



Lady Forster Kindergarten

## Information for Prospective Families



*Lady Forster Kindergarten acknowledges the Boonwurrung as the Traditional Owners of this country and pays tribute to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and gives respect to the Elders past and present.*

## Introduction

Thank you for considering Lady Forster Kindergarten for your child's early childhood education and care. We are very proud of our not for profit, community-based kindergarten, and our rating of *'Exceeding the National Quality Standard'*!

There is plenty of general information elsewhere on our website [www.lfk.org.au](http://www.lfk.org.au)

This guide provides answers to a collection of common questions we are asked by prospective families at our Open Day and provides information on the early childhood education and care system in general. More detailed information is provided to families in our 'Parent Handbook' at enrolment.

We hope this will be helpful to you, particularly if you are unable to attend our annual Open Day.

If you have further queries not covered here, please feel free to contact the kindergarten:

E: [info@lfk.org.au](mailto:info@lfk.org.au)

T: 9531 6812

Lady Forster Kindergarten has operated in the City of Port Phillip for nearly 100 years – we celebrate our centenary in 2024. You can learn more about our history and philosophy [here](#).

At Lady Forster Kindergarten, we value:

- Inclusiveness and equity
- Community
- Culture
- Environment
- Quality

## 1. Do you provide food for children?

Unfortunately, as our building only has a small domestic kitchen, we are unable to provide catered food for children. Families provide all food from home including lunch and all snacks.

## 2. Is there structure in the day?

Each program is flexible and changes to meet the needs of the children.

Children are free to move between the indoor and outdoor spaces throughout the session and choose activities of interest. The kindergarten session is structured around routines for arrival, lunch, group/meeting/mat times, morning/afternoon tea, rest and pack up times. The daily timetable is relaxed, fun and considers the flow of the day. Each child has an individual learning plan implemented throughout the day.

## 3. 'Play-based learning' model

Will my child be taught to read and write?

Specific information on our philosophies and programs are on our website. Lady Forster Kindergarten uses a 'play-based learning model' - which is the widely adopted model for early childhood education in Australia. This extract from the 'Early Years Learning Framework for Australia' perhaps best describes this model of learning:

### "LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise, and imagine. When children play with other children they create social groups, test out ideas, challenge each other's thinking and build new understandings. Play provides a supportive environment where children can ask questions, solve problems, and engage in critical thinking. Play can expand

children's thinking and enhance their desire to know and to learn. In these ways play can promote positive dispositions towards learning. Children's immersion in their play illustrates how play enables them to simply enjoy being. Early childhood educators take on many roles in play with children and use a range of strategies to support learning. They engage in sustained shared conversations with children to extend their thinking. They provide a balance between child led, child initiated, and educator supported learning. They create learning environments that encourage children to explore, solve problems, create, and construct. Educators interact with babies and children to build attachment. They use routines and play experiences to do this. They also recognise spontaneous teachable moments as they occur and use them to build on children's learning. Early childhood educators work with young children to promote and model positive ways to relate to others. They actively support the inclusion of all children in play, help children to recognise when play is unfair and offer constructive ways to build a caring, fair, and inclusive learning community.

**Intentional teaching:** involves educators being deliberate, purposeful, and thoughtful in their decisions and action. Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote or continuing with traditions simply because things have 'always' been done that way."

#### 4. How do I add my child to your Waiting Lists?

As a small community kindergarten, we have a limited number of spaces available each year to offer to prospective families. The kindergarten has 49 licensed places and is a two-room building.

The 49 places are allocated to programs as follows:

- 30 places in our larger kindergarten room (Extended Hours Kindergarten Program (4 & 5 year olds)
- 19 places in our smaller kindergarten room (for each of our 3 and 4 Year Old Sessional Kindergarten Programs and our Friday Care Program)

To ensure we allocate these places in a fair and equitable way, we provide an online waiting list where prospective families can register their child, up to two years in advance, [here](#).

The waiting list opens for a new year in January of each year.

e.g the waiting list from January 2023 allows for registration in programs for (2023), 2024 and 2025

As the demand for places at our Kindergarten usually exceeds the number of places available, we encourage families to consider adding their child to other kindergarten waiting lists in the community.

**It is important that if we are unable to offer your child a place in any of our programs, that you have alternative options available to you.**

If you are unfamiliar with other local early childhood services, or are new to the local community, these three web sites are helpful for finding/comparing other local services:

##### 1. Starting Blocks

<https://www.startingblocks.gov.au/>

This is a government-hosted site that enables families to search for early childhood services by postcode. A search can then be refined by:

- the 'type' of services families are seeking
- the 'service rating' so families can compare the 'service quality'
- other features.

