

▲ KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM POLICY

▲ NQS

Element 1.1: The educational program enhances each child's learning and development;

Element 1.2: Educators facilitate and extend each child's learning and development;

Element 1.3: Educators and co-ordinators take a planned and reflective approach to implementing the program for each child.

Education and Care Services National Regulations: 73-76

Each state and territory has its own early childhood education and care system. Nationally, the term preschool refers to an early childhood educational program delivered by a qualified Early Childhood Teacher to children in the years before school. In Victoria, preschool is referred to as kindergarten.

Kindergarten programs provide an educational program in which qualified early childhood teachers and educators work to engage each child in effective learning, thereby promoting communication, learning and thinking, positive relationships, identity and wellbeing.

Kindergarten Funding

Kindergarten Funding is funding provided to centres in order to assist in preparing a program for 3-year-old and 4-year-old children, during the last two years of care before commencing school. The Government will provide Kindergarten Funding to the centre based on how many children nominate to attend the centre's Funded Kindergarten Program. All funding received is to be invested back into the Kindergarten Program through improved resources, excursions, educator training.

FROEBEL also chooses to offer reduced daily fees to all families that nominate us for 3-year-old and 4-year-old Kindergarten Funding to acknowledge the financial assistance received.

FROEBEL offers an approved kindergarten program which is **fully integrated into our mixed-age kindergarten group**. This means that we do not differentiate between "3-year-old kinder" and "4-year-old kinder". Our integrated kindergarten program is generally provided by a qualified Early Childhood Teacher each day, 5 days a week including during school term breaks. Our kindergarten program is not limited to a certain number of hours per week; children who are enrolled for more than two days per week benefit from the kindergarten program on each day of their enrolment. Unlike centres that run separate Kindergarten Program or Sessional Kindergartens with shorter hours of care, our Kindergarten program is delivered over the whole day for maximum exposure and learning.

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Competence for Children

“Free Kinder” Funding

In 2023, The Victorian Government introduced “Free Kinder” Funding to assist families in offsetting the cost of the Kindergarten Program component of their care arrangements. This funding continues in 2024 and provides \$2,000 per child per annum during a child's 3-year-old and 4-year-old Kindergarten years. This payment is in addition to the normal Kindergarten Funding and is only available at the service the family is nominating to deliver the funded Kindergarten Program for their child.

This funding will be automatically paid directly to the service you have nominated to receive your Kindergarten Funding and will be applied to your family fee statement as an offset to your daily fees on a pro-rata basis. This facilitates the process for families, removing the need for claims to be made.

This “Free Kinder” Funding is calculated based on 15 hours per week, regardless of your child's actual attendance. In line with Kindergarten Funding, your child must be enrolled for a minimum of two days per week in order to be eligible for the credits. It means that the Government's \$2,000 per child payment translates to a credit in the amount of \$19.61 per day on two days per week, over FROEBEL's 51 operating weeks ($\$19.61 \times 2 \text{ days} \times 51 \text{ weeks} = \$2,000$).

FROEBEL will pass on this funding retrospectively as a weekly credit of \$39.22 from January through until the end of December of the funded kindergarten year.

Early Start Kindergarten Grants (ESK)

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) grants are available to FROEBEL for an eligible child who turns three years old by 30 April in the year they are attending a kindergarten program delivered by a Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered early childhood teacher.

An eligible child is

- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander,
- Refugee or Asylum Seeker, OR
- Known to Child Protection
-

ESK extension grants are available for eligible children in the year before school who are:

- Eligible for the kindergarten per capita grant but not eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy, and
- from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or known to child protection. A child is not required to access ESK in the previous year to access the ESK extension grant.

Eligibility for ESK or ESK extension may be provided to the centre director verbally from a parent or carer or can be written or verbal advice from a professional such as a case worker.

A confidential note will be entered on the child's enrolment records, stating the date and name of who notified that the child is eligible for ESK grants.



