

1.03 INCLUSION & EQUITY POLICY

QUALITY AREA 1 | VERSION 1.23



PURPOSE

This policy provides a clear set of guidelines to:

- ensure all adults and children at LEVNT EC Services are treated equitably and with respect, regardless of their background, ethnicity, culture, language, beliefs, gender, age, socioeconomic status, level of ability, additional needs, family structure or lifestyle.
- promote inclusive practices and ensure the successful participation of all children at LEVNT EC Services.
- create a positive mental health and wellbeing environment for children, educators, staff and families at LEVNT EC Services.

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

To fulfil our mission, LEVNT ECS Service operate to educate children in a Christian environment by providing inspiring education opportunities that enable them to reach their full potential. The foundation of Lutheran Education is the gospel of Jesus Christ which informs all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities of LEVNT EC Services.

Therefore, LEVNT EC Services are committed to:

- valuing all children as gifts of God.
- acknowledging and respecting the rights of all children to be provided with and participate in a quality early childhood education and care program.
- creating an environment that supports, reflects and promotes equitable and inclusive behaviours and practices.
- creating a sense of belonging for all children, families and staff, where diverse identities, backgrounds, experiences, abilities and interests are respected, valued and given opportunities to be expressed and developed.
- ensuring that programs are reflective of, and responsive to, the values and cultural beliefs of families using the service, and of those within the local community and broader society.
- working to ensure children are not discriminated against on the basis of background, ethnicity, culture, language, beliefs, gender, age, socioeconomic status, health status, level of ability or additional needs, family structure or lifestyle.
- considering the mental health and wellbeing needs of all children, families and staff.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children, and others attending the programs and activities of LEVNT EC Services, including during offsite excursions and activities.

BACKGROUND

The National Quality Framework (NQF) recognises all children's capacity and right to succeed regardless of diverse circumstances, cultural background and abilities. Education and care services must hold high expectations for the learning and development of all children, and at the same time recognise that every child follows an individual learning path and will progress in different and equally meaningful ways. Inclusion involves taking into account children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes. Early childhood education and care services must implement responsive, equitable, individualised opportunities and additional support whenever barriers are identified.

The NQF is underpinned by a commitment to 'Closing the Gap' and acknowledges Australia is a nation of great diversity, and an ancient land that has been cared for by Indigenous Australians for many thousands of years. Education and care services have a

shared responsibility to support children, families, colleagues and the local community to understand, respect and value diversity.

State and Commonwealth laws prohibit discrimination based on personal characteristics, including race, age, gender, religious belief, disability or illness and parental status.

Under the Child Safe Standards, services are expected to provide environments and activities that encourage all children to participate in and celebrate their identity. The standards are underpinned by three overarching principles which require services to take into consideration the increased vulnerability of Aboriginal children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with disabilities.

State governments require funded organisations to ensure that their policies and procedures promote equality of opportunity for all children to enable their full participation in kindergarten. A service's philosophy should reflect the values of inclusion and equity which are supported by developing and implementing an inclusion and equity policy. Developing professional knowledge and skills and using family-centred practice to work in partnership with children, families, communities, and other services and agencies, will assist services to identify, include and support children with additional needs and their families.

DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms refer to the Definitions file of each LEVNT EC policy folder.

Additional needs: A broad term relating to challenges experienced across a number of areas including physical health, mental health, disability, developmental concern, or emotional need (resulting from trauma, abuse or grief), family displacement (due to war or refugee status), domestic violence, mental illness, family separation or divorce, which affects a person's ability to participate or learn.

Culture: The values and traditions of groups of people that are passed from one generation to another.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD): Refers to individuals and groups who are from diverse racial, religious, linguistic and/or ethnic backgrounds.

Developmental delay: A delay in the development of a child under the age of 6 years that:

- a) is attributable to a mental or physical impairment, or a combination of mental and physical impairments, and
- b) is manifested before the child attains the age of 6 years, and
- c) results in substantial functional limitations in one or more of the following areas of major life activity:
 - i. self-care
 - ii. receptive and expressive language
 - iii. cognitive development
 - iv. motor development, and
- d) reflects the child's need for a combination and sequence of special interdisciplinary or generic care, treatment or other services that are of extended duration and are individually planned and co-ordinated (Disability Act 2006 (Vic)).