2. City of Port Phillip

<https://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/council-services/family-youth-and-children/early-childhood-education-and-care/register-for-children-s-services-waiting-list-cswl>

The local Council has a lot of information on local early childhood services and operates a centralised waiting list for all childcare services in the municipality.

3. DET: Find a Kinder Program

<https://findakinder.educationapps.vic.gov.au/>

The Department of Education and Training hosts this site to assist families to search for Kindergarten Programs by geographical location.

## 5. What is a service rating?

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA - pronounced *a-see-kwa*) is an independent national authority that assists governments in administering the [National Quality Framework](#) (NQF) for children's education and care in Australia. Education and care services are assessed and rated by their state and territory regulatory authority. In Victoria, the regulatory authority is the Department of Education and Training (DET). Services are assessed against the seven quality areas of the [National Quality Standard](#), generally every two years.

An explanation of what a 'rating' for an early childhood education and care service means is provided [here](#).

Lady Forster Kindergarten was last assessed against the *National Quality Standard* in February 2020 and was proud to achieve a rating of 'Exceeding the National Quality Standard' in all seven quality areas.

(We are the only early childhood service in Elwood to currently have this rating across all seven quality areas)

## 6. Will my child get priority of access to programs?

*The Lady Forster Kindergarten Enrolment Policy* is issued to families when offered a place at our Kindergarten. The Commonwealth and State governments fund kindergarten programs and set out guidelines for providing priority of access to early childhood service programs as follows:

**Commonwealth Government** priority of access guidelines [here](#)

**State Government of Victoria** priority of access guidelines [here](#):

In instances where more eligible children apply for a place at our kindergarten than there are places available, we:

- prioritise children based on the government criteria listed above
- work with other local kindergarten services, the City of Port Phillip and the regional Department of Education office whenever required, to ensure all eligible children have access to a kindergarten place.

Once all Commonwealth and State Government priority of access guidelines are met, Lady Forster Kindergarten gives priority of access to siblings of children either currently attending LFK, or who have attended LFK in the past. Beyond these criteria, we allocate places in date order of entries on our waiting lists.

## 7. What is available for my young child prior to kindergarten?

Our kindergarten is licensed for children aged 3 years and over only.

(A child can only attend once they have actually turned 3 years of age)

For children aged under three, there are many opportunities for families to meet and connect:

1. Local Playgroups [here](#).
2. 'Seedlings Nature Playgroup' [here](#).
3. Our website also lists a variety of resources that might be helpful to families of younger children [here](#).

## 8. How will I know if my child has a place at your kindergarten?

Our online waiting list form allows families to add their child to our lists, two years in advance. In January each year, a further waiting list year is opened for access via our online waiting list system. If your child is too young to be added to our list, consider setting a reminder in your device to add your child when the year ticks over in January.

In June each year, we host our annual 'Open Day' at the kindergarten, providing an opportunity for families to come and look around the kindergarten and meet our teachers, educators, and current parents from our Committee of Management.

We do not offer individual tours of the kindergarten outside of our annual Open Day unless a child has been offered a place in a specific program.

After the Open Day, we issue offers by email in waiting list order for each program and provide a closing date for accepting/declining the offer, usually one week. It is often the case that families may have moved out of the area or made different plans for the coming year and decline our offer. If an offer is declined, that place is offered to the next family on the waiting list accordingly, and so on. This process can sometimes take many weeks/months and several rounds of offers till all our places are fixed for the coming year. Families should not be discouraged if they don't receive an offer of place in the first round...we try and move through the process as quickly as we can to provide certainty for prospective families.

Even if we are unable to offer a place to families, we maintain all families on our waiting list through each year. Often plans change during the course of a year and families can withdraw from our programs if they move out of the area. We return to our waiting lists to offer families places at the kindergarten if any become available through the year and children often enter our programs at different times and not all at the beginning of any year.

## 9. What is the cut-off date for entry to programs?

From 2022, the Victorian Government commenced funding of 3-Year-Old Kindergarten (see below) and from this year onwards, our kindergarten's 'cut-off' date for all our programs (including our 3-year-old program) aligns with cut-off dates for entry to primary school.

