

Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan

Merri-bek City

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Department
of Education

1. Introduction

1.1. Reform context

The Victorian Government's \$14 billion Best Start, Best Life (BSBL) reforms are the most significant change to Victoria's early childhood sector in a generation.

The BSBL reforms include:

- **Free Kinder:** Free Kinder is now available for Victorian 3- and 4-year-old children at participating services in standalone (sessional) kindergartens and long day care centres – a saving of up to \$2,500 per child, every year.
- **Pre-Prep:** Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will gradually transition to 'Pre-Prep' – increasing to a universal 30-hour-a-week program of play-based learning for 4-year-old children in Victoria by 2036.
- **Three-Year-Old Kindergarten:** the continued roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, with programs increasing to 15 hours a week across the state by 2029.
- **Early learning and childcare centres:** the establishment of 50 Victorian government-owned and operated early learning and childcare centres. These centres will be built in areas with the greatest need and will make it easier for families to access early childhood education and childcare. The first of the centres will open in 2025.

These initiatives demonstrate a clear commitment to improving early learning outcomes for Victorian children, workforce participation and access for families, and present the most significant change to Victoria's early childhood sector in a generation.

Pre-Prep will roll-out in Merri-bek City in 2034. Statewide, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background, and children who have had contact with Child Protection services, will be able to access up to 25 hours of Pre-Prep in 2026, increasing to up to 30 hours from 2028. Children who have (or have a parent or guardian who has) a Commonwealth concession card and children who are a multiple birth child (triplets or more) across the state will be able to access up to 25 hours of Pre-Prep in 2028, increasing to up to 30 hours from 2030.

1.2. Purpose of Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plans (KISPs)

New and expanded infrastructure is key to delivering the BSBL reforms and will require a large expansion of kindergarten facilities across the State. KISPs, which are jointly developed with Local Governments, indicate where and when new infrastructure will be required to support both reform implementation and population growth in each of Victoria's 79 local government areas (LGAs). KISPs help all kindergarten providers meet demand and collectively provide a clear picture of infrastructure need across the State.

KISPs support planning for services and future capital works and include detailed information about:

- Current capacity and demand for funded kindergarten

- Capacity to be delivered for planned infrastructure projects and future demand for kindergarten
- Forecast ‘unmet demand’ for kindergarten – that is, the kindergarten places needed that cannot be met by current or planned capacity
- Information specific to each local government area and its early childhood education and care landscape.

KISPs were initially developed to support the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and have now been updated to incorporate Pre-Prep.

KISPs are intended to support planning. They are not funding documents and do not commit any party to addressing the unmet demand identified.

However, it is expected that future investment requests through Building Blocks and funding decisions about Local Government, not-for-profit projects (including non-government schools) would align with the relevant KISP (including Section 3: Local Context).

1.3. Structure of the KISP

Each KISP consists of the following sections:

- **Section 1:** A short introduction to the Best Start, Best Life reform and the KISP.
- **Section 2:** A map of existing and planned Early Childhood Education and Care services.
- **Section 3:** Local context and knowledge of key information in Merri-bek City relevant to early childhood education.
- **Section 4:** Unmet demand estimates in Merri-bek City over the life of the reform.

