

Policy

2022 Early Learning Fee and Payment Policy

NQS07 Quality Area 7 | Governance and Leadership

Policy Statement

1. Policy Purpose

This policy and associated Procedures will provide a clear guide for

- How TRY/Sparkways set their annual Kindergarten and Childcare fees
- Ensures the viability of each service we offer
- Ensure the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs TRY/Sparkways deliver.

2. Policy Statement

At Sparkways, we are committed to fostering the innate talents, confidence and potential in every child and young person we work with.

In all our work, we take a collaborative and evidence-based approach that allows us to ensure that our programs are always delivering long-lasting and meaningful outcomes.

Our Early Learning services reflect the educational, cultural, and social values specific to each community in which we operate. We offer safe and secure environments in which children can develop individually by taking part in flexible, educational and recreational programs, suited to the needs of each child.

3. Who this Policy applies to

This policy applies to all Sparkways employees, contractors, students, volunteers' parents and carers and all adults involved in the programs delivered for Sparkways/Try.

**This Policy should be read in conjunction with the
Kindergarten or Childcare Early Learning Fee and Payment Procedures.**

Early Learning Fee and Payment Procedure

Kindergarten Procedure

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1. Why fees are necessary

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides funding as a contribution toward the costs of providing a four-year-old kindergarten program. The fees within both three-year old and four-year old Kindergarten Services helps to meet the balance of costs to provide this service for children. Fundraising also assists to help meet these costs.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see below) is provided by the Department of Education and Training and enables children from eligible families to attend a three- year- old and four-year-old kindergarten program free of charge, or at a minimal cost.

Early Start Kindergarten is also funded through the Department of Education and Training. This funding is designed for eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

TRY/Sparkways provides a range of support options to parents and carers experiencing difficulty with payment of fees which are outlined within the attached Procedure.

2. How fees are set

As part of the budget development process at TRY/Sparkways we set fees each year for each service, taking into consideration:

- the financial viability of the service
- the level of government funding provided for the program, including the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- the availability of other income sources, such as grants
- the fees charged by similar services in the area
- the capacity of parents/carers to pay fees
- reasonable expenditure in meeting agreed program quality and standards
- requirements of the *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy* (details in *The Kindergarten Guide* available at: www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderfundingcriteria.aspx/)

Fees set for the year are only reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if attendance rates fall below the budget ‘break even’ point.

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3. Other charges

Other charges levied by TRY/Sparkways may include:

Kindergarten Application Fee

TRY/Sparkways do not charge application fees.

Late collection charge

TRY/Sparkways reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents or carers are frequently late in collecting a child from the service. This fee is outline within this procedure.

4. Funding

Three-year-old

The Victorian Government funds three-year-old kindergarten for five hours per week on a per child basis. However, this funding is only a contribution towards the total cost of providing the kindergarten program.

Four-year-old

The Victorian Government funds four-year-old kindergarten for 15 hours per week on a per child basis. However, this funding is only a contribution towards the total cost of providing the kindergarten program.

Fees

Consequently, parent/carers fees are necessary to cover the shortfall between the level of Government Funding and the costs of running the kindergarten to the standard enjoyed by the children.

A schedule of due dates is provided to families annually.

Term	Issue Date	Due Date - 3 weeks/21 days
1	4 February 2022	25 February 2022
2	29 April 2022	20 May 2022
3	15 July 2022	5 August 2022
4	7 October 2022	28 October 2022

Fees are set by TRY/Sparkways prior to commencement of Term 1 each year. All term fees are payable in the first three weeks of each term. Please refer to the above listed 2022 fee schedule.

Invoices will be issued three weeks prior to the due date. Invoices for each term will be sent via email. Receipts will be issued on request.

5. Fundraising

Not all service costs are covered by parent fees. Fundraising is undertaken to meet the balance and/or pay for additional items for the service. While participation in fundraising is voluntary, the support of every family is welcomed. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

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6. Deposit for allocation of a Kindergarten Place

TRY/Sparkways do not require deposits to confirm kindergarten placement offers.

7. Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

For families with children in the funded three-year-old and four-year-old programs, who hold a valid Health Care Card (HCC), Pension Card or eligible Visa, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and Concession Card Consent form is required to be completed and returned to Sparkways in order to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy which will ensure the correct fees are charged.

