



Education
and Training

Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan

Moorabool Shire

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. REFORM CONTEXT

In an Australian first, the Victorian Government has committed to implement Three-Year-Old Kindergarten for all children over a 10-year roll-out with a total investment of almost \$5 billion, including \$1.68 billion to support the infrastructure expansion required for the reform. This reform will add another year of universal funded kindergarten so that, by 2029, all children in Victoria will have access to two years of play-based learning through a funded kindergarten program.

1.2. PURPOSE OF KISPS

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will require a large expansion of kindergarten across the State. The Government has invited all 79 Victorian Local Governments to discuss and agree upon a Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP) for their Local Government Area (LGA).

Each KISP has been jointly developed with Local Government and published to estimate the growth in demand for kindergarten within the LGA. The KISPs will help all kindergarten providers meet demand and provide a clear picture of infrastructure need across the State.

While a KISP is not a funding document and does not define required infrastructure projects or commit any party to funding specific projects, it is expected that future investment requests through Building Blocks and funding decisions about Local Government and not-for-profit projects would align with the relevant KISP.

1.3. HOW TO USE THE KISP

Each KISP contains estimates of future kindergarten supply of, and demand for, Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places against existing enrolment capacity. Not-for-profit and for-profit providers can use these estimates to inform their plans to expand kindergarten programs, establish new services or invest in new or extended facilities.

For example, KISPs provide demand estimates in terms of where, when and how much demand for kindergarten places will grow in an LGA. KISPs also estimate where and how many kindergarten places providers can accommodate in existing facilities before an area needs new infrastructure to meet demand. The estimates can be used to inform decisions about where and when expansions of kindergarten program capacity and the construction of new or extended facilities are needed to meet demand growth.

Where there is an agreed KISP for the LGA, the Local Government and not-for-profit kindergarten providers seeking co-investments through the Building Blocks Capacity Building stream must refer to, and align their proposed project with, the infrastructure need identified in the KISP.

1.4. STRUCTURE OF THE KISP

Each KISP consists of the following sections:

- **Section 1:** A short introduction to the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform and the KISP.
- **Section 2:** A map of existing and planned Early Childhood Education and Care service locations.
- **Section 3:** Local knowledge and context relevant to the expansion of kindergarten services.
- **Section 4:** Funded kindergarten demand estimates.

1.5. DISCLAIMER

All data presented in this document are estimates only and are based on the best information available to the Department and Local Government at the time. They are published on an as-is basis and are for informational purposes only. They are subject to adjustment in response to market forces and as new data and other relevant information becomes available. The data may under- or over-estimate both total demand in a given location or year and the capacity for new demand to be met by providers. As a result, operational and business decisions should not be made solely based on this document. Any use of this data is solely at the risk of the user. The Department and Local Government accept no responsibility for any loss or damage, either direct or incidental, that may result from the use of the data.

2. MAP OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SERVICES IN MOORABOOL SHIRE

The map below shows the distribution of currently operating and new services that are planned to open in the future in the LGA and across its communities.

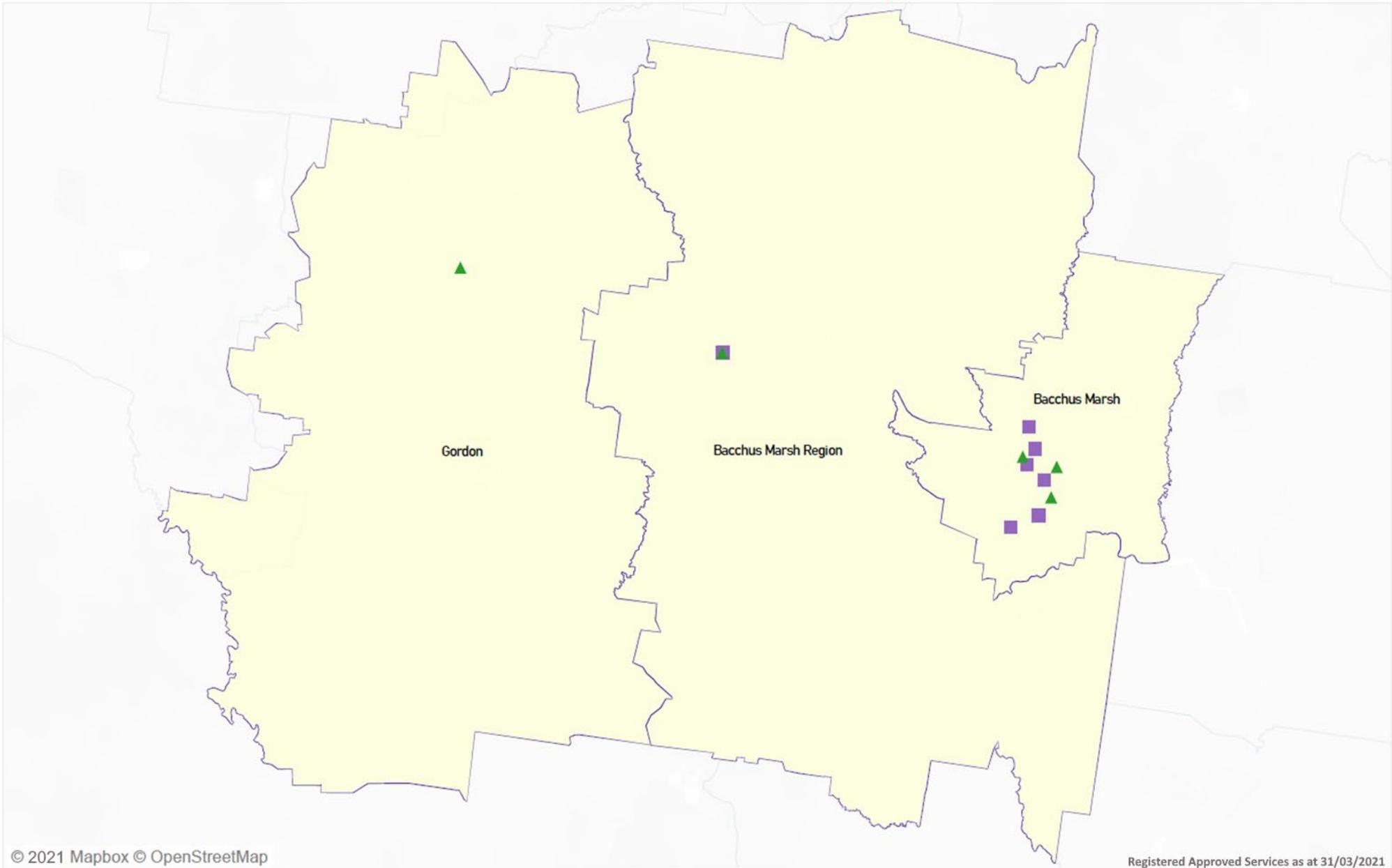
This map has been prepared using Departmental data, from both the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITS) and the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA). Where applicable, this map has been refined by the Moorabool Shire Council and the Department to capture other services that are planned to open in the future.

