



POLICY: PRIORITY OF ACCESS

INTRODUCTION

Mudgee Community Preschool must maintain compliance with the Priority of Access Guidelines defined by the NSW Department of Education Funding Agreements (Department Guidelines). Failure to meet Department Guidelines is a breach of the conditions of continued approval for receiving State Government funding.

Current research highlights the highest need for, and benefits of, a quality preschool education for children who are at risk of significant harm, children from disadvantaged backgrounds (low income and Aboriginal), children with English as a second language and children with a disability and/or additional needs (see references). Within the Guidelines these children are known as Equity children. As a community-based organisation, Mudgee Community Preschool is committed to working for the greater good of the Mudgee community and will provide priority to Equity children in the year before school to support this commitment.

This policy specifies the Mudgee Community Preschool Priority of Access Rules (Mudgee Community Preschool Rules) and the procedures for allocating places at Mudgee Community Preschool. The use of discretion, where it is permitted, is exceptional and not the norm.

Mudgee Community Preschool currently enjoys very high demand for its services and an annual review of the Mudgee Community Preschool Rules ensures the fair and equitable allocation of preschool places with respect to the changing demographics of the community and Mudgee Community Preschool. Any changes to this policy must be well considered and communicated to all stakeholders.

AIMS

- To ensure that Mudgee Community Preschool complies with the Department Guidelines.
- To provide guidelines for the Board of Management to review the allocation of places and order of priority groups.

- To support Mudgee Community Preschool's commitment, as a community-based organisation, to work for the greater good of the community by prioritising those children with greatest need when allocating places (Equity children).
- To promote a fair and easily understood allocation system that will enable parents to have a clear understanding of the order in which places are allocated.

BACKGROUND

In matters relating to enrolments, Mudgee Community Preschool is bound by: Department of Education funding guidelines

Research shows that children who participate in quality early childhood education in the year before school are more likely to start school equipped with the social, cognitive and emotional skills they need to engage in learning. An average of 600 hours per year or 15 hours per week is the minimum recommended level of participation.

This approach is consistent with the NSW Government's National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education with the Commonwealth Government. Funding is targeted to four and five year old children in the year before school, and children aged three and above from low income families, Aboriginal families, and children with disability and additional needs.

Only children enrolled for 600 hours receive the maximum rate of funding, with children enrolled for fewer hours attracting a pro-rata amount.

Mudgee Community Preschool aims to deliver 600 hours of education to the children enrolled.

In matters relating to priority of access, Mudgee Community Preschool is bound by:

Department of Education priority of access guidelines

The Department requires Mudgee Community Preschool to give priority of access to:

- Children who are at risk of significant harm (from a child protection perspective);
- Children who are at least 4 years old on or before the 31 July in that preschool year and not yet in compulsory schooling.
- Children who are at least 3 years old on or before 31 July and from a disadvantaged background (i.e. from a family holding a low income Health Care Card and/or is Aboriginal);
- Children with English as a second language (ESL);
- Children with disabilities;

MUDGEE COMMUNITY PRESCHOOL RULES

With regard to birth date, the Board of Management has determined that when the waiting list is extensive, children who have to go to school the following year ie those born before 31 December, will be prioritised over those children who are younger and who are eligible to attend Preschool the following year.

Mudgee Community Preschool will give priority of access to children in the following order:

1. Children at risk of significant harm
2. Re-enrolling children, or children returning after an agreed absence
3. Children who have declined an offer in the previous year (because of age of child and school readiness)
4. Equity Children who are 4 years old on or before 31 December in the year before their preschool year
5. All other children who are 4 years old on or before 31 December in the year before their preschool year
6. Equity Children who turn 4 between 1 January and 30 April in that preschool year
7. All other children who turn 4 between 1 January and 30 April in that preschool year

8. Equity Children who turn 4 between 1 May and 31 July in that preschool year
9. All other children who turn 4 between 1 May and 31 July April in that preschool year
10. Equity Children who are at least 3 years old on or before the 31 July in that preschool year
11. All other children who are at least 3 years old on or before the 31 July in that preschool year
12. In Addition places within each group will be allocated according to a child's date of registration on the waiting list.

Families will, when appropriate, be required to provide supporting documentation / evidence of their Equity status (e.g. low income health care card, reports from allied health therapists) prior to places being allocated..

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Parents will be provided with written information regarding the Mudgee Community Preschool Rules when registering their child on the waiting list. The waiting list application will provide options for parents to indicate their child's Equity status.
2. Parents of all eligible children currently on the waiting list for the following year will be contacted in **May** to confirm that contact details and Equity status are correct.
3. Prior to allocation of places, the Director will inform the Board of Management each year of:
 - a. The waiting list demographics including numbers of Equity children;
 - b. Community demographics (using for example, Australian Early Development Index; Mid-Western Regional Council statistics);
 - c. Enrolment trends over the previous 3 years;
 - d. Projected attendance numbers for the next 3 years;
 - e. Funding/income projections;

- f. Recommendations in regard to priority of access and enrolment patterns.
4. The Board of Management will confirm the Mudgee Community Preschool Rules and enrolment patterns for the following year.
5. Places will be allocated each year in accordance with the Mudgee Community Preschool Rules.
6. Registrations on the waiting list are accepted from birth and close on **31 July** for first-round offers for the following year. Children who were on the waiting list but not allocated a place in the first round will remain on the waiting list and be offered places in the second and subsequent rounds of offer in line with the Mudgee Community Preschool Rules as outlined above.
7. Children who registered on the waiting list after 31 July for enrolment in the following year will be offered places in the second and subsequent rounds of offer in line with the Mudgee Community Preschool Rules.
8. Mudgee Community Preschool understands that occasionally some situations will warrant special consideration. The Director will retain some discretion for individual cases.

EVALUATION

All enrolments will strictly adhere to the Priority of Access Policy to ensure equity, consistency and transparency for the community.

LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES

- Enrolment and Orientation
- Registration
- Confidentiality
- Child Protection
- Philosophy

STATUTORY LEGISLATION & CONSIDERATIONS

- Department of Education Funding Agreement
- The Council of Australian Governments' Early Childhood Education National Partnership

- Links to National Quality Standards/Elements: 6.1.1, 6.3.3, 7.3.2

REFERENCES

- NSW Department of Education Start Strong funding guidelines:
<https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-earlychildhood-education-service/grants-and-funded-programs/start-strong/start-strongguidelines>
- NSW Department of Education, *Lifting our Game Report* (Pasco S and Brennan D, December 2017) <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/whats-happening-in-the-early-childhood-education-sector/lifting-our-game-report/Lifting-Our-Game-Final-Report.pdf>
- Council of Australian Government, *Early Childhood*, accessed 2 June 2015, <https://www.coag.gov.au/early_childhood>
- Baxter, J and Hand, K 2013, *Access to Early Childhood Education in Australia*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, April 2013 <<https://aifs.gov.au/publications/access-early-childhoodeducation-australia>>
- Brennan, D 2012, *Review of NSW Government Funding for Early Childhood Education*, NSW Department of Education and Communities, 13 April 2012 <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/statistics-andresearch/public-reviews-and-enquiries/review-of-nsw-government-funding-for-earlychildhood-education/review_nsw_gov_funding_ece.pdf>

DEVELOPED: July 2014

AMENDED: 20 July 2015, 10 May 2016, July 2018; June 2022

POLICY REVIEWED	PREVIOUS MODIFICATIONS	NEXT REVIEW DATE
OCT 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No changes noted 	JUNE 2020
JUNE 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No changes noted 	JUNE 2023