

Fees Policy – Kindergarten

Purpose

This policy outlines a clear framework for:

- administering free kindergarten subsidies for eligible funded sessional kindergarten programs.
- supporting affordability for families through reduced fees in funded kindergarten programs offered in long day care settings.
- managing the setting, collection, and payment of fees to ensure transparency and fairness.
- maintaining ECMS's financial stability by implementing fees and charges that support sustainable service delivery while balancing our aim to increase access to early childhood education.
- applying fees consistently and equitably across all ECMS programs, upholding inclusivity and fairness.

Scope

This policy applies to all ECMS employees, including educators providing information or supporting the enrolment process. It also governs the systems and procedures for managing registrations and enrolments across ECMS kindergarten programs.

This policy supports us in:

- responding to the needs of local communities.
- complying with Department of Education and Training (DET) funding requirements for enrolment in government-funded kindergarten programs.
- operating in alignment with the Department of Education and Training's Early Years Management Framework.
- upholding Privacy and Human Rights legislation.

Free Kinder in Sessional Kindergarten Services

Three-year-old kinder

According to the Department of Education and Training (DET) Kindergarten Funding Criteria, the following children are eligible to attend the 3-year-old kindergarten program:

- **Eligibility Age:** A child must turn three by 30 April in the year they are eligible to access a funded kindergarten program (two years before school).
- **Commencement:** A child must have turned three before starting the program. Children cannot commence in the funded program until their third birthday. A place will be held for your child until they are eligible to begin.
- **Single Funded Year:** Children are entitled to one funded year of 3-year-old kindergarten. There is no provision for a second funded year.

Important Considerations for Families

Families with children born between 1 January and 30 April are encouraged to consider when their child should start kindergarten carefully. Once a child begins attending the service, they are accessing their funded year of 3-year-old kindergarten and are expected to progress to the 4-year-old funded program the following year.

Your child's kindergarten start date directly impacts the age at which they will begin primary school. When enrolling in 3-year-old kindergarten, we recommend that families plan and consider their preferred starting age for primary school.

Four-year-old kinder

According to the Department of Education and Training (DET) Kindergarten Funding Criteria, the following children are eligible to attend the 4-year-old kindergarten program:

- **Eligibility Age:** A child must turn four by 30 April in the year they are eligible to access a funded kindergarten program
- **Minimum Attendance:** Children must be enrolled for at least 15 hours per week or 600 hours annually.
- **Second Year:** Children eligible for a second year of kindergarten and, where applicable, an exemption from school has been completed, will receive Free Kinder in their additional year.

Fees and costs for sessional kindergarten

Kinder, with a program of 5-15 hours per week (200 to 600 hours per year), is funded by the Victorian Government. There is no charge for your child to attend one program under the Free Kinder initiative. Your child can only access one funded place under the Free Kinder Initiative, and you need to nominate which service receives this funding.

If you would like to enrol your child to attend kindergarten in addition to the one funded place, you are eligible to pay for these additional hours (over 15 hours). This will be invoiced to you directly after discussion to confirm that you understand your eligibility and the Free Kinder parameters.

- There are no additional compulsory out-of-pocket fees, costs or levies.
- There are no additional charges from ECMS for incursions and excursions as we build our programs to include these. As such, the Free Kinder funding the Victorian Government provides covers these.
- ECMS does not charge a deposit for you to reserve a place in one of our programs or enrol your child in one of our programs.
- While some of our kindergartens do run local fundraising initiatives, there is no requirement for you to donate to ECMS or the kindergarten so your child can attend one of our kindergartens.

Other Optional Fees

Some kindergartens may provide wrap-around care or extended hours. This service is an optional extra, and the fees will be provided at the individual service level. You will be asked to agree to these optional fees for this service.

Free Kinder in Early Learning Centres

At ECMS, we are committed to providing accessible and affordable early childhood education for families. Some ECMS Early Learning Centres (ELCs) also provide integrated kindergarten programs. Integrated Kindergarten Funding supports our long day care services by delivering high-quality, play-based kindergarten programs within the convenience of extended care. These programs are delivered by degree-qualified teachers, providing up to 15 hours per week (or 600 hours annually) of structured learning aligned with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).

Free Kinder Funding at ECMS

Through the Victorian Government's **Free Kinder** initiative, families at ECMS services can access 15 hours of funded kindergarten at no cost for sessional programs or a significantly reduced cost in long day care settings. Here's how the Free Kinder funding applies:

- **Sessional Kindergarten:** Families pay no fees for the 15 funded hours per week.
- **Long Day Care Kindergarten:** ECMS receives up to **\$2,050 per child annually**, which is directly applied to offset fees for the kindergarten component of the program.

How Fees Work in Long Day Care

For families enrolled in our long day care services:

- The **Free Kinder offset** reduces the cost of the 15-hour kindergarten program each week.
- This offset is applied to fees weekly and appears on invoices as *Victorian Government Free Kinder Offset*.
- Payments, and the offsets, begin from the start of the Victorian Term 1 to ensure alignment with school terms.
- Families are only charged for additional care beyond the funded 15 hours, such as wrap-around care.
- Clear fee schedules are provided within each service to ensure transparency about costs outside the funded program.
- During integrated kindergarten hours, there is no additional cost for incursions and excursions.
- There may be additional optional costs for incursions and excursions as part of your long day care access, and the parameters for this are covered in our ELC Fees Policy.
- Families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS) will not be charged.

Payments and Service Support

The Free Kinder funding is paid directly to ECMS by the Department of Education, allowing us to:

- Deliver high-quality kindergarten programs free or at reduced costs for families.
- Ensure equitable access to early childhood education across our services.
- Support the financial sustainability of our programs while meeting the diverse needs of our communities.

