

**Kindergarten Central Registration Procedure Review**

**December 2022**

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# Introduction

The City of Frankston is in the outer southern suburbs of Melbourne, about 40 kilometres south of the Melbourne CBD. It is bounded by the Cities of Kingston and Greater Dandenong in the north, the City of Casey in the east, the Shire of Mornington Peninsula in the south, and Port Phillip Bay in the west. It includes the suburbs of Carrum Downs, Frankston, Frankston North, Frankston South, Langwarrin, Langwarrin South, Sandhurst, Seaford, and Skye. The City is a predominantly residential area, with some rural-residential, industrial, commercial, and rural areas.

For this review, the municipality has been segmented into 12 geographical ‘local areas’ comprising Carrum Downs, Frankston Central, Frankston Heights, Frankston North, Frankston South, Kananook, Karingal, Langwarrin, Langwarrin South, Sandhurst, Seaford, and Skye.

The municipality’s population in 2021 of 140,809 is forecast to grow to 163,610 by 2041 (+16%). Over this period, the early years cohort (0- to 4-year-olds) is expected to grow slightly from 9,828 to 9,880 (+1%).[[1]](#footnote-1)

Frankston City Council’s (Council) early years services cover: universal maternal and child health program, enhanced maternal and child health program, sleep and settling model of care, first-time parent groups, immunisation program, Best Start program, supported playgroup program, playgroup development and support, Mahogany Rise Child and Family Centre, and kindergarten central registration.

# Background

## Kindergarten Central Registration Process

Council manages a centralised registration process for 24 community-based, sessional kindergartens located in the municipality. As part of lease and licence arrangements, all these kindergartens are required to participate in the registration process.

The process was last reviewed in 2014, with only minor adjustments made to reflect legislative changes.

## Policy reforms

Over the past few years, the State Government has made several policy changes that are likely to increase the demand for sessional kindergarten places. The policy changes are summarised below.

### Additional year of universal funded kindergarten

In 2019, the State Government committed to an additional year of universal funded kindergarten providing all children with two years of kindergarten before beginning primary school. In Frankston, this reform commenced in 2022 with five hours per week being available for eligible three-year-olds. From 2023, up to 15 hours per week will be available, and by 2029, all three-year-olds are expected to have access to 15 hours per week.

### Free kindergarten

In 2022, the State Government announced that, from 2023, kindergarten would be ‘free’ by allocating $2,500 per year for each attending three and four-year-old. This government funding being in lieu of any parent fees previously levied by service providers.

### Thirty hours of free ‘pre-prep’ services

In 2022, the State Government announced that, from 2025, 30 hours per week of free ‘pre-prep’ services would be available for all four-year-olds. The implementation process for this initiative is currently unclear including whether the take-up will be staged across the state.

## Implication of the policy reforms

The policy reforms are likely to lead to more eligible children applying for places at sessional kindergarten services in Frankston than there are places available. An equitable and robust procedure is needed to determine how best to allocate the available places.

# Procedure review

Given the policy reforms, it was considered timely to review the current kindergarten central registration procedure noting that it meets all legislative requirements set out by the State Government in terms of its priority of access criteria, whereby priority is given to:

* children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children in out-of-home care
* Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
* asylum seeker and refugee children
* children eligible for the kindergarten fee subsidy
* children with additional needs, defined as children who:
  + require additional assistance in order to fully participate in the kindergarten program
  + require a combination of services which are individually planned
  + have an identified specific disability or developmental delay.

The review has, therefore, only focused on the local criteria required to determine the order in which offers are made, after the priority of access criteria have been applied.

The current kindergarten registration procedure will apply for 2023, with a revised procedure, should there be one, to come into effect in 2024.

# Community consultation

## Stakeholder group

Via an expression of interest process (example attached), a stakeholder group was formed to assist Council undertake the kindergarten central registration procedure review, with representation from the following entities:

* kindergarten committees of management – 2 participants
* early years manager – one representative from Community Kinders Plus
* parents - 5 participants
* relevant Council departments – three participants.

The stakeholder group met on three occasions to:

* workshop views on the current local criteria and ballot process, and other potential criteria
* comment on draft survey questions
* identify ways of communicating to the community the need to apply the priority of access criteria
* consider the data obtained from the survey responses.

## Community survey

An online survey comprising 23 questions was posted on the Council website on xxx and closed on 21 November 2022. The community was encouraged to complete the survey through:

* direct email notifications to:
* families that had recently used the registration system
* service providers
* teachers
* social media advertisements
* the link on the Council website.

Three hundred and sixty surveys were completed.

# Community survey responses

## Key points from the survey responses

### Locational criteria

**Question 11: What do you consider to be most important when choosing the location of your preferred kindergarten?**

The location of the preferred kindergarten relative to the family’s residential address is clearly the most important criterion followed by a sibling/s school address. Of lesser importance, although still significant, are one’s work address, grandparents/ other family members address, education/training address, and family day care address.

This suggests that while the residential address is the clear priority followed by sibling/s school address, some flexibility is sought for those that have circumstances that are covered by the other criteria.

### On time registrations

**Question 12: How important do you think it is for registrations to be on time?**

Currently, applications submitted on time are ranked the highest. The survey responses are consistent with this approach, with 51% and 41% of respondents agreeing it to be ‘very important’ and ‘important’ respectively.

Some free text comments suggest that the opening and closing dates for registration could be reviewed and communication about them improved.

### Family’s relationship with the Frankston City municipality

**Question 13: The following are examples of criteria that may be used to prioritise a place in a kindergarten based on a family’s relationship with the Frankston City municipality. Please rank in order of importance.**

Being a resident of the municipality, regardless of home ownership, is clearly the most important criterion. The remaining criteria are of lesser importance and ranked closely in the following order: ratepayers not living in the municipality, non-Frankston City residents (homeowners and renters) living on the municipal boundary, and non-Frankston City residents working or attending education facilities in Frankston City.

