

**KINDERGARTEN PAYMENT OF FEES POLICY**

Under the Education and Care Services National Regulations [regulation 162 (2)], the approved provider must ensure a comprehensive written fee policy is in place for the payment of fees and clearly communicate this policy with all families at time of enrolment.

Our Service is committed to supporting the Victorian Government’s Free Kindergarten initiative as part of the Best Start, Best Life reform.

Links to Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011.

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| EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL REGULATIONS |
| 168 | Education and care services must have policies and procedures |
| 172 | Notification of change to policies and procedures |

Links to National Quality Standard 2018

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| QUALITY AREA 7: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP |
| 7.1 | Governance  | Governance supports the operation of a quality service  |
| 7.1.2 | Management Systems  | Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service  |
| 7.1.3 | Roles and Responsibilities  | Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and understood and support effective decision making and operation of the service  |

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 | Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (No Jab, No Play) Act 2015 |
| Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 | Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (MARAM) |
| Disability Discrimination Act 1992 | Children Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 |
| Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015 |  |
| Family Assistance Law- Incorporating all related legislation for Child Care Provider Handbook in Appendix G<https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/child-care-provider-handbook> |

Related Policies

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| CCS Accounts PolicyChild Care Subsidy (CCS) Governance PolicyDealing with Complaints PolicyDelivery of children to, and Collection from Education and Care Service Premises | Free Kindergarten Enrolment Policy (Vic)Fraud Prevention PolicyGovernance Policy Orientation of Families Policy Privacy and Confidentiality Policy Termination of Enrolment Policy  |

Purpose

For parents to gain a clear understanding of the service fee structure for Kindergarten, payment requirements and Child Care Subsidy benefits prior to enrolment. This policy provides guidelines for *Free Kinder* for funded kindergarten programs available at our Service and the collection and payment of additional hours of education and care.

Scope

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

Implementation

Our Service aims to ensure families understand the fee schedule and how *Free Kinder* funding is applied for our kindergarten programs and payment of fees for additional education and care above the funded program.

We are committed to meet our obligations to maintain financial integrity and comply with all *Free Kinder* funding and Child Care Subsidy legislative requirements.

We have effective compliance systems in place to ensure all childcare funding is administered appropriately. Our Service ensures the confidentiality and privacy of all personal information provided to the Service about the enrolled child and family and abide by the Victorian Protective Security Standards (VPSS) and Australian Privacy Principles (APP).

Fees/Free Kinder

* Fees are based on our ability to provide the requirements of the Education and Care National Law and National Regulations, Family Assistance Law, the Australian Taxation Office and guidelines contained in the Child Care Provider Handbook and the Funded Kindergarten Guide.
* Fees are charged for each session of care and vary depending on the age of the child in care, Free Kinder fee offset and the family’s eligibility for Child Care Subsidy (CCS).
* The Victorian Government will make *Free Kinder* payments to our Service to offset the parent fee component for a 15-hour program. This equates to a $2,000 reduction in fees per year for each child and is calculated and paid pro-rata from a child’s funding start date.
* Children must only receive funding for *Free Kinder* at one service. If a child attends more than one service that offers a funded kindergarten program (e.g., a sessional service for some days and a long day care service on other days), the family must nominate which service they will receive their funded kindergarten program and therefore their Free Kinder funding.
* Free Kinder fees will be applied weekly per school term. Free Kinder fees will not be paid during school holidays.
* Free Kinder offsets will not impact CCS payments to families for additional education and care provided by our Service.
* CCS is paid directly to the Service, and this is used as a fee reduction.
* Families are required to pay the difference between the fee charged, *Free Kindy* offset fee and the CCS subsidy amount- the ‘gap’ amount
* Fees must be kept in advance of a child’s attendance
* Free Kinder offsets will be shown on all account statements as “Vic Govt Free Kinder Offset”
* Fees are to be paid weekly through a direct debit system. If families wish to pay fees on a fortnightly or monthly basis, it is a requirement that the family pay in advance and are not in arrears.
* Fees are payable in advance for every session that a child is enrolled at the Service. This includes pupil free days, sick days, and family holidays but excludes periods when the Service is closed. The Service may be directed to close due to periods of local emergency such as bushfire or flood.
* If a session of care falls on a public holiday, families are required to pay normal fees. CCS may be paid for sessions that fall on public holidays.
* Fees are charged for full sessions only (regardless of the actual attendance hours any day).
* Casual days may be offered to families if available within the Service’s license.

