

FEES - FREE KINDER

QUALITY AREA 7 | ELAA VERSION 1.2



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how services comply with the Free Kinder funding requirements.



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Middle Park 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 Middle Park 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 nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	R	√	√	√	
Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for the payment of fees (if applicable) and the provision of a statement of fees charged by the service (<i>Regulation 168</i>), and take	R	√			

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reasonable steps to ensure those policies and procedures are followed (<i>Regulation 170</i>)					
Ensuring that families are informed of the operating hours including term dates, planned closures and additional hours to account for closures.	R	√			
Ensuring families are informed of the total annual fee amount, including any applicable fees for e.g. excursions and any additional hours	R	√			
Reimbursing families in full for enrolment deposits that have already been paid upon acceptance of enrolment during term 1, 2025 except where families have opted to donate the deposit	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) and/or “wrap around” care (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	R	√			
Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guidelines (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	√			
Providing communication to families explaining their access to one year of three-year-old and one of four-year-old funded kindergarten program	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 in line with acceptable uses of kindergarten funding, including to promote increased participation and/or enhance program quality	R	√			
Ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted	R	√			
Charging families via Ezidebit 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 <i>Fees - Free Kinder Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kinder (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges to families that have opted in to the additional hours/wrap around care (<i>refer to Attachments 2</i>) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable	R	√			

NOTE: parents must also be advised that enrolling for hours over 15 is optional and families can choose to only enrol for 15 hours and receive this program at no cost.					
Providing all parents/guardians with an additional hours payment fee agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 3</i>), if applicable	R	√			
Informing parents of any action that will be taken if additional hours fees are not paid (<i>refer to Attachments 3</i>)	R	√			
Reading the Middle Park Kindergarten Free Kinder 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				√	
Ensuring any additional hours fees are collected and receipted	R	√			
Notifying the approved provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of additional hours fees				√	
All families are to sign up to Esidebit Direct Debit. Families will be provided with advanced written notice when they are charged for excursions or special events. Esidebit will also be used to charge families for the additional hours in the 4 year old kindergarten group, above the 15 hour free kinder funding.		√		√	
Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to the Middle Park 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 approved provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	√	√	√	
Informing the approved provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding additional hours fees at the service		√	√		
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

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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 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 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



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*).

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 be 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 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 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.

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.

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.

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 Middle Park 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: 3-year-old Kindergarten schedule
- Attachment 3: 4-year-old kindergarten schedule

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Middle Park Kindergarten on 22nd July 2024.

REVIEW DATE: July 2025



ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDER INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Middle Park Kindergarten 2025

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	
Term 1	3-year-old Program: Monday – 8.30am to 1.30pm Wednesday – 8.30am to 1.30pm Friday – 8.30am to 1.30pm 4-year-old Program: Tuesday – 8.30am to 4.30pm Thursday – 8.30am to 4.30pm
Term 2	As above
Term 3	As above
Term 4	As above
Planned Closures	Victorian school holidays
Additional Hours account for closure	Curriculum days outlined at the beginning of each year

2. What Free Kinder means at our service

Middle Park 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 (16 hours per week) – parent fee will be reduced by the Free Kinder Funding

Middle Park 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.

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Middle Park 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*). Advanced notice of these charges will be provided and debits will be made from the family's Esidebit account

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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 and/or wrap around care fees

Middle Park Kindergarten offers families one hour above the set 15 hours per week (600 hours per year). The additional hours fee is determined by the hourly program rate based on the scheduled 2025 fee (including the costs of regular incursions and excursions).

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

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. Payment of fees for additional hours

Fees are payable for hours over and above 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or wrap around care.

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 deducted in the first week of each term from the Ezidebit account established with the kindergarten upon enrolment. The first term's fees must be received in full prior to the child commencing at the service. For children enrolled after the commencement of a term, a pro rata invoice will be issued and must be paid in full within 14 days of the child's commencement at the service. Receipts will be provided for all fee payments if requested.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Committee of Management to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* of the service will be complied with at all times in relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances.

7. Unpaid fees for additional hours/wrap around care

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

- An initial reminder letter will be sent to parents/guardians with a specified payment date, and will include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- Where payment is still not received, families will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan.
- Failure to attend the meeting and continued non-payment may result in a second and final letter notifying parents/guardians that the child's place at the service may be withdrawn unless payment is made or a payment plan is entered into within a specified period of time. This letter will also include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- 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 at the service, the parents/guardians will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing.
- No further enrolments of children from the parents/guardians will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

8. Refund of fees

The enrolment deposit (*refer to Definitions*) will be fully refunded to families only when the child commences at the service and only if they have elected not to donate the deposit in writing. Non-refundable waitlist fees (*refer to Definitions*) paid will be retained.

In any other case, 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:

- a child's short-term illness

- family holiday during operational times
- public holidays
- 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.

9. 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.

