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# Quality Assessment and Regulation newsletter

March 2024

## Welcome message

It has been a challenging start to the year with extreme weather across parts of Victoria. I acknowledge your leadership and resilience, and that of your educators, in delivering high quality programs for children in sometimes challenging circumstances.

[Last month](#) we ran an article about emergency management. This month, we include a reminder to consider the implications of telecommunications and power outages in your service's emergency planning.

We also keep the focus on children's safety with articles on supervision, and another on risk assessments and authorisations for excursions and regular outings.

Last week was [Harmony Week](#) — a celebration that recognises our diversity and brings together Australians from all different backgrounds. It's about inclusiveness, respect, and a sense of belonging for everyone.

Fittingly, this month's article in our series featuring winners in the [2023 Victorian Early Years Awards](#) (VEYA) celebrates the Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc for their achievements in increasing the participation of children from families with language backgrounds other than English.

Finally, the Victorian Government is investing \$3.6 million over 4 years to enable [bush kinder programs](#) in 150 kindergartens each year. The recipients of the most recent grant round have just been announced. We remind those who have been successful to notify us that they will be providing a bush kinder service.

Thank you for your continuing commitment to supporting Victorian children's learning, safety and wellbeing.

### Greg Norton

Executive Director

Quality Assessment and Regulation Division

This edition of our newsletter contains information on the following:

#### Quality

- Congratulations to the Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc - 2023 VEYA winners

#### Regulatory reminders

- Regular outings and excursions – risk assessments and authorisations

- Adequate supervision to minimise risks to children
- Emergency management during telecommunications and power outages
- Notification required for services providing a bush kinder program
- Notifiable diseases
- Child Safe Standards focussed compliance visits program

### Law reform

- Changes to Children's Services Regulations 2020 commence on 2 April 2024

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- NQA ITS unavailable during migration to the Cloud

### Professional development

- Current professional development opportunities for early childhood educators and services

[Visit QARD Website](#)

## Quality



### **Congratulations to the Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc - 2023 VEYA winners**

[Northern Schools Early Years Cluster Inc](#) (NSEYC) is the winner of Category 1: Improving Access and Participation in Early Learning and the winner of the Minister's Award at the 2023 VEYA Awards.

Category 1 is awarded for an initiative that promotes access, ongoing participation and engagement in early learning, particularly for families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

The Minister's Award is a special commendation that is selected from the pool of finalists across all seven categories and selected by the Minister for Children.

NSEYC is a not-for-profit Early Years Management organisation delivering 15-hours of free kindergarten for 3-year-olds across all its 15 kindergarten services in Melbourne's northern suburbs. The organisation has a strong commitment to improving access and participation in high quality early learning for children across the municipalities of Merri-bek, Hume, Melbourne and the Macedon Ranges, on Wurundjeri land in areas predominantly populated by families with language backgrounds other than English.

The NSEYC has been running 3-year-old kindergarten programs delivered by a Bachelor-qualified early childhood teacher since its inception, acknowledging that high quality early learning lays the foundations for later life and can help to bridge the gap in learning outcomes that is created by disadvantage and vulnerability.

To ensure innovative practice, NSEYC employs a collaborative governance model that includes oversight and involvement of local primary schools and other stakeholders.

The [NSEYC model](#) is based on the notion that access to high

quality kindergarten programs should not depend on where you live. The model focusses on 3 areas: infrastructure, workforce and program development. Through strategic forward-planning, innovation, and determination, NSEYC undertook comprehensive facility upgrades, recruited 51 additional educators and support staff, and upskilled their existing workforce to deliver mixed-age programming.

Most of the services are located on school sites and operate as part of a Kindergarten to Year 6 model, where the kindergarten is considered a part of the school community. This makes it easier for children to attend as families who have children at kindergarten and school only have a single drop-off, and provides the opportunity for children and families to develop connections and familiarity with the school environment which in turn supports continuity of learning and transition into formal schooling. It also gives children access to a broader range of facilities and programs such as a library, gymnasium, kitchen gardens, music and language programs, and supports continuity of learning for children from early childhood into Foundation/Prep.

