

Mandatory – Quality Area 7

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- the establishment, invoicing, payment and collection of Kindergarten Fees;
- ensuring the viability of Bethany Kindergarten Services (BKS), by setting appropriate Fees and charges; and
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of Fees across the programs provided by BKS.

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

BKS is committed to:

- providing responsible financial management of the Early Years Management Organisation, including setting Fees that will result in the organisation being financially viable, while keeping Fees at the lowest possible level;
- providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and/or inability to pay Fees and outstanding debts;
- working to eliminate financial barriers for families wanting to have their child access a funded early childhood program for their child/children;
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians;
- advising families about program funding, including government support and Fees to be paid by parents/guardians; and
- providing equitable access to kindergarten programs for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.

SCOPE

This policy applies to BKS as the Approved Provider, BKS staff, Kindergarten Parent Advisory Groups and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child at a BKS Kindergarten.

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

Background

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides per capita funding as a contribution towards the costs of the four-year-old kindergarten program. Income from other sources, primarily Fees, is required to meet all the additional costs incurred in the delivery of the children's program. In addition, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer to *Definitions*) enables eligible families to attend the four-year-old kindergarten program at no cost. DET provides funding for eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection or referred to Child FIRST, to access kindergarten programs as outlined in the DET Kindergarten Guide. Pre-kindergarten (3 year old) programs do not receive government funding. All costs associated with the pre-kindergarten program are met by the payment of parent Fees.

Bethany Kindergarten Services – Fees Policy

DET requires that Early Years Management Organisations have a comprehensive written Fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. The policy must include a written statement about the Fees to be charged, as required under Regulation 168(2) (n), and the payment process. All families must be informed of applicable term and annual Fees at the time of enrolment. Services must also advise eligible families of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy arrangements. The Fees charged must comply with the *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy* , and be responsive to the local community and the viability of the organisation. *The DET Kindergarten Funding Guide* outlines the criteria to be covered in the policy.

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 2010* (Vic);
- *Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Child Care Rebate) Act 2011*;
- *National Quality Standard*, Quality Area 7: Leadership and Service Management Standard 7.3: Administrative systems enable the effective management of a quality Service.

The most common amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

Victorian Legislation- Victorian Law Today: <http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au>

Commonwealth Legislation –ComLaw: <http://www.comlaw.gov.au>

DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy.

Approved Provider: An individual or organisation that has been approved by the DET as fit and proper (in accordance with Sections 12, 13 and 14 of the National Law) to operate one or more education and care services. BKS is the Approved Provider for all BKS Services.

Bethany Kindergarten Services: the Approved Provider as defined above.

Bethany Kindergarten Services Central Support: The centralised administration and support team with overarching responsibility for the delivery of BKS Kindergarten programs.

Child Care Benefit (CCB) – For Registered Care only: A Commonwealth Government payment to help families who use registered care services. Eligible families can receive a Child Care Benefit. Details are available at www.familyassist.gov.au/payments/family-assistance-payments/child-care-benefit/ - the CCB is no longer applies to sessional kindergarten from 01 July 2018, contact DET for further information.

Early Years Management Organisation: Bethany Kindergarten Services (BKS)

DET: Department of Education and Training.

Early Start Kindergarten: A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection or referred to Child FIRST to attend an additional kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for a specific number of hours. Details are available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/parents/kindergarten/Pages/earlystart.aspx>.

Bethany Kindergarten Services – Fees Policy

Fees Policy: this policy as amended from time to time.

Fees: The contribution made by parents or guardians of the Kindergarten children to the cost of the program provided to the Kindergarten children.

Kindergarten Children: The children enrolled and attending at the Service.

Kindergarten Parent Advisory Group: The group established by parents of the Kindergarten children at each Service.

Kindergarten Acceptance Deposit: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service. This is deducted from Kindergarten term Fees.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A state government subsidy paid directly to BKS to enable eligible families to attend a funded kindergarten program at minimal or no cost. Details are available at

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderFeesubsidy.aspx>

Kindergarten Registration Fee: A payment contributing to administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's enrolment application for a place in a program at the Service.

Late collection charge: A charge that may be imposed by BKS as the Approved Provider when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program (refer to Attachment 1 – Fee information for families).

Nominated Supervisor: A person who has been nominated by the Approved Provider of the Service under Part 3 of the Act to be the Nominated Supervisor of that service, and who has consented to that nomination. The Nominated Supervisor has day-to-day responsibility for the Service in accordance with the National Regulations. All Services must have a Nominated Supervisor.

Pre-Kindergarten: A 3 year old Kindergarten Program (refer BKS Parent Handbook).

Registered Care - in relation to CCB: Care provided by nannies, grandparents, relatives or friends, educators working within kindergartens, occasional care services and outside school hours care services that are registered with the Family Assistance Office. Eligible families can receive some reimbursement of costs when using a registered care provider. Details are available at www.familyassist.gov.au/payments/family-assistance-payments/child-care-benefit/ - the CCB no longer applies to sessional kindergarten from 01 July 2018, contact DET for further information.

