

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

QUALITY AREA 7 | WEST HAWTHORN PRE-SCHOOL



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how services comply with the Free Kinder initiative.



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

West Hawthorn Pre-school is committed to:

- supporting the Victorian Government’s 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.

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 West Hawthorn Pre-school.

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					
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 (<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	√			
Reimbursing families in full for enrolment deposits that have already been paid upon commencement of enrolment, unless the family agrees in writing for the service to keep this as a voluntary payment	R	√			
Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and voluntary family payments are permitted)	R	√			
Ensuring families are only charged for optional kindergarten programs hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	R	√			
Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Funding Guidelines (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	√			
Ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a 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 family payments 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>Free Kindergarten Fee Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kindergarten (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (<i>refer to Attachments 2</i>) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with an additional payment fee agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 3</i>), if applicable	R	√			
Reading the West Hawthorn Pre-school Free Kindergarten information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>), the Statement of Additional Hours Fees and Charges (<i>refer to Attachments 2</i>), and the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 3</i>) if applicable				√	

Signing and complying with the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 3</i>), 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 West Hawthorn Pre-school				√	
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	√	√	√	
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	√			
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 (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	√	√	√	
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.		√	√		



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 Kindergarten, 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 Kindergarten, this includes both 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs.

Free Kindergarten 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 a long day care service

Free kindergarten 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 family payments and/or fundraising must comply with the 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

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.

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) if applicable: 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: www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy. Not applicable to West Hawthorn Pre-School.

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 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. Not applicable to West Hawthorn Pre-School.

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 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. 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 2032, 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.

Wrap around care: care that is provided by a kindergarten service to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program. Wrap around care fees are not funded by the Victorian Government but may be covered by CCS (*refer to Definitions*). Not applicable to West Hawthorn Pre-School.

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 and Training): www.education.vic.gov.au
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au>
- The constitution of West Hawthorn Pre-school

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
- Fees Policy

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 Kindergarten information for families
- Attachment 2: Statement of additional hours and/or wrap around fees
- Attachment 3: Additional hours and/or wrap around care fee payment agreement



AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of West Hawthorn Pre-school on 10/10/2023

REVIEW DATE: 10/10/2024

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

West Hawthorn Pre-school 2024

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and eligible three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free as part of the Best Start, Best Life reform.

This investment will save families up to \$2,500 for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program.

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.

Operation hours	Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri 8.30am-4pm
Term 1	29 January 2024 – 28 March 2024
Term 2	15 April 2024 – 28 June 2024
Term 3	15 July 2024 – 20 September 2024
Term 4	7 October 2024 – 20 December 2024
Planned Closures	Set Up Days – 29 & 30 January, 1 February 2024 Pack Up Days – 19 & 20 December 2024 Staff Professional Development Day – June tbc
Additional Hours account for closure	Allowed for in regulations

2. What Free Kindergarten means at our service

West Hawthorn Pre-school has opted in to the Free Kindergarten Scheme for 2024. This initiative delivers:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children up to 15 hours per week – no parent fee
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children of 15 hours per week - no parent fee

West Hawthorn Pre-school will reimburse families in full for any enrolment security deposit (*refer to Definitions*) payments that have already been made upon commencement at the service, excluding any voluntary family payments that families agree to in writing.

For our groups, the following will apply:

- **Yellow Joeys** has a total of 18 hours so there is a term fee for the additional 3 hours (Thursday 12-3pm) above the 15 funded hours
- **Green Joeys** has a total of 12 hours so there is no term fee
- **Grey Kangaroos** has a total of 15 hours so there is no term fee
- **Red Kangaroos** has a total of 22.5 hours so there is a term fee for the additional 7.5 hours (Friday) above the 15 funded hours

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by West Hawthorn Pre-school that may be asked for in writing 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*).
- **SunSmart Hat:** The service may charge a small fee for a bucket style hat for your child to wear outdoors on appropriate days

4. Additional hour fees

West Hawthorn Pre-school offers Red Kangaroo families 7.5 hours above the set 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) which is the Friday session, and Yellow Joeys 3 hours above the set 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) which is part of the Thursday session between 12pm-3pm. Families have the option of choosing the other groups, Green Joeys or Grey Kangaroos should they wish to not be charged additional fees for unfunded hours.

