


Early Years Enrolment and Fee Policy

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Macedon Ranges Shire Council acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land and waterways. Council recognises their living cultures and ongoing connection to Country and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. Council also acknowledges local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander residents of Macedon Ranges for their ongoing contribution to the diverse culture of our community.

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Purpose/Objective

The process to be followed when enrolling a child at a Council managed kindergarten service, and the basis on which places within programs will be allocated and fees applied.

Background/Reasons for Policy

The Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (the National Regulations) require approved services to have a policy and procedures in place in relation to enrolment and orientation (Regulation 168(2) (k)).

It is intended that all eligible children (refer to Definitions) will have access to two years of funded kindergarten before commencing school. However, availability of places in some areas can limit choices for parents/guardians. Where demand is higher than availability, a priority system for access is determined by the approved provider in order to allocate the available places. The criteria used to determine the allocation of places will vary from service to service but is generally based on the Department of Education and Training's (DET) Priority of Access Criteria, as outlined in their Kindergarten Guide, a service's philosophy, values and beliefs, and the provisions of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. The Victorian Government requires funded organisations to ensure that their policies and procedures promote equal opportunity for all children. Criteria for access and inclusion are outlined in the Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria. Services participating in central enrolment schemes are required to comply with the enrolment procedures of that scheme.

Gender Impact Assessment

In accordance with the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, a Gender Impact Assessment is not required in relation to the subject matter of this policy.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Acceptable immunisation documentation	Documentation as defined by the Immunisation Enrolment Toolkit for early childhood education and care services as acceptable evidence that a child is fully vaccinated for their age, or is on a recognised catch-up schedule if the child has fallen behind on their vaccinations; or has a medical reason not to be vaccinated; or has been assessed as being eligible for a 16 week grace period.
Authorised nominee	A person who has been given written authority by the parents/guardians of a child to collect that child from the education and care service. These details will be on the child's enrolment form.
Children with additional needs	Children whose development or physical condition requires specialist or additional support.
Deferral	When a child does not attend in the year they are eligible for a funded kindergarten place, or the Early Childhood Teacher recommends they withdraw from a service prior to the end of February. DET considers that this child has not accessed a year of funded kindergarten and is therefore eligible for DET funding in the following year.
Early Start Kindergarten Program	<p>Department of Education and Training (DET): The state funding body.</p> <p>A state funded program which provides eligible children 15 hours of free kindergarten a week for two years before starting school.</p> <p>To be eligible, children must be aged three 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 from a family that has had contact with child protection.</p>
Eligible child	A child who meets the criteria as outlined in the Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding guide.

Enrolment form	A form that collects contact details, and personal and medical information from parents/guardians about their child. This is completed after a place has been offered by the service and accepted by the applicant. The information on this electronic form is held securely and confidentially within our online enrolment system as part of the child's enrolment record. Enrolment record: Contains information on each child, as required under the National Regulations, including contact details, names of authorised nominees (refer to Definitions), names of persons authorised to consent to medical treatment or to authorise administration of medication, names of persons authorised to take the child outside the service, details of any court orders, personal and health information including specific healthcare needs, medical management plans and dietary restrictions etc. (Regulations 160, 161, 162). A child cannot commence at the service unless the enrolment form has been completed in its entirety.
Kindergarten Inclusion Support Programme	Is a federal government funded program and is available to services, families and children to provide assistance to support the inclusion, learning and development of children with additional needs in the funded kindergarten program.
Kindergarten	Is a two year universal early childhood program, which is funded by the Victorian Government for eligible children.
Preferences	List, in order of preference, kindergartens to send your child to.
Kindergarten fees	Kindergarten fees are free for children enrolled in 2023 and 2024 as per the State Government Free Kinder initiative.
Registration form	An online form to apply for a place at a kindergarten service.
Registration 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.

