



CHILDREN'S &
FAMILY SERVICES

Children's and Family Services Kindergarten Enrolment and Orientation Policy and Procedure

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 Purpose and Scope	4
1.2 References	5
2. POLICY	5
2.1 Policy Statement	5
2.2 Priority of Access Criteria	6
2.3 Group Allocation	6
2.4 Request for Review Process	6
2.5 Children less than four years of age	6
2.5.1 Determining if my child is ready for kindergarten	7
2.6 Children turning six whilst attending Kindergarten	7
2.7 Children who have already received a funded year of kinder	8
3. REGISTRATION PROCEDURE	8
3.1 General Registration Procedures	9
3.1.1 Registration Process	9
3.1.2 Application to Register	9
3.1.3 Support Documents	9
3.1.4 Allocation Process	10
3.1.5 Group Allocation	10
3.1.6 Information and Files	11
3.1.7 Nominating Kindergarten Preferences	11
3.1.8 Offers	11
3.1.9 Fee Subsidies	12
3.1.10 Additional Needs	12
4. ENROLMENT AND ORIENTATION PROCESS	12
5. GOVERNANCE	13
5.1 Owner	13
5.2 Compliance Responsibility	13
5.3 Charter of Human Rights Compliance	13

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to outline the criteria for Registration, Enrolment and Allocation of all children wanting to access a place in a Warrnambool City Council (WCC) managed kindergartens.

TERM	DEFINITION
DET	Department of Education and Training
Eligible child – 4 year old kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child who will turn four years of age by 30 April in the year they attend kindergarten; • A child who has received funding for a second year of four year old Kindergarten; • A child who was eligible to attend the four year old program in the previous year, but deferred; • A child turning six years of age in their year of kindergarten who has been granted an exemption from school entry age requirements by their regional office of DET; • A child who is not eligible for a second year of funded kindergarten but whose families will pay the funding amount plus fees in order to access a second year of kindergarten. These children will only be allocated a kindergarten place after first and second round offers and only if a place is available; • A child who is younger than the eligible age, but whose parents / guardians have submitted a written request for their child to attend school the following year to their regional office of DET or non-government school – please refer to the section in this policy relating to children under 4 years of age; • Gifted children – please refer to the section in this policy relating to children less than 4 years of age.
Eligible child – 3 year old kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child is eligible to attend a three year old kindergarten program provided they have turned three years of age; • A child who will turn three years of age by 30 April in the year they attend kindergarten.
Kindergarten	Kindergarten is a universal early childhood program, funded by the state government, for children prior to commencing primary school.

1.2 References

Legislation

- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010,
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011,
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth),
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Victoria),
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986 (Commonwealth),
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Commonwealth),
- Sex and Age Discrimination Amendment Act 2011,
- Information Privacy Act 2000,
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005,
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005,
- Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006,

Supporting Documentation

- DET Children's Services Guide, www.education.vic.gov.au,
- DET – The Kindergarten Guide,
- Department of Education and Training website.

WCC Policies

- Kindergarten Fees Policy,
- WCC Early Years Learning & Development Complaints Grievances Policy,
- WCC Early Years Learning & Development Inclusion and Equity Policy,
- WCC Early Years Learning & Development Privacy Policy.

2. POLICY

2.1 Policy Statement

WCC is committed to:

- Ensuring kindergarten places are allocated in accordance with the priority of access criteria as set out in this policy in a transparent, equitable and fair manner,
- Compliance with relevant legislation, regulations and standards,
- Compliance with the Department of Education and Training (DET) funding requirements,
- Maintaining confidentiality in all aspects of the registration and enrolment process.

2.2 Priority of Access Criteria

This criteria is based on the Department of Education and Training Priority of Access criteria, feedback from the community and in accordance with the Municipal Association of Victoria guidelines.

High Priority Children (3 points)

- *Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children in Out of Home Care,*
- *Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Children,*
- *Children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy,*
- *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,**(Refer to DET website Priority of Access criteria for further information).*

1 point:

- Children who have attended one of the following programs at the preferred kindergarten (your first preference):
 - Early Start placement,
 - Childcare,
 - 3 Year Old Kindergarten,
 - 4 Year Old Kindergarten.
- Children of WCC ratepayers or who are living within the City of Warrnambool.

