

ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

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MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL



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STATEMENT

1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to guide Council in relation to the planning, delivery and evaluation of the kindergarten programs provided by Mitchell Shire Council Early Years Management.

2 APPLICATION

Council provides funded kindergarten services to the community within Mitchell Shire. Council recognises the importance of supporting programs which respond to the emerging and changing needs of children and their families. Council acknowledges that kindergarten programs operate in a variety of settings and are provided by other agencies, including community based kindergartens, long day care centres and schools.

3 DEFINITIONS

Early Years Management – Early years management brings together a group of kindergartens under the management of a single organisation.

Department of Education and Training (DET) – The Victorian State Government department with primary responsibility for the funding, approval, monitoring and quality assessment of services in Victoria in accordance with the national legislative framework and in relation to the National Quality Standard.

Victorian Kindergarten Funding Guide - This document assists organisations currently receiving or wanting to apply for kindergarten funding and to inform early childhood service providers of the policies, procedures and funding criteria associated with the Victorian kindergarten program.

Community-based kindergarten - A kindergarten which is managed by a 'not-for-profit' organisation.

Long day care service - A centre-based form of child care service providing all day or part-time care.

Funded organisation - A legal entity or organisation that has entered into a service agreement with the Department, receives the funds, and has responsibility for the management of funds and delivery of kindergarten programs. Also known as a service provider. A funded organisation may be responsible for the provision of kindergarten programs at a number of locations.

Funded kindergarten service - The children's service location for which an organisation is in receipt of kindergarten per capita funding and/or kindergarten cluster management grant payments to deliver a kindergarten program. Funded kindergarten services may operate in a variety of settings such as long day care centres, stand alone community-based settings and schools.

Kindergarten for four-year-old children – A universal early childhood program, funded by the State Government, for children in the year prior to commencing primary school (two years before Grade One). Children attending a kindergarten program receive a

developmentally appropriate program, planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher, which furthers the child's social, emotional, cognitive, physical and language development.

Per capita grant - An annual amount paid by the Victorian Government for each eligible child enrolled and attending a funded kindergarten program.

School – An organisation classified by the Victorian Department of Education and Training as a school.

National Early Years Learning Framework - The development of the National Early Years Learning Framework is linked to the National Quality Standard to ensure delivery of nationally-consistent and quality early childhood education, and underpins access to quality early learning in the year before formal schooling. The National Framework outlines five learning outcomes which are designed to capture the integrated and complex learning and development of all children across the birth to five age range.

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework - The Victorian Framework advances all children's learning and development from birth to eight years. It does this by supporting all early childhood professionals to work together and with families to achieve common outcomes for all children.

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 & Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 - All children's services must be licensed by the Department of Education and Training and comply with the National Act and Regulations.

Integrated long day care program – For the purposes of kindergarten funding, an integrated long day care program is a funded kindergarten program and a long day care program offered in the same premises at the same location. Children may or may not attend both programs.

4 REFERENCES

Mitchell Shire Council Plan 2017-2021
Mitchell Shire Council Life Stages Plan 2017-2021 (in development)
Victorian Kindergarten Funding Guide 2017
National Early Years Learning Framework 2009
Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework 2016
Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
Child Safe Standards Policy

5 POLICY

5.1 Policy Principles

The Mitchell Shire Kindergarten Services Policy has been developed with the following principles:

- Children's personal, family and cultural histories shape learning and development. The service is committed to acknowledging and supporting our diverse communities and families.
- Families are the primary influence on children's learning and development. Involvement is encouraged and the voices of all our children and their families are welcomed and valued.
- Children benefit from high quality inclusive services provided by professionals who are well supported to adopt contemporary and evidence based practices.
- Contributions from multidisciplinary agencies and professionals provide better support to families. Partnerships are valued and collaboration is facilitated.
- Services, facilities and infrastructure are provided by a range of organizations and governments. All can effectively contribute to the needs of our families and our future plans.
- Quality planning and sustainability awareness will support and promote future flexible and responsive kindergarten services.

