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# Guidelines

## Operating a community playgroup on a DET site

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## 1. PURPOSE

These guidelines provide information for Victorian Primary Schools on the operation of community playgroups on school sites. This includes information regarding the benefits of community playgroups to families and children for schools that are considering locating a community playgroup at their school, and also on operational and administrative considerations.

## 2. SCOPE

These guidelines apply to community playgroups only. Community playgroups can operate as incorporated entities (run by an incorporated Committee of Management, usually comprising parents) or be unincorporated.<sup>1</sup>

## 3. CONTEXT

Community playgroups are regular informal meetings of parents and pre-school age children. The benefits for children and parents of participating in a community playgroup and the benefits for a Primary School of hosting a community playgroup are detailed below:

## 4. BENEFITS

### *For children*

- community playgroups provide opportunities for children aged from birth to three years to participate with their parents in a regular group experience that includes quality play activities that maximise learning and development during the critical period from birth to three years.
- community playgroups provide opportunities for children to begin to learn to socialise with other children including same-age peers.
- community playgroups enable children to gradually become familiar with the school environment, leading to greater confidence in their transition to school.

### *For parents*

- community playgroups provide opportunities for parents to learn from each other about how to promote their children's learning and development
- community playgroups provide parents with an increased understanding of their role in their children's educational achievement
- community playgroups enable parents to become familiar and confident with the school environment, helping build their capacity to engage confidently with the school to support their children's educational achievement
- community playgroups enable parents to experience a Primary School prior to committing to enrolling their child at the school.

### *For Primary Schools*

- children start school already familiar with the school, which aids their transition to school.
- schools have the opportunity to positively engage with parents prior to their child commencing at the school
- Primary Schools have the opportunity to promote their school to parents who may be thinking of enrolling a child.

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<sup>1</sup> Incorporation is recommended by Playgroup Victoria for committees that: run a playgroup with multiple sessions; plan to apply for grants of more than \$5000; or will enter contracts or employ staff.

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## 5. CONSISTENCY WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Victorian Government's Education State articulates a set of *Shared Priorities* that include *Community Engagement in Learning*, whereby schools strengthen their capacity to build relationships with the broader community and make strategic use of community resources and capabilities. By locating a community playgroup onsite, Primary Schools support this Priority.

Community playgroups in Primary Schools also align with several of the five Early Childhood reform areas put forward as part of the Education State consultation in Early Childhood:

- Earlier engagement in learning
- More support for parents
- Boost to educational quality

## 6. MODELS

There are **three models** under which a community playgroup might operate at a primary school:

1. **MODEL 1:** Community playgroup is initiated by the participating parents, and the Council/Principal agree to provide a venue for the playgroup and to be actively involved in its operation;
2. **MODEL 2:** Community playgroup is initiated by the participating parents, and the Council/Principal agree only to provide a venue for the playgroup but not be actively involved in its operation; or
3. **MODEL 3:** Primary school initiates the establishment of a community playgroup and is actively involved in its operation.

### 3.1. Operating requirements

- 3.1.1 Regardless of the model adopted, the Management Committee, or group of parents, is required to complete a formal User Agreement with the Primary School before the playgroup commences.
- 3.1.3 Should a primary school site be declared excess to DET's requirements, the site will no longer be available for playgroup activities. Any existing User Agreement will no longer be valid.
- 3.1.4 The following responsibilities apply to the Primary School Council/Principal if the community operates under **MODEL #1 or #3**:
  - a. Ensure access to a suitable early childhood space/facilities.
  - b. Ensure Department of Education and Training (the Department's) Departmental policies and procedures are implemented and where required, develop site procedures that comply with Departmental operating requirements.
    - This includes consideration of work, health and safety requirements such as: emergency response procedures, First Aid procedures, fire danger ratings / procedures, hygiene requirements, security procedures and injury incident reporting and investigation procedures.
    - Child Protection requirements (see Section 3.2).
    - *No Jab No Play* requirements.
  - c. Develop an agreed understanding with all parties about the use of materials/ equipment and roles and responsibilities (i.e. participating parents may assist in the day-to-day running of the group, including setting and packing up of equipment).

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- d. Monitor the outcomes of the playgroup.
- 3.1.5 The following responsibilities apply to the Primary School Council/Principal if the community playgroup operates under **MODEL #2**:
- a. Ensure access to a suitable early childhood space/facilities.
- 3.1.6 The following responsibilities apply to the Management Committee or group of parents:
- a. Promote the playgroup to the community.
- b. Provide oversight and responsibility for the playgroup program.
- b. Ensure compliance with these Guidelines.
- c. Determine the level of parent contributions and monitor the budget.
- d. Ensure appropriate accounting procedures are adopted.
- e. Ensure the Primary School Council is kept informed of playgroup operations.
- 3.1.7 It is strongly recommended that all playgroup sessions at a Primary School operate when Departmental staff are on site. If a playgroup is to operate when Departmental staff are cannot be present, then the external organisation must undertake a risk assessment and document strategies to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the playgroup participants (family members and children) whilst in operation, for endorsement by the Primary School Council.
- 3.1.8 Community playgroups located at Primary Schools should take account of existing playgroups already established in the area and how a new playgroup on a Primary School site may affect the participation of families in both the new Primary School playgroup and any existing supported or community playgroups in the area.

### 3.2 Child Protection

The Primary School is responsible for ensuring:

- 3.2.1 Volunteers have up-to-date *Working with Children Checks*.<sup>2</sup>
- 3.2.5 Risk assessment is conducted to ensure the safety of the education environment for students attending the Primary School and the families attending the playgroup at the Primary School.

### 3.3. Insurance

Insurance requirements vary depending upon the model under which the community playgroup operates.

- **MODEL #1 or #3:** If the playgroup program is coordinated and run by the school, the activity is seen as an extension of authorised school activities and cover for public liability is provided under the Department's public liability policy. However, if a community playgroup is incorporated, it cannot be covered by the Department's public liability insurance. It must provide its own insurance, as described under **MODEL #2** below.

Parents are also encouraged to insure their children against accidental injury. Such insurance may provide cover for accident-related medical and dental expenses not covered by the family's general health or dental plan.

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<sup>2</sup> Under Section 27 of the Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic), a parent or carer volunteering for an activity in which their child participates, or normally participates, is exempt from needing a WWCC in respect of that activity.

- **MODEL #2:** If the Primary School is merely providing the premises for the playgroup activity and the playgroup is run by parents/carers without the school’s involvement or oversight, then the community playgroup would need to ensure that they have their own public liability insurance in place. Some categories of Playgroup Victoria membership provide this insurance.

### 3.4 Playgroup Victoria

Playgroups may choose to join Playgroup Victoria to obtain assistance, insurance cover, support and advice. Further information is available on Playgroup Victoria’s website.

## 7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Role	Authority/Responsibility for
Director, Early Learning and Development Reform Branch, Department of Education and Training	Endorse guidelines for providing a community playgroup at a Primary School.
Executive Director, Early Years and Primary Reform Division, Department of Education and Training	Approve guidelines for providing a community playgroup at a Primary School.
Parenting Support Unit, Early Years and Primary Reform Division, Department of Education and Training	Review the guidelines.
Principal/School Council	Comply with the requirements of these guidelines. Responsible for the quality and outcomes of DET playgroup programs, including a safe and healthy environment for staff, children, parents and carers.

## 8. REVIEW, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION

### 5.1 Review of guidelines

These guidelines will be reviewed on an annual basis.

### 5.2 Monitoring community playgroups

The operation of community playgroups under Models #1 and #3 is monitored by the Primary School. Refer to 3.1.4.