



FEES POLICY

Mandatory – Quality Area 7

Rowen Street Kinder Inc. has made the decision to opt in to the Victorian Government’s Free Kinder scheme for 2024. This fees policy should be read with the conditions of this scheme in mind.

Details of the Fees and Family Payment sought for 2024 can be found in Attachment 1

Details of the Free Kinder scheme can be found in Attachment 2

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees
- ensuring the viability of Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc., by setting appropriate fees and charges
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc.

POLICY STATEMENT

Values

Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. is committed to:

- providing responsible financial management of the service, including establishing fees (where applicable) 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 funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents/guardians

Scope

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Person with Management and Control, Nominated Supervisor, Person in Day-to-Day Charge, educators and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child at Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc.

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
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the Nominated Supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of Department of Education’s Free Kindergarten initiative (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	R	√	√	√
Reimbursing families in full for enrolment deposits that have already been paid upon acceptance of enrolment in accordance with this Fees Policy	R	√		
Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted)	R	√		
Ensuring families are only charged for optional kindergarten programs hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or “wrap around” care (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	R	√		
Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the 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	√		√
Ensuring that any surplus funding is used for directly supporting the quality of the teaching and learning in the kindergarten program and/or attendance at the service, including vulnerable children and families not yet enrolled and/or towards the change management required for preparing for three-year-old expansion	R	√		
Ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted	R	√		
Charging families only for an occasional special event/ excursions that occur outside the normal program/curriculum	R	√	√	
Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system	R	√	√	
Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system	R	√	√	
Ensuring that the Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	√		
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kindergarten (<i>refer to Attachment 2</i>)	R	√		
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable	R	√		

Providing all parents/guardians with an additional payment fee agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 3</i>), if applicable	R	√		
Signing and complying with the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (<i>refer to Attachment 3</i>), if applicable				√
Complying with the service's <i>Privacy and Confidentiality Policy</i> regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of additional hours fees	R	√	√	√
Notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the additional hours fees charged, or the way in which the fees are collected (<i>Regulation 172(2)</i>), ideally providing one term's notice.	R	√		
Implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the approved provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	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.		√	√	

Background and legislation

Background

The Best Start, Best Life reform will help all Victorian children dream even bigger through increased access to quality early childhood education and care. A critical part of the reform is Free Kindergarten, which will support access to two years of high-quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children. All families with a child enrolled in a funded kindergarten program are eligible for Free Kindergarten, this includes both 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs.

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

- providing a free 15-hour program to four-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service; and
- 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).

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.

Income from other sources, primarily fees for additional hours and family contributions, is required to meet all the additional costs incurred by Rowen Street Kindergarten in the delivery of its programs.

Department of Education also funds **Early Start Kindergarten** for three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from refugee or asylum seeker background and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs as outlined in The Kindergarten Funding Guide.

Legislation and standards

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006* (Vic)
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic)
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
- *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n)*

- *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* (Vic)
- *National Quality Standard*, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

Definitions

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy, For commonly used terms (eg Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority etc) refer to the General Definitions policy.

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK): A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for up to 15 hours per week. Details are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au. Children that are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) will continue to be enrolled, this ensure that service providers receive all funding entitlements and that these children have access to 15 funded hours of kindergarten across Victoria. 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.

Excursion/special event charge: An additional charge required to meet the cost of special events or excursions that occur in response to emerging children's program needs.

Family Payment: A voluntary contribution by a family (per child) to support the ongoing financial viability of the service, recognising that the cost of operating the kindergarten is not fully funded by the government.

Fees: A charge for program hours over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 per year). This fee is paid in advance prior to the start of each term.

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

Kindergarten Deposit: A fee charged to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service prior to the commencement at the service.

Sources and related policies

Sources

- Best Start Best Life: <https://www.vic.gov.au/give-your-child-the-best-start-in-life>
- *The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education):* www.education.vic.gov.au
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au>
- The constitution of Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc.

Service policies

- *Compliments and Complaints Policy*
- *Delivery and Collection of Children Policy*
- *Enrolment and Orientation Policy*
- *Governance and Management of the Service Policy*
- *Excursions and Service Events Policy*
- *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- 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
- 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
- notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures (*Regulation 172(2)*) unless a lesser period is necessary because of a risk.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: *Fee Information for Families 2024*
- Attachment 2: *Free Kinder: guidelines for services*
- Attachment 3: Additional hours fee payment agreement

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Committee of Management of Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. on 5 June 2023

Review date: MAY 2024

ATTACHMENT 1
Fee information for families
Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. 2024



1. General information

The Department of Education has given services the option to opt into the Free Kindergarten Initiative for 2024. Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. has decided to opt into this program for 2024.

Under this initiative, Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. will charge no fees for all programs up to 15 hours per week. A gap fee will be charged for the extra hours in the Dragonflies and Butterflies group.

The Department of Education also provides funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

2. Fee Structure for 2024

Under the Free Kinder scheme, services are permitted to charge for hours over and above 15 hours per week, provided that attendance for these hours is optional.