Early Childhood Services in Victoria

LGA
Moorabool (S)

Care Type
All

KGN	LDC	NEW
▲	■	●



3. LOCAL CONTEXT

3.1 PURPOSE

Local, place-based knowledge and context play an important role in supporting the implementation of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten across Victoria. This section of the KISP documents this knowledge and context and has informed the funded kindergarten enrolment estimates in Section 4.

3.2 KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Key demographic trends that influence demand for kindergarten

Located in Victoria's west, Moorabool is situated between the Melbourne CBD, Geelong and Ballarat. It is one of the fastest-growing peri-urban municipalities beyond Melbourne's metropolitan fringe, offering a rare blend of rural lifestyle and urban convenience.

Population and expected growth

Moorabool has a growing community of over 36,000 people, which is expected to double in the next two decades. More and more families with young children are moving to Moorabool from inner Melbourne suburbs.¹ It is estimated that there are 61 children that identify as Indigenous Australian and/or Torres Strait Islander living in Moorabool in 2021. This is projected to increase to 81 by 2029.²

Moorabool has seen net growth of just over 4,000 people (4,195) from July 2016 to June 2020. This number is roughly 500 people more than was expected³. The birth rate in Moorabool has remained steady for the last ten years, fluctuating between 350-400 births per year, with the exception of the 2020/2021 year. This indicates that the excess in growth can most likely be attributed to more in-migration and less out-migration. Pre-COVID-19, Moorabool normally experienced high-levels of out-migration among persons 20 to 40 years of age (almost 40% of all persons that migrated elsewhere, but only made up 31% of the population). However, owing to COVID-19 it is expected that this has reduced considerably. It is important to note that this is the key age bracket in which people give birth and have children of the age attending kindergarten; the implication being that it is highly likely Moorabool has retained families that are now having their children here and requiring access to kindergarten.

This is on top of the significant in-migration we see among people of this age group (pre-COVID-19 almost 40% of people that migrated to Moorabool were in this age bracket), which recent migration data suggests has continued through COVID-19. The combination of a lack of out-migration and the continuation of the significant in-migration of persons aged 20 to 40 years (and their children) provide a clear additional demand for kindergarten services that is not expected to recede.⁴

With a previously steady birth rate, Moorabool experienced a significant increase in births for the 2020/2021 year, with 464 births (an 18% growth rate on the 2019/2020 year).⁵ In the 2020/2021 year, Victoria similarly experienced a 'baby boom' of sorts, with an additional 1423 births expected

¹ *Our Community Vision for 2030*. Moorabool Shire Council, 2021.

² Council analysis using Census 2016 data and Profile.ID Population Projections

³ Profile.ID

⁴ Council analysis using Census 2016 data on employment location, migration and age.

⁵ CDIS, 2021.

between April and August 2021, compared to the same period the previous year. Some growth areas in Victoria experienced up to a 40% growth in birth rates. Two major hospitals that Moorabool residents use for birthing experienced significant growth: Ballarat Health (38%) and Western health (13%), based on the previous year.⁶ Attributed to COVID-19 lockdowns, this again highlights that COVID-19 impacts will be expected for years, and hard to predict at this stage.

In addition to the established areas of Bacchus Marsh, Darley, Maddingley and Hopetoun Park South there will be new residential developments that begin to come online around 2025 in Merrimu (full population of ~20,000 people), Parwan (full population of ~12,000 people) and Hopeton Park North (full population of ~2,500 people). Though the full population in each of these areas will not be reached until after 2040, it is expected that at least 3,200 people will be living in these locations by 2029. It is typical of greenfield growth areas to attract young couples and families that require early years services such as kindergarten, and as such the demand from these areas for these services will come online within the period of this KISP and will continue to grow significantly in the years just beyond (2030 and onwards).

Similarly, in addition to the established area of Ballan there is greenfield residential growth being planned that will accommodate up to 10,000 extra people at full buildout. This growth will begin coming online during the operational life of this KISP. We expect the population in Ballan to increase by 45% between 2021 and 2029 (growing from 2,645 to 3,840 people).⁷

Socioeconomic factors

When considering Bacchus Marsh SA2, a majority of all SA1s in the Bacchus Marsh township are more disadvantaged than Greater Melbourne and Peri-Urban Victoria. In the context of unemployment, this trend is also seen in a number of SA1s in the Bacchus Marsh township, with people experiencing a higher rate of unemployment than the state average. Similarly, when we examine the Bacchus Marsh Region and Gordon SA2s, we see the same trends for both SEIFA index and unemployment.⁸

Within Moorabool, the dominant tenure type is split evenly between ownership outright and currently being purchased (mortgaged), however there are pockets of SA1s in the Bacchus Marsh SA2 area where the dominant tenure is rentals- both private and social housing.⁹ In 2016, Moorabool had 316 residences being rented under a social housing arrangement. This represents 2.7% of all private residences and is well below the recommended 4.5% proportion suggested by Infrastructure Victoria's Draft 30 year strategy (published 2020).¹⁰ It is estimated that there are a further 272 households within Moorabool (240 in Bacchus Marsh SA2, and 32 in Bacchus Marsh Region SA2), that would be considered eligible, and have an acute need for, social and affordable housing, however are not living in this type of housing due to shortage in supply.¹¹

Overall, 20.6% (1,333) of households that rent or have a mortgage are in financial distress (spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs). This includes 34.4% (570) of all households that rent and 15.8% (763) of all households that have a mortgage.¹² It has been widely reported that since the beginning of COVID-19 the regional areas around Australia have been experiencing much more

⁶ Vic Health, 2021.

