



**WINTON SHIRE COUNCIL
LITTLE SWAGGIES CHILD CARE CENTRE**

FEES AND ATTENDANCE POLICY & PROCEDURE

FEES AND ATTENDANCE – POLICY & PROCEDURE

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FEES AND ATTENDANCE – POLICY & PROCEDURE

POLICY STATEMENT

Winton Shire Council (WSC) Little Swaggies Child Care Centre prides itself on providing quality care to all children and their families and providing a supportive working environment for educators. Our service relies on the prompt payment of fees and strives to assist families in claiming relevant government benefits through the Child Care Subsidy System (CCSS).

This policy and procedure document aims to ensure that families are aware of their responsibilities in relation to the payment of fees and attendance records and aware of Child Care Subsidy requirements.

SCOPE

Our service uses CCS approved software to manage the attendance and charging of fees in compliance with Family Assistance Law. We comply with the requirements outlined in the Child Care Provider Handbook and aim to provide families with information to support them with subsidies such as Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS). Families must also comply with these requirements to be eligible to receive subsidies.

Child Care Subsidy Key Points:

- Families are required to fulfil some basic requirements to be eligible to receive CCS including:
 - Child aged 13yrs and under
 - Meet immunisation requirements
 - Meet the residency requirements
 - Be liable to pay for care provided (see Managing Third Party Payments below)
 - Families must accurately record attendance times at the service.
 - There are three factors that will determine a family's level of CCS:
 - Combined Family Income
 - Activity Test – the activity level of both parents
 - Service Type – type of child care service
- CCS is generally paid directly to the service and passed onto families as a fee reduction, leaving families to pay the gap fee or out of pocket fee (difference between the fee charged and the subsidy amount)
- Families should contact Human Services/Centrelink in relation to queries about their entitlements.
- You will be charged for all days booked regardless of attendance including absences and Public Holidays. CCS will be paid where eligible; up to 42 absence days per financial year including for Public Holidays. Additional absences may receive Child Care Subsidy after the initial 42 days with approved documentation as per the Family Assistance Law requirements. In the event of a Pandemic which requires self-isolation of a child, as directed by Public Health or another government agency, families will still be responsible for fees payable unless otherwise advised. Each situation will be considered based on information on hand at the time and any change to this will be communicated to families.
- Families are required to enter into an agreement with the service for the planned arrangements for care. There are four types of arrangements:
 - Complying Written Arrangement
 - Relevant Arrangement
 - Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing)—provider eligible arrangement
 - Arrangement with an organisation (third party).
- The agreement through which families can receive Child Care Subsidy is a Complying Written Arrangement (CWA). A Complying Written Arrangement is an agreement to provide care in return for fees.

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- Complying Written Arrangements must have certain information (as set out in Table 5, page 41 of the Child Care Provider Handbook June 2019).
- An arrangement must be recorded, either on paper or electronically, and must be kept by the service. An arrangement can cover more than one child if multiple children in a family will attend the same child care service (each child must have their own enrolment).
- Once a service enters into a Complying Written Arrangement with an individual, they must submit an enrolment notice within seven days of the end of the week in which the arrangement started. An agreement should not be made more than 14wks before care commences as it will be deemed exited before care begins.

Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS)

“Additional Child Care Subsidy provides additional fee assistance to support vulnerable or disadvantaged families and children. This support recognises the preventative and protective influence of quality childcare on a child’s health, wellbeing and development and the importance of continuity of care. There are four different payments under Additional Child Care Subsidy:

- Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing)—to help children who are at risk of serious abuse or neglect.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (grandparent)—to help grandparents on income support who are the principal caregiver of their grandchildren.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (temporary financial hardship)—to help families experiencing financial hardship.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (transition to work)—to help low-income families transitioning from income support to work.”

Child wellbeing is submitted by the service, all other types are managed directly between families and Centrelink. Where a child is identified as being at risk of serious abuse or neglect the service must follow the guidance in the Child Care Provider Handbook and the Guide to Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing) including communication with government agencies. Under Child Wellbeing ACCS services must firstly submit a Certificate for a maximum of 6wks, if further assistance is identified and documentation is provided by a relevant agency a Determination may be submitted up to a maximum of 13wks.

“Where the ACCS (child wellbeing) eligibility requirements are met, the child’s family can generally access ACCS (child wellbeing) in respect of that child, providing:

- a higher rate of subsidy
- more hours of subsidised childcare.

The provider can also support families by:

- undertaking the application process for ACCS (child wellbeing) (giving a certificate or applying for a determination), which allows the family to focus on their circumstances
- making referrals and encouraging families to take advantage of other support services that can help them.
- When a provider gives a certificate or when the Department of Human Services makes a determination for ACCS (child wellbeing), and all other ACCS (child wellbeing) eligibility criteria are met, the Department of Human Services will make a determination of entitlement allowing ACCS (child wellbeing) to be paid in respect of the child. The ACCS (child wellbeing) payment is then made once the child’s attendance data has been received.”

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Prioritising Vacancies

“There are no requirements for filling vacancies. Providers can set their own rules for deciding who receives a place.

Providers are asked to (but are not legally obliged to) prioritise children who are:

- at risk of serious abuse or neglect
- a child of a sole parent who satisfies, or parents who both satisfy, the activity test through paid employment.