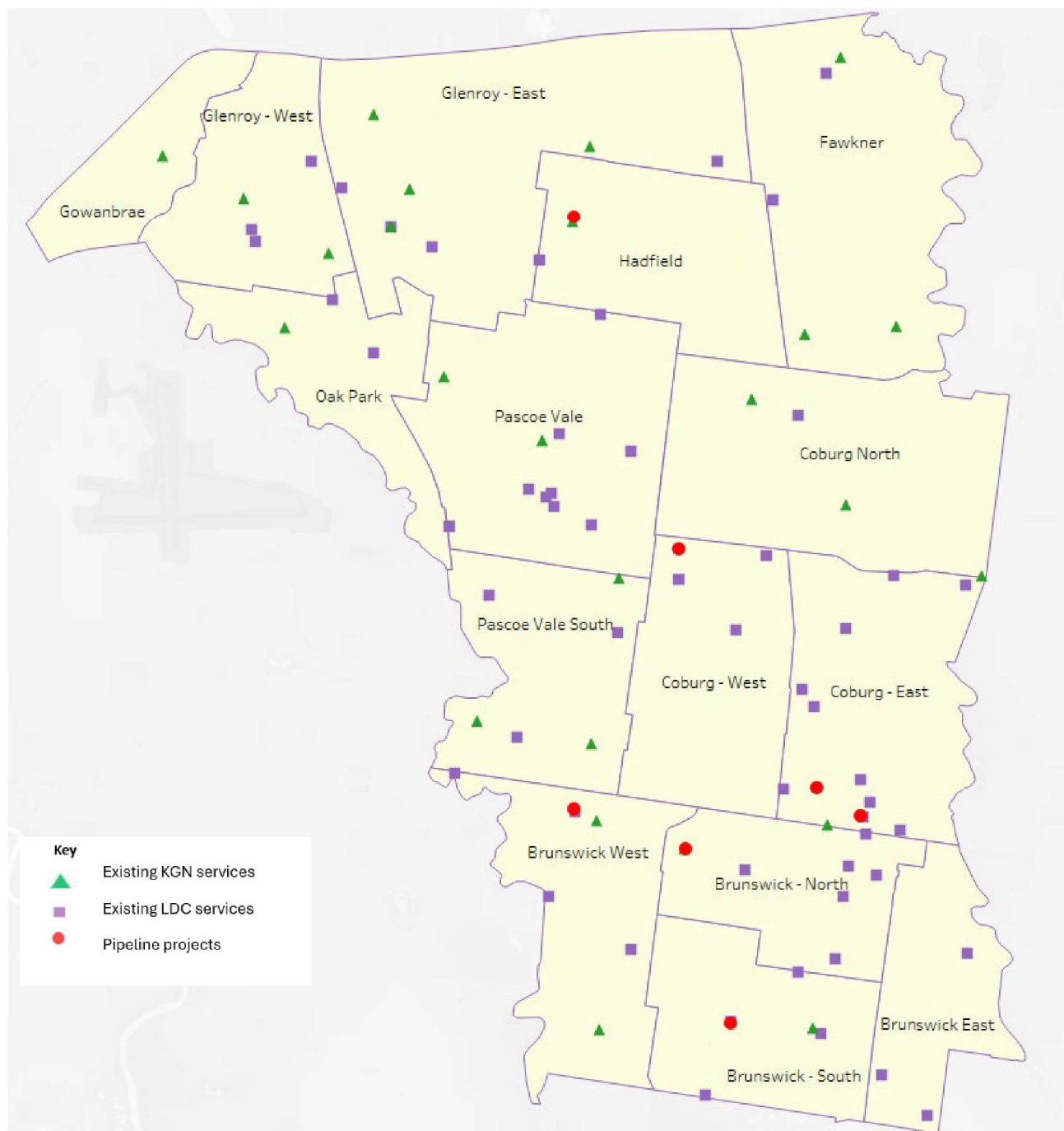
1.4. Disclaimer

All data presented in this document is published for information purposes only. Operational and business decisions should not be based solely on this document. Neither the Department nor Merri-bek City Council warrants, guarantees, makes any representation or assumes any duty of care in relation to the data, including as to its suitability, completeness, accuracy or adequacy.

2. Map of Early Childhood Education services in Merri-bek City

The map below shows the distribution of currently operating and new State-supported services that are planned to open in the future in Merri-bek City. Planned services by the private sector are not included.

This map has been prepared using departmental data, from both the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITS) and the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA).



3. Local context

3.1 Purpose

Local, place-based knowledge and context play an important role in supporting the implementation of the BSBL reforms across Victoria. This section of the KISP documents this knowledge and context and should be considered alongside the kindergarten demand estimates in Section 4.

Information provided as local context may support applications through the Building Blocks Capacity Building and Planning Grants streams.

3.2 Key considerations

Aboriginal Self Determination in Early Childhood Education and Care

There is a strong commitment in Merri-bek to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families have input into early years programs and that their culture is embedded in pedagogy. There are a number of professional development opportunities for the early years sector to increase knowledge and understanding of the needs and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The latest data states there are 89 children aged 0-4 years and 133 children aged 5-14 who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ABS 2021) in Merri-bek.