The following fees will apply to each group:

3 year-old Beetles 12 hours per week	Term Fees
Terms 1, 2, 3 and 4	Not applicable

3 year-old Butterflies 18 hours per week (fees for the 3 hours above 15 hours per week)	Term Fees
Term 1	\$480
Term 2	\$480
Term 3	\$480
Term 4	\$480
Total	\$1920

4 year-old Ladybugs 15 hours per week	Term Fees
Terms 1, 2, 3 and 4	Not applicable

4-year-old Dragonflies 19.5 hours per week (fees for the 4.5 hours above 15 hours per week)	Term Fees
Term 1	\$720
Term 2	\$720
Term 3	\$720
Term 4	\$720
Total	\$2880

Due to regulations, a child who has not turned three by the commencement of the kindergarten year cannot commence at Rowen Street Kindergarten **until** the child has turned three. However, full fees must be paid to hold the child's place in the applicable program.

3. Kindergarten Security Deposit

On acceptance of a place at Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc, the Kindergarten Security Deposit is payable by a family for each child enrolled. Payment of the Kindergarten Security Deposit is a **mandatory** part of the enrolment process as it secures a child's place in the applicable program offered by the service, and allows the Committee of Management to determine appropriate staffing levels and other planning based on enrolled numbers at the outset of a kindergarten year. The Committee of Management (at its sole discretion) may consider waiving the payment of the Kindergarten Security Deposit in extenuating circumstances as it should not act as a barrier for enrolment of vulnerable families.

The Kindergarten Security Deposit **is** refundable where a family accepts the place in the applicable program and the child remains enrolled at Rowen Street Kindergarten throughout the relevant year.

In such cases, the Kindergarten Security Deposit will be refundable as follows:

- (a) for groups that do not have any additional hours fees (i.e Beetles and Ladybugs), the Kindergarten Security Deposit will be refunded in April in circumstances where the family has not elected to allocate the Kindergarten Security Deposit towards the Family Payment; and
- (b) for groups that have additional hours fees (i.e Butterflies and Dragonflies), the Kindergarten Security Deposit will be refunded from Term 4 fees in circumstances where the family has not elected to allocate the Kindergarten Security Deposit towards the Family Payment. In such cases where remaining fees payable by a family are less than the Kindergarten Security Deposit, the relevant amount will be refunded to families.

The Kindergarten Security Deposit **is not** refundable in the following circumstances:

- (a) where a family accepts a place at the service but ultimately do not enrol and commence at the service; or
- (b) where a family unenrolls at any point during a kindergarten year and the child's place is not filled within two weeks of the child leaving (or such longer period as the Committee of Management may determine in its sole discretion).

The Kindergarten Security Deposit payable per child for 2024 will be:

Group	Kindergarten Security Deposit (per child)
3 year-old Beetles	\$1,125
3 year old Butterflies	\$1,125
4 year old Ladybugs	\$1,125
4 year old Dragonflies	\$1,125

The Committee of Management has set the Kindergarten Security Deposit at the amount of the requested Family Payment. Should a family elect to pay the Family Payment, the Kindergarten Security Deposit will be retained by Rowen Street Kindergarten (rather than being refunded in accordance with section 3 above) thereby reducing the administrative burden on the Committee of Management in seeking additional payments from families.

4. Family Payment

Free Kinder funding does not cover all of the costs and expenses of Rowen Street Kindergarten. In order to cover the gap between Free Kinder funding and kindergarten expenses and to maintain the high-quality programs offered by the kindergarten, Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. requests contributions from families for the following amounts in order to ensure the ongoing financial viability of the service. Payment of these amounts is strongly encouraged, however these voluntary amounts are not required to be paid in order for an enrolled child to attend the service.

Note that Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. is not authorised to receive tax deductible donations

Group	Family Payment (per child)
3 year-old Beetles	\$1,125
3 year old Butterflies	\$1,125
4 year old Ladybugs	\$1,125
4 year old Dragonflies	\$1,125

5. How fees are set

As part of the budget development process, the Committee of Management sets fees each year for the programs of the service to ensure the balance is achieved between the financial viability of the service and the affordability to parents/guardians, taking into consideration:

- the financial viability of the service
- the level of government funding provided for the program
- the availability of other income sources, such as grants and fundraising
- the fees charged by similar services in the area
- the capacity of parents/guardians to pay fees
- reasonable expenditure in meeting agreed program quality standards
- requirements of The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education) available from the Department of Education's website: www.education.vic.gov.au

6. Fundraising

Not all operating costs are covered by the Department of Education funding and fees. Fundraising may be 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 the Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. communities to come together.

7. Excursions and Special Events

One off Excursions and Special Events may be charged separately under the Free Kindergarten Initiative. These will be communicated to families well in advance and be charged separately.

8. Payment of fees

Fees are payable for all enrolled days, including any absences due to illness, holidays or public holidays. The Committee of Management will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

8.1 Procedures for fees collection.

Fees will be invoiced to parents/guardians directly and must be paid in full by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions. The first term's fees must be received in full prior to the child commencing at the service, and fees for subsequent terms must be received in full prior to the applicable term commencing.