You will also need to provide eligibility to your Kindergarten before October 31st in the year the child attends kindergarten. This will ensure that the correct fees are charged as

TRY/Sparkways is unable to backdate claims for Kindergarten Fee Subsidy following this date.

Your child is eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy in any of the following circumstances:

- if your child identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- if your child is identified on their birth certificate as being a multiple birth child (triplets or more).

Or if your child holds or has a parent or carer who holds, one of the following:

- a Commonwealth Health Care Card
- a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card
- a Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card or White Card
- Refugee or Asylum Seeker visa (200-204, 786 or 866)
- Bridging visas for any of the above Refugee or Asylum Seeker visas

If your family or child has a humanitarian or refugee visa listed by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection which is not included in the above list, your child may still be eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy. Please contact TRY/Sparkways on 8545 9500 or cs@sparkways.org.au for more information.

8. Absence from Kindergarten

Fees are non-refundable should the child be absent from the kindergarten for any reason including holidays and illness.

9. Centre Closures

Should the Kindergarten or Childcare Centre need to be closed for any reason, such as Staff Professional Development days, inability to source relief staff in the event staff are away, other emergency situations etc., fees will not be refunded to parents/ carers.

TRY/Sparkways follows health advice offered by the Department of Health in relation to infectious diseases such as Covid-19 and may need to close centres to meet these requirements.

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10. Late Enrolments

If a child is enrolled after the commencement of a kindergarten term, that term fee must be paid within 21 days of the first day the child attends. Pro rata fees will be provided for families commencing after the 3rd week of each term.

11. Payment of fees

TRY/Sparkways will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Fees are invoiced to parents/carers directly and are due on the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice is accompanied by payment instructions. For children enrolled after the commencement of a term, a pro rata invoice will be issued and paid in full within 21 days of the child's commencement at the service. Receipts can be provided for all fee payments where requested.

Following up on overdue fees places a large administrative burden and cost on the kindergarten. Paying kindergarten fees on time helps to keep fees affordable, maintain the ongoing viability of the kindergarten and reduces costs. We would like to work with you to help you select the best option to pay your fees. If you are experiencing difficulty in paying fees please contact the Early Learning Administrator on 1300 677 275 to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The Privacy and Confidentiality Policy of the service will be complied with at all times in relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances.

At TRY/Sparkways we offer options for processing of your child's term fees. These include:

Option 1: Direct Debit Agreement:

An invoice will be sent to you for each term advising that term fees will be debited from your nominated account or credit card on the due date. Payment will be automatic via Our eDDR Payment Gateway is Payrix.

Option 2: Invoice payment:

An invoice will be sent to you for each Term for you to process payments using either credit card or bank deposit through the link provided on the invoice.

For both Direct Debit Agreements and Invoice Payment

Where you choose to make payment direct from a bank account, no payment processing fees apply.

Where you choose to make payment using a credit card a payment processing fee of 1.59% will apply. Note, additional charges may apply for international credit card transactions

12. Payment Difficulties

Families experiencing financial hardship or difficulty in paying their kindergarten fees by the due date are encouraged to contact the Early Learning Administrator on 1300 677 275 or paymentsel@sparkways.org.au soon as possible to discuss payment arrangements. We can help you to develop an instalment plan which could assist avoiding late payment fees. Payments that lapse without prior notice or communication will be subject to the overdue fees process below.

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13. Overdue Fees

An account is considered overdue when payment has not been made by the due date specified on the invoice. The following procedures are followed once an account is considered overdue:

- Within 7 days of the account becoming overdue, we will contact you by either telephone call, text or email, as a reminder that payment of their kindergarten.
- If there is no response or payment made within an additional 7 days, a Reminder Notice will be sent via email. This notice will indicate that payment is overdue and required within 7 days.
- If there is still no response or payment, a Final Notice will be sent via email advising that they have a further 7 days to make payment. If payment is not received within this timeframe overdue fees and/or referral to a Debt Collection Agency will be considered.
- If a child is found to not be attending the service, the Executive Operations Manager, Early Learning will write to the family by registered post to officially confirm that the child's enrolment has been forfeited and that the kindergarten will also be notified that the child is not entitled to attend.
- As a matter of courtesy, the Executive Operations Manager-Early Learning will also notify the local Council registration officer and the Department of Education and Training (DET) representative that the child's place has been cancelled.

