

Fees Policy

Version	Final
NQF Requirements	Quality Area 7 – Mandatory
Approved by Committee of Management	25/07/2024
Next Review Date	2026

Purpose

This policy provides a clear set of guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees
- ensuring the viability of Highgate Early Learning Centre, by setting appropriate fees and charges
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by Highgate Early Learning Centre.
- compliance with the Free Kinder initiative

Policy Statement

Values

Highgate Early Learning Centre 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
- 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
- advising users of the service about program government funding and fees to be paid by parents/guardians
- providing equitable access for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and/or Early Start Kindergarten
- supporting the Victorian Government's Free Kinder initiative
- increasing access to quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children

Scope

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge and, parents/guardians attending Highgate Early Learning Centre.



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					
Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for the payment of fees 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	√			
Reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements	R	√			
Developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability	R	√			
Communicating with families at enrolment about fees, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the amounts charged • payment periods and methods • how the Child Care Subsidy or other government subsidy will be applied • notice periods • how they can access copies of statements/receipts • financial hardship considerations and payment plans 	R	√			
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of the Commonwealth Governments Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy, DE's The Kindergarten Funding Guide and DE's Free Kinder initiative (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	√			
Considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at Highgate Early Learning Centre and removing those barriers wherever possible	R	√			
Reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered	R	√			
Considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families	R	√			
Where Child Care Subsidy or Additional Child Care Subsidy is applicable, ensure that all subsidies a child is eligible for are applied to reduce cost to families (CCS and ACCS can be	R	√			



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					
accessed in combination with the Early Start Kindergarten grants).					
Providing communication to families explaining their access to one year of three-year-old and one of four-year-old funded kindergarten program	R	√			
Clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally sensitive way.	R	√			
Ensuring that the <i>Fees Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	√			
Taking reasonable steps to ensure that nominated supervisors, ECT/educators, staff and volunteers follow this policy and procedure (<i>Regulation 170</i>)	R	√	√		√
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kinder (<i>refer to Attachment 2</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with fee information (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with a Bonds & Levies request upon enrolment of their child/ren	R	√			
Obtaining agreement to fee payment terms from all parents/guardians via the online enrolment form.	R	√			
Providing parents/guardians with a Complying Written Arrangement (if applicable) or Relevant Arrangement (<i>refer to Definitions</i>). All arrangements must be recorded, either on paper or electronically, and must be kept by the provider.	R	√			
Ensuring that once the approved provider enters into a Complying Written Arrangement (<i>refer to Definitions</i>) with a family, they must submit an enrolment notice within seven days of the end of the week in which the arrangement started.	R	√			
Informing families that children who haven't attended a session of care in 26 consecutive weeks will no longer be eligible for Child Care Subsidy (<i>refer to Definitions</i>).	R	√			
Informing families if they are receiving Child Care Subsidy (<i>refer to Definitions</i>), they must update Centrelink on any changes to their income, activity and other circumstances via their Centrelink online account	R	√			



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					
Ensuring fees are collected and receipted	R	√			
Ensuring that families are informed of the operating hours and planned closures.	R	√			
Ensuring that children enrolled in a kindergarten program are not charged higher fees in comparison to children that are not attracting kindergarten funding.	R	√			
Directly offsetting the full “Free Kinder” payment from the fees of parents/ guardians with children receiving their funded kindergarten program at the centre (service providers are not required to separately calculate and record the cost of the kindergarten hours separately for integrated programs).	R	√			
Applying the “Free Kinder” fee offset regularly (e.g., fortnightly or monthly) and clearly indicating the offset amount (labelled Victorian Government Free Kinder offset) on parent/ guardian’s invoice statements.	R	√			
Communicating with parents/guardians that the “Free Kinder” offsets will not impact their CCS payments.	R	√			
Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guidelines (<i>refer to Sources</i>).	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	√		√	
Use any surplus funding on improvement efforts for the funded kindergarten program, such as improving quality and supporting engagement of families for the minority of cases where parents are charged less than the “Free Kinder” amount in out-of-pocket fees for the duration of the kindergarten year.	R	√			
Informing parents of any action that will be taken if fees are not paid (<i>Refer to Attachment 1</i>).	R	√			
Collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable.	R	√		√	



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					
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 fees.	R	√			
Notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days before any proposed changes that will affect the fees charged or the way in which fees are collected. (<i>Regulation 172(2)</i>)	R	√			
Addressing any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service in a timely manner	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.		√	√		
Reading the Highgate Early Learning Centre Fee information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>) and complying with the Complying Written Arrangement (if applicable).				√	
Notifying the approved provider if they are experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees.				√	
Providing the required documentation to enable the service to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and/or Early Start Kindergarten, if eligible (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>).				√	



Background and Legislation

Background

Regulation 168(2) (n) of Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 requires that Early Childhood Education and Care services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. The policy must include a written statement about the fees to be charged and the payment process. All families must be informed of applicable fees at the time of enrolment.

