

Fees - Free Kinder (Sessional) Policy

Policy Details

Classification	Mandatory
Quality area/s	7 – Governance and Leadership
Policy owner	President president@raleighst.org
Date of approval/most recent review	Oct 2024
Date of next review	June 2025



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how services comply with the Free Kinder funding requirements.



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Raleigh St Community Children's Centre Services (Raleigh St) are 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 families

SCOPE

This policy applies to the Committee of Management, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge and families attending at Raleigh St.

RESPONSIBILITIES	Committee of Management and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Families	Contractors, volunteers and students
R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted					
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with families, 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 reasonable steps to ensure those policies and procedures are followed (<i>Regulation 170</i>)	R	✓			
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	✓			
Ensuring families pay a security deposit of \$200 (\$50 for concession card holders) to hold their child's place, refundable at the end of the child's kinder years minus any outstanding fees. Families that do not go ahead with their child's enrolment after paying the deposit will not be refunded	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 provide banking details to cover late charges or one off excursions/incursions in their enrolment record	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 another 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 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 (Sessional) Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	✓			
Providing all families with information about Free Kinder (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	✓			
Providing all families with a statement of early drop off and late pick-up charges when a free kinder (sessional) enrolment is dropped off more than 5 minutes before the kinder session begins or is not picked within 5 minutes of the end of the kinder session (<i>refer to Attachment 2</i>) upon enrolment of their child 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. For more than 15 hours a week the enrolment type must change to integrated kinder, and daily fees are charged.	R	✓			
Reading the Free Kinder information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>) and the Fee Schedule – Sessional Kinder (<i>refer to Attachment 2</i>)				✓	
Notifying the approved provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of late fees				✓	
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 charges	R	✓	✓	✓	
Notifying families a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the late 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 families, the approved provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	✓	✓	✓	
Referring families 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 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 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 an ECEC service

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.

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*)

Late Fees: A charge for program hours over and above the 15 funded hours per week incurred when an enrolled child is dropped off more than 10 minutes before kinder begins, or picked up more than 10 minutes after kinder program ends

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: 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.

Security bond: 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 security bond will only be refunded (minus fees incurred) if the child commences in the service. The bond amount is set at 2 x the daily fee for attendance at childcare for children enrolled in Free Kindergarten.

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.

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>

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 Committee of Management 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
- monitor the number of families/children excluded from the service because of their inability to pay fees
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, 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: Statement of additional hours and/or wrap around fees



AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Committee of Management of Raleigh St Community Children's Centre on 8/10/2024.

NEXT REVIEW DATE: 01/06/2025

POLICY REVIEW HISTORY

Date	Modification
Sep 2024	Policy updated to reflect late/early fees administration, align with ELAA Ver 1.2. Details of security bond added
June 2024	Policy updated to reflect new fee and align with ELAA Ver 1.1
June 2023	Policy updated to reflect new fee from 10 July 2023
February 2023	Policy reviewed and updated to align with ELAA Version 1.0
June 2022	Policy reviewed and updated to align with CC Desktop template
July 2017	Policy created and endorsed by CoM

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDER INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

RALEIGH ST COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S CENTRE 2025

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.

Kinder hours - 9am to 4:30pm	Dates	3 yr old kinder days in Murrup Room	4 yr old kinder days at 2A Raleigh St
Term 1	29 January – 4 April	Tue, Wed, Fri	Mon, Tue, Wed
Term 2	22 April – 4 July	Tue, Wed, Fri	Mon, Tue, Wed
Term 3	21 July – 19 September	Tue, Wed, Fri	Mon, Tue, Wed
Term 4	6 October – 19 December	Tue, Wed, Fri	Mon, Tue, Wed
Planned Closures	Tuesday 10 th June		
Additional Hours to account for closure	TBD		

What Free Kinder means at our service

Raleigh St Community Children's Centre (Raleigh St) has opted in to the Free Kinder initiative. Applicable parent fee structures are outlined below:

- **Funded sessional kindergarten** for 3-year-old children (up to 15 hours per week) – no fee
- **Funded sessional kindergarten** for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no fee
- **Integrated Kindergarten** in ECEC for 3 and 4 -year-old children – weekly fee will be reduced by the Free Kinder Funding during school term times

Other charges

Other charges levied by Raleigh St are outlined in the Fee Schedule below

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*).
- **Late collection charge:** The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when families are late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by the Committee of Management and forms part of the Fee Schedule for the year of attendance.

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.

Security Bond

The security bond (*refer to Definitions*) will be fully refunded to families only when the child leaves Raleigh St at the end of a kinder year. **The bond is not refundable if the family decides not to go ahead with the enrolment after accepting an offer.**

Method of payment

- Fees are payable by direct debit only
- Raleigh St uses Xap, a Child Care Subsidy System used for tracking fees, subsidies and payments.
- Upon enrolment, families are issued with a username and password to set up their payment details and view their fees account in Xap
- Families are expected to become familiar with this application and keep track of their fees account via this portal at www.xap.rocks or through the Xap *Smile* app on a tablet or phone
- Invoices will be sent to the families' nominated email address on a fortnightly basis and payments are debited from the account by a direct debit arrangement between the family and a third party (QuickPay) on the due date of the invoice
- The direct debit occurs on the Friday following receipt of the last invoice, and families are invoiced for fees in arrears
- It is the family's responsibility to inform Raleigh St if invoices are not being received, or the nominated email address has changed
- An \$8.50 dishonour fee is charged by QuickPay if the direct debit fails due to insufficient funds.
- There are fees if you nominate a credit card facility to pay your account - 1.8% of the payment amount for Visa or Mastercard, and 3.6% for Amex or Diners Club cards
- Direct Debit from a savings account does not incur processing fees

Unpaid fees

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

- An initial reminder letter will be sent to families 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 families 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.
- Raleigh St 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 families will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing.
- No further enrolments of children from the families will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

ATTACHMENT 2. FEE SCHEDULE FOR 2025 – SESSIONAL KINDER

Late collection charge

The following late pick up /early drop off fees apply to families with children enrolled in the free sessional kinder program:

- \$5 for any part of the first 5 minutes before 8:55am or after 4:35pm,
- \$10 for 5-10 minutes before 8:55am or after 4:35pm
- \$15 for 10-15 minutes before 8:55am or after 4:35pm
- Plus - \$1 for each minute before 8:40am (drop off) or after 4:50pm (pickup)

The late fee is determined by the CoM and administered automatically by the fees system, based on sign-in and sign-out times.

We request that children are collected on time to allow for the correct staffing levels.

Security bond

A security bond is collected upon the acceptance of a place in the sessional kinder program. This amount is set at 2 x the daily fee for childcare. All families must pay this bond before their child(ren) begin enrolment, and this amount is refundable upon the end of the child's enrolment, minus any outstanding fees incurred.