

Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan

Ararat Rural City

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3
1.1. Reform context	3
1.2. Purpose of Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plans (KISPs)	3
1.3. Structure of the KISP	4
1.4. Disclaimer	4
2. Map of Early Childhood Education services in Ararat Rural City	5
3. Local context	6
3.1 Purpose	6
3.2 Key considerations	6
4. Unmet demand estimates between 2025 - 2036 for Ararat Rural City	9
4.1 Purpose	9
4.2 Methodology	9
4.3 Summary of current kindergarten provision	11
4.4 Agreed estimates of demand for kindergarten places	11
5. Authorisation	14

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Department
of Education

1. Introduction

1.1. Reform context

The Victorian Government's \$14 billion Best Start, Best Life (BSBL) reforms are the most significant change to Victoria's early childhood sector in a generation.

The BSBL reforms include:

- **Free Kinder:** Free Kinder is now available for Victorian 3- and 4-year-old children at participating services in standalone (sessional) kindergartens and long day care centres – a saving of up to \$2,500 per child, every year.
- **Pre-Prep:** Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will gradually transition to 'Pre-Prep' – increasing to a universal 30-hour-a-week program of play-based learning for 4-year-old children in Victoria by 2036.
- **Three-Year-Old Kindergarten:** the continued roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, with programs increasing to 15 hours a week across the state by 2029.
- **Early learning and childcare centres:** the establishment of 50 Victorian government-owned and operated early learning and childcare centres. These centres will be built in areas with the greatest need and will make it easier for families to access early childhood education and childcare. The first of the centres will open in 2025.

These initiatives demonstrate a clear commitment to improving early learning outcomes for Victorian children, workforce participation and access for families, and present the most significant change to Victoria's early childhood sector in a generation.

Pre-Prep will roll-out in Ararat Rural City in 2025. Statewide, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background, and children who have had contact with Child Protection services, will be able to access up to 25 hours of Pre-Prep in 2026, increasing to up to 30 hours from 2028. Children who have (or have a parent or guardian who has) a Commonwealth concession card and children who are a multiple birth child (triplets or more) across the state will be able to access up to 25 hours of Pre-Prep in 2028, increasing to up to 30 hours from 2030.

1.2. Purpose of Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plans (KISPs)

New and expanded infrastructure is key to delivering the BSBL reforms and will require a large expansion of kindergarten facilities across the State. KISPs, which are jointly developed with Local Governments, indicate where and when new infrastructure will be required to support both reform implementation and population growth in each of Victoria's 79 local government areas (LGAs). KISPs help all kindergarten providers meet demand and collectively provide a clear picture of infrastructure need across the State.

KISPs support planning for services and future capital works and include detailed information about:

- Current capacity and demand for funded kindergarten

- Capacity to be delivered for planned infrastructure projects and future demand for kindergarten
- Forecast ‘unmet demand’ for kindergarten – that is, the kindergarten places needed that cannot be met by current or planned capacity
- Information specific to each local government area and its early childhood education and care landscape.

KISPs were initially developed to support the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and have now been updated to incorporate Pre-Prep.

KISPs are intended to support planning. They are not funding documents and do not commit any party to addressing the unmet demand identified.

However, it is expected that future investment requests through Building Blocks and funding decisions about Local Government, not-for-profit projects (including non-government schools) would align with the relevant KISP (including Section 3: Local Context).

1.3. Structure of the KISP

Each KISP consists of the following sections:

- **Section 1:** A short introduction to the Best Start, Best Life reform and the KISP.
- **Section 2:** A map of existing and planned Early Childhood Education and Care services.
- **Section 3:** Local context and knowledge of key information in Ararat Rural City relevant to early childhood education.
- **Section 4:** Unmet demand estimates in Ararat Rural City over the life of the reform.

