



FREE KINDERGARTEN FEE (2024/25) POLICY

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- the application of surplus funding within Tecoma Preschool ensuring it is only used to ensure the quality of program delivery and development of children enrolled in the service
- the setting, payment and collection of any fees or payments (additional hours fees, minus the Free Kindergarten Funding).

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Tecoma Preschool is committed to:

- supporting the Victorian Government's Free Kindergarten 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 Tecoma Preschool.

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 DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Definitions)	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)	R	√			
Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Funding Guidelines (refer to Sources)	R	√			
If required, 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 for directly supporting the quality of the teaching and learning in the kindergarten program and/or attendance at the service, including vulnerable children and families not yet enrolled and/or towards the change management required for preparing for three-year-old expansion	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 KIM system	R	√	√		
Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system	R	√	√		
Ensuring that the Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kindergarten (refer to Attachment 1)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (refer to Attachments 2) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with an additional payment fee agreement (refer to Attachments 3), if applicable	R	√			
Reading the Tecoma Preschool Free Kindergarten 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				√	
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 Tecoma Preschool				√	
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 DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Sources)	R	√	√	√	
Informing the approved provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service		√	√		
Referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the approved provider.		√	√		

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

The Best Start, Best Life reform will help all Victorian children dream even bigger through increased access to quality early childhood education and care. A critical part of the reform is Free Kindergarten, which will support access to two years of high-quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children. All families with a child enrolled in a funded kindergarten program are eligible for Free Kindergarten, this includes both 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs.

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

- providing a free 15-hour program to four-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service
- providing a free 5-to-15-hour program to three-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service (subject to the length of funded program offered). In 2025, a rotational sessional program will be available to four-year-old children attending Tecoma Preschool offering between 15 hours a week and a 12-13 hour program will be available to three-year-old children..
- offsetting the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for three and four-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service

Free kindergarten supports every Victorian child to get the best start in life no matter where they live. Research shows that play-based learning is a powerful way to support children's learning and development. Two years of early learning is a crucial part of their educational journey, these benefits last into the school years and beyond.

Regulation 168(2) (n) of the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 requires that funded services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. Any voluntary parent donations and/or fundraising must comply with the Free Kindergarten subsidy guidelines and be responsive to the local community.

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: <http://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.

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): 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. Tecoma PreSchool does not qualify for the CCS.

Early Start Kindergarten: A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for up to 15 hours per week. Details are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au. Children that are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) will continue to be enrolled, this ensures that service providers receive all funding entitlements and that these children have access to 15 funded hours of kindergarten across Victoria. ESK enrolments contribute to School Readiness Funding (SRF) calculations for service providers. It also allows the Department to continue to monitor efforts to engage the most vulnerable children in kindergarten across Victoria and provide additional targeted support where required through SRF or Early Childhood LOOKOUT.

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)

Waitlist fee: A fee for when families register their child directly with a service (not part the council's central 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. For enrolments for the 2025 kinder programs the waitlist fee (\$40) will be charged alongside the Kinder Registration fee (\$100). For future years the Waitlist fee will be requested at the time of application.

Free Kindergarten: A Victorian Government initiative providing free kindergarten programs for four-year-old and three-year-old children in funded services

Kinder Registration Fee: 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 registration deposits will only be refunded if the child commences in the service.

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.

Extended session: care that is provided by Tecoma Preschool to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week funded program. Optional and subject to sufficient interest; an additional 2.5 hours session on Monday kinder days (1:30pm – 4pm). Commitment of a whole term is required, and pro rata payment options are not available. Please note, this session is not funded as part of the Kinder Fee Subsidy and is subject to additional fees.

Unfunded Kinder Positions: A position that is taken in the kinder program that does not attract funding by the DET. These positions are offered should the kinder have capacity within the kinder program once all funded applicants have been placed. They are offered in accordance with the Orientation and Enrolments policy and DET Priority of Access criteria. Unfunded Kinder Positions must be vacated for funded kinder positions where and when capacity in the program does not allow both and families will be refunded pro-rata for any sessions paid for past the date of vacation. Unfunded Kinder Positions must be paid for (out-of-pocket) by the family themselves.

