

Kindergarten Policy

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Approval by:	Council	Responsible Officer:	Manager Early Years
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1. Purpose

At its core, the policy recognises the social value of kindergarten. Kindergarten lays the foundation for lifelong learning, wellbeing, and social inclusion. High-quality kindergarten programs foster children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, support school readiness, and promote equity by ensuring every child, regardless of background, has access to the best start in life. For families, kindergarten provides trusted spaces of care, connection, and belonging, while for the broader community it strengthens social cohesion, inclusion, and resilience.

This policy affirms Council's role as a strategic planner and advocate in the kindergarten sector, guiding its approach to planning, collaboration, and advocacy in support of children and families. It confirms the Victorian State Government's responsibility to fund and regulate kindergartens and outlines Council's aspirations to support stakeholders in delivering high-quality, inclusive, and sustainable services for children in Knox.

The policy establishes a set of Guiding Principles, which articulate Council's overarching vision and values for the kindergarten sector. These are translated into Service Delivery Principles, which reflect the Guiding Principles but are framed in more practical terms. The Service Delivery Principles provide clarity for service providers and partners by defining roles, responsibilities, and ways of working that uphold the vision set out in the Guiding Principles.

Together, the Policy Guiding Principles and Service Delivery Principles establish a shared foundation for collaboration across the kindergarten system.

Context

The Victorian State Government funds and regulates all kindergarten programs. Through the recent Best Start, Best Life reforms, the State has reshaped the kindergarten service system by introducing two years of funded kindergarten before school. These reforms ensure all children have the opportunity to access high-quality early learning in crucial years before formal education, supporting their development, wellbeing, and school readiness.

In Knox, early years education and care is delivered through a mix of standalone kindergartens, kindergarten programs within schools, and long day care (LDC) centres with integrated kindergarten programs.

The standalone kindergarten sector is predominantly managed by non-profit organisations, of which the majority operate from Council owned facilities. This includes community-managed services, services operated under Early Years Management (EYM) arrangements, Council managed and a small number of programs delivered in independent and government schools.

The Child Care sector in Knox is primarily made up of privately operated long day care centres, most of which run on a for-profit basis. This is complemented by long day care non-for-profit services, community-managed non-profit centres, and Council managed. Together, these services deliver integrated kindergarten programs within broader education and care settings, contributing to the overall diversity of the local service system.

Knox City Council continues to directly manage two standalone kindergarten programs, as well as two integrated kindergarten programs, both programs are within the Children and Family Centre Hubs located in Wantirna South and Bayswater. Providing early years services under one roof assists families to have a better awareness of early years services on offer and provides easy access to multiple services.

As part of its planning role, Council operates a Central Registration Scheme that provides families with a single point of entry to register for funded kindergarten places in sessional kindergarten services and ensures that allocation of places are made in a fair and transparent way. Through this system, Council promotes equitable access and supports families to navigate the range of service options available across the municipality. In addition, Council owns the facilities from which the majority of sessional kindergarten programs are delivered, ensuring that local infrastructure continues to support the provision of early years education.

Alongside its broader advocacy role, Council actively promotes high-quality early years education across the municipality. While Council seeks to influence and support quality improvement in all services, its most direct role is exercised through the Central Registration Scheme and the facilities assets leased to kindergarten service providers. Together, these responsibilities give Council a degree of oversight and influence over a substantial proportion of the local kindergarten system, ensuring that quality, accessibility, and equity remain at the centre of service delivery.

Council is committed to working in genuine partnership with the Department of Education, families, educators, service providers, and the wider community. Through a deeply collaborative and integrated approach to planning and service delivery, we strive to support every child to thrive.

Children and Families in Knox are empowered to realise their full potential, connect with their community and live healthy lives.

To support the realisation of this vision in kindergarten in Knox, the work of the Early Years Department with children, families and providers is guided by the following principles:

- **Quality early learning:** Supporting high-quality kindergarten experiences that foster children's development, wellbeing, and readiness for school.
- **Inclusive access:** Ensuring all children, regardless of background, ability, or circumstance, can participate in and benefit from kindergarten.
- **Collaborative partnerships:** Strengthening relationships between Council, providers, families, and the broader early years sector to deliver better outcomes.

- **Adaptability and responsiveness:** Building a policy framework that can evolve with changing community needs, sector reforms, and local priorities.
- **Sustainability and long-term impact:** Promoting approaches that are financially, socially, and environmentally sustainable for future generations.

