

	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Inclusion and Equity Policy and Procedure</h2>
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Authorisation	Director City Life
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Responsible Officer	Manager Families and Children
Policy Owner	Early Childhood Coordinator

1. Purpose

Melton City Council is committed to:

- ensure all adults and children at Melton City Council are treated equitably and with respect, regardless of their background, ethnicity, Culture, language, beliefs, gender, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, level of ability, Additional Needs, family structure or lifestyle
- promote Inclusive Practices and ensure the successful participation of all children at Melton City Council.
- acknowledging and respecting the rights of all children to be provided with and to participate in a quality early childhood education and care program
- creating an environment that supports, reflects and promotes equitable and inclusive behaviours and practices
- creating a sense of belonging for all children, families and staff, where diverse identities, backgrounds, experiences, skills and interests are respected, valued and given opportunities to be expressed/developed
- ensuring that programs are reflective of, and responsive to, the values and cultural beliefs of families using the service, and of those within the local community and broader society
- working to ensure children are not discriminated against based on background, ethnicity, Culture, language, beliefs, gender, age, socioeconomic status, level of ability or Additional Needs, family structure or lifestyle.
- ensuring that no employee, prospective employee, parent/guardian, child, volunteer or student at the service is discriminated against based on having or being suspected of having an infectious disease or BBV (refer to *Definitions*)
- upholding the values and principles of Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and Early Childhood Intervention Australia's (ECIA) Position Statement on the Inclusion of Children with a Disability in Early Childhood Education and Care (refer to *Sources*)
- providing all children with the opportunity to access programs at the service, and recognising that all families are unique and that children learn in different ways and at different rates
- consistently updating and supporting the knowledge, skills, practices and attitudes of staff to encourage and ensure Inclusion and Equity
- complying with current legislation including the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, *Disability Act 2006*, *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*, and *Gender Equality Act 2020*.
- Compliance of the Victorian Child Safe Standards and the National Principals for a Child Safe Organisations.

1.1. This policy has been adapted from *PolicyWorks* Manual - National Quality Framework released by the Early Learning Association Australia.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Person in day-to-day charge, Responsible Persons, educators, staff, students on placement, volunteers, parents/guardians, children and others attending Melton City Council programs and activities.

3. Background

State and Commonwealth laws prohibit discrimination based on personal characteristics, including race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, disability and parental status.

Underpinning the development of this policy are the requirements of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*, *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, *Disability Act 2006*, *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* and *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*.

Children enrolling in Melton City Council's children's services come from a variety of backgrounds and home situations. These circumstances need to be considered when engaging with parents and supporting children in Melton City Council's children's services. Where families are accessing additional support from other services, it is important to ensure that a coordinated, confidential and sensitive approach is undertaken to providing support and strengthening the capacity of the family unit.

On commencing at a Melton City Council's children's service, families should be provided with information about the role of Inclusive Practice in achieving outcomes for all children and the key values underpinning Inclusive Practice.

Inclusion involves considering all children's social, cultural and linguistic Diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes. Equity and Diversity is one of a series of Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework Practice Principles (refer to *Sources*) and includes examples of best practice from a range of early childhood professionals across diverse settings.

under the Child Safe Standards, services are expected to provide environments and activities that encourage all children to participate in and celebrate their identity. The standards are underpinned by three overarching principles which require services to take into consideration the increased vulnerability of Aboriginal children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with disabilities.

In addition to developing and implementing an Inclusion and Equity policy and procedures, values of Inclusion and Equity should also be incorporated into a service's philosophy statement.

developing professional knowledge and skills and using Family-Centred Practice (refer to *Definitions*) to work in partnership with children, families, communities, and other services and agencies, will assist services to identify, include and support children with Additional Needs and their families.

Under the *Commonwealth's Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, it is illegal to discriminate against a person on the basis of the presence of organisms in their body that are capable of causing disease or illness. Early childhood services are also obligated by law, service agreements and licensing requirements to comply with the *Education and Care Services National Law* and *National Regulations* and privacy and health records legislation in relation to collecting and storing personal and health information about individuals (refer to *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*).

4. Definitions

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy and related procedures. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Regulatory Authority etc. refer to the *Glossary of Terms*.

