



# Kindergarten Services Policy

## Purpose

This Kindergarten Services Policy affirms Council's approach to the provision of kindergarten services, and the general provision and maintenance of our early year's facilities in Baw Baw. This policy articulates Council's vision and sets the future state provisions, interfacing with a suite of related Council policies and priorities.

## Vision

Baw Baw families have access to high quality three and four-year-old kindergarten programs that contributes to their children's optimal growth, development and lifelong learning.

The planning, development, design and delivery of kindergarten services in Baw Baw aligns with contemporary evidence, based on State, National and International models of best program and practice.

## Commitment to Child Safety

Council is committed to providing and actively promoting a safe environment for children. Council has zero tolerance towards child abuse, and is committed to protecting the physical, emotional, cultural and social wellbeing of all children. Council has policies and systems to protect children, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated seriously.

Baw Baw Shire Council acknowledges that children's safety is a whole of community responsibility and is everyone's business.

## Definitions and Acronyms

**CRES** – Kindergarten Central Enrolment and Registration Scheme

**DE** – Department of Education. The Victorian regulatory authority primarily responsible for the regulation, quality assessment and funding of education and care services in Victoria.

**EYM** – Early Year Management organisations are local government or community-based organisations that provide professional leadership and centralised management of kindergarten services.

**FFE** – Furniture, Fit Out and Equipment

**KOSS** – Kindergarten on School Site

**Place Based Approach** – Provides stakeholders with a framework for identifying and responding to local needs and improving social, economic and physical wellbeing in a particular location.

**Pre-Prep** – Second year of kindergarten prior to school entry

**Universal Access** – Ensures children have access to early childhood education for a two-year period prior to school commencement.

## Governance Principles

Section 9 of the Local Government Act 2020 (the Act) specifies the overarching governance principles and supporting principles that Council must adhere to in the performance of its role and functions.

This policy gives effect to the following overarching governance principles outlined in Section 9(2) of the Act:

- Council decisions are to be made and actions taken in accordance with the relevant law;
- Priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations;
- The economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted;
- The municipal community is to be engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making;
- Innovation and continuous improvement is to be pursued;
- Collaboration with other Councils and Governments and statutory bodies is to be sought;
- The ongoing financial viability of the Council is to be ensured;

- Regional, state and national plans and policies are to be taken into account in making strategic planning and decision making;
- The transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is to be ensured.

This report also takes into account the following supporting principles defined in Section 9(3) of the Act: *(remove the principles that do not apply)*

- The community engagement principles (Community Engagement Policy);
- The public transparency principles (Public Transparency Policy);
- The strategic planning principles;
- The financial management principles; and,
- The service performance principles.

## Scope

This policy affirms Council's position in relation to:

- Partnering with external organisations to deliver kindergarten services,
- Redevelopment and renewal of existing infrastructure, and
- Service delivery and infrastructure future growth and demand.

## Context/Background

Baw Baw Shire Council has a proud history of recognising and supporting quality and accessible early years services, and acknowledges the importance of children's contributions. Council recognises that families require flexible options and a diversity of service models to meet their needs, and therefore supports both integrated and sessional kindergarten being operated within the community. As such, State-funded universal access to integrated kindergarten in Long Day Care is delivered by a range of private providers across the Shire. Baw Baw Shire Council directly partners with approved Early Year Managers to deliver standalone sessional kindergarten for the community.

### Early Childhood Education Matters

The ages spanning three to five years are fundamental in a child's developmental process. By age five, approximately 90% of a child's brain development has already occurred. Neurobiology studies have demonstrated that these early developmental years establish the core structures of the brain. A child's environment, experiences, and relationships during this period influence neural pathways that can significantly impact their health, well-being, behaviour, and learning abilities.

Between the ages of three and five, children acquire essential skills that help them manage

their emotions and behaviour, build resilience and persistence, form positive relationships, and focus their attention. Such skills are vital in helping children adjust to school and cope with future changes they may face in their careers.

Research has consistently shown that quality education and care during a child's early formative years lead to better health, education, and employment outcomes later in life (Fox & Geddes, 2016; Tayler, 2016). High quality education and care services play a critical role in supporting children and their families setting the foundation for every child's future development and learning.

Additionally, evidence shows that investment in early childhood education has significant social and economic benefits. For every \$1 invested in early childhood education, Australia receives \$2 back over a child's life - through higher productivity and earning capacity, and reduced government spending on health, welfare and crime (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2019).