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 and Training): www.education.vic.gov.au
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au>
- The constitution of Tecoma Preschool

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 Kindergarten information for families
- Attachment 2: Statement of Additional Hours
- Attachment 3: Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement
- Attachment 4: Unfunded Kinder Contract

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Tecoma Preschool.

NEXT REVIEW DATE: MAY 2025

ATTACHMENT 1. Free Kindergarten information for families

Tecoma Preschool 2023

1. General information

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

This investment will save families up to \$2,500 for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program.

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

2. What free kindergarten means at our service

Tecoma Preschool has opted into the Free Kindergarten initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (12 hours per week) – no parent fee
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) – no parent fee

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Tecoma Preschool 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 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. The current Late Collection Charge is as follows:
 - \$15 for the first 15 minutes (regardless of whether the person responsible for collection of the child is five minutes or fifteen minutes late)
 - \$5 for every five minutes thereafter

4. Extended session fees

Tecoma Preschool offers an optional extended session of care once a week (subject to sufficient interest). This being an additional 2.5 hours session on a Tuesday and Thursday kinder days (1:30pm – 4pm). Commitment of a whole term is required and pro rata payment options are not available. This session is not funded as part of the Kinder Fee Subsidy and is subject to additional fees.

Extended Session Fee: \$45 per session (TBC), per child, paid in advance of the term commencing (commitment of a whole term is required).

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. Unpaid fees for extended session

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

With regards to Extended Sessions offered by Tecoma Preschool, payment of the Extended Session Fee covering the whole term is required prior to term commencement. 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 An

initial reminder letter will be sent to families if payment is not received by the due date. Should payment not be received by the date specified on the initial reminder, families will be given a final 14 days' notice stating that they cannot attend future extended sessions unless payment is made.

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 Persons with Management Control 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. Refund of fees

The Registration Fee(refer to Definitions) will be fully refunded to families only when the child commences at the service and attends until the Annual Census date.

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 educational program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled (see Enrolment and Orientation Policy).

8. 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.

9. Notification of fee changes during the year for extended hours

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.

10. Unfunded Positions in the Kinder Program

In accordance with DET policy, Tecoma Preschool will offer unfunded kinder positions should there be places available within the kinder program once all funded applicants have been placed.

Unfunded Kinder positions are at the discretion of Tecoma Preschool and may comprise 1-3 sessions per week, as well as the offer of the Extended Care session (see above).

As with the Extended Care Session, Unfunded positions are not eligible for any government subsidies or rebates and all fees must be paid by the family (out-of-pocket).

Positions in the kinder program are given according to the DET Priority of Access criteria and as such are subject to change at any time during the school year. Tecoma Preschool endeavours to provide unfunded position applicants with the most up-to-date information regarding their child's enrolment whilst acknowledging that there may be instances where an application for a funded position is made that requires the vacating of the unfunded position at short notice.

An outline of the fees contract for 2023 can be found in Attachment 4. Fees for 2025 will be decided once more information is known about the likelihood of unfunded applications.

ATTACHMENT 2. Statement of additional hours - EXAMPLE ONLY

Tecoma Preschool 2023 Extended Session Care for four-year-olds

Hours: 2.5 hours of additional care per week (each Thursday, 2:30 - 4:45pm)

This session is not funded as part of the kinder fee subsidy.

