



Education
and Training

Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan

Loddon Shire

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. REFORM CONTEXT

In an Australian first, the Victorian Government has committed to implement Three-Year-Old Kindergarten for all children over a 10-year roll-out with a total investment of almost \$5 billion, including \$1.68 billion to support the infrastructure expansion required for the reform. This reform will add another year of universal funded kindergarten so that, by 2029, all children in Victoria will have access to two years of play-based learning through a funded kindergarten program.

1.2. PURPOSE OF KISPS

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will require a large expansion of kindergarten across the State. The Government has invited all 79 Victorian Local Governments to discuss and agree upon a Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP) for their Local Government Area (LGA).

Each KISP has been jointly developed with Local Government and published to estimate the growth in demand for kindergarten within the LGA. The KISPs will help all kindergarten providers meet demand and provide a clear picture of infrastructure need across the State.

While a KISP is not a funding document and does not define required infrastructure projects or commit any party to funding specific projects, it is expected that future investment requests through Building Blocks and funding decisions about Local Government and not-for-profit projects would align with the relevant KISP.

1.3. HOW TO USE THE KISP

Each KISP contains estimates of future kindergarten supply of, and demand for, Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places against existing enrolment capacity. Not-for-profit and for-profit providers can use these estimates to inform their plans to expand kindergarten programs, establish new services or invest in new or extended facilities.

For example, KISPs provide demand estimates in terms of where, when and how much demand for kindergarten places will grow in an LGA. KISPs also estimate where and how many kindergarten places providers can accommodate in existing facilities before an area needs new infrastructure to meet demand. The estimates can be used to inform decisions about where and when expansions of kindergarten program capacity and the construction of new or extended facilities are needed to meet demand growth.

Where there is an agreed KISP for the LGA, the Local Government and not-for-profit kindergarten providers seeking co-investments through the Building Blocks Capacity Building stream must refer to, and align their proposed project with, the infrastructure need identified in the KISP.

1.4. STRUCTURE OF THE KISP

Each KISP consists of the following sections:

- **Section 1:** A short introduction to the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform and the KISP.

- **Section 2:** A map of existing and planned Early Childhood Education and Care service locations.
- **Section 3:** Local knowledge and context relevant to the expansion of kindergarten services.
- **Section 4:** Funded kindergarten demand estimates.