5.2 Kindergarten services within Mitchell Shire

Kindergarten services provided in Mitchell Shire are influenced and driven by:

- A growing population
- Policy positions of Federal and State government in relation to the provision and delivery of early years services
- State funding received to meet the costs of providing services
- The need to support the diverse and individual characteristics of the community

Council recognises it is not responsible for the provision and delivery of all kindergarten programs in Mitchell Shire. Across Victoria, kindergarten programs are delivered in a range of settings by a range of providers, including educational institutions, private and community child care organisations, religious organisations, private and community early years managers, State and local government.

Council's objectives in relation to kindergarten services within Mitchell Shire are to:

- Collect, maintain and enhance knowledge of kindergarten services and use this knowledge to support thriving service provision and innovation.
- Provide flexible and reflective services to respond to the needs of the community within resources available.
- Facilitate and maintain partnerships with policy and funding agencies to advocate for funding and resources.
- Maintain a current and comprehensive knowledge of demographic trends within the municipality to support effective service planning and responsible management of Council's kindergarten services
- Seek and utilise feedback from the children, families, the community, service providers and agencies, to understand expectations and identify opportunities to improve service provision and delivery.

5.3 Mitchell Shire Council Kindergarten Service Provision

Council will provide funded kindergarten services that:

- Meet requirements of the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* and the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*.
- Provide programs which meet the requirements of the National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care.
- Operate within a licensed children's services premises.
- Meet requirements under the Victorian Kindergarten Funding Guide.
- Deliver programs underpinned by the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and the National Early Years Learning Framework.
- Deliver educational programs planned and delivered by qualified, experienced and knowledgeable staff.
- Promote and support early childhood professionals to use the practice principles for learning and development, necessary for every child to learn and develop.
- Make the best and most efficient use of the resources available to Council to provide kindergarten services.
- Where possible, offer flexible service options within the limitation of Council's budget and human resources.

5.4 Service planning

Regular and ongoing kindergarten service planning will be undertaken to ensure Council has a current and comprehensive knowledge of:

- The Mitchell municipality which includes:
 - Demographics
 - Population growth and projected growth
 - The cultural mix and changing diversity of the community
- Service utilisation and projected demand in relation to kindergarten services
- Community expectations of kindergarten services
- Service innovations in the kindergarten environment
- Federal, state and local government policy context and funding in relation to kindergarten services.

5.5 Service options, provision and innovation

Kindergarten services provided by Council will be reviewed regularly as part of the ongoing service planning process to determine how effectively the range and provision of services are meeting the needs of the community and the need to modify services.

Services are modified in conjunction with early years staff and consider the needs of the community and the responsible use of Council resources.

A formal business case, including service demand, establishment and operational budgets will be prepared for all proposals for new and/or alternative service options.

Opportunities to collaborate and/or partner with other agencies to develop service options not currently available will be actively sought.

Council will actively explore and investigate opportunities for service innovation within the kindergarten system. Opportunities for innovation may be initiated and driven internally or may be part of alliances, collaborations or partnerships with other agencies or service providers.

5.6 Financial Management

Council receive funding for kindergarten services from DET in the form of a per capita grant for each eligible child enrolled in the program. Funds received do not cover the full cost of providing and delivering kindergarten programs. Further funding is sought through parent term fees and Council contributions. Council will ensure effective and responsible financial management in relation to the provision and delivery of kindergarten services by quantifying the full cost of providing kindergarten services.

Cost considerations may include but not be limited to:

- Direct contact hours
- Staff recruitment and availability
- Occupational health and safety
- Staff supervision and support
- Best practice standards
- Consumables
- Facility maintenance

6 FURTHER INFORMATION

6.1 Human Resource Management

Council has a legislative requirement to employ specifically qualified early years staff. Staff are required to maintain skills and qualifications which are supported and monitored by Council.

6.2 Evaluation and continuous improvement

Licensed kindergartens are required to undertake and regularly review Quality Improvement Plans for their service, to ensure practice principles under the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework underpin their program planning and delivery, to enhance the learning outcomes for all children within the service.

Early Years Managers are required to undertake an annual Self Assessment Tool used to identify areas of focus for each core responsibility. This informs the development of the annual Service Improvement Plan that is a funding requirement from DET.

7 REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every three years by Council, based on feedback from Councils' early year's staff, the community, families, children and other local early years staff and agencies.