2. Scope

The scope of Knox City Council's involvement in the kindergarten system spans different levels of influence:

Direct scope – Council is directly involved in the operation of two standalone kindergartens and two integrated kindergarten programs within its two Children and Family Centre Hubs, providing an opportunity to model high-quality practice and set benchmarks that influence the broader local system.

Council is the facility owner of many early years facilities and manages the occupancy arrangements provided to kindergarten service providers utilising our facilities for kindergarten programs.

Shared scope – Council's role in this shared scope is guided by the Service Delivery Principles, which frame expectations for partnership, collaboration, and alignment with the Vision and Guiding Principles of this policy. The Service Delivery Principles form part of the lease agreements between Council and kindergarten providers. In practice, Council partners with kindergarten providers, not only by leasing facilities for service delivery but also by supporting equitable and high-quality access to kindergarten places across the municipality.

Council also administers the Central Registration Scheme (CRES), providing families with a single, simplified process to register and apply for multiple kindergarten services. This streamlines enrolments for both families and providers, ensuring a transparent allocation of places. Responsibility in this shared scope is held collectively with the Department of Education, kindergarten service providers, and families.

Indirect scope – For the wider early years education and care system, this includes privately operated and independently managed services, Council's role is primarily one of planning, advocacy, and partnership. While it does not shape day-to-day delivery, Council contributes to system development through strategic planning, policy input, and collaboration with services providers and government.

Across these levels of influence Council's involvement extends beyond service delivery: it helps set expectations, and models good practice.

3. Council Policy

4.1 Council's Role

In relation to this Policy, Council supports the State Government initiatives for two years of funded kindergarten and plays a number of roles in relation to early years education and care services across the municipality, including:

Direct service delivery as an Approved Provider

- Council operates standalone and integrated kindergarten from its two Children and Family Centre Hubs that respond to the diverse needs of children, families and communities and are delivered within the context of service integration.

Management of Facilities and Occupancy Arrangements.

- Council is the owner of early years facilities across the municipality that provide standalone kindergarten programs. Some of these facilities offer other early years programs, such as Maternal Child Health and Playgroups.

Delivery of Central Registration Scheme

- Administration of the 'Central Registration Scheme'. This system supports the community with a single point of contact to register their child for kindergarten across Knox participating kindergarten providers. State Government Funded Kindergarten places are allocated through this system providing families with a fair and equitable way to access a kindergarten program in accordance with the State Government and Local 'Priority of Access Criteria and Funding Guidelines.

Partnerships with non-Council service providers

- Work collaboratively and in partnership with approved providers to achieve quality outcomes for children and families.
- Dissemination of information and connecting service providers through the facilitation of networks.

Municipal planner and advocate;

- Work in partnership with a range of community support services, early years agencies, education providers and families to plan and facilitate effective and coordinated services for children and their families in the municipality, this includes service system planning and developments as well as a whole of community approach to meeting the needs of children and their families.

4.2 Guiding principles

The Guiding Principles express Council's overarching vision for the kindergarten sector in Knox. They articulate the values that underpin high-quality, inclusive, and sustainable services, and provide a shared foundation for planning, partnerships, and advocacy. Each principle highlights a core area of focus—quality, inclusion, collaboration, responsiveness, and sustainability—and together they guide Council and service providers in supporting children, families, and the wider community.

Quality Early Learning High-quality kindergarten services are delivered in a professional and respectful way, grounded in evidence-based practices, family-centred approaches, adult capacity-building, collaborative partnerships, and a strengths-based focus on outcomes.

Council, in partnership with approved kindergarten providers, advocates for and supports the delivery of high-quality kindergarten programs in line with the *Australian Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010)* and *Regulations (2011)*.

Continuity of enrolment and recognition of sibling connections strengthen the stability of children’s learning environments. These practices foster secure relationships with educators, support wellbeing, and enhance readiness for school.

All approved providers, including Council, are responsible for meeting the requirements of the *National Quality Framework (NQF)* and for creating a Child Safe environment as described in the *Victorian Child Safe Standards* under the *Wellbeing and Safety Amendment Act (2015)* and *Child Wellbeing and Safety Regulations (2017)*.

In upholding this principle, Council and Other Kindergarten Providers commit to:

- Delivering programs aligned with the *National Law (2010)*, *Regulations (2011)*, and *NQF*, ensuring Child Safe environments and supporting staff through professional development and reflective practice.
- Recognising the importance of good governance and quality programs as central to achieving better outcomes for children, families, and the Knox community.
- Maintaining facilities that meet *NQF standards* and provide enriched learning environments.
- Operating transparent, equitable, and user-friendly processes for families, consistent with State Government Funding Guidelines.
- Promoting a shared culture of quality across all providers in alignment with the *NQF*.
- Embedding kindergarten quality within broader municipal planning and child wellbeing strategies.

