

KINDERGARTEN GROUPS

Warrnambool City Council (WCC) offers a number of options for kindergarten groups to children for both 3 and 4 year old kindergarten.

The 'group' decisions have been made based on our current models, feedback from the community, staff and our kindergarten working group which is made up of a number of professionals and educators across our current kindergarten team. Most importantly decisions have been made in the best interests of children and what we know as a highly experienced team operating kinder programs within the community for over 70 years.

Council has provided mixed-age group settings within our kinder programs. Whilst council has some groups which are largely based as straight 3 and 4 year old programs, each group will always have some children across different age groups within the program. This has been occurring since 2011 with the introduction of the State Governments Early Start Kindergarten Program into kindergartens.

Children who have attended a 3 year old program enjoy returning to kinder the following year as the 4 year old and supporting and leading the way for the new intake of 3 year olds within the group.

What are the benefits of mixed-age groups within a kindergarten program?

WCC provides mixed-age groups in services, which bring together children aged three to five years old, offering a unique opportunity for learning and development. Educators adapt the curriculum and their teaching strategies, to support individual children's development and maximise the educational benefits for their group.

Children in mixed-age groups will develop friendships and engage in learning just as they would in same age settings, with the added bonus of being able to access peer support and lead learning for other children. These opportunities offer children the ability to develop more sophisticated social skills.



Mixed-age grouping supports younger children over time, build their confidence as they engage and interact with children of the same age and older peers. Play across mixed-age groups is often more complex, as older children extend younger children's ideas or younger children follow the ideas suggested and contribute to the play supporting language development.

Research has shown that:

- Your child's brain will develop faster in the first five years of life than at any other time,
- Early education helps set children up for a bright future,
- Attending two years of quality kindergarten has added benefits,
- At kindergarten, children learn skills that they'll take with them throughout their life.

Research shows that quality, play-based learning is a powerful way to support children's learning and development. The benefits last into the school years and beyond. Kindergarten improves children's health and wellbeing, helps them to develop strong social skills, and encourages a love of learning. Children who go to kindergarten are more independent and confident and are more likely to make a smooth transition to primary school.

Our educators are trained to identify a child's needs and to adapt, plan and implement different teaching strategies accordingly, to support the learning and development of every child. They're able to identify each child's uniqueness and work collaboratively with families to ensure the best opportunities are provided for every child. Our staff have been working with children across different age groups within their kinder setting for many years.

What are sometimes the parental concerns of mixed-age grouping?

Concerns of a parent enrolling a younger child may include:

"What if my child feels overwhelmed or lost?"

"Will this make my child grow up too fast?"

Concerns of a parent enrolling an older child may include:

"Will my child be under-stimulated?"

"Will my child regress from playing with younger children?"

Parental concerns are generally very similar regardless of the way children are grouped or the age of the child being enrolled. There are wide developmental ranges between all children, from developmental differences seen between a 3 year old and a 4 year old and between two children of the same age. Every child is different and we understand that each and every child develops at their own pace and within their own abilities. We believe children will reach their milestones, be they physical, social, behavioural or cognitive, when their body and mind are ready – we'll be there offering guidance and patient support as they grow!

