

School and preschool enrolment policy

This is a mandated policy under the operational policy framework. Any edits to this page must follow the process outlined on the [creating, updating and deleting policy documents](#) page.

Overview

This policy aims to:

- identify children eligible to enrol in a government preschool and outline compulsory requirements for children and young people enrolling in government primary and secondary schools
- ensure the department staff, parents and guardians meet their legislative and regulatory obligations when enrolling children and young people
- ensure preschool and school practices in relation to enrolments are equitable and inclusive of all South Australian children and young people.

Scope

This policy describes the responsibilities of schools, preschools, parents and guardians in relation to:

- non-compulsory preschool
- compulsory education and the enrolment and participation requirements of children and young people under the [Education Act 1972 \(SA\)](#).

Detail

Part A – preschools

Eligibility for enrolment at preschool

It is recommended all children under 6 years of age complete a preschool program.

In South Australia (SA), all children are entitled to access a preschool program over 4 terms the year before they start school, commencing at the beginning of the year.

Children are able to enrol in a government preschool program provided that the child resides in SA and:

- has Australian citizenship or permanent residency, or
- is a child with a relevant specified visa or [Immicard](#).

Children who reside outside of SA may be considered for enrolment where specific requirements are met, as determined by the Minister.

Starting preschool

Government preschools have one intake at the beginning of each year for children who turn 4 years of age before 1 May. Children who turn 4 years of age on or after 1 May can start preschool the following year.

Eligible children who enrol after the commencement of the school year are able to start at a mutually agreed time between the parents/guardians and principal/preschool director ('director').

It is recommended families consider their child's readiness to commence preschool before enrolling in a preschool program. When a family decide their child will commence school in the year they turn 6 years of age, the child is eligible to access preschool in the calendar year prior to commencing school (refer to [starting school](#)).

Aboriginal children

Aboriginal children are eligible to attend preschool after their 3rd birthday. In these circumstances, children may attend for an average of 12 hours per week. At the beginning of the year in which the child turns 4 years of age before 1 May, the child is able to access their full preschool entitlement.

Aboriginal children may either start school when they reach the age of eligibility for enrolment at a government school (refer to [starting school](#)), or continue at preschool until they turn 6 years of age.

Children in care

Children who are or have been in care are eligible to attend preschool after their 3rd birthday. In these circumstances, children may attend for an average of 12 hours per week.

Children who are or have been in care may either start school when they reach the age of eligibility for enrolment at a government school (refer to [starting school](#)), or continue at preschool until they turn 6 years of age.

Gifted and talented learners

Children granted early entry to a school by the principal, as per the [curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting: early childhood services to year 12 policy \(PDF, 217.1 KB\)](#), are eligible to attend a preschool program over 4 terms in the year before they start school, commencing at the beginning of the calendar year.

The child's preschool enrolment is conditional on the principal of the school confirming, in writing, the child's early entry to school and their commencement date.

Interstate and overseas transfers

Children transferring from an interstate or overseas preschool, who turn 4 years of age on or before 31 July, are eligible to enrol in a SA government preschool.

The principal or director must be satisfied and have sufficient documented evidence that the child has been enrolled in and regularly attended a preschool program for a minimum of 1 term prior to transferring to SA.

Australian Defence Force families

Children who turn 4 years of age on or before 31 July and have a parent/guardian that is a full-time serving member of the permanent navy, the regular army or the permanent air force are eligible to enrol in a government preschool.

The principal or director must be satisfied and have sufficient documented evidence that one or both parents/guardians are current serving members.

Special consideration for other enrolments

Early entry to preschool is not a guarantee and children who meet the eligibility requirements for preschool are given priority for enrolment over early entry enrolments. Requests for early entry to a preschool are assessed on a case by case basis by the principal or director.

