs expenses- such as excursion or community engagement fees for the family
- employment of a kindergarten teacher
- professional development for educators, including training related to trauma and culturally safe practices

PRIORITY ACCESS CRITERIA (PoA) Kindergarten Funding Guide

In instances where more eligible children apply for a place at our Service for Three-Year-Old and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten programs than we have available, we must follow the [Priority of Access \(PoA\)](#) criteria to prioritise-specified cohorts of children and work with other local kindergarten services and the regional Departmental offices to ensure all eligible children have access to a kindergarten place.

Priority of Access

Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children who are:

- in Out-of-Home Care
- are eligible for ESK or Access to Early Learning (AEL)
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
- Asylum seeker and refugee children
- Children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- Children with additional needs, defined as children who
 - require additional assistance in order to fully participate in the kindergarten program
 - require a combination of services which are individually planned
 - have a specific disability or developmental delay

OUR FRAMEWORKS

Our kindergarten programs adhere to the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)* as the approved learning framework declared in the Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations core funding agreement.

THE APPROVED PROVIDER/ NOMINATED SUPERVISOR/ MANAGEMENT WILL:

- adhere to this policy in accordance with the *Free Kindergarten Enrolment Policy*

- ensure that any eligible child for Early Start Kindergarten is enrolled and recorded in the Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS)
- ensure enrolment and program data in KIMS is kept up to date
- ensure data within KIMS is updated immediately when service delivery or child enrolment changes occur
- adhere to the Department's Priority of Access criteria for all funded kindergarten places
- ensure families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket fees or levies (except for cost of one-off excursions- entry and transport costs) (See *Kindergarten Payment of Fees Policy*)
- provide families with a statement of additional fees and hours charged that are over and above the 15 hours of funded hours per week
- advise families that they may be able to access a free 15-hour per week kindergarten program at another Service
- meet the specific terms and conditions for delivering ESK funding grant as outlined by the Department of Education
- promote fair and equitable access to kindergarten programs
- display the Kinder Tick logo at our Service
- adhere to the Department's Priority of Access criteria for all funded kindergarten places
- communicate how waiting lists are prioritised clearly with families
- ensure families are not charged for community engagements or regular excursions (e.g. Bush Kinder)
- ensure any surplus funding is used to improve the quality of our funded kindergarten program and support engagement of families
- ensure Early Childhood Teachers are registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT)
- ensure all staff and educators hold current and checked Working with Children Checks (WWCC)
- ensure the program delivered to children adheres to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework
- create and maintain a child safe organisation and comply with the Child Safe Standards
- provide information to families about how personal information is collected and stored as per our *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*

FAMILIES WILL:

- complete all documentation required by the Service for enrolment including child's *Immunisation History Statement*
- provide required authorisations as indicated on enrolment form

- notify the Service of any specific health care needs of their child, including medical conditions and allergies and provide a medical management plan for the child if applicable
- provide updated information about their child by notifying the Service of any changes as soon as possible- medical, parenting orders, authorisations etc.
- discuss with management decisions to enrol their child born between January and April in three-year-old kindergarten in the year their child turns three, or the following year.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT/REFLECTION

Our *Early Start Kindergarten Enrolment Policy* will be updated and reviewed annually in consultation with families, staff, educators and management.

RESOURCES

[Early Start Kindergarten](#)

[Funding and policies supporting Three-Year-Old-Kindergarten](#)

[Kindergarten Information Management System](#)

[Priority of Access criteria for early childhood education](#)

[Resources for funded kindergartens](#)

SOURCES

Australian Government Department of Education. Child Care Provider Handbook

<https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/child-care-provider-handbook>

Department of Education and Training. (2016). [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. For all children birth to eight years](#)

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. (Amended 2023).

[Education and Care Services National Regulations](#). (2011) (Amended 2023)

Victorian Government Department of Education and Training. (2023). [The kindergarten funding guide](#)

REVIEW

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|--------------------|--|------------------|--------------|
| POLICY REVIEWED BY | Megan Hipkiss | Centre Support | October 2024 |
| POLICY REVIEWED | JUNE 2024 | NEXT REVIEW DATE | JUNE 2025 |
| VERSION NUMBER | V1.06.24 | | |
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