

	Thornbury Kindergarten Policies
Policy Title	<i>Free Kindergarten Fees Policy</i>
Quality Area	<i>7 – Leadership and Service Management</i>
Category	<i>Mandatory</i>

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten subsidies for funded sessional kindergarten programs;
- reduced fees for children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services;
- the application of surplus funding within Thornbury Kindergarten Inc. 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 (additional hours fees/gap fee for unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten, or parent fees minus the \$2000 offset); and
- ensuring the viability of Thornbury Kindergarten Inc., by setting appropriate additional hours fees/ gap fee for unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten.

POLICY STATEMENT

1. VALUES

Thornbury Kindergarten Inc. is committed to:

- supporting the Victorian Government’s 2021 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/carers.

2. SCOPE

- This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Person with Management and Control, Nominated Supervisor, Person in Day-to-Day Charge, educators and parents/carers with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child at Thornbury Kindergarten Inc.

3. BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

Background

In response to the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Victorian Government is investing up to \$169.6 million in early childhood education by providing free kindergarten to each enrolled child participating in a funded kindergarten program in 2021. All families with a child enrolled in a funded kindergarten program are eligible for Free Kindergarten, this includes all children attending funded kindergarten programs in the year before school (four-year-old kindergarten) and services offering funded three-year-old kindergarten. The initiative also includes reduced fees for children enrolled in a funded kindergarten program in a long day care centre and for children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services.

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 2021 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*, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

4. DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority 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.

Early start kindergarten: A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for up to 15 hours per week. Details are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au. Children that are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) will continue to be enrolled, this ensure that service providers receive all funding entitlements and that these children have access to 15 funded hours of kindergarten across Victoria. 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.

Enrolment application fee: A non-refundable payment to cover administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's enrolment application for a place in a program at the service.

Fees: A charge for program hours over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 per year) and/or wrap around care.

Free Kindergarten 2021: Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and eligible three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free in 2021 as part of a \$169.6 million investment in early childhood education in the 2020/21 Victorian State Budget. Free Kinder forms part of the economic recovery support for Victorians as we recover from the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The initiative is for 2021 only.

Health care card: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. Details are available at: www.humanservices.gov.au

Kindergarten fee deposit: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service, which is not applicable in 2021. Any deposit made prior to the commencement of Term One will be reimbursed to families.

Voluntary parent/carer 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.

5. SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

Sources

- *Free Kinder 2021 - Information for Service Providers*
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/freekinder2021.aspx>
- *Free Kinder 2021 – Frequently asked questions about Free Kinder 2021*
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/freekinder2021.asp>
- *The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training):*
www.education.vic.gov.au
- The constitution of Thornbury Kindergarten Inc.

Service policies

- *Complaints and Grievances Policy*
- *Delivery and Collection of Children Policy*
- *Enrolment and Orientation Policy*
- *Governance and Management of the Service Policy*
- *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*

PROCEDURES

The Approved Provider and Person with Management and Control are responsible for:

- implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/carers, the Nominated Supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Definitions);
- reimbursing families in full for any deposit or fee payments that have already been made for 2021 within a reasonable timeframe (excluding non-refundable enrolment administration fees and any voluntary payments/donations that the parent has agreed to);
- 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 kindergarten programs hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or "wrap around" care;

- ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service nominate 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 (in 2022 roll out areas);
- ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted;
- 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 2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171);
- providing all parents/carers with information about Free Kindergarten (refer to Attachment 1);
- providing all parents/carers with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (refer to samples in Attachments 2 and 3) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable;
- providing all parents/carers with an additional payment fee agreement (refer to samples in in Attachments 2 and 3) if applicable;
- 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;
- notifying parents/carers a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the additional hours fees charged, 2022 kindergarten fees or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2)), and ideally providing one term's notice.

The Nominated Supervisor and Person in Day-to-Day Charge is responsible for:

- assisting the Approved Provider in developing this policy, and ensuring that this policy is based on the DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Definitions);
- implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/carers, the Approved Provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Sources);
- ensuring families are only charged for kindergarten program hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or "wrap around" care;
- ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service nominate which service the child will participate in the funded kindergarten program;
- 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 Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171);
- providing all parents/carers with information about free kindergarten (refer to Attachment 1);
- providing all parents/carers with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (refer to samples in Attachments 2 and 3) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable;
- providing all parents/carers with an additional hours fee payment agreement (refer to samples in Attachments 2 and 3), if applicable;
- complying with the service's Privacy and Confidentiality Policy regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees;
- notifying parents/carers 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)), and ideally providing one term's notice.

