

Information for Early Childhood Professionals

School Readiness Funding 2027-28: Planning for Sustainable Outcomes

School Readiness Funding (SRF) has now been part of the Victorian early childhood landscape for several years. One of the most significant developments has been the introduction of the two-year planning cycle, encouraging services to move beyond short-term purchasing decisions and towards longer-term thinking about children's learning, educator practice and family engagement. As services begin planning for the 2027-2028 cycle, there is an opportunity to focus on sustainable improvements that strengthen outcomes for children, families and educators.

The Victorian Government's School Readiness Funding aims to address educational disadvantage by strengthening the capacity of educators, families and services to support children's learning, development and participation across three priority areas:

- **Communication** (language, literacy and numeracy)
- **Wellbeing** (social, emotional and executive functioning)
- **Access, Inclusion and Participation**

As the **Best Start, Best Life** reforms continue to roll out, increasing kindergarten provision to 30 hours per week, and with **Thriving Kids** commencing implementation across Victoria from October 2026, services have an important opportunity to consider how their SRF planning can support priority cohort children's active participation, engagement and success in kindergarten programs.

SRF planning should be viewed as more than a funding exercise. It is an opportunity to strengthen educator capability, embed evidence-informed practice and build more inclusive learning environments that recognise children's strengths, identities, languages and cultures.

THE VALUE OF TAKING A TWO-YEAR VIEW

The move to a two-year planning cycle provides services with an opportunity to focus on implementation, reflection and sustainable change over time.

Meaningful practice change takes time. Professional learning alone rarely leads to sustained improvement.

Early childhood professionals need opportunities to reflect, trial new approaches, receive feedback and evaluate impact. Similarly, strengthening relationships with families and embedding responsive practices cannot be achieved through one-off activities.

The two-year cycle allows services to consider:

- What changes do we want to see in our practice over time?
- How will families experience these changes?
- What systems and processes need to be strengthened?
- How will we know progress is occurring?

Planning over two years encourages a focus on implementation rather than simply acquisition.

STARTING WITH CHILDREN, NOT FUNDING

While the SRF priorities provide an important framework, every kindergarten community is different.

Understanding which children are experiencing barriers to participation and learning helps services target SRF investment where it can have the greatest impact.

The most effective SRF plans begin with a clear understanding of children's strengths, interests and developmental needs. Rather than selecting supports first and then seeking to justify them, services can use available evidence to identify priorities and determine which strategies are most likely to improve outcomes.

The most effective planning begins by asking:

What are children and families telling us through our data, our observations and our relationships?

This may include:

- Reviewing child assessment and learning data, including communication, wellbeing, inclusion and participation outcomes.
- Analysing service-level information such as attendance patterns, educator observations, family feedback and transition-to-school data.

- Reviewing Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data and other local indicators of children's wellbeing and development.
- Identifying children and groups who may require additional support, including multilingual learners, children experiencing vulnerability and children with additional needs.
- Considering the perspectives, aspirations, languages and cultures of families and communities when determining priorities.
- Selecting professional learning, coaching, mentoring or practice improvement initiatives that directly address identified needs.

A useful question for planning teams to ask is:

How will this investment improve outcomes for the children and families at our service?

If the connection is clear, the proposed activity is likely to be a strong fit for School Readiness Funding. When services start with these questions, SRF becomes a tool for achieving meaningful outcomes rather than an administrative task.

Into Practice

A service reviews its AEDC data and identifies an increase in the proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable in the social competence and emotional maturity domains. The service decides to prioritise Wellbeing and engages coaching and professional learning to strengthen teachers and educators' capacity to support social and emotional learning, self-regulation and positive relationships.

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

Effective SRF planning requires a balance between strategic thinking and practical implementation.

START EARLY

Contact preferred providers early to discuss availability and schedule support across the two-year funding cycle. Early planning provides greater flexibility and increases the likelihood of securing preferred delivery dates.

ENGAGE TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS

Kindergarten teachers and educators should be actively involved in planning decisions. As the people who will implement new practices and approaches, their perspectives are critical to ensuring the plan is realistic, relevant and achievable.