Second year	A second year of kindergarten is approved and funded by the Victorian government for children who meet the eligibility criteria for a second funded year of four year old kindergarten. Three year old kindergarten does not have the option to undertake a second year of funded kindergarten.
The Kindergarten Funding Guide (the Guide)	Provides detailed information about the types of kindergarten funding available, eligibility criteria for funding, how to apply for funding and how to comply with the operational requirements once funding has been granted. The Guide currently has a publishing date of 2016. Whenever there is a new production, Council will use the most current version. Funding rates will generally change each financial year and be published accordingly.

References

- > Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria
<https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide>
- > Australian Immunisation Register
www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/australian-childhood-immunisation-register
- > Victorian Department of Health
<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation>
- > Immunisation enrolment toolkit
<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/immunisation-enrolment-toolkit-quick-guide>

Related policies

- > Early Years - Acceptance and Refusal of Authorisations for a Child to Leave the Service Policy
- > Complaints Policy
- > Debt Management Policy

- > Fees and Charges Policy
- > Financial Hardship Policy
- > Privacy Policy

Related legislation

- > *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999*
- > *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*
- > *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)*
- > *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)*
- > *Child Wellbeing and Safety (Information Sharing) Amendment Regulations 2020*
- > *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*
- > *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*
- > *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulations 160, 161, 162, 168, 177, 183*
- > *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*
- > *Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Child Care Rebate) Act 2011*
- > *Family Violence Protection Amendment (Information Sharing) Act 2017*
- > *National Quality Standard, Quality Area 6: Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities*
 - *Standard 6.1: Respectful and supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained*
 - *Element 6.1.1: There is an effective enrolment and orientation process for families*

- > *The Privacy Act 1988 (Privacy Act)*
- > *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic)*
- > *Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (No Jab, No Play) Regulations 2015 (Vic)*
- > *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)*

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

- Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today
<http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/>
- Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation
<https://www.legislation.gov.au/>

Policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that kindergarten places are allocated in a manner which ensures equity of access and demonstrates a transparent enrolment administrative process. The policy sets out processes for setting and payment of fees and eligibility for fee subsidies.

2. Guiding principles

- 2.1. Kindergarten is a two year universal early childhood program, which is funded by the Victorian Government for eligible children. Kindergarten programs engage children in quality learning experiences in a community and centre-based environment. Research shows that quality early childhood education exerts a positive influence on longer-term educational and social outcomes, particularly for children experiencing educational and social disadvantage.
- 2.2. Collaboration between Council, families and children enables Council to share knowledge and strengths in order to plan and deliver seamless services.

3. Scope

- 3.1. The Victorian Government has announced that three and four year old Kindergarten will be free from 2023. (Subject to Victorian Government funding commitments).
- 3.2. This policy applies to the 2023 and 2024 kindergarten years
- 3.3. Three year old funded kindergarten is provided for children who turn three years of age on or before April 30 in the year of attendance.
- 3.4. In accordance with the Guide and its successive documents, two years of funded kindergarten is available to all children who turn three years of age on or before April 30 in the year of kindergarten attendance.
- 3.5. As per the Guide and its successive documents, Early Start Kindergarten is available to eligible children who turn three years of age on or before 30 April of the year of kindergarten attendance. Children enrolled as Early Start Kindergarten are entitled to two years of a funded 15 hour kindergarten program.

4. Objective

- 4.1. To facilitate the placement of children into Council managed kindergarten programs through a central enrolment system.
- 4.2. To provide details of the eligibility criteria for applications, the prioritisation and reservation of places and timelines for lodging of applications.
- 4.3. To ensure placements and procedures are in alignment with Victorian Government policy directions, legislation and funding criteria (including fee subsidies).

