

INCLUSION AND EQUITY POLICY

Best Practice – Quality Area 1 and 6

To view the full version of this policy (including attachments); please speak to the staff at your early learning service.

Uniting Victoria and Tasmania Limited is the Approved Provider of children's services known in these policies as Uniting Early Learning.

Overarching Policy Statement:

The *Keeping Children Safe Policy* of the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (refer to *Sources*) is the overarching whole of church policy to be implemented by individuals and entities involved with or connected to the Uniting Church. All children who are involved in any of the Church's activities, events or programs have a right to feel and be safe. The Church is committed to provide safe environments where children are cared for, respected, nurtured and sustained.

Policy statement

Uniting Early Learning is committed to:

- acknowledging and respecting the rights of all children to be provided with and 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 on the basis of 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, child, volunteer or student at the service is discriminated against on the basis of having or being suspected of having an infectious disease or blood-borne virus (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 Attachment 2 – *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 the *Education and Care Services National Law 2010* and *National Regulations 2011* and meeting the National Quality Standard
- complying with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- complying with current legislation including the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, *Disability Act 2006* and *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*

Each Founding Agency Policy, Procedure, Practice Manual or Form continues to have effect on and after the Date of Establishment as Uniting to the extent that it is not inconsistent with a Uniting Level 1 & 2 Policy and until such time as Uniting replaces it.

Purpose

This policy provides guidelines to:

- ensure all adults and children at Uniting Early Learning are treated equitably and with respect, regardless of their background, ethnicity, culture, language, beliefs, gender, age, socioeconomic status, level of ability, additional needs, family structure or lifestyle;
- promote inclusive practices and ensure the successful participation of all children at the service.

Summary of Procedures relating to this Policy:

“Inclusion involves taking into account all children’s social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes” (*Guide to the National Quality Standard*, Element 1.1.5 – refer to Attachment 2).

The intent is to ensure that all children’s experiences are recognised and valued and that they have equitable access to resources and participation and opportunities to demonstrate their learning (*Early Years Learning Framework*, page 24)

Educators and management should challenge practices that contribute to inequities and make decisions that promote the inclusion and participation of all children. They can do this by developing their professional knowledge and skills, and working in partnership with children, families, communities and other services and agencies to find equitable and effective ways to ensure that all children have opportunities to experience a sense of personal worth and achieve outcomes (*Guide to the National Quality Standard*, Element 1.1.5 – refer to Attachment 2).

Scope

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Certified Supervisor, educators, staff, students on placement, volunteers, parents, children and others attending the programs and activities of the service.

The responsibilities of each party listed in the previous paragraph are noted at Attachment 1.

Background and legislation

The Education and Care Services National Law Section 3 (3) outlines guiding principles for the National Quality Framework. These guiding principles are:

- (a) that the rights and best interests of the child are paramount;
- (b) that children are successful, competent and capable learners;
- (c) that the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity underlie this Law;**

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- (d) that Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued;
- (e) that the role of parents and families is respected and supported;
- (f) that best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services.

Education and care services are therefore required to consider the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity in making decisions about operating and in working to improve quality. Values of inclusion and equity should also be incorporated into the service's philosophy statement.

State and Commonwealth laws prohibit discrimination based on personal characteristics, including race, age, gender, religious belief, disability, disease or illness, or parental status. Additionally education and care services must comply with Commonwealth and State service and funding agreements, including priority of access requirements (refer to *Enrolment and Orientation Policy*).

Examples of best practice from a range of early childhood professionals across diverse settings can be found in *Practice Guide Four: Equity and Diversity*. This is one of a series of *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework Practice Guides* (refer to Attachment 2).

Developing professional knowledge and skills, and using family-centred practice (refer to *Definitions* below) 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.

Early childhood services are also obliged 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*).

Attachment 2 contains a list of the legislation and sources relevant to this policy, including Acts and Regulations.

Evaluation

In order to assess whether the goals and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness;
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy;
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice;
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required;
- notify parents at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures.

Definitions

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority etc. refer to the *General Definitions* section of this manual.

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.

Best Start: A prevention and early intervention project to improve the health, development, learning and wellbeing of all Victorian children from conception through to transition to school. It aims to strengthen the capacity of parents, families, communities and early years services to better provide for the needs of all young children and their families. There are 30 Best Start sites, six of which are Aboriginal Best Start sites. Further information is available in The Kindergarten Guide (refer to Sources)

Blood-borne virus (BBV): A virus that is spread when blood from an infected person enters another person's bloodstream. Examples of blood-borne viruses include human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B, hepatitis C and viral haemorrhagic fevers. Where basic hygiene, safety, infection control and first aid procedures are followed, the risk of contracting a blood-borne virus is negligible.

Culture: The values and traditions of groups of people that are passed from one generation to another.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD): Refers to individuals and groups who are from diverse racial, religious, linguistic and/or ethnic backgrounds.

Developmental delay: A delay in the development of a child under the age of 6 years that:

- a) is attributable to a mental or physical impairment, or a combination of mental and physical impairments, and
- b) is manifested before the child attains the age of 6 years, and
- c) results in substantial functional limitations in one or more of the following areas of major life activity:
 - i) self-care
 - ii) receptive and expressive language
 - iii) cognitive development
 - iv) motor development, and
- d) 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 co-ordinated (*Disability Act 2006 (Vic)*).