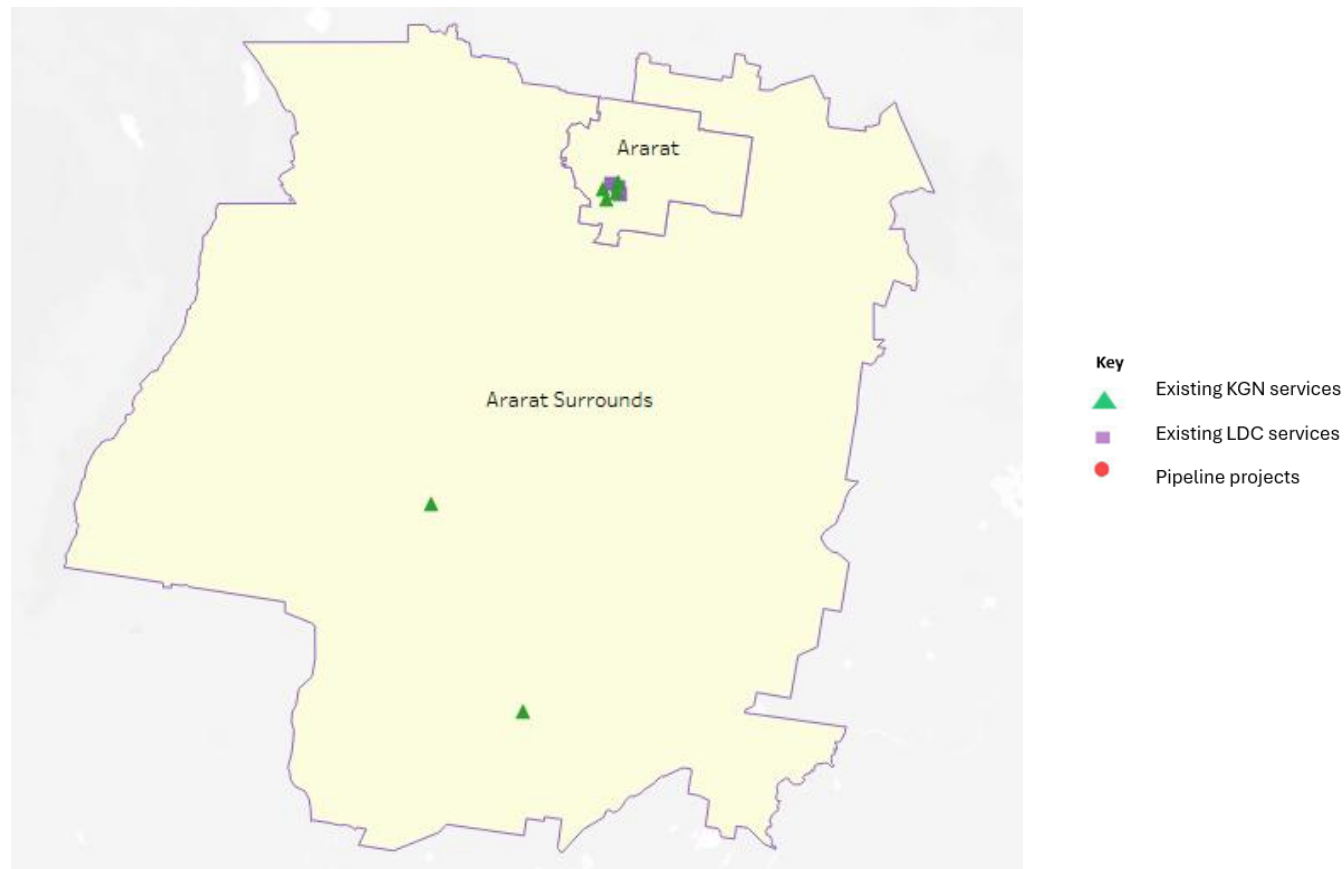
1.4. Disclaimer

All data presented in this document is published for information purposes only. Operational and business decisions should not be based solely on this document. Neither the Department nor Ararat Rural City Council warrants, guarantees, makes any representation or assumes any duty of care in relation to the data, including as to its suitability, completeness, accuracy or adequacy.

2. Map of Early Childhood Education services in Ararat Rural City

The map below shows the distribution of currently operating and new State-supported services that are planned to open in the future in Ararat Rural City. Planned services by the private sector are not included.

This map has been prepared using departmental data, from both the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITS) and the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA).



3. Local context

3.1 Purpose

Local, place-based knowledge and context play an important role in supporting the implementation of the BSBL reforms across Victoria. This section of the KISP documents this knowledge and context and should be considered alongside the kindergarten demand estimates in Section 4.

