

1. Objective

The objective of this policy is to guide and direct the operations of **bestchance** in its role as Approved Provider Early Years Manager of kindergartens in;

- Provision of information to families regarding enrolling in **bestchance** managed services
- The process to be followed when enrolling a child in the service
- The criteria for enrolment
- Complying with Department of Education and Training funding requirements relating to enrolment of children in funded kindergarten places
- Working collaboratively with Central Registration Schemes to ensure the best outcome for children and families

2. Scope

This policy applies to all **bestchance** employees including educators who provide information on or play a role in the process of enrolments. It also governs systems and processes for registrations and enrolments for **bestchance** kindergartens.

3. Policy

The Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 require approved services to have policies and procedures in place in relation to enrolment. **There are groups of 'high priority' children that are required to have priority of access to a program. Approved Providers will provide places for these children first.** These categories reflect the Department of Education and Training guidelines for Kindergarten and the Australian Government Guidelines for Centre Based Care on priority for allocating places.

bestchance is committed to;

- Meeting the needs of the local community;
- Complying with Department of Education and Training (DET) funding requirements relating to the enrolment of children in government funded kindergarten places;
- Adherence to Privacy and Human Rights legislation; and
- Working within Department of Education and Training Early Years Management Frameworks

ELIGIBILITY AND ACCESS TO A 4 YEAR-OLD FUNDED KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

As per the Department of Education and Training (DET) Kindergarten Funding Criteria, the following children are eligible for attendance in 4-year-old kindergarten program.

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- Children who have turned 4 years of age by 30 April in the year they will attend the funded kindergarten program and intend to go to school the following year. In order to receive government per capita funding, a child must be at least four years of age on 30 April in the year in which they will attend the kindergarten program. This aligns with the requirement for children to be at least five years of age on 30 April in the year they first attend school.
- Children who turn 6 years of age during the kindergarten year who have been granted an exemption from school entry age requirements by the regional office of DET.
- Children who have received funding for a second year of funded 4-year-old kindergarten.
- Children who were eligible to attend kindergarten in the previous year, but declined entry to the kindergarten program until the following year. Should your child turn 6 during their 1st year of 4 year old funded kindergarten a School Exemption will need to be completed and provided to the Department of Education and Training for approval for access into the 4 year old kindergarten program. (Refer to the DET Kindergarten Funding Guide).
- Children who are younger than 4 years of age by 30 April in the year of attendance whose family has submitted a written request for their child to attend school the following year to their regional office of DET. A copy of the written request must be attached with the application. Parents/guardians are advised that very few requests are approved by DET. If the child attends kindergarten early, but does not proceed on to school the following year, the child will be unable to access another year of funded kindergarten (Refer to the DET Kindergarten Funding Guide).

It is a DET requirement that an unsubsidised child (e.g. a child who has received a funded year of kindergarten but is not eligible for a second year of funded kindergarten according to DET criteria) shall not take the place of an eligible child.

CHILDREN WITH A BIRTH DATE BETWEEN 1 JANUARY AND 30 APRIL

All children are eligible to access a funded kindergarten program in the year before school. Families of children with birth dates between 1 January and 30 April have a choice about whether their child will commence school in the year they turn five or the following year, and therefore whether they commence kindergarten in the year they turn four or the year they turn five. Some children may benefit from starting school at a younger age, whilst other children benefit from starting later. Families need to make an informed choice about which year they would like their child to commence school.

Prior to enrolment, families with children born between 1 January and 30 April need to consider when it's appropriate to send their child to Kindergarten and to choose carefully, as children are only funded for one year of kindergarten before school (unless they are eligible for an Early Start Kindergarten grant or a second year of funded kindergarten). Once a child has begun to attend the service, the child is accessing their funded year of kindergarten.

Families who have questions about the best time for their child to commence kindergarten, and therefore school, should be encouraged to discuss this decision with an early childhood educator, MCH nurse, and/or any other professionals involved in supporting the child prior to

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commencement in the service. A discussion with an early childhood teacher can help reassure concerned families by discussing how a child's individual learning and development needs can be met within the program.

During the year an early childhood teacher and the child's parent/guardians will work together on a plan for the child's transition to school. All children accessing their 1st funded year of 4 year old kindergarten only, are eligible to access a second year of funded kindergarten if an early childhood teacher has identified developmental delays in two or more areas and the family and educator agree that the child will achieve better outcomes at kindergarten than at school.

ELIGIBILITY AND ACCESS TO A 3-YEAR-OLD FUNDED KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

As per the Department of Education and Training (DET) Kindergarten Funding Criteria, the following children are eligible for attendance in 3-year-old kindergarten program.