Regulation: The *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*

Responsible Person: An educator who consents to being placed in day-to-day charge of the Service.

Service: An associate member kindergarten of BKS.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

Sources

- *DET Kindergarten Funding Guide*

Service policies

- *Complaints and Grievances Policy*
- *Delivery and Collection of Children Policy*
- *Enrolment and Orientation Policy*
- *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*

PROCEDURES

BKS as the Approved Provider is responsible for:

- Developing and reviewing the BKS budget to determine fee income requirements;
- setting the Fees for all BKS Services;
- developing a Fees Policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay Fees, while providing a high-quality program and maintaining organisational viability;
- implementing and reviewing the Fees Policy in line with the requirements of *DET Kindergarten Funding Guide*
- ensuring that this Fees Policy is based on the principles of the *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy*;
- considering any issues regarding Fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at BKS and removing those barriers wherever possible;
- reviewing the number of families experiencing financial hardship and the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered;
- considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families;
- providing all parents/guardians with access to a statement of Fees and charges (refer to Attachments 2 and 3) upon enrolment of their child, and ensuring that the *Fees Policy* is readily accessible to families (Regulation 171);
- requiring all parents/guardians to agree to pay Fees via agreement in the kindergarten enrolment form;
- providing all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions;
- collecting and recording all Fee payments;
- complying with the BKS *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of Fees; and
- notifying parents/guardians within 14 days of any proposed changes to the Fees charged or the way in which the Fees are collected (Regulation 172(2)).

The Nominated Supervisor and Responsible Person are responsible for:

- communicating this policy and payment options to families;
- complying with the BKS *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of Fees;

Bethany Kindergarten Services – Fees Policy

All BKS staff are responsible for:

- informing BKS as 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 BKS Central Support as the Approved Provider; and
- when required assisting the Approved Provider, in sighting supporting documentation for access to the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.

Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- paying Fees by the due date;
- ensuring BKS have current contact details;
- providing the required documentation to enable BKS to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for eligible families (refer to Attachment 1 – Fee Information for Families);
- notifying BKS as the Approved Provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of Fees; and
- reading the attached documentation (refer Attachment 1: Fee Information for Families).

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purpose of this Policy have been achieved, BKS as the Approved Provider will:

- monitor the implementation of, compliance with and complaints about this Policy;
- keep the Fees Policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice; and
- revise the Fees Policy and the procedures set out in the Fees Policy as required.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Fee Information for Families.

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Bethany Kindergarten Services Board in July 2018

NEXT REVIEW DATE: 01 JUNE 2020

ATTACHMENT 1: FEE INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

1. Why are Fees necessary?

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides per capita funding as a **contribution** toward the costs of providing a four-year-old kindergarten program. BKS meets the balance of costs through charging Fees. Three-year-old kindergarten is funded exclusively by parent Fees. DET provides a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer below) that enables children from eligible families to attend a four-year-old kindergarten program at a minimal cost or free of charge. DET also provides funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection or referred to Child FIRST, to access additional kindergarten programs. Kindergarten Fees are compulsory and must be paid by the due date. BKS provides a range of support options to parents/guardians experiencing difficulty with payment of Fees.

2. How Fees are set?

The BKS Board sets Fees each year for the programs offered by BKS services, taking into consideration:

- financial viability of BKS Kindergartens and the Early Years Management Organisation;
- the level of government funding provided for the program, including the per capita and Kindergarten Fee Subsidy;
- availability of other income sources, such as grants;
- Fees charged by similar services in the area;
- capacity of parents/guardians to pay Fees;
- requirements of the DET Kindergarten Funding Guide; and
- reasonable expenditure in meeting the agreed program quality and standards.

3. Are there other Kindergarten Charges?

- **Kindergarten Registration Fee:** BKS charges an administration fee to register a child for kindergarten. This fee is not charged to families who have provided BKS with evidence of being eligible for a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy. This fee is not refundable.
- **Kindergarten Acceptance Deposit:** BKS charges a fee for families accepting a kindergarten place. This fee is deducted from Kindergarten Term Fees. Families accepting a four year old place that have provided BKS with evidence of being eligible for a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy are not required to pay the kindergarten acceptance deposit.
- **Late Collection Charge:** The BKS Board reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by the BKS Board.
- **Levies:** BKS does not charge families any additional levies.

4. Fundraising

Fundraising may be undertaken by Kindergarten Parent Advisory Groups to pay for additional items for the Service. The participation in fundraising is voluntary. The BKS Parent Advisory Group Partnership Agreement provides further information regarding fundraising activity.