Australian families receive help with the cost of child care through the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). The Australian Government, through the Department of Education (DE) and Services Australia, administers the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). Providers must be approved by the department to receive CCS.

DE is responsible for the legislation that underpins CCS. This legislation is called Family Assistance Law (FAL). All providers that receive CCS must follow the rules under FAL. DE monitors providers' compliance with FAL.

The Australian Government subsidises the cost of child care. State and territory governments are responsible for the health, safety, wellbeing and educational outcomes of children.

The Australian Government considers that immunisation is an important health measure for children and their families, as it is the safest and most effective way of providing protection against harmful and often deadly diseases. To meet the Child Care Subsidy immunisation requirements, children must be immunised according to the standard vaccination schedule, be on an eligible catch-up vaccination schedule or have an approved exemption from being immunised.

CCS is paid directly to approved providers and passed on to families as a fee reduction.

Additional Child Care Subsidy provides additional fee assistance to support vulnerable or disadvantaged families and children. This support recognises the preventative and protective influence of quality child care on a child's health, wellbeing and development; and the importance of continuity of care.

There are four different payments under Additional Child Care Subsidy:

- Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing)—to help children who are at risk of serious abuse or neglect.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (grandparent)—to help grandparents on income support who are the principal caregiver of their grandchildren.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (temporary financial hardship)—to help families experiencing financial hardship.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (transition to work)—to help low-income families transitioning from income support to work.

The Inclusion Support Program is designed to assist early childhood education and care services to include children with additional needs by providing support, in the form of practical and tailored advice and strategies on effective inclusive practice, from contracted Inclusion Agencies as well as funding to address more challenging inclusion barriers.

The Community Child Care Fund is designed to help eligible child care providers address barriers to child care participation, particularly in disadvantaged communities, including Indigenous communities.

Funded Kindergarten

The Department of Education (DE) (*refer to Definitions*) provides funding for each child who is enrolled and attending a funded kindergarten program two years before school. Income from other sources, primarily fees, is required to meet all the additional costs incurred by the service in the delivery of the children's program. In addition, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS) (*refer to Definitions*) enables eligible children to



attend a funded kindergarten program free of charge two years before school. KFS is not applicable to services that have opted into free kinder and / or LDC that don't invoice separately for kindergarten.

DE also funds Early Start Kindergarten (ESK). ESK enables children who are at least three years old by 30 April in the year they are enrolled to attend the kindergarten program and are from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or the family have had contact with child protection priority access to 15 hours of free or low cost kindergarten. Further program details are outlined in The Kindergarten Funding Guide (*refer to Sources*).

Regulation 168(2) (n) of Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 requires that funded kindergarten services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. The policy must include a written statement about the fees to be charged 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 (*refer to Definitions*) and/or or Early Start Kindergarten (*refer to Definitions*) arrangements. The fees charged must comply with the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy requirements (*refer to Definitions*) and/or or Early Start Kindergarten (*refer to Definitions*) and be responsive to the local community and the viability of the service. The Kindergarten Funding Guide (*refer to Sources*) outlines the criteria to be covered in the policy.

Free Kinder

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 Kinder, 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 Kinder 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 kinder 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 Kinder subsidy guidelines and be responsive to the local community.



Legislation and Standards

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999
- A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999
- A New Tax System (Family Assistance and Related Measures) Act 2000
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)
- Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rules 2017
- Child Care Subsidy Secretary's Rules 2017
- 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, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

- Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: 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 *General Definitions* schedule attached.

Active Contribution Levy: A refundable levy required to secure a child's enrolment each year. The levy is refunded following an Active Contribution by the family during the calendar year, e.g., attendance at a working bee, joining the Committee of Management etc.

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.

Capital Works & Equipment Levy: A non-refundable levy required to secure a child's enrolment each year. This levy goes towards purchasing new equipment, maintaining existing equipment or larger capital projects.

Centrelink: The agency that delivers payments and services to individuals and families on behalf of the Australian Government.

Child Care Safety Net: Targeted assistance to vulnerable and at-risk children and their families, as well as supporting child care services in disadvantaged communities to address barriers in accessing child care.

