

FEES & PAYMENT OF FEES - PRINCES CLOSE INCORPORATING FUNDED KINDERGARTEN Early Years Services

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the process of establishing the fee structure, fee collection and the procedures for overdue payment of fees.

This policy provides information to parents/guardians regarding the requirements to be eligible to enrol in the funded Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program as outlined by the Department of Education.

2. Policy

Fees structures are determined for Early Years Services after considering the costs of the services and all sources of income. City of Stonnington is committed to providing a fee structure that is clear, transparent, inclusive, and responsible.

Princes Close Early Years Service operates an integrated Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program within the Long Day Care service. For children enrolled in the Funded Kindergarten program, Victorian Free Kinder Offset payments reduce the fees. Services are required to communicate the following information to parents/guardians:

- how the Free Kinder offset will be applied to families' fees
- when payments will begin
- how the offset will be detailed on invoices
- that where families attend more than one service they must choose where the child will participate in the funded kindergarten program
- that children eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) are enrolled and funded under the ESK program.

The City of Stonnington operates a Central Registration Scheme (CRS) for offering funded Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places across the municipality. Princes Close Early Years Service participates in this scheme and families may be offered a place according to the scheme's criteria.

Definitions:

Child Care Subsidy - The main Australian Government payment to assist families with the costs of education and care for their children. It is, with some exceptions, paid directly to providers to be passed on to families as a fee reduction. Families make a co-contribution to their fees and pay the provider the difference between the fee charged and the subsidy amount. This is referred to as the Gap Fee. Additional Child Care Subsidy may be available where certain criteria are met.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Early Years Coordinator
- Team Leaders
- Educators
- Administration Officers
- Parents/Guardians

4. Responsibilities

The following roles are responsible for monitoring compliance with this policy:

- Director Community & Wellbeing
- Manager Community Services
- Early Years Coordinator
- Team Leaders
- Administration Officers
- Educators
- Parents/Guardians

5. Procedure

General information on commencement

- Once parents/guardians have accepted a place, a deposit is required to be paid. This must be paid as soon as possible after accepting the place.
- The place is not guaranteed until the enrolment offer is accepted, the enrolment record is submitted, and the place is confirmed on the My Family Lounge app
- The deposit is then due and payable to finalise the enrolment at the service.
- A registration fee is also charged for each child at this time except if the place is arranged through CRS, as the parent/guardian has already paid a fee as part of this scheme. This registration fee is not credited towards daily fees.
- At this time, an online Enrolment Form for the child must be completed through the My Family Lounge account and submitted to the service, including an up-to-date Immunisation History Statement.
- If the enrolment is for a Funded Kindergarten place, to meet Kindergarten funding eligibility, parents/guardians will be required to complete two forms. These are the Funded *Kindergarten Place Declaration form (One Funded Place form)*, acknowledging that they are accessing their funded Three- or Four-Year-Old Kindergarten place at Princes Close Early Years Service for that year and the *Parental Education and Occupation Details form*.
- Children enrolled for a minimum of two days per week in the Funded Kindergarten program meet the 15 hours program threshold and are eligible to receive the Victorian Free Kinder Offset fee payments.

- Fees are due and payable fortnightly, in advance. All fees must be maintained in advance. Upon enrolment all parents/guardians are provided with a schedule outlining due dates for fee payments for the current year.

Three- and Four-Year Old Kindergarten Program - Priority of Access

- Children enrolled and attending the Long Day Care program at Princes Close will be offered a position in the Three- or Four-Year Old Kindergarten program as a transition between Rooms at the service. This will be based on age and eligible date for enrolment at primary school, and after consultation with parent/guardians.
- If there are more children wishing to enrol in the Kindergarten (Bunjil) Room than there are available places, children enrolling in the Funded Kindergarten program will receive priority of access of places.
- Parents/guardians who wish their child to commence in the Funded Kindergarten program only will be required to lodge an application for placement through the CRS.
- Children who turn 3 years old before 30 April of the applicable year who meet the following conditions are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) funding:
 - come from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or
 - identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or
 - their family has had contact with child protection.