2.3 Group Allocation

WCC reserves the right to determine group allocations based on, but not limited to, the following:

- Total numbers,
- Children with additional needs,
- Children requiring a second year of kindergarten,
- Early Start placements.

2.4 Request for Review Process

A Request for Review process will be available to all families following completion of the allocation process. These will be mediated by the Manager Children's and Family services. All requests for review will be responded to in a timely and collaborative manner which seeks a satisfactory resolution for all parties.

2.5 Children less than four years of age

If a child is less than four years of age by 30 April in the year they are to attend a funded kindergarten program and the child is deemed gifted, the parents must first request approval for early school entry for their child to attend school in the following year. Requests must be made in writing to the appropriate Departmental regional office in accordance with government school entry processes, or directly to the non-government 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.

Families need to be aware that their child is not guaranteed early school entry as a result of being enrolled to attend a kindergarten early. Early school entry must be approved by the appropriate Departmental Regional Director. It is only granted in exceptional circumstances when there are strong grounds for believing long term educational disadvantage would otherwise occur.

Most applications for early school entry are unsuccessful and children granted early entry to kindergarten, are **not eligible** to apply for another year of funded kindergarten in the following year, if the child does not attend school.

A copy of the written request for early school entry must accompany the child's application for kindergarten registration. WCC must sight this request and include a copy in the child's enrolment record. If the family has previously been a client of another WCC service eg. Maternal & Child Health, WCC Three Year Old Kinder, a letter of recommendation from each of these services will also be needed to support the application for early entry. It is WCC policy that families requesting early entry to kinder that have the completed necessary paper work and recommendations, if applicable will be placed after all other offers are made and only if there are places remaining will an offer be made to the family.

For more information visit the Department of Education and Training website: www.education.vic.gov.au.

2.5.1 Determining if my child is ready for kindergarten

Children who turn 4 years old on or before April 30 are eligible to attend a four year old kindergarten program. Each child develops at his/her own rate and although your child's age may make him/her eligible to start kindergarten, other factors may impact on his/her readiness for this experience. You are encouraged to consult with relevant childhood professionals eg: Maternal and child Health Nurse, kindergarten or prep teacher, early years therapist/s or support services working with your child/family for guidance, as your child will be expected to complete a full year of kindergarten once they begin attending. State Government funding is limited to one year for each child (unless your child is eligible for an Early Start Kindergarten grant or a second year of funded kindergarten).

2.6 Children turning six whilst attending Kindergarten

If your child will turn **6 years of age (compulsory school age)** before or while attending their **first or second** year of funded kindergarten, you must obtain an exemption from attending school. Parents/guardians are responsible for seeking this exemption by applying to the Department of Education and Training using an '*Exemption from school due to attendance in a kindergarten program*' form.

First year of funded 4 year old kindergarten

A parent/guardian may apply for an exemption from school for a child turning six before or during their first funded year of 4 year old kindergarten if one or more of the following circumstances apply:

- the family has moved from interstate or overseas where the school entry age criteria are different from those in Victoria,
- the child's early education has been delayed due to chronic illness, disability or development delay,
- the child is a refugee/asylum seeker who has suffered trauma and would benefit significantly from a year of kindergarten before enrolling in school,
- the child has not been able to access kindergarten previously due to transient family circumstances, or
- other special considerations.

The parent/guardian is required to obtain written confirmation from a relevant professional (e.g. kindergarten teacher, medical practitioner or an allied health professional) verifying the reason for exemption and why it is in the child's best interest to attend kindergarten rather than commence at school. A copy of this written evidence and any other written advice that supports the child's exemption from school, must be attached to the '*Exemption from school due to attendance in a kindergarten program*' form.

Second year of funded 4 year old kindergarten

A parent/guardian may apply for an exemption from school for a child turning six before or during their second funded year of 4 year old kindergarten, if a '*Declaration of eligibility for a second year of funded kindergarten*' has been submitted by the early childhood teacher in the Kindergarten Information Management system (KIM). This Declaration confirms the child is eligible for a second funded year of 4 year old kindergarten because an assessment by an early childhood teacher has identified developmental delays in two or more key areas of development.