5. Policy implementation

5.1. Funding and fees

- 5.1.1. The Victorian Government provides funding to kindergartens for each eligible child attending the funded kindergarten program. Children cannot access more than one funded kindergarten program at the same time.
- 5.1.2. The Victorian Government is now providing funding to cover program fees for all families attending 3 and 4 Year old kindergarten. These fees contribute to meeting the cost of operating the kindergarten.
- 5.1.3. Council kindergarten registration administration fees are reviewed when financial year budgets are set annually and are subject to change in July each year.
- 5.1.4. While current Victorian and federal government funding is for 15 hours of kindergarten for each four year old child, and up to 15 hours of kindergarten for three year old children, confirmation of this funding is subject to change. The Victorian Government aims to deliver 15 hours of funded three year old kindergarten a week by 2029 to all services.
- 5.1.5. Possible future funding changes within the sector may result in program hours changing from one year to the next. Information on current kindergarten programs and operations are suggestive only. Macedon Ranges Shire Council, as Early Years Manager, reserves the right to review and implement changes to program hours, session times, group sizes, fees and all aspects of the service operations.

5.2. No Jab No Play

5.2.1. From 1 January 2016, an early childhood education and care service cannot confirm enrolment of a child unless the parent/carer has provided their child's immunisation history statement from the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) that shows the child:

- a) is fully vaccinated for their age; or
- b) is on a recognised catch-up schedule and is on track with the catch up schedule; or
- c) has a medical reason not to be vaccinated; or
- d) is eligible for the 16 week grace period.

Further details can be found on the Department of Health website.

5.3. Eligibility criteria for three year old kindergarten

5.3.1. Children must be three years of age on or before 30 April in the year of attendance to be eligible to attend a three year old funded kindergarten program. Due to regulatory requirements and educator to child ratios, children cannot commence a funded three year old group until they have turned three years of age.

5.3.2. Families with children born between 1 January and 30 April need to make an informed choice about which year they would like their child to commence three year old kindergarten and therefore which year their child will attend a funded four year old kindergarten program.

5.3.3. A place will be reserved for children that have enrolled but are not yet three years old.

5.3.4. The Victorian Government offers one year only of funded three year old kindergarten and there is currently no option to repeat.

5.3.5. Families will be required to agree and acknowledge on their electronic enrolment form that they will be accessing the three year old kindergarten program with the Macedon Ranges Shire Council kindergarten.

5.3.6. Macedon Ranges Shire Council kindergartens do not accept unfunded three year old children in their program.

5.3.7. Council will review and amend programs annually or as required if enrolments are not sufficient to provide a financially viable service.

5.4. Eligibility criteria for four year old kindergarten

- 5.4.1. In accordance with the Guide and its successive documents, one year of funded kindergarten is available to all children who turn four years of age on or before April 30 in the year of kindergarten attendance. If a child has previously attended a four year old funded kindergarten program, they will only be eligible for a second year of four year old funded kindergarten in consultation with the teacher, providing they meet the eligibility criteria and have formal approval from the DET.
- 5.4.2. In accordance with the Guide and its successive documents, Early Start Kindergarten and the Access to Early Learning Program is available to eligible children of three and four years of age on or before 30 April of the year of kindergarten attendance.
- 5.4.3. Families with children born between 1 January and 30 April need to make an informed choice about which year they would like their child to commence school and therefore which year their child will attend a funded four year old kindergarten program. All children learn and develop in different ways. The Victorian Government offers one year only of funded four year old kindergarten in the year before school to children who turn four prior to the 30 April in the year they will attend. The expectation is that once services have confirmed their funded enrolments to the DET, this will be counted as the child's funded place.
- 5.4.4. Families will be required to agree and acknowledge on their electronic enrolment form that they will be accessing the four year old kindergarten program with the Macedon Ranges Shire Council kindergarten.
- 5.4.5. Macedon Ranges Shire Council kindergartens do not accept unfunded four year old children in their program.

5.5. Enrolment timelines for three and four year old kindergarten

- 5.5.1. Kindergarten registrations can be made at any time, however all applications will be reviewed and allocated from 1 July the year prior to attendance.
- 5.5.2. To be eligible for consideration in the first round of offers, registrations must be lodged with Council by 30 June the year prior to attendance.
- 5.5.3. Reminders to register will be widely advertised each year.