This initiative has improved outcomes by enabling more children in the area to access 3-year-old kindergarten. Enrolments in 2023 across 8 kindergartens were more than double the 2021 enrolments. Teachers and educators report that the additional hours are having a positive impact on children commencing 4-year-old kindergarten by improving their social skills and better preparing them to continue their learning.

Congratulations to the NSEYC team for their efforts in enhancing access to early learning through the provision of free kindergarten for 3 year old children. Their contributions have played a significant role in fostering positive outcomes within the community.

## Regulatory reminders



### Regular outings and excursions - risk assessments and authorisations

Excursions are an important part of the learning experiences of all children. They can support quality program delivery and can provide important social and emotional development opportunities for children. These might include teamwork, resilience and confidence-building through challenge, problem-solving, connecting with nature, creative and imaginative play and coordination and strength.

Excursions and regular outings should have an educational purpose and contribute to the program or other educational value.

Recently, some services have been attempting to operate under a 'blanket' authorisation for outings within a certain radius of the service or taking children on 'spontaneous' outings (without family approval or risk assessment).

This article explains why these approaches are not compliant with regulatory requirements.

## What is the difference between an excursion and a regular outing?

An **excursion** is an outing organised by the service or family day care educator to a destination outside the service. Each excursion requires a separate risk assessment and written authorisation to be given by a parent.

This does not include an outing organised by the service on a school site if:

- the child or children leave the service premises with an educator, and
- the child or children do not leave the school site.

For example, a preschool group visiting the library within the school site that the preschool is co-located on, is not considered an excursion or regular outing. In such a situation, however, it would be best practice for the service to conduct a risk assessment and seek written authorisations.

A **regular outing** includes a walk, drive or trip to and from a destination:

- that the service visits regularly as part of its educational program, and
- where the circumstances relevant to the risk assessment are **'substantially the same'** on each outing.

Where the circumstances relevant to the risk assessment are **not 'substantially the same'** on each outing, a new risk assessment and written authorisation is required for each outing.

Some examples of circumstances that may change, and require a new risk assessment, include:

- location
- additional children attend
- proposed route and destination
- method of transport to and from the proposed destination
- proposed activities
- proposed duration of the outing.

'Blanket' risk assessments and authorisations for a general area are not compliant

Conducting a risk assessment and authorisation for multiple destinations within a general area, either in the community or around the service premises, does not comply with the regulatory requirements for either regular outings or excursions:

- Authorisations and risk assessments must refer to a particular destination - they cannot be applied to multiple possible destinations within a general area (for example within a 2km radius of the service)
- To meet requirements for a regular outing, the circumstances must be 'substantially the same' each time. A separate authorisation and risk assessment is required for each destination in the defined area.

### Spontaneous outings are not permitted

A service cannot consult families on the day an excursion/outing

occurs. A risk assessment must always be completed, and information provided to parents/authorised persons with the written authorisation, before consent can be given to take the child outside the service.

### How to comply with regulatory requirements for excursions and regular outings

Read step-by-step instructions and information on complying with requirements for [excursions and regular outings](#) including:

- policies and procedures for excursions and regular outings
- written risk assessments (including how risks will be minimised)
- staffing requirements (including first aid requirements, and specific skills relevant to the type of outing)
- practical considerations
- transportation requirements (if relevant)
- information that must be included in the written authorisations
- authorisations (including how often they are required).

### Resources

- [Excursions and regular outings in early childhood services](#)
- ACECQA has developed the following risk assessment templates that can be downloaded at [Quality Area 2 on the Risk assessment and management tool tab](#):
  - Risk assessment and management template – Excursions
  - Risk assessment and management template – Transporting children
  - Risk assessment and management template – Transporting children (other than as part of an excursion)
- [Policy Guidelines - Excursions](#)
- [Guide to the NQE](#) - Section 2.13: Excursions (page 386)



### Adequate Supervision to minimise risks to children

Adequate supervision is critical to protecting children from harm and hazards of all kinds while they are in the care of the service. This includes while children are in the service premises, as well as when they are on an excursion, and during transportation provided or arranged by the service.