Fee procedure

- Direct Debit through Debitsuccess is the preferred method of payment for all families. Debitsuccess transactions are processed every second Friday for all enrolled days during the upcoming fortnight.
- **It remains the responsibility of the parent/guardian to ensure all fees are paid each fortnight by close of business on the due date.**
- Free Kinder Offset payments will be allocated each week throughout **school terms only**. The first of these payments will be applied from the beginning of Term 1. These credits will be applied fortnightly in advance, in line with the existing billing cycle, prior to Gap Fee being due and payable.
- Parents/guardians will receive reminders via email regarding the dates Free Kinder Offset payments will or will not be applied.
- If a child is enrolled in the Funded Kindergarten program, fees continue to be payable for all enrolled days during designated school term breaks. Free Kinder Offset payments will not be applicable during this time.
- Changes to the fee structure that will affect the fees charged or the way in which fees are collected will be communicated to parents/guardians with a minimum of four weeks' notice.

Payment methods

- **Direct debit** Parents/guardians can complete a Debitsuccess Authorisation either on the My Family Lounge portal or via a hard copy form at the service. By providing credit card details or bank account details, transactions will be automatically processed on the due dates each fortnight by Debitsuccess. Successful payments will be automatically credited to accounts through the Qikkids software program.

Paper forms can only be received in hard copy at the service, not via email, due to Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS).

- **EFTPOS** - Payments can be made by credit card or EFTPOS in person at the service. Credit card payments can also be made by telephone at Princes Close Early Years' Service on 8290 3247.
- **Cash/Cheque payments** – Payments are not accepted via cash/cheque from 1 July 2023 in line with integrity measures put in place by Department of Education.

Fee statements/receipts

- Statements are issued to all parents/guardians fortnightly in line with Department of Education requirements. Additional statements are available upon request.
- Statements display attendance days, actual arrival/departure times, absences, fees charged, recent payments made on the account and absent counts for the current financial year. Child Care Subsidy details will be displayed as an underlined bold estimate or as a final calculation (not bold or underlined) for any fee reductions.
- Free Kinder Offset payments, when applicable, will be displayed on statements (Victorian Government Free Kinder Offset). In these instances, the week commencing date will be shown.

Fees during absences

- Fees are due and payable during any absences as this is an ongoing enrolment for the said child. This includes absences due to illness or holidays etc.
- **Fees are due for attendance days falling on gazetted public holidays at the normal rate.**

Non-payment of fees:

- Parents/guardians experiencing financial difficulties with fee payments may contact the Team Leader and request a payment plan. The parent/guardian will need to advise when the fees will be paid in full as part of the payment plan.
- If any payments required under the payment plan are not received parents/guardians will be given two weeks' written notice that their enrolment will be cancelled.
- If full payment has not been made within two weeks the parent/guardian will be advised that their child's enrolled days will be reduced immediately. If fees are not brought up to date the enrolment will be ceased.
- For Debitsuccess transactions, an additional fee of \$19.95 is charged to the parent/guardians if a payment is declined. Payment is then required to be made at the service as soon as practicable.

Debt collection

- When a child's enrolment has been terminated and the account remains due after a reasonable time: "Debtors will be referred to the Debt Collector contracted by Council to ensure fees are paid for all services operated by City of Stonnington."

Additional/casual days

- An administration surcharge will be implemented for additional casual days booked for children.

Late collection of children

- A late collection fee will be applied to any account when the parent/guardian has not collected their child before the designated closing time for the service. The fee will include an initial penalty fee for the first 10 minutes and an additional fee per 10 minutes or part thereof until the parent/ guardian/ authorised person collects the child. Continual late collection of children may result in cancellation of the enrolment for the child.