Information provided as local context may support applications through the Building Blocks Capacity Building and Planning Grants streams.

3.2 Key considerations

Aboriginal Self Determination in Early Childhood Education and Care

The proportion of the Ararat Rural City's population that is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander persons is 1.89%, close to double of the proportion of 1.01% in Victoria (ABS Census 2021). Within the age cohort of 0-4 years, the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children is also much higher at 2.77% in Ararat Rural City, compared to 1.87% in Victoria.

The local early childhood education and care providers are recognising the need to have culturally inclusive programs. The Ararat Early Learning Centre has a Reconciliation Action Plan through the Narragunnawali online platform, and has RAP Network Connections with Carey St Kindergarten and St Andrews Kindergarten.

The Gariwerd Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG) has recently been re-established under the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc (VAEAI). LAECGs are voluntary bodies made up of a broad range of local Koorie community (parents, carers and community members), and at a local level play an important role in providing important links between the Koorie communities and educational institutions such as early childhood education services, schools, TAFEs and Universities.

Key demographic trends that influence demand for kindergarten

Ararat Rural City's Community Vision 2035 includes the goal of "Strong population growth trajectories that buck trends in rural Victoria". The Ararat Rural City has a target to grow the population by 1000 by June 2029 in the Council Plan 2025-29. This growth in the overall population will also increase the population of children, which increases demand for kindergarten places and puts pressure on the capacity of the infrastructure.

This target population growth has a very high likelihood of being achieved. Victorian Government strategies to grow advanced manufacturing, food production and exports, transition to renewable energy, boost regional health and tourism services, strengthen major transportation links and support the resettlement of migrants have attracted both public and private sector investment and are generating hundreds of new jobs in Ararat.

In many other rural and regional areas, workforce attraction and population growth have been dampened by lack of housing. Over the last few years Council have undertaken bold new approaches to overcome housing market failure, support local jobs and transform its community and economy. Council actively pursued new housing options and supported innovative housing models that work to overcome market failure and create capacity to increase the population of Ararat Rural City.

In 2021, Council secured \$950,000 investment from the Victorian Government to alleviate the upfront capital cost burden of trunk utilities and civil infrastructure to the Ararat East Development

Zone, which has unlocked the private investment needed to build more homes¹². Other similar examples of addressing the partial market failure has yielded results. There is now a pipeline of over 500 housing lots in the Ararat township across Green Hill Lake, Evans Park, and Omaroo Estates, and Ironbark Lane, and many new houses being built across Ararat.

Council has also partnered with local philanthropists, reputable and capable property developers and businesses to rapidly increase supply of suitable, sustainable, safe and affordable housing. Examples include the establishment of the Ararat Housing Enterprise, a public-private partnership between Ararat Rural City Council and a private enterprise headed by ACE Radio Network owners and Willaura farmers, Rowly and Judy Paterson³. The first Ararat Housing Enterprise home was completed in December 2024 with new tenants moving in before Christmas.

Council has also secured \$7.3 million from the Commonwealth Government's Housing Support Program in January 2025 to build enabling infrastructure for more housing⁴. With the bottleneck of housing shortages beginning to be addressed, local major employers have greater confidence and are actively recruiting to fill job vacancies in 2025. Examples include Corrections Victoria, AME Systems, East Grampians Health Service and others. As at the September 2024 quarter, the unemployment rate in Ararat LGA was 4.8%⁵. Unemployment rates of 5% or lower is considered by some as full employment, where anyone who is able and wants to work is already employed. This means many of the job vacancies in the Ararat municipality will be filled by new residents and families moving to this region. These new families, if they have children, will create increased demand for kindergarten places.

More major economic initiatives are also on the near horizon, which will create more jobs and support population growth. For example, the new Ararat Bioenergy⁶ project and associated industrial developments and new businesses that could access "behind the meter" gas & electricity is expected to generate over 600 jobs. Ararat is the location of the first PlastOil Australia plant, a soft plastics recycling facility⁷ and is expected to create over 100 ongoing jobs.

Ararat Rural City Council's focus on creating a strong economy with a stable housing supply, lifestyle and affordability is giving first home buyers and young families the confidence and security to move to regional Victoria for employment opportunities and to buy a home. These trends and opportunities are expected to result in more and more workers, their families and young children moving to the region, placing increasing demand for kindergarten places.

