

Document name:	Free Kindergarten Fees Policy
Document Type:	Policy
Document Number:	
Domain:	Meli Kindergarten Services
Regulation:	National Quality Framework
Regulatory Area:	Quality Area 7
Version:	2.2
Document Status:	Published
Effective Date:	2/11/2023
Review Date:	2/11/2026
Approver:	CEO
Custodian:	Executive Director Services

1.0 Purpose

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- Free kindergarten funding for sessional kindergarten programs
- The application of surplus funding within Meli Kindergarten Services (Meli) 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 additional fees minus the Free Kindergarten Funding
- Ensuring the viability of Meli, by setting appropriate Fees and charges where applicable

2.0 Values

Meli 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

3.0 Scope

This policy applies to Meli as the Approved Provider, Meli staff, Kindergarten Parent Advisory Groups, and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child at a Meli Kindergarten.

4.0 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)
- 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 2021 Free Kindergarten subsidy guidelines and be responsive to the local community.

5.0 Definitions

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy.

Approved Provider: an individual or organisation that has been approved by the DE as fit and proper (in accordance with *Sections 12, 13 and 14 of the National Law*) to operate one or more education and care services. Meli is the Approved Provider for all Meli Kindergarten Services.

Meli Kindergarten Services: the Approved Provider as defined above. Also referred to as Meli

Meli Kindergarten Services Central Support: centralised administration and support team with overarching responsibility for the delivery of Meli kindergarten programs.

Early Years Management Organisation: Meli Kindergarten Services (Meli).

DE: Department of Education

Fees: a charge for program hours over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 per year).

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

Health care card: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. Details are available at: www.humanservices.gov.au

Voluntary parent/guardian payment/donation: A voluntary payment/donation for items not directly related to the provision of the children's program. Written agreement is required for any voluntary payments.-Attendance at the service is not conditional on this payment.

Kindergarten Parent Advisory Group: the group established by parents of the Kindergarten children at each Service.

Late collection charge: a charge that may be imposed by Meli as the Approved Provider when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program This charge will be set at a level determined by the approved provider.

6.0 Responsibilities

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider (Meli) and persons with management 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					
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative	R	✓	✓	✓	
Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for the payment of fees (if applicable) and the provision of a statement of fees charged by the service (<i>Regulation 168</i>), and take reasonable steps to ensure those policies and procedures are followed (<i>Regulation 170</i>)	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 and any additional hours		✓			
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) and/or "wrap around" care	R	✓			
Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guidelines	R	✓			
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 any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted	R	✓			
Ensuring that the <i>Fees - Free Kinder Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	✓			
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kinder (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	✓			
Informing parents of any action that will be taken if fees are not paid	R	✓			
Reading the Meli Free Kinder information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)				✓	
Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to Meli				✓	
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 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	R	✓			

fees are collected (<i>Regulation 172(2)</i>), ideally providing one term's notice.					
Implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the approved provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kinder initiative	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.		✓	✓		

7.0 Evaluation

To assess whether the values and purpose of this policy have been achieved, Meli as the Approved Provider will:

- Seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness,
- Monitor the implementation of compliance with and complaints about this Policy;
- Keep the Policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy, and best practice; and
- Revise the Policy and the procedures set out in the Fees Policy as required.
- Notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures unless a lesser period is necessary because of a risk (*Regulation 172(2)*).

8.0 Attachments

Attachment 1: Free Kindergarten Information for Families

9.0 Related Meli policies and procedures

Meli Kindergarten's:

- Complaints and Grievances Policy
- Delivery and Collection of Children Policy
- Enrolment and Orientation Policy
- Excursions and Service Events Policy
- Governance and Management of the Service Policy
- Inclusion, Equity, and Anti-Bias Approach Policy
- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy

10.0 Relevant 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 2010 (Vic);
- National Quality Standard, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

11.0 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 Meli Kindergarten Services

ATTACHMENT 1 - Free Kindergarten Information for Families

Meli Kindergarten Services

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and eligible three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services are 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.

DE 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

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

- a) Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (up to 15 hours per week) - no parent fee
- b) Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Meli are included on the Statement of Fees and Charges. These include:

- a) **Late collection charge:** The Meli Kindergarten Services 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 Meli Board.

4. 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.

5. Refund of fees

Any enrolment deposits paid will be fully refunded to families when the child commences at the service.

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.