Inclusive access

Inclusive and accessible kindergarten services are welcoming, culturally safe, and responsive to the diverse circumstances of families. They reduce barriers to participation, promote fairness and equity, and ensure that all children can fully engage in learning opportunities regardless of background, ability, or life circumstances.

Application of both State Government and Local Priority of Access (POA) criteria as outlined in the Kindergarten Central Registration Scheme Procedure supports a fair and equitable allocation of kindergarten places. Prioritising children residing within Local Community Areas (LCA) ensures equitable access for families who are part of the service’s defined community catchment. This approach is not based on distance alone. By applying LCA boundaries, Council ensures that families living further from the central and more served areas are not excluded from kindergarten access. Local community areas rebalance demand across the municipality, protecting peripheral families by guaranteeing them access to their designated community area. In this way, LCA prioritisation promotes fairness, reduces barriers to participation, and strengthens community belonging.

Council, in partnership with kindergarten providers, advocates for and supports the delivery of programs that:

- Promote universal access to funded kindergarten and facilitates awareness of State Government supports such as Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) and Access to Early Learning (AEL). These initiatives operate across sessional and integrated settings to enhance inclusion for children experiencing vulnerability.
- Provide a single point of entry through the Centralised Registration Scheme (CRS), creating a fair, transparent, and user-friendly process for families while prioritising vulnerable children.
- Use Local Community Areas (LCAs) as the geographic framework for service planning and enrolment, ensuring that all neighbourhoods, including those in peripheral or historically less-served areas — have fair access to kindergarten places
- Promote diverse service models that reflect local demographics and extend access to all families.

Collaborative partnerships

Integrated and collaborative early years services are grounded in strong partnerships, shared planning, and cooperative networks.

They strengthen connections across providers, families, and government to streamline access, reduce duplication, and create seamless pathways of support for children and families. The Service Delivery Principles, which are aligned with the five Guiding Principles of this policy, provide the foundation for these collaborative approaches.

Acknowledging previous connections to the service (such as siblings attending) reinforces family engagement and community participation. It strengthens relationships between families, providers, and Council, building a collaborative foundation for better outcomes.

Council, in partnership with kindergarten providers, advocates for and supports approaches that:

- Support the co-location of complementary early years and family services to strengthen integration and service coordination.
- Ensure co-location arrangements within Council facilities are formalised through occupancy agreements and commitment to the Service Delivery Principles and maintain Council’s role in prioritising kindergarten access through the Central Registration Scheme (CRS).
- Promote reciprocal data and knowledge sharing to inform local planning and respond effectively to community needs.
- Demonstrate active leadership in building and sustaining strategic partnerships across the municipality.
- Encourage joint training, shared initiatives, and cooperative networks with Early Years Managers (EYMs) and community-managed services.

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- Collaborate with partners to streamline allocation processes and improve navigation for families.
 - Consider local service planning with state and federal policy directions to strengthen cross-sector collaboration and investment.

This principle underpins Council's role in enabling high-quality, accessible, and integrated early years services that meet the diverse needs of the community.

Adaptability and responsiveness

Responsive and Adaptive kindergarten services are forward-looking, and able to adjust to changing community needs. They anticipate demographic and policy shifts, respond to family feedback, and foster innovation to remain relevant and sustainable.

Giving priority to twins reflects responsiveness to demographic realities and family circumstances. This ensures that enrolment practices remain flexible and sensitive to changing community needs.

Council, in partnership with kindergarten providers, advocates for and supports approaches that:

- Encourage adaptation of programs and group sizes to reflect demand, workforce capacity, and evolving family needs.
- Encourage providers to maintain and align facilities with demographic change, pedagogical shifts, and community demand, including by applying for available capital funding opportunities.
- Regularly review and adjust the Centralised Registration Scheme in response to feedback and changing local needs.
- Encourage innovation and adaptability in service delivery models.
- Monitor policy reform and population trends through the Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP) and strategic foresight.

Sustainability and long-term impact

Operationally viable and sustainable kindergarten services are accountable, resilient, and responsive to economic needs. They balance quality with efficiency, align resources with community demand, and support sustainable approaches to ensure the long-term stability of the system.

The tiered prioritisation of LCA residents, Knox residents, and non-residents balances demand with available resources. This supports sustainable service provision, ensuring that kindergarten services remain viable and responsive for future generations.

