



## **Fees Policy**

### **PURPOSE**

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees
- ensuring the viability of West Wimmera Shire Kindergarten Cluster, by setting appropriate fees and charges
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by West Wimmera Shire Kindergarten Cluster

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

#### **Values**

West Wimmera Shire Kindergarten Cluster 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
- minimising financial barriers for families wishing to access a kindergarten 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.

#### **Scope**

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Certified Supervisor, educators and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child in a West Wimmera Shire Council kindergarten.

### **PROCEDURES**

#### ***The Approved Provider is responsible for:***

- reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements
- developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability
- implementing and reviewing this policy in line with the requirements of DET's *Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria* (refer to *Sources*)
- ensuring that this policy is based on the principles of the *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy* (refer to *Definitions*)
- considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling in a West Wimmera Shire Council kindergarten and minimising these barriers wherever possible



- reviewing the number of families experiencing financial hardship and the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered
- considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families
- providing all parents/guardians with a copy of the document containing fee information for families (refer to Attachment 1) available at West Wimmera Shire Council website and onsite. Hard copies available on request
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges (refer to Attachments 2 and 3) upon enrolment of their child, and ensure that the *Fees Policy* is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)
- providing all parents/guardians with a fee payment agreement (refer to Attachments 3 and 4)
- collecting and receipting all fees
- collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable
- complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- notifying parents/guardians within 14 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2))
- ensuring a notice outlining fees charged by the service is displayed in the main entrance of each West Wimmera Shire Council kindergarten
- providing families experiencing difficulty paying their fees with payment options (refer Attachment 6).
- Collaboration with WWSC internal departments to strive toward positive outcomes for families

***Nominated Supervisor & Certified Supervisors and other educators are responsible for:***

- 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
- assisting the Approved Provider, as required, in sighting supporting documentation for access to the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.
- contributing to policy and procedure review

***Parents/guardians are responsible for:***

- reading West Wimmera Shire Council's Fee information for families (refer to Attachment 1) and the Statement of Fees and Charges (refer to Attachments 2)
- agreeing and complying with the Fee Payment Agreement on KidsXap
- paying each term's fees in advance of their child attending the program
- 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 for eligible families on Kidsxap (Attachment 1 – Fee information for families).



## BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

### Background

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides per capita funding as a contribution towards the costs of the three and four-year-old kindergarten program. Income from other sources, primarily fees, is required to contribute to the costs incurred by the service in the delivery of kindergarten programs. In addition, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer to *Definitions*) enables eligible families to attend the four-year-old kindergarten program at minimal or no cost.

DET also funds eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs as outlined in the *Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria* (refer to *Sources*).

DET requires that funded services have a comprehensive written fees policy in place, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. The policy must include a written statement about the fees to be charged, as required under Regulation 168(2)(n), 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 arrangements. The fees charged must comply with the *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy* (refer to *Definitions*), and be responsive to the local community and the viability of the service. The *Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria* (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), as amended 2011
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic), as amended 2012
- *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, Quality Area 7: Leadership and Service Management*
  - Standard 7.3: Administrative systems enable the effective management of a quality service

## DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority etc. refer to the *General Definitions* section of this manual.

**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 a specific number of hours. Details



are available at <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/child-care-kindergarten/Pages/early-start-kindergarten.aspx>

**Fees:** A charge for a place within a program at the service.

**Health Care Card:** A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. Details are available at [www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/conc\\_cards\\_hcc.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/conc_cards_hcc.htm)

**Kindergarten fee deposit:** Term 1 fees paid in advance to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service.

**Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS):** A state government subsidy paid directly to the funded service to enable eligible families to attend a funded kindergarten program at no cost (or minimal cost) to promote participation. Details are available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/parents/kindergarten/Pages/fees.aspx>

**Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy:** Provides operational guidelines for services administering the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and can be found in the *Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria* available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderfundingcriteria.aspx>

**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 – Fee information for families).

## **SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES**

### **Sources**

- *Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria:*  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderfundingcriteria.aspx>

### **Service policies**

- *Complaints and Grievances Policy*
- *Delivery and Collection of Children Policy*
- *Enrolment and Orientation Policy*
- *Excursions and Service Events Policy*
- *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*



## EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- seek feedback from parties affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- 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
- notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures (Regulation 172(2)).

## ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Fee information for families
- Attachment 2: Statement of Fees and Charges – Fee schedule – Three and Four-year-old kindergarten program
- Attachment 3: Payment Plan Agreement

## AUTORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of West Wimmera Shire Council Kindergarten Cluster on **27/09/2017**

REVISION	DATE APPROVED	AUTHOR	SIGNATURE	DATE OF NEXT REVISION
1	1/08/18	C. Hurley	<i>C. Hurley</i>	1/08/21
2	13/11/2019	Tracey Bone	<i>TL Bone</i>	21/11/2020
3	05/08/2020	Tracey Bone	<i>TL Bone</i>	05/08/2021



## **FEE POLICY - Attachment 1**

### **Fee information for families**

#### **1. Why fees are necessary**

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides per capita funding as a contribution toward the costs of providing a three and four-year-old kindergarten program. Services meet the balance of costs through charging fees and fundraising activities.