A principal or director may grant a child early entry to a preschool program based on the following considerations:

- the child will continue to access preschool at the same service the following year
- the preschool has the capacity to accept the enrolment within existing resources
- additional time at preschool is likely to significantly improve the child's learning, wellbeing and developmental outcomes
- there has been consultation between the principal/director, parents/guardians and relevant departmental staff and agencies.

Early entry to preschool may be offered to:

- children with additional needs and/or disability
- children with significant extenuating family or individual circumstances
- children with emerging English as an additional language or dialect (EALD)
- children who are at significant risk due to family circumstances.

The child may attend preschool for up to 6 hours in term 4, prior to the child starting their eligible preschool year. Children accessing early entry may be eligible to access support services.

Admission to preschool

Admission to a government preschool is managed by the principal or director in accordance with the instructions outlined in the following procedures:

- [admission procedure \(PDF, 635.7 KB\)](#)
- [placement procedure \(PDF, 639.7 KB\)](#)
- [transfer procedure](#)
- [registration of interest process procedure.](#)

Before admission, parents/guardians will be asked to provide evidence of their child's immunisation status, residential address, identity and age.

Extended transition to school

When a parent/guardian request a child has additional time at preschool, a principal and director may grant an extended transition to school, of 1 additional term at preschool, based on the following considerations:

- the child has additional needs and/or disability and has a personalised learning plan ([One Plan](#))
- there has been consultation between the principal, director, parents/guardian and student support services staff
- additional time in the preschool environment will maximise the child's educational outcomes
- the preschool has the physical capacity to support the extended transition to school.

The enrolment of the child is at the school, and during the transition period the school will be responsible for providing additional staffing and resources required to support the child within the preschool setting.

Children who meet the eligibility requirements for preschool are given priority for preschool enrolment over extended transition arrangements.

Withdrawing from preschool

A child may formally withdraw from preschool within the first 4 weeks of term 1, and is eligible to re-enrol in a preschool program, commencing at the beginning of the following calendar year. The end date must be recorded in the child's enrolment record.

Families seeking to re-enrol their child in the same preschool must apply through the registration of interest process for the coming calendar year (ie a place will not be reserved).

Part B – schools

Compulsory school requirements

Compulsory school age

All children living in SA must be enrolled and attend a school from the age of 6 until they turn 16 years of age. This is known as the compulsory school age pursuant to the [Education Act 1972 \(SA\)](#).

Parents/guardians may be subject to penalties if it is found that a child or young person of compulsory school age is not enrolled in a school and does not have an approved exemption from attending school.

Compulsory education age

When a young person reaches 16 years of age they must continue to be enrolled in school or other approved learning program until they turn 17 years of age. This is known as compulsory education age pursuant to the [Education Act 1972 \(SA\)](#).

Where a young person has achieved a South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) or other qualification under an approved learning program, there is no requirement for them to continue to participate at or over the age of 16 years.

Eligibility for enrolment at school

All compulsory school age children or young people are able to enrol in a government school provided the child or young person resides in SA, and:

- has Australian citizenship or permanent residency, or
- a student with a relevant specified visa or [Immicard](#). Enrolment is subject to certain conditions, which may include payment of student fees. Refer to [international education](#).

Other persons, such as children or young people who are pre and post compulsory school age, adult students, or children who reside outside of SA may be considered for enrolment where specific requirements are met, as determined by the Minister.

Starting school

Government schools have one intake per year for children starting in reception in term 1.

The parents/guardians of a child under the age of 6 years can enrol in a government school if:

- the child has turned 5 years of age before 1 May; the child can start school the first day of term 1 of that school year
- the child has turned 5 years of age on or after 1 May; the child can start school the first day of term 1 of the following school year.

A child must be enrolled at a school by their sixth birthday. It is recommended a child who will turn 6 years of age during the school year start school on the first day of term 1 of that school year.