Council, in partnership with kindergarten providers, advocates for and supports approaches that:

- Promote compliance, workforce resilience, and efficient use of resources to deliver value for families.
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- Maintain efficient systems and data processes.
 - Build resilient partnerships with shared accountability and sustainable service delivery principles.
 - Commit to achieving service sustainability through strategic planning, strong governance, and continuous innovation.
 - Advocate for infrastructure funding to support projects that are durable, environmentally sustainable, cost-effective, and contribute to long-term system resilience.
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4.3 Service Delivery Principles

The Guiding Principles set out in this Policy articulate Council’s overarching vision and values for kindergarten services across Knox. To ensure these principles are translated into practice, they are supported by a set of practical Service Delivery Principles.

The **Service Delivery Principles** apply to all kindergarten service providers operating within Council-owned or early years facilities. They provide a practical framework for how Council and kindergarten service providers work together. They outline expectations for governance, planning, partnerships, access, and sustainability, and set out shared responsibilities, measures, and review processes. In doing so, they act as a bridge between Council’s strategic intent and the day-to-day realities of service delivery.

The Service Delivery Principles are documented in companion frameworks and agreements with service providers. This approach ensures they remain aligned with the Guiding Principles, while allowing flexibility to adapt to changing community needs, evolving service models, and future government reforms. Together, the Policy Guiding Principles and practical Service Delivery Principles establish a shared foundation for delivering high-quality, inclusive, and sustainable kindergarten services for the Knox community.

4.4 Guiding principles and Local Priority of Access

The Guiding Principles set out in this Policy articulate Council’s overarching vision and values for kindergarten services across Knox. These principles are not only supported but are translated directly into the rationale underpinning Council’s Local Priority of Access criteria. In this way, the criteria serve as a practical expression of Council’s commitment to quality, inclusion, collaboration, adaptability, and sustainability. Although the details of the Local Priority of Access are defined and reviewed through Council’s procedures, the rationale is outlined here to ensure transparency and alignment with Council’s strategic intent.

The Local Priority of Access criteria operate after the State Government’s Priority of Access requirements have been applied. The State Government criteria ensure that children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage, and those requiring continuity of enrolment, are given priority across all funded kindergarten services in Victoria. Council fully applies these requirements as the first step in allocation of places.

Following this, Council’s Local Priority of Access criteria provide an additional framework to guide allocations for participating kindergarten providers and the Knox community.

Council’s agreed approach is to prioritise:

1. Children residing within the Local Community Area (LCA).
2. Children residing in Knox but outside the LCA.
3. Children residing outside Knox.

Within each category, further priorities apply:

- Sibling connections are acknowledged, giving preference to families with children currently or previously attending the service.
- Twins are prioritised to support same-service enrolments.

These criteria reflect Knox's responsibility to balance fairness, community connection, and sustainability in service delivery.

4. References

5.1 Community Vision 2025

Knox: where we connect with our people and our environment, ensuring they are safe, supported and have every opportunity to thrive.

5.2 Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-29

- Strategy 1.2 Our community can access diverse training and life-long learning opportunities through delivery, promotion and partnerships with relevant organisations.
- Strategy 1.5 Our community's health and wellbeing is improved through proactive planning, delivery, partnerships and advocacy that enable access to services, education and programs.
- Strategy 2.1 Our community's diverse needs are addressed by ensuring equity and inclusion are considered in decision making and strategic planning.
- Strategy 2.3 Our community is supported to thrive during all stages of life through the promotion and provision of services, advocacy and partnerships with local service providers.
- Strategy 2.4 There are opportunities for social connection and active living through planning, provision of facilities, program delivery and support for local groups.
- Strategy 6.2 High quality, integrated community services and facilities are available through the planning, design and maintenance of multifunctional places that promote connection and inclusion.

5.3 Knox Council Reconciliation Plan

7.7 Continue to build understanding of First Nations services and histories in our Early Years Centres and youth programs, to build culturally safe and inclusive settings for families and children

5.4 Relevant Legislation and Standards

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic);
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic);
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment Act 2015;
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Regulations 2017;
- Child Wellbeing and Safety (information sharing) Amendment Regulations 2021
- Child Safe Standards (Vic);

- Disability Discrimination Act 1992;
- Early Years Management Policy Framework 2016;
- Early Years Management Improvement Framework 2021
- Education and Care Services National Law 2010;
- Education and Care Services Regulations 2011, incorporating Amendments 2017;
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004;
- No Jab No Play Legislation.

