

Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan

Wangaratta Rural City

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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 opened 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 Wangaratta Rural City in 2026. 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 Wangaratta Rural City relevant to early childhood education.
- **Section 4:** Unmet demand estimates in Wangaratta Rural City over the life of the reform.

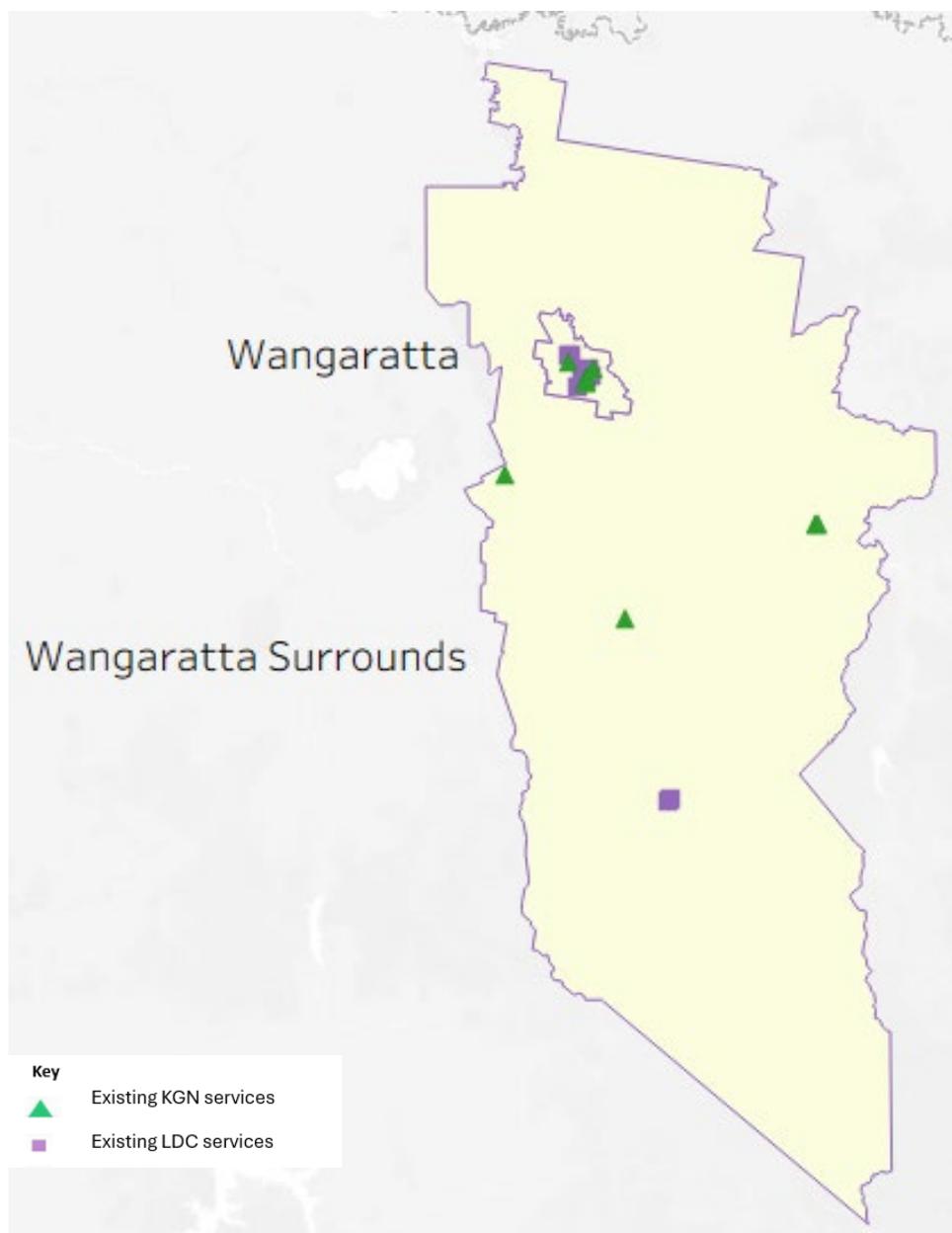
1.4. Disclaimer

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 Wangaratta 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 Wangaratta 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 Wangaratta 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

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander self-determination in early childhood education is grounded in creating culturally safe, inclusive, and empowering environments for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children and families. This is achieved by embedding cultural identity, knowledge, and practices into the daily life of early childhood settings in meaningful and respectful ways.

