BALWYN EAST KINDERGARTEN INC.

FEES - FREE KINDER

QUALITY AREA 7 | ELAA VERSION 1.4

Free Kinder Funding Compliance

Services that opt into the Victorian Government Free Kinder initiative must comply with all funding guidelines, including requirements that:

- **No compulsory fees are charged for the funded kindergarten program**
- **Any optional charges are clearly identified and agreed to**
- **Funding is used in accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guide**

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- how services comply with the Free Kinder funding requirements.

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Balwyn East Kindergarten 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 Balwyn East Kindergarten.

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted					
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative *(refer to Definitions)*	R	√	√	√	
Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for the payment of fees (if appliable) and the provision of a statement of fees charged by the service *(Regulation 168)*, and take reasonable steps to ensure those policies and procedures are followed *(Regulation 170)*	R	√			
Ensuring that families are informed of the operating hours including term dates, planned closures and additional hours to account for closures.	R	√			
Ensuring families are informed of the total annual fee amount, including any applicable fees for e.g. excursions and any additional hours	R	√			
Reimbursing families in full for enrolment deposits that have already been paid upon acceptance of enrolment	R	√			
Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted)	R	√			
Ensuring families are only charged for optional kindergarten programs hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or "wrap around" care *(refer to Definitions)*	R	√			
Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guidelines *(refer to Sources)*	R	√			
Providing communication to families explaining their access to one year of three-year-old and one of four-year-old funded kindergarten program	R	√			
Ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service **nominate and document** which service the child will participate in the funded kindergarten program	R	√		√	
Ensuring that any surplus funding is used in line with acceptable uses of kindergarten funding, including to promote increased participation and/or enhance program quality	R	√			

Ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted	R	√			
Charging families only for an occasional special event/ excursions that occur outside the normal program/curriculum	R	√	√		
Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the Arrival system	R	√	√		
Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the Arrival system	R	√	√		
Ensuring that the *Fees - Free Kinder Policy* is readily accessible at the service *(Regulation 171)*	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kinder *(refer to Attachment 1)*	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges to families that have opted in to the additional hours *(refer to Attachments 2)* upon enrolment of their child, if applicable **NOTE:** parents must also be advised that enrolling for hours over 15 **is optional** and families can choose to only enrol for 15 hours and receive this program at no cost.	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with an additional hours payment fee agreement *(refer to Attachments 3)*, if applicable	R	√			
Informing parents of any action that will be taken if additional hours fees are not paid *(refer to Attachments 3)*	R	√			
Reading the Balwyn East Kindergarten Free Kinder information for families *(refer to Attachment 1)*, the Statement of Additional Hours Fees and Charges *(refer to Attachments 2)*, and the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement *(refer to Attachments 3)* if applicable				√	
Signing and complying with the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement *(refer to Attachments 3),* if applicable				√	
Ensuring any additional hours fees are collected and receipted	R	√			
Notifying the approved provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of additional hours fees				√	
Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to the Balwyn East Kindergarten				√	
Complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of additional hours fees	R	√	√	√	
Notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the additional hours fees charged, or the way in which the fees are collected *(Regulation 172(2))*, ideally providing one term's notice.	R	√			
Implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the approved provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative *(refer to Sources)*	R	√	√	√	

Informing the approved provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding additional hours fees at the service		√	√		
Referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the approved provider.		√	√		

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

The Victorian Government's Best Start, Best Life reforms are transforming early childhood education by expanding access to funded kindergarten programs and increasing funded hours of Four-Year-Old Kindergarten through the progressive rollout of more hours of 4-Year-Old Kinder (Pre-Prep).

As part of these reforms, Free Kinder supports Victorian children to access funded kindergarten programs by reducing or removing parent fees associated with funded kindergarten hours. These initiatives aim to ensure all children can benefit from high-quality early childhood education and receive the best possible start to learning and development.

Regulation 168(2)(n) of the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 requires approved providers to maintain a comprehensive written fees policy and communicate the policy to families. Any voluntary parent contributions, donations or fundraising activities must align with current Victorian Government kindergarten funding requirements, including Free Kinder funding guidelines where applicable.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- National Quality Standard

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

Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au

DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms e.g. Approved provider, Nominated supervisor, Notifiable complaints, Serious incidents, Duty of care, etc. refer to the Definitions file of the PolicyWorks catalogue.