Key demographic trends that influence demand for kindergarten

Merri-bek Kindergarten participation rates

Merri-bek performs slightly below the state average for kindergarten participation. In 2024, the kindergarten participation rate in Merri-bek for four-year-olds was 92% in comparison with the Victorian statewide average of 96%. The three-year-old participation rate was also just lower at 89% over the Victorian average of 90% (Department of Education, 2024).

Merri-bek is a culturally and socio-economically diverse community which continues to experience significant population growth, particularly in Fawkner and Oak Park as well as in Coburg and Brunswick. The increasing population will lead to higher demand for kindergarten, with the greatest demand forecast in central and northern suburbs.

Merri-bek demographic data and population projections

Based on projected population growth in Merri-bek, by 2036 the total forecasted unmet demand for kindergarten places will be 917. The highest unmet demand estimates are predicted in Fawkner requiring over 200 additional kindergarten places while Brunswick East, Oak Park and Coburg West will require over 100 additional kindergarten places by 2036.

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) 2024 data show an increase in the percentage of children experiencing developmental vulnerability. It is also recognised that children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may require additional support to access and engage in kindergarten programs. It is anticipated that many of these families will be included in the 2026 and 2028 priority cohorts and will be eligible for increased kindergarten hours.

Kindergarten Preferences

In Merri-bek, there is a slight preference for sessional kindergarten over integrated services with 1043 eligible four-year-old children attending a sessional kindergarten and 884 attending an integrated Kindergarten. However, there is a preference for three-year-old kindergarten children to attend an integrated kindergarten with 931 attending a sessional kindergarten and 854 attending integrated kindergarten in a long day care setting in 2024. Service modelling and timetabling are also factors in parental preferences with most kindergartens now offering 7.5-hour sessions.

At times, children may participate in a mix of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services and attend a sessional kindergarten while also remaining in an integrated Long Day Care program a few days a week. Parents have reported this is due to personal preference and costs associated with integrated kindergarten. Parents in areas with higher rates of socio-economic disadvantage may experience financial barriers to their children attending integrated kindergarten and ensuring an adequate number of sessional places where a full fee subsidy is applied will be required.

Based on Merri-bek's kindergarten central enrolment data and current waiting lists, community-run not-for-profit ECECs continue to be in high demand and indicate a parental preference over private services.

Projects or trends that may influence supply of early childhood education and care

Current provision and performance of Council's early years facilities: Merri-bek Early Years Infrastructure Plan (EYIP) 2022-2030

The EYIP presents a snapshot of Council's early years services and facilities, detailing a framework for future infrastructure development to meet the increasing demand for early years services in Merri-bek. The EYIP assesses early years infrastructure needs and details opportunities for refurbishment and expansion, together with recommendations for addressing the identified needs which aligns with the Merri-bek's Children, Young People and Families Plan 2021-2025.

There are currently 81 ECECs in Merri-bek; 56 Early Learning Centres and 25 sessional Kindergartens. 26 of these services operate from council owned or head leased facilities.

Based on the projections of unmet kindergarten demand, there will be a strong reliance on the private sector to provide kindergarten places to fill the gap between current and required future offerings. There is currently insufficient infrastructure in Merri-bek to fully support the roll out of 30 hours of kindergarten by 2036.

Scope for Meeting Demand

Merri-bek has an established Building Blocks Partnership Agreement with the VSBA to roll out 12 Capital Works Projects by 2029. Over the next five years Council will have built, expanded, or redeveloped 12 services as part of this agreement, providing approximately 300 new licensed places by 2029.

As Merri-bek is an established area, there is limited scope for purchasing new land to increase Kindergarten places due to lack of availability and significant costs associated. An audit of Council owned early years facilities has been undertaken to assess opportunities for infrastructure expansion. These findings have been addressed through proposed early years infrastructure projects detailed in Merri-bek's Early Years Infrastructure Plan and Building Blocks Partnership Agreement. While the proposed infrastructure projects will address some projected unmet kindergarten demand, it is acknowledged that future provision will be achieved through Department of Education delivered projects and expansion of the private sector.