Word/Term	Definition
Additional Needs	A broad term that can include families and children experiencing Disability, a medical condition, a developmental concern, an emotional need (resulting from trauma, abuse or grief), family displacement (due to war or refugee status), domestic violence, mental illness, family separation or divorce.
Blood-Borne Virus (BBV)	A virus that spreads when blood from an infected person enters another person's bloodstream. Examples of BBVs include Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and Viral Hemorrhagic fevers. Where basic hygiene, safety, infection control and First Aid procedures are followed, the risk of contracting a BBV is negligible.
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)	Refers to individuals and groups who are from diverse racial, religious, linguistic and/or ethnic backgrounds.
Culture	The values and traditions of groups of people that are passed from one generation to another.
Developmental Delay	<p>A delay in the development of a child under the age of six years that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is attributable to a mental or physical impairment, or a combination of mental and physical impairments • is manifested before the child attains the age of six years • results in substantial functional limitations in one or more of the following areas of major life activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - self-care - receptive and expressive language - cognitive development - motor development <p>and reflects the child's need for a combination and sequence of special interdisciplinary or generic care, treatment or other services that are of extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated (<i>Disability Act 2006 (Vic)</i>).</p>
Disability	<p>In relation to a person, refers to a sensory, physical or neurological impairment or acquired brain injury, or any combination thereof, that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is, or is likely to be, permanent, and causes a substantially reduced capacity in at least one of the areas of self-care • lacks self-management, mobility or communication, and requires significant ongoing or long-term episodic support • is not related to ageing • is not an Intellectual Disability • is not a Developmental Delay (<i>Disability Act 2006 (Vic)</i>).
Diversity	Refers to all characteristics that make individuals different from one another, including race, religion, language, ethnicity, beliefs, age, gender, sexual orientation, level of ability, Additional Needs, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, personality, marital and/or parental status, family structure, lifestyle and general life/work experience.

Word/Term	Definition
Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS)	These services support families and children experiencing a Disability or Developmental Delay (refer to <i>Definitions</i>) from birth to school age. ECIS are funded through the Department of Education & Training (DET) and provided by specialist children's services teams and early childhood intervention agencies.
Early Start Kindergarten	A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to attend a free Kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for a specific number of hours. Further details are available at the DET website (see <i>Sources</i>).
Equity	(In the context of human rights) is the behaviour of acting in a fair and just manner towards others.
Family-Centred Practice	<p>Children learn in the context of their families, and families are the primary influence on children's learning and development. Professionals also play a role in advancing children's learning and development and can engage in Family-Centered Practice by respecting the pivotal role of families in children's lives.</p> <p>Early childhood professionals should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use families' understanding of their children to support shared decision-making about each child's learning and development • create a welcoming and culturally inclusive environment, where all families are encouraged to participate in and contribute to children's learning and development • actively engage families and children in planning children's learning and development • provide feedback to families on each child's learning and provide information about how families can further advance children's learning and development at home and in the community (Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework – see <i>Sources</i>).
Inclusion	The incorporation of children and families into the service ensures that all individuals have an equal opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.
Inclusion Support Agencies	Funded by the Commonwealth Government to provide advice on Inclusive Practices in childcare services. Inclusion Support Professionals are employed to help services access a range of practical support.
Inclusive Practice	The provision of a flexible, innovative and responsive program that supports the learning needs and meaningful participation of all children attending the service.
Koorie Early Childhood Education Program	<p>Supports Aboriginal children and their families to access and participate in kindergarten programs. The program consists of three components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a statewide coordinator who provides support, information and assistance to regional KESO – Early Childhood Development • KESO – Early Childhood Development • the Koori Preschool Assistants program.

Word/Term	Definition
Preschool Field Officer Program	An early intervention, outreach service that is universally available within state-funded preschools for any child with developmental concerns. The primary role of the Preschool Field Officer Program is to assist children with Additional Needs to access and participate in funded Kindergarten programs.
Child Safe Standards	<p>These Standards were introduced via amendments to the <i>Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005</i> (Vic), and from January 2017, all Victorian organisation which provide services for children, including Council, were required to comply with the Standards.</p> <p>On July 1, 2022, new Child Safe Standards were legislated. The Standards now consist of 11 Standards. The 11 Standards cover four main areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Children and Families2. Leadership, governance, and culture3. Staff, contractors, and volunteers4. Risk Management. processes, policies, and complaints

5. Responsibility/Accountability

5.1. The Approved Provider, according to Regulations is responsible for the implementation of this policy. This will be achieved through the Leadership Group and their service staff:

