



Kindergarten access for all children: Ensuring the sector is responsive to the community

Research shows quality education and care early in life leads to better health, education and employment outcomes later in life. The early years are critical for establishing self-esteem, resilience, healthy growth and capacity to learn. Quality education and care shapes every child's future and lays the foundation for development and learning.

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about>

Access to two years of quality kindergarten programs enhances children's learning and development. It is particularly beneficial to children with a disability or developmental delay, or children who experience vulnerability or disadvantage. Participation in quality early childhood education benefits children's learning in the here and now and well into the rest of their lives.

Access for all children relies on communities, governments, employers, organisations and agencies, professionals and families working together. A collaborative approach results in services seeking to understand the changing needs of families and planning programs to respond to all families.

This work is about connecting to what is important in local communities, responding to diversity, addressing barriers and designing programs that deliver quality in responsive ways.

It is more than a response to a funding agreement – it is an essential response to children as citizens.

With the implementation of two years of funded kindergarten, educators, service managers and approved providers should communicate with families and the community about the way programs will continue to support children's learning and development. This may include addressing questions or concerns about the implementation of two years of kindergarten to build families confidence in and continued engagement with early childhood education.

This strategy is effective when we adopt a welcoming and inclusive approach towards all families, especially those who are harder to reach or who experience barriers to participation.



Effective implementation of two years of funded kindergarten is enhanced when educators engage with the Practice Principles of the **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework**

- Reflective practice
- Partnerships with families
- High expectations for every child
- Respectful relationships and responsive engagement
- Equity and diversity
- Assessment for learning and development
- Integrated teaching and learning approaches
- Partnerships with professionals.

It is recommended that educators refer to the **VEYLDF** and the Practice Guides for further suggestions and ideas about continuous improvement.



Practical tips to support access for everyone:

- **Review local trends and demographics.**

It is important that professionals, along with their employers and managers, investigate, understand and respond to changes in local demographics and families' circumstances. Family life can change rapidly and the demographics of a whole community can change too; for example, one year families may be able to readily access a sessional program, and the next year families may require longer hours, to enable work or study. An annual review that examines local data (best sourced via local government) combined with conversations with local community members will ensure that programs are designed to be responsive to contemporary communities.

- **Use school readiness funding.**

Funded kindergarten programs can consider evidence-based programs from the school readiness funding menu of evidence-informed programs and supports, focused on the priority area of access and inclusion.

- **Trial an innovative model.** Consider offering an alternative to the standard programs offered at the service as part of a trial – a Saturday morning for example. Sometimes it is helpful to try something new and invite the participants (children, families and professionals) to help with the evaluation.

- **Use the Early ABLES online tool.** Educators can plan tailored learning and development programs for children aged two to five years with a disability or developmental delay.
- **Make decisions based on increased access for all children and their families.** This sounds obvious but there are times when particular interests get in the way of making ethical decisions. This process takes time and a commitment to constructive dialogue. Sometimes it might be a matter of choosing between two good options. In the end children's rights and best interests are always paramount. (The ECA Code of Ethics - listed below - is a useful tool to support this discussion).
- **Communicate with everyone.** Deciding on how to ensure access to kindergarten services for everyone requires communication. Talking with families, other professionals, employers and the community should be planned and systematic when important decisions are being made about program delivery. It is helpful to delegate this task to a particular person who can ensure regular communication with all involved.

Questions for reflective discussion:

The VEYLDF Practice Principle **Reflective Practice** invites educators to think about and challenge the practices they take for granted.

Use the following questions to support discussion with your colleagues.

- What are your shared understandings of the needs of the families in your local community?
- What agencies operate in your local community? What can they tell you about the needs of families?
- What barriers or difficulties do families experience as they access kindergarten?
- What strategies can be developed to eliminate or reduce these difficulties?
- What strategies have you used to establish strong relationships with children and their families, especially those experiencing vulnerability?
- Why do you think they have worked? What might you do differently?
- Consider ways to encourage engagement and participation of families in the decisions that shape the service – how could we share power with the families we work with?

References and further reading

Department of Education and Training and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2016). Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. DET and VCAA, Melbourne.

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veylframework.pdf>

Resources on the Practice Principles

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/Pages/veylproflearn.aspx>

Reflective Practice Education Resource

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/profdev/Pages/reflectivepractice.aspx>

ECA Code of Ethics

<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-ethics/>

Resources for funded kindergartens

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/improvedchildratioinkindergarten.aspx>

ACECQA resources for families

The families section outlines how quality education and care is vital to children's development and explains what the National Quality Framework means.

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/resources/information-families>

DET webpage supporting educators to plan for and run Three-Year-Old Kindergarten Programs <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/Pages/running-three-year-old-kinder.aspx>

DET website about Kindergarten for parents

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/parents/kindergarten/Pages/default.aspx>

DET School Readiness Funding menu

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/SRFmenu.aspx>

DET Early ABLES assessment tool

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/learningneeds/Pages/ablesassessment.aspx>



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