### State Government

Licensed early years services operate in a complex and highly regulated environment. Federal, State and Local Government all have important roles in the regulation, funding and delivery of children's services.

The Victorian Government (through the Department of Education) has a responsibility for state-wide policy and the provision of funding, planning and regulation of early years services. It regulates the National Quality Standards set by the Commonwealth and provides funding to support universal access to three and four-year old kindergarten. It also provides infrastructure grants to early education facilities (both long day care and sessional).

State-funded universal access to kindergarten, known as *Best Start, Best Life*, includes:

- Funded three-year-old kindergarten from 2023
- Free kindergarten from 2023 for three and four-year-old children
- Up to 30 hours of 'pre-prep' commencing 2026, and fully implemented by 2032

### Policy Commitments and Principles

Council commits to ongoing delivery of three and four-year-old kindergarten services through partnering with external organisations and the provision of Council approved infrastructure.

In alignment with the Local Government Act (2020), and with consideration of Best Value Principles, Council commits to delivering services with our partners through the framework represented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Decision Making Framework:**

Service Principle	Acquittal
Efficient	<p>The model and resourcing will provide value for money, with services and infrastructure delivered at a level of subsidy that is acceptable to Council.</p> <p>Council will seek to create efficiencies through partnering with other specialist and generalist providers.</p>
Effective	<p>Council will seek to ensure access to quality early childhood services for the local community. The planning, development, design and delivery of kindergarten services in Baw Baw will align with contemporary National and International models of best practice.</p>
Accessible	<p>The Baw Baw Shire community is growing more diverse, and families will not be disadvantaged to access Council services because of personal characteristics. As a leader, planner and facilitator of service provision, Council will be cognisant of the cultural and personal needs of community members, and support the local early years sector to provide accessible services to all.</p>
Affordable	<p>Affordability should not be a barrier to receiving quality services. Council will deliver universal access standalone sessional kindergarten (via EYM partnerships) as part of the <i>Best Start, Best Life</i> reforms.</p> <p>Council's sessional kindergarten program will be provided at no cost to families, and there will be no cost for registering applications under CRES.</p>
Equitable	<p>Council recognises that greater effort may be required for some children to achieve equality of opportunity.</p>
Responsive to community needs	<p>Council's EYM service system planning and development role will facilitate a whole-of-community approach to meeting the needs of children and their families.</p> <p>Council will ensure that services are based on the best information available, and delivered in a timely manner.</p>
Responsive to community expectations and values	<p>Services will be delivered through a model and level of subsidy that is acceptable to community members.</p> <p>Council will ensure community voice is heard and responded to in service operations and planning and reflected in a continuous improvement approach.</p>

	This approach includes community preferences for the organisations that deliver services.
Promote local employment growth or retention	<p>Council will support local employment, and seek to partner with relevant providers within the municipality to foster the attraction, retention and professional development of educators and staff in the sector.</p> <p>The benefits for families who may be better able to enter or re-enter employment as a result of childcare are also recognised.</p>

## Council's Role

Council is dedicated to ensuring that every eligible child in Baw Baw has access to state-funded three-year-old and four-year-old kindergarten programs, as mandated by the *Best Start Best Life* obligation.

Local Government has a statutory and social responsibility to plan for its local community. It supports the learning, health and wellbeing of local children and families through determining policy at a local level. In line with the Municipal Association of Victoria's Early Years Compact (2017-2027), Baw Baw Shire Council takes *'a place-based approach to planning, funding and infrastructure investment, as well as the coordination and delivery of services for children and families'*.

## Central Registration and Enrolments (CRES)

Council provides a Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme (CRES) to maximise enrolment capacity. This also provides one point of access and coordination for standalone kindergartens. The following kindergartens participate in CRES via a Memorandum of Understanding:

- Grace Berglund Kindergarten
- Drouin Kindergarten
- Longwarry Kindergarten
- Erica Kindergarten
- Warragul Community Kindergarten
- Mary Beck Kindergarten
- Oak Street Kindergarten
- Drouin Primary School ELC
- Drouin West Primary School ELC
- Trafalgar Primary School ELC
- Warragul Primary School ELC
- Willow Grove Kindergarten
- Thorpdale and District Kindergarten

- St Andrews Kindergarten
- Yarragon Primary School Kindergarten

CRES is reliant on recurrent funding from the State government; however, it does incur a small cost to Council on an annual basis. CRES will expand as the *Best Start Best Life* reforms roll out.