- that service programs are available and accessible to families from a variety of backgrounds
- encouraging collaborative, Family-Centred Practice at the service
- providing families with information about the role of Inclusive Practice in achieving positive outcomes for all children, the key values underpinning Inclusive Practice and the support options available for children attending Melton City Council programs and services
- working with individual families to determine the needs of their child and facilitating the Inclusion of both the child and the family into the service
- that educational programs are delivered in accordance with an approved learning framework, are based on the developmental needs, interests and experiences of each child, and consider the individual differences of each child (Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework)
- that the enrolment process is fair and equitable, and facilitates access for all children
- tailoring the orientation process to meet the individual needs of children and families
- considering barriers to participation in service programs and activities, and developing strategies to overcome these
- considering options to provide appropriate physical infrastructure, staffing and resources to facilitate the Inclusion of all children at the service
- that staff have access to appropriate and accredited professional development activities that promote a positive understanding of Diversity, Inclusion and Equity, and provide skills to assist in implementing this policy
- that the Nominated Supervisor, person in day-to-day charge, Responsible Persons , educators and all staff are aware of the service's expectations

regarding positive, respectful and appropriate behaviour when working with children and families

- considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at Melton City Council, and removing these barriers wherever possible
- providing service information in various community languages wherever possible
- using language services to assist with communication where required
- working with the Nominated Supervisor/Person in day-to-day charge, Responsible Persons and educators to ensure appropriate program planning and resourcing for children with Additional Needs
- where practicable, accessing resources, support and professional development to facilitate Inclusion of children with Additional Needs who are ineligible for specific support packages
- working with specialised services and professionals e.g. ECIS and Inclusion Support Agencies, to provide support and services for families and children experiencing severe disabilities, complex medical needs and/or developmental concerns
- that all eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children known to Child Protection are supported to access the Early Start Kindergarten program
- implementing appropriate programs and practices to support vulnerable children and families, including working co-operatively with relevant services and/or professionals e.g. Child FIRST / Orange Door
- that service programs are inclusive of children with medical conditions, including Anaphylaxis, Asthma, Diabetes and Epilepsy
- that no employee, prospective employee, parent/guardian, child, volunteer or student at the service is discriminated against based on having or being suspected of having an infectious disease, BBV, illness or medical condition
- that any behaviour or circumstances that may constitute discrimination or prejudice are dealt with in an appropriate manner
- that all Melton City Council policies and procedures, including the *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy and Procedure* are always adhered to.

5.2. The Nominated Supervisor/Person in day-to-day charge, Responsible Persons is responsible for:

- being aware of the service's expectations regarding positive, respectful and appropriate behaviour when working with children and families
- identifying children who may be disadvantaged, have Additional Needs, or be at risk of discrimination/exclusion, and being aware of the support/resources required to ensure that these children are included in service programs
- consulting with families and liaising with the Approved Provider/Manager to access support and resources for individual children, where required
- developing an educational program that is reflective of the service's values, beliefs and philosophy, and embraces the principles of fairness, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework)
- ensuring that the program provides opportunities for all children to participate and interact with one another
- using language services (refer to All Graduates Interpreting & Translating website) to assist with communication, where required
- working with the Approved Provider/Manager and educators to ensure appropriate program planning and resourcing for children with Additional Needs

- using Family-Centred Practice and working collaboratively with staff, parents/guardians, specialist services and other professionals to implement the program at the service and provide individualised support for children, where required
- responding to the needs and concerns of parents/guardians, and providing support and guidance, where appropriate
- providing support and guidance to educators/staff, where required
- ensuring that service programs are inclusive of children with medical conditions, including Anaphylaxis, Asthma, Diabetes and Epilepsy
- ensuring that individualised programs incorporate opportunities for regular review and evaluation, in consultation with all people involved in the child's education and care
- providing opportunities for families to contribute to the program
- notifying the Approved Provider/Manager of any behaviour or circumstances that may constitute discrimination or prejudice
- advising the Approved Provider/Manager if they become aware of discrimination against anyone at the service based on having or being suspected of having an infectious disease, BBV, illness or medical condition
- ensuring that all Melton City Council policies and procedures, including the *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*, are always adhered to.

5.3. Person in day-to-day charge, Responsible Person, Educators and other staff are responsible for:

- being aware of the service's expectations regarding positive, respectful and appropriate behaviour when working with children and families
- using Family-Centred Practice and working collaboratively with other staff, parents/guardians, specialist services and professionals to implement the program at the service and provide individualised support for children, where required
- delivering an educational program that is reflective of the service's values, beliefs and philosophy, and embraces the principles of fairness, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework)
- using language services to assist with communication, where required
- understanding and respecting different cultural child-rearing and social practices
- working with the Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor, Person in day-to-day charge, Responsible Persons to ensure appropriate program planning and resourcing for children with Additional Needs
- meeting any specialised medical and nutritional needs of children on a day-to-day basis
- discussing any concerns regarding individual children with the Nominated Supervisor/Person in day-to-day charge, Responsible persons or Approved Provider, and parents/guardians
- responding to the needs and concerns of parents/guardians, and providing support and guidance, where appropriate
- reviewing and evaluating individualised support programs in consultation with all people involved in the child's education and care
- critically reflecting on practice to ensure that interactions and programs embrace an approach in which children and families feel valued and respected, and that their contributions are welcomed

