

KINDERGARTEN PRIORITY OF POLICY



QUALITY AREA <7> | MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

PURPOSE

This Priority of Access Policy ensures that places in sessional kindergarten services managed by ECMS are allocated fairly and equitably, providing priority to children who are most in need and maximising the benefits of early childhood education. It is in accordance with the Priority of Access position issued by the Victorian Government.

SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- The Approved Provider, persons with management or control, Centre Director, Nominated Supervisor, and persons in day-to-day charge.
- Early Childhood teachers, educators (including those providing information or supporting the enrolment process), staff, contractors, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children, and others enrolled and participating in ECMS programs and services, including during offsite excursions and activities.
- All ECMS-operated Kindergarten programs, including sessional kindergarten programs operating under the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) guidelines and the Framework of Free Kinder.

This policy governs the systems and procedures for managing registrations and enrolments across ECMS Kindergarten programs. This policy supports us in:

- responding to the needs of local communities
- complying with state and national legislation and requirements for enrolment in long day care programs.

POLICY STATEMENT

Sessional kindergarten services are a critical component of early childhood education. Priority will be given to certain cohorts to ensure equitable access based on specific criteria outlined below. This policy aims to provide a clear framework for allocating kindergarten places and ensuring that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children receive the support they need.

POLICY PRINCIPLES

The following principles underpin all ECMS policies:

- Our policies reflect our purpose

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- We use evidence to guide decisions
- Our policies are clear, accessible and purposeful
- Safety, equity and inclusion are non-negotiable
- We are accountable, transparent and always learning

Alongside ECMS’s overarching principles, the following principles provide specific guidance for this policy:

- **Child-centred:** Enrolment processes are designed around the best interests of each child. Decisions prioritise children’s wellbeing, safety, developmental needs, and continuity of learning, with flexibility to support inclusion and smooth transitions (including ESK and Pre-Prep). Family input is valued and considered, while the child’s rights and outcomes remain central, in line with Regulations 155–157.
- **Culturally safe and inclusive:** ECMS is committed to culturally safe, respectful, and inclusive enrolment practices that are free from discrimination. We welcome Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, refugees, and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds through culturally responsive practices, language support where needed, and acknowledgement of Country. Priority of Access is applied to promote inclusion and reduce barriers, in accordance with the Equal Opportunity Act 2010.
- **Equity:** ECMS promotes equitable access by applying Priority of Access consistently and supporting children and families who may experience vulnerability. Local criteria (such as siblings or proximity) are considered only after priority groups are applied. No child is excluded unlawfully, and enrolment and orientation processes are adapted where needed to address barriers such as technology, language, documentation, or immunisation requirements.

POLICY

Priority Criteria: High

- **Children at Risk:** Children identified as being at risk of significant harm or neglect, including those in out-of-home care or those with a history of abuse.
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:** As part of the enrolment process, service providers must respectfully ask families, ‘Is your child Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander?’ and record this information in KIMS/Arrival.
- **Asylum seekers and refugee children:** An appropriate visa identifies the child and/or parents as refugees or asylum seekers.
- **Children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy:** A child or parent holds a Commonwealth Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card, Veteran’s Affairs Card, or multiple birth children, triplets or quadruplets.

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- **Children with Additional Needs:**

- children who are assessed as having delays in two or more areas and is declared eligible for a second funded year of kindergarten
- holds a child disability health care card
- has previously been approved for a Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) package
- referred by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Early Childhood Intervention Service, Preschool Field Officer (PSFO), or Maternal and Child Health (MCH) nurse.

Criteria for Children not Identified as High-Priority

We will prioritise allocating kindergarten places to children who have attended that service in the previous year before allocating to other families. This remains no guarantee of a preferred group, rather a placement at the preferred service.

Application and Enrolment Process

Application:

- For some ECMS services, the local council manages registrations and allocates kindergarten places. All families must submit an application form for sessional kindergarten places either with their council or directly with ECMS via our website. The form will collect information required to assess priority, including details about the child's background and any additional needs.
- For more information on how to apply, visit www.ecms.org.au and select your centre's page.

Enrolment:

- Applications will be reviewed based on the priority criteria outlined above. Families will be notified of their child's enrolment status and any required next steps.

This *Kindergarten Priority of Access* Policy is designed to ensure a transparent and equitable process for managing sessional kindergarten enrolments so that all children have the opportunity to benefit from early childhood education.

In instances where more eligible children apply for a place at a kindergarten service than there are places available, services must:

- prioritise children based on the criteria listed above
- work with other local kindergarten services and the regional Department office to ensure all eligible children have access to a kindergarten place.

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Monitoring, Review and Continuous Improvement

ECMS reviews and assesses this policy for effectiveness, adequacy and relevance every three years, or earlier if legislation, Child Safe Standards, or organisational priorities change. The review and update process will be aligned to legislative and regulatory changes, and interim updates may be made sooner, if significant changes occur, with regard to new regulatory obligations, or as a result of incident findings, audit outcomes or organisational restructure. Feedback from children, families, educators, and leaders informs learning and opportunities for continuous improvement to inform training, practice improvement and policy review. Insights are used to strengthen and implement improvement strategies through practice and systems, ensuring children remain safe, seen and heard.

