

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Program

Fact Sheet for Educators

WHAT IS THE KINDERGARTEN INCLUSION SUPPORT (KIS) PROGRAM?

The KIS program contributes to the provision of a quality kindergarten program in line with the National Quality Framework and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

The KIS Program enhances a kindergarten service's capacity to provide a program that is responsive to the individual abilities, interests and needs of children with disability or developmental delay and ongoing high support needs or children with complex medical needs. Services meeting the eligibility criteria for this program are able to apply for additional staffing support, specialist consultancy, specialist training and minor building modifications.

WHAT DOES AN INCLUSIVE KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

Inclusive education is about making sure all children, regardless of their ability, are able to participate and reach their full potential in kindergarten. In inclusive kindergarten programs early childhood professionals:

- make reasonable adjustments to ensure equitable access and opportunities for children with disability to meaningfully participate in all aspects of the program
- use integrated teaching approaches to build on children's skills and interests and facilitate their connection with the group
- demonstrate high expectations for all children
- share information and have open communication between staff members and with families
- share the responsibility of care, learning and development of all children and support children to develop warm secure relationships with all staff.

Inclusive education benefits all children. As children develop a more knowledgeable sense of self they learn to work collaboratively with others and foster an appreciation of diversity. Inclusion supports children with disability to be engaged and connected, enabling them to build friendships with others and strengthen their sense of identity, wellbeing and belonging. Families are more willing to share information and decision making around their child's learning and development when they feel welcome contributing positively to children's sense of security and learning outcomes.

THE KINDERGARTEN INCLUSION SUPPORT PROGRAM:

- provides assistance to complement early childhood teacher knowledge and skills, while acknowledging their expertise in supporting children's learning and development
- supports early childhood teachers to enhance their capacity to develop and implement an inclusive program
- responds to children's individual abilities and strengths, as well as their needs by providing additional resources to support the kindergarten group
- promotes collaboration between families and professionals recognising that early childhood teachers require varying levels of additional support.

WHAT ARE THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS?

The application for KIS assistance must address the eligibility criteria. It is important to note that it is the kindergarten service, not the parent that applies for assistance.

To be eligible for KIS the kindergarten program must be:

- funded by the Victorian government or the child is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten funding and
- seeking support to enhance its capacity to provide for the access and participation of a child with a disability and ongoing high support needs and/or complex medical needs and
- the support requested is in addition to the existing resources available to the kindergarten service.

For information on the eligibility criteria please visit:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/news/Pages/kinderinclusion.aspx>

THE ROLE OF THE PROGRAM SUPPORT GROUP

The Program Support Group (PSG) brings together key people to support planning for the access and meaningful participation in the kindergarten program of a child with disability or developmental delay. The PSG is a partnership between the child's parents, the early childhood teacher and any other person who supports the child's learning, development and wellbeing, for example early childhood intervention professionals. The early childhood teacher convenes the PSG. This involves organising meetings and facilitating conversations to support planning for the child.

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Meetings should be held at least once per term with the initial meeting occurring before the child's attendance at the service.

The PSG is responsible for:

- identifying the child's interests, abilities and support needs
- determining any adjustments to be made to the program or environment
- establishing shared goals for the child through the KIS plan
- developing strategies to support the child's learning and development
- deciding whether an application for KIS is required
- assisting in the child's transition to school.

The KIS plan comprises a set of goals and strategies that form the basis for ongoing planning and monitoring of the child's learning and development. Goals should be reviewed at each PSG meeting, with outcomes documented and areas for additional support identified.

HOW IS KIS SUPPORT ALLOCATED?

The level and type of support provided to the service will be determined by information provided in the KIS application and associated KIS plan. A Regional Advisory Group will assess the eligibility of the application and decide the level of resources to be provided to the kindergarten service. The range of resources available through the KIS Program include specialist consultancy to support program planning, specialist training to meet the individual needs of children with disability and/or complex medical needs, minor building modifications and additional staffing support.

The resources allocated to kindergarten services from the KIS program are intended to support the needs of the whole group during the kindergarten year.

The kindergarten service, as the applicant for support, will be advised of the outcome and is responsible for advising the family.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A KIS FUNDED ADDITIONAL ASSISTANT?

If a KIS funded additional assistant is allocated to your service as the result of a KIS application, they will work as a member of the team delivering a kindergarten program that is inclusive of all children in the group. This team approach to inclusion increases a services capacity to provide a flexible program that responds to the needs of each child in the group.