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The following policies apply:

Parents/guardians acknowledge that

- the calculation of FROEBEL's daily fees takes into consideration the service is approved (and continues to be approved) for Kindergarten Funding by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, and is eligible to receive Kindergarten Funding towards the provision of its kindergarten program for all its children in the two years before school;
- their child can only attend **one** funded kindergarten program at one service at any one time;
- a child's attendance is only funded for two years of kindergarten before school unless the child has been approved by the DET for further funding. Please note that the kindergarten program can be continued at another kindergarten if required (e.g. when the child/family moves).
- Where a child's school readiness is in doubt in the year before starting school, an application can be made for an additional year of Funded 4-year-old Kindergarten. It is not possible to claim a second year of Funded 3-year-old Kindergarten.
- families must provide evidence that their child/ren are fully vaccinated in order to enrol at a service offering a Funded Kindergarten Program as the Government's No Jab, No Play policy applies.

Parents/guardians **must declare that they nominate FROEBEL to deliver the funded kindergarten program** for their child in accordance with this policy.

Families with a child who is **already enrolled in a funded kindergarten program at another service/kindergarten**, who do not wish to nominate FROEBEL to deliver the funded kindergarten program, will be transitioned to our Unfunded Kindergarten Daily Fees upon start of their unfunded 3-year-old or 4-year-old kindergarten program to provide for the kindergarten funding we will be unable to claim.

In the event there is not a sufficient number of places available in the Kindergarten Room for all eligible children to transition into the Kindergarten room/s at the beginning of the Kindergarten year, the Department's Priority of Access criteria as outlined below will apply. FROEBEL can provide access to the Funded Kindergarten Program for these families in the Toddler room until such time as a placement becomes available to allow a transition to the Kindergarten space. In these instances, funded children in our Toddler room will be transitioned to our reduced "Funded Toddler Fees". The Centre Director will discuss this with families when and where applicable.

In instances where more eligible children apply for a place in our Kindergarten Program than FROEBEL has available, FROEBEL will take into consideration the Department's Priority of Access criteria for the following high priority children:

- Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children in Out-of-Home Care
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
- Asylum seeker and refugee children



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- Children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- Children with additional needs, defined as children who:
 - o require additional assistance in order to fully participate in the kindergarten program
 - o require a combination of services which are individually planned
 - o have an identified specific disability or developmental delay

Families wishing to take extended holidays whilst enrolled in the Kindergarten Program should discuss the potential implications on Kindergarten Funding with their Centre Director. All absences greater than six weeks will impact any CCS entitlements and may also impact Kindergarten Program placement and funding.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy is not applicable to long day care centres where Childcare Subsidy is applicable, however, families are requested to note, that the Department provides 15 hours of free Kindergarten to eligible children at other Kindergarten services (e.g. sessional Kindergartens). For further information, including eligibility, please refer to the following link: <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/kindergarten>

Scenarios to assist with determining your funded Kindergarten year/s:

The following scenarios apply with regard to the funded kindergarten year:

Scenario 1:

Children with a birth date between 1 May and 31 December

Children who have turned 3 years old between 1 May and 31 December will commence their first kindergarten year on the 1st of January following their third birthday, and FROEBEL will enrol them in the 3-year-old funded kindergarten program with the parents' consent.

Children who have turned 4 years old between 1 May and 31 December will commence their second kindergarten year on the 1st of January following their fourth birthday, and FROEBEL will enrol them in the 4-year-old funded kindergarten program with the parents' consent.

Scenario 2:

Children with a birth date between 1 January and 30 April

If your child turns 4 between 1 January and 30 April you will be able to elect which year to send your child to primary school. This will also determine the years your child will be eligible for Kindergarten funding. Please discuss with your Centre Director if you are unsure.