Kindergarten Models and Offerings

There are a range of kindergarten models including single age, mixed age, rotational and integrated models that services can implement to increase the supply of kindergarten places. The management team at each service determines the model of kindergarten they provide and consultation with local communities and DE's support and advice is encouraged. Council provides workforce planning supports through strategies outlined in Merri-bek's Early Years Workforce Strategy 2024-2029.

Key local geographic considerations or information relevant to Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and Pre-Prep

Kindergarten Access

It is understood that some Merri-bek families access Kindergarten in neighbouring municipalities such as Yarra, Darebin, Moonee Valley and Hume, thus increasing or decreasing supply in bordering suburbs which may impact access to kindergarten. Similarly, changes in Merri-bek's supply may impact children and families in neighbouring municipalities.

Several Merri-bek suburbs are bound by creeks and major roads (i.e. Oak Park, Fawkner and Gowanbrae) and accessibility may be impacted due to geographical constraints and limited public transport. It is important to ensure adequate kindergarten supply in these suburbs. In 2024, 86.1% of residents accessed early years services within Merri-bek while 13.9% travel to other municipalities (Department of Education 2024).

Other information about the expansion of early childhood services

Kindergarten Central Enrolment

Council provides a central enrolment program for sessional three and four-year-old Kindergarten with 24 sessional kindergartens being part of this service. Council encourages all sessional kindergartens to join central enrolment to provide a streamlined and accessible entry point to kindergarten.

Council also provides a central enrolment program for community-based Early Learning Centres. Eight services currently utilise this program, all of which also offer integrated kindergarten programs.

4. Unmet demand estimates between 2025 - 2036 for Merri-bek City

4.1 Purpose

As the BSBL reforms are rolled out and Victoria's population grows, demand for kindergarten and Pre-Prep places will increase significantly. While additional capacity will be needed to meet this demand, this will vary across the State and over time, due to differences in the capacity of existing services, growth trends and sector composition.

To identify where, when and how many additional kindergarten places are expected to be required over the roll-out in Merri-bek City, Merri-bek City Council and the department have developed:

1. a summary of the current provision of kindergarten within Merri-bek City (**Section 4.3**).
2. an estimate of kindergarten places that cannot be met through existing services for the 2025 - 2036 period, taking into account the additional demand that can be accommodated by optimising utilisation of existing services and infrastructure (**Section 4.4**).

Local governments and providers can use these published estimates to inform reform implementation activities such as service planning, kindergarten program expansion, infrastructure investments and Building Blocks funding applications in alignment with future demand over the roll-out.

4.2 Methodology

The estimated kindergarten places used in the following sections have been agreed between Merri-bek City Council and the department, and were informed by:

- demand projections developed by the department which draw on a range of inputs, including population forecasts and current enrolments
- the estimated capacity of existing and planned services in the LGA (Section 2)
- where applicable, modelling undertaken by Merri-bek City and service level information; and
- local knowledge and context provided by the local government (Section 3) that explains particular issues and trends in their area.

Kindergarten places explainer

The KISP measures a service's capacity to deliver funded kindergarten in terms of the number of **15-hour places** (referred to as "kindergarten places") available for Three-Year-Old kindergarten and Pre-Prep (noting that, by 2036, two kindergarten places will be required for one Pre-Prep enrolment). The number of kindergarten places is different from a service's licensed or approved places, which count the number of children permitted to attend the service at any one time under the license. Many services can enrol more children in their funded kindergarten program(s) than they have licensed places for because they can run more than one kindergarten program per week. Kindergarten places are therefore a more accurate measure of service kindergarten capacity than licensed places.

Kindergarten places have been presented as 15-hour places so that new Three-Year-Old Kindergarten places and the additional 15-hour places required for Pre-Prep can be easily compared to existing 15-hour Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places. This is because, when Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is fully rolled out in 2029, three-year-old children will have access to 15-hours of kindergarten. When Pre-Prep is fully rolled out in 2036, four-year-old children will have access to up to 30-hours of kindergarten, an increase of the current offering of 15-hours per week.