Approved providers must ensure children are adequately supervised at all times they are in the care of the service. This involves careful planning, risk assessments, teamwork and excellent communication between educators. Meeting [educator to child ratios](#) may not be sufficient on its own.

The approach to supervision will vary widely depending on the number, age and abilities of the children involved and how well the educators know the children. Educators' knowledge of children attending a holiday program will be vastly different to their knowledge of children attending a regular preschool or outside school hours care (OSHC) program. Knowing each child's developmental needs and abilities is essential to ensure educators are properly positioned in play spaces or during activities.

Supervision will also vary depending on the individual circumstances of the service's environment and the activities planned that day. Additional educators may be required to monitor specific activities, incursions/excursions, or if there are areas that are difficult to monitor. Educators should conduct risk assessments as well as using their professional judgement to determine the appropriate approach to supervising children given all the circumstances. When circumstances change, they should adjust the level of supervision needed.

If children are being adequately supervised an educator can respond immediately if a child is distressed, and can intervene in potentially hazardous situations such as:

- children using equipment intended for older children (and being seriously injured)
- children being fed known allergens
- exiting services unnoticed by educators
- engaging in sexualised play with peers
- injuring each other or sustaining injuries that cannot be explained.

Adequate supervision also gives educators opportunities to have meaningful interactions with children and build strong relationships with them. Being present and monitoring children's play allows children to extend their play and challenge themselves as educators can quickly react to keep children safe. Educators can also identify appropriate opportunities for development that can be included in educational programming.

### **Considerations for outside school hours care (OSHC) services**

OSHC services cater for children of a wide range of ages. Younger children will require close supervision, whereas for older children it is important to balance the need for close supervision with respect for their age and developing independence. OSHC services may also need to consider the following:

- The organisation of the physical environment to balance supervision and children's growing need for privacy and autonomy
- The location of children's toilets and how children will be supervised when visiting and returning from the toilets
- Supervision during the daily movement between school and the OSHC service premises (safe arrival)
- Supervision of children's transportation to and from the OSHC service premises.

### **Supervision in specific situations**

There are specific requirements in some situations:

- [Sleep and rest](#)
- [Safe arrival of children - information sheet](#) and [Safe arrival policy and procedure guidelines](#)  
[Guidance for adequate supervision during transportation](#)

### **Resources**

- [Supervision in early childhood services](#)
- [QA2 Active supervision: Ensuring safety and promoting learning - Information sheet](#)

- [Children's Health and Safety: An Analysis of Quality Area 2 of the National Quality Standard \(Occasional Paper 2\)](#)



## Emergency management during telecommunications and power outages

Reliable telecommunications equipment and electric power supply are critical in ensuring the safety, security, and efficiency of operations in early childhood services.

Educators and service staff must have ready access to a telephone or similar means of communication to enable **immediate communication** to and from parents and emergency services.

Examples of communication equipment are:

Fixed-line telephone

- Mobile phone
- Satellite phone
- 2-way radio
- Video conferencing equipment

**Telecommunication outages** whether caused by technical failures, natural disasters, or other unforeseen circumstances, can disrupt vital communication channels between educators and other staff, parents and emergency services if a child were to have a serious health emergency such as an asthma attack or anaphylactic reaction.

**Power outages** can create potential hazards for children at services and are likely to mean a service cannot operate safely. This could occur if there are extreme heat days and no cooling, or no ability to use air conditioning to protect the service from poor air quality outside due to smoke.

Approved providers and services must consider the implications of telecommunications and power outages when conducting risk assessments. In an emergency setting where a service does not have functioning communication equipment or is experiencing a power outage, the service must assess whether it is safe and secure to operate the service considering the potential dangers to the health and safety of both children and staff.