Our Service promotes participation of all children, particularly among children who require additional support, such as children with disability and Aboriginal children. Free or low-cost programs are available for eligible children through the Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) program.

Daily Fees

Our daily fees are as follows:

Daily Fee - $140

Casual Fee - $140

Public holidays will be charged as normal.

Our service does not charge for the two-week Christmas closure inclusive of public holidays.

Payment of Fees

* Families will be able to access their statement through the Xplor Home App.
* Free Kinder fee offset will be clearly indicated on parent statements as “Vic Govt Free Kinder Offset”
* Families are required to pay fees using the Service’s direct debit system. The family is required to provide banking details to facilitate set up of the direct debit account
* Fees and charges associated with direct debit system are outlined upon enrolment
* A dishonour fee will apply for direct debit transactions where there are insufficient funds to cover the fees
* Families eligible for Child Care Subsidy will be issued with a *Statement of Entitlement* on a fortnightly basis in accordance with the fee payment and Regulatory requirements
* The *Statement of Entitlement* is generated using our CCS Software which meets all requirements as per Family Assistance Law legislation.

**Financial Difficulties**

Our Service is committed to building supportive and trusting partnerships with families and children.

* If a family is experiencing financial difficulties, a suitable payment plan may be arranged with authorisation of the Approved Provider.
* Families can apply for Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) through Centrelink for additional fee assistance if they are experiencing temporary financial hardship.
* There are four different payments under Additional Child Care Subsidy:
	+ Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing)—to help children who are at risk of serious abuse or neglect. The approved provider is involved in determining children who may require additional support who are at risk of harm
	+ Additional Child Care Subsidy (grandparent)—to help grandparents on income support who are the principal caregiver of their grandchildren. Families are required to contact Centrelink directly regarding this payment
	+ Additional Child Care Subsidy (temporary financial hardship)—to help families experiencing financial hardship. Families are required to contact Centrelink directly regarding this payment

Additional Child Care Subsidy (transition to work)—to help low-income families transitioning from income support to work. Families are required to contact Centrelink directly regarding this payment.

Debt Recovery Procedure

* If a family fails to pay the required fees on time, a reminder letter will be issued after one week and then again, after two weeks if the fees are still outstanding.
* At any time of the debt recovery process the family will be encouraged to enter a debt agreement with the service to repay outstanding fees. The family will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss repayment options.
* A written contract will be provided for the family to sign outlining repayment plan details. The repayment plan will provide information as to the duration and amount of the repayments as well as steps that will be taken if the repayment plan is not adhered to.
* A child’s position will be terminated if payment has not been made after three weeks, for which the family will receive a final letter terminating the child’s position. At this time the Service will initiate its debt collection process, following privacy and conditional requirements.

Late Fees

* Our Service is not licensed or insured to have children on the premises after hours. This is a breach in the Education and Care Regulations.
* It is unacceptable to pick children up late from the Service. A late fee will apply where children are not picked up prior to closing time.
* Currently, a fee of $15.00 per 10 minutes block or part thereof will be incurred by the family.
* Late fees will not have Child Care Subsidy or Kindergarten Funding applied
* A review of the child’s enrolment will occur where families are consistently late with fee payment.

Change of Fees

* Fees are subject to change at any time provided a minimum of 14 days written notice is given to all families.
* CCS hourly rate caps may be increased by the [CPI](https://guides.dss.gov.au/family-assistance-guide/acronyms#cpi) at the commencement of each financial year. Any CCS hourly rate increases are governed by CCS and are automatically adjusted through our CCS Software.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