5.5.4. Allocation of placements will be made in accordance with priority categories and date of receipt, if an application is received after 30 June.

5.5.5. Council cannot guarantee applicants will receive a kindergarten place.

5.6. How to apply

5.6.1 Registration for three year old and four year old kindergarten can be completed online via the Macedon Ranges Shire Council website: <https://www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/Live-Work/Children/Kindergarten/Kindergarten-registration-and-fees>

5.6.2 A registration application must be accompanied by the following documents in order to be accepted and processed:

- a) Proof of child's age (such as the child's birth certificate, immunisation history statement or passport) uploaded to the online registration form and,
- b) Non-refundable registration fee, using a valid debit or credit card (unless exemption applies).
- c) If the child or family hold an eligible concession card as outlined in 5.21.7, the family is eligible to receive a fee subsidy from the Victorian Government and they are not required to pay the registration fee. A copy of the valid concession card must be uploaded to the online registration form.
- d) If a child is registering for kindergarten and they are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten, they are also exempt from paying a registration fee.

5.6.3 Children enrolled in a three year old kindergarten group at Council's facilities are not automatically eligible for a place in four year old kindergarten. Families must submit another kindergarten registration application and enrolment will be determined through the kindergarten enrolment application process.

5.6.4 In the case of multiple births (such as twins, triplets or quadruplets), a registration application needs to be completed for each child and must indicate that it is part of a multiple birth on the registration.

5.7. Application priorities – three and four year old kindergarten

5.7.1 Children registered for a funded three or four year old kindergarten will be allocated a place at a kindergarten service based on the priority category list below:

Priority Number	Criteria
Priority 1 (all of equal priority)	a) Children who DET have approved for a second year of funded kindergarten (applicable to funded four year old kindergarten only).
	b) Children who are identified by parent, carer or guardian as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.
	c) Children who are at risk of abuse or neglect, known to Child Protection or Child FIRST Services or children in Out-of-Home Care. Children who are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten or Access to Early Learning.
	d) Children who are identified as an asylum seeker or refugee.
	e) Children who are triplets or quadruplets.
	f) Children who are eligible for the kindergarten fee subsidy.
	g) Children with additional needs who have identified specific disability or developmental delay or require additional assistance to fully participate in the kindergarten program.
Priority 2	a) Four year old Kindergarten for Children who attended a Macedon Ranges Shire Council Kindergarten in the three year old program.
	b) Children who were eligible to attend the previous year but deferred to the following year or who lodged a deferral form before or by the end of February of the previous year.
Priority 3	Children of residents who reside in the Shire of Macedon Ranges or pay rates to Macedon Ranges Shire Council.
Priority 4	Children of non-Macedon Ranges' residents

5.7.2 Eligibility for Priority 1c can be advised verbally and/or in writing by a Child Protection, Integrated Family Services Worker or Maternal Child Health Nurse. Families may also self-

identify their eligibility on the registration form. An identified vulnerability includes a family known to child protection, Child FIRST, Integrated Family Services, newly arrived status, asylum seeker or refugee children, Children in Out-of-Home or Kinship Care, children referred by Early Childhood Intervention or who hold a Child Disability Health Care Card.

5.8 Reserved places for three and four year old kindergarten

5.8.1 Each service will hold two reserved places that will be available for allocation until the end of December prior to the commencement of the first term of kindergarten in the following year. The purpose of the reserved places are to be able to offer Priority 1 or vulnerable children access to the service. The unallocated reserved places may then be released for those on the waiting list according to priority.

5.9 Late registrations

5.9.1 Registrations will continue to be received after June 30 the year prior to attendance, but will be deemed as a late application.

5.9.2 Late registrations may be included in the first round of offers, in accordance with the priority of access and date of registration.