Exemption application process

The completed '*Exemption from school due to attendance in kindergarten program*' form must be forwarded by the parent/guardian to the Area Executive Director of the relevant Department of Education and Training regional office, by 1 November in the year before the child turns six.

The Department will provide written confirmation of the decision to the parent/guardian following consideration of the request.

The parent/guardian must provide a copy of the Department's decision to the child's kindergarten service as evidence of eligibility for kindergarten per capita funding.

Please note that the nominated parent/guardian has the option to withdraw the school exemption request.

2.7 Children who have already received a funded year of kinder

Children who have been identified as already receiving a funded year of 4 year old kinder and have not been approved for a second year of funding through the DET, can apply for a kinder place but will be placed last after all other offers are made and only if there are places remaining will an offer be made to the family for a non-funded kinder place. The kinder place will be a non-funded place and the family will be charged fees accordingly to a non-fund place.

3. REGISTRATION PROCEDURE

WCC is committed to:

- Ensuring kindergarten places are allocated in accordance with the priority of access criteria as set out in this policy in a transparent, equitable and fair manner,
- Compliance with relevant legislation, regulations and standards,
- Compliance with the Department of Education and Training (DET) funding requirements,
- Maintaining confidentiality in all aspects of the registration and enrolment process.

3.1 General Registration Procedures

Warrnambool City Council (WCC) manages a central registration and enrolment process for all 12 WCC kindergartens.

3.1.1 Registration Process

Applications to register in kindergarten will be accepted from the day kindergarten registrations open until close of registrations in the year prior to kindergarten attendance.

Application's received after this time will be added to a waiting list and processed after first and second round offers have been made.

3.1.2 Application to Register

- Applications to register can be found online at www.warrnambool.vic.gov.au/kindergartens
- One application form is to be completed for each child. The parent or legal guardian of the child is required to complete the application form.
- Once the application to register is submitted the applicant will receive an email to confirm the submission.
- Support is available for families who are unable to complete the application to register online. For an appointment please contact Warrnambool City Council on 55594800.
- Applications will be checked to ensure all relevant documentation has been received. You may be contacted if further documentation is required.

3.1.3 Support Documents

The following documents are required for all applications. They will be copied and kept on file for the duration of the kindergarten year.

Proof of Date of Birth

Proof of date of birth documents is required for all applications. They will be copied and kept on file for the duration of the kindergarten year. Proof required includes;

- A copy of the child's birth certificate; or
- A copy of the child's passport; or
- A statutory declaration will be accepted if neither of these documents is available.

Documents to support fee subsidy applications

Documents to support fee subsidy applications will be copied and kept on file for the duration of the kindergarten year:

- Commonwealth Health Care Card,
- Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card,
- Department of Veteran's Affairs Gold or White Card,
- Eligible Refugee, Asylum Seeker, Humanitarian or bridging visa.

Documents to support priority of access criteria

Children identified as high priority families already case managed by relevant Council services will automatically receive points under these criteria.

For other families:

- A letter can be provided from a case manager/supporting organisation, or
- Families can tell WCC how their child meets this weighting, or
- Families can indicate on the application form that they would like a Council officer to call them.

Families may be asked to provide relevant additional evidence later on.

Children assessed as having special needs, a disability or developmental delay:

- A letter from an appropriate support agency or professional is required for children assessed as having special needs, a disability and/or a developmental delay.

Proof of residency within the City of Warrnambool

- A copy of a utility bill issued within the last three months (e.g. electricity, gas, telephone), or
- A copy of relevant building permit if you are currently building a residence in Warrnambool, or
- A copy of a tenancy agreement,
- A copy of a rates notice.

In order to verify eligibility for priority of access criteria, contact may be made with the person providing the supporting documentation.

3.1.4 Allocation Process

- Applications for registration must be received by the nominated closing date to be considered for an offer. First, second and possibly third round offers will be made depending on the number of applications.
- After the allocation of first and second round offers, any remaining and new applications received will be processed as places become available.

