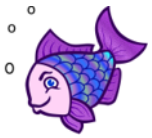
FEES - FREE KINDER

QUALITY AREA 7 | ELAA VERSION 1.2

Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how services comply with the Free Kinder funding requirements.

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre 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 Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre.

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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 *(refer to Definitions)*	R	√	√	√	
Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for the payment of fees (if appliable) and the provision of a statement of fees charged by the service *(Regulation 168)*, and take reasonable steps to ensure those policies and procedures are followed *(Regulation 170)*	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 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 *(refer to Definitions)*	R	√			
Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guidelines *(refer to Sources)*	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 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	√			

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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 *Fees - Free Kinder Policy* is readily accessible at the service *(Regulation 171)*	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kinder *(refer to Attachment 1)*	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges to families that have opted in to the additional hours/wrap around care *(refer to Attachments 2)* upon enrolment of their child, if applicable **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.	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with an additional hours payment fee agreement *(refer to Attachments 3)*, if applicable	R	√			
Informing parents of any action that will be taken if additional hours fees are not paid *(refer to Attachments 3)*	R	√			
Reading the Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre Free Kinder information for families *(refer to Attachment 1)*, the Statement of Additional Hours Fees and Charges *(refer to Attachments 2)*, and the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement *(refer to Attachments 3)* if applicable				√	
Signing and complying with the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement *(refer to Attachments 3),* if applicable				√	
Ensuring any additional hours fees are collected and receipted	R	√			
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 Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre				√	
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	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 *(Regulation 172(2))*, 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 *(refer to Sources)*	R	√	√	√	

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Informing the approved provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding additional hours 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 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 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
Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au

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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 Policy Works catalogue.

Additional Hours/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).*

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

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 by 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.

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: For service's that have not opted for Free Kinder, 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.

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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 2036, 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.

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
- The constitution of [Service Name]

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 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 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 Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre on 16th December 2025

REVIEW DATE: 16th December 2026

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ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDER INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre [Year]

1. 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.

Operation hours	**[Insert session days and times]**
Term 1	Rotational model Monday – Friday 9:00am-4:30pm
Term 2	Rotational model Monday – Friday 9:00am-4:30pm
Term 3	Rotational model Monday – Friday 9:00am-4:30pm
Term 4	Rotational model Monday – Friday 9:00am-4:30pm
Planned Closures	We observe all Victorian public holidays plust 2 professional development days dates TBC

2. What Free Kinder means at our service

Northern Bay College has opted in to the Free Kinder initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

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 (15 - 30 hours per week) - no parent fee

3. Other charges [only applicable to services that provide over and above the free 15 hours per week (600 hours per year); and/or wrap around care]

Other charges levied by Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre are included on 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)*.

Late collection charge: The approved provider/Committee of Management/Board [delete whichever is not applicable] 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 approved provider/Committee of Management/Board.

4. Additional hours and/or wrap around care fees.

Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre offers families hours above the set 15 hours per week (600 hours per year). The additional hours fee is determined by the hourly program rate based on the scheduled 2026 fee (including the costs of regular incursions and excursions).

Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre offers wrap around care outside of the 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) sessional kindergarten program. This fee is applicable to all families that require care before and after the kindergarten session.

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Families have the option of only enrolling for 15 hours and being charged no additional fees.

[if merging this policy with LDC Fees Policy -

5. 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.

6. Subsidies

6.1 Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

6.2 Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is an Australian Government subsidy that can assist eligible families with the costs of childcare at an approved child care provider. Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre is an approved care provider.

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 of subsidy received 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.servicesaustralia.gov.au/child-care-subsidy

Long day care providers that offer funded kindergarten as part of the long day care program are required to directly offset the full payment of the Free Kinder initiative from parents' out of pocket fees (after CCS is applied). Fee reductions will be made proportionally across the year to families' bills, i.e. fortnightly or monthly. Only children receiving a funded kindergarten place at [service name], led by a qualified teacher, are eligible under this initiative.

Exclusions and exceptions: Not available for providers that primarily provide an early educational program to children in the year that is two years before grade one of school (preschool or kindergarten).

7. Payment of fees for additional hours/wrap around care

8. Fees are payable for hours over and above 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or wrap around care.

The approved provider 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. Receipts will be provided for all fee payments.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact approved Provider 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 additional hours/wrap around care

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

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- An initial reminder letter 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 approved provider 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.

11. Refund of fees

The enrolment deposit *(refer to Definitions)* will be fully refunded to families only when the child commences at the service. Non-refundable waitlist fees *(refer to Definitions)* paid will be retained.

In any other case, additional hours are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Approved provider). 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.

12. 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.

13. Notification of fee changes during the year for additional hours/wrap around care

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.

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ATTACHMENT 2. STATEMENT OF ADDITIONAL HOURS AND OR WRAP AROUND CARE FEES

Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre

Fee schedule 2026

Funded sessional kindergarten for three/four-year-olds

Hours: Addition days per week and/or

Hours: "[wrap around hours]" hours per week [delete if no applicable]

	Additional Days	Wrap around care	Total ($)
Term 1	$125.00	Before Kinder care 7:30am-9:00am After kinder care 4:30-5:30 pm	$20.00 $15.00
Term 2	$125.00	Before Kinder care 7:30am-9:00am After kinder care 4:30-5:30 pm	$20.00 $15.00
Term 3	$125.00	Before Kinder care 7:30am-9:00am After kinder care 4:30-5:30 pm	$20.00 $15.00
Term 4	$125.00	Before Kinder care 7:30am-9:00am After kinder care 4:30-5:30 pm	$20.00 $15.00
Total			

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued [timeframe] and must be paid by the due date.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

For information on the Child Care Subsidy, ***refer to Free Kinder Information for Families*****.**

Late collection charge

The approved provider 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)*.

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ATTACHMENT 3. ADDITIONAL HOURS AND/OR WRAP AROUND CARE FEE PAYMENT AGREEMENT

[Applicable to services that provide over and above the 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or wrap around care, not appliable for integrated services or Pre-Prep]

2026

Please complete this form and return to Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre before commencement of care.

Fee payment contract

Child's full name: _____

Parent's/guardian's full name: _____

- 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 and/or wrap around care 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 and/or wrap around care 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 additional hours each term are non-refundable.
- I/we acknowledge that if fees for additional hours are not paid by the due date, the approved provider 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 Approved provider 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.

Signature (parent/guardian): _____ Date: ____/____/_____

Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with the Northern Bay College Early Learning Centre *Free Kinder Fee Policy*.

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