

FEES POLICY

Mandatory – Quality Area 7

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees
- ensuring the viability of St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten by setting appropriate fees and charges
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten

1. VALUES

St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten is committed to:

- providing responsible financial management of the service, including establishing fees that will result in a financially viable service, while keeping user fees at the lowest possible level
- providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and/or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts
- ensuring there are no financial barriers for families wishing to access an early childhood program for their child/children
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians
- advising users of the service about program funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents/guardians
- providing equitable access for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Person with Management and Control, Nominated Supervisor, Person in Day-to-Day Charge, educators and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child at St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten.

3. BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

Background

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides funding for each child who is enrolled and attending a funded kindergarten program in the two years before school. Income from other sources, primarily fees, is required to meet all the additional costs incurred by the service in the delivery of the children's program. In addition, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer to *Definitions*) enables eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten program for a minimal cost.

DET also funds Early Start Kindergarten for three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs as outlined in *The Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Sources*).

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 1995 (Vic)*
- *National Quality Standard, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership*

4. DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. (refer to Attachment 1 – Fee information for families for more information).

Early Start Kindergarten: A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for up to 15 hours per week. Details are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au

Booking Fee: A payment to cover administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's enrolment application for a place in a program at the service.

Excursion/Service Event Charge: An additional charge required to meet the cost of special events or excursions that occur in response to emerging children's program needs.

Fees: A charge for a place within a program at the service.

Health Care Card: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. Details are available at: www.humanservices.gov.au

Enrolment/Placement Deposit: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service. This is deducted from term fees.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A state government subsidy paid in addition to per capita grants to subsidise the costs of parent fees and enable eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten for 15 hours free of charge (*The Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to Sources)). (

Late Collection Charge: A charge that may be imposed by the Approved Provider when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program

Voluntary Parent/Guardian Contribution: A voluntary payment for items not directly related to the provision of the children's program. Attendance at the service is not conditional on this payment.

5. SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

Sources

- *The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training):* www.education.vic.gov.au
- The constitution of St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten Committee of Management

Service Policies

- 6.09 Service Feedback
- 8.09 Priority of Access
- 8.10 Waiting List
- 6.09 Delivery and Collection of Children Policy
- 5.04 Inclusion and Social Justice

- 7.01 Confidentiality and Record Keeping Policy

PROCEDURES

LEVNT and the St Paul's Committee of Management are responsible for:

- reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements
- developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability
- implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the Nominated Supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's *The Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Sources*)
- considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten and removing those barriers wherever possible
- reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered
- considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally-sensitive way, and in the family's first language where possible
- ensuring that the *Fees Policy* is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)
- providing all parents/guardians with fee information (refer to Attachment 1)
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges upon enrolment of their child
- providing all parents/guardians with a fee payment agreement
- ensuring fees are collected
- collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable
- complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2)), and ideally providing one term's notice.

The Nominated Supervisor/Service Leader is responsible for:

- assisting the Approved Provider in developing this policy, and ensuring that this policy is based on the *Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Definitions*)
- implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the Approved Provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's *The Kindergarten Funding Guide*.
- considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten and removing those barriers wherever possible
- considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- communicating this policy, the availability of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and payment options to families in a culturally-sensitive way and in the family's first language where possible
- providing all parents/guardians with fee information
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges upon enrolment of their child, and ensuring that the *Fees Policy* is readily accessible at the service
- providing all parents/guardians with a fee payment agreement

- collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documents regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable
- complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- notifying parents/guardians within 14 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected.

All other staff are responsible for:

- informing the Nominated Supervisor/ Service Leader of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service
- referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the Nominated Supervisor/Service Leader.

Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- reading the St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten Fee information for families, the Fee Payment Agreement and the Statement of Fees and Charges
- signing and complying with the Fee Payment Agreement
- notifying the Nominated Supervisor/Service Leader if experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees
- providing the required documentation to enable the service to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for eligible families

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness, particularly in relation to affordability, flexibility of payment options and procedures for the collection of fees
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- monitor the number of families/children excluded from the service because of their inability to pay fees
- 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 parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures (Regulation 172(2)) unless a lesser period is necessary because of a risk.

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten on [Date].

REVIEW DATE: [DAY]/[MONTH]/[YEAR]

ATTACHMENT 1 Fee Information for Families

St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten General Information

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides funding for each child enrolled and attending kindergarten in the two years before school as a contribution toward the costs of providing the program. Services meet the balance of costs through charging fees and fundraising activities.

DET provides a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see below) that enables children from eligible families to attend a kindergarten program for little or no cost in the two years before school.

DET 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.

St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten provides a range of support options to parents/guardians experiencing difficulty with payment of fees (see below).