Disability: In relation to a person, refers to:

- a sensory, physical or neurological impairment or acquired brain injury, or any combination thereof, that:
 - i. is, or is likely to be, permanent, and
 - ii. causes a substantially reduced capacity in at least one of the areas of self-care, self-management, mobility or communication, and
 - iii. requires significant ongoing or long-term episodic support, and
- is not related to ageing, or
- an intellectual disability, or
- a developmental delay (Disability Act 2006 (Vic)).

Diversity: Refers to all characteristics that make individuals different from one another, including race, religion, language, ethnicity, beliefs, age, gender, sexual orientation, level of ability, additional needs, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, personality, marital and/or parental status, family structure, lifestyle and general life/work experience.

Early Start Kindergarten: A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background and children known to Child Protection, to attend a free kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for a specific number of hours.

Equity: (In the context of human rights) is the behaviour of acting in a fair and just manner towards others.

Family-centred practice: Practice which:

- uses families' understanding of their children to support shared decision-making about each child's learning and development
- creates a welcoming and culturally-inclusive environment, where all families are encouraged to participate in and contribute to children's learning and development
- actively engages families and children in planning children's learning and development
- provides feedback to families on each child's learning, and provide information about how families can further advance children's learning and development at home and in the community.

Inclusion: The engagement and involvement of children and families to ensure that all individuals have an equal opportunity to participate and achieve their maximum potential.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A Victorian government subsidy paid directly to the funded service to enable eligible families to attend a funded kindergarten program or funded three-year-old place at no cost (or minimal cost) to promote participation. Details are available in The Victorian Kindergarten Guide (refer to Sources).

Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) Packages: A package of support for children with a disability and high support needs and/or with complex medical needs.

Mental health: in early childhood can be understood as a young child's ability to experience, regulate and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community and cultural expectations for young children. Infant mental health is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development (from Be You – refer to Sources).

Out-of-Home Care: Is the term used in Victoria when a child or young person is placed in care away from their parents. It includes placement in kinship care, home-based care such as foster care and residential care. For these children, the State of Victoria is their legal parent, and with this comes the responsibilities of a parent to care for and protect them, and to ensure that they have access to all the services they need for their immediate and longer-term benefit (Early Childhood Agreement on Out-of-Home Care – refer to Sources).

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Approved Provider, persons with management and control, nominated supervisor and/or persons in day-to-day charge are responsible for meeting requirements set out in the table below. Actions which are legislated requirements of the ECEC sector are indicated with **LR**.

	Approved Provider and/or persons with management and control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teachers, educators and all other staff	Parents, guardians and carers	Contractors, volunteers and those on student placement
Ensuring that all policies of LEVNT EC Services, including Inclusion and Equity, Code of Conduct and Privacy & Confidentiality policies, are adhered to at all times	LR	LR			
Ensuring that the service provides a safe, inclusive and empowering environment which celebrates diversity through positive, respectful and appropriate behaviour when working with children and families (refer to Code of Conduct and Interactions with Children Policy)	LR	LR	✓		✓
Promoting cultural awareness in all children, including greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being	LR	✓	✓		✓
Actively supporting and facilitating participation and inclusion at LEVNT EC Services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families	LR	✓	✓		✓
Creating a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people	LR	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring that facilities are designed and/or adapted to support access by every child, family, educator and staff member, including adaptive equipment to support the inclusion of all children	LR	LR	✓		✓
Encouraging collaborative, family-centred practice at the service which facilitates the inclusion and active participation of both the child and the family at the service	LR	✓	✓		✓
Using family-centred practice and working collaboratively with staff, parents/guardians, specialist services and other professionals to implement the program at the service and provide individualised support for children	LR	LR	✓		✓
Providing families with information about the support options available for children attending LEVNT EC Services	LR	✓	✓		
Ensuring that service programs are available and accessible to families from a variety of backgrounds (refer to Curriculum Development Policy)	LR	LR	✓		✓
Ensuring that educational programs are delivered in accordance with an approved learning framework, are based on the developmental needs, and experiences of each child, and take into account the individual differences of each child	LR	LR	✓		✓
Providing an educational program that is reflective of the service's values, beliefs and philosophy, and embraces the principles of fairness, equity, diversity and inclusion	LR	LR	✓		✓
Ensuring that the program provides opportunities for all children to participate and interact with one another	✓	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring there are quiet and reflective spaces for children, educators and families	LR	✓	✓		
Embedding social and emotional learning in the service program and practice, and teaching children to care for their own mental health (refer to Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy)	✓	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring the diversity and interests of the children, families, educators and staff are reflected in the physical environment	✓	✓	✓		✓

