



PANORAMA HEIGHTS PRESCHOOL

FREE KINDER POLICY

Version 1.0

Mandatory – Quality Area 7

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how Panorama Heights Preschool complies with the Free Kinder initiative
- free kindergarten funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- the application of surplus funding within Panorama Heights Preschool ensuring it is only used to ensure the quality of program delivery and development of children enrolled in the service
- clear communication of any additional fees and charges

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Panorama Heights Preschool 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 Panorama Heights Preschool.

RESPONSIBILITIES

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
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>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
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>)	✓	✓			
Ensuring that families are informed of the operating hours including term dates, planned closures and additional hours to account for closures.	✓	✓			
Ensuring families are informed of the total annual fee amount, including any applicable fees for e.g. excursions and any additional hours	✓	✓			
Reimbursing families in full for enrolment deposits that have already been paid upon acceptance of enrolment	✓	✓			
Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted)	✓	✓			
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>)	✓	✓			
Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Funding Guidelines (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	✓	✓			
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	✓	✓		✓	

Ensuring that any surplus funding is used for directly supporting the quality of the teaching and learning in the kindergarten program and/or attendance at the service, including vulnerable children and families not yet enrolled and/or towards the change management required for preparing for three-year-old expansion	✓	✓			
Ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted	✓	✓			
Charging families only for an occasional special event/ excursions that occur outside the normal program/curriculum	✓	✓	✓		
Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system	✓	✓	✓		
Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system	✓	✓	✓		
Ensuring that the <i>Free Kinder Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)	✓	✓			
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kindergarten (refer to Attachment 1)	✓	✓			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional fees and charges (refer to Attachments 2) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable	✓	✓			
Informing parents of any action that will be taken if fees are not paid	✓	✓			
Reading the Panorama Heights Preschool Free Kindergarten information for families (refer to Attachment 1) and the Statement of Fees and Charges (refer to Attachments 2)				✓	
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 Panorama Heights Preschool				✓	
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	✓	✓	✓	✓	
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.	✓	✓			

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 Kindergarten initiative (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
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.		✓	✓		
✓ Bold tick indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted					

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 Victoria 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)

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 parent donations 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 2010 (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 *General Definitions* section of this manual.

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): 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: 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 council's central enrolment scheme). This fee will not be refunded as it is not part of the Free Kindergarten 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 initiative providing free kindergarten 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*).

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: www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide
- The constitution of Panorama Heights Preschool

- Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA): www.acecqa.gov.au

RELATED POLICIES

- Compliments and Complaints Policy
- Delivery and Collection of Children Policy
- Enrolment and Orientation Policy
- Excursions and Service Events Policy
- Governance and Management of the Service
- Privacy and Confidentiality 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
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service’s policy review cycle, or as required
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk (*Regulation 172 (2)*).

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Free Kinder information for families
- Attachment 2: Statement of fees and charges

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Panorama Heights Preschool on 1st September 2023.

REVIEW DATE: 1st August 2024

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDER INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Panorama Heights Preschool 2023 and 2024

Additional information for families can be found in the Panorama Heights Kindergarten Handbook.

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.

Department of Education (DE) 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.

2023 Key Dates	
Operation hours	See timetable for session times on website 3yo kinder: 9am – 3pm 4yo kinder: 8:30am – 4pm
Term 1	Friday 27 January – Thursday 6 April
Term 2	Monday 24 April – Friday 23 June
Term 3	Monday 10 July – Friday 15 September
Term 4	Monday 2 October – Wednesday 20 December
Child-free Organisational Days	Friday 27 January Monday 30 January Wednesday 20 December

2024 Key Dates	
Operation hours	See timetable for session times on website 3yo kinder: 9am – 3pm 4yo kinder: 8:30am – 4pm
Term 1	Tuesday 30 January – Thursday 28 March
Term 2	Monday 15 April – Friday 28 June
Term 3	Monday 15 July – Friday 20 September
Term 4	Monday 7 October – Friday 20 December

Child-free Organisational Days	Monday 29 January
	Tuesday 30 January
	Friday 20 December

2. What Free Kinder means at our service

Panorama Heights Preschool 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 hours per week) - no parent fee

Panorama Heights Preschool does not charge any kindergarten fee deposit upon acceptance of enrolment.

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Panorama Heights Preschool are included on the Statement of Fees and Charges (*refer to Attachment 2*), that will be provided to families upon enrolment.

These include:

- **Excursion/service event charge (outside of the 15 hours per week program):** Throughout the year, additional excursion(s) or event(s) may be arranged where it is considered relevant to the service's program and the children's interests. Where possible, excursion and service event costs will be included as part of the Panorama Heights Preschool kindergarten program. If there are any additional costs to families, this is taken into consideration before a decision is made to participate in the excursion or event (*refer to Excursions and Service Events Policy*). The Committee of Management reserves the right to charge a reasonable fee to adults accompanying children on excursions to help recoup the costs of bus hire/venue entrance fees
- **Late collection charge:** As per the *Delivery and Collection of Children Policy* the approved provider and 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 approved by the Committee of Management.
- **Additional hours and/or wrap around care fees:** In exceptional circumstances Panorama Heights Preschool may provide 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 Free Kinder funding rates.

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. 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.

ATTACHMENT 2. STATEMENT OF FEES AND CHARGES

Late collection charge

The approved provider and Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge of \$25 per 15 minute block, or part thereof, when parents/guardians are frequently regularly late in collecting a child (*refer to Attachment 1 and Delivery and Collection of Children Policy*).

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued monthly and must be paid by the due date.