Early entry to school

Children, who turn 5 years of age on or after 1 May, will be eligible for early entry at a government school, if the principal:

- has granted the child early entry to school as a gifted and talented learner as per the [curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting: early childhood services to year 12 policy \(PDF, 217.1 KB\)](#) and [curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting: early childhood services to year 12 guideline \(PDF, 357.4 KB\)](#)

- is satisfied the child will turn 5 years on or before 31 July and there is sufficient documented evidence to support that:
 - the child has recently moved from interstate or overseas and:
 - has enrolled in and attended 4 terms of preschool or equivalent immediately prior to commencing school, or
 - has been enrolled and regularly attended school immediately prior to transferring to a SA government school (minimum 1 school term)
 - the child is a dependent of a parent/guardian who is currently a full-time serving member of the permanent navy, the regular army or the permanent air force.
- is satisfied the child is transferring from a registered SA non-government primary school and attended for a minimum of 1 school term immediately prior to the transfer. This includes children who met the requirements to gain entry through a non-government primary school mid-year reception intake. Children transferring from a mid-year intake will have a minimum of 6 terms of reception.

Special consideration

Outside of the above conditions, a child will only be considered for early entry to school in exceptional circumstances where the Minister is satisfied that it is in the child's best interest and has approved that the child should be enrolled and attend a government school. Requests for exceptional circumstances are assessed on a case-by-case basis, and must be recommended by the department, via the local education director.

Early entry to school is not a guarantee but rather an exception, where it is determined to be in the best interests of the child, with consideration to the child's age, continuity of their education and assessment the child has the required social and emotional skills to succeed at school.

The principal can assist parents/guardians in determining if a child has the necessary attributes required for early entry to school.

Participation

Once a child is enrolled at a school, the child must attend every day (and for such parts of every day) that instruction is provided for the child at the school, including all compulsory school activities.

If a student is absent, parents/guardians must provide the school with a reasonable explanation for the absence, unless permission for the absence has already been granted via a temporary exemption.

The full-time participation (attendance) requirements for government schools are described in the [attendance policy](#).

The department offers various alternative schooling options for children and young people to support their participation in education, including:

- children unable to attend mainstream schooling may be eligible to enrol in distance education as per the [Open Access College enrolment policy](#)

- secondary school aged students who are disengaged from school may be able to participate in a flexible learning option (FLO) as per the [flexible learning option \(FLO\) enrolment policy](#)
- children and young people with a disability may be eligible to enrol in an inclusive education option as per the [children and students with disability policy](#).

All government schools must make reasonable efforts to work with families and provide appropriate adjustments and support to ensure every child is given the opportunity to engage in learning, and is able to meet the education and participation requirements of the [Education Act 1972 \(SA\)](#).

Refer to [education participation requirements for children and young people](#) for participation requirements at various ages.

Education participation requirements for children and young people

Preschool age children

A child can participate in an approved preschool program the year prior to starting school, if the child meets the requirements for entry determined by the department.

Children under 6 years – pre compulsory school age

A child can enrol and be admitted to a school under the age of 6 years, if the child meets the requirements determined by the Minister.

Once a child under 6 years of age is enrolled in school they are subject to the same participation requirements as children of compulsory school age.

Attendance and participation requirements for a child under 6 years of age may be modified to meet the child's specific needs. This is arranged by negotiation between the principal and the parents or guardians.

Children aged 6 to 16 years – compulsory school age

Must be enrolled in a primary or secondary school and attend school, from when a child turns 6 years until they turn 16 years of age, unless the child has an approved exemption from participation.

Children aged 16 to 17 years – compulsory education age

Must participate in a full-time approved learning program, or a combination of programs, as to constitute full-time, until they turn 17 years, unless they have achieved a SACE or other qualification under an approved learning program.

Regulation 61 of the [Education Regulations 2012 \(SA\) \(PDF, 210KB\)](#) sets out rules and criteria for determining what constitutes full-time participation in approved learning programs.

Young persons aged 17 to 21 years – post compulsory school/education age

Students, who turn 17 years of age, are no longer obligated to continue their enrolment at school. However continuing students can elect to remain enrolled and complete their studies.

