

Emerge Early Years Services (EEYS) are committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children, and this will be the primary focus of our education, care and decision-making. Our commitment will be enacted through the implementation and monitoring of the Child Safe Standards.

EEYS have zero tolerance to child abuse.

EEYS are committed to providing a child safe environment where children feel safe, secure and empowered and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Particular attention will be paid to the Cultural safety of Aboriginal Children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as the safety of children with a disability.

Please note that sections written in blue are only applicable for integrated services that are providing Free Kindergarten and Long Day Care Program

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how services comply with the Free Kinder initiative.



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

EEYS 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 EEYS.

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 <i>(refer to Definitions)</i>	R	✓	✓	✓	
2. 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 reasonable steps to ensure those policies and procedures are followed <i>(Regulation 170)</i>	R	✓			
3. Ensuring that families are informed of the operating hours including term dates, planned closures and additional hours to account for closures.	R	✓			
4. Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted)	R	✓			
5. Ensuring that children enrolled in a kindergarten program are not charged higher fees in comparison to children that are not attracting kindergarten funding	R	✓			
6. Directly offsetting the full Free Kinder entitlement from the fees of parents/ guardians with children receiving their funded kindergarten program at the centre (service providers are not required to separately calculate and record the cost of the kindergarten hours separately for integrated programs)	R	✓			
7. Applying the fee offset regularly (e.g., fortnightly or monthly) and clearly indicating the offset amount (labelled Victorian Government Free Kinder offset) on parent/ guardian's invoice statements]	R	✓			
8. Communicating with parents/guardians that the offsets will not impact their CCS payments	R	✓			

9. Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guidelines (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	✓			
10. Providing communication to families explaining their access to one year of three-year-old and one year of Pre-Prep program	R	✓			
11. Ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten/pre prep and a long day care service nominate and document which service the child will participate in the funded kindergarten/pre prep program	R	✓		✓	
12. 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	✓			
13. Use any surplus funding on improvement efforts for the funded kindergarten program, such as improving quality and supporting engagement of families for the minority of cases where parents are charged less than the Free Kinder entitlement -of-pocket fees for the duration of the kindergarten year					
14. Ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted	R	✓			
15. Charging families only for an occasional special event/ excursions that occur outside the normal program/curriculum	R	✓	✓		
16. Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system	R	✓	✓		
17. Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system	R	✓	✓		
18. Ensuring that the <i>Fees – Pre-Prep Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	✓			
19. Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kinder (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	✓			
20. 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	✓	✓	✓	
21. 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	✓			

22. 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	✓	✓	✓	
23. 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 old kindergarten and Pre-Prep.

Free Kinder supports families to access a funded kindergarten program by:

- providing up to free 30-hours of Pre-Prep 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.

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 of 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*)

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 up to 30 hours of free Pre-Prep for eligible children in the year before school
- 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: 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 [Service Name]

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

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of EEYS on 1/1/2026.

NEXT REVIEW DATE: September 2026



VERSION	REVIEW DATE	DOCUMENT WRITER	REVISION DESCRIPTION	APPROVED BY
V1	September 2025	Policy Officer	Endorsing a new policy in line with new Pre prep rollout 2026	Elicia Napoli

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDER INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

EEYS 2026

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for three-year-old children and Pre-Prep for four-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	Depended on individual services
Term 1	Tuesday 27 January 2026 – Friday 5 April 2026
Term 2	Tuesday 20 April 2026 – Friday 26 June 2026
Term 3	Monday 13 July 2026 - Friday 18 September 2026
Term 4	Monday 5 October 2026 - Friday 18 December 2025
Planned Closures	TBA

2. What Free Kinder means at our service

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

- o Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (up to 15 hours per week) – no parent fee
- o Funded sessional kindergarten for Pre-Prep 4-year-old children (up to 20 hours per week) - no parent fee
- o Kindergarten and Pre-Prep in long day care for 3 and 4 -year-old children – parent fee will be reduced by the Free Kinder Funding

4.1 Integrated Services

EEYS will directly offset the Free Kinder entitlement from the fees of parents/ guardians with children receiving their funded kindergarten program at the centre

The fee offset will be applied regularly (e.g., fortnightly or monthly) and clearly indicating the offset amount (labelled Victorian Government Free Kinder offset) on parent/ guardian's invoice statements]

The offsets will not impact their CCS payments.

3. 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.

4. Subsidies

4.1 Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is an Australian Government subsidy that can assist eligible families with the costs of childcare at an approved child care provider. EEYS is an approved care provider.

Approved child care are providers that meet certain standards and requirements, and are approved by the Australian Government. Approved child care providers must:

- hold the required approvals or licences to provide child care in the state or territory that the service/s operate in
- ensure the provider and any individual who is or will be a Person with Management or Control of the Provider is fit and a proper person to administer the CCS (requirements set out in Section 194E of A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999.
- be financially viable and is likely to remain so
- ensure that required fit and proper checks are carried out for each Person with Management or Control of the Provider, Persons with Responsibility for Day-to-Day Operation of the Service and In-Home Care and Family Day Care Educators

The amount of subsidy received is determined by the circumstances of the applicant's including the family income, the hourly rate cap and the hours of activity undertaken by the parents.

Further information for parents can be found here: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/child-care-subsidy>

Long day care providers that offer funded kindergarten as part of the long day care program are required to directly offset the full payment of the Free Kinder initiative from parents' out of pocket fees (after CCS is applied). Fee reductions will be made proportionally across the year to families' bills, i.e. fortnightly or monthly. Only children receiving a funded kindergarten place at [service name], led by a qualified teacher, are eligible under this initiative.

Exclusions and exceptions: Not available for providers that primarily provide an early educational program to children in the year that is two years before grade one of school (preschool or kindergarten)