The Child Care Safety Net has three components:

- Additional Child Care Subsidy
- Community Child Care Fund
- Inclusion Support Program

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) if applicable: 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

Children/families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage (in relation to this policy): children are vulnerable if the capacity of parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long-term development and wellbeing is limited. Some factors which may contribute to a child experiencing vulnerability include: a child with a disability; living in a family with a low income, or one which is experiencing problems with housing, domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health; known to child protection; in statutory out-of-home care; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, having a culturally and linguistically diverse background; having a young or sole parent, or a parent with a disability (adapted from the Kindergarten Funding Guide)

Concession: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. This includes one of the following:

- a Commonwealth Health Care Card
- a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card
- a Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card or White Card
- Refugee or Asylum Seeker visa (200-204, 786 or 866)
- Bridging visas for any of the above Refugee or Asylum Seeker visas
- Multiple Births (triplets or more)

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK): A funding program that provides eligible children 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten program each week for two years before starting school. To be eligible a child must be 3



by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten and be from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or the family has had contact with child protection. Details are available at: www.vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten

If a child is eligible for ESK, they should be enrolled in ESK, even where Free Kinder and/or 15 hours per week of funded three-year old kindergarten is offered. This ensures eligible children have priority access to 15 hours of funded kindergarten provided by an early childhood teacher and that service providers receive additional funding and support. 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.

These children can also access free year-before-school kindergarten through the ESK Extension Grant regardless of whether they have accessed ESK in the previous year.

Early Start Kindergarten extension grant: provides a free or low cost year-before-school kindergarten program for children:

- not eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- who participated in Access to Early Learning in the previous year or are from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or the family have had contact with child protection.

A child is not required to access ESK in the previous year to access the ESK extension grant.

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

Fees Bond: A payment equivalent to two weeks fees required to secure a child's enrolment each year. The bond is held throughout the child's enrolment and refunded to families at the end of enrolment. If days of attendance are reduced, the relevant portion of the Fees Bond will be credited. If days of attendance are increased, an additional Fees Bond will be requested.

Free Kinder: A Victorian Government Best Start, Best Life initiative providing Free Kinder programs for four-year-old and three-year-old children in funded services, that have opted into the initiative.

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

- providing a free 15-hour program to 4-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service
- providing a free 5 to 15-hour program to 3-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 3 and 4-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service.

Funded Kinder Bond: A refundable levy charged to families taking a **Funded** 3-year-old or 4-year-old Kinder place. The levy is refunded to families at the beginning of Term 2, assuming the child continues to be enrolled in the Funded Kindergarten Program.

Funded Kindergarten: The Victorian Government provides funding to support children to access a high-quality kindergarten program in the two years before they start school. The funding is a contribution towards meeting the cost of the kindergarten program. Funded kindergartens charge fees to help meet the cost of running kindergarten programs. Fees are set by individual kindergartens and depend on things like how many hours children attend and whether there are extra costs such as excursions.

High priority families: as defined in the Kindergarten Guide this includes:

- Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children in Out-of-Home Care
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children



- Asylum seeker and refugee children
- Children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- A child or parent holds a Commonwealth Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card, Veteran's Affairs Card, or multiple birth children (triplets, quadruplets)
- 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

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A state government subsidy paid in addition to per capita grants to subsidise the costs of parent fees and enable eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten for 15 hours free of charge (The Kindergarten Funding Guide *(refer to Sources)*)

Late collection fee: 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)*

Pre-Prep: Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will gradually transition to Pre-Prep over the next decade from 2025. Funded kindergarten hours will double from 15 to up to 30 hours a week. Pre-Prep will be delivered through sessional kindergartens and long-day-care centres. By 2032, children across Victoria will have access to 1,800 hours of funded kindergarten before school, comprising 600 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and 1,200 hours of Pre-Prep.

Waitlist fee: A fee for when families register their child directly with a service (not part the councils 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.



Sources and Related Policies

Sources

- Department of Education: Child Care Subsidy (CCS): www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/child-care-subsidy
- The Child Care Provider Handbook: www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/child-care-provider-handbook
- Best Start Best Life: <https://www.vic.gov.au/give-your-child-the-best-start-in-life>
- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education): www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide
- The constitution of Highgate Early Learning Centre

Related Policies

- Compliments and Complaints
- Delivery and Collection of Children
- Enrolment and Orientation
- Excursions and Service Events
- Governance and Management
- 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
- 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
- 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 \(2\)](#))
- investigating what measures can be taken to reduce any barriers to access the program, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children

Attachments

- Attachment 1: Fee information for families
- Attachment 2: Free Kinder information for families

Acknowledgements

This policy is based on the ELAA Long Daycare, Funded Kindergarten and Free Kinder Fees Policies which were last updated in June 2024.