Young persons over the age of 18 years who have left school and wish to return to complete their studies may do so. However if they have been absent from school for more than 6 months they must have a current [relevant history screening](#) before starting at the school.

Adults aged 21 years or older – Adult Education Provision (AEP)

Adults aged 21 years or older who have not achieved their SACE can complete this qualification under the [adult education provision \(AEP\) policy](#).

Students have up to 2 years (full-time) and 5 years (part-time) to complete their SACE. The AEP is only provided once for each eligible person.

Exemption from attending school

The Minister (or delegate) has the authority to grant a child of compulsory school age an approved exemption (including home education) from attendance in school in certain circumstances.

Temporary or permanent exemptions to attend school (including students working full time) are managed by the principal, in accordance with the instructions outlined in the [exemption from school procedure](#).

Admission to school

Placement in a particular government school or service is managed by the principal in accordance with Regulation 60(2) of the [Education Regulations 2012 \(SA\) \(PDF, 210KB\)](#) the instructions in the [placement procedure \(PDF, 639.7 KB\)](#).

Principals will manage admission and transfers to their school or services in a fair and transparent manner, without discrimination or prejudice as per the [admission procedure \(PDF, 635.7 KB\)](#) and [transfer procedure](#).

Equal opportunity is promoted in government schools to improve access to education for priority groups including Aboriginal children and children in care.

Roles and responsibilities

Parents and guardians

A parent/guardian must ensure:

- that when their child is of compulsory school age the child or young person is enrolled at a school as per section 75 of the [Education Act 1972 \(SA\)](#)
- an enrolment form is completed and the necessary documentation is supplied to confirm the child or young person's name, date of birth, place of residence and any other information as required (for example immunisation status, family or youth court orders, intervention orders and parenting plans)
- they exercise proper care and control of their child to attend school as per section 76 of the Education Act 1972 (SA)
- where appropriate, their child has received an approved exemption from school.

Principal or preschool director ('director')

Is responsible for the management of day-to-day operations of the school or preschool, including enrolments. The principal or director must:

- manage processes to acquire necessary resources and facilities to accommodate eligible students
- ensure relevant enrolment information is communicated to parents, guardians and prospective applicants
- maintain accurate and complete enrolment data
- manage all enrolments into the school or preschool in a transparent manner without discrimination or prejudice
- ensure enrolments proceed in accordance with departmental procedures.

Education director

Is responsible for:

- making determinations in relation to enrolment disputes that can't be resolved at the school or preschool level
- ensuring principals and directors manage enrolments in accordance with instructions set out by relevant national and state legislation and departmental policies and procedures.

Early childhood leader

Provide advice to principals and directors in the interpretation of the preschool eligibility requirements.

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Provide advice to principals and education directors in the interpretation and implementation of enrolment requirements determined by the Minister and the department.

Ensures this policy and corresponding procedures are compliant and up-to-date with relevant legislative and state government obligations.

Where a child or young person is not able to meet the education participation requirements, the Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division has the delegations in place to issue an exemption certificate on behalf of the Minister.

Early Years and Child Development division

Provide advice in relation to preschool enrolments.

Monitor the application of this policy on a statewide basis.

Evaluate and review this policy in collaboration with the Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division.

Minister for Education

Determines when a child under the age of 6 can enrol and be admitted to school as per regulation 63 of the [Education Regulations 2012 \(SA\) \(PDF, 210KB\)](#).

Can by written notice grant an exemption from participation or delegate as per section 81A of the [Education Act 1972 \(SA\)](#).

Definitions

additional needs and/or disability

Children with disability and/or additional needs include physical impairment, hearing impairment, vision impairment, autistic spectrum disorder, global developmental delay, speech and language impairment and/or significant challenging behaviours.

admission

The administrative process of enrolling or being allowed to enrol at a school and preschool.

adult student

A student who is 18 years of age or over.

