

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

Mandatory – Quality Area 7

1.0 Purpose

1.1 This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- a) Free kindergarten 2021 subsidies for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- b) Reduced fees for children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services.
- c) The application of surplus funding within Bethany Kindergarten Services (BKS) ensuring it is only used to ensure the quality of program delivery and development of children enrolled in the service
- d) The setting, payment and collection of the gap fee for unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten
- e) Ensuring the viability of BKS, by setting appropriate Fees and charges including a registration fee for all kindergarten enrolments and acceptance fees payable on enrolments for 2022.

2.0 Values

2.1 BKS is committed to:

- a) Supporting the Victorian Government's 2021 Free Kindergarten initiative
- b) Increasing access to quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children
- c) Ensuring there are no financial barriers for families wishing to access an early childhood program for their child/children
- d) Maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians;

3.0 Scope

3.1 This policy applies to BKS as the Approved Provider, BKS staff, Kindergarten Parent Advisory Groups and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child at a BKS Kindergarten.

4.0 Background

4.1 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). The initiative also includes reduced fees for children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services.

4.2 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.

5.0 Definitions

5.1 The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy.

5.2 **Approved Provider:** an individual or organisation that has been approved by the DET as fit and proper (in accordance with Sections 12, 13 and 14 of the National Law) to operate one or more education and care services. BKS is the Approved Provider for all BKS Services.

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

- 5.3 **Bethany Kindergarten Services:** the Approved Provider as defined above.
- 5.4 **Bethany Kindergarten Services Central Support:** the centralised administration and support team with overarching responsibility for the delivery of BKS Kindergarten programs.
- 5.5 **Early Years Management Organisation:** Bethany Kindergarten Services (BKS).
- 5.6 **DET:** Department of Education and Training
- 5.7 **Early Start Kindergarten:** a funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection or referred to Child FIRST to attend an additional kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for a specific number of hours. 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.
- 5.8 **Fees:** the contribution made by parents or guardians of the Kindergarten children to the cost of the program provided to the Kindergarten children.
- 5.9 **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.
- 5.10 **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
- 5.11 **Kindergarten acceptance 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.
- 5.12 **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.
- 5.13 **Kindergarten Parent Advisory Group:** the group established by parents of the Kindergarten children at each Service.
- 5.14 **Kindergarten Registration Fee:** a payment contributing to administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's enrolment application for a place in a program at the Service.

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

5.15 **Late collection charge:** a charge that may be imposed by BKS as the Approved Provider when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program (refer to Attachment 1 – 2021 Free Kindergarten information for families).

6.0 Responsibilities

6.1 BKS as the Approved Provider is responsible for:

- a) Implementing and reviewing this policy in line with the requirements of DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Definitions)
- b) Reimbursing families in full for any deposit or fee payments that have already been made for 2021 within a reasonable timeframe (excluding any voluntary payments/donations that the parent has agreed to)
- c) Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted)
- d) 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)
- e) Ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted
- f) Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIMS system
- g) Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIMS system
- h) Ensuring that the 2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)
- i) Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kindergarten (refer to Attachment 1)
- j) Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (refer to <https://bethanykindergartens.org.au/>) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable
- k) Complying with the BKS Privacy and Confidentiality Policy regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of Fees; and
- l) Notifying parents/guardians within 14 days of any proposed changes to the additional fees, 2022 kindergarten fees or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2)).

6.2 The Nominated Supervisor and Responsible Person are responsible for:

- a) 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)
- b) Implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the Approved Provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Sources)
- c) Ensuring families are only charged for kindergarten program hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year).
- d) Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIMSS system
- e) Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIMSS system
- f) Ensuring that the Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

- g) Providing all parents/guardians with information about free kindergarten (refer to Attachment 1)
- h) Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (refer to samples in Attachments 2 and 3) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable
- i) 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
- j) 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)), and ideally providing one term's notice.

6.3 All BKS staff are responsible for:

- a) Informing BKS as the Approved Provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding Fees at the Service;
- b) Referring parents/guardians questions in relation to this policy to BKS Central Support as the Approved Provider; and

6.4 Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- a) Reading BKS 2021 Free Kindergarten information for families (refer to Attachment 1), the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (refer to Attachments 4 and 5) and the Statement of Additional Hours Fees and Charges (refer to Attachments 2 and 3), if applicable
- b) Signing and complying with the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (refer to Attachments 4 and 5) if applicable
- c) Notifying the Approved Provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of additional hours fees
- d) Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to BKS.
- e) Paying Fees by the due date.
- f) Ensuring BKS have current contact details.
- g) Providing the required documentation to enable BKS to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for eligible families (refer to Attachment 1: 2021 Free Kindergarten Information for Families).
- h) Notifying BKS as the Approved Provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of Fees.
- i) Reading the attached documentation (refer Attachment 1: 2021 Free Kindergarten Information for Families).

7.0 Evaluation

7.1 In order to assess whether the values and purpose of this policy have been achieved, BKS as the Approved Provider will:

- a) 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
- b) Monitor the implementation of, compliance with and complaints about this Policy;
- c) Keep the Policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice; and
- d) Revise the Policy and the procedures set out in the Fees Policy as required.
- e) Notify parents/guardians 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.

