

Thinking about when to send your child to preschool or school?

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Each year parents are faced with the decision of whether to send or defer their child from preschool. This can be a difficult decision as many parents believe a child is ready when they are age eligible... but this is not always the case. Further thought and discussion may be advantageous before deciding in which year to enrol your child.

Currently the Victorian State Government funds only one year of preschool per child- the year before they start school. Therefore it is important to consider when you will access this year as a second year of preschool is not guaranteed and is only available under certain circumstances....

A second year of preschool maybe granted for your child if and only when your child's teacher has assessed your child as having delays in two development areas. This delay can be indentified when comparing the average rate of learning and development for children of the same age i.e. not in comparison to other children in the child's preschool group who may be older. Your teacher must then sign a legal document, a Declaration of Eligibility, which must then be submitted to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development by the end of term three.

In the process of seeking a second year of preschool for your child there is a series of steps which must be taken. A second year of preschool discussion with the family must be started in term two and a plan for learning and development (which identifies strategies that focus on the developmental outcome areas where a delay has be identified) will be implemented in term three, reviewed and then continued into term 4. It is recommended that the Preschool Field Officer (PSFO), the child's Maternal and Health nurse or family doctor contribute information and advice about the child's level of learning and development.

If your child is deemed ineligible for a second year of preschool funding, the family may choose to self-fund an additional year, although children who have yet to have a year of preschool will get first priory of any available places. Self-funding an additional year of preschool as of July 2013 is approximately \$4500 per child. (Standard per capita rate for 15 hours plus individual preschool charges and levies)

Department of Education and Early Childhood development- school Entrance Eligibility

"Children must be a minimum of five years of age by April 30 in the year they are eligible to start school. However, children are not legally required to attend school until the year which they turn six years of age."

Considering your child's readiness for 4-5 year old preschool and then school the following year...

Even though your child may enjoy preschool and appears to be coping in day to day activities, parents should be aware of the long term challenges of school the following year. School children need to be independent as they play with other children in the playground and be able to solve problems and disputes in a friendly manner, look after their own belonging and go the toilet by themselves. These skills are always encouraged at the preschool level but adult support is more really accessible and the staff: child ratio is lower.

It is important to remember that activities at preschool are usually free choice, play based and generally open ended. Where as, at school activities are generally task-centred and require extended concentration on designated activities.

Think about the difference between school and preschool: the number and age of children your child may need to mix with, the physical environment including the amount of classroom, buildings and school boundaries, working and talking with different teachers and supporting staff and importantly the amount of hours your child may spend at school.

Your child will probably be ready for school if you feel they are developing well in the following areas (taken from the Victorian Early years Learning and Development Framework):

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity.

- Can build secure attachments with educators
- Can communicate their needs for comfort and assistance
- Openly express their feelings and ideas and can demonstrate an increasing capacity for self-regulating emotions
- Initiate and engage in play and conversation with peers and educators
- Persist when faced with challenges and when first attempts are not successful.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Listen to other's ideas and respect differences between people
- Become aware of ways in which people are included or excluded from physical and social environments
- Use play to investigate, project and explore new ideas
- Develop the ability to recognise unfairness and bias and the capacity to act with compassion and kindness

- Explore relationships with other living and non-living things and observe, notice and respond to change

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Seek out and accept new challenges, make new discoveries and celebrate their own efforts and achievements and those of others
- Increasingly cooperate and work collaboratively with others
- Recognise and communicate their bodily needs (for example thirst, hunger, rest, comfort, physical activity)
- Manipulate equipment and manage tools with increasing competence, skills and purpose to explore and respond to their world

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Express wonder and interest in their environment and are curious and enthusiastic participants in their learning
- Apply a wide variety of thinking strategies to engage with situations and solve problems and adapt these to new situations
- Participate in a variety of rich and meaningful inquiry-based experiences

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Engage in enjoyable two-way interactions verbally and non-verbally with others
- Contribute and give their ideas in play, small and large group discussion
- Show increasing knowledge, understanding and skill in conveying meaning
- Being to understand and engage with written and oral literacy and numeracy concepts

When thinking about preschool and then school you will need to consider your child based on his/her personality, development and maturity, as we know, all children develop at different rates. For some children waiting an extra year may mean the difference between being “okay” at school and “thriving” at school. For other children parents generally know that their child is ready for that next big step of childhood and they are confident and ready to guide this transition.

Recommendations of further reading:

- What’s the Hurry? Kathy Walker
- Raising Boys Steve Biddulph

References

DEECD / VCAA Victorian Early Years Learning and Developmental Framework

DEECD The Kindergarten Guide 2013

DEECD Does my child need a second year of kindergarten?