### Family’s relationship with their preferred kindergarten

**Question 14: The following are examples of criteria that may be used to prioritise a place in a kindergarten based on a** **family’s relationship with their preferred kindergarten. Please rank in order of importance.**

Having attended a kindergarten as a three-year-old is significantly the highest ranked response for the criterion relating to a family’s relationship with their preferred kindergarten, with the second most important being a sibling having attended the kindergarten within the last two years. Having a sibling attend the kindergarten three or more years ago was viewed as being of limited importance.

### Family’s proximity to their preferred kindergarten and zoning

**Question 15: The following are examples of criteria that may be used to prioritise a place in a kindergarten based on a family’s proximity to their preferred kindergarten. Please rank in order of importance.**

**And**

**Question 16: If you think zoning should be a considered criteria, what do you consider to be a reasonable zoning distance?**

Both questions taken together suggest that proximity/zoning appear to be the most important consideration for which kindergarten is available, with a zoning distance of 5km from a kindergarten being preferred. Note though that 22% of respondents were against zoning.

### Allocating places when demand exceeds supply

**Question 18: If there are more eligible registrations than places available at a kindergarten, then how should allocations be determined?**

A computer-generated ballot based on weighted criteria is the clear preference for determining allocations when there are more eligible registrations than places available at a kindergarten (79%).

### Influencing factors

**Question 20: When registering, should reasons for selecting a preferred kindergarten/s be included and considered?**

An overwhelming majority of respondents (90%) supported the proposition that reasons for selecting a preferred kindergarten/s should be included and considered. This suggests that a predetermined/rigid approach is not preferred, and that some discretion should be available for Council to apply in particular circumstances.

### Availability of kindergarten information

**Question 21: Should a kindergarten timetable be available to assist you to decide on your preferred kindergarten?**

**And**

**Question 22: Please rank in order of importance.**

Both questions taken together produce a clear-cut result as to the importance of key kindergarten information being available for families to consider. Ninety-six percent of respondents agreed that a kindergarten’s timetable should be available. Other information of critical importance being session hours, days of operation, and educational approach. Information on cost (free kindergarten) and after-hours care were also viewed as important but of a lower priority.

## Conclusion

The survey respondents have provided very clear criteria and priorities for consideration. How they will be ranked is still to be determined. It appears evident however, that registrations on time may no longer be the first criterion.

The respondents have also highlighted the importance of building in flexibility so that a family’s particular circumstances can be taken into consideration.

The respondents have demonstrated a very clear preference for being provided with kindergarten operational information, such as days and hours of sessions, and the kindergarten teacher’s educational approach prior to being asked to register.

# Recommendations

| **Community Recommendation** | **Officer Response / consideration** | **Conclusion / outcome**  **Immediate change**  **Phase in**  **Investigate further**  **Not to be included** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Three-year-old a priority | Agree | Immediate change from 2023 |
| Sibling priority | Already in the procedure | Continue |
| Resident/rate payer priority | Already in the procedure | Continue |
| On time registrations to be prioritised over late | Already in the procedure | Continue |
| Proximity/zoning priority | Currently postcode – need to investigate capabilities of system. What are other LGAs using?  5km zoning is an issue in that some kindergartens are under 3kms from each other and depending on where someone lives, they may have two or more within 5kms. Is 2km better as this is walking distance?  Current system is incapable of applying this filter, therefore data would need to be run through an external platform, which involves cooperation with other internal departments – this could happen multiple times throughout the year and could delay the offer process considerably. Does this contradict the preference system as some do not preference their closest kindergarten and 22% have indicated not wanting proximity. | Investigate further and benchmark against other local government areas.  Outcome to investigation to be completed by September 2023 |
| Increase nominated kindergarten preferences | Adding more preferences sets expectation that one of the preferences will be received. This is not always the case and may lead to more community discontent. Consider how we can communicate this clearly to community.  **Suggestion to avoid adding preferences is to include the following in mail when someone does not receive their first reference:**  Preferred kindergarten: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  If we are unable to offer your child a place at your preferred kindergarten the enrolment team will contact you to offer an alternative. Please identify what is most important to you when selecting a kindergarten to assist with this process.  As close as possible to address \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  As close as possible to primary school \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Prefer longer sessions  Prefer shorter sessions  Unable to attend kindergarten on | M | T | W | T | F | | Not to be included |
| Kindergarten timetables available prior to registrations opening | Need to discuss with kindergarten providers to ascertain their capacity to provide this information in time for the registration open period. | To complete further investigation by September 2023 and continue to review throughout kindergarten reform period. |
| Dates for open and close of registration period | Need to discuss with kindergarten enrolment officers the logistics of the enrolment process as this is directly impacted by registration timing for both three and four-year-olds. | Phase in for open of registrations in 2024 |
| Opt-in to four-year-old kindergarten when registering for three-year-old kindergarten | Need to consider fee structure and impact on budgeting.  Consideration of accuracy of data due to registration being up to 18 months old. Resource required to check details and follow up families that have registered for two years.  Communication to ensure enrolled three-year-olds are registering for four-year-old kindergarten immediately | Consideration for future 2026 |
| Use of weighted ballot system when kindergarten is oversubscribed | Considerations to include:   * prior relationship with kindergarten * resident * proximity.   System capabilities to be investigated. | To complete further investigation by September 2023. |

**Attachment 1: Committee of Management Expression of Interest Invitation**

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**Attachment 2: Survey Response Summary**



1. forecast.id.com.au/frankston accessed 28 November 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)