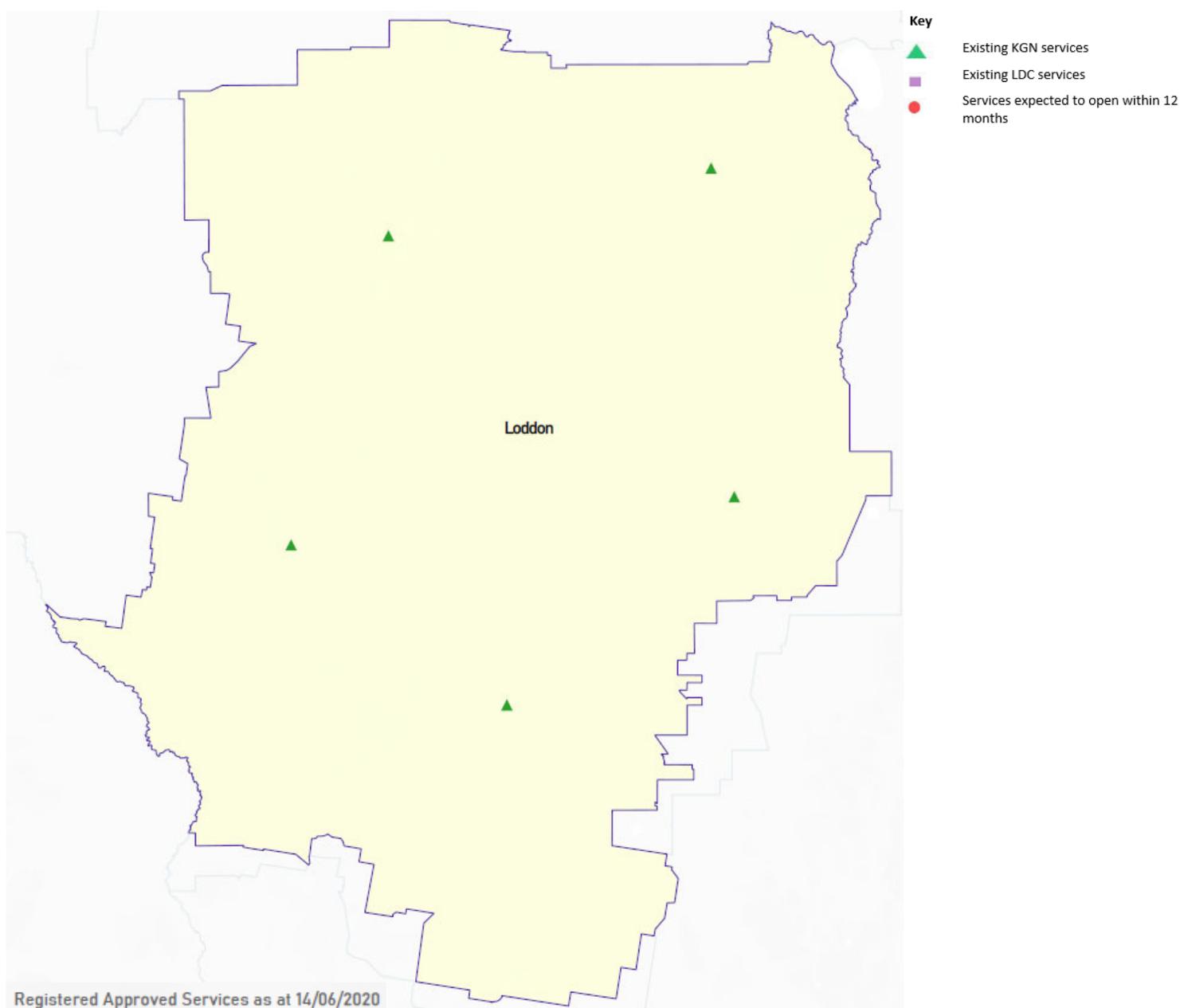
1.5. DISCLAIMER

All data presented in this document are estimates only and are based on the best information available to the Department and Local Government at the time. They are published on an as-is basis and are for informational purposes only. They are subject to adjustment in response to market forces and as new data and other relevant information becomes available. The data may under- or over-estimate both total demand in a given location or year and the capacity for new demand to be met by providers. As a result, operational and business decisions should not be made solely based on this document. Any use of this data is solely at the risk of the user. The Department and Local Government accept no responsibility for any loss or damage, either direct or incidental, that may result from the use of the data.

2. MAP OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SERVICES IN LODDON SHIRE

The map below shows the distribution of currently operating and new services that are planned to open in the future in the LGA and across its communities.

This map has been prepared using Departmental data, from both the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITS) and the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA). Where applicable, this map has been refined by Loddon Shire Council and the Department to capture other services that are planned to open in the future.



3. LOCAL CONTEXT

3.1 PURPOSE

Local, place-based knowledge and context play an important role in supporting the implementation of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten across Victoria. This section of the KISP documents this knowledge and context and has informed the funded kindergarten enrolment estimates in Section 4.

3.2 KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Key demographic trends that influence demand for kindergarten

Dispersed and decreasing population trends

Loddon Shire Council is located in central Victoria, 175 kilometres North West of Melbourne. Loddon Shire is predominately a rural area with many small towns and communities. The shire encompasses a total land area of approximately 6,700 square kilometres and has an estimated population of 7,558 as outlined in the 2016 Census. 4.29% of Loddon's population is aged 0-4. The Victorian in Future Small Areas Report predicts a 2.79% decrease in the populations across Loddon by 2036. Whilst the predictions show a decrease in population, the last Loddon Census data showed the population decrease had plateaued and showed a slight increase at that time. With changes to work environment in responding to the pandemic, real estate sales in the municipality has also seen a recent spike.