Projects or trends that may influence supply of early childhood education and care

As at the end of 2024, all existing sessional kindergartens operated from single-rooms and most are located in single-room facilities. Ararat North Kindercare (sessional) has two rooms available, however the second room is much smaller than the main classroom and is used for support playgroup and other uses.

All of the existing sessional kindergarten infrastructure is aged and/or poorly configured, poorly insulated for heating and cooling, and there is very limited natural lighting at one of the locations. One facility is reaching its end of life and will require replacement in the near future, or if it is unable to be replaced, would result in a loss of supply. The long term tenure of another site is also uncertain, creating challenges for the planning of future facility refurbishments and upgrades as well as forecasting of the long term supply of places. Most other facilities have not been refurbished or updated since they were built, some many decades ago.

¹ Premier of Victoria media release 4 September 2024, Laying The Foundations For More Homes In Ararat, <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/laying-foundations-more-homes-ararat>, accessed 31 January 2025

² Premier of Victoria media release 1 December 2023, Huge Homes Boost For Regional Workers, <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/huge-homes-boost-regional-workers>, accessed 31 January 2025

³ Ararat Rural City Council media release 13 December 2024, Ararat Continues To Break Ground On Affordable Housing, <https://www.ararat.vic.gov.au/news/ararat-continues-break-ground-affordable-housing>, accessed 31 January 2025

⁴ Australian Government media release on 16 January 2025, The Albanese Government is turbocharging housing in Victoria, <https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/c-king/media-release/albanese-government-turbocharging-housing-victoria>, accessed 31 January 2024

⁵ REMPLAN unemployment trends: <https://app.remplan.com.au/Ararat/economy/trends/unemployment>, accessed 31 January 2025.

⁶ Ararat Bioenergy, <https://araratbio.com.au/>, accessed 31 January 2025

⁷ PlastOil Australia, <https://plastoilaustralia.com.au/>, accessed 31 January 2025

The aged and tired state of the sessional kindergarten facilities presents challenges in attracting and retaining staff to supply early childhood education and care. Particularly recent graduates and early career ECTs who, generally speaking, can relocate more easily and would choose workplaces that are more modern, appealing and closer to metropolitan areas. Higher quality infrastructure may support attraction and retention of staff.

The Long Day Care (LDC) based kindergarten services have set aside one dedicated room for kindergarten programs, retaining their other rooms for LDC services which have high demand. Attraction and retention of staff has been a challenge for LDC providers as well. Workforce issues have prevented one centre from meeting kindergarten funding requirements since 2021.

Ararat Rural City Council are working proactively with training providers and the local ECEC providers to have the Cert 3 and Diploma courses in Early Childhood Education and Care delivered within the municipality. Council are also working with providers to promote and upskilling to ECT. Collaborative efforts are also underway to actively promote the lifestyle and employment opportunities in Ararat Rural City to attract and build the local workforce.

However, the increasing demand for ECEC workforce across Victoria may result in the loss of staff to other, more attractive, workplaces. New or improved infrastructure is critically needed to support the attraction and retention of more early childhood education and care staff in Ararat Rural City, as well as to enable optimal efficiency.

Key local geographic considerations or information relevant to Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and Pre-Prep

Ararat Rural City has two SA2s, one is the Ararat township and the second is Ararat Surrounds, which encircles the Ararat township. There are two kindergarten providers located in Ararat Surrounds between 35km and 50km south of the Ararat township in Willaura and Lake Bolac.

Children located in Ararat Surrounds in the north, east and west of the Ararat township would attend kindergarten services located in the Ararat township rather than within the Ararat Surrounds SA2, because the kindergartens in the Ararat Township are simply closer or more practical for these families than kindergartens in Willaura and Lake Bolac. Part of the Ararat Surrounds SA2 demand is therefore allocated to the Ararat township. This provides a more accurate prediction of where the kindergarten demand will occur.

Other information about the expansion of early childhood services

The expected increase in population will also increase demand for early childhood education and care services other than 3 Year Old Kindergarten and Pre-Prep, including long day care and outside of school hours care. The Ararat Rural City also has townships such as Lake Bolac that are already severely underserved for these other forms of early childhood services. New early childhood services will be needed in Ararat and Lake Bolac to meet this demand.

