

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 Renown Kindergarten ensuring it is only used to ensure the quality of program delivery and development of children enrolled in the service
- the setting, payment and collection of gap fees for unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten
- ensuring the viability of Renown Kindergarten, by setting appropriate gap fees for unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten

POLICY STATEMENT

1. VALUES

Renown Kindergarten 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 Renown Kindergarten.

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.

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 ensures 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

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
- The constitution of Renown Kindergarten

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)
- Managing any donations or voluntary payments that have been made to the Service during the Free Kindergarten initiative
- 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 roll out areas)
- 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)
- 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 Renown Kindergarten 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
- 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 Renown Kindergarten

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
- Attachment 2: Statement of additional hours and/or wrap around fees
- Attachment 3: Statement of gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds
- Attachment 4: Additional hours and/or wrap around care fee payment agreement
- Attachment 5: Gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds payment agreement

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of Renown Kindergarten on 6/3/21

REVIEW DATE: POLICY IS ONLY IN PLACE FOR 2021

ATTACHMENT 1

2021 Free Kindergarten information for families

Renown Kindergarten 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

Renown Kindergarten has opted in to the 2021 Free Kindergarten initiative. Renown Kindergarten will welcome donations from families with children enrolled in the 4-year-old programs (Wombat, Koala and Coccinelle)

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee, donations welcomed.
- Unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children – parent fee will be reduced by a \$1,600 offset (which will be prorated for less than five hours)

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Renown Kindergarten are included in 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*).

4. 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.

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 payable 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.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy>.

5. **Unfunded three-year-old programs**

Families that have children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services will receive \$1,600 reduction in parent fees. Compulsory parent fees can be charged above this amount but must not exceed the gap between the payment made by the State and the fee for 2021. Services are required to directly offset the full \$1,600 payment (which will be prorated for less than five hours) from parent fees.

6. **Payment of fees**

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. Please also refer to Renown Kindergarten's Fee Policy below

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yARQAIR5lmePKCn3RIRP0eGile_WqA1YOCeuhsv9h7I/edit?usp=sharing

Fees will be invoiced to parents/guardians directly and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions. 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.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Director or Accounts Payable to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The Committee of Management is committed to supporting the welfare of the wider community and will support families facing financial hardship to the best of their ability. 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 - Please refer to Renown Kindergarten's Fees Policy**

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yARQAIR5lmePKCn3RIRP0eGile_WqA1YOCeuhsv9h7I/edit?usp=sharing

8. **Refund of fees - Please refer to Renown Kindergarten's Fees Policy**

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yARQAIR5lmePKCn3RIRP0eGile_WqA1YOCeuhsv9h7I/edit?usp=sharing

9. **Children turning three during the year of enrolment for unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten**

Full payment of a gap fee from the first day of Term 1 is required if a place is to be reserved for a child in the three-year-old kindergarten program. Children can only commence the program when they have turned three.

10. **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.

11. **Notification of fee changes during the year**

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

Please refer to Renown Kindergarten Fee Policy

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yARQAIR5lmePKCn3RIRP0eGile_WqA1YOCeuhsv9h7l/edit?usp=sharing

ATTACHMENT 3**Statement of gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds****Renown Kindergarten****Fee schedule 2021****Echidna Program for 3 year olds**

	Gap fee	Total (\$)
Term 1	600	600
Term 2	67	67
Term 3	67	67
Term 4	67	67
Total	800	800

Possum Program for 3 year olds

	Gap fee	Total (\$)
Term 1	1,100	1,100
Term 2	567	567
Term 3	567	567
Term 4	567	567
Total	2,800	2,800

Coccinelle Program for 3 year olds

	Gap fee	Total (\$)
Term 1	1,555	1,555
Term 2	1,022	1,022
Term 3	1,022	1,022
Term 4	1,022	1,022
Total	4,620	4,620

Echidna & Coccinelle Dual Program for 3 year olds

	Gap fee	Total (\$)
Term 1	2,155	2,155
Term 2	1,622	1,622
Term 3	1,622	1,622
Term 4	1,622	1,622
Total	7,020	7,020

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued for Renown Kindergarten's 3 year old programs and must be paid by the due date.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

For information on the Child Care Subsidy, refer to Fee information for families.

Children turning three during the year

Full payment of the gap fee from the first day of Term 1 is required if a place is to be reserved for a child in the three-year-old unfunded kindergarten program. Children can only commence the program when they have turned three.

Late collection charge

The Committee of Management/Board reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child (refer to Fee information for families).

ATTACHMENT 4

Additional hours and/or wrap around care fee payment agreement \

Please complete this form and return to Renown Kindergarten by

Fee payment contract

Child's full name:

Parent's/guardian's full name:

- I/we acknowledge that the four-year-old 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) funded kindergarten program is fully funded by the state government, with the balance of additional hours over and above and/or wrap around care coming from fees paid by parents/guardians.
- I/we understand that fees for additional hours each term are non-refundable.
- I/we acknowledge that if fees for additional hours are not paid by the due date, the Committee of Management/Board will implement the late payment of fees procedures, as outlined in the *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Information for Families*, which could result in the withdrawal of my/our child's place at the service and no further enrolments until the outstanding fees are paid.
- I/we agree that if my/our financial circumstances change and I/we am/are unable to pay as agreed, I/we will immediately notify the Committee of Management to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service's *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Information for Families*, which outlines the procedure for payment of fees.

Signature (parent/guardian)

Date

Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with the Renown Kindergarten *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Policy*.

ATTACHMENT 5

Gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds payment agreement

Please complete this form and return to Renown Kindergarten by

ATE> Fee payment contract

Child's full name:

Parent's/guardian's full name:

- I/we acknowledge that the unfunded kindergarten program for 3-year olds is only partly funded by the state government, with the balance of the gap coming from fees paid by parents/guardians.
- I/we agree to pay the gap fee by the due date on the invoice.
- I/we understand that gap fees for each term are non-refundable.
- I/we acknowledge that if the gap fees are not paid by the due date, the Committee of Management/Board will implement the late payment of fees procedures, as outlined in the *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Information for Families*, which could result in the withdrawal of my/our child's place at the service and no further enrolments until the outstanding fees are paid.
- I/we agree that if my/our financial circumstances change and I/we am/are unable to pay as agreed, I/we will immediately notify the Committee of Management to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service's *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Information for Families*, which outlines the procedure for payment of fees.

Signature (parent/guardian)

Date

Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with the Renown Kindergarten *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Policy*