

PURPOSE

To operationalise the national **Enrolment and Orientation Policy** and Fee Payment Policy by setting out how Busy Bees services in Victoria comply with the Department of Education's kindergarten funding requirements. This procedure ensures that eligible children have equitable access to funded kindergarten programs and that services meet their obligations for enrolment, reporting, and accountability.

LEGISLATION & STANDARDS (Victoria)

This procedure is implemented in line with:

- Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations
- *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Vic), including requirements for handling School Family Occupation and Education (SFOE) data
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic)
- Relevant human rights obligations

RESPONSIBILITIES

<p>Centre Director</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verifies eligibility, • ensures forms are completed, • manages records, and • applies access priorities.
<p>Funding Support Officer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides operational guidance, • conducts audits, and • liaises with the Department of Education.
<p>Educators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support families to provide accurate enrolment information and documentation.
<p>Families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply eligibility evidence and complete required forms (e.g. One Funded Place).

DEFINITIONS

- **ARRIVAL** – The Department of Education's reporting system for funded kindergarten enrolments. Services must flag eligible Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) children in ARRIVAL to ensure correct funding and associated School Readiness Funding (SRF) uplift.
- **KIMS (Kindergarten Information Management System)** – The Department's system used by services to confirm funded enrolments, manage annual census data, and reconcile funding allocations.
- **ESK (Early Start Kindergarten)** – Funding that provides eligible three-year-old children (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children in Out-of-Home Care, and children from refugee/asylum seeker backgrounds) with up to 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten each week.
- **Free Kinder** – The state-funded initiative providing fee offsets to ensure three- and four-year-old children can attend a funded kindergarten program at no cost or reduced cost to families.
- **SRF (School Readiness Funding)** – Funding allocated to services to build their capacity in the areas of communication, wellbeing, and inclusion. SRF cannot be used to pay for direct therapeutic services for individual children.

- **CRES (Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme)** – Local government or community-led systems that coordinate kindergarten enrolments across services in some municipalities. Services participating in a CRES must apply priority criteria in line with local agreements.
- **One Funded Place Form** – A Department-mandated form signed by families to confirm that each child is enrolled in only one funded kindergarten program.
- **PE&O (Parental Education and Occupation) Details** – Information collected from families to inform funding allocation and reporting.

PROCEDURES

1. Eligibility and Priority of Access

Why this matters

Priority of Access requirements apply only to the allocation of funded kindergarten places (including 3-year-old, 4-year-old, and Early Start Kindergarten). These requirements do not apply to general childcare enrolments or CCS-funded care. Services must apply the Department of Education's eligibility and priority criteria transparently to avoid inequity or loss of funding.

Golden Rules

- When offering and allocating funded kindergarten places, services must give priority to:
 - children at risk of abuse or neglect, including those in Out-of-Home Care
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
 - children from refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds
 - children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS)
 - children with additional needs, disability, or developmental delay.
- Eligibility must be verified and documented before a funded place is confirmed.
- Where a service participates in a **CRES**, local priority agreements also apply.

Step-by-Step

1. Confirm child's age and year of kindergarten eligibility.
2. Request and verify supporting documentation (e.g. concession cards, visa evidence, NDIS plan, cultural identification).
3. Record evidence in the child's enrolment record.
4. Apply priority criteria where demand exceeds places.
5. Communicate enrolment decision to families and document outcomes.

CRES Participation

Where the service participates in a Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme (CRES), priority criteria must also be applied in line with local agreements.

2. Funding Streams

Why this matters

Different funding streams support access and inclusion. Each stream has unique requirements that must be applied consistently.

a. Early Start Kindergarten (ESK)

Early Start Kindergarten gives eligible children 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten a week for 2 years before starting school.

Golden Rules

- To be eligible, the child must be 3 by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten, and:
 - from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or
 - identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or
 - the family has had contact with child protection.
- All ESK enrolments must be flagged in ARRIVAL to ensure correct funding and SRF uplift.
- Families must be advised that they can choose a free 15-hour sessional place at another provider if they do not require LDC hours.

