

Maximising kindergarten enrolments



Enrolment numbers are the largest single driver of a kindergarten's financial performance and sustainability. This resource aims to provide service providers with practical solutions on how to maximise kindergarten enrolments.

The introduction of the improved educator to child ratio of 1:11 means that the average cost per child to run a kindergarten service has increased. Therefore, maximising kindergarten income through enrolments has become very important for service providers.

This resource aims to provide service providers, including Committees of Management (COM) and Early Years Management (EYM) organisations, as well as kindergarten educational staff, with considerations which may affect enrolments, and practical solutions on how to maximise kindergarten enrolments up to the approved number of places.

Factors which may influence a parent's choice to enrol their child at a specific kindergarten can include:

- location and proximity to home, work, or siblings' schools
- reputation of the kindergarten within the community
- physical appearance of the indoor and outdoor environment
- session structures, times, and availability of additional services (for example, before or after session care)
- suitability to family needs (for example, teaching philosophy and curriculum, cultural sensitivity, accessibility requirements)
- enrolment enablers (for example, local council central enrolment, kindergarten open days)
- enrolment barriers (for example, non-refundable deposits, difficult enrolment processes)
- affordability of parent fees.

The kindergarten program, services, and offerings

A kindergarten program that engages with the local community and meets the needs of children and parents is crucial to maximising kindergarten enrolments. Particular areas to be considered may include:

- **Programs:** Development, implementation, and promotion of kindergarten programs that meet the needs and expectations of the local community. This may include a particular educational philosophy, specific curriculums and programs (e.g. languages, cooking, song and dance, bush kinder), and accessibility requirements such as programs offered in languages other than English.
- **Inclusion and support:** Promotion and discussion with parents and carers about the kindergarten's ability to tailor programs to the specific needs of individual children, engage with local family support services, and accommodate three year old children in mixed aged or four year old programs, may encourage participation. This may include children with complex needs, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (and extension) programs.

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- **Additional service offerings:** Depending on community demand, the kindergarten may wish to offer additional programs, to provide parents and carers added flexibility, and to assist with children's development based on specific needs. Particular alternative program offerings to be considered may include:
 - **Extended hours care:** allows children to attend an early childhood program at the kindergarten before and after the formal kindergarten session, or during the school holidays, to allow parents to attend other commitments.
 - **Occasional care and assisted play groups:** allows children who are too young to attend formal kindergarten sessions the opportunity to play with other children during an early childhood program at the kindergarten. This allows children the opportunity to be introduced to the kindergarten, as well as their parents/carers the opportunity to meet other parents. Note that additional educators are required under the National Regulations where children are under 36 months of age.
 - **Supported play groups:** allows children with complex needs and their parents the opportunity to attend a kindergarten program with children and families facing similar challenges. Such programs are supported by an educator specialising in inclusion support.

The kindergarten session structure

The Kindergarten should consider how to optimise the use of the kindergarten's facilities and resources, while offering convenient session structures and class timetables to the local community. Particular areas to be considered may include:

- **Session timetabling:** Convenient session times are an important consideration for some families enrolling their children at a particular kindergarten. Ideally, decisions concerning session timetables should be made after consulting with families prior to, or during the enrolment process. Many kindergartens provide an enrolment questionnaire for families to complete where timetable preferences can be indicated. Some families may prefer shorter or longer session lengths, depending on the children's needs, or parent preferences and commitments. Timetabling should also take into account educator feedback, community and council feedback, and other kindergartens within the local area.
- **Session structure:** Whether a kindergarten has one or more educational rooms, the improved educator to child ratio of 1:11 is calculated according to the total number of children receiving education and care at the service at one time. Session structures, class sizes, resourcing, and timetabling can be varied to maximise enrolments across the service, for example:
 - **Rotational session structure:** If enrolments for an age group exceed the number of approved places for the kindergarten the introduction of a rotational session structure can cater for additional enrolments, whereby children are allocated into smaller groups which are combined together on a particular day to form a larger group.



Kindergarten reputation

Enrolments can be significantly influenced by the reputation the kindergarten has in the local community. A negative perception of the kindergarten can dissuade parents from enrolling children at the kindergarten. The service provider and educational staff at the kindergarten should work diligently and closely with all stakeholders, to ensure the kindergarten's reputation is managed and enhanced wherever possible.



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- **Team teaching:** If employing extra educators is not required under regulations or cost prohibitive then team teaching² can allow kindergartens to spread a floating educational resource across the service to allow the service to operate with the desired level of enrolments, while maintaining the child to educator ratio.
- **Multi-age groups:** If enrolments for either three year old, four year old, or both aged programs are low, then combining three year old and four year old children into a multi-age group³ can allow the kindergarten to accommodate all children, rather than turn families away, whilst also making the most efficient use of staff and resources.
- **Approved places:** The service can also explore if there is scope to increase the number of approved places at the service, which could be achieved through re-configuration and optimisation of existing space, or by extending, modifying or building new or additional kindergarten rooms⁴.

