



2021 FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

Mandatory – Quality Area 7

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten subsidies for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- reduced fees for children enrolled in a funded kindergarten program in a long day care centre and for children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services.
- the application of surplus funding within Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc. ensuring it is only used to ensure the quality of program delivery and development of children enrolled in the service

POLICY STATEMENT

1. VALUES

Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc. is committed to:

- supporting the Victorian Government's 2021 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

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Person with Management and Control, Nominated Supervisor, Person in Day-to-Day Charge, educators and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child at Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc.

3. BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

Background

In response to the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Victorian Government is investing up to \$169.6 million in early childhood education by providing free kindergarten to each enrolled child participating in a funded kindergarten program in 2021. All families with a child enrolled in a funded kindergarten program are eligible for Free Kindergarten, this includes all children attending funded kindergarten programs in the year before school (four-year-old kindergarten) and services offering funded three-year-old kindergarten. The initiative also includes reduced fees for children enrolled in a funded kindergarten program in a long day care centre and for children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services.

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 2021 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*, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

4. DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority etc. refer to the *General Definitions* section of this manual.

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: <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy-0>

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 ensure 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.

Enrolment application fee: A payment to cover administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's enrolment application for a place in a program at the service.

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 2021: Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and eligible three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free in 2021 as part of a \$169.6 million investment in early childhood education in the 2020/21 Victorian State Budget. Free Kinder forms part of the

economic recovery support for Victorians as we recover from the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The initiative is for 2021 only.

Health care card: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. Details are available at: www.humanservices.gov.au

Kindergarten fee deposit: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service, which is not applicable in 2021. Any deposit made prior to the commencement of Term One will be reimbursed to families.

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.

Wrap around care: care that is provided by a kindergarten service to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program.

5. SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

Sources

- *Free Kinder 2021 - Information for Service Providers*
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/freekinder2021.aspx>
- *Free Kinder 2021 – Frequently asked questions about Free Kinder 2021*
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/freekinder2021.asp>
- *The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training):*
www.education.vic.gov.au
- ELAA <https://elaa.org.au/>

Service policies

- *Complaints and Grievances Policy*
- *Delivery and Collection of Children Policy*
- *Enrolment and Orientation Policy*
- *Excursions and Service Events Policy*
- *Governance and Management of the Service Policy*
- *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*

PROCEDURES

The Approved Provider and Person with Management and Control are responsible for:

- implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the Nominated Supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Definitions)
- reimbursing families in full for any deposit or fee payments that have already been made for 2021 within a reasonable timeframe (excluding any voluntary payments/donations that the parent has agreed to)
- ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted)
- ensuring families are only charged for kindergarten programs hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or "wrap around" care.
- ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service nominate which service the child will participate in the funded kindergarten program

- 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 in 2022.
 - ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted
 - charging families only for excursions/special events that occur outside the normal program/curriculum
 - ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system
 - collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system
 - ensuring that the 2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)
 - providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kindergarten (refer to Attachment 1)
 - providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (refer to samples in Attachments 2 and 3) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable
 - providing all parents/guardians with an additional payment fee agreement (refer to samples in Attachments 4 and 5), if applicable
 - complying with the service's Privacy and Confidentiality Policy regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of additional hours fees
- notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the additional hours fees charged, 2022 kindergarten fees or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2)), and ideally providing one term's notice.

The Nominated Supervisor and Person in Day-to-Day Charge is responsible for:

- assisting the Approved Provider in developing this policy, and ensuring that this policy is based on the DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Definitions)
- implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the Approved Provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Sources)
- ensuring families are only charged for kindergarten program hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or "wrap around" care.
- ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service nominate which service the child will participate in the funded kindergarten program
- charging families only for excursion/special event that occur outside the normal program/curriculum
- ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system
- collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system
- ensuring that the Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)
- providing all parents/guardians with information about free kindergarten (refer to Attachment 1)
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (refer to samples in Attachments 2 and 3) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable
- providing all parents/guardians with an additional hours fee payment agreement (refer to samples in Attachments 4 and 5), if applicable
- complying with the service's Privacy and Confidentiality Policy regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- 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 (Regulation 172(2)), and ideally providing one term's notice.

Educators and all other staff are responsible for:

- 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.

Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- reading the Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc. 2021 Free Kindergarten information for families (refer to Attachment 1), the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (refer to Attachments 4 and 5) and the Statement of Additional Hours Fees and Charges (refer to Attachments 2 and 3), if applicable
- signing and complying with the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (refer to Attachments 4 and 5) 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 the Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc.

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
- notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures (Regulation 172(2)) unless a lesser period is necessary because of a risk.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: 2021 Free Kindergarten information for families

AUTHORISATION

SIGNED

Name: Sigrid Hyett, CEO, Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc.

DET Approved Provider appointed person with management and control NSEYC

| DOCUMENT CONTROL TABLE | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| ACTION | DATE |
| Adopted | 1 August 2013 |
| Reviewed | 13 August 2019 |
| Reviewed | 6 October 2020 |
| Reviewed | 1 April 2021 |
| Next Review Date | October 2021 |

ATTACHMENT 1

2021 Free Kindergarten information for families

Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc. 2021

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and eligible three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free in 2021 as part of a \$169.6 million investment in early childhood education in the 2020/21 Victorian State Budget. Free Kindergarten forms part of the economic recovery support for Victorians as we recover from the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The initiative is for 2021 only.

This investment will save families around \$2,000 for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program in 2021.

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

[Service Name]The Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc. has opted in to the 2021 Free Kindergarten initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (5 hours per week) – no parent fee
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee

Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc. will reimburse families in full for any deposit or fee payments that have already been made for 2021 within a reasonable timeframe (excluding any voluntary parent donations/payments that you agree to in writing.)

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc.] 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 Board and Person with Management and Control 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 Person with Management and Control. .

4. Unfunded three-year-old programs

Families that have children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services will not pay fees in 2021. The Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc. will waive the gap between the usual program fee and the payment made by the State in 2021.

5. 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.

