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Columbia Park



Early Learning Centre

FEES – FUNDED KINDERGARTEN

QUALITY AREA 7 |

Version no.	Reviewed by	Authorised by	Date of issue	Amendments made
V1	CPELC FY2022 Committee & Management	CPELC FY2022 Committee	1/2/23	The free kinder funding will be applied to families accounts once received monthly.
V1.1	CPELC FY2023 Committee & Management	CPELC FY2023 Committee	1/2/23	The free kinder funding will be applied to families accounts once received monthly.
V1.2	CPELC FY2024 Committee & Management	CPELC FY202 Committee & Management	9/4/2024	<p>Fee schedule added in the attachment</p> <p>Free Kindergarten payment paid to families monthly</p> <p>For 4-year-old children, this means \$2,000 for children enrolled in a 15-hour kindergarten program (600 hours a year). For 3-year-old children, this means from \$666.67 (for a child enrolled in the funded kindergarten program for 5 hours) to \$2,000 (for a child enrolled for 15 hours).</p>



PURPOSE

This policy provides a clear set of guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees
- ensuring the viability of Columbia Park Early Learning Centre , by setting appropriate fees and charges
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by Columbia Park Early Learning Centre .



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Columbia Park Early Learning Centre is committed to:

- providing responsible financial management of the service, including establishing fees that will result in a financially viable service, while keeping user fees at the lowest possible level
- providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and/or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts
- 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
- advising users of the service about program funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents/guardians
- providing equitable access for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and/or Early Start Kindergarten.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge and parents/guardians attending Columbia Park Early Learning Centre .

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					
Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for the payment of fees 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	√			
Reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements	R	√			
Developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability	R	√			
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in	R	√			

line with the requirements of DE's The Kindergarten Funding Guide (<i>refer to Sources</i>)					
Considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at Columbia Park Early Learning Centre and removing those barriers wherever possible	R	√			
Reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered	R	√			
Considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families	R	√			
In long day care settings, where Child Care Subsidy or Additional Child Care Subsidy is applicable, ensure that all subsidies a child is eligible for are applied to reduce cost to families (CCS and ACCS can be accessed in combination with the Early Start Kindergarten grants) [remove if not applicable]	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	√			
Clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally sensitive way, and in the family's first language where possible	R	√			
Ensuring that the <i>Fees Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with fee information (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges (<i>refer to samples in Attachments 2 and 3</i>) upon enrolment of their child	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with a fee payment agreement (<i>refer to samples in Attachments 4 and 5</i>)	R	√			
Ensuring fees are collected and receipted	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, levies and any additional hours	R	√			
Informing parents of any action that will be taken if fees are not paid (<i>Refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	√			
Collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	R	√		√	
Complying with the service's <i>Privacy and Confidentiality Policy</i> regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees	R	√			
Notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the	R	Ö			

fees are collected (<i>Regulation 172(2)</i>), and ideally providing one term's notice.					
Addressing any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service in a timely manner	R	√			
Reading the Columbia Park Early Learning Centre Fee information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>), the Fee Payment Agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 4 and 5</i>) and the Statement of Fees and Charges (<i>refer to Attachments 2 and 3</i>)				√	
Signing and complying with the Fee Payment Agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 4 and 5</i>)				√	
Notifying the approved provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees				√	
Providing the required documentation to enable the service to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and/or Early Start Kindergarten, if eligible (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>).				√	

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION



BACKGROUND

The Department of Education (DE) (*refer to Definitions*) provides funding for each child who is enrolled and attending a funded kindergarten program two years before school. Income from other sources, primarily fees, is required to meet all the additional costs incurred by the service in the delivery of the children's program. In addition, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS) (*refer to Definitions*) enables eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten program free of charge two years before school. KFS is not applicable to services that have opted into free kinder and / or LDC that don't invoice separately for kindergarten.

DE also funds Early Start Kindergarten (ESK). ESK enables children who are at least three years old by 30 April in the year they are enrolled to attend the kindergarten program and are from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or the family have had contact with child protection priority access to 15 hours of free or low cost kindergarten. Further program details are outlined in The Kindergarten Funding Guide (*refer to Sources*).

Regulation 168(2) (n) of Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 requires that funded kindergarten services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. The policy must include a written statement about the fees to be charged and the payment process. All families must be informed of applicable term and annual fees at the time of enrolment. Services must also advise eligible families of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (*refer to Definitions*) and/or or Early Start Kindergarten (*refer to Definitions*) arrangements. The fees charged must comply with the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy requirements (*refer to Definitions*) and/or or Early Start Kindergarten (*refer to Definitions*) and be responsive to the local community and the viability of the service. The Kindergarten Funding Guide (*refer to Sources*) outlines the criteria to be covered in the policy.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)

- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- National Quality Standard, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

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.