- notifying the Nominated Supervisor or Approved Provider/Person in day-to-day charge, Responsible persons of any behaviour or circumstances that may constitute discrimination or prejudice
- advising the Nominated Supervisor/Person in day-to-day charge, Responsible Persons or Approved Provider if they become aware of discrimination against anyone at the service based on having or being suspected of having an infectious disease, BBV, illness or medical condition

5.4. Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- adhering to the Melton City Council policies and procedures
- communicating with the service to ensure awareness of their child's specific needs
- raising any issues or concerns regarding their child's participation in the program
- being involved in, keeping fully informed about, and providing written consent for any individualised intervention or support proposed/provided for their child
- responding to requests from educators for written permission to arrange for an assessment or to collect reports on their child.

5.5. Volunteers and students, while at the service, are responsible for following this policy and its procedures.

Procedure

In terms of children with Additional Needs

- Council welcomes children with Additional Needs into their care services. Services will assess each application and may make a time to meet with the family to ensure the individual child's needs are or if they can be catered for.
- The service may require background information on specific disabilities or Additional Needs, such as extra care required or behaviour concerns to enable an understanding of the child when the application is received.
- When the application has been received indicating Additional Needs the Service Leader will:
 - contact the parent/guardian to discuss their child's needs and may arrange a time to meet in person.
 - discuss and document the child's placement with other educators/staff.

In terms of Family Day Care (FDC)

- FDC is provided for small groups of children in the home and allows for individualised care. Educators are limited in the number of children they can care for at any one time: (four or less children who have not started school & seven or less children in total). This number also includes the educator's own children up to the age of 13.

In terms of Imagination Magic

- Council provides a performing arts and literacy program for children aged birth to five years. The program operates from accessible venues within the city of Melton. Online and phone bookings ensure that families have equal opportunity to book a place and a waiting list operates to ensure that as many families as possible can access the program.

In terms of Kindergarten

- Melton City Council Kindergartens provide access for all children to gain a quality early childhood education program in the year before school. Kindergarten applications can be made online or via a hard copy application form. Applications

are processed in date order and in line with the following criteria which determines the priority of each application received:

Priority 1

- Deferrals and second year applications
- Children who are currently enrolled at Kindergarten who have received funding for a second year of Kindergarten; or children who were eligible to attend four-year-old Kindergarten in the previous year but deferred or withdrew from the program.
- High Priority Children (all of equal priority)
- Children at risk of abuse or neglect, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and children with additional needs.

Priority 2: Resident applications

- Children who live within the municipality and meet the eligibility requirements set by Department of Education & Training (DET). This includes families in the process of moving into the municipality.

Priority 3: Families residing outside of the municipality

- Kindergarten applications from those, families will be limited to book one session per week. Families wishing to enrol in OCC are required to complete an enrolment form and return it to the service. Enrolment packages can be sent out upon request. If there are no vacancies in the program the family will be placed on a waiting list and contacted when a place/s becomes available.

In terms of Vacation Care (VAC)

- Bookings are allocated in accordance of time and date received. Access will be considered based on the families and service's needs. . The booking procedure is designed to provide fair and equitable access to the VAC program for families who work, live or send their children to school within the municipality.

6. References, Sources, Links to Legislation and Other Documents

6.1. Legislation

- Child and wellbeing and safety Act 2005
- Gender Equality Act 2020

6.2. Related service policies and Procedures

- *Anaphylaxis Policy and Procedures*
- *Asthma Policy and procedures*
- *Code of Conduct Policy and Procedures*
- *Complaints and Grievances Policy and Procedures*
- *Dealing with Infectious Diseases Policy and Procedures*
- *Dealing with Medical Conditions Policy and Procedures*
- *Diabetes Policy and procedures*
- *Educational Program Development Policy and Procedures*
- *Enrolment and Orientation Policy and Procedures*
- *Epilepsy Policy and Procedures*
- *Fees Policy and Procedures*
- *Interactions with Children Policy and procedures*
- *Nutrition and Active Play Policy and Procedures*
- *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy and Procedures*

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- *Staffing Policy and procedures*