1. Fee Setting Procedure

As part of the budget development process, the Committee of Management sets fees each year for the programs of the service, taking into consideration:

- the financial viability of the service
- the level of government funding provided for the program, including the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- the availability of other income sources, such as grants
- the fees charged by similar services in the area
- the capacity of parents/guardians to pay fees
- reasonable expenditure in meeting agreed program quality and standards
- requirements of *The Kindergarten Funding Guide* (Department of Education and Training) available from the DET website: www.education.vic.gov.au

Once fees are set for the year, they will only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if enrolments drop and the service is at risk of not being able to meet its expenses.

2. Other Charges

Other charges levied by St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten are included on the Statement of Fees and Charges. These include:

- **Enrolment/Placement Deposit:** This payment secures a child's place at the service and is payable on acceptance of enrolment. The deposit is retained as part payment on term fees. **Families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see below) are not required to pay the deposit.** Families experiencing hardship should discuss any difficulties with the service.
- **Excursion Event Charge:** 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.
- **Refundable Levy/Working Bee Fee:** The participation of parents/guardians is encouraged by the service and can help to keep costs more affordable. As not all families are able to assist at the service, a refundable levy system has

been introduced to replace volunteering or fundraising activities. Payment will be refunded to parents/guardians on participation in specified activities which may include working bees, maintenance and gardening etc. The levy is not intended to be a barrier to participation and families experiencing difficulties should discuss this with the service.

- **Late Collection Charge:** The Committee of Management 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 Committee of Management.
- **Sun Hat Charge:** To avoid forgotten, misplaced or inappropriate sun hats. St Paul's will provide a Sun Smart hat for each child for the duration of their time at the service. A charge for this will be applied to Term 1 fees. The hat will be given to the child upon cessation of their time at kindergarten.

3. Schedule of Fees and Charges

A schedule of fees and charges will be provided to families on enrolment.

4. Fundraising

Not all service costs are covered by DET per capita funding and the fees charged. Fundraising is undertaken to meet the balance and/or pay for additional items for the service. 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.

5. Subsidies

5.1 Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

The Kindergarten Fee Subsidy is provided by DET and enables eligible children to attend 15 hours of kindergarten for four year olds or 5 hours of pre-kinder for three year olds at little or no cost. Eligibility conditions may change from time-to-time and must be checked in the most recent edition of the *Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Sources*).

Families may be eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy in the two years before school if their child:

- is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; or
- holds, or has a parent/guardian who holds a Humanitarian or refugee Visa; or
- is a multiple birth child (triplets or more); or
- holds, or has a parent who holds a Commonwealth Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card or Veteran's Affairs Card.

Exclusions and exceptions: Not available for approved child care services in receipt of Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy.

Where a child is identified by a parent, carer or legal guardian as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, no verification is required.

In all other instances, supporting documentation should be sighted by the service on acceptance of a place or on commencement in the program, however where there are delays, such as in obtaining health care cards for children in out-of-home care, the delay should not provide a barrier to the child accessing the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy. Families are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for the full term in which their concession is valid. Details are available at: www.humanservices.gov.au

5.2 Early Start Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

Three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children known to Child Protection are eligible to attend a funded early childhood program that is planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher free of charge. The service receives funding for children who meet the eligibility criteria. Details are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au or via the service.

6. Payment of Fees

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. The first term's fees must be received in full prior to the child commencing at the service. 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.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Service Leader 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. Unpaid Fees

If fees are not paid by the due date, the following steps will be taken (*see Overdue Account Management Flowchart*)

In the event that fees are unable to be collected from a family after following the debt collection flow chart, the fees will be written off as a bad-debt and forwarded to a Debt Collection Firm. This procedure is to take place at the authority of the Committee of Management and under the guidance of the Treasurer or equivalent.

8. Refund of Fees

If a family becomes eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy during a term, a full refund of the applicable term fees (and fee deposit, where appropriate) will be provided. Fees may still apply for programs.

In any other case, fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Committee of Management). 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.

In addition, 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.

9. Children Turning Three During the Year of Enrolment

Full payment from the first day of Term 1 is required if a place is to be reserved for a child in the three-year-old kindergarten program. Children can only commence the program when they have turned three.