14. Cancellation of Care and Refunds

TRY/Sparkways retains the right to cancel any kindergarten placements, without notice, if parents/carers fail to comply with the kindergarten's policies and procedures. In the event of sessions being cancelled, fees will not be refunded.

Should the parent/carer wish to cancel a place at the service, they must provide TRY/Sparkways Kindergarten Administrator, Early Learning with two weeks written notice via cs@sparkways.org.au

Pro-rata refunds may be issued in the event that a family withdraws the child from a kindergarten. Part weeks of attendance will be treated as full weeks.

Parents/carers are responsible for contacting Sparkways to discuss withdrawal of children from the kindergarten and request any refunds that may be payable. The reasons for the cancellation of the placement may be documented as part of TRY/Sparkways continuous improvement processes.

If a family becomes eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy during a term, a full refund of the applicable term fees will be provided. Evidence of eligibility must be provided before October 31st in the year the child attends kindergarten in order to be eligible for this subsidy to ensure the correct fees are charged. Sparkways is not able to backdate claims for Kindergarten Fee Subsidy following this date.

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In any other case, fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Approved Provider). There will be no refund of fees in the following circumstances:

- a child’s short-term illness
- public holidays
- family holiday during operational times
- closure of the service for one or more days when a qualified educator is absent and a qualified reliever is not available
- closure of the service for staff training days
- closure of the service due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances.

In addition, there will be no refund where a family chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

15. Confidentiality

TRY/Sparkways will treat as confidential, information it receives relating to the parents/carer’s financial situation and the payment/non-payment of fees.

16. Late Collection of Children

If a child is not collected at the end of a schedule kindergarten session the service will in the first instance contact the parents / carer, if not available they will contact the parent/carers authorised contact list.

If the child has not been collected within 60 minutes of the conclusion of the session, and staff are unable to contact the parent/carer or a person on the authorised pick up list, kindergarten staff will contact the regional branch of the Department of Health and advise them of the situation. If this occurs, the child will be collected by a Community Services Representative and the parent/carer will be required to liaise with the Department to arrange to pick up their child.

17. Late Fees

The procedure for late collection of children and late fees is detailed below:

1. Kindergarten staff will issue the family with a first verbal notification and provide a written copy of this late fee policy. Parents/carers will be asked to sign the late book or a late form to acknowledge the discussion has taken place.
2. Kindergarten staff will issue the family with a second verbal notification. Parents/carers will be asked to sign the late book or a late form to acknowledge the discussion has taken place.
3. Kindergarten Staff will notify the family of the applicable late fee which will be charged by TRY/Sparkways. TRY/Sparkways will issue the family an invoice for the late fee, payable within 14 days. Late fees are described below.

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Nominal late fees

Late fees are charged in 15-minute blocks, or part thereof after the conclusion of the session. Late fees are charged at \$20.00 per 15-minute block.

18. Early Start Kindergarten Funding

Kindergarten programs help children with their language, development and self-confidence. Research shows that an earlier start and more time at kindergarten prepares children for success at school and has a positive impact later in life. Aboriginal children and children known to Child Protection are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten grants.

Early Start Kindergarten provides free kindergarten to eligible three-year-old children where programs are offered by a qualified teacher. Some services will be able to offer your child a place in a program for four-year old's or a mixed age group. Funding is available to enable these children to attend kindergarten for up to 15 hours per week for two years before school, to improve access and overcome barriers to participation.

19. Early Start Kindergarten Eligibility

Your child is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten if they are aged three by 30 April in the year they will be attending a kindergarten program, and:

- your child is identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or
- your child has a current, or a history of, involvement with Child Protection, including those in out-of-home care, or has been referred by Child Protection, Child FIRST, Integrated Family Services or Services Connect.

Please contact the Early Learning Administrator on 1300 677 275 to discuss further if you believe your child is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten.

20. Children turning three during the year of enrolment

Children must turn three by the 30th April in the year of attendance to be eligible for funded 3-year-old kindergarten in that year. Please note that children, who have not yet turned three at the commencement of term 1, will not be able to attend until their third birthday. An orientation session where the child is accompanied by a responsible adult will be available prior to the child's third birthday. Parents are not required to pay full term fees to secure their child's place, a pro rata fee will be issued from the child's third birthday.