Additional Hours/Wrap around care: care that is provided by a kindergarten service to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program. Wrap around care fees are not funded by the Victorian Government but may be covered by CCS *(refer to Definitions).*

Approved child care: Approved child care services are services that have Australian Government approval to receive the Child Care Subsidy *(refer to Definitions)* on behalf of eligible parents. Approved

child care includes centre-based day care, including long day care and occasional care, family day care, outside school hours care and in-home care.

Child care subsidy (CCS) if applicable: A Commonwealth Government means tested subsidy to assist eligible families with the cost of child care. Payments are paid directly to approved child care providers. Further information can be found at: www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK): A funding program that provides eligible children 15 hours of free or low cost kindergarten program each week for two years before starting school. To be eligible a child must by 3 by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten and be from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or the family has had contact with child protection. Details are available at: www.vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten If a child is eligible for ESK, they should be enrolled in ESK, even where Free Kinder and/or 15 hours per week of funded three-year old kindergarten is offered. This ensures eligible children have priority access to 15 hours of funded kindergarten provided by an early childhood teacher and that service providers receive additional funding and support. ESK enrolments contribute to School Readiness Funding (SRF) calculations for service providers. It also allows the Department to continue to monitor efforts to engage the most vulnerable children in kindergarten across Victoria and provide additional targeted support where required through SRF or Early Childhood LOOKOUT.

Waitlist fee: A fee for when families register their child directly with a service (not part the councils central registration and enrolment scheme). This fee will not be refunded as it is not part of the Free Kinder subsidy, and not related to the fee charged for delivery of the kindergarten program. A service may charge for one-off excursions/incursions, and registration fees (sometimes called waitlist fees). Waitlist fees are returned to families once they have accepted a kindergarten place.

Excursion/service event charge: An additional charge required to meet the cost of special events or excursions that occur in response to emerging children's program needs. Events that are planned ahead and are included as an expenditure item in the service's budget do not incur this additional charge *(refer to Excursions and Service Events Policy)*

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

Free Kinder: A Victorian Government Best Start, Best Life initiative providing Free Kinder programs for four-year-old and three-year-old children in funded services, that have opted into the initiative.

Free Kinder supports families to access a funded kindergarten program by:

- providing a free 15-hour program to 4-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service
- providing a free 5 to 15-hour program to 3-year old children enrolled at a sessional service (subject to the length of funded program offered)
- offsetting the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for 3 and 4-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service.

Funded Kindergarten: For service's that have not opted for Free Kinder, the Victorian Government provides funding to support children to access a high-quality kindergarten program in the two years before they start school. The funding is a contribution towards meeting the cost of the kindergarten program. Funded kindergartens charge fees to help meet the cost of running kindergarten programs. Fees are set by individual kindergartens and depend on things like how many hours children attend and whether there are extra costs such as excursions.

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.

More hours of 4-Year-Old Kinder: Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will gradually transition to increase 4-year-old kindergarten hours over the next decade from 2025. Funded kindergarten hours will double from 15 to up to 30 hours a week. More hours of 4-Year-Old Kinder will be delivered through sessional kindergartens and long-day-care centres. By 2036, children

across Victoria will have access to 1,800 hours of funded kindergarten before school, comprising 600 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and 1,200 hours of More hours of 4-Year-Old Kinder.

More hours of 4-Year-Old Kinder priority cohort: From 2026, between 16 and 25 hours of 4-year-Old will be available to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- children from a refugee or asylum seeker background
- children who have had contact with Child Protection
- children who were supported by Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) or Access to Early Learning (AEL) in their Three-Year-Old Kindergarten year.

More hours of 4-Year-Old Kinder hours for this group of priority cohort children increase to up to 30 hours from 2028.

Voluntary parent/guardian payment/donation: A voluntary payment/donation for items not directly related to the provision of the children's program. Explicit and written agreement from a parent is required for any voluntary payments. Attendance at the service is not conditional on this payment.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- Best Start Best Life: https://www.vic.gov.au/give-your-child-the-best-start-in-life
- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education): www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: https://www.vic.gov.au/resources-funded-kindergartens
- The constitution of [Service Name]

RELATED POLICIES

- Compliments and Complaints
- Delivery and Collection of Children
- Enrolment and Orientation
- Excursions and Service Events
- Governance and Management of the Service
- Inclusion and Equity
- Privacy and Confidentiality

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the approved provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness, particularly in relation to affordability, flexibility of payment options and procedures for the collection of fees
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation and government policy, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk *(Regulation 172 (2))*.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Free Kinder information for families
- Attachment 2: Statement of additional hours fees
- Attachment 3: Additional hours fee payment agreement

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Balwyn East Kindergarten on 3/11/2026.