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

Priority of access in ECMS Kindergarten meets the requirements of the Victorian Department of Education and Training, the Federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment, and the Public Health Amendment (No Jab, No Play) Act. Universal access to high-quality early learning helps children get a good start in life and has positive effects across society, consistent with ECMS's purpose to foster lifelong learning. This policy is aligned to legal obligations stipulated under relevant Commonwealth and Victorian legislation, regulations and standards, including the *Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010)*, *Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011)*, *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*, *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)*, *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic)*, *Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 (Vic)*, the National Quality Framework, Child Safe Standards (Vic), and associated relevant legislation, regulation and standards.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010) and Regulations 2011 (Vic)
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic) - Sections 39, 40, 41, 42 and 43
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic) and Regulations 2019 (Vic)
- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)
- Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic) and Regulations 2006 (Vic)
- National Quality Standards - Quality Area 7- Governance and Leadership
- Child Safe Standards (Vic) - Standard 5- Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice (5.3 and 5.4)
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (VIC)

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

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- **Victorian Legislation** – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
- **Commonwealth Legislation** – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- ACECQA: QA7 – [Development of child enrolment record](#)
- Australian Department of Education: [Early childhood and care laws](#)
- Victorian Government: [Priority of access for early childhood education](#)
- Vic Government: [Kindergarten Funding Guide](#)
- Vic Government: [Free kinder guidelines for services](#)
- Vic Department of Health: [No Jab, No play for early childhood education and care services](#)
- Vic Government: [Priority of access criteria for early childhood education](#)
- Vic Government: [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework](#)
- Vic Government: [Early Start Kindergarten](#)
- Vic Government: [Additional year of funded four-year-old kindergarten](#)
- Vic Government: [Going to kindergarten if your child is 6 years old](#)

ECMS FRAMEWORKS

- Assurance Framework
- Compliance Management Framework
- Financial Management Framework
- Policy Governance Framework
- Risk Management Framework

RELATED POLICIES

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Complaints & Feedback Policy
- Kindergarten Enrolment Policy
- Payment of Fees Policy
- Orientation Policy
- Privacy and Confidential Information Policy
- Supervision of Children Policy

RELATED PROCEDURES

- Group Allocation Procedure

EVALUATION

To assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, ECMS will:

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- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service’s policy review cycle, or as required
- notify all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedure, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk (*Regulation 172 (2)*).

ATTACHMENTS

- **Appendix 1:** Roles & Responsibilities
- **Appendix 2:** Definitions

DOCUMENT VERSION HISTORY

Document Version History			
Version	Reason for Amendment	Approved by	Review date
2.0	Update criteria in line with current practice and requirements	ECMS Executive	March 2026

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APPENDIX 1: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This section outlines the key roles and responsibilities required to implement and uphold this policy.

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
Approved Provider/ Executive Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversee policy governance, implementation and compliance. Ensure systems are in place to implement this policy consistently across all ECMS services. Provide resources, training, and support to services.
Area Managers / Nominated Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement and comply with this policy. Liaise with Local Government. Inform the Enrolments Team if they become aware of a family's eligibility for priority to enable fair allocation.
Enrolments Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement and comply with this policy. Apply priority of access criteria and effectively allocate places. Liaise with Local Government on registration and enrolment processes. Collect completed enrolment forms and supporting documents (e.g. Immunisation History, Health Care Card, Confirmation of Kindergarten Funding, etc.).
Educators, Staff, Students on Placement, Volunteers and Contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist families to access enrolment and supporting documents. Discuss concerns about enrolment processes or submitted documents with Nominated Supervisors. Liaise with families about enrolment, entry age, and second-year applications.
Parents/Guardians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow enrolment processes and provide relevant documents (e.g. Immunisation History, Health Care Cards, etc) Discuss any additional needs with the team at their service.

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APPENDIX 2: DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms, refer to the Definitions file of the ECMS Policy Catalogue.

Term	Definition
Approved Provider	The person or entity approved under the <i>Education and Care Services National Law 2010</i> to operate an education and care service.
Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme (CRES)	Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme (CRES) is a best practice model for local councils and other organisations to support families and carers to secure a kindergarten place for their child.
Enrolment	An enrolment occurs when the provider has an arrangement with an individual or organisation to provide care to a child and the provider submits an enrolment notice in the Child Care Subsidy System. It is a requirement under Family Assistance Law for all children who attend childcare (or have an arrangement for care) to have an enrolment notice regardless of their Child Care Subsidy eligibility status.
ESK (Early Start Kindergarten)	<p>Early Start Kindergarten grants enable families to attend 15 hours of funded kindergarten each week.</p> <p>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"> • from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or • Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or • known to child protection
Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS)	The Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) program provides capacity building support to Victorian funded kindergarten programs so they can respond to the individual abilities, interests, and needs of children with a disability, developmental delay, or complex medical needs.
Pre-prep	<p>From 2025, Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will gradually transition to Pre-Prep, with programs across Victoria increasing from 15 to 30 hours each week.</p> <p>In 2026, Pre-Prep will be available statewide for Victorian children who meet certain eligibility criteria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander • from a refugee or asylum seeker background • who have had contact with Child Protection
Priority of Access (PoA)	The Priority of Access (PoA) criteria support kindergarten services to prioritise children for

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	enrolment when there are more applications than places available.
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