There are five stand-alone kindergartens across the Loddon Shire. Kindergartens are located in Boort, Dingee, Inglewood, Pyramid Hill and Wedderburn. Loddon Shire Council is the Early Years Manager for all services in Loddon. Each service has a parent committee who work with council's early years team to support the running of the service.

Higher than state average vulnerability levels in both Early Years and broader community

Loddon's 2018 AEDC Data indicated that 25.4% of children were vulnerable in one or more domain and 17.5% were vulnerable in two or more domains. This is significantly higher than the state average and highlights the need for support in areas of language, communication and physical health. The Strong Families Strong Children program has been developed to address these areas of concern and advocate for systemic change to improve the outcomes of families and children throughout the Loddon Shire.

	Physical	Social	Emotional	Language	Communication	Vulnerable 1	Vulnerable 2
Loddon	17.5	9.5	9.5	12.7	14.3	25.4	17.5
Victoria	8.2	8.8	8.1	6.4	7.4	19.9	10.1
Australia	9.6	9.8	8.4	6.6	8.2	21.7	11.0

Loddon Shire Council's 2016 SEIFA Index rating was 942 placing the area in the 31st percentile for disadvantage. This is slightly lower than the Regional Victorian average and well below the Victorian and Australian averages, again highlight the significant disadvantages children and families across Loddon face.

	2016 Index Rating	Percentile
Loddon	942.0	31
Regional Victoria	977.0	32
Victoria	1010.0	51
Australia	1001.9	46

Access to Early Childhood Services and wider community

Services for children and families are limited across the shire. There is limited access to childcare provided by family day care operators and no long day care service within the municipality; for most families three-year-old kindergarten is the first time children are cared for by someone outside their family.

Access to allied health professionals, GP's and pediatricians is limited or non-existent across the area. Families who require access to specialists for their children's developmental needs are required to travel outside the area to receive this care. Many families are unable to access these services due to transportation issues, financial concerns and limited availability of appointments putting children at risk of commencing kindergarten with significant development delays.

Transport

Families across the Loddon Shire are required to travel long distances to attend kindergarten, for some families the closest kindergarten service can be up to 25km. Many of these families utilize the school bus service to assist in transporting their children to kindergarten. For families who are not eligible to use this service, where the cost to transporting children to kindergarten is unaffordable children often do not attend kindergarten as there is no suitable public transportation and.

Low cost housing

The Loddon Shire has seen a recent increase in real estate sales, with many families who have the ability to work from home relocating out of Melbourne and into small rural towns. Low cost housing across the Loddon Shire has also seen an increase in young families relocating to the area.

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

Demand for kindergarten varies significantly across the Loddon Shire. In 2020 all funded four year old programs integrated an unfunded three year old program into their sessions. This multi aged program will remain in place for 2021 to ensure financial viability for all services.

Funded three-year-old kindergarten and Free Kindergarten

Funded three-year-old kindergarten has seen a significant increase in enrolments for all areas of the shire. Forecasts are indicating that some services will see further increases throughout the next few years and could potentially require more staff or building upgrades to increase capacity.

Kindergarten Infrastructure

While the services can currently accommodate a combined three and four-year-old program, Boort and Dingee Kindergartens are on the precipice of having enrolment numbers that would make this

untenable. In this circumstance the single room facilities currently available will make it difficult to offer two stand-alone 15 hour programs each week as offering extended hour sessions to increase facility availability is limited due to staff availability to support break backfill requirements when operating a single room service. In situations where this occurs, this will impact on the service's ability to offer a full 15 hour three-year-old program.

Kindergarten Buildings

All the kindergarten facilities are owned by Loddon Shire Council, these facilities have been well maintained and minor upgrades and repairs are regularly undertaken by council or parent committees. The Dingee Preschool is currently being considered for a potential expansion opportunity to increase capacity of the service.

Recruitment and retention of high quality ECEC staff

Recruitment of qualified early childhood staff is an ongoing challenge in the area. We currently have a limited number of staff available for backfill and quite often rely on current staff to fill vacancies across the services. If numbers increased to a position where more permanent staff are required this could pose a significant issue in delivering services.