⁷ Profile.ID Population Projections

⁸ Council Analysis using SEIFA data from Profile.ID's 'Social Atlas'.

⁹ Profile.ID Social Atlas

¹⁰ ABS Census data, 2016.

¹¹ Council Analysis

¹² ABS Census data, 2016.

subdued out-migration to capital cities. This, it is expected, has contributed to the substantial house price increases in regional settings.

Pre-COVID-19 approximately 65% of Moorabool's workforce were commuting outside of the LGA. Most of those people were commuting into Greater Melbourne and in industries/occupations that could feasibly work from home and are expected to have begun doing so during COVID-19, not least because of the separation between Greater Melbourne and Regional Victoria for several months (the entirety of Moorabool has been in Regional Victoria for the purposes of COVID-19-related lockdowns). This would mean they would have more flexibility to drop off/pick up children from kindergarten when previously they may have relied on other family members or the long day care sector.

An analysis by Council gives an insight into the feasibility of families in Moorabool being able to afford kindergarten in a long day care setting. This analysis suggests that families with incomes of less than \$125,000.00 per annum may find it difficult to afford the 80 days of long day care per annum required to complete the 600 hours of kindergarten. Just 23 percent of children aged four years old live within families earning more than 125K per annum,¹³ and some of Moorabool's most vulnerable households bring in gross income of less than \$59,000.00 per annum.¹⁴ Subdued wage growth and the potential economic impacts of COVID-19 make this information relevant to the planning for the next decade, should these trends continue.

Data from enrolments in the long day care setting show that minimal, if any, families are accessing the kindergarten fee subsidy¹⁵. This accounts for less than 1% of kindergarten fee subsidy enrolments for Moorabool. This is likely to be because the kindergarten fee subsidy is only available to services who offer sessional programs (with few long day cares offering this in Moorabool) and may also indicate that vulnerable families may view the cost of a kindergarten program in a long day care setting as prohibitive to access, even with subsidies available and the extended care hours it provides. This will need to be monitored, in view of changes to be made to the child care subsidy from March 2022 (to increase affordability for families with multiple children attending a service)

Additionally, forecasts in the KISP assume that demand for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will increase incrementally, with similar participation rates to 4 year old kindergarten not being achieved until 2029. However, by removing the financial barrier with funding of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, Council believes there may be a significant increase in families interested in enrolling their child in Three-Year-Old Kindergarten earlier than this, especially when sessions increase above 5 hours per week.

Barriers to participation

Location and access to kindergarten services is an important feature for families when considering a kindergarten program. The most recent update of the Victorian State Government's Plan Melbourne puts a significant focus on the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods. The underlying principle of this is that people should be able to access their daily needs within a 20-minute (round trip) walk or ride of their home – and this includes kindergarten services. At a local level, Moorabool has adopted a similar concept named 'sustainable neighbourhoods' in the 'Housing Bacchus Marsh 2041 Strategy'.¹⁶

In relation to Bacchus Marsh SA2, there is currently an existing shortfall of four-year-old kindergarten programs in the Maddingley area, forcing families to travel into Darley or Bacchus Marsh to access

¹³ ABS, 2016

¹⁴ Council Analysis

¹⁵ *Funded kindergarten enrolments at service level 2019 and 2020*. Department of Education and Training, 2020.

¹⁶ *Housing Bacchus Marsh 2042 Strategy*, 2018. Moorabool Shire Council.

services. With the planned development in the Maddingley area to deliver 8000 new residents and the introduction of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, current infrastructure in Bacchus Marsh and Darley cannot cope with current or future service demands, highlighting the need for urgent early years infrastructure in this particular area, to fit in with the concept of 20 minute neighbourhoods, and ensure families can access a service of choice with minimal travel time.

Evidence from the administration of Councils Central Enrolment Scheme shows that a significant percentage (19-33%) of enrolments for the standalone kindergartens that participate in the scheme are received as late enrolments (those received after first and second round of allocation). A significant number of late enrolments are received from families that are eligible for Early Start kindergarten, referrals from children and family services, families who are new to the community and families who speak English as a second language- indicating families that have less knowledge of available services cannot navigate or access the services as proficiently as others. Enrolling late may lead to the child missing out on a place at the families first preference, or having to access a program through a service model that may not suit the family or their needs.

An analysis of the Australian Early Development Census Moorabool Community Profile 2018, which measures the development of children in Australia in their first year of full-time school, shows that while the percentage of at risk and vulnerable children has mostly decreased since 2015, with Moorabool performing on average better than the national average, there are areas with cause for concern when drilling down to SA2 level.¹⁷

Suburbs within the Gordon SA2 experience higher levels of children vulnerable on one or more domain that the national average (26.9% for the Bungaree-Gordon region compared to 21.7% nationally), and suburbs within both the Gordon SA2 and Bacchus Marsh Region SA2 experience higher levels of children vulnerable on two or more domains that the national average (11.8% for Ballan surrounds, and 11.5% for Bungaree-Gordon, compared to the national average of 11.0%).¹⁸

Departmental data shows that in recent years, the children that had been assessed as having delays in learning and development outcome areas, and had received funding to attend four-year-old kindergarten for an approved second year were mostly attending through a sessional service (91% of second year children in 2019, and 88% of second year children in 2020)¹⁹, compared to attendance through long day care services. Although this is only applicable to a small cohort, Council considers this may suggest that either families are more inclined to enrol their child in a standalone program if they have concerns regarding their child's development, or that standalone kindergartens may better facilitate recognition and recommendation for a child to attend a second year of kindergarten.

Whilst standalone kindergartens account for less than 50% of services that provide funded kindergarten programs in Moorabool, they have accounted for 70—80% of four-year-old enrolments over the past five years.²⁰

Victorian early childhood education and care services with a service rating against the National Quality Standard showed that just under 87% of these services held an NQF rating of Meeting NQS or above, and 13% of Victoria services are working towards meeting the NQS²¹. In comparison, for services within Moorabool, only 29% of services Meet NQS, whereas 71% of services are still Working Towards NQS²².