Attachment 1: Fee Information for Families

General information

Highgate Early Learning Centre abides by the *Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for Families Child Care Package) Act 2017* (refer to *Legislation and standards*). The Child Care Subsidy helps by assisting families with their child care fees and provides greater assistance to low and middle-income families. The Child Care Safety Net provides families and services extra support if they are vulnerable and disadvantaged or located in a regional or remote community.

Hours of operation

- 7.15am to 6.15pm - Monday to Friday.
- Highgate Early Learning Centre is closed on Public Holidays and for a minimum of two weeks over the Summer Holidays in December/January.
 - Fees are charged for public holidays (excluding public holidays which fall during the closedown period).
 - Fees are not payable during the closedown period.
- Highgate is closed for a Staff Professional Development Day each year. Parents will be advised in advance of this date. Fees are not payable on this day.

A late fee is charged for children collected after 6.15pm (*see below*).

How fees are set

As part of the budget development process, Highgate Early Learning Centre sets fees each year for the programs of the service, taking into consideration:

- the financial viability of the service
- the level of government funding provided
- 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 Child Care Subsidy : www.education.gov.au

Once fees are set for the year, they will only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if enrolments drop and the service is at risk of not being able to meet its expenses.

Fees are usually set for the upcoming calendar year following approval of the budget for the financial year. Changes in fees will be communicated to families prior to accepting enrolment for the upcoming calendar year.

Bonds & Levies request

A Bonds & Levies request will be provided to families on enrolment. Payment of the Bonds & Levies requested is required to secure enrolment as follows:

Fees Bond (<i>Refunded at end of enrolment</i>)	Weekly fees x 2
Active Contribution (<i>Refundable – attendance at working bee etc</i>)	\$300
Funded Kinder Bond (<i>Funded kinder only – refundable</i>)	\$200
Capital Works & Equipment Levy (<i>Non-refundable</i>)	\$130



Late collection fee

Highgate Early Learning Centre 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 Highgate Early Learning Centre considering the circumstances leading to the late collection, the number of occurrences and overtime payments to staff required to stay late.

Bonds & Levies request

A Bonds & Levies request will be provided to families on enrolment. Payment of the Bonds & Levies requested is required to secure enrolment each year.

Subsidies

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

The Kindergarten Fee Subsidy is provided by DE and enables eligible children to attend 15 hours of kindergarten free of charge. Eligibility conditions may change from time-to-time and must be checked in the most recent edition of the Kindergarten Funding Guide (*refer to Sources*).

Your child is eligible for the kindergarten fee subsidy:

- if your child identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- if your child is identified on their birth certificate as being a multiple birth child (triplets or more).

or if your child holds or has a parent or guardian who holds, one of the following:

- a Commonwealth Health Care Card
- a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card
- a Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card or White Card
- Refugee or Asylum Seeker visa (200-204, 786 or 866)
- Bridging visas for any of the above Refugee or Asylum Seeker visas

If your family or child has a humanitarian or refugee visa listed by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection which is not included in the above list, your child may still be eligible for the kindergarten fee subsidy.

Where a child is identified by a parent, carer or legal guardian as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, no verification is required.

In all other instances, supporting documentation should be sighted by the service on acceptance of a place or on commencement in the program, however where there are delays, such as in obtaining health care cards for children in out-of-home care, the delay should not provide a barrier to the child accessing the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy. Families are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for the full term in which their concession is valid.

Early Start Kindergarten

Early Start Kindergarten gives eligible children 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten a week for two years before starting school.

To be eligible, the child must be three by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten and meet one of the following criteria:

- be from a refugee or asylum seeker background
- identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- the family have had contact with Child Protection.

Children can also access free or low cost Four-Year-Old Kindergarten through the Early Start Kindergarten Extension Grant. Contact the service for further information.



Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is an Australian Government subsidy that can assist eligible families with the cost of child care in long day care services. Highgate Early Learning Centre is an approved care provider.

Payment of fees

Highgate Early Learning Centre will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Fees will be invoiced on a weekly basis. Invoices will show any childcare subsidy payments made by the Commonwealth Government and the remaining gap fee is to be paid by parents/carers within seven days of the date of the invoice. Families are expected to pay the gap fee shown on the invoice regularly and not allow fees to fall more than four weeks into arrears.

Fees are paid by Direct Bank Transfer to Highgate Early Learning Centre's bank account. Bank details are provided at the bottom of the fee statement.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Business Manager 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.

