

# FEES – 2024 “FREE KINDER”

QUALITY AREA 7 | ELAA VERSION 1.1



## PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how services comply with the Free Kinder initiative.
- Free Kinder funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs.
- The application of surplus funding within Gordon Street Pre-School 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 extended care fees.



## POLICY STATEMENT

### VALUES

Gordon Street Pre-School 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 Gordon Street 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 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 Extended Care 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 Extended Care	R	√			
Reimbursing families in full for enrolment fees that have already been paid upon acceptance of enrolment	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 are only charged for optional kindergarten programs hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or “wrap around” care ( <i>refer to Definitions</i> )	R	√			
Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guidelines ( <i>refer to Sources</i> )	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 Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service ( <i>Regulation 171</i> )	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kinder ( <i>refer to Attachment 1</i> )	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of Extended Care fees and charges ( <i>refer to Attachments 2</i> ) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with an additional fee payment fee agreement ( <i>refer to Attachments 3</i> ), if applicable	R	√			
Informing parents of any action that will be taken if fees are not paid	R	√			
Reading the Gordon Street Pre-School Free Kinder information for families ( <i>refer to Attachment 1</i> ), the Statement of Extended Care Fees and Charges ( <i>refer to Attachments 2</i> ), and the				√	

Extended Care Fee Payment Agreement ( <i>refer to Attachments 3</i> ) if applicable					
Signing and complying with the Extended Care Fee Payment Agreement ( <i>refer to Attachments 3</i> ), if applicable				√	
Notifying the approved provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of Extended Care fees				√	
Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to the Gordon Street 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 Extended Care fees	R	√	√	√	
Notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the Extended Care 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 DE's Free Kinder 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 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 Kindergarten, 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 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](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au)
- Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: [www.legislation.gov.au](http://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](http://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 fee:** An additional fee 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 Fee:** 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 fee will only be refunded if the child commences and remains enrolled in the service.

**Extended Care:** care that is provided by a kindergarten service to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program. Extended care is not funded by the Victorian Government. (*refer to Definitions*). Fees apply.

**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*).

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## 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](http://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide)
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: [www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide](http://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide)
- The constitution of Gordon Street 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

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## 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)*).



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## ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Free Kinder information for families
- Attachment 2: Statement of Extended Care Fees
- Attachment 3: Extended Care Fee payment agreement



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## AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Gordon Street Pre-School on 9 October 2023.

**REVIEW DATE:** 9 September 2024

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## ATTACHMENT 1. “FREE KINDER” INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

### Gordon Street Pre-School 2024

#### 1. General information

Kindergarten programs for three-year-old and four-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.

Department of Education 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 Kinder means at our service

Gordon Street Pre-School has opted in to the Free Kinder initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (15 hours per week) – no parent fee
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee
- Extended Care Program for 3 and 4-year-old children (7.5 hours per week) – parent fee

Gordon Street Pre-School will reimburse families in full for any kindergarten enrolment fee (*refer to Definitions*) payments that have already been made upon **commencement** at the service, excluding any voluntary parent contributions that are agreed to in writing. **There will be no refund of the enrolment fee if parents withdraw their child/ren prior to or during Term 1 2024.**

#### 3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Gordon Street Pre-School are included on the Statement of Fees and Charges, that will be provided to families upon enrolment.

These include:

- **Excursion/service event fee (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*).
- **Late collection charge:** The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by the Committee of Management and is currently \$15 per fifteen minutes.
- **Extended Care Fees:** Gordon Street Pre-School offers an optional Extended Care session to enrolled children outside of the sessional kindergarten program. Places are limited and subject to demand. Enrolment is per term. Fees apply. Invoices will be issued and will be due within 14 days.
- **Late Payment Fee:** A \$10 per week late fee will apply to Extended Care term fees not paid by the due date.

#### 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.

#### 5. Payment of fees for Extended Care Session

Fees are payable for hours over and above 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) “Free Kinder” program.

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 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 (*refer to attachment 2: Extended Care Fees*).

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Compliance Coordinator 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.

## **6. Unpaid fees for Extended Care Session**

If fees are not paid by the due date, the following steps will be taken. Note Extended Care Fees must be each term prior to the start of term for children to attend.

- An initial reminder will be sent by email from the Compliance Coordinator to parents/guardians with a specified payment date, and will include information on option of a payment plan.
- Failure of the parents/guardians to reply to or contact the Compliance Coordinator will result in the child's place in the Extended Care session to be withdrawn and offered to a family on the waitlist.
- The Committee of Management will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector for unpaid fees.
- If fees remain unpaid a decision may be 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.

## **7. Refund of fees**

The enrolment fee (*refer to Definitions*) will be fully refunded to families at the end of term one only if the child commences and remains enrolled at the service.

In any other case, Extended Care fees 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.

## **8. 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.

## **9. Notification of fee changes during the year for Extended Care 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 EXTENDED CARE FEES

### Gordon Street Pre-School

#### Fee schedule 2024

##### Extended Care for three/four-year-olds (mixed age group)

The Extended Care Program is limited and subject to demand. Fees apply.

Hours: 7.5 hours per week

Fridays 8:30am-4:00pm (during school term)

	Number of Weeks per Term	Extended Care Fee
Term 1	6 weeks (commence 16 February 2024)	\$540
Term 2	11 weeks	\$990
Term 3	10 weeks	\$900
Term 4	10 weeks	\$900
Total		\$3,330

#### Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued by email and will be due prior to the start of the upcoming term (within 14 days). Fees must be paid by the due date for the child to attend, unless prior arrangement has been made.

#### Extended Care Deposit \$125

This is payable on application and acceptance of the Extended Care Program. Once the application is confirmed the child will be booked in for the 4 terms and invoices prior to each term. Families must give 14 days' notice if they wish to withdrawal from the Extended Care Program. The Extended Care deposit will be deducted from term 4 fee invoice if the child remains enrolled in the Extended Care Program for the duration of the year. It will not be refunded if the child is withdrawn from the Extended Care Program or the service.

#### Late Payment Fee

Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late payment fee when parents/guardians do not pay the Extended Care Term fees (*refer to Free Kinder Information for Families*). **The current late payment fee is \$10 per week.**

#### Late Collection charge

Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child (*refer to Free Kinder Information for Families*). **The current late collection fee is \$15 per fifteen minutes.**

## ATTACHMENT 3. 2024 EXTENDED CARE FEE PAYMENT AGREEMENT

### Fee payment agreement

Parent's/guardian's agree to:

- I/we acknowledge that the 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) funded kindergarten program is fully funded by the state government, with the balance of optional Extended Care Program 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 by the due date on the invoice.
- I/we understand that fees for Extended Care each term are non-refundable.
- I/we acknowledge that if fees for Extended Care are not paid by the due date, the Committee of Management will implement the late payment of fees procedures, as outlined in the Free Kinder 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 Compliance Coordinator to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service's Free Kinder Information for Families, which outlines the procedure for payment of fees.

Please note parent's/guardian's agree to payment of fees via the Confidential Enrolment Form (EnrolNow) they complete for their child prior to commencement.

Invoices and collection of fees will be in accordance with the Gordon Street Pre-School *Free Kinder Fee Policy*.