Excludes those students who turned 18 years during the course of their studies at school, these students are referred to as continuing students.

approved learning programs

The following learning programs are approved by the Minister:

- SACE (SA Certificate of Education), including modified SACE
- International Baccalaureate (IB)
- Steiner Education (Waldorf Schools) Secondary Certificate
- Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses or accredited courses offered by registered training organisations
- apprenticeships or traineeships undertaken with an approved employer under the [Training and Skills Development Act 2008 \(SA\) \(PDF, 104KB\)](#)
- university degrees, diplomas or other university award courses
- other programs authorised by the Minister (or delegate)
- a combination of the above.

best interest of a child

Consideration of the long-term and short-term welfare concerns for a child or young person, such as their academic, social and emotional needs, aspirations and abilities.

child

Persons under 18 years of age.

children and young people in care

Where a child or young person is the subject of a custody or guardianship order under the [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017 \(SA\) \(PDF 542KB\)](#).

This includes the following care arrangements:

- where a child or young person is under the custody or guardianship of the Chief Executive of the department
- where there is an order granting a specified person care of a child (previously referred to as Other Person Guardianship)
- voluntary custody agreements
- unaccompanied refugee minors under the [Immigration \(Guardianship of Children\) Act 1946 \(Cth\)](#) with guardianship delegated from the Minister for Home Affairs to the Chief Executive of the Department for Child Protection.

child of compulsory school age

A child of or above the age of 6 years but under the age of 16 years.

child of compulsory education age

A child who is 16 years of age but under the age of 17 years.

children with significant extenuating family or individual circumstances

The principal or director has the ability to accept the early entry of a child at their preschool if they determine it will support the child's wellbeing. This may include:

- compassionate circumstances such as chronic homelessness, escaping domestic violence or recently orphaned
- medical reasons, including severe illness and mental health reasons
- matters that significantly impact the welfare of the child.

delegate

A person or persons appointed and engaged in the department that has been delegated powers or certain functions by the Minister under [Education Act 1972 \(SA\)](#).

discrimination

Treating a person in a way that person or their child receiving less favourable treatment because of their gender, nationality, culture, disability, religion, gender identity, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, sexual orientation, intersex status, marital or relationship status, and family responsibilities as defined in the [Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(SA\) \(PDF, 563KB\)](#), the [Sex Discrimination Act 1984 \(Cth\)](#) and [Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cth\)](#).

documented evidence

The following evidence is considered sufficient documentation for the assessment of eligibility for early age entry to school or preschool:

- A letter from the educational leader of the previous preschool or school acknowledging that the child met the eligibility criteria for entry into their service, and was either enrolled in and regularly attended preschool or school prior to transferring (for the minimum period).
- An Australian Defence Force certificate of service or an extract of service (or other authorised record) indicating that one or both parents are currently an effective full-time serving member of the permanent Australian navy, the regular army or the permanent air force.

The evidence must be to the satisfaction of the principal or director.

enrolment

The process through which a person becomes a student of an education provider.

eligible preschool year

Children who are 4 years of age before 1 May are eligible to access up to 4 terms of preschool in a calendar year before they start school.

Children who will commence school in the year they turn 6 are eligible to access preschool in the calendar year prior to commencing school.

exemption certificate

A formal certificate issued by the Minister or delegate exempting a child or young person of compulsory school age from attending school permanently or for a nominated period of time.

flexible learning option (FLO)

A student enrolment strategy aimed to assist school and the wider community in supporting the successful engagement and retention of young people in secondary school.

home education

A child or young person exempted from attending school whose education will be conducted by one or both parents/guardians from a home base. A child must be registered and approved for home education with the department.

living in South Australia

The child's primary place of residence (physical home) is located within the jurisdiction of South Australia.

learning plan (One Plan)

A document that sets out the needs, aims and objectives for individual children or young people in order to facilitate access and participation in their educational program on the same basis as their same-aged peers.