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If your child will start school in 2025, your child will be eligible to nominate:

- 4-year-old Kindergarten Funding in 2024

If your child will start school in 2026, your child will be eligible to nominate:

- 3-year-old Kindergarten Funding in 2024
- 4-year-old Kindergarten Funding in 2025

If your child will start school in 2027, your child will be eligible to nominate:

- 3-year-old Kindergarten Funding in 2025
- 4-year-old Kindergarten Funding in 2026

All children learn and develop in different ways. Some children may benefit from starting school at a younger age, while other children may benefit from starting later. 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 kindergarten program. FROEBEL encourages parents to choose carefully, as the State Government now funds children to attend two full years of kindergarten before school (unless they are eligible for an additional year of funded kindergarten). The approved provider will submit all confirmed enrolments to the Department as required.

Parents/guardians of a child who will turn 4 years old between the 1st of January and the 30th of April agree to follow the procedures below:

- Parents/guardians acknowledge that
 - They need to carefully consider in advance whether they would like their child to go to school in the year they turn 5 years old;
 - Discuss their decision with the Early Childhood Teacher and Centre Director as soon as possible;
 - In the middle of the year that their child turns 4 years old parents/guardians will agree to attending a meeting with the Early Childhood Teacher and Centre Director where their child's development and readiness for school will be discussed.
- Parents who decide to postpone their first (funded) kindergarten year to the year in which their child turns 4 (between 1 January and 30 April of that year) are advised that FROEBEL would not be able to claim (and would miss out on) kindergarten funding for their child's attendance in the event that they later revise their decision and commence school earlier after all. FROEBEL therefore kindly requests that the decision is made with sincerity and in consideration of the impact an earlier withdrawal from the centre would have for the service provider.
- Parents who elect for their child to commence school the year they turn five, meaning 3-year-old Kindergarten Funding is claimed the year they turn 3 and 4-year-old Kindergarten Funding is claimed the year they turn 4, but then elect to delay their child's school start until the year their child turns six, may remain enrolled at FROEBEL for the additional year. The enrolment will transition onto our Unfunded Daily Fees for the additional year as all Kindergarten Funding



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entitlements will have already been claimed for both years and there will be no further Kindergarten Funding available to reduce FROEBEL's daily fees unless a child's readiness is in question. In the event a child's school start is delayed due to question of the child's school readiness, refer to Scenario 3 below.

Scenario 3:

Children who turned 4 years old between 1 January and 30 April, who are enrolled in the (funded) kindergarten program as per their parents' consent, and whose "school readiness" is in question later in the (kindergarten) year

AND

Children who turned 4 years old between 1 May and 31 December in the previous year and who are enrolled in the (funded) kindergarten program and whose "school readiness" is in question later in the (kindergarten) year

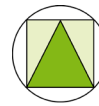
In most cases it is appropriate for a child to transition to school after their second kindergarten year. Schools are responsible for ensuring all students have access to a quality education that meets their diverse needs and are obligated under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 to make adjustments to accommodate students with a developmental delay and/or disability.

In exceptional circumstances where a child is observed to display delays in key outcome areas of learning and development, the possibility of an additional year of funded kindergarten may be considered.

If a child's readiness for school is in question,

- Parents will agree to attending a meeting with the Early Childhood Teacher and Centre Director where their child's development and readiness for school will be discussed;
- Parents will agree to completing a referral form for their child to be observed by the relevant Pre-School Field Officer (PSFO);
- The PSFO will attend the kindergarten program and observe the child's learning and development and discuss their findings with the Early Childhood Teacher and the parents;
- The PSFO will discuss strategies to support the child's learning and development and a 'Term 3 Plan' will be developed and implemented by all kindergarten educators;
- If the PSFO and Early Childhood Teacher observe the child display delays in two key outcome areas of learning and development, the possibility of a second year of funded kindergarten may be considered. This delay can be identified when comparing the average rate of learning and development for children of the same age and may include, but is not restricted to, children with a diagnosed developmental delay or disability.





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The outcome areas according to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework are:

- identity (emotional development)
- community (social development)
- wellbeing (self-care)
- learning (cognitive development)
- communication (receptive/expressive language).