Council notes that the KISP modelling does not distinguish between places in a sessional or integrated setting, and therefore does not take into account family preferences, and the potential

¹⁷ Moorabool Community Profile, 2018. Australian Early Development Census.

¹⁸ Moorabool Community Profile, 2018. Australian Early Development Census.

¹⁹ 2019 Kindergarten Census and 2020 August Kindergarten Information Management system (KIMS) data

²⁰ Census and Kindergarten Information Management system (KIMS) data. Department of Education, 2020.

²¹ NQF Snapshot Q1 2021. ACECQA, May 2021.

²² Childcare Finder, 2021

impacts this can have on sessional kindergarten waitlists, particularly when taking into account that 70-80% of all kindergarten enrolments in Moorabool are through a sessional kindergarten.

In a survey of young families Council undertook in 2021 (n=86), a preference for sessional kindergarten compared to integrated kindergarten was clearly evident, with two-thirds of respondents indicating that they preferred a standalone service model²³. This corresponds with the 70-80% four-year-old enrolment patterns observed in previous years.

The steady split observed between funded programs in standalone and long day care settings in previous years of enrolment data indicates a strong preference by families to attend a funded kindergarten program in a standalone setting.

The survey also highlighted a relationship between session times and preference, with families who indicated they preferred a longer day (e.g. In a long day care setting) did so because of the convenience offered for their family needs and other commitments.

Another important factor of family preference is that of familiarity. Anecdotal evidence from Council's Central Enrolment Scheme suggests families are likely to wish to retain any existing or past relationship with a service provider, rather than initiate an enrolment with a different service.

Council believes waitlists for standalone kindergartens may still generate if families exercise their choice of program setting and an increase in places in standalone kindergartens does not match community expectations. All partners to the provision of kindergarten in Moorabool (Council, service providers and the Department) will need to continue to work together to ensure service optimisation, new infrastructure and change in community perception occurs to ensure all three-year-olds in Moorabool are able to access a kindergarten place in a model that suits their needs.

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

Currently in Moorabool, standalone kindergartens operate from four Council-owned assets, and one standalone kindergarten service that runs from a non-Council owned asset. All five standalone services participate in Council's central kindergarten enrolment scheme.

Within Bacchus Marsh SA2, there are a number of long day care centres that offer kindergarten programs, within the three main suburbs: Maddingley, Darley and Bacchus Marsh. One long day care service in Bacchus Marsh Region SA2 has recently been approved to offer a funded kindergarten program, and there are currently no long day care services in the Gordon SA2.

Infrastructure

The Moorabool Community Infrastructure Framework (CIF) sets out how Moorabool plans and delivers a network of community facilities that effectively and efficiently meet community needs and support delivery of community services.

In relation to kindergarten, Council's Community Infrastructure Framework (CIF) stipulates a standard of one kindergarten enrolment place per child aged three to four-years old. This is supported by DET's data that shows that kindergarten participation for Moorabool sits at 95% for resident four-year-olds.²⁴ The CIF stipulates that each new kindergarten room should accommodate 33-licensed places. Though the CIF recognises the capacity of long day care centres to provide

²³ 3 Year Old Kindergarten Community Survey, 2021. Moorabool Shire Council.

²⁴ *Moorabool Community Infrastructure Framework: Community Infrastructure Needs Analysis, Attachment C: 4 year-old kindergarten*, 2019. Moorabool Shire Council.

kindergarten, it also recognises that Council do not have control over the quantum or quality of these programs. Therefore, the CIF assesses kindergarten capacity of sessional facilities.

Existing Council owned assets have been assessed for fitness of purpose through the CIF, with each asset receiving two scores: one for fitness for purpose at time of the report (2019), and the other score for future fitness for purpose (notionally 5 years after the assessment). All Council owned assets for kindergarten, except the newer Darley Early Years Hub, were assessed as being in good to fair condition, however in regards to fitness for purpose, assessed to be in need of fairly major works.

This most likely aligns with the age of the infrastructure, for example, Ballan and Young St sites' layouts identified as a hindrance to optimal service delivery and capacity. Young St in particular, being in a central urban location, was assessed as an undersized facility that should be expanded through more major works to increase capacity.²⁵

Whether improvement plans, renovations, expansions and upgrades or the building of new facilities, it is important that Council takes a proactive approach and ensures that infrastructure spending is staged over time, to try and offset the continual pressure on resources and budgets. The opportunities for grants will be investigated throughout, as another way that Council can help offset costs while providing needed infrastructure improvements and new infrastructure in line with the priorities identified within the CIF, so that increases in demand are managed on time, and not retrospectively.

Family preference

Council notes that the KISP demand and supply modelling does not differentiate between existing sessional and integrated kindergarten capacity, and therefore does not take into account the important factor of family preference, and the impact this can have on waitlists for particular services. Council considers that there is existing strong community preference for sessional kindergarten, which could result in less take up of long-day-care places than estimated in the KISP. It will be important to monitor the future community response to Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, including take-up of integrated kindergarten in long-day-settings.

Whilst there is considerable utilisation of funded programs integrated in a long day care setting, it must be recognised that families that access funded programs through integrated care, and families that don't, will still require long day care services to meet their additional care requirements. In Council's recent Three-Year-Old Kindergarten Community Survey, 48% of respondents who identified standalone kindergarten as the model of their preference, indicated that they would continue to use long day care services to meet their childcare needs, *while* also accessing a funded kindergarten program through a standalone service.²⁶

Government Policy

The Victorian Government Policy to provide kindergarten on or adjacent to all new primary schools²⁷ is supported by Council, however despite the predicted growth in population in Moorabool, there are no planned new state school sites in Moorabool in the foreseeable future. This means that the risk and responsibility of planning for new or expanded sessional kindergarten infrastructure to meet increased demand defers primarily to Council if no new schools are planned and other sessional providers choose not to invest in the area. Council are committed to working with the Department of Education to support effective planning and the delivery of the commitment, as well as exploring

²⁵ Moorabool Community Infrastructure Framework: Community Infrastructure Needs Analysis, Attachment C: 4 year-old kindergarten, 2019. Moorabool Shire Council.