Financial Impact

Financial viability of services to accommodate additional programs or models of service is a concern. Parent committees fundraise throughout the year to cover the shortfall of programing costs. Council works with committees to limit these additional costs where practicable.

Key local geographic considerations or information relevant to three-year-old kindergarten

It is important that children have a kindergarten space available in their local town. For most families this will be where their children will undertake future schooling and begin developing relationships and connections with their local communities.

When using place availability in comparison to the expected early years' cohort usage across the whole municipality, it is important to understand that whilst Council's overall data may demonstrate ample availability of places for additional enrolments, the physical location of the services across a large geographic area means where a kindergarten enrolment cannot be supported at a service, there is little option for parents to access an alternative service due to the distance between services, and the disconnection created in the subsequent transition to school (which would not be the school in the same town as kindergarten – if accessing an alternative service).

As there is little access to childcare across the shire families are more inclined to send children to kindergarten earlier than they otherwise would, thus putting added pressure on services and increasing demand for places across our services.

	2021		2022		2023	
	4 Year Old	3 Year Old	4 Year Old	3 Year Old	4 Year Old	3 Year Old
Boort (26)	16	6	6	14	14	16
Dingee (21)	6	11	11	13	13	8
Inglewood (26)	9	10	10	11	11	13
Pyramid Hill (24)	11	4	4	8	8	7
Wedderburn (30)	9	8	8	15	15	5

Other information about the expansion of early childhood services

Future Early Years' Service Provision

Access to childcare services in Loddon Shire Council is limited to a small number of family day care services operating in two locations. There is no long day care child care service in Loddon Shire and currently limited capacity to operate a sustainable stand-alone long day service in the current environment due to the dispersed early years population, unknown demonstrated demand and inability to enhance existing services (as no existing service exists). The lack of regular and reliable childcare has both early childhood education and economic impacts for our community members.

The AEDC data demonstrates the need to provide early structured education options for our children (Loddon's 2018 AEDC Data indicated that 25.4% of children were vulnerable in one or more domain and 17.5% were vulnerable in two or more domains. This is significantly higher than the state average and highlights the need for support in areas of language, communication and physical health.)

Integrated Community Hub

Council is currently developing a business case and modified model in an attempt to influence the ability to attract a long day care service into our community – two pilot sites have been identified in Boort and Inglewood (based on the number of eligible children in a radius catchment). It has been identified that a community hub facility hosting kindergarten, playgroups (including supported playgroup), child care, maternal & child health and other visiting early years' services improves the family/caregiver/child's early years' experience but also provides the best option to improve the sustainability of any child care service. The aim is to commence with two pilot sites, with a view to extend to additional communities until all townships that currently host kindergarten will offer an early years' hub

Loddon Shire Council will need to work in collaboration with State and Federal Governments to achieve this outcome and create opportunities to provide the highest quality learning environments for children and families now and into the future.

Kindergarten on School Sites

Hosting the facilities on or near existing education sites in these communities enhances the learning in place experience for families and children. Loddon Shire Council is currently exploring the possibility of enhancing the Dingee Preschool site, which is currently located next to the school facilities to increase capacity of the service and provide potential future expansion opportunities.

Loddon Shire Council is keen to work with DET to achieve this outcome and optimise opportunities to provide the highest quality learning environments for children and families now and into the future.

4. FUNDED KINDERGARTEN ENROLMENT ESTIMATES BETWEEN 2021-29 FOR LODDON SHIRE

4.1 PURPOSE

As Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is rolled-out and Victoria's population grows, demand for both Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten 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 over the roll-out in Loddon Shire, Loddon Shire Council and the Department have developed:

1. A summary of the current provision of kindergarten within the LGA (**Section 4.3**).
2. An approach to optimising the utilisation of existing services and infrastructure through 'change management' strategies that Loddon Shire Council and the Department will support to help meet additional demand in the LGA (**Section 4.4**).
3. An estimate of the Three and Four-Year-Old kindergarten places that cannot be met through existing services for the 2021-29 period, taking into account the additional demand that can be accommodated by optimising utilisation of existing services and infrastructure through point 2, above (**Section 4.5**).