* Parents/guardians are required to register for CCS through their [myGov](https://my.gov.au/LoginServices/main/login?execution=e2s1) account linked to Centrelink and provide documentation to support the CCS payment
* Basic requirements that must be satisfied for an individual to be eligible to receive Child Care Subsidy. The child must:
	+ be a ‘Family Tax Benefit child’ or ‘regular care child’ and
	+ be 13 or under and not attending secondary school and
	+ meet immunisation requirements
* The person claiming the Child Care Subsidy, or their partner must:
	+ meet residency requirements and
	+ be liable to pay for care provided under a Complying Written Arrangement (their written agreement) with their childcare provider
* Childcare must be provided by an approved provider
* Families level of Child Care Subsidy will be determined by:
	+ combined family income
	+ activity test of parents
	+ type of early learning and childcare Service.
* Child Care Subsidy will be provided directly to the Service and this amount deducted from the parent/family account.
* Families must regularly check their details are correct and report a change in circumstance to Centrelink (family income, activity levels, relationship changes or any other changes to their circumstances).
* Any disputes with CCS payments are the responsibility of the family. The family will be referred to contact Centrelink directly for any enquiries regarding CCS payments.

Discounts will only be offered as outlined in the CCS Handbook.

Complaints Relating to the Administration of Child Care Subsidy

Families who wish to raise concerns regarding the management of Child Care Subsidy should speak with the Nominated Supervisor in the first instance. The Nominated Supervisor will follow the steps as outlined in this policy, including advising the Approved Provider of all grievances.

Families can raise concerns regarding management of the Child Care Subsidy to the dedicated Child Care Tip-Off Line either via phone or email:

Phone: 1800 664 231

Email: tipoffline@education.gov.au

Termination of Enrolment

* Parents are to provide two weeks written notice of their intention to withdraw a child from the Service.
* If termination from the Service is required without notification, families may lose their Child Care Subsidy, resulting in the payment of requirement for full fees to be charged.
* If a child moves to another service during the kindergarten year, funding from Free Kinder will more with the child, with regular payments made to the new service for the remainder of the year.
* In some circumstances CCS may not be paid for sessions if the child has not physically started care.
* Additionally, CCS may not be paid for absences submitted after a child’s last physical day of care, unless conditions have been met as specified by Family Assistance Law.

Responsibility of Management

THE APPROVED PROVIDER AND NOMINATED SUPERVISOR WILL:

* provide all families with access to our *Kindergarten Payment of Fees Policy*
* provide information to families of operating hours including term dates, planned closures and additional hours to account for closure [related to funded kindergarten programs]
* review this policy annually and in consultation with families/staff and other stakeholders
* ensure families are aware of payment options and procedures
* directly offset the full Free Kinder payment from the fees of parents with children receiving their funded kindergarten program at the service
* ensure families are not charged for incursions or regular excursions (e.g.; Bush Kinder)
* ensure families are notified of any additional charges – excursions/incursions in writing
* ensure any surplus funding is used to improve the quality of our funded kindergarten program and support engagement of families
* ensure that any funded child is recorded in KIMS
* notify families of any overdue fees
* discuss fee payment with families if required
* provide families with reminder letters as required
* provide at least 14 days written notice to families of any proposed fee increases or the way in which fees are collected. Families will be notified via electronic means on Storypark.
* adhere to the service’s *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information
* share or request information with other Information Sharing Entities (ISEs) under legislative principles of Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) or Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS)
* ensure any person with management or control and any person responsible for the day-to-day operation of the service are fit and proper persons to be involved in the administration of Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy (Family Assistance Law)
* ensure background checks, including criminal history checks are carried out for any personnel administering Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy (Family Assistance Law)

Educators and Other Staff Will:

* read and adhere to the *Kindergarten* *Payment of Fees Policy*
* advise the Nominated Supervisor or management of any concerns or complaints regarding the management of Child Care Subsidy or kindergarten funding subsidy or grants raised by families

Responsibility of Families

* read and adhere to the *Kindergarten Payment of Fees Policy*
* provide the Service with the correct enrolment details to facilitate the *Free Kinder Funding* and Child Care Subsidy (CCS), if required, including:
	+ Centrelink Reference Numbers for child and CCS claimant
	+ Date of Birth for child and CCS claimant
* provide proof of their child’s immunisation status as per No Jab No Play legislation
* nominate and document which service their child will participate in to receive Free Kinder funding
* ensure payment of additional fees as per policy
* notify the approved provider/nominated supervisor if experiencing any payment difficulties
* notify Centrelink of any changes that may affect their CCS entitlement
* confirm their child’s enrolment through the parents myGov account.