At ECMS, we believe every child deserves access to quality early learning, and the Integrated Kindergarten Funding and Free Kinder offset are vital tools in making this vision a reality. Families can enjoy the flexibility of long day care combined with the benefits of a funded kindergarten program, ensuring every child's best start to life.

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK)

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) offers eligible 3-year-old children up to 15 hours of kindergarten per week (600 hours annually). This grant is available in any setting where the program is delivered by a degree-qualified teacher, including:

- Dedicated 3-year-old kindergarten programs
- Mixed-age group programs
- 4-year-old funded kindergarten programs that incorporate Early Start enrolments

Eligibility Criteria

Children are eligible for ESK if they turn three by 30 April in the year they are enrolled and meet one of the following criteria:

- Identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Are known to Child Protection
- Are from a refugee or asylum seeker background

Determining Eligibility

Eligibility can be confirmed through your local government's Central Registration Scheme or by discussion between the family and the educator.

If a child is eligible for ESK, they will be enrolled and funded by the Victorian Government under the ESK program.

Access to a Second Year of Funded Four-Year-Old Kindergarten

ECMS supports access to a second year of funded Four-Year-Old Kindergarten when it is determined to be in the child's best interests. This applies in exceptional circumstances where a child demonstrates developmental delays that would benefit from additional time in kindergarten before transitioning to school.

The Victorian Government funds this second year of four-year-old kindergarten once they approve the eligibility declaration.

Eligibility Criteria

A second year of kindergarten may be considered if:

- The child displays developmental delays in at least two key learning and development areas outlined in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).

- It is determined that the child will achieve better outcomes by strengthening these skills before starting school.

Families are encouraged to work closely with educators to understand the benefits of a second year and how it supports the child's transition to school.

Priority of Access (PoA)

At ECMS, we are committed to ensuring equitable access to our kindergarten programs, particularly for children who may face barriers to participation. When demand exceeds available places, we follow these Priority of Access guidelines:

High Priority Children

The following groups are given the highest priority for kindergarten places:

1. Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including those in out-of-home care:
 - a. Referred by professionals such as Child Protection, family services, or Maternal and Child Health (MCH) nurses.
 - b. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children:
 - i. Families are respectfully asked during enrolment if they identify their child as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
2. Children from refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds:
 - a. Identified through documentation such as visas or ImmiCards or referred by outreach workers.
3. Children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS):
 - a. Includes children of families holding Health Care Cards or equivalent and multiple birth children (e.g., triplets).
4. Children with additional needs:
 - a. Identified through healthcare professionals, Early Childhood Intervention Services, or other referrals.

Locally Agreed Criteria

After high-priority children have been allocated places, remaining spots are offered based on locally agreed criteria, such as:

- Proximity to the kindergarten
- Sibling enrolments
- Strong community or family connections to the service

Priority of access children are given priority over all other children regardless of the hours they attend.

Monitoring and Compliance

ECMS complies with Victorian Government requirements for Free Kinder funding. We maintain accurate records and provide reports to ensure all benefits are passed on to families.

This policy will be reviewed regularly to reflect current regulations and ECMS's commitment to accessible, affordable, and high-quality early childhood education.

For more information, visit www.ecms.org.au.

Roles & Responsibilities

Chief Financial Officer	Accountable for implementing and complying with this policy
Area Managers	Responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing and complying with this policy • Liaising with the Department of Education and Local Government bodies • Discussing concerns about fees with families, Nominated Supervisors and Centre Directors
ECMS Enrolments Team	Responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing and complying with this policy • Applying priority of access criteria and effectively allocating places • Collecting completed enrolment forms and supporting documents and applying fees
Centre Directors and Nominated Supervisors	Responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing and complying with this policy • Collecting completed enrolment forms and supporting documents and applying fees • Supporting educators and families with enrolment, entry age, and second-year applications • Discussing concerns about fees with families, Nominated Supervisors and Centre Directors
Employees, Volunteers, Contractors, and Student Placement Workers	Responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting families to access fee information and supporting documents • Discussing concerns about fees with families, Nominated Supervisors and Centre Directors • Liaising with families about enrolment, entry age, and second year applications
Families	Responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complying with this policy • Asking questions about fees and their understanding of this policy or the application of it

Sources

Related Policy and Procedure	ECMS allocation of kindergarten places procedure Kindergarten Enrolment Policy ELC Enrolment Policy ELC Fees Policy Child Safe Culture Policy Child Safe Policy and Procedure Code of Conduct Policy Confidential Information Policy Early Learning Centre Fees Policy Immunisation Policy and Procedure Orientation Policy Privacy Policy Privacy Collection Statement
Relevant Legislation	Child Safe Standards Children, Youth, and Families Act 2055 (VIC) Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (VIC) Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (VIC) Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (Vic): Sections 168, 169, 172, 173 and 175 Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (VIC): Regulations 73-76, 84, 155 – 157, and 158 – 162 Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (VIC): Sections 39, 40, 41, 42 and 43 Working with Children Act 2005 (VIC) Working with Children Regulations 2006 (VIC)

Sources and Further Reading

[Priority of access criteria for early childhood education](#)

[Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework](#)

[Kindergarten Funding Guide](#)

[Free kinder guidelines for services](#)

[Early Start Kindergarten](#)

[Second year of funded four-year-old kindergarten](#)

[Going to kindergarten if your child is 6 years old](#)

Kindergarten Fees Policy

Owner: Finance

Reviewed: Yearly

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Next Review: December 2025