Based on this analysis, services must decide whether they will operate or not in these scenarios, and/or how to manage and minimise these risks. These decisions should be reflected in each service's emergency management plan (EMP), as well as their emergency and evacuation policy and procedures. Services should consult families of their approach to emergencies and consider how families will be kept informed of any closures.

If power is lost while the service is operating:

- Ensure all children are safe from any potential risks relating to visibility
- Ensure all children are safe from any fallen power lines
- Use flashlights and emergency lighting to provide light at the service
- Contact the energy supplier to ascertain if the outage is temporary or if further actions are required to ensure children's safety and wellbeing

- Assess if the lack of power is going affect the safety and comfort of children due to no heating, cooling, cooking facilities or refrigeration
- Contact families and recommend that children are collected if there is going to be an extended power outage.

### Notify the Regulatory Authority

In the event of telecommunications outage or power outage where the service environment is unsafe for children and staff, services must notify the Regulatory Authority that the [service needs to close](#) due to an emergency. Services are reminded that they also need to notify the Regulatory Authority when the service re-opens following a closure.

### Resources

- read about [Emergency and evacuation requirements](#) for early childhood services, and download a template Emergency Management Plan (EMP) to guide and document your emergency management requirements
- updated ACECQA [Policy and Procedure Guideline – Emergency and evacuation](#)
- download ACECQA's 'Risk Assessment and Risk Management Tool' at [Quality Area 2 - Children's health and safety](#)
- information on managing [bush fires and grass fires](#).



### Notification required for services providing a bush kinder program

Bush kinder programs are part of educational programs operated by approved early childhood services. They take place outdoors, and children learn in nature. These natural spaces can include:

- metropolitan parks
- regional parks
- local bushland
- local beaches
- visitor sites within national and state parks.

Starting a bush kinder program is a change to the nature of the education and care provided by the service that needs to be notified to the Regulatory Authority.

Approved providers must notify the Regulatory Authority, QARD in Victoria, within 7 days of providing, or ceasing to provide, a bush kinder program or other nature-based outdoor education program. Providers and services are reminded that they cannot exceed the number of approved places for the service, regardless of it being an outdoor program.

This obligation to notify the Regulatory Authority commenced on 1 October 2023 for NQF services (kindergarten and long day care), and will apply to occasional care, limited hours and other children's services regulated under the Children's Services Act 1996 from 2 April 2024.

Under the new notification requirement, approved providers must also notify the Regulatory Authority of an intended change to the age ranges of children being educated and cared for by the

service.

### How to notify?

- Approved providers of NQF services must notify via [NQA ITS](#)
- Approved providers of children's services (occasional care and limited hours) must complete form AS10 and email it to [licensed.childrens.services@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:licensed.childrens.services@education.vic.gov.au).

### Resources

- [Changes to early childhood provider and service details](#)
- [Notifying the early childhood Regulatory Authority about incidents, complaints and other circumstances](#)
- [Notification types and timeframes](#) (ACECQA)
- [Bush kinders](#)

If you have any questions please call our Enquiry Line on 1300 307 415 or email [licensed.childrens.services@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:licensed.childrens.services@education.vic.gov.au).



### Notifiable diseases

Ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of children attending early childhood services is a fundamental legal obligation for approved providers and services. It applies regardless of the type of service and the children's ages.

Two or more cases of an infectious disease can be an **outbreak**. If one is identified at an early childhood service, the approved provider must:

- take all reasonable steps to prevent the spread of the disease at the service
- contact each child's parent or guardian to notify them of the outbreak as soon as practical
- display a notice at the service stating that there has been an infectious disease outbreak
- notify the Victorian Department of Health (DH) or the [Local Public Health Unit](#)
- confirm whether children and contacts (children who have been exposed to particular infections) must be excluded from the service by referring to DH's Exclusion Table. Exclusions may apply to children with particular infections and contacts.