21. Support services

Families experiencing severe financial hardship often require access to family support services. Information on these services is available from the kindergarten service provider and a list can be supplied to those families who require it. Those families with children enrolled in 4-year-old kindergarten may also be able to apply for fee assistance.

Please discuss this with the Early Learning Administrator on 1300 677 275 or cs@sparkways.org.au

22. Notification of fee changes during the year

Fees set for the year would only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if attendance rates fall below the budget 'break even' point. Parents/carers will be notified one term in advance of any required fee increase and will be offered the option to request a payment plan.

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Early Learning Fee and Payment Procedure

Childcare Procedure

1. Introduction

Sparkways Early Learning (Sparkways) is committed to providing parents with affordable childcare places and quality services.

Our Early Learning services reflect the educational, cultural, and social values specific to each community in which we operate. We offer safe and secure environments in which children can develop individually by taking part in flexible, educational and recreational programs, suited to the needs of each child.

2. Child Care Subsidy

From 2 July 2018 the Australian Government introduced the Child Care Subsidy to assist families with the cost of child care. This subsidy is paid directly to the child care provider to reduce the fees you pay.

To be eligible for the Child Care Subsidy you need to meet certain criteria. You may be eligible if you or your partner:

- care for a child 13 or younger and not attending secondary school, unless an exemption applies
- use an approved child care service
- responsible for paying the child care fees
- meet residency and immunisation requirements

Additional Child Care Subsidy gives some families extra help with the cost of approved child care. You must first claim and be eligible for Child Care Subsidy to apply for this additional subsidy. You'll also need to meet extra criteria.

Eligibility basics

- meet the eligibility requirements for Child Care Subsidy, and
- be an eligible grandparent in receipt of an income support payment
- be transitioning from certain income support payments to work, or
- be experiencing temporary financial hardship

How to claim assistance with child care fees

You need to submit a claim for Child Care Subsidy. You can claim using your [Centrelink online account](#) through [myGov](#).

For instructions on how to claim the subsidy please visit <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/additional-child-care-subsidy>

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3. Payment of fees

Fee Statements will be issued to parents/carers fortnightly (generally via email) for payment.

- Payment of fees by parents is critical to the operations of the centre;
- Fee statements are issued fortnightly and must be paid by the due date;
- Fees are payable for ALL days booked including any absences due to illness, holidays or public holidays;
- Fees for the service are set for the calendar year commencing January.
- Families will be advised of the New Year's fee charges in the November prior to the year commencing.
- In the event of any exceptional circumstances the fees will be subject to review.
- All services will be closed for Staff Professional Development – Conference Day on Tuesday 29th March. Fees are not payable on for this closure.

To acknowledge acceptance of a child care position, parents are required to pay the first billing period in advance.

Sparkways method of payment for Child Care Fees is through Debit Success. Payments will be deducted from the Parent's / carer's nominated Bank Account or Credit Card (Mastercard or Visa) on the nominated day each fortnight.

- A Debit Success Calendar is available for your reference
- There is an additional Debit Success charge of 1.6% surcharge for Direct Debit payments from Credit Cards (there is no cost for payments debited from nominated bank accounts).
- If there are insufficient funds in your nominated bank account or your nominated Mastercard or Visa declines the direct debit, a 'failed direct debit fee' of \$14.90 will be debited against your nominated bank account or Credit Card 7 days thereafter
- Our Centre Director will contact you to rectify the failed payment to ensure the ongoing availability of your child care place

Parents/carers experiencing difficulty in paying fees are encouraged to contact the Centre Director to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The Privacy and Confidentiality Policy of the service will be complied with at all times in relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances.

4. Overdue Fees

Following up overdue or unpaid fees places a large administrative burden and cost on the Centre. Paying childcare fees on time helps maintain the ongoing viability of the centres and reduces costs. All fees not paid by the due date may incur a weekly Late Payment fee of \$22.00 (inc GST).

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An account is overdue when payment hasn't been made by the due date specified on the statement.

If an account is overdue, the parent will be notified and advised that:

- the account must be paid in full;
- Late Payment Fee of \$22.00 (inc GST) may be added to the account and will be added each week until the account is paid in full;
- failure to pay the account in full may result in their child's place being forfeited; and
- If not resolved within 14 days, the service may stop your child's care. The debt including any late payment charges may be handed over to the company's debt collection agency for processing.
- Please contact your Centre Director if you're experiencing difficulties paying your child care fees so a payment plan can be put in place. Payment plans will cover your existing weekly childcare fees and an additional amount to pay off the incurred debt. The additional payment will be worked out in consultation with the Centre Director.