Definitions

Child Care Subsidy A Commonwealth Government means tested subsidy to assist families with childcare fees at approved education and care services. Payment is made directly to approved childcare providers. Eligible families can receive CCS under Family Assistance Law. [[Child Care Subsidy](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy)]

Early Start Kindergarten A funding program that enables eligible three-year old children to access up to 15 hours of kindergarten a week for two years before starting school. Eligible children must be three by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten and include those who are from a refuge or asylum seeker background, or identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or are known to Child Protection or Child FIRST [[Early Start Kindergarten](https://www.vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten)]

Enrolment application fee A payment to cover administrative costs associated with the enrolment of a child at our service

Excursion/event fee An additional fee charged to cover the costs for participation in a planned excursion where fees are required to cover transportation, entry fees or other related costs. (See: Excursion/Incursion Policy)

Fees Fees charged for program hours over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 per year).

Free Kindergarten Free Kinder is an initiative by the Victorian Government to support families access up to 15 hours of free kindergarten for three-year-old and four-year-old children in a funded service.

Kindergarten fee deposit Payment to secure a position in a funded kindergarten program. This fee should no act as a barrier to enrolling families to our Service. The enrolment fee will be refunded in the child commences in a funded kindergarten program. If the child does not commence kindergarten

Statement of entitlement A statement provided to parents eligible for CCS each fortnight detailing sessions of care provided and the resulting fee reduction amounts, including the Free Kinder offset fees.

Sources, further reading and useful websites

Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority. (2014).

Australian Government Department of Education. Child Care Provider Handbook <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/child-care-provider-handbook>

Australian Government Services Australia. (2021). [Child Care Subsidy](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy).

Department of Education and Training. (2023). [*The Kindergarten Funding Guide*](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide#funding-guide)*.*

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

[Education and Care Services National Regulations](https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/sl-2011-0653?query=((Repealed%3DN+AND+PrintType%3D%22act.reprint%22+AND+PitValid%3D@pointInTime(20200831000000))+OR+(Repealed%3DN+AND+PrintType%3D%22reprint%22+AND+PitValid%3D@pointInTime(20200831000000))+OR+(Repealed%3DN+AND+(PrintType%3D%22epi.reprint%22+OR+PrintType%3D%22epi.electronic%22)+AND+PitValid%3D@pointInTime(20200831000000)))+AND+Content%3D(%22early%22+AND+%22childhood%22)&dQuery=Document+Types%3D%22%3Cspan+class%3D%27dq-highlight%27%3EActs%3C/span%3E,+%3Cspan+class%3D%27dq-highlight%27%3ERegulations%3C/span%3E,+%3Cspan+class%3D%27dq-highlight%27%3EEPIs%3C/span%3E%22,+Search+In%3D%22%3Cspan+class%3D%27dq-highlight%27%3EAll+Content%3C/span%3E%22,+All+Words%3D%22%3Cspan+class%3D%27dq-highlight%27%3Eearly+childhood%3C/span%3E%22,+Point+In+Time%3D%22%3Cspan+class%3D%27dq-highlight%27%3E31/08/2020%3C/span%3E%22). (2011). (Amended 2023).

Policy review

NSELC encourages staff and parents to be actively involved in the annual review of each of its policies and procedures. In addition, NSELC will accommodate any new legislative changes as they occur and any issues identified as part Next Steps ELC’s commitment to quality improvement. NSELC consults with relevant recognised authorities as part of the annual review to ensure the policy contents are consistent with current research and contemporary views on best practice.

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| POLICY REVIEWED BY: | Rhiannon Gough | Educational Leader | 24/10/2023 |
| POLICY REVIEWED | OCTOBER 2023 | NEXT REVIEW DATE | JUNE 2024 |
| VERSION | V4.06.23 |
| MODIFICATIONS | * Policy re-written to adhere to *Free Kinder* funding guidelines (2023)
* hyperlinks checked
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| POLICY REVIEWED | PREVIOUS MODIFICATIONS | NEXT REVIEW DATE |
| OCTOBER 2021 | * New policy drafted for Funded Kindergarten (VIC)
 | JUNE 2022 |