A child must turn 3 years of age by April 30 in the year they are eligible to access a funded kindergarten program (2 Years before School)

- A child must be 3 years of age before they commence the program.
- It is important to note that the child is not able to commence in the funded program at the service until on or after their third (3rd) birthday. Your child's place will held until they can commence in the kindergarten program.
- Children can only attend **one year of funded three year old kindergarten**, there is no option for a 2nd year of 3 year old funded kindergarten.

Prior to enrolment, families with children born between 1 January and 30 April should consider when it is appropriate to send their child to kindergarten and to choose carefully as once a child has begun to attend the service, their child is accessing their funded year of 3 year old kindergarten and will be expected to continue into the 4 year old funded program the following year. When you child starts kindergarten directly relates to the age they will start at primary school. When enrolling in 3-year-old kindergarten, we encourage families to plan ahead and consider the age they would like their child to start at primary school.

EARLY START KINDERGARTEN (ESK)

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) provides eligible 3-year-old children with access of up to 15 hours of kindergarten per week (or 600 hours per year) for free. This grant is available in all settings where the kindergarten program is delivered by a degree qualified teacher, including in a 3-year-old kindergarten program, a mixed age program or where Early Start enrolments are incorporated into a 4-year-old funded kindergarten program.

ESK is available for children who are 3 years old by 30 April in the year they are enrolled to attend the program and who are either:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or

- Know to Child Protection
- From a refugee or asylum seeker background

A child's eligibility can be determined through each Local Government's Central Registration Scheme or in discussion between a parent/guardian and educator. Children eligible for ESK will be offered a kindergarten program free of charge.

IMMUNISATION AND ENROLMENT

The Victorian Government has amended the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2009. The amendments mean that enrolments cannot be confirmed unless the parent/carer has provided documentation that shows the child:

- Is up to date for their age, or:
- Is on a recognised catch-up schedule if their child has fallen behind with their vaccinations; or:
- Has a medical condition preventing them from being fully vaccinated, or:
- Has documentation that shows the child is eligible for a 'grace period'. A grace period of 16 weeks from the first day of the child's attendance at the education and care service may apply to children from families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage

This information is to be provided to **bestchance** as part of the enrolment process. Enrolments are unconfirmed until an "up to date" status is shown on the immunisation statement and has been provided. The only document that is accepted as proof of vaccination is the "Immunisation History Statement" issued by the Australian Immunisation Register. No other form of documentation will be accepted.

GROUP SIZE

The maximum group size will be the same as the maximum licensed capacity at that service unless otherwise determined by **bestchance**. Decisions outside this approach will be based on consideration of these three factors;

- Demand for kindergarten places in the local community;
- Financial capacity of the service to staff additional places; or
- Particular needs of the children enrolled that might warrant consideration of a smaller group size for that year.

WHEN DEMAND IS HIGHER THAN PLACES AVAILABLE

If demand for care exceeds places available, the Australian Government has determined guidelines for allocation of places. **bestchance** in collaboration with Central Registration Schemes will prioritise children who are:

1. Children and families with multiple and complex needs
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people experiencing disadvantage or who are vulnerable

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3. Children and young people and/or parents/carers with disability experiencing disadvantage or who are vulnerable
4. Children and young people who have experienced abuse and/or neglect, including children in out-of-home care and young people leaving out-of-home care and transitioning to adulthood.

This reflects the Australian Government's intention to help families who are most in need, and support the safety and wellbeing of children at risk in accordance with the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031.

PRIORITISING ACCESS TO KINDERGARTEN PLACES

The Victorian Government requires funded organisations to ensure that policies and procedures promote equal opportunity for all children. Criteria for access and inclusion are outlined in *The Kindergarten Funding Guide*.

The prioritisation of allocations sits with each Local Governments Central Registration Scheme.

There are five groups of 'high priority' children that are required to have priority of access to a funded kindergarten program.

High priority categories:

1. Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children in Out-of-Home Care
2. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
3. Asylum seeker and refugee children
4. Children who hold or have a parent 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 of Asylum Seeker visa (200-204, 786 or 866)
 - Bridging visas for any of the above Refugee or Asylum Seeker Visas
5. Children with additional needs, defined as children who:
 - a. require additional assistance in order to fully participate in the kindergarten program
 - b. require a combination of services which are individually planned
 - c. have an identified specific disability or developmental delay

GROUP ALLOCATION

Following the acceptance of a kindergarten offer (based on the above Priority of Access), **Central Registration Schemes** will request your group preference.

