

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedural guideline is to provide direction to the council's preschool central enrolment system to ensure that a fair and equitable process for the enrolment and allocation of places in the preschool system is undertaken.

The preschool enrolment procedural guideline is based on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's (DEECD) *'The Kindergarten Guide 2013'* and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) *'A Framework and Resource Guide for Managing a Central Registration Process for Kindergarten Places 2013'*. These documents comply with the legislative requirements of the anti discrimination and human rights laws. In addition, service providers receiving funding from the DEECD are required to operate in accordance with the *Protecting the Safety and Wellbeing of Children and Young People* protocol.

2. BACKGROUND

Wodonga City Council operates as a kindergarten cluster manager and is responsible for the overall management of the six council run preschool sites in the municipality. In addition to this, the cluster provides support to the Koori First Steps Preschool under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation.

The major responsibilities of a cluster manager include:

- The management and employment of staff;
- Compliance with regulatory and funding requirements;
- Demonstrating good governance and financial management;
- Strategically planning for and implementing key government initiatives; and
- Contributing to local early years planning.

Council operates both three year old (3 hours per week) and four year old (15 hours per week) programs. The cluster operates a central enrolment for all preschool places available in the council operated services.

Under the direction of the DEECD and *The Kindergarten Guide 2013*, cluster managers must ensure their application and enrolment policies:

- Promote fair and equitable access to kindergarten programs;
- Support all eligible children to access a kindergarten program, including those who face barriers to participation; and
- Do not inadvertently present barriers to participation.

In order to achieve these objectives, kindergarten cluster managers are required to make sure their enrolment policies/procedural guidelines;

- Comply with the Victorian and national legislation, including anti-discrimination and human rights laws;
- Are developed on the basis of local need determined by surveys of the local community;
- Support children who are experiencing disadvantage;
- Address issues of eligibility for funded places, vacant funded places and vacant unfunded places;
- Outline how waiting lists will be prioritised; and
- Are effectively communicated to families and the local community.

3. DEFINITIONS

Preschool

Preschool is an interchangeable term for kindergarten. The term kindergarten is used by the DEECD and the Victorian Government. In Wodonga the term preschool is used to describe the year before primary school. The reason for this is to negate confusion with NSW as the term kindergarten is used to describe the first year at primary school.

Three year old program (unfunded – user pays, except for *Early Start Kindergarten*)

A three hour per week program that is provided to three year-old children that is planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher.

Four year old program (funded by the DEECD and parent fees)

A universal early childhood program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher to children in the year that is two years before grade one of school, for which funding is received from the DEECD. In Victoria, a funded kindergarten program complies with all the applicable

requirements set out in *'The Kindergarten Guide 2013'* and provides developmentally appropriate program in accordance with the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*. From 2013, this is a 15 hour per week program.

Early start kindergarten

Two types of early start kindergarten grants enable eligible children to access a kindergarten program for up to 15 hours per week in the two years prior to primary school.

- The *Aboriginal Early Start Kindergarten* grant; and
- The *Early Start Kindergarten* grant for children known to Child Protection or referred to Child and family services information, referral and support teams (Child FIRST).

High priority children

High priority children include those:

- Children at risk of abuse or neglect;
- Children in Aboriginal and/Torres Strait Islander families; and
- Children with additional needs, who are defined as children,
 - Who require additional assistance in order to fully participate in the kindergarten program;
 - Who require a combination of services which are individually planned; or
 - Who have an identified specific disability or developmental delay.

Second year

A second year of preschool can be approved and funded by DEECD for children who meet the eligibility criteria as per *The Kindergarten Guide 2013* p. 59.

Deferrals

The funded preschool year for a child can be deferred to the following year if relevant documentation by the early years teacher is forwarded to the DEECD and the child is withdrawn from the program before the end of the second term. Deferrals are made by the recommendation of the preschool teacher in consultation with parents/guardians.

Funding

The DEECD provides kindergarten per capita (per child) grants to service providers as a contribution towards the cost of the funded kindergarten programs. In addition, the DEECD provide the *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy* to eligible children (*The Kindergarten Guide 2013*, p. 42) to enable them to attend a funded program free of charge. Families who are not eligible for the *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy* or the *Early Start Kindergarten* grant are required to pay fees.

4. SCOPE

This procedural guideline provides details of the eligibility criteria for enrolment applications, the prioritisation and reservation of places, time lines for the lodging of enrolment forms and processes.

5. PROCEDURAL IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Eligibility criteria

- 5.1.1 In order to receive kindergarten per capita funding a child must be at least four years of age on April 30 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 April 30 in the year they first attend school).
- 5.1.2 All children eligible to attend kindergarten are entitled to equal access to enrolment in accordance with anti-discrimination and human rights laws.
- 5.1.3 To attend the three hour program or to attend *Early Start Kindergarten*, children are required to have turned three years of age. This is in accordance with the *Education and Care National Regulations 2011*, whereby children must have turned three years of age before attending kindergarten programs to maintain the educator to child ratio requirements.