Step-by-Step

1. Confirm eligibility evidence (e.g. cultural identification, child protection order, visa/refugee documentation).
2. Flag the ESK enrolment in ARRIVAL at the point of enrolment confirmation, and ensure the flag is in place before the Annual Confirmation deadline (30 April).
3. Apply fee relief (up to 15 hours free).
4. Record eligibility evidence and ARRIVAL flag in the child's enrolment record.
5. Provide the family with information about both ESK and sessional options, ensuring their choice is informed.

b. Free Kinder

Why this matters

The Victorian Government's Free Kinder initiative ensures that every three- and four-year-old child can access a funded kindergarten program at no or low cost. Long day care services receive an annual fee offset to reduce families' out-of-pocket fees for integrated kinder programs. Correct and timely application protects families and ensures funding compliance.

Golden Rules

- Apply the Free Kinder Offset for 15-hour programs (and the Pre-Prep >15h multiplier as applicable for priority cohorts per the Victoria Government Pre-Prep rollout schedule).
- Apply the offset after CCS, weekly in advance with reconciliation of payments when required, and label it on invoices as "Victoria Government Free Kinder Offset".
- Use the department's One Funded Place form (on the official template) and keep a signed copy on file.
- Re-confirm a child's funded program participation before Annual Confirmation so funding is paid to the correct service.
- Reconcile offsets before 31 December to confirm every family received their full entitlement.
- Where families' gap payments are less than the offset during the year, set aside the balance; by year-end, any remaining fee offset may be used to improve the funded kindergarten program (e.g., quality/family engagement).

Step-by-Step

1. At enrolment/fee set-up, confirm program hours and determine the offset (15h, pro-rata, or Pre-Prep multiplier).
2. **Apply** the offset **after CCS** on a **weekly** basis in advance across all weeks of the year and label it correctly on invoices.
3. Collect and securely store the **One Funded Place** form (department template).
4. Track any **set-aside** balances for families whose gap fees are below the offset during the year.
5. **Re-confirm** funded participation prior to **Annual Confirmation**, and ensure enrolment data is current in the **department's system (Arrival, replacing KIMS)** for monthly payments.
6. **By 31 December**, reconcile offsets and document that each family received their full entitlement; use only any **remaining** offset to improve the funded kindergarten program.

c. School Readiness Funding (SRF)

Why this matters



SRF strengthens service capacity to improve outcomes for children in the areas of communication, wellbeing, and inclusion. Correct use of SRF ensures Busy Bees' services meet state requirements and improve educational equity.

Golden Rules

- SRF allocations are provided on a two-year planning cycle.
- Funding must be used on evidence-based programs, resources, or professional development aligned with the DoE priority areas.
- SRF cannot be used to pay therapists or specialists to work directly with children.
- Services must maintain an SRF plan and expenditure records for audit.

Step-by-Step

1. Review the SRF allocation and DoE guidance for the funding cycle.
2. Develop or update the service’s SRF plan, aligned to communication, wellbeing, and inclusion.
3. Select initiatives from the DoE evidence menu or equivalent programs with demonstrable evidence.
4. Record planned use and obtain approval from the Funding Team.
5. Implement initiatives, track expenditure, and retain all receipts/invoices.
6. Monitor impact and update the SRF plan annually.
7. At the end of the two-year cycle, evaluate outcomes and prepare evidence for audit.

Examples of Allowable SRF Use

Priority Area	Allowable Use (Examples)	Not Allowable
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase of evidence-based language/literacy programs • Professional development in early literacy/numeracy • Coaching for educators on language modelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paying a speech pathologist to deliver 1:1 therapy to an individual child
Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social-emotional learning programs (e.g., resilience, self-regulation) • Staff PD in trauma-informed practice • Whole-of-service wellbeing initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding general staff salaries or rostering
Access & Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilingual resources and inclusive play materials • Family engagement initiatives (e.g., translated communication tools) • Cultural competence training for educators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General admin costs not linked to inclusion • Therapy delivered directly to one child

3. Fees and Charges

Why this matters

Funding reforms such as **Free Kinder** and **Early Start Kindergarten** are designed to reduce financial barriers for families. The Department of Education requires services to apply fees and charges fairly so that priority cohorts can access kindergarten, families are not double-charged, and participation in the core kindergarten program is free. Transparent, equitable fee practice also demonstrates compliance during audits.