²⁶ 3 Year Old Kindergarten Community Survey, 2021. Moorabool Shire Council.

²⁷ *Kindergartens at or next door to schools*, 2021. Victorian School Building Authority.

other opportunities to fund infrastructure planning and provision, including state funding through the Building Blocks Program.

The decision to maintain funding and availability of Early Start Kindergarten until Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is scaled up to 15 hours per week will ensure that Council continues to work internally and with service providers and other external agencies to enrol those most vulnerable in kindergarten through Council's central enrolment scheme.

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

Within Moorabool, there are two distinct profiles between the East (Bacchus Marsh SA2) and West (Bacchus Marsh Region and Gordon SA2s) of the Shire. The Bacchus Marsh SA2 has a higher population density (121 people per square kilometre, compared to 6.1 people and 7.1 people per square kilometre for Bacchus Marsh Region and Gordon SA2s, respectively)²⁸ and therefore has more infrastructure and existing facilities. Within the Bacchus Marsh Region and Gordon SA2, population is more spread out, and there are fewer facilities available. Each profile presents with concerns regarding Three-Year-Old Kindergarten rollout.

Significant areas of concern geographically

Public transport services are limited to buses within townships, and in the most populated SA2, Bacchus Marsh, public transport options are limited, with very little direct connection between the three main suburbs (Bacchus Marsh, Darley and Maddingley), meaning residents must access two or more bus routes to travel from one suburb to another. In regards to private travel, while congestion has been mitigated somewhat with recent road infrastructure and improvements, delays are still experienced when travelling from one suburb to another, especially during peak times such as school drop off and pick up times.

The most recent update of the Victorian State Government's Plan Melbourne puts a significant focus on the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods. The underlying principle of this is that people should be able to access their daily needs within a 20-minute (round trip) walk or ride of their home – and this includes kindergarten services²⁹. At the LGA level, Moorabool has adopted a similar concept named 'Sustainable Neighbourhoods' in Council's Housing Bacchus Marsh to 2041 Strategy³⁰.

Council's Community Infrastructure Framework (CIF) undertakes a travel accessibility assessment to determine whether people can travel to services and facilities within a reasonable journey time. The current population of Maddingley is 4,688 in 2021³¹ and with the planned development in the Maddingley area to deliver 8000 new residents, the CIF Travel Standard defines a reasonable journey time as a 10 minute drive (for populations over 2,000).

The CIF identified that the only current service that meets this standard is one private long day care provider.³² Families that prefer a sessional model or a standalone provider have to travel to other suburbs (mainly Darley and Bacchus Marsh) to meet their needs. These sessional service providers have already had to instigate changes to their model to create more places for three-year-olds for the 2022 rollout of Three-Year-Old kindergarten in response to the demand experienced for places.

²⁸ *Regional population 2019-20: population change*, 2021. ABS

²⁹ *Plan Melbourne 2017-2050*, 2017. Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

³⁰ *Housing Bacchus Marsh to 2041*, 2018. Moorabool Shire Council

³¹ Maddingley Population 2021, 2021. Profile.ID

³² *Moorabool Community Infrastructure Framework: Community Infrastructure Needs Analysis, Attachment C: 4 year-old kindergarten*, 2019. Moorabool Shire Council.

Without mitigating this demand overflow from the population growth being experienced in Maddingley by building infrastructure to deliver a sessional kindergarten in the area, an increasing pressure point will continue to develop, placing stress on services in Darley and Bacchus Marsh as the funding scales up to the full 15 hours a week program.

Similarly, over the next decade, we may experience more pressure on the existing services located within the West of the Shire (Bacchus Marsh Region SA2 and Gordon SA2). Traditionally more sparsely populated, there are only a total of three existing services in these two regions (2 sessional kindergartens and one long day care centre). Both regions experienced an increase in population of over 1% from 2019-2020, with the biggest contributing factor being a large increase in net internal migration.³³ If a significant portion of this population increase being experienced in these regions is young families, again, services may begin to experience pressure on them as demand exceeds capacity. The demand for these services must be observed carefully in the short- to mid-term, in order for all parties to effectively work together to address any shortfall in places that may be experienced earlier than the modelling shows.

Movement across LGAs

It is recognised that several facilities outside of Moorabool are currently accessible to Shire residents, particularly those who reside in a town on or near the Shire boundaries. However, as all councils prioritise kindergarten places for their own residents, and with the expected increase in demand as Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is rolled out and scaled up, Council cannot be certain that its residents will always be able to access kindergarten facilities in other municipalities. Therefore, to ensure that Moorabool residents are adequately provided with enough kindergarten places to meet demand, Council's planning assumes that all demand for kindergarten within Moorabool's population will need to be fulfilled using Moorabool services.

Participation rates

From 2016 to 2019, Moorabool experienced fluctuating participation rates for kindergarten, ranging from a low of 87% to a high of 101.5%. The average for this period was a participation rate of 93.5%, which places the Moorabool participation rate slightly higher than the average for the same period for the state of Victoria as a whole (93.3%).³⁴

rates for 2020 have not been published for Victoria due to the effect of service closures bought on by the significant restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of the census (August 2020).³⁵ This is another impact that parties will need to be mindful of for 2021 and beyond, considering similar restrictions were in place in Victoria in 2021, and the long term effects of these restrictions will remain unknown for some time.

The modelling in the KISP assumes full (100 per cent) participation in Three-Year-Old Kindergarten by 2029 (indicating similar participation rates for three-year-olds to four-year-olds). The modelling assumes that this participation rate will be obtained through a steady increase in demand year on year. This will need to be a focal point of the next review, as Council anticipates that demand may increase substantially earlier for the three-year-old program, as more families become aware of the rollout.

Family preferences

Throughout the years since Council implemented the central enrolment scheme, there is a trend of certain sessional kindergarten service providers experiencing consistently high enrolments and wait

³³ *Regional population 2019-20: population change*, 2021. ABS

³⁴ VCAMS Kindergarten participation rate, 2021. Department of Education and Training

³⁵ *Preschool Education, Australia*, 2021. ABS

lists at times, even while other service providers in close proximity have available vacancies, indicating influencing factors other than simple demand and supply.

As a smaller municipality with limited choices, as children get older, families are likely to look into kindergarten services that are informally associated with the primary school they will attend. While Council acknowledges that kindergartens are not zoned in the same way that primary schools are and the choice of kindergarten service does not impact admission to primary school, the central enrolment team has anecdotally experienced families that have a strong preference for a particular sessional kindergarten, because of proximity to certain schools and a community pattern of enrolling children in certain kindergartens based on their preference for primary school, to ensure children maintain some consistency with their children's social contacts through early childhood and primary education.

Additionally, families with more than one child, who need to access multiple education and/or care services in a day are unlikely to want to travel too far between services and will show a preference for choosing a service in close proximity to other services they are accessing.

Other information about the expansion of early childhood services

It is imperative that continual reviews are undertaken on a regular basis as the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform rolls out, to ensure that planning is responsive and adaptable to the changing needs of the community.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is a fairly new aspect that appears to have already had some impact on demand and supply of kindergarten places, and this may continue for some time into the future. While we are still experiencing uncertainty regarding the true extent of the effects of the pandemic, there are already some understandings and anticipation of how COVID-19 may impact supply and demand, which may include, but are not limited to:

- In regards to population, we may see higher levels of population growth due to less overseas out-migration, increased in-migration and increased birth rates. These factors may increase demand for places in future reviews.
- In terms of vulnerability, residents may experience higher levels of unemployment, leading to lower household income, financial and/or mortgage stress and potentially unstable housing. These factors may impact community preference, increasing demand for standalone models, as historically, this model accounts for most, if not all, families that are utilising free or low cost kindergarten incentives.
- Economically, services (both standalone and long day care sectors) may experience negative impacts due to a shrinking workforce, or an inability to recruit and/or retain suitably qualified staff. These factors may have an impact on available supply of places for future review.

In terms of known operational impacts for services, the enrolment numbers for 2021 for Council's central enrolment scheme were lower than previous years. Later enrolments by families disrupted service providers ability to plan for service delivery, and this can be partly attributed to the uncertainty that COVID-19 brought to families in considering enrolment and attendance in services. This trend has also been seen (though at lower levels) within Bacchus Marsh SA2 for 2022 enrolments. Continued monitoring of enrolment trends will need to occur in the short term to determine if this trend can be attributed (in part) to COVID-19, or if there are other motivators affecting this trend.

While at this stage all of the impacts of the pandemic cannot be predicted, it is important for all parties to observe, anticipate and plan for a wide range of possibilities, and how these might be addressed in the future as they occur, particularly for future modelling.

Council Strategy

Council's Integrated Planning and Delivery Framework provides the basis for improving strategic planning at Moorabool. It creates a long term vision for Moorabool communities by preparing key strategies and plans based on 2021, 2031 and 2041 timeframes. These strategic plans are then directed into short term plans for action, such as operational plans and individual plans and include a process of reviewing and reporting.

The Moorabool Shire Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP) is a local area plan that provides vision and strategic direction for the municipality, in regards to the development, enhancement, coordination and planning of services for children aged from birth - 12 years, and their families. A Council initiated plan, it is developed in collaboration with local child and family service providers. As such, the plan serves as a practical tool to guide the actions of Council and external child and family service providers in the municipality, to ensure community needs are met.

The MEYP consolidates Council's commitment that all children living in Moorabool have access to a funded four-year-old kindergarten place, and kindergartens will be accessible within 20 minute return travel time by public transport or private vehicle. Priority Area One states that Council will endeavour that the child and family service sector is responsive to the emerging needs of children and families, by ensuring that current and future Early Years infrastructure and service planning keep pace to the current and future population needs of families and children.³⁶

As the responsible authority, Council undertakes planning for development of social and physical infrastructure, by recognising social needs and ensuring a range of accessible community resources are made available, including education, cultural, health and community support (mental health, aged care, disability, youth and family services) facilities.³⁷

In regards to Council owned assets and infrastructure, it is imperative that Council investigates the options available to partner with external agencies, or seek funding from available opportunities to ensure that community needs are met with warranted new infrastructure, while also allowing Council to stage infrastructure spending over time, to try and offset the continual pressure on resources and budgets.

With long day care infrastructure being addressed by the private sector, it is not clear how many new centres, if any, will be built and open in the next decade. Therefore, to ensure Council acts responsively to infrastructure planning and the community needs, private facilities are not counted in the KISP modelling until construction has begun. When the KISP is next due for review, updated information will be available in respect to newly built or proposed long day care facilities that are anticipated to be near completion.

It must be noted that while Council leases buildings to the majority of the standalone kindergarten providers in Moorabool and administers the Central Kindergarten Enrolment Scheme for all standalone kindergarten providers in Moorabool, there is no involvement from Council in regards to the daily operations of the services. Council assists with renewing licensing agreements, as well as maintenance and upgrades to buildings to ensure service levels and national regulations are met and will work with kindergarten providers to assess capacity of existing infrastructure and preparation requirements to accommodate the increase in demand that will be seen with the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten rollout.

³⁶ Moorabool Shire Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2021, 2015.

³⁷ Moorabool Planning Scheme, Section 19. 2021.

Unexplored relationships

Council caters for non-residents in its Central Kindergarten Enrolment Scheme, with eligibility and access being determined by the scheme's Priority of Access system. Similarly, some Moorabool residents choose to enrol in services outside of Moorabool. Reasons for this may involve the service chosen is closer to a family's other needs, such as work or study, or because non-Moorabool services may actually be in closer proximity than Moorabool services (particularly for families who reside on the edge of Moorabool boundaries). The Department of Education and Trainings 2020 Early Learning Profile shows that 37 of non-Moorabool children attended Moorabool Services in 2020, and 74 Moorabool children attended outside of the LGA. 44 of these children are attending services in the City of Ballarat and Council assumes this may be as City of Ballarat kindergartens are the closest kindergarten service to many families living in rural areas of Moorabool.³⁸ These existing access patterns are reflected in the KISP through the four-year-old demand estimates, which are based on current enrolments. The need for local access is reflected in the calculation of three-year-old demand, which is based on residential population. Should access patterns shift significantly over the reform period, with more families seeking to access services within Moorabool LGA, this may result in higher levels of unmet demand than indicated in the KISP.

On top of potential workforce issues, given the limited data available regarding the current demand for, and anticipated participation rates for three-year-old kindergarten in a long day care setting, even in the short term, may mean that demand or supply could be significantly under- or over-estimated in the current modelling. Similarly, given that long day care services provide care for longer hours, and may be used by families for care only, and not kindergarten programs, much is unknown on how these services may respond to and alter their services to ensure the kindergarten rollout remains an effective model for their service. Council will need to work closely with DET, and service providers where possible, to ensure that the latest available data at the time of review is informing future modelling and response.

Differences in modelling

Council recognises the collaborative effort that has occurred between itself and DET to refine and agree on this KISP modelling of demand and supply. Council uses differently sourced data, assumptions and methods when calculating its own internal model of demand and supply. Council notes the KISP model does not discriminate between standalone and integrated models when providing estimates of supply and assumes that existing long day care capacity will contribute to overall supply. Council considers that real-life data and community engagement show that the community largely prefers to enrol in the standalone model. Moving forward, and once real life data is obtained regarding the uptake of three year old kindergarten, Council and DET will need to analyse data to gain insight on real-life distribution of enrolments. The use of Profile.Id data (Council) versus Victoria in Future data (DET) is also a point of difference in regards to population data. The difference in population source data has been mitigated in this KISP by using an agreed upon midpoint. The KISP modelling also differentiates geographical areas by SA2s (Statistical Areas Level 2), a designation defined by the ABS. While SA2s represent a community that interacts together socially and economically,³⁹ Council will continue to analyse, monitor and report any pressure points that are being experienced at the more micro, suburb level, to enable Council and DET to understand and respond to any impacts and instances of unmet demand being experienced in a particular geographical area.

Scaling up to 15 hours by 2029

Careful consideration will need to occur when considering the scaling up of funded three-year-old programs to 15 hours a week, and when and how this can occur. Council expects that it is at this

³⁸ Moorabool (S) Early Learning Profile 2020, 2020. Department of Education and Training.

³⁹ Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 1 - Main Structure and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas, 2016. ABS.

point that the most pressure and demand will be experienced for funded kindergarten places. Current facility sizes in standalone services mean that there is no spare infrastructure capacity to allocate to the creation of more licenced places. Some services may be in a position to adopt change management to increase service optimisation, there will be a limit to this efficiency improvement due to lack of space or staffing. This constraint will restrict services from offering similar numbers of places to three-year-olds, while maintaining existing service levels for the four-year-old program.

Council will also need to continue to closely work with standalone kindergarten providers, to determine plans and timelines for the scaling up of hours for three-year-old kindergarten programs. Council anticipates that this scaling will be informed by both the community survey results, which showed families are very interested in the uptake of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, with a strong preference for a standalone or sessional model, as well as the actual demand observed through applications to the central kindergarten registration scheme. This capacity assessment and preparation will need to ensure that accommodation for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten does not come at the expense of a reduction in the service levels for four-year-old kindergarten.

Consideration will need to be given to Council and DET working with private service providers in the short- to mid-term to determine if there is any intention for long day care services to provide sessional services for families that will prefer this model, in an attempt to ensure every Moorabool child can access a 15 hour kindergarten program for two years, at a service or program model of their choice by 2029.

Some kindergartens (both standalone and integrated) may be in a good position to implement changes to their operating model to meet the requirement of 15 hours per week of three-year-old kindergarten before or by 2029, however many services will have constraints on the changes they will be able to make without considering significant investment for expansion. Therefore, the modelling numbers in terms of supply in this KISP are on the conservative side, to account for these potential constraints and the need for significant infrastructure expansion to ensure that every child in Moorabool can access 15 hours of kindergarten for two years by 2029.

4. FUNDED KINDERGARTEN ENROLMENT ESTIMATES BETWEEN 2021-29 FOR MOORABOOL SHIRE

4.1 PURPOSE

As Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is rolled-out and Victoria's population grows, demand for both Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten 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 over the roll-out in Moorabool Shire, Moorabool Shire Council and the Department have developed:

1. A summary of the current provision of kindergarten within the LGA (**Section 4.3**).
2. An approach to optimising the utilisation of existing services and infrastructure through 'change management' strategies that Moorabool Shire Council and the Department will support to help meet additional demand in the LGA (**Section 4.4**).
3. An estimate of the Three and Four-Year-Old kindergarten places that cannot be met through existing services for the 2021-29 period, taking into account the additional demand that can be accommodated by optimising utilisation of existing services and infrastructure through point 2, above (**Section 4.5**).

Local Government 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 10-year roll-out.

4.2 METHODOLOGY

The estimated Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places used in the following sections have been agreed between Moorabool Shire Council and the Department, and were informed by:

- Estimates developed by the Department which draw on a range of inputs, including population forecasts, current enrolments and results from the Kindergarten Capacity Assessment Program (KCAP), conducted in 2019.
- The estimated capacity of new services that are planned to open in the LGA (Section 2)
- Local knowledge and context provided by the Local Government (Section 3) that explains particular issues and trends in their area.
- The approach to optimising utilisation of existing services in the LGA (Section 4.4), and
- Other sources, such as modelling undertaken by Local Governments and local data.

The KISP measures a service's capacity to deliver funded kindergarten in terms of the number of children it could enrol in Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten. The number of funded 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.

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten places have been presented as 15-hour places so they can be easily compared to Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places. Moreover, when Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is fully rolled-out in 2029, every three-year-old child will have access to 15-hours of kindergarten.

From 2023 all providers will have flexibility to determine how many hours of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten they deliver per week, with a minimum of five hours and a maximum of 15-hours funded pro-rata. It is expected that hours offered will vary. Given this variation, **it is important to be aware that during the transition to all three-year-old children receiving 15-hours of funded kindergarten per week in 2029, the 15-hour places presented in this report may represent multiple three-year-old places that individually receive less than 15-hours of kindergarten per week.**

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, which is medium-sized areas which represent a community that interacts socially and economically, with a population range of 3,000 to 25,000 people, and an average population of about 10,000 people.