Key strategies include incorporating cultural learning experiences into programming, engaging in open and respectful conversations, preparing and sharing traditional foods, holding yarning circles, growing and using traditional foods, and celebrating and remembering significant Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander cultural events. These practices foster a sense of belonging, pride, and connection to culture for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children, while also enriching the broader learning environment for all children.

Empowering Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander voices in the design and delivery of early childhood programs is essential to ensuring these practices are authentic and community led. This approach supports children's development, strengthens family and community connections, and contributes to broader self-determination in education.

Embedding Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander self-determination within early childhood education required genuine partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO's), respectful inclusion of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island voices in decision making processes, and the recognition of cultural knowledge as central to children's learning and development.

This includes inviting Elders and community members into early learning settings to share stories, lead cultural learning experiences, and foster strong connections between children, families, and cultural Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) play a critical role in guiding this work, especially when they identify practical and age-appropriate actions that can be meaningfully implemented with young children.

Applying a cultural lens to both decision-making and curriculum design helps ensure early childhood services are not only inclusive but actively support Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children and their families. It also provides opportunities to educate the broader community, build cultural awareness, and celebrate the richness and resilience of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander cultures.

A commitment to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander self-determination in early childhood education is not only a matter of equity it is a vital step in closing the gap in outcomes for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children and families. Upholding this commitment means embedding a self-determination philosophy or policy within individual early childhood services, guiding both daily practice and long-term planning.

This includes fostering strong, respectful partnerships with local Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities and actively involving them in the co design and delivery of culturally rich, child-led education. Cultural learning experiences that reflect Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander ways of

knowing, being, and doing such as storytelling, yarning circles, connection to Country, and traditional practices should be integrated into everyday programming.

By creating environments where Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children see their culture respected, represented, and celebrated, and where non-Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children are invited to learn alongside them, early childhood services can play a powerful role in promoting reconciliation and building a more inclusive future.

Key demographic trends that influence demand for kindergarten

The Rural City of Wangaratta has experienced modest population growth, with an estimated resident population of 30,169 as of June 30, 2024., reflecting a 0.56% increase from the previous year. This growth reflects increased migration to regional areas, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Early childhood service providers in the Rural City of Wangaratta collaborate closely with local early intervention services, along with our Maternal Child Health service to ensure various cohorts with significant vulnerabilities or disadvantage needs are given priority access along with up to 25 funded hours of Pre-Prep to kindergarten placements. This integrated approach strengthens early identification and support, and promotes equitable participation. The partnership reflects a shared commitment to inclusion, cultural safety, and improved developmental outcomes for all children.

As kindergarten hours increase from 2026, our standalone kindergartens will adopt a measured and sustainable approach to expanding their hours. Meanwhile, long daycare services will move to offering 20 hours of Pre-Prep as of 2026 (with additional hours for eligible children), providing a more immediate response to the reform. This positions long daycare providers as a more attractive option for working families in our community, offering extended hours and greater flexibility to meet their needs.

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

By mid-2025, Wangaratta will see a significant boost in early childhood education capacity with the opening of Bright Beginnings, a new long day care provider offering an additional 84 childcare places. Simultaneously, Country Buddies Wangaratta is undergoing an expansion that will create a further 54 places. Both services will also contribute to an increase in local kindergartens, enhancing access for families across the community. However, securing a qualified workforce to support this growth remains a critical barrier for our local government area, with staffing shortages posing ongoing challenges to service delivery.

Two proposed childcare services are currently in the planning phase but have yet to receive formal approval. It is unclear if these services will offer funded kindergarten.

The kindergarten on school site project has now been completed at Whitfield Primary School and will offer 20 Pre Prep hours in 2026. Whilst this will remove the burden for this community and for the neighbouring community of Moyhu, it will not address the demand in the SA2 that working families are seeking as outlined below.

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

Most standalone kindergartens in the municipality are Council-owned and located on landlocked sites, limiting physical expansion. Similarly, five out of seven long day care centres in Wangaratta face the same constraints, restricting their ability to grow in response to increasing demand.