Golden Rules

- **Deposits/waitlist acceptance fees** must be refunded or waived for ESK and AEL families.
- **Registration/admin fees** are permitted but services are strongly encouraged to exempt priority groups.
- **Regular incursions/excursions** that form part of the core kindergarten program must not attract additional charges.
- **One-off incursions/excursions** may be cost-recovered but no child may be excluded due to hardship.

Communication with Families

- All fee arrangements, inclusions, and any permitted additional charges must be clearly outlined in enrolment packs, fee schedules, and family handbooks.
- Families must be informed that core kindergarten participation is free or low-cost under Free Kinder, and that no child will be excluded from the program due to financial hardship.

Applying Funding

- Funding is applied weekly, with backdating where required.
- Payments commence at the start of January.
- Funding appears as “Fee Relief” on statements and invoices.

4. Pre-Prep Transition (Future Reform)

Why this matters

The Victorian Government’s **Best Start, Best Life reforms** will expand funded kindergarten hours for four-year-olds over the coming years. Services need to be aware of these changes so families can be supported and the organisation can prepare to deliver expanded programs.

Golden Rules

- **From 2026**, additional funded hours (16–25 per week) will begin for priority cohorts, scaling to 30 hours in later years.
- Priority cohorts include:
 - Aboriginal children
 - Children in Out-of-Home Care
 - Children in Child Protection contact
 - Children eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) or Access to Early Learning (AEL).
- From 2028, further cohorts (children from concession-card families and triplets/multiple-birth siblings) will join the reform, scaling to 30 hours by 2030.
- Services must continue to apply priority of access criteria and maintain compliance with ratios and teacher delivery.
- The Funding Support Manager will monitor annual Department of Education updates and provide updated guidance as required.

Step-by-Step

1. Stay informed of Pre-Prep updates shared by Busy Bees and the Department of Education.
2. Apply existing enrolment and access rules consistently.
3. Refer family questions to the Centre Director or Funding Support Officer for up-to-date information.

5. Records, Reporting and Compliance

Why this matters

Services are custodians of sensitive family and child information. Compliance with privacy legislation is critical for trust and for meeting DoE audit requirements.

Action Checklist

- **Collect and retain documentation:**
 - Signed *One Funded Place* form (Department template)
 - *Parental Education & Occupation (PE&O)* data
 - Eligibility evidence (e.g. concession card, visa, Aboriginal identification, NDIS plan)
- **Maintain accurate enrolments:**

- Tag funded children correctly in XAP (3YO/4YO program tags; upload KFS evidence)
- Keep enrolment data current in the Department's system (Arrival, replacing KIMS)
- **Meet reporting deadlines:**
 - Complete Annual Confirmation by 30 April each year
 - Complete Free Kinder reconciliation by 31 December each year
- **Audit readiness:**
 - Retain confirmations, reports, and evidence in secure storage
 - Provide records promptly on request from Busy Bees or the Department of Education
- **Confidentiality:**
 - Handle all child and family information in line with the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)

BREACHES

Failure to comply with this procedure may result in recovery of funds by DoE, regulatory action under the National Law, or internal disciplinary action.

REVIEW AND EVALUATION

This procedure will be reviewed annually, or earlier if Department of Education requirements change. Reviews will consider family feedback, audit outcomes, and changes to state or national legislation.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Enrolment and Orientation Policy (National)
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Complaints and Feedback Policy
- Confidentiality and Privacy Policy

VERSION CONTROL

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years and/or in line with legislation and organisation requirements.

Version	Date	Owner	Responsibility	Change Description
1	02/12/2025	Chief Operating Officer	Funding Team	Replace all previous versions

This document is uncontrolled when printed and may be varied, replaced, or terminated without notice.