Children/families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage (in relation to this policy): children are vulnerable if the capacity of parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long-term development and wellbeing is limited. Some factors which may contribute to a child experiencing vulnerability include: a child with a disability; living in a family with a low income, or one which is experiencing problems with housing, domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health; known to child protection; in statutory out-of-home care; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, having a culturally and linguistically diverse background; having a young or sole parent, or a parent with a disability (adapted from the Kindergarten Funding Guide)

Concession: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. This includes one of the following:

- a Commonwealth Health Care Card
- a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card
- a Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card or White Card
- Refugee or Asylum Seeker visa (200-204, 786 or 866)
- Bridging visas for any of the above Refugee or Asylum Seeker visas
- Multiple Births (triplets or more)

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK): provides eligible children with 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten each week led by a qualified Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered teacher. ESK is available to children who are at least three years old by 30 April in the year they are enrolled to attend the program and are:

- from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or
- the family have had contact with child protection.

These children can also access free year-before-school kindergarten through the ESK Extension Grant regardless of whether they have accessed ESK in the previous year.

Early Start Kindergarten extension grants: provides a free or low cost year-before-school kindergarten program for children:

- not eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

- who participated in Access to Early Learning in the previous year or are from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or the family have had contact with child protection.
- A child is not required to access ESK in the previous year to access the ESK extension grant.

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: 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.

High priority families: as defined in the Kindergarten Guide this includes:

- 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
- Children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
 - A child or parent holds a Commonwealth Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card, Veteran's Affairs Card, or multiple birth children (triplets, quadruplets)
- Children with additional needs, defined as children who:
 - require additional assistance in order to fully participate in the kindergarten program
 - require a combination of services which are individually planned
 - have an identified specific disability or developmental delay

Pre-Prep: Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will gradually transition to Pre-Prep over the next decade from 2025. Funded kindergarten hours will double from 15 to up to 30 hours a week. Pre-Prep will be delivered through sessional kindergartens and long-day-care centres. By 2032, 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 Pre-Prep.

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 a place within a program at the service.

Late collection charge: A charge that may be imposed by the approved provider when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program (*refer to Attachment 1*)



SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training): www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding
- The constitution of Columbia Park Early Learning Centre

RELATED POLICIES

- Compliments and Complaints
- Delivery and Collection of Children
- Enrolment and Orientation
- Excursions and Service Events
- 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
- investigating what measures can be taken to reduce any barriers to access the program, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children
- monitor the number of families/children excluded from the service because of their inability to pay fees
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, 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: Fee information for families
- Attachment 2: Statement of Fees and Charges – 3-year-old kindergarten program
- Attachment 3: Statement of Fees and Charges – 4-year-old kindergarten program

AUTHORISATION



This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Columbia Park Early Learning Centre on 4/4/2024

REVIEW DATE: 4/4/2025

ATTACHMENT 1. FEE INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Columbia Park Early Learning Centre

The below information is a guide and must be adapted to suit each individual service's requirements.

1. General information

The Department of Education (DE) *refer to Definitions*) provides funding for each child enrolled and attending kindergarten in the two years before school as a contribution toward the costs of providing the program. Services meet the balance of costs through charging fees and fundraising activities.

DE also provides Early Start Kindergarten funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, from a refugee or asylum seeker background or the family have had contact with child protection, to access kindergarten programs.

Columbia Park Early Learning Centre provides a range of support options to parents/guardians experiencing difficulty with payment of fees (see below).

2. How fees are set

As part of the budget development process, the Committee of Management/Board sets fees each year for the programs of the service, taking into consideration:

- the financial viability of the service
- the level of government funding provided for the program, including the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and Early Start Kindergarten
- the availability of other income sources, such as grants
- the fees charged by similar services in the area
- the capacity of parents/guardians to pay fees
- reasonable expenditure in meeting agreed program quality and standards
- requirements of The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education) available from the DE website: www.education.vic.gov.au

Once fees are set for the year, they will only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if enrolments drop and the service is at risk of not being able to meet its expenses.

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Columbia Park Early Learning Centre are included on the Statement of Fees and Charges. These include:

Children/families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage (*refer to Definitions*) and families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see below) are not required to pay the deposit. Families experiencing hardship should discuss any difficulties with the service.

- **Excursion/service event charge:** 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 and Service Events Policy*).
- **Late collection charge:** The Committee of Management/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 Committee of Management/Board.

4. Statement of fees and charges

A statement of fees and charges for three-year-old kindergarten and/or four-year-old will be provided to families on enrolment (*refer to Attachment 2 and 3*).