10. Notification of fee changes during the year for additional hours/wrap around care

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. 3-YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN SCHEDULE

Attachment A – please complete table below

		PLEASE COMPLETE BELOW
ENROLMENT DEPOSIT We are requesting families to donate this deposit to go towards resources and the kindergarten program	\$800	Already Paid
TERM ONE	FREE	FREE
TERM TWO	FREE	FREE
TERM THREE	FREE	FREE
TERM FOUR	FREE	FREE
Suggested Annual Sports Levy	\$275 per year	\$
Suggested Annual Music Levy	\$120 per year	\$
Suggested Annual Maintenance Levy	\$100 per year	\$
Additional Contributions Welcome		\$
TOTAL	\$800 already paid \$495 donation	\$

We welcome and appreciate any donations by 29 November 2024 for the Committee to be able to advise our specialist music & sports teachers of bookings for 2025. We require enough donations to be able to offer these programs in 2025. Please complete above.

Payable to: Middle Park Kindergarten

BSB: 063 100

Account: 1005 1032

Ref: Your child's name

Attachment A / cont.

**Letter of Offer Acceptance Form
2025 Offer of Enrolment
3 year old Kindergarten Program due 29 November 2024
(leave blank any boxes that are not applicable)**

Yes, I accept a place forin the 3 year old group in 2025

ENROLMENT DEPOSIT

Yes, I wish to give my enrolment deposit already paid as a donation towards the kindergarten program

OR

No, I do not wish to donate my enrolment deposit already paid.
Please refund to my bank account

BSB: _____

Account Number: _____

Refunds will be made early in Term 1, 2025 upon commencement at kinder.

SPORT / MUSIC / MAINTENANCE LEVY

Yes, I will be making a donation towards sports/music/maintenance levy of
\$ _____ (total as per previous page – suggested \$495)

Your bank reference/receipt no: _____

Deposit Date: _____

EZIDEBIT – ONE OFF SPECIAL EVENTS

Yes, I agree for Middle Park Kindergarten to charge through Ezidebit the small cost for a one off event with two weeks written notice. Ezidebit form to be completed and returned by 29th November 2024.

OR

I hold a valid concession card and will present the original card along with photo identification in person to Middle Park Kindergarten by 29 November 2024.

Name: _____ Signed: _____

Attachment B

Form to Access One (only) 'Free Kinder Payment' Place

I confirm that my child will be accessing their 'Free Kinder Payment' (funded kindergarten place) at Middle Park Kindergarten for the three year old program in 2025 only.

Section 1

Name of service: Middle Park Kindergarten (Incorporated Association Name: Middle Park Kindergarten Inc)	
Date:	Child name:
Parent name:	Signature:

ATTACHMENT 3. 4-YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN SCHEDULE

Attachment A – please complete below table

		PLEASE COMPLETE BELOW
ENROLMENT DEPOSIT	\$800	Already Paid
TERM ONE – due 29 November 2024	\$450	\$450
TERM TWO – due end of term 1	\$450	\$450
TERM THREE – due end of term 2	\$450	\$450
TERM FOUR – due end of term 3	\$450	\$450
Suggested Sports Levy	\$275 per year	\$
Suggested Music Levy	\$120 per year	\$
Suggested Maintenance Levy	\$100 per year	\$
Additional Contributions Welcome	\$	\$
TOTAL		\$

Term 1 Fees – for program above the 15 hours of free kinder (\$450 per term)

Term 1 Fees must be paid by 29 November 2024 to confirm and secure your child's enrolment.

We welcome and appreciate any donations by 30 November 2024 for the Committee to be able to advise our specialist music & sports teachers of bookings for 2025. We require enough donations to be able to offer these programs in 2025. Please complete above.

Payable to: Middle Park Kindergarten

BSB: 063 100

Account: 1005 1032

Ref: Your child's name

Attachment A (continued)

Letter of Offer Acceptance Form
2025 Offer of Enrolment
4-year-old Kindergarten Program due 29 November 2024
(leave blank any boxes that are not applicable)

Yes, I accept a place forin the 3 year old group in 2025

ENROLMENT DEPOSIT

Yes, I have paid my term 1 fees – due 29th November 2024 and acknowledge that fees for Term 2, 3 and 4 will be charged via Ezidebit

SPORT / MUSIC / MAINTENANCE LEVY

Yes, I will be making a donation towards sports/music/maintenance levy of \$_____ (total as per previous page – suggested \$495)

Your bank reference/receipt no: _____

Deposit Date: _____

EZIDEBIT – ONE OFF SPECIAL EVENTS

Yes, I agree for Middle Park Kindergarten to charge through Ezidebit the small cost for a one off event with two weeks written notice. Ezidebit form to be completed and returned by 29th November 2024.

OR

I hold a valid concession card and will present the original card along with photo identification in person to Middle Park Kindergarten by 29 November 2024.

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Attachment B

Form to Access One (only) 'Free Kinder Payment' Place

I confirm that my child will be accessing their 'Free Kinder Payment' (funded kindergarten place) at Middle Park Kindergarten for the four year old program in 2025 only.

Section 1

Name of service: Middle Park Kindergarten (Incorporated Association Name: Middle Park Kindergarten Inc)	
Date:	Child name:
Parent name:	Signature: