

Investing in the now and future

- Creating better educational outcomes



Equipment and resources within a kindergarten environment are important tools which support children's learning, discovery, and development of new skills. This resource aims to provide service providers with practical tips on managing and planning kindergarten investment to create better educational outcomes for children.

Children are natural learners - they learn in many ways and learn very quickly in their early years. Research demonstrates that the design, layout and space in kindergarten environments can influence a child's learning, creativity, behaviour and cultural interests. This resource aims to inform service providers, including Committees of Management and Early Years Management (EYM) organisations, as well as kindergarten educational staff on how to plan and manage kindergarten investment now and in the future to create better educational outcomes for children.

To create the best learning environment within a kindergarten, regular and periodic investments in equipment, resources, and materials is essential. Making moderate investments on a periodic basis provides children the same opportunities, experiences, and quality of resources as their predecessors. Making moderate investments is easier to plan and manage, than waiting for resources to degrade to a point where significant finances might be required to fund replacements or repairs at short notice.

Why planned investment in kindergarten environments is important

Equity: Parent fees contribute to the operation of the kindergarten, including the purchase of equipment and resources. Children enrolled in programs have equal entitlement to benefit from up-to-date equipment (e.g. reading materials, puzzles, learning games, IT equipment and outdoor equipment) as the children attending the kindergarten before them. Parents can witness the benefits of new equipment and resources, and recognise the contribution their fees are making to the provision of quality education programs at the kindergarten.

Enhanced learning: Children learn in many ways – not just through watching, listening and asking, but also importantly through play, where they discover, develop, practice and implement new interests and skills. Equipment and resources that are up-to-date and stimulating will facilitate this process. The age, quality, variety and condition of teaching equipment can have a significant impact on its suitability for children to learn effectively.

Community and parent perceptions: The suitability and condition of a kindergarten's educational equipment, as well as the indoor and outdoor environment, can have a significant influence on community and parent perceptions of the kindergarten. Favourable community and parent perceptions of the kindergarten and its educational program can have a positive impact on enrolments.

Adequate quantity: Although children are encouraged to share resources during kindergarten programs, an adequate quantity and variety of equipment and resources in good condition is important to provide children with an opportunity to experience all aspects of the kindergarten program.

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How much to invest

Amounts for renewing resources and equipment should be included in the annual budget for the kindergarten. The amount invested in the renewal of resources and equipment each year will differ from kindergarten to kindergarten based on the specific program offered. The following factors will also influence the amount to invest each year:

- the total number of children participating in each session
- the number of sessions being offered
- the relative age and condition of the existing equipment and resources
- the content and structure of the teaching programs, and the intended learning outcomes for children
- the advice and views of educators, as decisions about purchasing are best informed through a partnership between educators and service providers
- the expectations of the community and children's parents
- the capacity of the kindergarten to fund investments through current funding sources and reserves, or increase fundraising and/or parent term fees (where appropriate).

The specific amount to invest on the renewal of resources and equipment will vary; however, the following guidelines are indicative of the approximate investment amount per child each year in a single room kindergarten:

- \$20 - \$35 for materials such as arts and crafts resources
- \$20 - \$40 for educational equipment and resources such as toys and books
- \$10 - \$25 for furniture and equipment such as restoration of existing furniture, and purchase of new furniture.

What resources to invest in

The service provider should have a clear vision of spending priorities to decide the specific equipment, resources, and materials to fund each year. A broad purchasing plan, which outlines spending priorities over a three to five year period, may be useful to articulate and document this vision. In deciding the resources and materials to buy, the service provider should consider:

- the requirements of early childhood regulations (e.g. outdoor and natural learning environments need to be maintained to comply with health and safety standards) as provided by the Department of Education and Training (the Department)
- the relative condition of existing educational equipment and resources
- the structure of the educational program and a balanced and broad selection of equipment to stimulate:
 - social and emotional development, for example, toys and equipment that encourage interaction between children
 - creative development, for example, materials with different textures, colours, and structures, which can be utilised by the children in a variety of ways

Kindergarten environment planning

Service providers may wish to seek assistance in the planning and development of indoor and outdoor learning spaces by contacting:

- Local government – particularly when the kindergarten facility is owned by Council
- Play Australia Inc.² (note that a membership fee may be applicable)

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- physical development, for example, outdoor play spaces and equipment
- cognitive development, for example, building blocks, puzzles and items that allow children to creatively explore their own interests
- language development, for example, books, recordings, and music.

How to sustain the investment

Regular periodic investment is encouraged because it requires a relatively moderate level of spend each year, as opposed to large investments made once every five or ten years. However, sustaining the investment can be problematic for some service providers.

In sustaining funding for investment in equipment and resources, service providers may consider:

- Setting a balanced budget with periodic investment amounts scheduled for update and renewal of resources and equipment. Maintaining a reasonable parent term fee per child, which allows the kindergarten to periodically update and renew the indoor and outdoor learning environment, is recommended. In considering amounts to invest, service providers should recognise that the kindergarten might need to incur a modest operating loss in some years to sustain investment in the kindergarten environment.
- Seeking other funding sources to cover the cost of investment in the kindergarten environment. It may not be possible for the kindergarten to rely solely on parent fees. Investments of greater significance could require the kindergarten to:
 - undertake fundraising activities (e.g. raffles, parent trivia nights)
 - seek cash and/or in-kind donations from the local community
 - apply to the Department and/or local government for grants (e.g. small capital works).

Ideas for further discussion

It is worth conducting reflective discussions to determine the specific investment needed in kindergarten resources and equipment, and to develop a long-term vision and purchasing plan for the kindergarten.

For a service provider, discussions may include:

- How much can the kindergarten reasonably afford to invest each year and what fundraising amounts are required?
- How will purchasing or fundraising activities generate collaborative partnerships with families and communities?
- How will the development of a purchasing plan, documented in writing, assist in delivering long term quality outcomes at the kindergarten?
- What purchasing practices or expenditure on specific educational resources and equipment should be continued, moderated, or discontinued?

1 OECD, *Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*, <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/48483409.pdf>

2 <https://www.playaustralia.org.au>