5.9.3 If no places are available, the applicant will be placed on the waiting list according to priority and date of application.

5.10 Changes to registration details

5.10.1 When applicants wish to alter their original kindergarten preferences after submitting the Registration Application they should contact the Enrolment Officer.

5.11 First round allocations

5.11.1 All registrations will be allocated according to priority of access guidelines and the due date. Refer to clauses 5.7 and 5.5.

5.11.2 Refer to clause 5.5 in regard to lodgement date for first round offers and for late registrations refer to clause 5.9.

5.11.3 Where registration numbers exceed the number of places available at the first preference kindergarten, applicants will be allocated their second or third preference based on availability of places. If there are no places available at any stated preferences, then the

applicant will be placed on a waiting list at the kindergarten of their first preference nominated on the registration form.

5.12 Review of the remaining places

5.12.1 Offers will continue to be made after round three and after the commencement of the kindergarten year.

5.12.2 Applications will be allocated to available places according to category of priority and date of receipt. If no places are available, applicants will be placed on a waiting list according to priority.

5.13 Offer of placement at allocated kindergarten

5.13.1 Applicants will be notified of the kindergarten allocated in writing via email during August/September in the year prior to attendance.

5.13.2 Applicants not offered a placement in the first round remain on the waiting list of their preferences in order of priority and date of application. A review of available kindergarten placements will be conducted after first round offers and responses are processed.

5.13.3 Any applicants who remain on the waiting list after all places have been allocated; will be offered a placement appropriate to their priority as soon as a vacancy occurs at their preferred kindergarten.

5.14 Responses to offers

5.14.1 Applicants can select one of the following choices:

- a) accept the kindergarten place that is on offer and select your group preference;
- b) decline the offer of the kindergarten place and be placed on a waiting list for their preferred kindergarten or particular kindergarten group as listed on their registration form;
- c) decline the offer and cancel their application;
- d) defer to the following year, subject to making contact with the Enrolment Officer to verify eligibility.

5.14.2 Applicants must complete the Program Preference Form, which requires them to select one of the responses above.

5.14.3 Where no response is received by Council within the specified timeframe identified in the letter of offer, the child's place will be cancelled. If a family contacts Council later than the required response date, their child will be reinstated to the waiting list with the appropriate priority, according from their response date.

5.15 Deferral of funded kindergarten places

5.15.1 In accordance with The Kindergarten Funding Guide and its successor agreements, states a child is entitled to one year of either 3 year old or 4 year old funded kindergarten experience. As a guide when applying for kindergarten, parents need to carefully consider the age/year their child is to commence school and working back from that to work out the year they are to commence either 3 or 4 year old kindergarten.

5.15.2 Under current funding, children who have commenced in the program may be identified by the Early Childhood Teacher as benefiting from delaying their commencing of kindergarten to the following year. Children need to be identified by the teacher before they are recorded on the Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS), which counts the child as attending a funded program for the year and is finalised by the end of February. Deferring by this timeline, allows access to a funded kindergarten position the following year.

5.15.3 The Teacher must notify the Enrolment Officer if the parent agrees with their recommendation to defer their child's kindergarten year, prior to accessing their funded kindergarten place in KIMS.

5.16 Second year of funded kindergarten – four year old kindergarten

5.16.1 A second year of kindergarten is only available to children who meet the eligibility criteria as set and approved by the Victorian Government, and is only applicable to funded four year old kindergarten.

5.16.2 Families identified as eligible to enrol their child in a second year of kindergarten must submit a registration form to be considered in the first round of offers. A second registration fee will not be payable in these circumstances.

5.16.3 Allocations will be processed in accordance with the priority of access.

5.16.4 Registrations received after 30 June will be treated as a late registration, however, will be given priority according to clause 5.7.

5.17 Children who will turn six years of age during the funded kindergarten year

5.17.1 Children who turn six years of age during the kindergarten year must have an exemption from attending school that year and need to provide the approval letter to the kindergarten with their child's enrolment form.