	Approved Provider and/or persons with management and control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teachers, educators and all other staff	Parents, guardians and carers	Contractors, volunteers and those on student placement
Actively supporting and encouraging children's ability to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights	LR	✓	✓		✓
Recognising multilingualism as an asset and provide support for children to maintain their first language, learn English as an additional language, and learn languages other than English	✓	✓	✓		✓
Critically reflecting on practice to ensure that interactions and programs embrace an approach in which children and families feel valued and respected, and that their contributions are welcomed	LR	LR	✓		✓
Providing opportunities for families to contribute to the program as key partners	LR	LR	✓		✓
Identifying and supporting children with additional needs and ensuring that service programs are inclusive of all children with additional needs	LR	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring that service programs are inclusive of all children with medical conditions	LR	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring that parents/guardians are consulted, kept informed and provide written consent, where individualised programs, action, support or intervention are planned and provided for their child	LR	✓	✓	✓	
Ensuring that individualised programs incorporate opportunities for regular review and evaluation, in consultation with all people involved in the child's education and care	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Responding to the needs and concerns of parents/guardians, and providing support and guidance, where appropriate	✓	✓	✓		✓
Responding to requests from educators for written permission to arrange for an assessment, collect reports on their child and to speak to service providers about their child				✓	
Being involved in, keeping fully informed about, and providing written consent for any individualised intervention or support proposed/provided for their child				✓	
Reviewing and evaluating individualised support programs in consultation with all people involved in the child's education and care	✓	✓	✓		✓
Implementing appropriate programs and practices to support vulnerable children and families, including working co-operatively with relevant services and/or professionals, where required (refer to Child Safe Environment Policy)	✓	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring that cultural values and expectations about health and wellbeing are respected	LR	✓	✓		✓
Considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at LEVNT EC Services, and removing these barriers wherever possible (refer to Fees policy)	LR	✓			
Ensuring that all eligible families are supported to access the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer to Definitions and Fees Policy), including families with concession cards, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and refugee and asylum seeker families (not applicable under Free Kinder)	LR	LR			
Ensuring that all eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background and children known to Child Protection are supported to access the Early Start Kindergarten program	LR	LR			
Ensuring that the enrolment process is fair and equitable, and facilitates access for all children (refer to Enrolment and Orientation Policy)	LR	✓	✓		