Orientation discounts

Orientation discounts will be applied during the first 2 weeks of enrolment, based on the length of each session. A maximum of two sessions at zero fee (up to 2 hours) and 2 sessions at 50% fee (up to 4 hours) will be offered to each child. Orientation discounts will not apply if you have deferred your start date.

As the discount is based on the length of the session, fees will be adjusted, if necessary, the day after children have attended.

Cancellation fees

Where a place is cancelled prior to the commencement date, the Fees Bond, equivalent to two weeks of fees, will be retained by Highgate as a cancellation fee. Likewise, if a place is booked for an identified number of days and these are reduced prior to the commencement date, that part of the Fees Bond relating to the days of care no longer required will be retained by Highgate as a cancellation fee if we are unable to fill the place immediately.

Notice period

Families are asked to provide four weeks' notice of the cancellation of a booking unless after 1st November, where days cannot be reduced without full fees payable.

Fees will continue to apply for the notice period unless the vacant place is filled before this date..

Unpaid fees

If fees are not paid by the due date, the following steps will be taken:

An initial reminder email will be sent to parents/guardians requesting payment of the outstanding fees

Where payment is still not received, a second reminder email will be sent to parents/guardians with a specified payment date

If fees are more than 10 weeks in arrears, , families will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan if required.

Failure to attend the meeting and continued non-payment will be reported to the Committee of Management and may result in a formal letter notifying parents/guardians that the child's place at the service may be withdrawn unless payment is made, or a payment plan is entered into within a specified period of time. This letter will also include information on a range of support options available for the family.



Highgate Early Learning Centre will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector. If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the parents/guardians will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing. No further enrolments of children from the parents/guardians will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

Refund of fees

Fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the approved provider). There will be no refund of fees in the following circumstances:

- a child's short-term illness
- public holidays
- family holiday during operational times
-
- 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 program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

Casual care fees

Children can attend additional/casual care days if other children are absent or if there is a temporary place available. Casual care fees are charged at the same daily rate as permanent booking fees.

A reduced fee is available for absent days if the place is taken by another child as casual care (and there is no vacancy on that day). In these circumstances, only 50% of the daily fee is charged to the family whose child is absent.

Fundraising

Fundraising is undertaken to pay for additional items for the service. While participation in fundraising is voluntary, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

Support services

Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to family support services. Information on these services may be available from the Director or alternatively families may contact the local council.

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 prior to enrolment acceptance each year of any required fee increase. .



Attachment 2: Free Kinder information for families

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.

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.

What Free Kinder means at our service

Highgate Early Learning Centre] has opted in to the Free Kinder initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

- Funded kinder daily rate – applies to all days of care
- Weekly fee offset (after Child Care Subsidy) – shown on invoice as Victorian Government Free Kinder offset

Other charges

Other charges levied by Highgate Early Learning Centre are included on the Bonds & Levies request, that will be provided to families upon enrolment.

In addition, 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.

Integrated Services

Highgate Early Learning Centre will directly offset the full “Free Kinder” payment from the fees of parents/guardians with children receiving their funded kindergarten program at the Centre.

The fee offset will be applied weekly , clearly indicating the offset amount (labelled Victorian Government Free Kinder offset) on parent/ guardian’s invoice statements

The offsets will not impact their CCS payments.

Subsidies

Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is an Australian Government subsidy that can assist eligible families with the costs of childcare at an approved child care provider. Highgate Early Learning Centre is an approved care provider.

Approved child care are providers that meet certain standards and requirements and are approved by the Australian Government. Approved child care providers must:

- hold the required approvals or licences to provide child care in the state or territory that the service/s operate in
- ensure the provider and any individual who is or will be a Person with Management or Control of the Provider is fit and a proper person to administer the CCS (requirements set out in Section 194E of A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999.
- be financially viable and is likely to remain so
- ensure that required fit and proper checks are carried out for each Person with Management or Control of the Provider, Persons with Responsibility for Day-to-Day Operation of the Service and In-Home Care and Family Day Care Educators



The amount of subsidy received is determined by the circumstances of the applicant's including the family income, the hourly rate cap and the hours of activity undertaken by the parents. Further information for parents can be found here: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/child-care-subsidy>

Long day care providers that offer funded kindergarten as part of the long day care program are required to directly offset the full payment of the Free Kinder initiative from parents' out of pocket fees (after CCS is applied). Fee reductions will be made proportionally across the year to families' bills, i.e. weekly over 50 weeks. Only children receiving a funded kindergarten place at Highgate Early Learning Centre, led by a qualified teacher, are eligible under this initiative.