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- **Educational programs perceptions:** Parents are heavily influenced by the content and relevance of the kindergartens educational programs, the level of educator to child interactions, and level of educator to parent communications. Ideally, educators will actively collaborate with parents by seeking their feedback on program content and structure, to understand each child's kindergarten experience with the aim to identify improvement areas.
- **Physical appearance:** The physical presentation of session rooms, the outdoor playground, and the age and condition of educational equipment will strongly influence parent perceptions of whether the kindergarten offers a quality-learning environment for their children. While some families may prefer contemporary session rooms and equipment, others may prefer a more traditional kindergarten – either way, the service provider and educational staff should ensure that the physical appearance meets the expectations of current and prospective families.
- **Stakeholder relationships:** The quality of the relationships between the service provider, educational staff, local schools, local government and council, and the broader community can significantly influence parents and community perceptions of the kindergarten. Respectful and strong relationships, which encourage meaningful dialogue, will favourably influence parent and community perceptions. Kindergartens that have strong connections to local schools and provide an effective transition to schools programs are often viewed favourably by parents.

Educator to child ratio

Whether a kindergarten has one or more educational rooms, the improved educator to child ratio of 1:11 is calculated according to the total number of children receiving education and care at the service at one time.

Rotational models

If enrolments for an age group exceed the number of approved places for the kindergarten the introduction of a rotational session structure can cater for additional enrolments.

Approved capacity

The service can also explore if there is scope to increase the number of approved places at the service, which could be achieved through re-configuration and optimisation of existing space, or by extending, modifying or building a new or additional kindergarten room.

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- **Broader community involvement:** The active presence and participation of the kindergarten in the broader community will assist in raising the profile of the kindergarten with prospective families. This might involve an active kindergarten presence at meetings/information sessions run by the local council on issues that affect children within the community, kindergarten open days, participation in community organised events such as 'Fun in the Park', 'Clean up Australia Day', tree planting events, becoming a polling place on election days, or assisting other community based organisations to run events.

The application and enrolment process

It is important for kindergartens to offer easy and convenient application and enrolment processes, access to relevant information, and the opportunity to interact with the kindergarten prior to enrolling. The enrolment process will be the first kindergarten experience for many families. As first impressions are often lasting impressions, it is important for a family's first experience to be positive if enrolments are to be maximised. Particular areas to be considered may include:

- **Enrolment process:** If the kindergarten is not part of a central enrolment scheme, the kindergarten should consider appointing a dedicated enrolment officer. The primary tasks of the enrolment officer is encouraging enrolments (using methods such open days, enrolment information sessions and advertising) and ensuring the enrolment process is convenient and easy to complete. Kindergartens which have their enrolment process centrally managed by a council or EYM organisation can still influence prospective parent's experience of enrolling by:
 - developing a strong working relationship with the relevant enrolment officer
 - providing helpful guidance to prospective families in relation to the central enrolment process
 - providing opportunities for families to visit the kindergarten prior to enrolment application submission.
- **Access to information:** The kindergarten enrolment process can be daunting for families enrolling their children in kindergarten for the first time, who are unfamiliar with the kindergarten environment, or for families who are culturally and linguistically diverse. To assist with the enrolment process understandable information covering a variety of comprehensive kindergarten topics should be made available in alternative formats, such as pamphlets, the kindergarten's website, through information sessions, or via the phone. The Department website provides kindergarten resources in a number of different languages, and for some families, access to interpreters may be required during enrolments.

Parent management

Parents are often anxious about ensuring their child receives a place at their preferred kindergarten. An important part of managing parents is to ensure that queries and questions are responded to promptly, and that parent expectations are managed carefully to avoid disappointment if they do not receive an offer to their preferred kindergarten

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- **Interaction prior to enrolment:** Attending kindergarten for the first time can be the first experience of children and their parents being separated. As a result of this, both the child and their parents can be anxious. Access to the kindergarten and educators at the kindergarten prior to enrolment can reduce anxiety as it allows the children and their families an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the environment. For other families it allows them to assess the kindergarten and its suitability for their needs. Open days or enrolment information sessions held at the kindergarten are a great way to allow parents and children to experience the kindergarten environment.
- **Responsiveness to queries and questions:** Parents are often anxious about ensuring their child receives a place at their preferred kindergarten. An important part of managing parents is to ensure that queries and questions are responded to promptly, and that parent expectations are managed carefully to avoid disappointment if they do not receive an offer to their preferred kindergarten. In kindergartens, more than one person may be required to manage and respond to queries and questions in a timely manner. Sometimes the role of an enrolment officer is shared between two people, with responsibility for either the three year old or four year old program.

Further details regarding managing enrolments, including important operational and regulatory considerations, can be found in The Kindergarten Funding Guide on the Department of Education and Training website⁶.



Further details

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¹ A comprehensive outline of further additional offerings is available on the DET website in the resource titled *Additional kindergarten service offerings*.

Note that service providers should carefully consider regulatory requirements of such additional and alternative offerings before proceeding.

² A comprehensive outline of team teaching is available on the DET website in the resource titled *Collaborative Teaching: teaching as a team*. At: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/improvedchildratioinkindergarten.aspx>

³ A comprehensive outline of multi-age program is available on the DET website in the resource titled *Multi-age Groups: working with mixed age groups*. At: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/improvedchildratioinkindergarten.aspx>

⁴ Local and Victorian Government will often provide capital grants to eligible services for the purpose increasing the number of approved places at a service

⁵ Translated resources are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/parents/support/Pages/translatedresources.aspx

⁶ The Kindergarten Funding Guide is available at: www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderfundingcriteria.aspx