Local Government 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 10-year roll-out.

4.2 METHODOLOGY

The estimated Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places used in the following sections have been agreed between Loddon Shire Council and the Department, and were informed by:

- Estimates developed by the Department which draw on a range of inputs, including population forecasts, current enrolments and results from the Kindergarten Capacity Assessment Program (KCAP), conducted in 2019.
- The estimated capacity of new services that are planned to open in the LGA (Section 2)
- Local knowledge and context provided by the Local Government (Section 3) that explains particular issues and trends in their area.
- The approach to optimising utilisation of existing services in the LGA (Section 4.4), and
- Other sources, such as modelling undertaken by Local Governments and local data.

The KISP measures a service’s capacity to deliver funded kindergarten in terms of the number of children it could enrol in Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten. The number of funded 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.

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten places have been presented as 15-hour places so they can be easily compared to Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places. Moreover, when Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is fully rolled-out in 2029, every three-year-old child will have access to 15-hours of kindergarten.

From 2023 all providers will have flexibility to determine how many hours of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten they deliver per week, with a minimum of five hours and a maximum of 15-hours funded pro-rata. It is expected that hours offered will vary. Given this variation, **it is important to be aware that during the transition to all three-year-old children receiving 15-hours of funded kindergarten per week in 2029, the 15-hour places presented in this report may represent multiple three-year-old places that individually receive less than 15-hours of kindergarten per week.**

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, which is medium-sized areas which represent a community that interacts socially and economically, with a population range of 3,000 to 25,000 people, and an average population of about 10,000 people.

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:

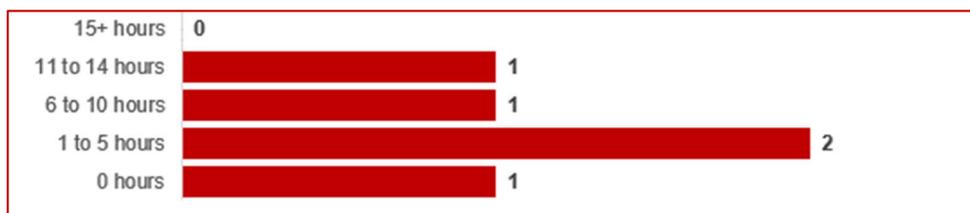
- The Kindergarten Capacity Assessment Program (KCAP), collected between June and October 2019.
- The Department’s Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS), as at 2019.
- The Department’s Quality and Regulatory Division (QARD) monitoring data, as at 2019.
- The National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITs), as at April 2020.
- The Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS), as at 2018.

Please note that, because these sources were collected at different points, this may result in slightly different totals appearing in the below data.

Number of services by service type (NQAITs, 2020)	
Stand-alone kindergartens	5
Long day care centres	0

Percentage of services by management type, LGA level (NQAITs, 2020)	
Type	Percentage
Local Government	100%
Private not for profit	0%
Private for profit	0%
Other	0%

Current kindergarten offering	
Four-Year-Old Kindergarten participation rate (VCAMS, 2018):	104%
Number of services that offer a funded kindergarten program (DET, 2019):	5
Number of services that offer an unfunded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program (DET, 2019):	5



4.4 APPROACH TO OPTIMISING THE USE OF EXISTING SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Change management strategies to optimise existing services and infrastructure

Children can often be accommodated through existing spare places and by services ‘unlocking’ unused capacity. As the experience of providers in the 2020 Three-Year-Old Kindergarten roll-out LGAs shows, while the optimisation of existing services can be challenging, it is highly time- and cost-effective compared to building new capacity through infrastructure projects. It also helps target infrastructure investment to the places that need it most and avoids over-supplying the local market.

Loddon Shire Council and the Department will support providers and services to maximise their kindergarten places through the following change management activities and practices:

- Increasing the capacity of any Local Government operated services by:
 - Running additional programs.
 - Using different timetables, including running 7.5-hour days.
 - Changing the delivery model, such as introducing rotational models or mixed-age groups.
 - Having degree-qualified kindergarten teachers leading integrated kindergarten programs in long day care settings.