There is no cost for current providers to participate in the service.

The responsibility of timetabling falls on the Council, in collaboration with Early Years Manager partners. Anticipated timetables play a pivotal role in managing enrolment expectations as the number of children enrolled in kindergarten changes in accordance with State Government policy.

### Partnerships

Council engages State Government approved Early Years Managers to provide kindergarten services. In instances where new facilities are to be established, Council will maintain its current partnership approach and adhere to its procurement policy when tendering these sites.

As of 2024, Council supports 13 kindergartens to be managed and operated by a number of different early years partners. Current EYM partners are

- YKinders
- BestChance Child and Family Services
- Uniting Vic.Tas
- Yarragon Primary School Board

Relationships parameters and expectations are articulated in the EYM Partnership Agreement (2024).

There are multiple long day care providers in the municipality, some of which offer funded kindergarten, somewhat easing the burden on Council provisions. Council does not provide central enrolment for integrated kindergartens in long day care services within the municipality.

Given the unprecedented growth in Baw Baw and the implementation of State Government reforms, additional infrastructure will be necessary to accommodate all children in kindergarten programs. Council will continue to actively advocate for funding to support investments in kindergarten infrastructure, as well as for the maintenance of any new state-owned facilities.

### Early Years Facilities, Licence Agreements and Maintenance

For Council owned facilities, EYMs are offered a licence to operate from the building. The standard term of licence agreements is six years, with an additional three-year option at \$100 per annum, payable upon demand. Licence end dates for all agreements are synchronised.

Additionally, the Licence Agreements are consolidated and furnished to individual entities, comprehensively listing all the associated kindergarten services.

Upgrades and new services will be designed according to Council's endorsed Kindergarten Design Guide (2024) and State Government KOSS templates.

In line with the current licencing agreements, partnered organisations can apply to remodel and or extend facilities within the limits of this policy, and with Council's approval and partnership.

Council will provide structural and general maintenance for facilities that are owned by Council. Maintenance of facilities that are not owned by Council (including KOSS) will be the responsibility of the Lessee.

### Fit Out and Equipment (FFE)

Council will partially fund the provision of furniture, fit out and equipment as detailed in the application for new service tender documents. Council will maintain ownership of FFE provisions requiring partners to return all FFE to Council as per the Licence Agreement when licences are terminated and or not renewed.

### Kindergarten on School Sites (KOSS):

To ensure consistency with exiting conditions, Council will assume the head lease with the Department of Education for all present and future state KOSS sites. However, Council will not be responsible for general and structural maintenance costs. Council also reserves the right not to hold head leases if current conditions change creating additional burdens.

## 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. Examples of minor administrative changes include changes 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, and when new services are added. Where any change or update may materially change the intent of this policy, it must be considered by Council.



## Associated Policies & Documents

Baw Baw Shire Council (BBSC) Plan and Community Vision 2021 – 2025

BBSC Municipal Early Years Plan 2024 – 2027

BBSC Municipal Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2025– 2041

A Better Future for Baw Baw- 2019 Advocacy Priorities

BBSC Long Term Infrastructure Plan 2022-2032

BBSC EYM Partnership Agreement 2024

BBSC Timetabling and CRES Operations Guide and MOU 2024

BBSC Kindergarten Central Enrolment Policy 2024

BBSC Kindergarten Design Guide 2024

BBSC Child Safe Policy 2022

BBSC Community Engagement Policy 2023

Kindergarten Infrastructure Service Plan (KISP) 2019

## References

Fox, S and Geddes, M. (2016). *Preschool – Two Years are Better Than One: Developing a Preschool Program for Australian 3 Year Olds – Evidence, Policy and Implementation*, Mitchell Institute Policy Paper No. 03/2016. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (2019). *A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia, Economic analysis of universal early childhood education in the year before school in Australia*. The Front Project, Sydney.

Taylor, C. (2016). *The E4Kids Study: Assessing the effectiveness of Australian early childhood education and care programs. Overview of findings in 2016*. Final report to the Partner Organisations of the Effective Early Educational Experiences (E4Kids Study).

Approval date	3 July 2024
Approval authority	Council
Effective from	4 July 2024
Review term	Every 4 years or any significant change
Next review date	4 July 2028
Responsible position	Manager Family and Children's Services
Responsible Director	Director Strategy and Organisational Performance
Version	1