It is important to note that enrolments are not equivalent to 15-hour places. One 15-hour place can support a total of 15 hours of delivery per week split between one or more children, including but not limited to the following examples:

One 15-hour place (15 hours of delivery)		
Example 1	1 child	1 x 3YO attending 15 hours per week
Example 2	1 child	1 x 4YO attending 15 hours per week
Example 3	2 children	2 x 3YOs attending 7.5 hours per week
Example 4	3 children	3 x 3YOs attending 5 hours per week

Two 15-hour places can support a total of 30 hours of delivery per week split between one or more children, including but not limited to the following examples:

Two 15-hour places (30 hours of delivery)		
Example 1	1 child	1 x 4YO attending 30 hours per week
Example 2	2 children	2 x 3YOs attending 15 hours per week
Example 3	2 children	1 x 3YO, and 1 x 4YO both attending 15 hours per week
Example 4	3 children	2 x 3YOs attending 7.5 hours per week, and 1 x 4YO attending 15 hours per week

Geographic boundaries used in the KISP

These estimates have been developed at an LGA and community level to show the overall forecast and variation within an area. The KISP defines community at the Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2), which is a medium-sized area which represents a community that interacts socially and economically, with an approximate population range of 3,000 to 25,000 people, and an average population of about 10,000 people. The KISP uses 2021 SA2 boundaries. More information is available at the [Australian Bureau of Statistics website](https://www.abs.gov.au/).

Supply contributed by pipeline projects

Merri-bek City Council and the department have added any new places that will be made available through planned expansions of existing services or new services into estimates of existing supply,

where this information is available. This may include projects being delivered by not-for-profit providers (including non-government schools) with support from the Victorian Government, planned Kindergartens on School Sites, and government-owned and operated early learning and childcare centres.

The KISP does not estimate how and when the broader sector will expand to meet the additional demand for kindergarten places that are estimated over the roll-out period.

4.3 Summary of current kindergarten provision

The figures below provide a summary of current kindergarten provision within the LGA and provide relevant context for the estimates of demand for funded kindergarten places included in Section 4.5. The data included in this section are largely drawn from:

- the department's Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS), as at 2024.
- the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITS), as at August 2025.

Number of services by service type (NQAITS)	
Stand-alone kindergartens	25
Long day care centres (including services not currently delivering funded kindergarten)	56

Percentage of services by management type, LGA level (NQAITS)	
Type	Percentage
Local Government	0%
Private not for profit	57%
Private for profit	41%
Other	1%

Current kindergarten offering in Merri-bek City	
Three-Year-Old Kindergarten participation rate (KIMS):	89%
Four-Year-Old Kindergarten participation rate (KIMS):	92%
Number of services that offer a funded kindergarten program (KIMS):	76

4.4 Agreed estimates of demand for kindergarten places

The below estimates (**Table 1** onwards) have been developed by Merri-bek City Council and the department to illustrate the estimated:

1. Demand – the total number of kindergarten places expected to be required over the roll-out period to support the current provision of Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, the BSBL reforms, and population growth

2. Supply – the total number of kindergarten places that can be accommodated by existing services and infrastructure, and planned, State-supported services which are yet to open.
3. Unmet demand – kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by optimising existing services and infrastructure (i.e. the shortfall between demand and supply).

Interpreting the estimates

Infrastructure need in the LGA and its local communities is indicated by the bottom rows of the tables in this section (**Table 1** onwards): *Unmet demand*. If the number of kindergarten places in this row is above zero, it means that the area is estimated to need additional infrastructure capacity. Any type of provider – local government, not-for-profit (including non-government schools) or for-profit – can build this additional infrastructure.

Sub-SA2 factors may need to be considered to give a holistic picture of unmet demand. For example, in rural communities, one SA2 may contain several small towns, some with excess supply and some with unmet demand. At the SA2-level, demand may appear to be met because all supply and demand is considered in aggregate; however, it is not feasible to for families to drive long distances to access kindergarten capacity in another town. Sub-SA2 factors are covered in **Section 3: Local context**.

