



## 2026 Free Kinder information for families

### 1. General information

Kindergarten programs for three-year-old children and Kindergarten or Pre-Prep for four-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free as part of the Best Start, Best Life reform.

Free Kinder provides families with a free program in sessional services and a fee offset in long day care services.

This investment will save families up to \$2,627 for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program.

DE 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.

Operation hours	Session Times
<b>Session Days and Times</b>	<u>Amber Group</u> (3 year old kinder): Thursday 8.30am – 4.00pm <u>Cherry Group</u> (4 year old kinder): Monday 8.30am – 4.00pm and Tuesday 8.30am – 4.00pm (Additional hours/wrap around care may be available as per Attachment 2) <u>Yellow Group</u> (4 year old kinder) Wednesday 8.30am – 4.00pm and Friday 8.30am – 4.00pm (Additional hours/wrap around care may be available as per Attachment 2)
	<b>Term Dates</b>
<b>Term 1</b>	Wednesday 29 <sup>th</sup> January – Thursday 2 <sup>nd</sup> April Organisational Days and Starting Dates for children to be advised in December 2025
<b>Term 2</b>	Monday 20 <sup>th</sup> April – Friday 26 <sup>th</sup> June
<b>Term 3</b>	Monday 13 <sup>th</sup> July – Friday 18 <sup>th</sup> September
<b>Term 4</b>	Mon 5 <sup>th</sup> October – Thursday 17 <sup>th</sup> December Closure for Organisational Day - Friday 18 <sup>th</sup> December
<b>Planned Closures</b>	Thursday 23 <sup>rd</sup> April and Friday 26 <sup>th</sup> June
<b>Additional Hours account for closure</b>	Not Applicable

### 2. What Free Kinder means at our service

Progress Kindergarten has opted in to the Free Kinder initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (7.5 hours per week) – no parent fee
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee

### 3. Pre-Prep (see Definitions)

From 2026, all Victorian funded early childhood education services will start to deliver Pre-Prep to eligible children from priority cohorts across the state. Pre-Prep will launch to eligible children from

priority cohort groups in 2026 and 2028. From 2026, between 16 and 25 hours of Pre-Prep will be available to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- children from a refugee or asylum seeker background
- children who have had contact with Child Protection
- children who were supported by Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) or Access to Early Learning (AEL) in their Three-Year-Old Kindergarten year.

#### 4. Other charges (over and above the free kinder hours per week)

Other charges levied by [Company] include:

- **Excursion/service event charge (outside of the weekly program):** At times throughout the year an additional excursion(s) or event(s) may be arranged where it is considered relevant to the service's program and the children's interests. At this time any additional costs to families are taken into consideration before a decision is made about any charges ([refer to Excursions and Service Events Policy](#)).
- **Late collection charge:** The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by the Committee of Management ([refer to Statement of additional hours/wrap around care fees below](#)). *This fee will apply to when children not registered for additional hours are collected after 4pm.*
- **Additional Hours and/or Wrap Around Care fees:** The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides funding for each child enrolled and attending kindergarten in the year before school as a contribution toward the costs of providing the program and also provides funding in relation to the Free Kinder initiative. Wrap around care/additional hours fees are not funded by the Victorian Government and are not covered by CCS.

As part of the budget development process, the Committee of Management sets charges and fees for any additional hours/wrap around care, taking into consideration the following:

- The costs associated with providing this service
- The financial viability of the service
- Reasonable expenditure to ensure meeting program quality and standard
- Requirements of the Free Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training) available from the DET website: [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)

These fees are detailed in the Statement of Additional Hours/wrap Around Care fees below.

#### 5. Additional Hours and/or Wrap Around Care

- In order to comply with the Pre-Prep requirements for priority cohorts, [Company] aims to offer eligible families 1 hour above the 15 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten per week (600 hours per year) from 2026.
- Depending on interest from families and financial viability, all families in **Cherry Group and Yellow Group** may be offered the option of additional hours. This will be discussed with families and the outcome advised by the start of Term 1, 2026.
- The additional hours/wrap around care option does not apply to the 3-year-old kindergarten program (**Amber Group**).
- The additional hour will be applied in 30 minute increments at the end of each daily session ie: from 4pm to 4.30pm. Families may choose to opt in for the additional time on one day or both days. Families will be required to nominate their choice upon enrolment at the service.
- Families have the option of only enrolling for 15 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten and being charged no additional fees ie: finish at 4pm.
- Families that are eligible for priority access will be able to access the additional hour per week at no cost. The service will contact eligible families on enrolment to advise this option is available.

- If families wish to cancel their child's enrolment in the additional hours/wrap around care program this must be done 4 weeks prior to the commencement of each term.

## 6. Payment of fees for Additional Hours/Wrap Around care

- Fees are payable for hours over and above 15 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten per week (600 hours per year)
- 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.
- Fees will be invoiced to parents/guardians directly and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions.
- Fees are due and payable **in advance** at the start of each term. An invoice will be issued 4 weeks prior to the start of term.
- Invoices must be paid in full prior to the child accessing the additional hours/wrap around care.
- For children enrolled after the commencement of a term, a pro rata invoice will be issued and must be paid in full within 14 days of the child's commencement at the service.
- Receipts will be provided for all fee payments.
- Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Director 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.

## 7. Refund of fees

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 or organisational 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 additional hours/wrap around care on any given day.

## 8. Unpaid fees for Additional Hours/Wrap Around Care

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

- An initial reminder letter will be sent to parents/guardians with a specified payment date and will include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- Where payment is still not received, families will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan.
- Failure to attend the meeting and continued non-payment may result in a second and final letter notifying parents/guardians that the child's place in the additional hours program may be withdrawn unless payment is made or a payment plan is entered into within a specified period of time. This letter will also include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- The Committee of Management will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector.
- If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place in the additional hours program, the parents/guardians will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing.
- No further enrolments of children from the parents/guardians will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

## **9. Fundraising and voluntary family donations**

While **participation in fundraising is voluntary**, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

Progress Kindergarten accepts and welcomes donations from families and community members. These donations help us provide a supportive, high-quality and engaging environment for the children. All children will receive the same level of education and care, regardless of any voluntary contributions made by family.

Any funds raised through fundraising or voluntary donations are allocated to expenses, resources and equipment that directly benefit the children and our educational program.

## **10. Support services**

Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to family support services. Information on these services may be available from the kindergarten service provider or alternatively families may contact the local council.

## **11. Notification of fee changes during the year for Additional Hours/Wrap Around care**

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.