The right time to start kindergarten

Under the National Quality Framework and Universal Access funding is provided to support children to attend kindergarten for 600 hours (15 hours per week) in the year prior to school.

It is important that children start school when they are ready to learn in a more formal environment. Therefore it is important for parents to consider when is the best time for their child to start school, as this will determine the best time to attend kindergarten.

In previous years parents have been able to start their child in kindergarten and have the option to withdraw if, after consultation with educators, it was considered that the child would benefit more from kindergarten in the following year. THIS OPTION IS NO LONGER AVAILABLE TO US and there is an expectation that once the child has commenced in kindergarten that this will be considered to be their year of funded kindergarten. Consequently it is important to consider carefully the year in which a child will benefit most from kindergarten.

Educators at kindergartens and at the HDKA office are available to speak to you about making the best decision for your child.

Waiting another year for kindergarten

Each child develops at his/her own rate, and although your child’s age may make him/her eligible to start kindergarten, other factors may impact on his/her readiness for such an experience.

Once you make a decision and your child starts kindergarten it will be expected that they will complete the year. Should you and the educator see signs that the child is not ready to benefit from the kindergarten experience in the current year, there is a small window of opportunity in which the child can be withdrawn and access their funded year of kindergarten in the following year. This is prior to the data for enrolments being passed on to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and MUST BE as early as possible and definitely prior to the end of term 1.

From the beginning there needs to be open, honest communication between you and the educators, keeping the child’s needs, best interest and your family’s needs at the forefront. Speaking to your child’s teacher early in the year is essential to making an informed decision about the best time for your child to benefit from their kindergarten year.

More information can be found at
Access to 3 year old kindergarten places

3 year old kindergarten attracts no government funding and as such needs to be independently financially viable – ie. It needs to cover its own costs. Consequently, 3 year old kindergarten is much more expensive than 4 year old kindergarten. However, some children may benefit from a year in a 3 year old kindergarten program prior to commencing in the 4 year old kindergarten program. Should your child commence in a 4 year old kindergarten program and you and the educator decide that the child is not ready to gain full benefit from that program they may benefit more from a 3 year old kindergarten program. HDKA retains several vacancies in the 3 year old kindergarten programs to allow for children to withdraw from 4 year old kindergarten early in the year and be placed in a 3 year old kindergarten program. You should discuss this option with your kindergarten teacher and with the enrolment officer at HDKA.

In some circumstances a child may attend 3 year old kindergarten and after discussion with the educator the decision may be made that the child would benefit from another year of 3 year old kindergarten prior to commencing in the 4 year old kindergarten program. This decision should be made in consultation with the 3 year old kindergarten teacher and the 4 year old kindergarten teacher.

How to gauge your child’s readiness

Generally speaking readiness for either 3 year old or 4 year old kindergarten is more about maturity and social and emotional readiness than what the child knows or can do.

Consideration should be given to

- the child’s ability to separate happily from their primary care givers
- the child’s desire and ability to interact with adults other than their primary care givers
- the child’s desire and ability to interact with other children
- independence skills such as looking after their own belongings and making their needs understood
- emotional readiness indicated by such things as not becoming unnecessarily upset should routines change or things not being as expected

Of course many of these skills are developing during these years and should be discussed with the educators in order to make an informed decision.

Remember

Think carefully about when your child is likely to gain the most benefit from starting school, and therefore when is the best time for the child to have a kindergarten experience. If you are unsure, talk to others who know your child and whose judgement you trust. This could be the kindergarten educators, other parents who have made this decision in the past, the prep teacher or school principal or your Maternal and Child Health Nurse.

Attend kindergarten information sessions and ask about the kindergarten program and the expectations that the educators will have.

Before your child starts kindergarten and early in the year share your concerns, thoughts and ideas about your child’s development openly with the kindergarten teacher and be prepared to be guided by these skilled professionals with regard to your child’s readiness to benefit from their kindergarten experience.