10. Support Services

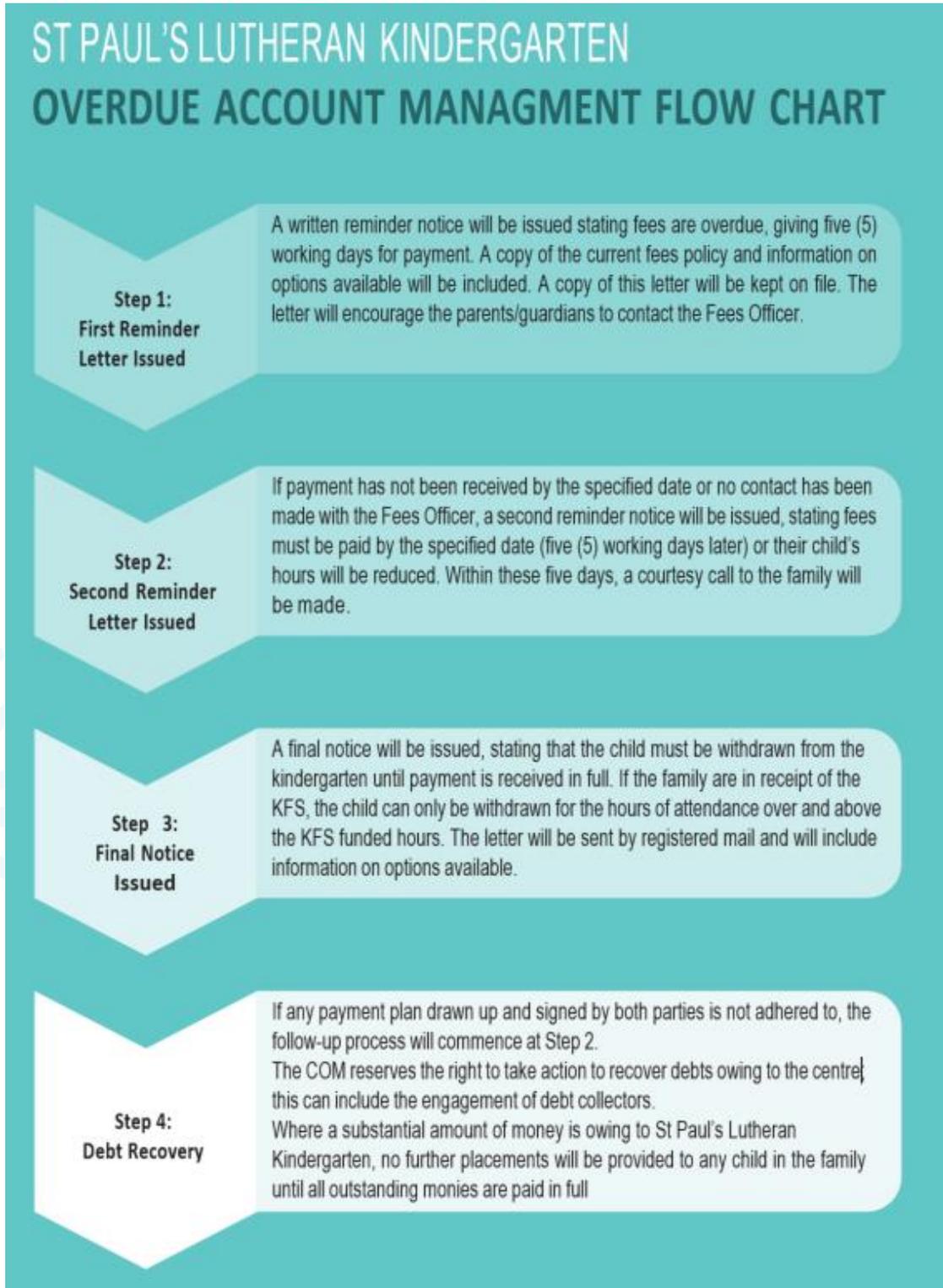
Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to family support services. Information on these services may be available from the kindergarten service provider or alternatively families may contact the local council.

11. Notification of Fee Changes During a Calendar Year

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.

ATTACHMENT 2

Overdue Account Management Flowchart



Fee Payment Agreement

Please complete this form and return to St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten along with all enrolment paperwork.

Fee Payment Contract

Child's full name: _____

Parent's/guardian's full name: _____

- I/we acknowledge that the pre-kinder and kindergarten programs are partially funded by the state government, with the balance of funds coming from fees paid by parents/guardians.
- I/we understand that I/we am/are entitled to obtain the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy if I/we meet one of the criteria. If my/our eligibility lapses, then I/we understand that full payment of fees is required from the beginning of the following term.
- I/we agree to pay fees by the due date on the invoice.
- I/we understand that term fees are non-refundable.
- I/we acknowledge that if fees are not paid by the due date, the Committee of Management will implement the late payment of fees procedure, as outlined in the *Fee Information for Families*, which could result in the withdrawal of my/our child's place at the service and no further enrolments until the outstanding fees are paid.
- I/we agree that if my/our financial circumstances change and I/we am/are unable to pay as agreed, I/we will immediately notify the Service Leader to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service's Fee information for families, which outlines the procedure for payment of fees.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

Please advise if the child is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Please tick: Yes No

Do you hold a current Health Care or Pension Concession card? Please tick: Yes No

Early Start Kindergarten

Three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children known to Child Protection are eligible to attend a funded early childhood program that is planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher free of charge. The service receives funding for children who meet the eligibility criteria. Contact the service for further information.

Please advise if the child is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Please tick: Yes No

Please advise if the child is known to child protection Please tick: Yes No

Except in the case of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, supporting documentation will need to be sighted on commencement at St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten by the Service Leader.

Note: the eligibility of concessions may vary from time-to-time. Up-to-date information can be found in The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training): www.education.vic.gov.au

Signature (parent/guardian)

Date

Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with St Paul's Lutheran Kindergartens *Fees Policy*.