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 Kindergarten Capacity Assessment Program (KCAP), collected between June and October 2019.
- The Department's Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS), as at 2019.
- The Department's Quality and Regulatory Division (QARD) monitoring data, as at 2019.
- The National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITS), as at March 2021.
- The Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS), as at 2018.

Please note that, because these sources were collected at different points, this may result in slightly different totals appearing in the below data.

Number of services by service type (NQAITs, 2021)

Stand-alone kindergartens	5
Long day care centres	7

Percentage of services by management type, LGA level (NQAITs, 2021)

Type	Percentage
Local Government	0%
Private not for profit	42%
Private for profit	58%
Other	0%

Current kindergarten offering

Four-Year-Old Kindergarten participation rate (VCAMS, 2018):	87%
Number of services that offer a funded kindergarten program (DET, 2019):	11
Number of services that offer an unfunded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program (DET, 2019):	5

Hours of unfunded 3YO programs currently offered (DET, 2019):



4.4 APPROACH TO OPTIMISING THE USE OF EXISTING SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Change management strategies to optimise existing services and infrastructure

Children can often be accommodated through existing spare places and by services ‘unlocking’ unused capacity. As the experience of providers in the 2020 Three-Year-Old Kindergarten roll-out LGAs shows, while the optimisation of existing services can be challenging, it is highly time- and cost-effective compared to building new capacity through infrastructure projects. It also helps target infrastructure investment to the places that need it most and avoids over-supplying the local market.

Moorabool Shire Council and the Department will support providers and services to maximise their kindergarten places through the following change management activities and practices:

- Increasing the capacity of any Local Government operated services by:
 - Running additional programs.
 - Using different timetables, including running 7.5-hour days.
 - Changing the delivery model, such as introducing rotational models or mixed-age groups.
 - Having degree-qualified kindergarten teachers leading integrated kindergarten programs in long day care settings.
- Encouraging and supporting other providers and services in the LGA to undertake change management.

Moorabool Shire Council and the Department have estimated how many Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places can be accommodated through existing services in the LGA (**Table 1**). Both parties are committed to helping providers and services offer these kindergarten places before progressing to funded infrastructure solutions to meet demand. This commitment is reflected in the LGA and community level estimates below (**Table 2** onwards), which assume that demand will be met first through existing services and second through additional infrastructure. Note that in some cases the number of kindergarten places that can be offered through existing services may exceed demand for kindergarten places.

Table 1: Total estimated funded kindergarten places that can be offered by optimising existing services and infrastructure across the LGA, between 2021-29 (presented in 15-hour equivalent places)

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Estimated existing supply of kindergarten places*	723	723	723	723	723	723	723	723	723

*This may be higher than current three and four-year-old enrolments as it includes any spare places that are currently available or could be generated by making some minor adjustments to programming approaches.

4.5 AGREED ESTIMATES OF DEMAND FOR FUNDED KINDERGARTEN PLACES THAT CANNOT BE MET THROUGH EXISTING SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The below estimates (**Table 2** onwards) have been developed by Moorabool Shire Council and the Department to illustrate the estimated:

1. Total number of Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places expected over the roll-out period.
2. Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by optimising existing services and infrastructure over the roll-out period.

These estimates have been developed to reflect that the increase in demand for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten places will be gradual.

In estimating how many Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten places cannot be accommodated by existing services and infrastructure, Moorabool Shire Council and the Department have taken into account 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 Local Government owned services being developed and planned Kindergartens on School Sites.

These estimates do not, however, 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.

Infrastructure need in the LGA and its local communities is indicated by the bottom rows of the tables in this section (**Table 2** onwards): 'Total kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by existing services'. For example, if the number of kindergarten places for the LGA or a community is above zero in this row, it means that the area is estimated to need additional infrastructure (noting that further optimisation which avoids the need for additional infrastructure may be possible). Any type of provider – Local Government, not-for-profit or for-profit – can build this additional infrastructure. If this row shows all zeros, it means that there is no estimated need for additional infrastructure in the area.

Local Government and not-for-profit kindergarten providers must refer to the estimates in this section when applying through the Building Blocks Capacity Building Grants stream for Government funding. Under this stream, projects must be in a community where there is infrastructure need as shown in the community's table of estimated demand for kindergarten places (i.e. there are numbers in the bottom row above zero). Projects in LGAs or communities where demand can be met through existing services (i.e. the bottom row shows all zeros) are not eligible for funding under this stream.

LGA estimates

Table 2: Estimated three and four-year-old kindergarten places between 2021-29 (presented in 15-hour equivalent places)

LGA level estimates	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Total estimated demand for kindergarten places (three and four-year-old children)	493	642	713	788	860	978	1,062	1,151	1,263
Total kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by existing services	0	0	8	67	137	255	339	428	541

Community estimates

Table 3-5: Estimated three and four-year-old kindergarten places between 2021-29 (presented in 15-hour equivalent places)

Bacchus Marsh estimates	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Total estimated demand for kindergarten places (three and four-year-old children)	393	504	561	620	676	769	836	909	999
Total kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by existing services	0	0	8	66	123	215	283	356	445

Bacchus Marsh Region estimates	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Total estimated demand for kindergarten places (three and four-year-old children)	83	104	112	122	132	148	159	170	185
Total kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by existing services	0	0	0	0	9	24	35	46	61

Gordon estimates	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Total estimated demand for kindergarten places (three and four-year-old children)	17	34	40	46	52	61	66	72	80
Total kindergarten places that cannot be accommodated by existing services	0	0	0	1	6	16	21	26	34

5. AUTHORISATION

The Area Executive Director (Central Highlands) of the Department of Education and Training and the Chief Executive of Moorabool Shire Council endorse this Kindergarten Services and Infrastructure Plan (KISP) for Moorabool Shire by signing on ...05.... / ...04.... / .2022..

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 2024 to publish a new version that will replace the previous version.

Signed for and on behalf and with the authority of Moorabool Shire Council



Derek Madden, CEO



Dianne Elshaug (Witness)

Name: Derek Madden

Title: Chief Executive Officer, Moorabool Shire Council

Address: 15 Stead Street, Ballan

Signed by Area Executive Director (Central Highlands), Department of Education and Training



.....
Signature



.....
Witness Signature

Name: Jenny McCrabb

Title: Area Executive Director (Central Highlands)

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