	Approved Provider and/or persons with management and control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teachers, educators and all other staff	Parents, guardians and carers	Contractors, volunteers and those on student placement
Tailoring the orientation process to meet the individual needs of children and families (refer to Enrolment and Orientation Policy)	LR	✓	✓		
Identifying the barriers to participation in service programs and activities, and developing strategies to overcome these barriers	✓	✓	✓		
Understanding children's diverse circumstances, and providing support and responding to those who are vulnerable	LR	LR	✓		✓
Attending to any adjustments to provide equal protection for all children (refer to Child Safe Environment Policy)	LR	LR	LR		LR
Ensuring that staff have access to appropriate and accredited professional development activities that promote a positive understanding of diversity, inclusion and equity, and mental health and wellbeing, and provide skills to assist in implementing this policy (refer to Staffing Policy)	✓	✓			
Ensuring that the nominated supervisor and all staff are aware of the service's expectations regarding positive, respectful and appropriate behaviour when working with children and families (refer to Code of Conduct Policy and Interactions with Children Policy)	LR				
Encouraging and supporting other educators, staff and families as role models to demonstrate positive and respectful relationships, and positive mental health and wellbeing	LR	✓			
Providing information to families about local parenting and family services, mental health and wellbeing and other resources that are available to support the health and wellbeing of children and families	✓	✓	✓		
Providing service information in various community languages wherever possible	✓	✓			
Using language services to assist with communication where required and considering the employment of a multilingual worker/s to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families	✓	✓			
Working with the nominated supervisor and educators to ensure appropriate program planning and resourcing for children with additional needs	✓	✓			
Where practicable, accessing resources, support and professional development to facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs who are ineligible for specific support packages	✓	✓			
Developing partnerships with other education and care settings and schools to enable children to move successfully from one setting to another	✓	✓	✓		
Ensuring collaborative relationships with specialised services and professionals to provide support and services for families and children with a disability, complex medical needs and/or developmental delay	✓	✓	✓		
Ensuring racism within the organisation is identified, confronted and not tolerated	LR	LR	✓		✓
Ensuring that no employee, prospective employee, parent/guardian, child, volunteer or student at the service is discriminated against	LR	LR			
Ensuring that any behaviour or circumstances that may constitute discrimination or prejudice are dealt with in an appropriate manner (refer to Compliments and Complaints Policy)	LR	LR			
Notifying the Approved Provider of any behaviour or circumstances that may constitute discrimination, bullying, harassment or prejudice		✓	✓	✓	✓

	Approved Provider and/or persons with management and control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teachers, educators and all other staff	Parents, guardians and carers	Contractors, volunteers and those on student placement
Ensuring there are clear referral options and pathways for children, staff, educators and families to access support services for mental health and wellbeing	LR	LR			
Developing links with other services and/or professionals to support mental health and wellbeing, children with additional needs and have referral pathways in place	✓	✓	✓		
Ensuring that educators and staff are supported to learn about and care for their own mental health and wellbeing	LR	LR			
Ensuring that mental health and wellbeing information and policy requirements are included in educator and staff orientation/induction	LR	LR			
Ensuring that leadership practices and on-the-ground support enable a work environment that minimises stress and promotes mental health and wellbeing for educators and staff (<i>refer to Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy</i>)	LR	LR			

EVALUATION

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
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- assess whether a satisfactory resolution has been achieved in relation to issues arising from this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of a 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 procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk

AUTHORISATION & REVIEW

This policy was adopted by Lutheran Education VIC, NSW, TAS and ACT Ltd as Approved Provider for this service on 20 July 2023.

REVIEW DATE July 2025 or earlier as required.

REFERENCES

LEGISLATION & STANDARDS

- Age Discrimination Act 2004
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)
- Charter for Children in Out-of-home Care (Vic)
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Child Safe Standards (Vic)
- Dardee Boorai: the Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young People (Vic)
- Disability Act 2006 (Vic)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)
- Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)
- Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)
- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)
- National Quality Standards Quality Areas 1-7
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
- Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic)
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)

SOURCES

- Be You: www.beyou.edu.au
- Commission for Children and Young People, Child Safe Standards: www.ccp.vic.gov.au
- NSW Child Safe Standards <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/working-in-early-childhood-education/child-safety/standards>
- Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care (January 2019).
- Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and Early Childhood Intervention Australia's (ECIA) Position Statement on the Inclusion of Children with a Disability in Early Childhood Education and Care – available at: Search 'statement on inclusion of children with disability' at: <https://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-work/inclusion-resources/>
- FKA Children's Services: www.fka.org.au
- Guide to the National Quality Framework: www.acecqa.gov.au
- Guide to the National Quality Standard: www.acecqa.gov.au
- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (DE): www.education.vic.gov.au
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework Principal Practice Guide: Equity and Diversity: www.education.vic.gov.au

RELATED POLICIES

- Anaphylaxis and Allergic Reactions
- Asthma
- Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing
- Code of Conduct
- Compliments and Complaints
- Curriculum Development
- Dealing with Infectious Diseases
- Dealing with Medical Conditions
- Diabetes
- Enrolment and Orientation
- Epilepsy
- Excursions and Service Events
- Fees
- Interactions with Children
- Nutrition, Oral Health and Active Play
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Staffing