5.17.2 Parents need to apply for an exemption before the child starts kindergarten by filling in the appropriate Victorian Government documentation:

www.education.vic.gov.au/documents/school/principals/participation/schoolexemption.pdf

5.17.3 If the Victorian Government has not granted an exemption, Council will not be in a position to accept the child's place at kindergarten.

5.18 Transfer of kindergarten places

5.18.1 Once a place has been allocated to a child, the child's place is not transferable between kindergarten centres unless there is availability. If an applicant believes their circumstances are exceptional, they may contact the Enrolment Officer to ask for consideration of their request. Changing groups within the same service will only occur if vacancies exist in the group (this must be confirmed with the Enrolment Officer), and after consultation with the teachers.

5.18.2 Each request will be taken on its merit and considered in relation to the available vacancies and current waiting lists. There is no guarantee of transfer.

5.19 Children with additional needs

5.19.1 Macedon Ranges Shire Council's kindergartens are inclusive of all children.

5.19.2 Additional support for funded kindergarten may be available to services, families and children with additional needs through the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Programme.

5.19.3 Applicants are required to notify Council of their child's additional needs on the registration form, so that, where required, appropriate assistance can be secured and provided, and planning can occur in advance. Disclosing your child's additional needs will not disadvantage your child's application.

5.20 Staff educating their child

5.20.1 Teachers and educators who are also parents of children attending Macedon Ranges Shire kindergartens cannot educate their children within the same group they teach. It is acknowledged that from time to time, personal circumstances may arise where this may not

be possible and staff should apply in writing to the Early Years Coordinator for consideration.

5.21 Registration fees

5.21.1 A non-refundable administration processing fee is payable when submitting the kindergarten registration form.

5.21.2 To reduce barriers to enrolment, there are no registration fees for children enrolling under priority 1 for funded three and four year old kindergarten and priority 1a, b, c, d, e, and f.

5.21.3 The registration fee will be reviewed annually when financial year budgets are set and are subject to change in July each year.

5.22 Fees

5.22.1 The Victorian Government is providing funding to cover kindergarten program fees for families from 2023. These fees contribute to meeting the cost of operating the kindergarten.

5.22.2 Council kindergarten registration administration fees are reviewed when financial year budgets are set annually and are subject to change in July each year.

5.23 Kindergarten sessions

5.23.1 Kindergarten sessions and enrolment numbers will be reviewed annually as part of the allocation process and DET funding confirmation, as well as feedback from families and staff.

5.23.2 Sessions may vary from year to year at each centre. Council may make alterations to any kindergarten session dependant on applications or individual centre numbers at any time.

5.23.3 Consultation will take place from time to time to ensure services respond to the demand of the majority of applications.

5.23.4 Once enrolled, each child will be able to access 15 hours of kindergarten per week for the four year old program and working towards 15 hours of three year old kindergarten per week by 2029 as part of the State Government three year old kinder rollout.

Attachment 1

Important information regarding your child's three and four year old kindergarten year

The Victorian Government provides funding to support children to access a high quality three and four year old kindergarten program. Your child can only be funded for a kindergarten place at one service at any one time, and only for one year for three year old kindergarten and one year of four year old kindergarten (unless your child's kindergarten teacher assesses your child as being eligible for a second four year old funded year). Your child is enrolled to attend our kindergarten program and we will be claiming funding for your child on your behalf. You acknowledge that your child is accessing their funded kindergarten place at our service in the year your child is attending. If your child will be attending another children's service that offers a funded kindergarten program, you must tell that service we will be claiming funding for your child.

If your child is enrolled as Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) in a 15 hour program, they will not be using their funded year and would be eligible to attend a funded four year old kindergarten in the following year.

I confirm that my child will be accessing their funded three or four year old kindergarten place (whichever is applicable) at service you have enrolled in.

I confirm

Signature of

Date