3.1.5 Group Allocation

WCC will determine, in consultation with relevant staff, group allocations based on, but not limited to, the following:

- Total numbers;
- Children with additional needs;
- Children requiring a second year of kindergarten;
- Early Start Placements.

3.1.6 Information and Files

By submitting an application form, families are agreeing to have a file created. This file includes details provided on the application form. These details are processed by relevant WCC Staff, recorded and provided to the nominated kindergarten/s.

3.1.7 Nominating Kindergarten Preferences

On the application, kindergarten preferences are to be numbered according to your preference with number 1 being your first preference. If all options are not numbered and WCC is unable to offer families a place in one of their nominated preferred kindergartens, WCC will randomly allocate children to a group.

3.1.8 Offers

- For first and second round offers, Warrnambool City Council will contact families in writing.
- Families are required to reply by the specified date in the Letter of Offer.
- At the end of Term 1 no further transfers will be made unless extenuating circumstances exist.

Accepting an Offer

- The family will be contacted in writing and offered a place.
- If families wish to accept the offer they are required to complete the response form within the timeframe indicated on the Letter of Offer.
- WCC records the response as accepted.

A placement will be held vacant for a child for a maximum of one term only. Fees must be paid to hold the place or application for fee subsidy made for this period. If a child does not return to kindergarten after an absence of one term, the enrolment will be cancelled.

Accepting an Offer and Requesting a Transfer

- If you receive your third or lower kindergarten preference, families have the option of electing to go on a Transfer List for one other preferred kindergarten group. However you must accept the kindergarten place offered to be eligible to go on the Transfer List.
- We will contact you should a place become available.

Rejecting an Offer

- An offer is considered to be cancelled if the family rejects an offer and/or if the family fails to respond to a Letter of Offer, within the timeframe indicated on the Letter of Offer.
- If the offer is rejected and families wish to register their child for the following year they will be required to complete a new application, when applications for the following year open.

Cancelling Enrolments

Families are to contact WCC to complete the Kindergarten update/cancellation form if they wish to cancel their child's enrolment.

3.1.9 Fee Subsidies

Some families may be eligible for a fee subsidy which provides access to free or low cost kindergarten. All families must provide evidence they are eligible for a fee subsidy.

3.1.10 Additional Needs

A number of places are allocated at each kindergarten for children with additional needs. To access these places children with additional needs will be assessed using the same priority of access criteria as applied to other applicants. If the priority of access weightings return an equal result, a decision will be made based on the specific needs of the individual children.

4. ENROLMENT AND ORIENTATION PROCESS

All families will receive the following information during the kindergarten enrolment process;

- Online Kindergarten Enrolment,
- Kindergarten Handbook,
- Transition to Kindergarten document.

Families will be required to complete the kindergarten enrolment, acceptance of policies form, transition to kindergarten form and where relevant any medical plans or family custody plans prior to their child's commencement date.

The children will be invited to an orientation visit in December. Parents will be encouraged to discuss any separation concerns or the need for an individualised orientation program for their child on this day.

Families will be encouraged to make an appointment with the kindergarten teacher if there are any matters of a sensitive nature that they need to share with the kindergarten team. This may include custody plans, medical plans, risk minimisation plans, behavioural issues or separation anxieties.

The kindergarten teacher will read the Transition to Kindergarten forms prior to the children's kindergarten commencement, to assist the children with the transition process.

Families will be encouraged to communicate with the kindergarten staff regarding their child's settling and strategies may be implemented to assist children who may be having difficulty settling into the kindergarten program. Strategies may include a family member staying with the child, attending for shorter session times or bringing in a comfort toy, as agreed on by the child's family and kindergarten staff.

5. GOVERNANCE

5.1 Owner

The Service Manager, Early Years Learning and Development is responsible for the implementation, monitoring and review of this policy.

5.2 Compliance Responsibility

All relevant employees are responsible to implementing this policy as written.

5.3 Charter of Human Rights Compliance

It is considered that this policy does not impact negatively on any rights identified in the Charter of Human Rights Act (2007).

Warrnambool City Council is committed to consultation and cooperation between management and employees. The Council will formally involve elected employee health and safety representatives in any workplace change that may affect the health and safety of any of its employees.