8.0 Attachments

8.1 Attachment 1: 2021 Free Kindergarten Information for Families

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

8.2 Attachment 2: 2021 Fees and Charges

9.0 Related Bethany policies and procedures

9.1 Bethany Kindergarten Services Ltd.:

- a) Complaints and Grievances Policy
- b) Delivery and Collection of Children Policy
- c) Enrolment and Orientation Policy
- d) Excursions and Service Events Policy
- e) Governance and Management of the Service Policy
- f) Inclusion and Equity Policy
- g) Privacy and Confidentiality Policy

10.0 Relevant legislation and standards

10.1 Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- a) Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic);
- b) Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic);
- c) Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth);
- d) Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010;
- e) Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n);
- f) Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic);
- g) National Quality Standard, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

10.2 The most common amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

- a) Victorian Legislation- Victorian Law Today: <http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au>
- b) Commonwealth Legislation –ComLaw: <http://www.comlaw.gov.au>

11.0 Sources

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

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

ATTACHMENT 1 - 2021 Free Kindergarten information for families

Bethany Kindergarten Services (BKS) 2021

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.

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

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

- a) Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee
- b) Unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children – parent fee will be reduced

BKS will reimburse families in full for any applicable deposit or fee payments that have already been made for 2021 within a reasonable timeframe.

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by BKS are included on the Statement of Fees and Charges

These include:

- a) **Late collection charge:** The BKS Board 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 BKS Board.

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.

6. Payment of fees

BKS 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.

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact BKS Fees to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* of BKS 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.

- a) 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.
- b) 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.
- c) 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.
- d) The Board will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector.
- e) 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.

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.

Where a child is withdrawn from the kindergarten program:

- BKS will provide a refund of the Acceptance Deposit paid for the position if notified prior to Term 3 of the year before attendance.
- BKS will provide a 50% refund of the Acceptance Deposit paid for the position if notified prior to the end of Term 4 in the year before attendance.
- Acceptance Deposits will not be refunded where notification has been received after the end of Term 4 in the year before attendance, except in extraordinary circumstances.

Additional hours or unfunded 3 year old gap fees are non-refundable.

There will be no refund of 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 or

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.

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

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. **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.

10. 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/guardians will be notified one term in advance of any required fee increase and will be offered the option to request a payment plan.

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

ATTACHMENT 2

2021 FEES AND CHARGES

Kindergarten Registration Fee: A non-refundable payment, currently set at \$35.00 per child, contributing to administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's registration for a place in a program at a BKS kindergarten. This one off fee is paid when the child is first registered with BKS.

Kindergarten Acceptance Fee: This fee must be paid by parents/guardians when accepting an offer of a kindergarten place. This payment is retained and deducted from Term fees. Payment will secure the child's place in the kindergarten program. The Acceptance Fees for 2021 three year old kindergarten is \$125.00 up until 30 November 2020. No acceptance fee is payable for four year old kindergarten in 2021. Places offered after 30 November 2020, will be required to pay the full fees as the Acceptance Fee.

Kindergarten Program Fee: The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides per capita funding as a contribution toward the costs of providing a four-year-old kindergarten program. BKS meets the balance of costs through charging fees.

Funding for the 2021 kindergarten year has been increased and as such fees payable have changed.

Kindergarten program fee	Full Year Fees for 2021
4 year old program – 15 Hours per week	Fully funded, no term fees
3 year old program – 3 Hours per week	\$106.80 full year
3 year old program – 4 Hours per week	\$142.40 full year
3 year old program – 4.5 Hours per week	\$160.00 full year
3 year old program – 5 Hours per week	\$178.00 full year
3 year old program – 6 Hours per week	\$533.60 full year

Are you eligible to be fee exempt? 4 Year Old Program: Families who are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer to the Kindergarten Registration Handbook for eligibility criteria) will not be required to pay program fees for those terms in which their concession is valid. It is the responsibility of the family to ensure BKS has been provided with current proof of Kindergarten Fee Subsidy eligibility.

Are you eligible to be fee exempt? 3 Year Old Program: Some families may be eligible for a fees exemption (refer to the Kindergarten Registration Handbook for eligibility criteria).

Late Collection Charge: BKS reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child.

For further information, please refer to the BKS Fees Policy at: bethanykindergartens.org.au

FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

Payment of fees

2021 fees are due in full by Friday 29 January 2021

Fee Payment Options

Option 1	Internet Bank Transfer Bank: National Australia Bank Account Name: Bethany Kindergarten Services BSB: 083 004 Account number: 19114 1980 <u>Payment reference: invoice number and parent surname</u>
Option 2	By Credit Card see form below or phone Bethany Kindergarten Services on 5273 0212
Option 3	In person Please contact the Fees Office for further information
Option 4	Cheque Payable to Bethany Kindergarten Services, mailed to PO Box 325, North Geelong 3215 <u>Payment reference: invoice number and parent surname</u>
Option 5	Bank deposit At any National Australia Bank branch Account Name: Bethany Kindergarten Services BSB: 083 004 Account number: 19114 1980 <u>Payment reference: invoice number and parent surname</u>

Payment Plan Options

Option 6	Direct Debit contact the Fees Office at fees@bethany.org.au or phone (03) 5273 0212
Option 7	Centrepay contact the Fees Office at fees@bethany.org.au or phone (03) 5273 0212

If you are experiencing difficulties paying kindergarten fees, and for all other enquiries, please contact the Fees Office on (03) 5273 0212 or by emailing fees@bethany.org.au to discuss payment plan options.