5. Fundraising

Not all service costs are covered by DE per capita funding and the fees charged. Fundraising is undertaken to meet the balance and/or pay for additional items for the service. While participation in fundraising is voluntary, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

6. Subsidies

6.1 Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

The Kindergarten Fee Subsidy is provided by DE and enables eligible children to attend 15 hours of kindergarten free of charge. Eligibility conditions may change from time-to-time and must be checked in the most recent edition of the Kindergarten Funding Guide (*refer to Sources*).

Your child is eligible for the kindergarten fee subsidy:

- if your child identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- if your child is identified on their birth certificate as being a multiple birth child (triplets or more).

If your family or child has a humanitarian or refugee visa listed by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection which is not included in the above list, your child may still be eligible for the kindergarten fee subsidy.

Where a child is identified by a parent, carer or legal guardian as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, no verification is required.

In all other instances, supporting documentation should be sighted by the service on acceptance of a place or on commencement in the program, however where there are delays, such as in obtaining health care cards for children in out-of-home care, the delay should not provide a barrier to the child accessing the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy. Families are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for the full term in which their concession is valid.

6.2 Early Start Kindergarten

Early Start Kindergarten gives eligible children 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten a week for two years before starting school.

To be eligible, the child must be three by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten and meet one of the following criteria:

- be from a refugee or asylum seeker background
- identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- the family have had contact with Child Protection.

Children can also access free or low cost Four-Year-Old Kindergarten through the Early Start Kindergarten Extension Grant. Contact the service for further information.

6.3 Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is an Australian Government subsidy that can assist eligible families with the cost of child care in long day care services. Columbia Park Early Learning Centre is an approved/registered care provider.

7. Payment of fees

The Committee of Management/board 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 [responsible position] 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.

8. Unpaid fees

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

- An initial reminder letter will be sent to parents/guardians with a specified payment date, and will include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- Where payment is still not received, families will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan.
- Failure to attend the meeting and continued non-payment may result in a second and final letter notifying parents/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.
- The Committee of Management/Board will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector.
- If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the parents/guardians will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing.
- No further enrolments of children from the parents/guardians will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

9. Refund of fees

If a family becomes eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy during a term, a full refund of the applicable term fees (and fee deposit, where appropriate) will be provided. Fees may still apply for programs offering more than the required minimum hours per week.

In any other case, fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Committee of Management/Board. 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.

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

10. Support services

Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to family support services. Information on these services may be available from the kindergarten service provider or alternatively families may contact the local council.

11 Notification of fee changes during the year

Fees set for the year would only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if attendance rates fall below the budget 'break even' point. Parents/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 FEES AND CHARGES

Three-year-old funded kindergarten

Columbia Park Early Learning Centre

Fee schedule 2024

Three-year-old kindergarten

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued [timeframe] and must be paid by the due date.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

Families who are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer to Fee information for families) will not be required to make fee payments.

Early Start Kindergarten

Families who are eligible for the Early Start Kindergarten (*refer to Fee information for families*) will not be required to make fee payments.

Children turning three during the year

Children can only commence the program when they have turned three. Fees to be paid upon commencement.

Late collection charge

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

ATTACHMENT 3. STATEMENT OF FEES AND CHARGES

Four year old funded kindergarten

Columbia park early learning centre

Fee schedule 2024

Four-year-old kindergarten

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued [timeframe] and must be paid by the due date.

Kindergarten fee deposit

Parents/guardians are required to pay the fee deposit on offer of a place. This payment is retained and deducted from term fees. Payment will secure the child's place in the four-year-old kindergarten program. **Children/families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage (refer to Definitions) and families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see below) are not required to pay the deposit.** Families experiencing hardship should discuss any difficulties with the service.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

Families who are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer to Fee information for families) will not be required to make fee payments.

Late collection charge

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

Weekly Rate \$585.00 - 3 and 4 years kinder fees

Daily Rate \$122.00 – 3 and 4 years kinder fees

FEE SCHEDULE

FEE	AMOUNT	PER	NOTES
Normal Fees			Paid 2 weeks in advance.
Enrolment Fee	\$20.00	Family	Payable at time of enrolment.
Annual Association Fee	\$15.00	Family per annum	Payable at annual re-enrolment time.
Non _ Kindergarten Daily Fees	\$132.00	Per Child Per Day	Not enrolled in the kindergarten program
Fines			Invoiced and paid with the next fee payment.
Sign In / Sign Out	\$5.00	Family per occurrence	Sign in and sign out are 2 separate occurrences, therefore in one day 2 fines could be charged.
Late Pick-ups	\$2.00	Per minute after 6.00pm	Please call whenever possible.
Late Payment Penalty	\$5.00	Per day childcare fees invoices are paid late	Charged to childcare fees account