Ararat Rural City is also becoming increasingly culturally diverse. Council has partnered with the Wyndham Community and Education Centre to deliver the Grampians New Settlement and Workforce Pilot to fill chronic workforce shortages. The impact of the New Settlement project will be the continued in-migration of culturally diverse families from Wyndham and other metropolitan areas to Ararat. Early childhood services will see an increase in the number of culturally and linguistically diverse children attending their programs and services.

4. Unmet demand estimates between 2025 - 2036 for Ararat Rural City

4.1 Purpose

As the BSBL reforms are rolled out and Victoria's population grows, demand for kindergarten and Pre-Prep places will increase significantly. While additional capacity will be needed to meet this demand, this will vary across the State and over time, due to differences in the capacity of existing services, growth trends and sector composition.

To identify where, when and how many additional kindergarten places are expected to be required over the roll-out in Ararat Rural City, Council and the department have developed:

1. a summary of the current provision of kindergarten within Ararat Rural City (**Section 4.3**).
2. an estimate of kindergarten places that cannot be met through existing services for the 2025 - 2036 period, taking into account the additional demand that can be accommodated by optimising utilisation of existing services and infrastructure (**Section 4.4**).

Local governments and providers can use these published estimates to inform reform implementation activities such as service planning, kindergarten program expansion, infrastructure investments and Building Blocks funding applications in alignment with future demand over the roll-out.

4.2 Methodology

The estimated kindergarten places used in the following sections have been agreed between Ararat Rural City Council and the department, and were informed by:

- demand projections developed by the department which draw on a range of inputs, including population forecasts and current enrolments
- the estimated capacity of existing and planned services in the LGA (Section 2)
- where applicable, modelling undertaken by Ararat Rural City and service level information; and
- local knowledge and context provided by the local government (Section 3) that explains particular issues and trends in their area.

Kindergarten places explainer

The KISP measures a service's capacity to deliver funded kindergarten in terms of the number of **15-hour places** (referred to as "kindergarten places") available for Three-Year-Old kindergarten and Pre-Prep (noting that, by 2036, two kindergarten places will be required for one Pre-Prep enrolment). The number of kindergarten places is different from a service's licensed or approved places, which count the number of children permitted to attend the service at any one time under the license. Many services can enrol more children in their funded kindergarten program(s) than they have licensed places for because they can run more than one kindergarten program per week. Kindergarten places are therefore a more accurate measure of service kindergarten capacity than licensed places.

Kindergarten places have been presented as 15-hour places so that new Three-Year-Old Kindergarten places and the additional 15-hour places required for Pre-Prep can be easily compared to existing 15-hour Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places. This is because, when Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is fully rolled out in 2029, three-year-old children will have access to 15-hours of kindergarten. When Pre-Prep is fully rolled out in 2036, four-year-old children will have access to up to 30-hours of kindergarten, an increase of the current offering of 15-hours per week.

It is important to note that enrolments are not equivalent to 15-hour places. One 15-hour place can support a total of 15 hours of delivery per week split between one or more children, including but not limited to the following examples:

One 15-hour place (15 hours of delivery)		
Example 1	1 child	1 x 3YO attending 15 hours per week
Example 2	1 child	1 x 4YO attending 15 hours per week
Example 3	2 children	2 x 3YOs attending 7.5 hours per week
Example 4	3 children	3 x 3YOs attending 5 hours per week

Two 15-hour places can support a total of 30 hours of delivery per week split between one or more children, including but not limited to the following examples:

Two 15-hour places (30 hours of delivery)		
Example 1	1 child	1 x 4YO attending 30 hours per week
Example 2	2 children	2 x 3YOs attending 15 hours per week
Example 3	2 children	1 x 3YO, and 1 x 4YO both attending 15 hours per week
Example 4	3 children	2 x 3YOs attending 7.5 hours per week, and 1 x 4YO attending 15 hours per week

Geographic boundaries used in the KISP

These estimates have been developed at an LGA and community level to show the overall forecast and variation within an area. The KISP defines community at the Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2), which is a medium-sized area which represents a community that interacts socially and economically, with an approximate population range of 3,000 to 25,000 people, and an average population of about 10,000 people. The KISP uses 2021 SA2 boundaries. More information is available at the [Australian Bureau of Statistics website](#).