5.2 Enrolment timelines -new enrolment applications

- 5.2.1 Enrolment applications can be made from March in the year prior to preschool attendance.
- 5.2.2 To be eligible for consideration for the first round offers, enrolments must be lodged at the council by 5.00pm July 30 in the year prior to attendance.
- 5.2.3 Advertisement to enroll will appear each year in the councils 'City Life' and website and 'The Border Mail' newspaper.
- 5.2.4 Allocation of placements will be made in accordance with priority categories.
- 5.2.5 Council cannot guarantee applicants will receive a place at the centre of first preference.
- 5.2.6 Conditions in regard to the number of available preschool places and funding from the DEECD will apply.
- 5.2.7 Letters confirming preschool placement will be issued from August of the year prior to attendance.
- 5.2.8 Each enrolment application submitted after July 31, will be processed within two weeks and a letter issued confirming enrolment or advising the applicant they will be placed on a waiting list until a position becomes available.

5.3 Children currently enrolled in a council early year's service (3 hour program or occasional childcare)

- 5.3.1 Children currently enrolled in the three hour program or attending the occasional childcare service that are eligible for the 15 hour program in the following year will be required to complete a re-enrolment form by June 1, in the year of their attendance. The re-enrolment form will be provided to families by the teaching and education staff.

5.4 How to apply

- 5.4.1 Application forms are available from the following locations:
 - All council operated preschools, childcare, maternal and child health centres and community centres;
 - Wodonga City Council offices; and
 - Wodonga City Council website.

5.4.2 Enrolment applications can be posted or returned to the council offices with a copy of the following relevant documents:

- Proof of age (such as the child's birth certificate or immunisation record);
- Child's health care card details; and
- Immunisation record.

5.4.3 In the case of multiple births, an enrolment form needs to be completed for each child and on the enrolment form indicated whether the child is a twin, triplet or quadruplet.

5.4.4 Letters confirming a preschool placement will be issued to applicants as evidence of enrolment following the allocation of places process.

5.5 Late applications

5.5.1 Applications will continue to be received after July 31 in the year prior to attendance. These will be processed following the first round allocations.

5.5.2 If no places are available, then applicants will be placed on the preschool placement waiting list.

5.5.3 Letters advising the confirmation of a placement or being on a waiting list will be issued within two weeks of the council receiving the application.

5.6 Changes to application details

5.6.1 When applicants wish to alter their original enrolment details, they are to contact the councils early years unit. This includes changes to the applicant's eligibility to receive the DEECD *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy*.

5.7 Application priorities - 15 hour program and three hour program

5.7.1 Places will be allocated based on a priority of access categories. These categories include:

- Children of Wodonga City Council residents who are identified by a parent, carer or guardian as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent;
- Children of Wodonga City Council residents and ratepayers; and
- Children of non-resident ratepayers of Wodonga City Council.

5.7.2 Children who are Victorian residents and do not fit into either of the categories in 5.7.1 will only be allocated a place if there are vacancies after all Wodonga residents and ratepayers have been placed.

5.8 Allocation of places

5.8.1 Places will be allocated in the first instance for children in the following categories:

- Children approved by the DEECD for a second year of funded preschool;
- Places for returning *Early Start Kindergarten* into the 15 hour funded preschool program;
- Children currently enrolled in the three year program or those attending the occasional childcare service who are eligible for preschool the following year;
- Children at risk of abuse or neglect;
- Children in Aboriginal and/Torres Strait Islander families;
- Children with additional needs, defined as children:
 - Who require additional assistance in order to fully participate in the kindergarten program;
 - Who require a combination of services which are individually planned; and
 - Who have an identified specific disability or developmental delay.

This allocation provides fair and equitable access for all children and supports those who may face barriers to participation and complies with Victorian and national legislation.

5.8.2 Children who have had a sibling attend a preschool location in previous years will have this taken into consideration in allocating their preferences. This consideration will only apply if all eligible children identified in 5.8.1 have been placed.

5.8.3 Allocations for applications that are received after July 31, in the year prior to preschool, will be based on availability of places.

5.8.4 If an application is received after July 31 and a child falls into the categories listed in 5.7.1 and 5.8.1 and places are filled and unavailable, their enrolment applications will be considered for priority listing on the preschool waiting list.

5.9 First round allocations

- 5.9.1 All applications will be allocated according to priority of access criteria and allocation of places.
- 5.9.2 Where application numbers exceed the number of places available at the first preference preschool, applicants will be allocated their second then third preference based on availability of places. If there are not places available at all stated preferences, then the application will be offered a place at another service. This process is attended as a random selection by the *Xpedite* preschool system. This random process whereby all children are eligible for the available spaces meets Victorian and national legislation including anti-discrimination and human rights law.
- 5.9.3 If applicants choose not to accept the placement that is offered, a transfer can be requested and the applicant will be placed on a waiting list for the requested service. Transfer requests will be placed as a priority on the service's waiting list.