Cancelling/Ceasing Enrolment

- Parents/guardians are expected to provide a minimum of two week's written notice (10 business days) when discontinuing the enrolment at the service. The notice period will be effective from the business day following written notification being received by the service.
- A Notification to Cease Enrolment form is required to be completed and passed on to the Team Leader or Administration Officer.
- Regardless of when the enrolment ceases, there is no CCS entitlement after a child's last physical day of attendance. Full fees will apply, or be recalculated by Services Australia, if absences occur at the end of a child's enrolment.
- If parents/guardians reduce their enrolled days in the funded Kindergarten Program and attend less than two days per week, eligibility for Free Kinder Offset payments will cease.
- If parents/guardians give notice to cease enrolment at the service and one or more Free Kinder Offset payments have been allocated in advance, these payments will be reversed.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

- Parents/guardians are encouraged to contact Centrelink to determine their eligibility for CCS.
- Both the parent/guardian and the child CRN's need to be provided to enable the CCS enrolment to be linked to the service.
- Parents/guardians are then required to confirm the CCS enrolment in their Centrelink account. This allows the Qikkids software program to estimate any fee reductions the parent/guardian may be entitled to.
- The parent/guardian is liable to pay any Gap fees not covered by CCS for enrolled sessions.
- **All parents/guardians will be charged full fees unless they provide their Customer Reference Numbers (CRN's) and link their approved CCS assessment to Princes Close.**

Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS)

- Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) may be available for parent/guardians eligible for CCS, who also meet one of the following criteria:
 - grandparents on income support who are the primary carer of their grandchild
 - parent/guardians transitioning from income support to work
 - families experiencing temporary significant financial hardship
- The application process to determine eligibility is through Centrelink. If approved, ACCS entitlements are paid to the service.
- Where a child is identified at “risk of serious harm, abuse or neglect” the service can apply for ACCS Child Wellbeing on behalf of the parent/guardians.
- Supporting documentation is required from external support agencies or professional practitioners to allow submission of any ACCS Child Wellbeing applications.
- If the service applies for ACCS child wellbeing a referral must be made to an appropriate support agency. This is a requirement under Family Assistance Law.
- The service must also follow Victorian reporting obligations. This is commonly referred to as mandatory reporting.
- In some instances, ACCS may cover the entirety of the gap fees for the approved period. In this instance, the parent/guardian will not be charged gap fees for the enrolled place for this time.
- ACCS applications may be lodged for additional time periods if the child is still deemed to be at “risk of serious harm, abuse or neglect.”
- If an application for ACCS is rejected, fees will be calculated according to any existing CCS eligibility, and parents/guardians will be liable to pay any resulting gap fees.
- Further information can be discussed with the Team Leader or Administration Officer.

Free Kinder Offset

- Children enrolled in the Funded Kindergarten Program are eligible for an additional fee offset – Free Kinder Offset - which will further reduce the gap fee payable for eligible weeks during the Victorian school term dates.
- Free Kinder Offset payments are approved Third Party Payments and are allocated after any applicable CCS payments have been estimated and applied to sessions.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) – Conditions

- Parents/guardians are required to sign a Complying Written Arrangement (CWA) form. This confirms that the service is receiving government funding on their behalf as part of the enrolment and provision of an Early Childhood Education and Care program. The CWA form confirms the enrolment at the service, the enrolled days and the fees charged.
- Session reports will be submitted through the Qikkids Software program via the Child Care Subsidy System (CCSS) to Services Australia. Any CCS fee reduction entitlements are then calculated, confirmed, and paid to the service.
- Eligibility for CCS is monitored by Services Australia and is dependant on a range of circumstances, including maintaining up to date immunisation records and meeting the work, training, study test.