Responsibility for one-on-one support for any children in the program should be shared between all members in the kindergarten team. The KIS funded additional assistant should not work exclusively with the child identified in the KIS application and therefore does not attend PSG meetings.

KIS funded additional assistants are employed by the KIS auspice organisation and are not part of the regulated minimum staff to child ratios. They should not be supervising children without another educator employed by the kindergarten service present. They work under the direction of the early childhood teacher and share the everyday team responsibilities.

It is important that all staff in the kindergarten environment, including the KIS funded additional assistant, feel part of the team as this supports their wellbeing and the participation and engagement of all children. Early childhood teachers should support the KIS funded additional assistant to become an active member of the team by:

- providing an orientation for the additional assistant that includes the physical layout and safety procedures of the service, introducing them to other staff and discussing the program and dynamics of the group
- outlining roles and responsibilities and how they will work as a team to support all children
- welcoming the additional assistant to attend team meetings and ensuring they have the opportunity to contribute to discussions about the program.

SPECIALIST CONSULTANCY SUPPORT

Kindergarten programs eligible for KIS support may request or be allocated specialist consultancy support by the Regional Advisory Group. Specialist consultants may assist early childhood teachers to enhance their knowledge, confidence and skills to:

- assess a child's strengths and capabilities
- identify and implement adaptations to the program, activities and environment to support the child's meaningful participation in all aspects of the program
- plan a program that responds to the learning and development needs of all children
- Coaching around specific skills and educational strategies
- Reflect critically on their practice
- implement a team approach to inclusion
- respectfully engage with families
- collaborate with other professionals.

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The type and level of specialist consultancy support is informed by consultation and collaboration with the early childhood teacher and may include:

- provision of resources and information
- linkages to professional development
- one to one consultation and coaching sessions (onsite, telephone).

CAN I REQUEST AN APPEAL ON THE OUTCOME OR LEVEL OF SUPPORT?

The kindergarten service may request an appeal of decisions regarding eligibility or level of support approved, but only on the basis of new or additional relevant information. Appeals are to be in writing to the convenor and signed by the early childhood teacher, parent/guardian and, where applicable, a representative from the Early Years Manager. Information about other children in the group should not be sighted by the parent/guardian of the child identified in the application.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICE?

There are a wide variety of resources available to early childhood educators to support the implementation of inclusive practice.

Resources available on the Department's website include:

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)

The VEYLDF supports early childhood professionals to work together and with families to achieve the best learning and developmental outcomes for all children. The VEYLDF includes 8 evidence-based principles to guide early childhood professionals practice. The framework supports inclusive practice by providing a common language and generating reflection and collaboration.

The National Quality Framework (NQF)

The NQF and standards aim to drive improvements in the quality of early education and care services.

Disability Standards for Education 2005

The Disability Standards for Education outline the legal obligations for education under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. This legislation ensures the right of every child with disability to education on the same basis as children without disabilities. This includes early childhood settings.

Early ABLES

Early ABLES is an online assessment for learning tool to assist early childhood teachers provide a more individualised learning experience for children with disability or developmental delay.

Online learning modules

There are two series of learning modules available on the Department's website to support early childhood educators develop a greater understanding of planning a quality, inclusive program for children with disability.

The early childhood inclusion for children with disability modules build an understanding of inclusion, supporting children's communication, promoting positive behaviors and planning for the diverse abilities, strengths and interests of all children.

The including children with autism in the early years modules provide an introduction to young children with autism, practice to support planning for the learning and development of a child with autism and developing a responsive program.

AllPlay Learn provides online evidence-based resources and training for teachers including how to be an inclusive teacher and day-to-day tips for supporting children with disability.

Autism and inclusion at kindergarten booklet

The autism and inclusion at kindergarten booklet is a practical guide for early childhood teachers containing information about autism in young children and strategies for creating an inclusive learning environment.

For more information on these resources visit:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/news/Pages/default.aspx>

Other resources

Other resources may include:

- Community resources for example other early childhood educators in the kindergarten service or in other local services, families of children in the program, Early Childhood Intervention professionals, kindergarten management, local government and Preschool Field Officers.
- Professional development and training.
- Peak bodies such as Early Learning Association. Australia and Early Childhood Intervention Australia.