Where group preference requests exceed number of places available, priority will be determined based on the Priority of Access to kindergarten places which also includes:

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- Children approved to access second year of the same program
- 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 who hold or have a parent 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
- 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

Please note that the following Councils allocate to service and group level – Baw Baw Shire Council, Cardinia Shire Council, City of Greater Dandenong & Wyndham City Council – group allocation enquiries or to request a group change are directly administered through the above four councils. **bestchance** Early Years Management and Education Staff will not internally facilitate any families request for a change to your child’s group allocation.

MANAGING A KINDERGARTEN WAITLIST

In the event that there are more eligible children seeking a place at a kindergarten than there are places available, **bestchance** will continue to work with Central Registration Schemes to assist in managing waitlists.

NON-ATTENDANCE

If your child is unwell, away or unable to attend kindergarten we request that you contact your kindergarten educator to let them know. If your child has not attended kindergarten we advise the following:

- A) 1 week of absence – the kindergarten educator(s) will contact you
- B) 2 weeks of absence and no contact- the educator(s) will contact **bestchance** central enrolments to advise. **Bestchance** central enrolments will contact via email and phone (call & SMS) requesting a reply
- C) 3 weeks of absence and no contact – if no response has been received and you are still non-contactable a final email will be sent advising of one week’s response time or your child’s place may be cancelled.
- D) 4 weeks of absence and no contact- If no response has been received from the final email, your child’s place will be cancelled. **Bestchance** central enrolments will advise the relevant

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Local Government Central Registration Scheme of your child's last date of attendance and to cancel the place. Supporting documentation (copies of emails) will be provided if requested.

PLANNED EXTENDED LEAVE

Children can take between 2 to 14 weeks of extended leave from kindergarten for reasons such as moving to a new address or family holidays.

If you are planning or require extended leave from between 2 to 14 weeks please advise the kindergarten of the following:

- Last date your child will attend
- Date your child will return to kindergarten
- Reason for extended leave

This information will be provided to our central enrolment team to document. After your leave has finished, if your child has not returned to kindergarten we will follow the process of non-attendance from point D and your child's place will be cancelled.

If your child will miss kinder due to illness or other extenuating circumstances beyond the 14 weeks, families will need to seek approval to hold the place. Families must maintain contact with the kindergarten and or enrolment team throughout the period of absence. Approval will be based on individual circumstance.

FEE INFORMATION

bestchance will be participating in the below Victorian Government initiative and zero fees will be payable by families for our kinder programs.

Free Kinder in 2024

Free Three- and Four-Year-Old Kinder will be available across Victoria at participating services in 2024 at both long day care and sessional (standalone) services.

Free Kinder means more Victorian children can have the best start in life, no matter where they live:

- For three-year-olds, this means from 5 and up to 15 hours per week of a kindergarten program
- For four-year-olds, this means 15 hours per week (600 hours a year)

Free Kinder means a saving of up to \$2,500 per child, each year, and also means more than 28,000 Victorians can return to work, including almost 26,600 of which are women.

Participating kindergarten programs will receive funding directly from the Victorian Government, so families are not out of pocket.

4. Parents/guardians are responsible for;

- Reading and complying with the Enrolment Policy
- Completing enrolment forms prior to their child's commencement at the service

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- Ensuring that all required information is provided to the service (immunisation History Statement, Allergy information, risk management plans etc)
- Updating information by notifying the service of any changes as they occur e.g. change of address, contact details
- Informing **bestchance** of intention to withdraw their enrolment in writing to enrolments@bestchance.org.au
- Declaring if their child is accessing three-year-old or four-year-old funded kindergarten program in another setting. This includes, but is not limited to, funded programs offered in Long Day Care settings. Your child's kindergarten funding can only be claimed at once service at one time.
- Retaining receipts and correspondence relating to the enrolment of their child

5. Associated Procedures – Registration Process

Baw Baw Shire:

<https://www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au/Our-Community/Children-and-Families/Kindergartens>

Cardinia Shire: <https://www.cardinia.vic.gov.au/kindergarten>

Dandenong Council: <https://www.greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/kindergarten/enrol-kindergarten>

Wyndham Council:

<https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/services/childrens-services/kindergarten/kindergarten-registration-process>

RELATED POLICIES

This policy relates to the following National Regulations:

- 168 (2)(k) Policies and procedures are required in relation to the following; enrolment and orientation.
- 183 Storage of records and other documents.
- 157 Access for parents
- 160 Child enrolment records to be kept by approved provider
- 161 Authorisations to be kept in enrolment record
- 162 Health information to be kept in enrolment record
- 177 Prescribed enrolment and other documents to be kept by approved provider

6. Relevant legislation sources

<https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide>

<https://www.vic.gov.au/second-year-funded-four-year-old-kindergarten>

<https://www.vic.gov.au/priority-access-criteria>

<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/protecting-australias-children>