
KINDERGARTEN READINESS

As teachers, we are often asked 'Will my child be ready for four-year-old kindergarten?' This letter aims to provide you, as parents, with some considerations when making this important decision in your child's start to education.

1. Government funding

A set amount of government funding is provided per year for each child enrolled in the four-year-old kindergarten program. Each child is eligible for only one funded year.

Due to the new funding model, when a child begins three-year-old Kindergarten they will be expected to transition to four-year-old kindergarten in the following year. It is considered that the child has accessed their funded kindergarten years. The expectation is that they will then transition to school the following year.

In some circumstances, children who show delays in two key areas of learning and development may apply for a third year of funding. This extra year of funding will ONLY be available for children in the four-year-old program, with strict eligibility criteria applying. Children who are simply not ready for kindergarten or who are developmentally immature would not meet these criteria. There is a misconception that there is an option for families to simply pay for a second year but this is not true. Access to the second year of 4-year-old Kindergarten is only available under limited circumstances and should not be assumed as an automatic entitlement. In the instance that a child completes a funded year of four-year-old kindergarten and is not ready for school the next year, other options for parents to explore include child care or a pre-prep program.

2. Criteria for a Second year of 4-year-old Kindergarten

In order to meet the criteria for a second funded year of kindergarten, the parents of the child and the educator must meet several times to discuss and complete the required forms. These forms include: the second-year discussion form, a term 3 learning and development plan (which must also be evaluated), and the declaration of eligibility for a second year of funded kindergarten.

The early childhood teacher can declare that a child is eligible to receive a second year of funded kindergarten if:

- the child is observed as **having delays in at least two outcome areas** of learning and development detailed in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework,
- and
- there is **evidence to suggest the child will achieve better outcomes if he/she attends a second year of kindergarten** to strengthen the learning and development of skills in these areas and better facilitate transition to school the following year.

3. Deferment

If your child begins four-year-old kinder and you feel they are not ready, but they do not meet the eligibility criteria for a second year of kinder, you need to speak to your child's Kindergarten Teacher as soon as possible. It may be possible for your child to withdraw from the program and return the following year, but you do need to speak to your teacher early in the first term.

4. Age/birthday

In Victoria we have one of the world's youngest school starting rates. Although every child's development is unique, observation and research suggest that children who turn 4 between January and April can benefit significantly from waiting a year before they begin their educational journey.

In our teaching experience; a high percentage of children with birthdays between January and April will find it more difficult to cope with the kindergarten program and to gain the most benefit from their 4-year-old Kindergarten educational experience.

Some points to consider when thinking about kindergarten readiness include:

- Can my child separate from me for periods of time without becoming unduly stressed?
- Can my child's speech generally be understood?
- Can my child demonstrate some basic social and play skills such as turn taking and sharing
- Is my child able to make some decisions and initiate some activities and play by him or

herself? (without needing lots of prompting from the teacher)

- Is my child able to talk with and respond to the teacher and peers?
- Can my child take some responsibility for his or her own belongings? E.g. taking art smock off, hanging up his/her bag?
- Is my child ready to sit in small or large group experiences and carry out a task without 1:1 adult assistance in a busy room?
- Is my child ready to be part of a large group and interact with other children and adults? At four-year-old kindergarten there are 22 children in each session with 2 staff and 1 parent helper.

4. Group participation

At kindergarten children will be part of a large group of children. What can be tackled or played with competently at home, without the distraction of noise and other children, can be a different experience in a kindergarten setting. At kindergarten, communication, co-operation, creativity and conflict resolution are key aspects of the program provided. Being a successful member of a group involves a number of skills.

These include:

- The ability to concentrate, despite other things going on around you.
- Being able to follow instructions and complete tasks
- Being able to ask for help or clarification and
- Being able to express needs and feelings, wait your turn and share materials and the teacher's time.

There are no hard and fast rules about kindergarten readiness. Each child's needs and development should be considered individually and we advise parents that if in doubt, it is best not to push your child before he or she is ready. We like to promote the idea; that we want children to **“thrive and not just survive.”** This ties in with our philosophy of having high expectations for every child.

We want children to have a really positive, successful year at kindergarten, and children will gain a greater benefit from the program when they have the skills outlined above. A positive year at kindergarten will give your child a great sense of achievement and build confidence in

himself/herself and his/her abilities. It will stand your child in good stead for school and for life in general.

5. We are here to help

If you would like clarification or further information about when the best time for your child to begin 4-year-old kindergarten, please share your concerns, thoughts and ideas openly with the teacher. If you would like to discuss Kindergarten readiness, we would be happy to make a time to chat with you.

Kind regards,

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