Disability: In relation to a person, refers to:

- a) a sensory, physical or neurological impairment or acquired brain injury, or any combination thereof, that:
 - i) is, or is likely to be, permanent, and
 - ii) causes a substantially reduced capacity in at least one of the areas of self-care, self-management, mobility or communication, and
 - iii) requires significant ongoing or long-term episodic support, and
 - iv) is not related to ageing, or
- b) an intellectual disability, or
- c) a developmental delay (*Disability Act 2006 (Vic)*).

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.

Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS): These services support families and children experiencing a disability or developmental delay (refer to *Definitions*) from birth to school age. ECIS are funded through the Department of Education and 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. Details are available at www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/careankinder/earllystart/

Equity: (In the context of human rights) is the behaviour of acting in a fair and just manner towards others.

Family-centred practice: 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-centred practice by respecting the pivotal role of families in children's lives. Early childhood professionals should:

- 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*, p10).

Inclusion: The incorporation of children and families into the service to ensure that all individuals have an equal opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.

Inclusion support agencies: Funded by the Commonwealth Government to work at a local level with early childhood education and care services. ISAs provide practical advice on inclusive practices and support child care services to build their capacity and to access training. The ISA may also recommend that services access resources, bi-cultural support and specialist equipment, administered by the Professional Support Coordinators (PSCs), to better facilitate a child's inclusion in a service. Further information and eligibility requirements are available at: <http://education.gov.au/inclusion-and-professional-support-program>

Inclusion support subsidy (ISS) : Assists eligible child care services to improve their capacity to include children with ongoing high support needs, including those with disability, so they can be cared for appropriately within a service. Further details are available at: <http://education.gov.au/inclusion-and-professional-support-program>

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.

Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU): Funded by the Commonwealth to provide professional development and support to services with a high proportion of indigenous children. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) is the IPSU in Victoria. VAEAI can also provide support to mainstream education and care services to raise their cultural competency. More information is available at: www.vaeai.org.au

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A state government subsidy paid directly to the funded service to enable eligible families to attend a funded kindergarten program or funded three-year-old place at no cost (or minimal cost) to promote participation. Details are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au/ecprofessionals/kindergarten/

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services (KISS): A program offering supplementary assistance to early childhood services to support the inclusion of children who have been diagnosed with developmental concerns, a disability or complex medical needs, into a funded kindergarten program. Services include the Preschool Field Officer Program (refer to *Definitions*) and Kindergarten Inclusion Support Packages (refer to *Definitions*). Details are available in *The Kindergarten Guide* (refer to *Sources*).

Koorie Early Childhood Education Program: Supports Aboriginal children and their families to access and participate in kindergarten programs. The program consists of three components:

- a statewide co-ordinator who provides support, information and assistance to regional Koorie Engagement Support Officers – Early Childhood Development
- Koorie Engagement Support Officers – Early Childhood Development (refer to *Definitions*)
- the Koorie Preschool Assistants program (refer to *Definitions*).

Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs): Employed by the Department of Education and Training (DET) to assist families in accessing the broad range of services and support needed to ensure the best start in life for Aboriginal children from birth through to completion of school. KESOs provide advice and practical support to services that offer funded kindergarten places to ensure the delivery of programs that are respectful of the cultural beliefs and practices of Aboriginal children.

Koorie Preschool Assistants (KPSA) program: Implemented by the Department of Education and Training (DET) in partnership with local Aboriginal communities employing KPSAs and administer the program. KPSAs work in kindergartens to assist teachers to develop and deliver culturally-inclusive and responsive programs for Aboriginal children. Details are available in *The Kindergarten Guide* – refer to *Sources* in Attachment 2.

Out-of-Home Care: Is the term used in Victoria when a child or young person is placed in care away from their parents. It includes placement in kinship care, home-based care such as foster care and residential care. For these children, the State of Victoria is legal their parent, and with this comes the responsibilities of a parent to care for and protect them, and to ensure that they have access to all the services they need for their immediate and longer term benefit (from: *Early Childhood Agreement on Out-of-Home Care* – refer to *Sources*).

Preschool Field Officers (PSFOs): Employed by local government authorities or other agencies to assist children with additional needs to access and participate in funded kindergarten programs. The PSFO service is part of the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services (refer to *Definitions*) program.

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.

Authorisation

This policy was adopted by: Uniting Victoria and Tasmania Limited on: 1/7/2017

Review date: December 2017

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following:

- *Anaphylaxis Policy*
- *Asthma Policy*
- *Child Safe Policy*
- *Code of Conduct Policy*
- *Complaints and Grievances Policy*
- *Dealing with Infectious Diseases Policy*
- *Dealing with Medical Conditions Policy*
- *Diabetes Policy*
- *Educational Program and Practice Policy*
- *Enrolment and Orientation Policy*
- *Epilepsy Policy*
- *Fees Policy*
- *Interactions with Children Policy*
- *Nutrition, Oral Health and Active Play Policy*
- *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*
- *Staffing Policy*