Supply contributed by pipeline projects

Ararat Rural City and the department have added any new places that will be made available through planned expansions of existing services or new services into estimates of existing supply, where this

information is available. This may include projects being delivered by not-for-profit providers (including non-government schools) with support from the Victorian Government, planned Kindergartens on School Sites, and government-owned and operated early learning and childcare centres.

The KISP does not estimate how and when the broader sector will expand to meet the additional demand for kindergarten places that are estimated over the roll-out period.

4.3 Summary of current kindergarten provision

The figures below provide a summary of current kindergarten provision within the LGA and provide relevant context for the estimates of demand for funded kindergarten places included in Section 4.5. The data included in this section are largely drawn from:

- the department's Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS), as at 2023.
- the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITS), as at October 2024.

Number of services by service type (NQAITS)	
Stand-alone kindergartens	6
Long day care centres (including services not currently delivering funded kindergarten)	3

Percentage of services by management type, LGA level (NQAITS)	
Type	Percentage
Local Government	0%
Private not for profit	67%
Private for profit	33%
Other	0%

Current kindergarten offering in Ararat Rural City	
Three-Year-Old Kindergarten participation rate (KIMS):	96%
Four-Year-Old Kindergarten participation rate (KIMS):	92%
Number of services that offer a funded kindergarten program (KIMS):	8

4.4 Agreed estimates of demand for kindergarten places

The below estimates (**Table 1** onwards) have been developed by Ararat Rural City Council and the department to illustrate the estimated:

1. Demand – the total number of kindergarten places expected to be required over the roll-out period to support the current provision of Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, the BSBL reforms, and population growth

2. Supply – the total number of kindergarten places that can be accommodated by existing services and infrastructure, and planned, State-supported services which are yet to open.
3. Unmet demand – kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by optimising existing services and infrastructure (i.e. the shortfall between demand and supply).

Interpreting the estimates

Infrastructure need in the LGA and its local communities is indicated by the bottom rows of the tables in this section (**Table 1** onwards): *Unmet demand*. If the number of kindergarten places in this row is above zero, it means that the area is estimated to need additional infrastructure capacity. Any type of provider – local government, not-for-profit (including non-government schools) or for-profit – can build this additional infrastructure.

Sub-SA2 factors may need to be considered to give a holistic picture of unmet demand. For example, in rural communities, one SA2 may contain several small towns, some with excess supply and some with unmet demand. At the SA2-level, demand may appear to be met because all supply and demand is considered in aggregate; however, it is not feasible to for families to drive long distances to access kindergarten capacity in another town. Sub-SA2 factors are covered in **Section 3: Local context**.

Table 1: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Ararat Rural City

Ararat Rural City estimates	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten places	354	380	396	402	411	419	425	430	434	437	441	446
Unmet demand	0	10	31	35	43	47	52	56	60	63	66	70

Community estimates

Table 2-A: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Ararat

Ararat estimates	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	301	329	350	357	365	372	377	381	385	388	391	395
Kindergarten supply	305	319	319	322	322	325	325	325	325	325	325	325
Unmet demand	0	10	31	35	43	47	52	56	60	63	66	70

Table 2-B: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Ararat Surrounds

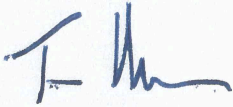
Ararat Surrounds estimates	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	53	51	46	45	47	47	48	49	49	49	51	51
Kindergarten supply	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

5. Authorisation

The Area Executive Director of the Department of Education and the Chief Executive Officer of Ararat Rural City endorse this Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP) for Ararat Rural City Council by signing on02 / .07..... 2025....

This KISP is not intended to create legal relations or constitute a legally binding contractual agreement between the parties. The parties may review this KISP in 2028 to publish a new version that will replace the previous version.

Signed for and on behalf and with the authority of Ararat Rural City Council.



.....
Signature

Name: Dr Tim Harrison

Title: Chief Executive Officer

Signed for and on behalf and with the authority of the Department of Education



.....
Signature

Name: Anne Gawith

Title: Acting Executive Director, Central Highlands Area