Table 1: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Merri-bek City

Merri-bek City estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten places	3707	3860	4302	4415	4640	4723	4784	4843	5343	5863	6701
Unmet demand	68	77	49	45	87	106	120	135	235	450	917

Community estimates

Table 2-A: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Brunswick – North SA2

Brunswick - North estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	225	236	263	270	285	292	298	304	334	366	415
Kindergarten supply	321	321	335	335	375	375	375	375	404	404	404
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11

Table 2-B: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Brunswick – South SA2

Brunswick - South estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	214	225	252	255	270	277	283	287	316	348	394
Kindergarten supply	271	275	285	285	285	285	285	285	306	434	434
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	0	0

Table 2-C: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Brunswick East SA2

Brunswick East estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	163	169	191	197	210	217	222	228	255	284	326
Kindergarten supply	171	171	182	182	182	182	182	182	204	204	204
Unmet demand	0	0	9	15	28	34	40	46	52	81	122

Table 2-D: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Brunswick West SA2

Brunswick West estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	249	259	288	294	308	315	320	323	354	386	436
Kindergarten supply	376	376	388	388	388	388	388	388	412	412	412
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25

Table 2-E: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Coburg – East SA2

Coburg - East estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	394	407	439	452	471	480	485	492	529	571	634
Kindergarten supply	541	541	569	574	574	574	574	574	631	631	631
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3

Table 2-F: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Coburg – West SA2

Coburg - West estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	196	205	238	246	263	269	273	277	315	354	419
Kindergarten supply	128	128	306	306	306	306	306	306	306	306	306
Unmet demand	68	77	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	47	113

Table 2-G: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Coburg North SA2

Coburg North estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	165	166	181	182	188	191	192	194	215	237	274
Kindergarten supply	217	217	220	220	220	220	220	220	227	227	227
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	47

Table 2-H: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Fawkner SA2

Fawkner estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	383	402	456	469	494	502	507	512	567	627	724
Kindergarten supply	471	471	479	479	479	479	479	479	495	495	495
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	15	23	28	33	72	131	229

Table 2-I: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Glenroy – East SA2

Glenroy - East estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	406	416	461	474	494	500	503	506	558	612	699
Kindergarten supply	605	605	618	618	618	618	697	697	731	731	731
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2-J: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Glenroy – West SA2

Glenroy - West estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	205	213	242	249	264	269	274	279	310	343	394
Kindergarten supply	285	285	292	292	292	292	292	292	307	307	307
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	36	87

Table 2-K: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Gowanbrae SA2

Gowanbrae estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	64	65	70	71	74	75	76	77	86	94	108
Kindergarten supply	126	126	126	126	126	126	126	126	126	126	126
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2-L: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Hadfield SA2

Hadfield estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	194	200	222	228	240	245	249	253	279	305	348
Kindergarten supply	203	203	203	263	263	263	263	263	263	263	263
Unmet demand	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	16	42	85

Table 2-M: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Oak Park SA2

Oak Park estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	186	198	225	234	248	253	256	259	288	317	365
Kindergarten supply	199	199	204	204	204	204	204	204	214	214	214
Unmet demand	0	0	21	30	44	49	52	56	74	103	151

Table 2-N: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Pascoe Vale SA2

Pascoe Vale estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	371	396	446	456	477	482	486	489	543	598	690
Kindergarten supply	625	625	658	658	658	658	658	658	723	723	723
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2-O: Estimated kindergarten places required between 2025 - 2036 in Pascoe Vale South SA2

Pascoe Vale South estimates	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036
Demand for kindergarten	293	302	330	337	352	357	360	363	393	423	474
Kindergarten supply	403	403	412	412	412	412	412	412	430	430	430
Unmet demand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45

5. Authorisation

Mr Johnathon Lowe, the Hume Merri-bek Area Executive Director of the Department of Education and the Manager Early Years and Youth, Mr Barry Hahn, of Merri-bek City endorse this Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP) for Merri-bek City Council by signing on 15 / 10 / 2025

This KISP is not intended to create legal relations or constitute a legally binding contractual agreement between the parties. The parties may review this KISP in 2028 to publish a new version that will replace the previous version.

Signed for and on behalf and with the authority of Merri-bek City Council.



Signature

Name: Barry Hahn

Title: Manager Early Years and Youth

Signed for and on behalf and with the authority of the Department of Education



.....
Signature

Name: Jonathan Lowe

Title: Executive Director, Hume Merri-bek Area