Cut off dates are uniform for both 3- and 4-year-old programs:

*"A child must have turned 3 years of age by 30<sup>th</sup> April in the year they commence 3-Year-Old Kindergarten"*

*"A child must have turned 4 years of age by 30<sup>th</sup> April in the year they commence 4-Year-Old Kindergarten"*

## 10. How do I choose when my child will start kindergarten?

Your child cannot start at Lady Forster Kindergarten in our 3-Year-Old Sessional Kindergarten Program unless your child has actually turned 3 years of age.

This is because Lady Forster Kindergarten is not licensed to educate or care for children under the age of three. (Higher staffing ratios are required for children under the age of three)

Families with children born between January and April can choose which year to start Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. These children can start in the same year they turn three, or in the year they turn four years of age.

DET provides a helpful 'date of birth' calculator [here](#) to help families see which year their child is eligible to start kindergarten programs.

### Issues to consider if your child is born between January and April:

When your child starts at kindergarten directly relates to the age your child will be when they start at primary school so this can be an important decision for many families.

For younger children born between January and April this is particularly important.

Our kindergarten year commences at the end of January, as state primary schools re-open.

If your child has their third birthday between late January and 30<sup>th</sup> April this will mean they cannot commence in our 3-Year-Old program until they have had their third birthday.

If your child is turning three during these months, you may wish to delay your child's start till they are aged four because:

- Your child will not be able to start in the program at the same time as other children in their cohort (at the start of the kindergarten year)
- Your child will be amongst the youngest in the cohort and this will continue throughout their schooling years.
- As a younger child in the cohort, your child may not be 'school ready' by the end of their 4-year-old kindergarten year and the teacher may assess/recommend your child may benefit from a second year of four-year-old kindergarten. A second year often provides time for younger children to develop social and emotional skills to be 'school ready' (but they must show a developmental delay in two areas to be eligible – see below)

If you have a choice of which year to start Three-Year-Old kindergarten and are unsure of your which to choose, consider adding your child to both years' waiting lists so that you keep your options open.

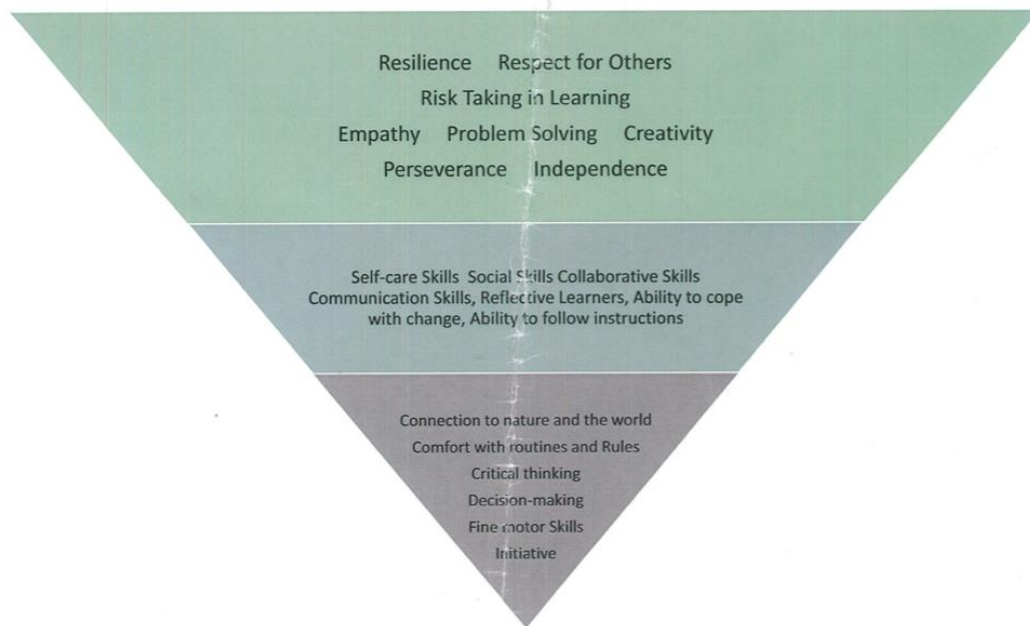
Generally, our teachers together with primary school teachers in local feeder schools, strongly encourage parents/carers of children born between Jan and April who have a choice of which year to start their child at kindergarten, to consider starting their child later rather than earlier.

Please be aware that under the State Government funding regime, children are not permitted to undertake a second year of (repeat) 3 year old kindergarten and must move through to a 4 year old program.

Lastly, the graphic below was prepared by local primary school teachers to illustrate the areas they deemed important in determining school readiness. There is more information [here](#) but please feel free to speak with our teachers if you are unsure of when to start your child in 3 year old kindergarten at Lady Forster Kindergarten.