5. Cancellation of Care & Refunds

Should the parent / carer wish to cancel a permanent place at the Centre, they must provide the Centre Director with at least 2 weeks written notice.

Sparkways retains the right to cancel care for any child / children without notice if parents / carers fail to comply with the Centre's policies and procedures.

Parents are responsible for contacting the Centre Director to discuss withdrawal of children from the centre. Should there be a credit balance after all fees owing are paid and the child has ceased care (and bond applied as applicable) parents will be refunded this credit via EFT.

6. Refunds

An EFT Reimbursement form will be issued for completion and will be submitted to Head Office for processing. Reimbursement processing cannot not take place till all CCS payments have been finalised and not pending.

7. Change of Care Days

For any changes to your child's permanent booked days 2 weeks' notice is required.

8. Late Collection of Children

If a parent fails to pick up a child, 15 minutes after the closure of the centre, staff will in the first instance contact the parents/carers. If no contact can be made then the Authorised Persons to collect as per the Enrolment Form will be contacted to collect the child.

If the child has not been collected within 60 minutes of the closure of the centre, and staff are unable to contact the parent or a person on the authorised pick up list, staff will contact the regional branch of the Department of Human Services (DHHS) and advise them of the situation. If this occurs, the child will be collected by a Community Services Representative and the parent will be required to liaise with DHHS to arrange to pick up their child.

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9. Late fees

The procedure for late collection of children and late fees is detailed below:

1. Staff will issue the family with a first verbal notification and provide a written copy of this late fee policy. Parents will be asked to sign the late book or a late form to acknowledge the discussion has taken place.
2. Staff will issue the family with a second verbal notification. Parents will be asked to sign the late book or a late form to acknowledge the discussion has taken place.
3. Staff will notify the family of the applicable late fee which will be charged by TRY. TRY will issue the family a Statement that will include the late fee, payable within 14 days. Late fees are described below.

Nominal late fees

Late fees are charged in 15-minute blocks, or part thereof after closure of the centre. Late fees are charged at \$20.00 per 15-minute block.

Support Services

Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to family support services. Information on these services is available from the Approved Provider and a list can be supplied to those families who require it.

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Related Legislation and Documents

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic), as amended 2011
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic), as amended 2017
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth), amended 2015
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- National Quality Standard, Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

Standard 7.3: Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.

- DET The Kindergarten Guide:
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderfundingcriteria.aspx>
- The Department of Human Services: <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/>

Related Policies

Complaints and Grievance Policy
 Delivery and Collection of Children Policy
 Enrolment and Orientation Policy
 Excursions and Special Events Policy
 Inclusion and Equity Policy
 Privacy and Confidentiality Policy

Definitions/Key Terms

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority etc. refer to the *General Definitions* section of this manual.

Approved care

Care given by a service provider that has been approved by the Family Assistance Office to receive Child Care Subsidy payments on behalf of eligible families. Most long day care, family day care, before-and-after school care, vacation care, some occasional care and some in-home care childcare services are approved providers. Details are available at <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy>

Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

A Commonwealth Government payment to help families who access an approved care service. Details are available at <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy>

Early Start Kindergarten

A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for a specific number of hours.

Enrolment application fee

A payment to cover administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's enrolment application for a place in a program at the service.

Fees

A charge for a place within a program at the service.

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Health Care Card

A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. Details are available at www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/conc_cards_hcc.htm

Pensioner Concession Card

A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for families receiving certain income support payments and meet age and work requirements. Details are available at <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/pensioner-concession-card>

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS)

A state government subsidy paid directly to the funded service to enable eligible families to attend a funded kindergarten program at no cost (or minimal cost) to promote participation. Details are available at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/comms/kinderfeesub.pdf>

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy

Provides operational guidelines for services administering the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and can be found in The *Kindergarten Guide* available at: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/pages/kinderfundingcriteria.aspx>

Late collection charge

A charge that may be imposed by TRY/Sparkways when parents/carer are late to collect their child/children from the program on repeated occasions.

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