- Encouraging and supporting other providers and services in the LGA to undertake change management.

Loddon Shire Council and the Department have estimated how many Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places can be accommodated through existing services in the LGA (**Table 1**). Both parties are committed to helping providers and services offer these kindergarten places before progressing to funded infrastructure solutions to meet demand. This commitment is reflected in the LGA and community level estimates below (**Table 2** onwards), which assume that demand will be met first through existing services and second through additional infrastructure. Note that in some cases the number of kindergarten places that can be offered through existing services may exceed demand for kindergarten places.

Table 1: Total estimated funded kindergarten places that can be offered by optimising existing services and infrastructure across the LGA, between 2021-29 (presented in 15-hour equivalent places)

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Estimated existing supply of kindergarten places*	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152

*This may be higher than current three and four-year-old enrolments as it includes any spare places that are currently available or could be generated by making some minor adjustments to programming approaches. The likely expansion of services and kindergarten places in response to population growth (i.e. growth in demand not generated by the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten Reform that would likely occur) is not accounted for in these estimates.

4.5 AGREED ESTIMATES OF DEMAND FOR FUNDED KINDERGARTEN PLACES THAT CANNOT BE MET THROUGH EXISTING SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The below estimates (**Table 2** onwards) have been developed by Loddon Shire Council and the Department to illustrate the estimated:

1. Total number of Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places expected over the roll-out period.
2. Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by optimising existing services and infrastructure over the roll-out period.

These estimates have been developed to reflect that the increase in demand for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten places will be gradual.

In estimating how many Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places cannot be accommodated by existing services and infrastructure, Loddon Shire Council and the Department have taken into account 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 Local Government owned services being developed and planned Kindergartens on School Sites.

These estimates do not, however, 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.

Infrastructure need in the LGA and its local communities is indicated by the bottom rows of the tables in this section (**Table 2** onwards): 'Total kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by existing services'. For example, if the number of kindergarten places for the LGA or a community is above zero in this row, it means that the area is estimated to need additional infrastructure (noting that further optimisation which avoids the need for additional infrastructure may be possible). Any type of provider – Local Government, not-for-profit or for-profit – can build this additional infrastructure. If this row shows all zeros, it means that there is no estimated need for additional infrastructure in the area.

Local Government and not-for-profit kindergarten providers must refer to the estimates in this section when applying through the Building Blocks Capacity Building Grants stream for Government funding. Under this stream, projects must be in a community where there is infrastructure need as shown in the community's table of estimated demand for kindergarten places (i.e. there are numbers in the bottom row above zero). Projects in LGAs or communities where demand can be met through existing services (i.e. the bottom row shows all zeros) are not eligible for funding under this stream.

LGA estimates

Table 2: Estimated three and four-year-old kindergarten places between 2021-29 (presented in 15-hour equivalent places)

LGA level estimates	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Total estimated demand for kindergarten places (three and four-year-old children)	104	108	111	113	115	124	128	131	134
Total kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by existing services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Community estimates

Table 3: Estimated three and four-year-old kindergarten places between 2021-29 (presented in 15-hour equivalent places)

Loddon estimates	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Total estimated demand for kindergarten places (three and four-year-old children)	104	108	111	113	115	124	128	131	134
Total kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by existing services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

5. AUTHORISATION

The Area Executive Director (Loddon Campaspe) of the Department of Education and Training and the Chief Executive of Loddon Shire Council endorse this Kindergarten Services and Infrastructure Plan (KISP) for Loddon Shire by signing on 24 / 03 / 2021

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 2024 to publish a new version that will replace the previous version.

An out-of-cycle review may be triggered if both parties agree that there has been a change in relevant data, information or the local early childhood sector that significantly affects the reliability of a KISP's estimates for planning purposes.

Signed for and on behalf and with the authority of Loddon Shire Council



Signature

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Witness Signature

Signed by Area Executive Director (Loddon Campaspe) Department of Education and Training



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