5. Subsidies

5.1 Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

For eligible families, the State Government provides a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy to provide for 15 hours of kindergarten per week. Eligibility conditions can be found on the DET website. Families who are currently eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (four year old programs only) include those where:

- ❖ the child is identified by a parent, carer or legal guardian as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- ❖ the child individually holds, or has a parent or guardian who holds one of the following:
 - ❖ a Commonwealth Health Care Card;
 - ❖ a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card;
 - ❖ a Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card or White Card;
 - ❖ Refugee visa (subclass 200);
 - ❖ In-country special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201);
 - ❖ Global Special Humanitarian concern visa (subclass 202);
 - ❖ Temporary Humanitarian concern visa (subclass 786);
 - ❖ Protection visa (subclass 866);
 - ❖ Emergency Rescue visa (subclass 203);
 - ❖ Woman at risk visa (subclass 204);
 - ❖ Bridging visas A-E; or
 - ❖ The child is identified on their birth certificate as being multiple birth child (triplets or more).

Supporting documentation must be sighted by BKS as the Approved Provider on acceptance of a place or during the year if a family becomes eligible for a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy or a concession card expires. It is the responsibility of the family to provide this information to BKS. Families are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for the full term in which their concession is valid.

5.2 Early Start Kindergarten Grants

Three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children known to Child Protection or referred to Child FIRST are eligible to attend Early Start Kindergarten. This is an additional funded early childhood program that is planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher free of charge. BKS receives funding for children who meet the eligibility criteria. Contact BKS Enrolments for further information.

6. Child Care Benefit (CCB) – For Registered Care

Child Care Benefit (CCB) - receipts will no longer be issued due to a change in the legislation.

Further details are available at:

<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/child-care-benefit>

<http://www.education.gov.au>

7. Invoicing and Payment of Fees

The BKS Board will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Kindergarten Term Fees will be invoiced annually to parents/guardians. Unless fully paid at the commencement of the year, each term's fee must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Invoices and any subsequent statements will be accompanied with payment instructions.

Families may choose from the following payment options:

- ❖ self-managed banking transfers;
- ❖ Cash/cheque
- ❖ credit card;
- ❖ direct debit instalments (Credit or Debit card); or
- ❖ Centrepay instalments.

Fees are due in advance of attendance, and are due as indicated for each Term on the invoice. The first term's Fees must be received in full, or an approved payment plan must be in place through Direct Debit, Centrepay or an agreed arrangement, prior to a child commencing at a service.

For children enrolled after the commencement of a Term, the Term fee will be charged as the Acceptance Deposit and will be charged at a pro-rata fees rate from the date of confirmed Acceptance.

An invoice will be issued and Fees must be paid according to the specified due dates. Receipts will be provided within 5 business days following payments received.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying Fees are requested to contact BKS Central Support to discuss an agreed payment plan.

The *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* of BKS will be complied with at all times in relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances.

8. Overdue Fees

If Fees are not paid by the due date a reminder will be sent to parents/guardians. Where payment is still not received within a further two weeks, BKS will contact families to discuss payment options; including:

- continuing to work with families to resolve the debt through an extended payment plan;
- employing the services of a debt collector to recover unpaid fees through legal action;
- where a debt collector is appointed it may be the responsibility of families to pay the costs incurred by BKS in appointing the debt collector.

9. Notification of fee changes during the year

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

10. Refund of Fees

Refund for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

- if a family becomes eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy during a term, a full refund of the applicable term's Fees (and the Kindergarten Enrolment Fee, where applicable) will be provided when evidence of this eligibility is provided to BKS.

Refund of kindergarten Fees prior to the commencement of the kindergarten year

- if BKS receives written notification of a child withdrawal prior to the end of Term 3 in the year before attendance, BKS will provide a refund of Fees paid upon application. This does not include the registration fee.
- if BKS receives written notification of a child's withdrawal prior to the end of Term 4 in the year before attendance, BKS will provide a 50% refund of the Fees paid upon application. This does not include the registration fee.
- if BKS receives written notification of a child's withdrawal after the end of Term 4 in the year before attendance, the parent/guardian will not be eligible for a refund of Fees paid except in extraordinary circumstances.

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 or
- withdrawal of a child during term time unless exceptional circumstances apply.

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.

If a family no longer requires a kindergarten place during the kindergarten year, BKS must be provided with 4 weeks written notification that the position is no longer required. Where written notification is provided within the timeframe, Term fees may be adjusted to a pro rata rate for the weeks attended.

Families wishing to reserve a pre-kindergarten (3 year old program) place for children turning three during the year of enrolment, will be liable to pay term Fees from the first day of Term one. Children can only commence the pre-kindergarten program after they have turned three years old. This is only applicable if the child turns three years old on or before 30 April.

11. Support Services

Families experiencing financial hardship may benefit from accessing family support services. Information on these services is available from BKS.

12. Summary of Fees and Charges

An outline of current BKS fees and charges can be accessed at the BKS website.