5. Security Deposit

West Hawthorn Pre-school charges a refundable security deposit as part of the enrolment process for all groups to hold the child's place. This is \$1,250 for Yellow Joeys, Red and Grey Kangaroos and \$1,000 for Green Joeys (as they have less funded hours) and is refundable on commencement of Term 1. Families may be asked in writing if they would like to convert this security deposit payment into a Voluntary Family Payment to help support our high-quality programs at the start of the year.

6. Fundraising and voluntary family payment

While **participation in fundraising is voluntary**, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

Our Service has opted into the 'Free Kinder Scheme' for 2024 in good faith that families will make voluntary family payments to ensure that our high-quality programs are not compromised and our costs as a not-for-profit kindergarten are covered.

7. Child Care Subsidy (CSS)

The Child Care Subsidy does not apply to West Hawthorn Pre-school.

8. Payment of fees for unfunded additional hours

Term fees are payable for hours over and above 15 hours per week (600 hours per year).

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.

Fees will be automatically direct debited from an online payment system, such as Ezidebit. Any applicable term fees must be received in full prior (paid in advance) to the child commencing that term at the service. For children enrolled after the commencement of a term, a pro rata payment will be requested through the online payment system 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 on request.

From time to time an Invoice or a Credit Note may be issued to the family. The terms and conditions on these Invoices or Credit Notes must be met.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the service to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* of the service will be complied with at all times in relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances.

9. Unpaid fees for unfunded additional hours

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

- An initial reminder email will be sent to parents/guardians 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 parents/guardians 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.
- The Committee of Management 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 parents/guardians will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing.
- No further enrolments of children from the parents/guardians will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

10. Refund of fees

The enrolment security deposit (*refer to Definitions*) will be fully refunded to families only when the child commences at the service.

In any other case, additional hours are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Committee of Management). There will be no refund of these fees in the following circumstances:

- a child's short-term illness
- public holidays
- family holiday during operational times
- closure of the service for one or more days when a qualified educator is absent, and a qualified reliever is not available
- closure of the service for staff training days
- closure of the service due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances.

In addition, there will be no refund where a family chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

11. 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.

12. Notification of fee changes during the year for unfunded additional hours

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. STATEMENT OF ADDITIONAL HOURS FEES



Fee schedule 2024 – Yellow Joeys

Funded sessional kindergarten for three-year-olds

Hours: 3 hours per week

Yellow Joeys	Additional Hours	Total (\$)
Term 1	30	390.00
Term 2	27	390.00
Term 3	30	390.00
Term 4	33	390.00
Total	120	1,560.00



Payment of fees

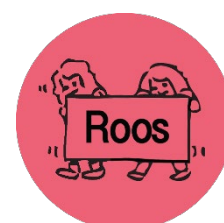
Payments are to be made by automatic direct debit through an online payment system as determined by WHPS such as Esidebit.

Fee schedule 2024 – Red Kangaroos

Funded sessional kindergarten for four-year-olds

Hours: 7.5 hours per week

Red Roos	Additional Hours	Total (\$)
Term 1	75	975.00
Term 2	67.5	975.00
Term 3	75	975.00
Term 4	82.50	975.00
Total	300	3,900.00



Payment of fees

Payments are to be made by automatic direct debit through an online payment system as determined by WHPS such as Esidebit.

ATTACHMENT 3. ADDITIONAL HOURS FEE PAYMENT AGREEMENT - SAMPLE

2024

AS COMPLETED AND AGREED TO IN THE ENROLMENT FORM

Please complete this form and return to West Hawthorn Pre-school.

Fee payment contract

Child's full name: _____

Parent's/guardian's full name: _____

- I/we acknowledge that should my child attend any other children's service that offers a funded kindergarten program, I/we shall notify the other service(s) that West Hawthorn Pre-school will be claiming this funding for my child.
- I/we acknowledge that the three-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 coming from fees paid by parents/guardians
- 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 coming from fees paid by parents/guardians.
- I/we agree to pay any additional fees for services above the 600 hours through an automatic direct debit facility as required, and if invoiced to pay by the due date.
- 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 will implement the late payment of fees procedures, as outlined in the Free Kindergarten Fees Policy, 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 service to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service's Free Kindergarten Fees Policy, 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 West Hawthorn Pre-school *Free Kindergarten Fee Policy*.