FOCUS ON PRIORITIES

Review service data and identify one or two priority areas where support will have the greatest impact. Focusing on a small number of priorities often leads to deeper and more sustainable improvements.

THINK CREATIVELY

Consider how SRF funding, including Local Solutions options, can be used flexibly to respond to the unique strengths and needs of your children, families and community.

BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

Explore opportunities to collaborate with neighbouring kindergarten services, schools, community organisations and SRF providers. Collaborative professional learning and Communities of Practice can strengthen outcomes and maximise resources.

PLAN FOR WORKFORCE CAPACITY

Reflect on whether teachers and educators feel sufficiently supported to respond to the needs of priority cohort children and the changing expectations associated with ongoing sector reforms.

Consider the backfill, rostering and release time required to enable team members to participate in professional learning, coaching and reflective practice.

Into Practice

A kindergarten preparing for priority cohorts of children uses SRF funding to support facilitated conversations, collaborative planning and curriculum approaches. Teachers and educators are provided with release time to participate in group learning and time to reflect on how new practices can be integrated into everyday routines, teaching and learning.

INVESTING IN SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Professional learning is most effective when supported by ongoing coaching, mentoring and reflective practice. Services should consider how learning will be embedded into everyday practice and sustained over time.

Rather than asking, “what training should we attend?” services may benefit from asking “what support will help us embed and sustain change?”

Strategies may include:

- Regular reflective practice discussions.
- Peer mentoring arrangements.
- In-program coaching and feedback.
- Collaborative planning and teaching opportunities.
- Incorporating new approaches into Quality Improvement Plans, policies and procedures.

Into Practice

Following professional learning focused on inclusion and participation, educators establish monthly reflective practice meetings to discuss implementation, share successes and identify challenges. This supports the transfer of learning from training into everyday practice.

REVIEW AND ADAPT

School Readiness Funding is designed to support continuous improvement. Services should revisit their plan regularly throughout the funding cycle and consider:

- Are the intended outcomes being achieved?
- Have new priorities emerged?
- Is the support meeting the needs of educators and children?
- Are adjustments required?
- Is the plan effectively reducing barriers to participation and improving outcomes for priority cohort children and their families?

The mid-year review provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on progress and make changes where required. Services can work with their Kindergarten Improvement Advisor (KIA) and SRF providers to amend plans if circumstances change.

Into Practice

During a mid-year review, a service determines that one planned support is no longer addressing the needs of children. In consultation with their KIA and provider, they redirect funding toward a more targeted approach that better aligns with current priorities.

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Successful SRF planning involves collaboration across the service. Whether plans are developed by teachers, educational leaders, approved providers or leadership teams, those responsible for implementing the work should be actively involved throughout the planning process. This helps ensure goals are realistic, resources are appropriately allocated and supports can be effectively embedded into practice.

FUTURE FOCUSED

As services prepare for the next SRF cycle, we encourage you to consider how your plan will address educational disadvantage, support priority cohort children and strengthen educator capability for the future.

As the SRF framework continues to evolve, the opportunity for services is clear. The question is no longer simply how to spend funding. The question is how to use funding strategically to strengthen outcomes for children, families and educators over time.

We encourage services to think beyond individual menu items and towards a broader vision for practice improvement, inclusion and equitable outcomes for all children.

By grounding decisions in evidence, embedding culturally responsive approaches and taking a long-term view, services can use School Readiness Funding as a catalyst for lasting and meaningful change.

The most valuable outcome of SRF is not what is purchased. It is the sustainable growth in capability, confidence and inclusion that remains long after the funding cycle ends.

HOW WE CAN HELP

fka Children’s Services (*fkaCS*) advocates for children’s cultural and linguistic rights and provides support to education and care services in the provision of culturally rich environments that support a civil society.

We offer early childhood education and care services access to skilled and experienced pedagogy and practice consultants. We also offer a range of multilingual resources and professional learning opportunities for services, which are customised according to individual needs.

Contact us to discuss support

03 9428 4471 · culturalinclusion@fka.org.au

More resources available at www.fka.org.au