REVIEW DATE: 03/11/2027

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDER INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Balwyn East Kindergarten 2025

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free as part of the Best Start, Best Life reform.

Free Kinder provides families with a free program in sessional services and a fee offset in long day care services.

DE also provides funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, Asylum seeker and refugee children and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

Operation hours	**Monday, Tuesday, Thursday 8:30am-3:00pm** **Wednesday and Friday 8:30am-4:00pm**
Term 1	Thursday 28 January – Thursday 25 March
Term 2	Monday 12 April – Friday 25 July
Term 3	Monday 12 July – Friday 17 September
Term 4	Monday 4 October – Friday 17 December
Planned Closures	Tuesday 26 January, Monday 8 March, Friday 26 March, Monday 14 June, Tuesday 2 November
Additional Hours account for closure	

2. What Free Kinder means at our service

Balwyn East Kindergarten has opted in to the Free Kinder initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (15 hours per week) – no parent fee
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee

Balwyn East Kindergarten will reimburse families in full for any kindergarten fee deposit *(refer to Definitions)* payments that have already been made upon acceptance of enrolment, excluding any voluntary parent donations/payments that you agree to in writing.

3. Other charges

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

These include:

Excursion/service event charge (outside of the 15 hours per week program): At times throughout the year an additional excursion(s) or event(s) may be arranged where it is considered relevant to the service's program and the children's interests. At this time any additional costs to families are taken into consideration before a decision is made *(refer to Excursions Regular Outings and Service Events Policy)*.

Late collection charge: The 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 determined by the Committee of Management.

4. Additional hours fees

Balwyn East Kindergarten offers families 4.5 hours above the set 15 hours per week (600 hours per year). The additional hours fee is determined by the hourly program rate based on the scheduled 2025 fee (including the costs of regular incursions and excursions).

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

5. Fundraising and voluntary parent payment/donations

While **participation in fundraising/donation is voluntary**, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

6. Payment of fees for additional hours

Fees are payable for hours over and above 15 hours per week (600 hours per year).

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/guardians directly and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions. The first term's fees must be received in full prior to the child commencing at the service. For children enrolled after the commencement of a term, a pro rata invoice will be issued and must be paid in full within 14 days of the child's commencement at the service. Receipts will be provided for all fee payments.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the President or Secretary 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 for additional hours

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

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. The Committee of Management will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector.
5. 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.
6. No further enrolments of children from the parents/guardians will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

8. Refund of fees

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

In any other case, additional hours are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the 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. 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 for additional hours/wrap around care

Fees set for the year would only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if attendance rates fall below the budget 'break even' point. Parents/guardians will be notified one term in advance of any required fee increase and will be offered the option to request a payment plan.

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

BALWYN EAST KINDERGARTEN INC.

Balwyn East Kindergarten

Fee schedule 2025

Funded sessional kindergarten for four-year-olds

Hours: 4.5 hours per week

	Additional Hours	Total ($)
Term 1	4.5 hours/week	$600/term
Term 2	4.5 hours/week	$600/term
Term 3	4.5 hours/week	$600/term
Term 4	4.5 hours/week	$600/term
Total	4.5 hours/week	$2400/year

Payment of fees

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

Late collection charge

The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child *(refer to Free Kinder Information for Families)*.

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

BALWYN EAST KINDERGARTEN INC.

2027

Please complete this form and return to Balwyn East Kindergarten by [Date]

Fee payment contract

Child's full name:

Parent's/guardian's full name:

- I/we acknowledge that the four-year-old 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) funded kindergarten program is fully funded by the state government, with the balance of additional hours over and above and/or wrap around care coming from fees paid by parents/guardians.
- I/we agree to pay any additional fees for services above the 600 hours by the due date on the invoice.
- I/we understand that fees for additional hours each term are non-refundable.
- I/we acknowledge that if fees for additional hours are not paid by the due date, the Committee of Management will implement the late payment of fees procedures, as outlined in the Free Kinder Information for Families, which could result in the withdrawal of my/our child's place at the service and no further enrolments until the outstanding fees are paid.
- I/we agree that if my/our financial circumstances change and I/we am/are unable to pay as agreed, I/we will immediately notify the Committee President to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service's Free Kinder Information for Families, which outlines the procedure for payment of fees.

Signature (parent/guardian): Date:

Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with the Balwyn East Kindergarten *Free Kinder Fee Policy*.