5.10 Review of any remaining places

- 5.10.1 A review of the remaining places will take place which includes applications on the waiting lists and application received after June 31 in the year prior to attendance. Applications will be allocated to available places according to category of priority. If no places are available, applicants will be placed on a waiting list according to priority.
- 5.10.2 The council aims to operate each preschool at a viable occupancy rate according to the DEECD's funding requirements. This requires a minimum number of enrolments in each preschool program.

5.11 Offer of placement letter

- 5.11.1 Letters confirming placement will be sent within 2 weeks of July 31 of each year.
- 5.11.2 Letters advising applicants of unavailable places will be sent within 2 weeks of July 31 of each year. The enrolment application will be placed on a waiting list.
- 5.11.3 Enrolment applications submitted after July 31 of each year will be sent a letter either confirming the preschool placement or advising of unavailability and the placement on a waiting list. This will occur within 2 weeks of the application being received.

5.12 Responses to confirmation of enrolment

5.12.1 Applicants can make one of the following choices upon receiving confirmation of a preschool placement:

- Accept the preschool place with no other requirement needed;
- Request for a transfer of preschool service, in which child will be placed on the waiting list;
- Cancel the enrolment; or
- Defer their child's placement to the following preschool year.

5.12.2 When applicants request:

- A transfer of placement they will remain on the current preschool service class list until a position becomes available. The request will be placed as a priority on the waiting list of the preferred service.
- To cancel their preschool place and be placed on a waiting list for a preferred preschool they will forego the placement offered. The applicant will be placed on the waiting list of their preferred service according to category of priority. Placement is not guaranteed at the preferred service.
- A deferral, the allocated place will be deferred to the following preschool year if the child is still eligible to attend preschool. In deferring, the applicant will forego the place offered, and will be forwarded to the following preschool year with the appropriate confirmation letter.

5.13 Deferral of places once commenced

5.13.1 The preschool teacher in consultation with parents/guardian will lodge the appropriate forms to the DEECD.

5.13.2 Appropriate documentation must be lodged with the DEECD and the child withdrawn from preschool before the end of the second term of attendance. This is to ensure the child remains eligible for preschool funding from the DEECD in the following year.

5.14 Second year of preschool

- 5.14.1 A second year of preschool is only available to children who meet the eligibility criteria as set by the DEECD.
- 5.14.2 The council's early years unit must be notified by the preschool teacher of the number of second year places requested and submit a re-enrolment form.
- 5.14.3 Places will be reserved until confirmation of funding is approved by the DEECD. If the application is not approved the child will have their preschool enrolment cancelled.

5.15 Children who will turn six years of age during the preschool year

- 5.15.1 Children who turn six year of age during the preschool year must be exempted from attending primary school.
- 5.15.2 Parents need to apply for an exemption before the child commences preschool by filling in the appropriate DEECD documentation. Advice can be sought from the preschool service or council's early years unit.
- 5.15.3 If an exemption has not been granted by the DEECD the council cannot accept the child into preschool.

5.16 Transfer of preschool places

- 5.16.1 Once a place has been allocated to a child, a transfer to another preschool service can be requested.
- 5.16.2 The child will be placed on a waiting list for the preferred service whilst maintaining their current position.
- 5.16.3 The child will be placed as a priority on the waiting list.
- 5.16.4 If applicants cancel the place offered, a transfer cannot be requested. The applicant can request to be placed on the waiting list for the preferred service and will be offered a place once all children enrolled in the service have had their requests of transfers met.

5.17 Children with additional needs

- 5.17.1 Children with additional needs are welcome to access council's preschool services.
- 5.17.2 Applicants should notify the council of their child's additional needs on the enrolment form, so that appropriate assistance can be secured and provided.
- 5.17.3 Enrolments will be assessed by the early years unit to determine which service will best meet the needs of the child. This decision will be made in collaboration with parents/guardians.

5.18 Preschool fees

5.18.1 The council has a 'Fees and payment' procedural guideline. Applicants can;

- Request a copy of the fees and payment procedural guideline from the council's early years unit; or
- Access the guidelines on the council website.

5.19 Refunds for cancelled preschool places

5.19.1 If applicants cancel their preschool position and have paid fees a pro-rata refund will be reimbursed. From the date of cancellation, parents will receive their refund through the next council pay run. This will usually be within two weeks of notification of the cancellation.

5.20 Preschool operational sessions

5.20.1 Preschool operational sessions and enrolment numbers will be reviewed annually as part of the allocation process. Sessions may vary from year to year at each centre. Council may make alterations to any preschool session dependant on applications or individual centre numbers at any time.

5.20.2 Consultations will take place yearly to ensure services respond to the demand of the majority of applications.

5.20.3 Eligible children will be able to access 15 hours of preschool per week.

5.20.4 Timetables of sessions are available at the following locations:

- Printed on the back of the parent information booklet;
- Wodonga City Council offices; or
- Wodonga City Council website

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- The Kindergarten Guide 2013, DEECD.
- MAV: A framework and resource guide for managing a central registrations process for kindergarten places.
- Protecting the Safety and Wellbeing of Children and Young People protocol (Victoria).
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2010
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Equal opportunity Act (Victoria) 1995
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986
- Disability Discrimination Act (Commonwealth) 1992

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