For children enrolled after the commencement of a term, an invoice for the Kindergarten Security Deposit will be issued and must be paid in full prior to the child commencing at the service to secure the spot. A pro rata invoice will be issued for term fees, where applicable, and must be paid in full by the date indicated on the invoice. Fees for the remaining year will be invoiced as set out below.

Fees will be invoiced to parents / guardians directly as follows:

- On acceptance of a place, the Kindergarten Security Deposit is payable. The Kindergarten Security Deposit is refundable in the circumstances and at the times set out in Section 3 above.
- Term 1 fees will be invoiced approximately four weeks prior to commencement of the kindergarten year, Term 2, 3 and 4 will be invoiced approximately four weeks prior to the end of the previous term. Invoices must be paid by the due date, prior to the start of the applicable term.
- All families will receive an invoice detailing the charges for the period invoiced and the amount owing (if any).

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying the Kindergarten Security Deposit and/or fees are requested to contact the Treasurer or President 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.

8.2 Method of payment

Payments can be made by debit card payment through the Payrix service (or alternative services at the discretion of the Committee of Management). Any transaction or processing fees associated with the nominated payment systems will be passed on to parents/guardians. Alternatively, Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. also offers bank transfer as a payment method.

9. Unpaid fees

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

- An initial reminder will be issued stating fees are overdue.
- If payment has not been received 10 working days after the initial reminder notice is issued, the parents/guardians will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss alternative payment options and to develop an agreed payment plan. Minutes of this meeting will be kept on file. If a payment plan is agreed, both parties will sign the agreed plan and a copy will be kept on file.
- If the parents/guardians fail to attend the meeting and/or if payment is still not received, the Committee of Management will issue a final written request for full payment within 10 working days from the date of the initial reminder notice. The letter will notify the family that, if payment is not received, the child's place at the service will be cancelled unless otherwise notified by the Committee of Management.
- No further enrolments of children from the parents/guardians will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.
- Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. may engage the services of debt collection agencies if outstanding balances are not paid following the cancellation of the child's place at the service.

The Committee of Management will endeavour to offer support to families experiencing difficulties in meeting fee invoices. The Treasurer, Committee of Management members and staff involved in fee discussions will comply with the Privacy and Confidentiality Policy of Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. Staff may be consulted on a child's attendance rates and any other information required for the Treasurer to fulfill their role

10. Refund of fees and Kindergarten Security Deposit

1. If a child leaves before the end of the term, no pro-rata refund of fees will be available for that term. 4 weeks written notice of departure / withdrawal is required prior to the commencement of the following term.
2. The Committee may consider a partial refund of fees in exceptional circumstances. Applications for a refund must be in writing and must clearly outline the reasons why the child ceased to attend the kindergarten. Any refund will be at the discretion of the Committee and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. An administration fee may be applied.
3. Refunds of fees and the Kindergarten Security Deposit may be provided when the child's place is filled within two weeks of the child leaving the kindergarten. This is at the sole discretion of the Committee of Management.
4. Refer to section 3 above for further details relating to the circumstances in which a refund of the Kindergarten Security Deposit may be considered by the Committee of Management.

Once a place has been accepted, 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 for one or more days when a qualified educator is absent and a qualified reliever is not available
- closure of the service for staff training days
- 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 (i.e. no pro rata fees).

11. Support services

Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to family support services. Rowen Street Kindergarten Inc. can provide information on these services or alternatively families may contact the local council.

12. Notification of fee changes during the term for additional hours

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 one term in advance of any required fee increase and will be offered the option to request a payment plan.

ATTACHMENT 2

Free Kinder – Guidelines for Services

The Department of Education's Free Kinder Guidelines (as updated from time to time) are available on the Victorian Government's website ([Kindergarten funding | Victorian Government \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding))

The guidelines for the 2023 Free Kinder program are available via the following link:

[Service-Guidance-Free-Kinder-2023.pdf \(education.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/service-guidance-free-kinder-2023.pdf)

ATTACHMENT 3 Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement

2024

Please complete this form and return to Rowen Street Kindergarten by [Date]

Fee payment contract

Child's full name:

Parent's/guardian's full name:

- I/we acknowledge that the three-year-old 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) funded kindergarten program is funded by the State Government, with the balance of additional hours over and above coming from fees paid by parents/guardians.
- I/we acknowledge that the four-year-old 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) funded kindergarten program is funded by the State Government, with the balance of additional hours over and above coming from fees paid by parents/guardians.
- I/we agree to pay any additional fees for services above the 600 hours by the due date on the invoice.
- I/we understand that fees for additional hours each term are non-refundable.
- I/we acknowledge that if fees for additional hours are not paid by the due date, the Committee of Management will implement the late payment of fees procedures, as outlined in the Fees Policy, which could result in the withdrawal of my/our child's place at the service and no further enrolments until the outstanding fees are paid.
- I/we agree that if my/our financial circumstances change and I/we am/are unable to pay as agreed, I/we will immediately notify the President and the Treasurer to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received (or can access on the service's website) and read the service's Fees Policy, which outlines the procedure for payment of fees.

Signature (parent/guardian):

Date:

Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with the Rowen Street Kindergarten Fees Policy.