Open Access College (OAC)

The department's registered educational service that provides an external education program to students with limited schooling choice available to them due to a variety of reasons, including access and distance. OAC also provides a wider subject choice for school based students who may enrol in only a component of the program.

parent/guardian

Includes:

- a biological parent who has legal responsibility for the child or young person; and
- a person who has been granted legal guardianship of the child or young person by a Court.

This does not include a parent/guardian of the child or young person who has had their legal responsibility or guardianship for the child or young person removed by a Court.

placement

The act of prioritising offers for enrolment and allocating children or young people to a particular preschool or school.

preschool program

An approved early childhood educational program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher to children in the year before they start schooling, or as defined within the [Education and Care Services National Regulations 2018](#).

Preschools may also be referred to as a kindergarten, school-based preschool, children's services centre or integrated children's centre.

Under the [National partnership on universal access to early childhood education agreement](#) a child may attend a preschool for 600 hours in the year prior to starting full time school delivered over 40 weeks in a calendar year.

qualification

Means a SACE or at least a Certificate 2 (or equivalent qualification), under an approved learning program. A student over the age of 16 years of age, who has achieved a qualification under an approved learning program, is considered as having completed their schooling.

reasonable effort

means the efforts that any reasonable person would use to comply with the obligation to provide a child the opportunity to engage in learning.

reception

The first year of schooling in South Australia.

registration of interest

A formal expression for a child or young person to enrol to attend a school or preschool for the coming school year. This is not an enrolment but an application process.

SACE

[South Australia Certificate of Education](#). Includes SACE achieved through modified subjects at Stage 1 and Stage 2 for students with identified intellectual disabilities.

school

Non-government and government schools at which education services (courses of instruction in primary or secondary education) are provided, or students enrolled, and who are registered with the [SA Education standards board](#) per the [Education and Early Childhood Services \(Registration and Standards\) Act 2011 \(SA\)](#) (PDF, 1.1MB).

specified visa

Includes international students, dependants of tertiary students, children entering on a tourist / visitor visa who will be studying in a public school or dependants of temporary resident visa holders. See [placement procedure \(PDF, 639.7 KB\)](#).

transfer

The act or process of moving a student from one school or preschool to another.

young person

Generally those aged from 16 years to 21 years of age.

Supporting information

Related legislation

[Children's Services Act 1985 \(SA\) \(PDF, 137KB\)](#)

[Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017 \(SA\) \(PDF, 542KB\)](#)

[Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#)

[Early Years Learning Framework \(PDF, 1.9MB\)](#)

[Education Act 1972 \(SA\)](#)

[Education and Early Childhood Services \(Registration and Standards\) Act 2011 \(SA\) \(PDF, 1.1MB\)](#)

[Education Regulations 2012 \(SA\) \(PDF, 210KB\)](#)

[Education \(Compulsory Education Age\) Amendment Act 2007 \(SA\) \(PDF, 33KB\)](#)

[Education and Care Services National Regulations 2018](#)

[Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(SA\) \(PDF, 563KB\)](#)

[Immigration \(Guardianship of Children\) Act 1946](#)

[National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education Agreement – 2018](#)

[Sex Discrimination Act 1984](#)

[Training and Skills Development Act 2008 \(SA\) \(PDF, 104KB\)](#)

Related policy documents

[Admission procedure \(PDF, 635.7 KB\)](#)

[Placement procedure \(PDF, 639.7 KB\)](#)

[Registration of Interest process procedure](#)

[Transfer procedure](#)

[Year level progression and class placement procedure](#)

[Adult education provision policy](#)

[Children and students with disability policy](#)

[Curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting: early childhood services to Year 12 policy \(PDF, 217.1 KB\)](#)

[Curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting: early childhood services to Year 12 guideline \(PDF, 357.4 KB\)](#)

[Exemption from school procedure](#)

[Flexible learning option \(FLO\) enrolment policy](#)

[Open Access College enrolment policy](#)

[Attendance policy](#)

[Screening and suitability – child safety policy \(PDF, 136.3 KB\)](#)

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