	Additional Hours	Total (\$)
Term 1	\$40 x 10 weeks	\$400
Term 2	\$40 x 9 weeks	\$360
Term 3	\$40 x 10 weeks	\$400
Term 4	\$40 x 11 weeks	\$440
TOTAL		\$1600

***Commitment of a whole term is required.

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued prior to term commencement 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 from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by the Committee of Management. The current Late Collection Charge is as follows:

- \$15 for the first 15 minutes (regardless of whether the person responsible for collection of the child is five minutes or fifteen minutes late)
- \$5 for every five minutes thereafter

ATTACHMENT 3. EXAMPLE ONLY

Additional hours fee payment agreement (For Extended Session 2023)

Please complete this form and return to Tecoma Preschool by [Date]

Fee payment contract

Child's full name:

Parent's/guardian's full name:

- I/we acknowledge that the three-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 is 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 Kindergarten Information for Families, which could result in the withdrawal of my/our child's place within the extended session offered within the service 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 Persons with Management Control to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service's Free Kindergarten 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 Tecoma Preschool Free Kindergarten Fee Policy.

**ATTACHMENT 5. Unfunded Kindergarten Contract Letter
for Additional Sessions and Unfunded Kindergarten Positions**

Unfunded Kindergarten Contract Letter



Date _____

Dear _____

We are pleased to offer (Child's name) an unfunded position in our (3 or 4) year old kindergarten program.

This offer is contingent on there being space available once all funded applications have been placed in the program in accordance with the DET Priority of Access Criteria below.

As such, should a funded application come in at any stage during the year and require your space in the program the unfunded positions will need to be vacated in the order in which they were accepted.

Tecoma Preschool understands that you would like _____ (child's name) to attend ____ sessions per week of the 5 hour sessional program and ____ sessions per week of the extended session (refer to timetable). The days for regular sessions will be _____, and the day/s of extended session/s will be _____.

Schedule of Fees (2023)

Fees will be payable as follows. Fees must be paid by term, in advance for the following term. **[Admin: Choose option below and delete others]**

Number of weekly 5 hour sessions		Payment amount	Payment due
1 Session - \$50 per week	Term 1: 10 weeks	\$500	
	Term 2: 9 weeks	\$450	
	Term 3: 10 weeks	\$500	
	Term 4: 11 weeks	\$550	
2 Sessions - \$100 per week	Term 1: 10 weeks	\$1000	
	Term 2: 9 weeks	\$900	
	Term 3: 10 weeks	\$1000	
	Term 4: 11 weeks	\$1100	
3 Sessions - \$150 per week	Term 1: 10 weeks	\$1500	
	Term 2: 9 weeks	\$1350	

	Term 3: 10 weeks	\$1500	
	Term 4: 11 weeks	\$1650	
Extended Session - \$40 per week	Term 1: 10 weeks	\$400	
	Term 2: 9 weeks	\$360	
	Term 3: 10 weeks	\$400	
	Term 4: 11 weeks	\$440	

Cancellation of Enrolment

Families MUST notify Tecoma Preschool in writing of their intention to cancel their child’s enrolment within 2 weeks of the beginning of the term in which the child is to attend. Likewise, Tecoma Preschool will make unfunded applicants aware should any incoming applications for funded positions likely impact their place in the program.

Vacating an unfunded position

Positions in the kinder program are given according to the DET Priority of Access criteria and as such are subject to change at any time during the school year. Tecoma Preschool endeavours to provide unfunded position applicants with the most up-to-date information regarding their child’s enrolment whilst acknowledging that there may be instances where an application for a funded position is made that requires the vacating of the unfunded position at short notice.

Holding Fee: In the instance where an extended period (one or more terms) of non-attendance is expected (eg, extended holiday) there will be a holding fee of \$300.

Please complete this form and return to Tecoma Preschool by [Date]

Unfunded Position/ Additional Session/ Extended Session Fee payment contract

Child’s full name: _____

Parent’s/guardian’s full name: _____

- I/we acknowledge that the three-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 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 Kindergarten Information for Families, which could result in the withdrawal of my/our child’s place within the unfunded/additional session/s offered within the service 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 Persons with Management Control to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service’s Free Kindergarten Information for Families, which outlines the procedure for payment of fees.
- I/we have read and understand that the unfunded kinder position for my child must be vacated in the instance of a funded applicant’s need to enter the program.

Signature (parent/guardian):

Date:

Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with the Tecoma Preschool Free Kindergarten Fee Policy.