Both Glenrowan and Whorouly Kindergartens are experiencing increasing demand due to a growing number of three- and four-year-old children in their communities. There is concern that annual increases in participation may exceed the licensed capacity of these services. Combined

with staffing constraints, this could result in children missing out on local placements. These pressures highlight the need for proactive planning and investment to ensure these communities are not disadvantaged and can meet future demand.

The Wangaratta Children Services site has available land that could support future development, and Country Buddies Wangaratta is currently expanding its facility, which may help alleviate some pressure.

Families from rural areas (Wangaratta Surrounds SA2) are increasingly choosing to enroll in Wangaratta SA2-based services due to proximity to work and the greater availability of kindergarten hours. This trend contributes to rising demand in town. Unmet demand in Wangaratta Surrounds SA2 could be addressed by infrastructure in Wangaratta town

Families from neighboring LGAs often select Wangaratta services due to work commitments, placing additional pressure on local capacity and potentially limiting availability for Wangaratta-based families. This has been one of the contributing factors of the increased demand in Glenrowan and Whorouly who are in close proximity to Benalla and Alpine areas

Other information about the expansion of early childhood services

Some sessional kindergarten services throughout Wangaratta are offering fewer hours for Three Year Old Kindergarten to accommodate increased Pre-Prep hours. As a result, some families are unable to access the full eligible hours their children are entitled to, limiting the effectiveness and equity of service delivery in these communities.

This challenge is compounded by ongoing staffing shortages, which limit the ability for services to expand or maintain service levels. Educators interested in upskilling, particularly to diploma-level qualifications, often face barriers such as the requirement to re-complete Certificate III if a significant number of years have passed since initial completion.

This requirement acts as a deterrent and contributes to workforce stagnation. Additionally, cross-border enrolment pressures from neighboring local government areas opting for Wangaratta-based services to access increased Pre-Prep hours further strain local capacity. These factors collectively raise concerns about equitable access, sustainability, and the need for targeted support to ensure all children can benefit from early childhood education regardless of their geographic location.

4. Unmet demand estimates between 2026 - 2036 for Wangaratta 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 Wangaratta Rural City, Wangaratta Rural City Council and the department have developed:

1. a summary of the current provision of kindergarten within Wangaratta Rural City (**Section 4.3**).
2. an estimate of kindergarten places that cannot be met through existing services for the 2026 - 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 Wangaratta 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 Wangaratta 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

Wangaratta Rural City Council 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 4.4. The data included in this section are largely drawn from:

- the department’s Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS), as at 2024.
- the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITS), as at August 2025.

Number of services by service type (NQAITS)	
Stand-alone kindergartens	10
Long day care centres (including services not currently delivering funded kindergarten)	7

Percentage of services by management type, LGA level (NQAITS)	
Type	Percentage
Local Government	6%
Private not for profit	76%
Private for profit	12%
Other	6%

Current kindergarten offering in Wangaratta Rural City	
Three-Year-Old Kindergarten participation rate (KIMS):	90%
Four-Year-Old Kindergarten participation rate (KIMS):	100%
Number of services that offer a funded kindergarten program (KIMS):	16

4.4 Agreed estimates of demand for kindergarten places

The below estimates (**Table 1** onwards) have been developed by Wangaratta 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 2026 - 2036 in Wangaratta Rural City

Wangaratta Rural City estimates	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten places	715	774	839	868	963	965	965	967	970	967
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	71	72	73	43	46	44

Community estimates

Table 2-A: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2026 - 2036 in Wangaratta SA2

Wangaratta estimates	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	539	583	630	651	718	719	719	719	720	717
Kindergarten supply	659	673	673	673	673	673	673	701	701	701
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	44	45	45	18	19	16

Table 2-B: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2026 - 2036 in Wangaratta Surrounds SA2

Wangaratta Surrounds estimates	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	176	191	209	217	246	246	247	248	250	250
Kindergarten supply	218	219	219	219	219	219	219	223	223	223
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	26	27	27	25	27	28

5. Authorisation

The Ovens Murray Area Executive Director, Mr Bernie Boulton, of the Department of Education and the Chief Executive Officer, Stephen Swart of the Wangaratta Rural City endorse this Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP) for Wangaratta Rural City Council by signing on 6 January 2026.

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 2029 to publish a new version that will replace the previous version.

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



.....
Signature

Name: Stephen Swart

Title: Chief Executive Officer

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



.....
Signature

Name: Bernie Boulton

Title: Area Executive Director – Ovens Murray