#### **2. How fees are set**

As part of the budget development process, West Wimmera Shire Council sets fees each year for their programs, taking into consideration:

- the financial viability of the service
- the level of government funding provided for the program, including the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- 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 Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy* (details in the *Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria* document)
- In 2021 kindergarten fees will not increase in the understanding of exceptional circumstances - Covid-19 Pandemic – impacting financial pressures on families

#### **3. Fees and charges for 2021**

3 & 4 year old kindergarten fees for 2021 are \$320 per term, for 15 hours of kindergarten.

#### **4. Fundraising**

Not all service costs are covered by DET per capita funding and the fees charged. Fundraising is undertaken by the Parent Advisory Group (PAG) each year in order to maintain the kindergarten yards which keep fees low for families. PAG fundraising may also provide additional activities and resources for the program. Participation in fundraising is voluntary, although the support of every family is encouraged.

#### **5. Subsidies**

##### **5.1 Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (three and four-year-old programs)**

The Kindergarten Fee Subsidy is provided by DET and enables eligible children to attend kindergarten free of charge or at minimal cost.

Families who may be eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (four-year-old programs only) include those who are:

- Health Care Card holders
- Pensioner Concession Card holders
- Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card holders



- Temporary Protection/Humanitarian Visas 447, 451, 785 or 786
- Asylum seekers on Bridging Visas A–F
- Refugee and Special Humanitarian Visa 200–217
- Resolution of Status (RoS) visa, Class CD, subclass 851
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children
- triplets or quadruplets attending a funded kindergarten program in the same year.

**Supporting documentation must be sighted by the service on acceptance of a place or on commencement in the program.** Families are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for the full term in which their concession is valid. If a current concession is not shown at the time, families will be required to pay fees for that term. Please contact the service for further information.

### **5.2 Early Start Kindergarten fee subsidy**

Three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children known to Child Protection are eligible to attend a funded early childhood program that is planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher free of charge. The service receives funding for children who meet the eligibility criteria. Please contact the service for further information.

### **6. Payment of fees**

Fees will be invoiced to parents/guardians directly via KidsXap and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions. Fees are not to be paid directly to the kindergarten.

***Fees are to be paid in advance each term – prior to your child attending for that term.***

In order to confirm your child's place in the program, Term One fees must be paid upon enrolment, and prior to your child commencing at the kindergarten. Invoices for subsequent terms will be issued via KidsXap prior to the completion of each term, and must be paid before the commencement of the following term. Receipts will be available for all fee payments via KidsXap.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Manager Community Support and Wellbeing 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.

Families experiencing financial hardship may require access to family support services. Information on these services can be obtained from the Manager Community Support and Wellbeing or the kindergarten.

West Wimmera Shire Council will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to the needs of families, and fair to all service users.

### **7. Unpaid fees**

If fees are not paid by the first day of each term, 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.
- If payment is still not received after 7 days, 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 establish a payment plan will result in a second and final letter notifying parents/guardians that the child's place at the service may be withdrawn in a further 7 days unless payment is made or a payment plan is entered into.
- If a child's place is withdrawn, they will be eligible to attend the service again upon payment of all unpaid fees, including the current term's fees in advance, provided that there is still a place available in the program.
- West Wimmera Shire Council reserves the right to employ the services of a debt collector for any unpaid fees.

#### **8. Refund of fees**

If a family becomes eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy during a term, a refund of the applicable term fees may be provided, depending on the timeframe.

In any other case, fees are non-refundable.

There will be no refund of fees or discounted fees if a family chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

#### **9. Children turning three during the year of enrolment**

Full payment from the first day of Term 1 is required if a place is to be reserved for a child in the three year old Kindergarten program. Children can only commence in the program once they have turned three. This payment will be credited for the term the child commences.

#### **10. Late collection charge**

West Wimmera Shire Council reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child. Parents/guardians will be notified in writing if this is going to occur.

#### **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.





## **FEE POLICY - ATTACHMENT 2**

### **Statement of Fees and Charges**

#### **West Wimmera Shire Council Kindergarten Cluster** **Fee schedule 2021**

#### **Kindergarten Program (3 & 4 year old, funded kindergarten)**

**Hours: 15 hours per week**

	<b>Fees (\$)</b>	<b>Other charges (\$)</b>	<b>Total (\$)</b>	<b>Families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy</b>		
				<b>Fees (\$)</b>	<b>Other charges (\$)</b>	<b>Total (\$)</b>
Term 1	<b>\$320</b>		<b>\$320</b>	\$0		\$0
Term 2	<b>\$320</b>		<b>\$320</b>	\$0		\$0
Term 3	<b>\$320</b>		<b>\$320</b>	\$0		\$0
Term 4	<b>\$320</b>		<b>\$320</b>	\$0		\$0
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1280</b>		<b>\$1280</b>	\$0		\$0

#### *Payment of fees*

Term One fees are to be paid in advance of your child starting in order to secure their position in the program. For subsequent terms fees must be paid before your child commences each term. Invoices will be issued via KidsXap.

#### *Kindergarten fee deposit*

Parents/guardians are required to pay Term 1 fees in advance of their child starting in order to secure their child's place at kindergarten. No additional deposit is needed.

#### *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy*

Families who are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy, i.e. Health Care Card holders, will be required to provide evidence of their eligibility and will then not be required to make fee payments.

If evidence of eligibility is not provided, fees will be required to be paid before your child commences the term.