### Resources

- [A-Z list of 'blue book' diseases](#) provides information on diseases and whether you must notify DH
- DH's [Exclusion table](#) states the minimum period of time a child must not attend their early childhood service. This includes all types of services, and applies to both pre-school and school-aged children
- [Notification procedures for infectious diseases](#)
- [Staying healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services](#) (NHRMRC). The current 2013 edition is under review
- [Notifiable infectious diseases, conditions and micro-organisms](#)

## Child Safe Standards focussed visits program



The Quality Assessment and Regulation Division (QARD) is the regulator of the Victorian Child Safe Standards (CSS) for all approved early childhood services and providers operating in Victoria, integrating this into our regulatory work under the National Quality Framework and the Children's Services Act 1996.

Each CSS states an expected outcome and includes minimum requirements that services must meet. It requires specific actions, strategies, operational practices and governance arrangements that services must put in place to meet the CSS. In complying with the CSS, each service must implement the CSS in a way that is appropriate to them given the specific needs of the children and families.

In the coming months, authorised officers from QARD will be conducting focussed compliance visits to a number of services across Victoria. Services will be asked to demonstrate their understanding of the CSS, how it is implemented in the service, and how their practice complies with the it,

Read more about how to implement the CSS in early childhood services:

- [information and guidance about each of the 11 Standards](#) specifically aimed at early childhood services
- [how QARD monitors compliance with the CSS](#) in early childhood services
- [Commission for Children and Young People \(CCYP\) resources](#) – including fact sheets, resources and videos aimed at all organisations that must comply with the CSS

## Law reform



### Changes to Children's Services Regulations 2020 commence on 2 April 2024

Changes to the Children's Services Regulations 2020 (CS Regulations) commence on 2 April 2024.

These changes keep the CS Regulations aligned with requirements already in place for services that operate under the National Quality Framework (NQF).

The changes apply to [children's services](#), which include:

- limited hours services (where children attend for a short period of time)
- occasional care services
- mobile services
- school holiday care programs that operate for fewer than 28 days a year
- some services that formerly received funding under the Commonwealth Government's Budget Based Funded program or Indigenous Advancement Program.

Read more about these changes in the [special edition of our newsletter for children's services in March 2024](#). The newsletter also provides resources and guidance on how to comply with these

new requirements.

All changes commence on **2 April 2024**, except for the prescribed currency periods for first aid qualifications and training, which commence on **1 July 2024**.

The changes were made by the [Children's Services Amendment Regulations 2024](#). The amendments will be consolidated into the [Children's Services Regulations 2020](#) when they commence.

If you have any questions please email [licensed.childrens.services@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:licensed.childrens.services@education.vic.gov.au) or call our Enquiry Line on 1300 307 415 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

## Information



Australian Children's  
Education & Care  
Quality Authority

### NQA ITS unavailable during migration to the Cloud

This article applies to approved providers and services under the NQF. It does not apply to Victorian children's services (occasional care and limited hours services) regulated under the Children's Services Act 1996.

The NQA ITS system and Public Portal are being migrated to a cloud platform as part of a significant technical upgrade. There will be better security through two factor authentication and a new look and feel for users.

**The system will not be available to users during the upgrade from 5:00pm on Thursday 28 March 2024 until 8:00am on Tuesday 2 April 2024.**

From 2 April 2024 users will need to re-register for a user account, even if you have previously used the legacy system, and follow the new log in procedure.

Users will receive email advice about the steps required, before the upgrade. For more information, see [ACECQA's website](#).

## Professional development and training



### Current professional development opportunities for early childhood educators and services

The Department is currently offering a range of professional development opportunities including:

- [Financial support for educators to upskill](#)
- [Effective mentoring program for experienced teachers](#)

To stay up to date with professional development opportunities, grants and other incentives please read the [Early Childhood Update](#) each month.

## Tell us what you think

Please share your feedback on the Quality Assessment and Regulation update.

Send feedback

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The department respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pays respect to the ongoing living cultures of First Peoples.

Information is correct at time of publishing.

This email was sent by the Department of Education, 2 Treasury Place, East Melbourne, VIC, 3002, Australia to [Azi.Sheikh@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:Azi.Sheikh@education.vic.gov.au)

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