5.5 Relevant Policy and Data Sources

- Australian Early Development Census;
- Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home-Care;
- Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan;
- National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education;
- National Partnership Agreement for Early Childhood Education;
- National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development;
- National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care;
- National Early Years Learning Framework;
- National Quality Standards for Early Childhood;
- Reportable Conduct Scheme;
- Victorian Kindergarten Early Years Management Policy Framework;
- Victorian Kindergarten Policy, Procedures and Funding Criteria;
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework;
- Victorian Child Safe Standards'
- Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme Practice Guide
- Best Start, Best Life Reform – Victorian State Government
- Victorian Government Kindergarten State Funding Guide

5.6 Charter of Human Rights

- This procedure has been assessed against and complies with the charter of Human Rights.

5.7 Related Council Policies

- Local Government Act 1989 or Local Government Act 2020 as applicable – Conflict and Interest Provisions.
- Funded Kindergarten Policy

5.8 Related Council Procedures

- Kindergarten Central Registration Scheme (CRS) Procedure

5. Definitions

Term	
Access to Early Learning (AEL)	<p>The Access to Early Learning (AEL) program provides an intensive early intervention. Through AEL, a facilitator supports three-year-olds from families experiencing vulnerability with multiple and complex needs, assisting them to access universal kindergarten programs. AEL is for families that have a range of barriers to children's kindergarten participation.</p> <p>AEL facilitators undertake in-home visits and work with families to build their child's engagement with formal learning. They also work to strengthen the home learning environment. Facilitators collaborate with educators and other services to support the family and child.</p>
Approved Provider	Individual, organisation or company with management or control to operate the education and care service.
Best Start, Best Life	A suite of Victorian Government initiatives designed to transform early childhood education by expanding access to two years of funded kindergarten before school. The reforms aim to give every child the best start in life, ease cost-of-living pressures for families, and support parents to participate in work, study, or community life.
Central Registration Scheme	Knox City Council's process of registering children in kindergarten for families, ensuring the process is simple, consistent, inclusive and equitable for the participating sessional Kindergartens. As per the CRS Guidelines Council will only accept registrations for children who will attend a kindergarten in the following year.
Council	Knox City Council, whether constituted before or after the commencement of this Policy.
DE	<p>Department of Education (Victoria).</p> <p>The State Government department responsible for funding, services approvals and regulations of approved early years services in Victoria.</p>
Early Start Kindergarten (ESK)	<p>Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) predominately addresses financial barriers by providing eligible children with 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten each week led by a qualified Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered teacher. ESK is available to children who are at least three years old by 30 April in the year they are enrolled to attend the program and are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; or

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known to Child Protection,. • From a refugee or asylum seeker background
Early Years Management (EYM)	Early Years Management brings together a group of community-based kindergarten services under the management of a single service provider. It is a key strategy to building a stronger, responsive universal kindergarten system.
Early Childhood Education and Care Services (ECEC)	Kindergarten and Child Care services that must operate in accordance with the National Quality Framework are referred to as education and care services.
Eligible Children	Children who are assessed in accordance with the State Government's Priority of Access requirements as eligible for a funded kindergarten place.
Funded Kindergarten	An early childhood educational program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher to children in the two years before school, for which funding is received from the Department. In Victoria, a funded kindergarten program complies with all the applicable requirements set out in the Kindergarten Funding Guide and provides a program in accordance with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. Funded kindergarten programs may operate in a variety of settings, including long day care centres, standalone services, schools, or community centres, and may be operated by a variety of service providers, including community organisations, local councils, schools, not-for-profit organisations or private operators.
Integrated Child Care Program	For the purposes of kindergarten funding, an integrated child care program is a funded kindergarten program provided as part of a child care program.
Information Sharing	Maternal and Child Health Nurses and Support Service Professionals can assist families to register for kindergarten by registering the family on their behalf using existing information sharing protocols.
Local Community Area (LCA)	A Local Community Area (LCA) is a defined geographic boundary used by Council to plan, monitor, and coordinate early years services at a neighbourhood level. LCAs group nearby suburbs and catchments that share community connections such as playgroups, parent networks, and local services, as well as similar social and travel patterns. In Knox, LCAs mirror the existing Maternal and Child Health (MCH) catchments, creating consistency across early years planning and ensuring that data, outreach, and service delivery are coordinated at the same local scale.
National Quality Framework (NQF)	The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (the National Quality Framework) applies to kindergartens, long day care, family day care and outside school hours care services, and aims to raise quality and drive continuous improvement and consistency in education and care services, with a focus on outcomes for children.

6. Administrative Updates

From time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this Policy. Where an update does not materially alter this Policy, such a change may be made administratively on approval of the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate. Examples of minor administrative changes include change to names of Council departments or positions, change to names of Federal or State Government departments or a minor amendment to legislation that does not have material impact. Where any change or update may materially change the intent of this Policy, it must be considered by Council.