## Key Skills and Dispositions



### 11. Can my child go to kindergarten if 6 years old?

The law in Victoria states that children must attend school from the age of 6. To enrol in a government school, a child must turn 5 before **30 April of the year they start school**. There can be exemptions to the age policy, but these are very rare.

Children can go to kindergarten when they're 6 years old if they have a disability, developmental delay, or it's a special situation. You need to get written confirmation from a professional (such as a kindergarten teacher, doctor, or an allied health professional) to confirm the circumstance. The professional must also explain why it's best for your child to go to kindergarten instead of starting school.

If your child turns 6 in their first or second year of four-year-old kindergarten, you must get an [exemption from school](#). If your child turns six in late December (between the last day of the school year and 31 December), they can attend Four-Year-Old Kindergarten in that year and attend school the following year.

More on applying for an 'exemption from school' [here](#).

### 12. Can I choose to have a second year of 4-Year-Old Kindergarten?

A second year of kindergarten is not available in the 3-year-old program. All children will automatically progress from the 3-year-old program to a 4-year-old program the following year.

Parents cannot elect to hold their child back from starting school for a second year of kindergarten if the child is assessed as 'school ready'.

During four-year-old kindergarten, your teacher will assess your child, plan for their transition to school and identify any developmental areas that may need particular attention. There may be a small number of children for whom a second year of kindergarten is appropriate and beneficial.

Your child may be eligible if your child's teacher has found they have developmental delays in at least 2 key areas of learning and development, and your child will have better outcomes through a second year of kindergarten than going to school.

More information about the process [here](#).

### 13. What is the 15 hours of funded 3-Year-Old Kindergarten roll out?

By 2029, all Victorian kindergarten services will be delivering 15 hours of funded kindergarten programs to children in the two years before they start school. Victoria is the first Australian state or territory to give children access to two years of funded kindergarten programs before they start school.

In 2022, three-year old funding was provided to families at Lady Forster Kindergarten, with funding of 5 hours of our established 6-hour program.

From 2024 to 2029, early childhood services will scale up their delivery to 15 hours of three-year-old kindergarten.

Lady Forster Kindergarten is currently working on a delivery model for increasing the weekly hours of our three-year-old program from 6 to 9 hours in 2024.

Building space constraints will need to be addressed for a subsequent increase to 15 hours by 2029. We have consulted with our waiting list families and will keep you informed on this planning and any proposed changes to our current delivery of 6 hours per week of funded 3YO kindergarten.

Three-year-old kindergarten funding maximises the number of Victorian children who are able to receive the learning, development and wellbeing benefits that come with attending two years of funded kindergarten programs before school. More information [here](#).

### 14. How do you staff your programs?

At the kindergarten we have a high-quality team of permanent teachers, educators and management, both full-time and part-time. This provides children with a secure and familiar environment where they are with the same staff every day and are supported by this consistency and familiarity. We use one preferred casual staffing agency to provide cover for staff absence, both planned and unplanned and have our own pool of casual educators.

The required minimum ratio of educators per child for children in early childhood in Victoria aged three to five years of age, is 1:11 (one staff member for every 11 children)

At Lady Forster Kindergarten we have well above this minimum ratio requirement as we employ an additional staff member (surplus to ratio) throughout each week across our programs, in addition to our permanent staffing team that meet the required ratio.

### 15. What financial support is available to families (2022)?

Our kindergarten programs are supported by Government funding at all levels – Federal, State and Local. Our 'fees' are the difference between the amount of government funding we receive and the annual cost of providing the staffing, programs, facilities, resources, and other provisions that support delivery of our programs.



Our 4-year-old programs have been funded by the Victorian State Government for many years and now this funding is extending to 3-year-old programs with the rollout of '15 hours of funded 3-year-old kindergarten' by 2029.

The Federal Government funds all our 'non-sessional kindergarten' programs via the 'Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy' system for eligible families.

At a local level, the City of Port Phillip provides direct funding to the kindergarten together with provision of our buildings under an extended lease arrangement, for negligible rent.

We are grateful for this support which in turn enables the kindergarten to maintain fees that are (possibly) the lowest in the municipality, providing families with low-cost access to high-quality early childhood education and care.

In addition to this general funding, the Governments (Federal and State) provide several specific funding supports to vulnerable or disadvantaged families/children. Families are connected to these supports during the enrolment process and include:

- **Early Start Kindergarten** programs for children of families who have had contact with Child Protection or who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children. More info [here](#).
- **Kindergarten Fee Subsidy** which provides low or no cost kindergarten for eligible four year old children as detailed [here](#).
- **Additional Child Care Subsidy** available to families receiving Child Care Subsidy under circumstances detailed [here](#).