However, a second year should only be considered where the kindergarten program is deemed to be the most appropriate learning program and environment for that individual child, and that the child will achieve better outcomes at kindergarten than if they go to school. Careful consideration should be given to this decision as in many cases, school can be the most appropriate environment for a child with identified delays or disabilities for a number of reasons including:

- increased contact time in an educational environment
- strong peer/friendship group support
- access to additional support, equipment or specialist staff.

It is important to consider the anticipated barriers to the child achieving good outcomes in school and what the experience of an additional year in kindergarten will provide to address these barriers.

If a child is eligible for an additional year of four-year-old funding the child will be able to attend the FROEBEL kindergarten program for a second year paying FROEBEL's Funded Kindergarten Daily Fees. The eligibility for a second funded year is determined and approved by the appointed Early Childhood Teacher, in consultation with the Centre Director and the child's parents/guardians.

It is not possible to claim a second year of three-year-old Kindergarten Funding.

If a family makes an informed decision that an additional year of kindergarten is their preferred choice even though the child's Early Childhood Teacher supports the transition to primary school, the child will be allowed to attend the FROEBEL kindergarten for another year. However, the family will be transitioned to our Unfunded Kindergarten Daily Fees if they have previously consented to funding being claimed during the previous years. The **same applies** for all cases where parents request an additional year of kindergarten in the year when their child turns 5 years old (after their child was already enrolled in the funded kindergarten program the previous year) for any other reason.

Scenario 4:

For children who turn six during the kindergarten year

Children who turn 6 at any time during the kindergarten year must be exempted from attending school. Parents should apply for an exemption before the child starts kindergarten by submitting an exemption from school due to attendance in kindergarten program form to the appropriate Departmental regional office by 1 November in the year prior to the child turning 6. The service provider must sight the approved exemption form and note that it has been sighted on the child's enrolment record for later reporting through the annual confirmation process.



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Scenario 5:

Children less than four years of age

Giftedness is identifiable in very young children, and early identification is essential for the long-term wellbeing of the gifted child. Early entry to kindergarten may be appropriate for gifted or talented children who meet the criteria for early entry to school. A child who is less than 4 years but at least 3 years and 6 months of age by 30 April in the year they are to attend the 4-year-old funded kindergarten program, may only attend the program if the child's parent(s)/ guardian(s) have requested approval for early entry to school.

Requests must be made in writing to the appropriate Departmental regional office in accordance with government school entry processes, or directly to the nongovernment school that the child will be attending. It is unlikely that the regional office or the non-government school will be able to determine the outcome of the request for early school entry until close to the school commencement date. Early school entry in government schools must be approved by the appropriate Department Regional Director and is only granted in exceptional circumstances when there are strong grounds for believing it is in the best interest of the child and that long-term educational disadvantage would otherwise occur. Please be advised that only a small number of applications for early school entry are successful and your child is not guaranteed early school entry as a result of being enrolled to attend kindergarten early. A copy of the written request for early school entry must accompany the child's application for kindergarten enrolment. FROEBEL must sight this request and include a copy in the child's enrolment record.

▲ SERVICE NAMES

The Kindergarten Program Policy applies for the following services:

- FROEBEL Carlton, Melbourne Connect, 700 Swanston Street, Carlton VIC 3053
- FROEBEL Fitzroy North, 138 Barkly Street, Fitzroy North VIC 3068
- Professor Lynn Corcoran Early Learning Centre: FROEBEL Parkville, 1G Royal Parade, Parkville VIC 3052

▲ POLICY REVIEW

- The Centre (together with educators/carers) will review this policy at least every 12 months.
- The Approved Provider and Centre Director ensure that at all times all educators maintain and implement this policy and its procedures.
- Families are encouraged to collaborate with the Centre to review the policy and procedures.

- **Last review:** 2/11/2023
- **Next review:** 2/11/2024



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