



EARLY START KINDERGARTEN

INFORMATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) is a grant funded by the Department of Education and Training that provides eligible three-year-old children access to 15 hours of kindergarten per week for free or at low cost, including in areas with funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.

This grant is available in both long day care and sessional services where the kindergarten program is delivered by a qualified teacher. A child can be placed in a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program, a mixed age program or where Early Start enrolments are incorporated into a four-year-old program.

The ESK grant is available for children who are:

- three years old by 30 April in the year they are enrolled
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or known to Child Protection.
- enrolled in a kindergarten program delivered by a Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered early childhood teacher.

Notification of a child's eligibility for ESK can be provided to your service verbally or in writing from a parent or by any professional supporting the family. No other action or information is required to determine eligibility.

Once notified of a child's eligibility for ESK, it is important to support their enrolment in a funded kindergarten program as soon as possible. Children accessing ESK can be enrolled in a three-year-old group, a mixed age group, or a four-year-old group, and can be enrolled in multiple groups in order to access 15 hours per week.

ESK continues to be available to all eligible children during the roll-out of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.

The staged roll-out of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will start from 2020. It is important that all eligible children continue to access ESK, even if funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is available. This will ensure that they can access the full 15 hours a week of funded kindergarten in all service settings—including long day care, and that your service receives all funding entitlements.

For instance, ESK enrolments contribute to School Readiness Funding calculations.

HOW TO APPLY

Service providers should apply for ESK grants in the Kindergarten Information Management (KIM) system as soon as the child is enrolled. For further detail, see the 'quick reference guide: how to add, edit or remove an Early Start Kindergarten enrolment' by searching for **Kindergarten Information Management System** at www.education.vic.gov.au.

Service providers not registered to use the KIM system should contact the appropriate Departmental regional office to apply for ESK.

ESK IN SESSIONAL OR LONG DAY CARE

ESK is available in sessional kindergarten programs or in kindergarten programs integrated into long day care.

ESK in sessional kindergarten programs – Service providers must offer children eligible for ESK up to 15 hours per week of the kindergarten program free of charge.



ESK in integrated kindergarten programs – In kindergarten programs at a long day care service, ESK can be used in conjunction with the Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy.

Where ESK children have additional fees for child care hours outside the kindergarten program, long day care providers should use all available additional funding to reduce or waive fees and provide all kindergarten hours free of charge.

EARLY START KINDERGARTEN EXTENSION GRANTS

The ESK extension grant is available for children in the year before school who are:

- eligible for the kindergarten per capita grant but not eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy, and
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and/or have received an ESK grant or participated in an Access to Early Learning program in the previous year.

Service providers should apply for ESK extension grants when entering the child as a 'Year Before School' enrolment in KIM. This can be done as part of annual confirmation or as an adjustment if the child enrolls after confirmation.

Find the 'Early Start Kindergarten extension grants' quick reference guide by searching under **Kindergarten Information Management System** at www.education.vic.gov.au.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

Staff in Departmental regional offices can assist families with any queries about ESK or any other kindergarten program.

Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs) can assist with questions about ESK for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children.

Early Childhood Learning Advisers can assist with questions about ESK for children in out-of-home care.

REGIONAL OFFICE CONTACTS

North East Victoria 1300 333 231

North West Victoria 1300 338 691

South East Victoria 1300 338 738

South West Victoria 1300 333 232

For a list of the Department's regional offices, go to:

www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/regions

More information about ESK can be found by searching for **Early Start Kindergarten** at www.education.vic.gov.au