Educators and all other staff are responsible for:

- informing the Approved Provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service;
- referring parents'/carers' questions in relation to this policy to the Approved Provider.

Parents/carers are responsible for:

- reading the Thornbury Kindergarten Inc. 2021 Free Kindergarten information for families (refer to Attachment 1), the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement and the Statement of Additional Hours Fees and Charges (refer to Attachments 2 and 3), if applicable;
- signing and complying with the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (refer to Attachments 2 and 3) 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 Thornbury Kindergarten Inc.

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;
- notify parents/carers at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures (Regulation 172(2)) unless a lesser period is necessary because of a risk.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: 2021 Free Kindergarten information for families
- Attachment 2: Statement of gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds
- Attachment 3: Gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds payment agreement

AUTHORISATION

- This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of Thornbury Kindergarten Inc. on 12/03/2021.

REVIEW DATE: 1/12/2021

ATTACHMENT 1

2021 Free Kindergarten information for families

Thornbury Kindergarten Inc.

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and eligible three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free in 2021 as part of a \$169.6 million investment in early childhood education in the 2020/21 Victorian State Budget. Free Kindergarten forms part of the economic recovery support for Victorians as we recover from the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The initiative is for 2021 only.

This investment will save families **around \$2,000** for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program in 2021.

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.

2. What free kindergarten means at our service

Thornbury Kindergarten Inc. has opted in to the 2021 Free Kindergarten initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee
- Unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children – parent fee will be reduced by a \$1600 offset (which will be prorated for less than five hours)

Thornbury Kindergarten Inc. will reimburse families in full for any deposit or fee payments, excluded non-refundable administration fees that have already been made for 2021 within a reasonable timeframe (excluding any voluntary parent donations/payments that you agree to in writing.)

3. Other charges

- Other charges levied by Thornbury Kindergarten Inc. are included on the Statement of Fees and Charges, that will be provided to families upon enrolment.

These include:

- **Late collection charge:** The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/carers are frequently late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by the Committee of Management.

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. Unfunded three-year-old programs

Families that have children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services will receive \$1,660 reduction in parent fees. Compulsory parent fees can be charged above this amount but must not exceed the gap between the payment made by the State and the fee for 2021. Services are required to directly offset the full \$1,600 payment (which will be prorated for less than five hours) from parent fees. Any deposits or payments, excluded the administration fees, made totally \$1,600 will be refunded in a reasonable timeframe.

6. Payment of fees

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 invoiced to parents/carers 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/carers experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Director of TK 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.

7. Unpaid fees

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

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

8. Refund of fees

Any fee payments including an enrolment deposit that would normally be taken off Term 1 fees will be fully refunded to families. Non-refundable enrolment administration fees paid prior to the kindergarten year will be retained.

In any other case, additional hours or unfunded three year old gap 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.

9. Children turning three during the year of enrolment for unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten

Full payment of gap fee from the first day of Term 1 is required if a place is to be reserved for a child in the unfunded three-year-old kindergarten program. Children can only commence the program when they have turned three.

10. 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.

11. Notification of fee changes during the year

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/carers 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 gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds

Thornbury Kindergarten Inc.

Fee schedule 2021

	Gap fee	Total (\$)
Term 1	\$105	\$105
Term 2	\$105	\$105
Term 3	\$105	\$105
Term 4	\$105	\$105
Total	\$420	\$420

Payment of fees

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

Children turning three during the year

Full payment of the gap fee from the first day of Term 1 is required if a place is to be reserved for a child in the three-year-old unfunded kindergarten program. Children can only commence the program when they have turned three.

Late collection charge

The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/carers are frequently late in collecting a child (refer to Fee information for families).

ATTACHMENT 3

Gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds payment agreement

2021

- Please complete this form and return to Thornbury Kindergarten Inc.

Fee payment contract

Child's full name: _____

Parent's/carer's full name: _____

- I/we acknowledge that the unfunded kindergarten program for 3-year old's is only partly funded by the state government, with the balance of gap coming from fees paid by parents/carers.
- I/we agree to pay the gap fee by the due date on the invoice.
- I/we understand that gap fees for each term are non-refundable.
- I/we acknowledge that if the gap fees are not paid by the due date, the Committee of Management will implement the late payment of fees procedures, as outlined in the *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee 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 Director to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service's *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Information for Families*, which outlines the procedure for payment of fees.

Signature (parent/carer)

Date

- Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with the Thornbury Kindergarten Inc. *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Policy*