- Services Australia can adjust or cancel CCS fee reduction entitlements with little notice. Parents/guardians remain liable for any fees that may be recalculated by Services Australia in these circumstances.
- After 14 weeks of non-attendance the child's CCS enrolment will automatically be ceased by Services Australia. Any CCS entitlements paid for absences following the last physical day of attendance will be retrieved by Services Australia.
- Parents/guardians remain liable for any fees that may be recalculated by Services Australia.
- It is the parent's/guardian's responsibility to be informed about and familiar with the terms and conditions for applying for and receiving CCS or ACCS.
- Any breaches of the terms and conditions for receiving CCS or ACCS will result in full fees being due and payable for that time. This may result in parent's/guardian's requiring to 'pay back' benefits previously received as CCS or ACCS.

Verifying attendances

- Parents/guardians/authorised contacts must sign each child in and out via the iPad located within the service. This identifies and records the actual arrival and departure time as well as the person delivering or collecting the child, which is a legal requirement to verify attendance.
- Parents/guardians must confirm absences via the iPad to verify the accuracy of these records next time they are at the service.
- Attendance records for the service may be audited by the Department of Education at their discretion to verify any absences claimed.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) – Absences

- All parents/guardians are eligible for 42 allowable absence days per child per financial year for which CCS will be applicable.
- Once the 42 absences have been used, CCS is payable for additional absences only if the absence is for an additional absence reason such as:
 - Illness with a medical certificate
 - Non-Immunisation
 - Rostered day off
 - Rotating shift work
 - Temporary closure of school
 - Periods of local emergency
 - Court ordered shared custody
 - Attendance at pre-school
 - Exceptional circumstances
- Supporting documentation for all additional absences must be supplied by the parents/guardians and maintained at the service.
- The Department of Education may provide for Additional Absences in periods of local emergency or unforeseen circumstances e.g., a pandemic or natural disasters.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) – Long Day Care (LDC) Limitations

- Holding Fees: When families are on extended holiday/leave and want to continue their children's enrolment, CCS payments may be affected.
- If this holiday/leave exceeds six weeks, the Team Leader will need to seek approval from the Early Years Coordinator on a case-by-case basis to see if the enrolment can continue during this time.
- The parent/guardian may be liable to pay full fees during the absence period in line with CCS guidelines.
- CCS **may not** be claimed, and full fees are due and payable in the following circumstances:
 - Absences prior to the child's first day of attendance.
 - In lieu of fees due and payable for the two weeks' notice required when ceasing the child's enrolment.
 - If the child does not attend their final enrolled day, full fees are due and payable for all absences since their last physical day of attendance.
- If a child is absent within seven days (one week) prior to the commencement of their enrolment, CCS may be payable. This is only applicable if the child's absence is for an approved absence reason, evidence is provided, and they have not exhausted the 42 absences for the financial year.
- CCS may be payable for absences for up to seven days (one week) after the child's last physical attendance at the service at the end of their enrolment. This is only applicable if the child's absence is for an approved absence reason, evidence is provided, and they have not exhausted the 42 absences for the financial year.

6. Relevant Legislation, Policies & Sources

A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999

A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999

Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for Families Child Care Package) Act 2017
Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rules 2017

Child Care Subsidy Secretary's Rules 2017

Child Care Subsidy (Transition of Approved Services) Determination 2018

Child Care Subsidy (What Constitutes a Session of Care) Determination 2018

Department of Education Child Care Provider Handbook

[Child Care Provider Handbook - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)

Department of Education - Funded Kindergarten Place Declaration form (for the applicable year) <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/form-for-parents-one-funded-place-in-2024.docx>

Department of Education - Parental Education and Occupation Details form
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/funding/Parental-education-and-occupation-details.docx>

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010

Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011 SI 653) - Version 1st October 2023

Family Assistance (Immunisation and Vaccination) (Education) Determination 2018

Family Assistance (Public Interest Certificate Guidelines) (Education) Determination 2018

National Quality Standards

8. Related Services Policies/Forms

Complying Written Arrangement (CWA)

Direct Debit Request - Authorisation Form

Enrolment Form

Kindergarten Form for Parents one funded place form

Fortnightly Due Dates

Notification to Cease Enrolment Form

Kindergarten Parental Education and Occupation details form