## 16. How will fees change in 2023 with the introduction of 'Free Kinder'?

A critical part of the 'Best Start, Best Life' reform being implemented by the Victorian State Government from 2023, is "Free Kinder" which supports access to two years of high-quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children.

### 16.1 Kindergarten Program Fees

At Lady Forster Kindergarten for 2023, 'Free Kinder' funding will be implemented as follows: Please email to receive a copy of our detailed guide on Free Kinder funding for 2023: [info@lfk.org.au](mailto:info@lfk.org.au)

#### **3 Year Old Sessional Kindergarten & 4 Year Old Sessional Kindergarten Programs:**

No enrolment fee charged.

No term fees will be charged for either of our 3YO and 4YO Sessional Kindergarten Programs from 2023, as part of the 'Free Kinder' reform.

#### **Extended Hours Kindergarten Program:**

No enrolment fee charged.

Annual funding of \$2,000 per child under 'Free Kinder' reform from 2023.

Families will pay the weekly fee listed in the LFK Fee/Program table and will receive a monthly credit on their account of \$100 from Feb to Nov 2023 inclusive (\$2,000 pa), reflecting the 'Free Kinder' funded portion of this long day kindergarten program.

**Friday Care Program and Holiday Program Fees:**

These are not funded kindergarten programs so are not eligible for 'Free Kinder' funding. Daily fees detailed in LFK program/fee table.

**Child Care Subsidy**

For all programs (except our 3YO & 4YO Sessional Kindergarten programs), families enrolled in these programs may pay reduced fees if eligible for Federal Child Care Subsidy funding. Child Care Subsidy reduces the fees detailed in our fee table.

**16.2 Other fees:**

A small fee (\$10-\$20) may be charged to recover costs for any extra (unplanned) incursion/excursion during 2023.

**Late Pick-Up Fee**

\$6 per minute after 6 pm (all programs)

## 17. How do you charge fees/how can I best budget for these?

The kindergarten does not have a direct debit or credit card facility.

All fee charges are issued by invoice and paid by families to our kindergarten bank account by internet banking transfer.

**Three and Four Year Old Sessional Kindergarten Programs**

No fees are applicable in 2023 under the 'Free Kinder' funding regime.

**Programs: Extended Hours Kindergarten, Friday Care and Holiday Program**

All of our 'non-sessional kindergarten' programs qualify for the Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy and are invoiced in a fortnightly cycle, retrospectively. Families can check [here](#) if they are eligible for this subsidy, how much they might be eligible to receive, and the steps to apply for the Subsidy. The Child Care Subsidy amount is paid direct to the kindergarten and the fee families pay fortnightly is reduced by this amount.

**Extended Hours Kindergarten – Extra note**

Please note that the fees for our Extended Hours Kindergarten Program are weekly fees and are charged regardless of attendance, as our fees/budget covers the cost of our permanent staffing team throughout each year.

The weekly fee is charged every week regardless of whether:

- your child is absent with illness or away from kindergarten for a holiday
- you elect for your child to attend less than the five days per week provided in the program
- a public holiday falls on a weekday
- annual staff planning day

The Extended Hours Kindergarten Program operates for approximately 40 weeks each year. If a family also requires continuity of care through the term holidays (Holiday Program) this increases fees to 46 weeks each year. Multiplying the weekly fee in the Extended Hours Kindergarten program by 40 weeks (or 46 weeks each year if using the holiday programs every day), provides families with an estimated annual cost for this program (which is reduced by Child Care Subsidy entitlements, for eligible families)

Families will receive a \$2,000 credit under the 'Free Kinder' funding regime in 2023. The credit will be applied in 10 x monthly amounts to family accounts from 1 Feb 2023 to 1 Nov 2023 inclusive.

## 18. Term holidays and Christmas holiday closure

The kindergarten year is divided into four terms, similar to primary schools. Our kindergarten and Friday Care programs do not run during the two-week holiday between each term, hence there is no charge for these programs during term breaks. Instead, families can access our (optional) Holiday Program during the term breaks by booking in for the day(s) they select in the program. The holiday programs are advertised to LFK families five weeks prior to each term holiday.

In late December each year, the kindergarten closes completely and does not re-open until late January the following year, allowing staff to take annual leave. Families seeking care during this shutdown period often enrol children in local community holiday programs such as MSAC [here](#).