This meets the Australian Government’s aims of helping families who are most in need and supporting the safety and wellbeing of children at risk.”

Absences

“Child Care Subsidy is payable for up to 42 absence days for a child in a financial year for sessions of care a child is enrolled in and did not attend, but only for sessions of care where an individual still incurs a genuine fee liability to pay for the care. A reason does not need to be provided for a child’s initial 42 days of absence.

Once 42 absence days have occurred in a financial year, Child Care Subsidy can only be paid for any additional absences where they are taken for a reason set out in Family Assistance Law. These reasons are:

- the child, the individual who cares for the child, the individual’s partner or another person with whom the child lives is ill and the service has been given a medical certificate by a medical practitioner
- the child is attending preschool
- alternative arrangements have been made on a pupil-free day
- the child has not been immunised against an infectious disease, the absence occurs during an immunisation grace period and a medical practitioner has certified that exposure to the infectious disease would pose a health risk to the child
- the absence is because the child is spending time with a person other than the individual who is their usual carer as required by a court order or a parenting plan, and the service has a copy of the relevant court order or parenting plan for the child
- the service is closed as a direct result of a period of local emergency
- the child cannot attend because of a local emergency (for example, because they are unable to travel to the service), during the period of the emergency or up to 28 days afterwards
- the individual who cares for the child has decided the child should not attend the service for up to seven days immediately following the end of a period of local emergency.

Managing Longer Absences

If a long absence from care is anticipated, the plan for this, and how it will be managed, can be specified in the Complying Written Arrangement (including, for example, any changes to fees). However, where a child does not attend a service within a period of 14 weeks or more, the enrolment will be ceased. Even where an absence longer than 14 weeks is planned in the Complying Written Arrangement, a new enrolment notice will need to be submitted when care recommences after the absence. If a long absence is planned, the family may prefer to end the enrolment and submit a new notice when physical attendance recommences so that the child is not reported as absent (using up the child’s initial 42 days of absence).”

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Little Swaggies fee free absence policy

You will be charged for all days booked including Public Holidays. Where a doctor's certificate for illness or a holiday form has been completed you will not be charged for bookings. If these documents are not supplied to the service you will be charged for all days booked regardless of attendance. CCS will be paid where eligible up to 42 absence days per financial year. Additional absences may be subsidised after the first 42 days with approved documentation as per the Family Assistance Law requirements.

Public Holidays

"Most childcare services charge for public holidays even though the centre is closed. Families are entitled to receive Child Care Subsidy for up to 42 allowable absence days per child, per financial year. These absences can be taken for any reason without the need for families to provide documentation. This is to ensure continuity of fee relief for families where they are required to pay for childcare when their children are absent from care, due to circumstances such as illness, public holidays, parental leave and other absence reasons.

What if a child has used all of their 42 absence days?

Additional absence days beyond the initial 42 allowable absences are available for the following reasons, defined in the Family Assistance Law:

- the child, parent, the parent's partner or another person with whom the child lives is ill.
- the child is attending preschool.
- alternative arrangements have been made on a pupil-free day.
- the child has not been immunised against a particular infectious disease, the absence occurs during an immunisation grace period and a medical practitioner has certified that exposure to the infectious disease would pose a health risk to the child.
- the absence is because the child is spending time with a person other than the individual who is their usual carer as required by a court order or a parenting plan.
- the service is closed as a direct result of a period of local emergency.
- the child cannot attend because of a local emergency (e.g. because they are unable to travel to the service), during the period of the emergency or up to 28 days afterwards.
- the parent has decided that the child should not attend the service for up to seven days immediately following the end of a period of local emergency.

Evidence is required for additional absence days. However, evidence is not required for additional absences for COVID-19 related reasons until 31 December 2021.

Can absences be reported before a child has started at a service, or after a child's final day of actual attendance at a service?

From 13 July 2020, families can receive Child Care Subsidy for absences up to seven days before a child's first, and after a child's last physical attendance at a service, where they have been booked in for care, for any of the following reasons:

- any of the additional absence reasons
- the child, the individual who cares for the child, the individual's partner or another person with whom the child lives is ill (no medical certificate required if the child has not used 42 absence days)
- the service has changed ownership
- the usual service is closed and the child is attending a different service under the same provider
- a family tragedy (a major event including the death of an immediate family member) has occurred, or the enrolment ceased incorrectly"

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Statement of Entitlement

“Once every fortnight, providers must provide a Statement of Entitlement to parents eligible for Child Care Subsidy for children enrolled in their service. This statement must include details of the sessions of care provided and the resulting fee reduction amounts. The provider will need to use information about entitlements and payments for each child received in their payment advice (through their child care software or the PEP) to prepare these statements.”

Managing Third Party Payments and Child Care Subsidy:

- Contributions towards fees from state and territory governments - State and territory governments (and their agencies) can contribute to the payment of the gap fee, in part or in full. Payments from state or territory governments, or authorities of state or territory governments, that are made to providers to reduce the child care fee liabilities of disadvantaged and vulnerable families are not required to be deducted from the total fee reported to calculate the CCS.
- Contributions towards fees from other third parties - if a third party (other than state or territory government) pays all or part of the fee for a session of care, this amount must be applied to the fee upfront, with the parent only entitled to CCS in relation to any remaining portion of the fee they are genuinely required to pay. Therefore, where a third party pays any part of the fee for a session of care, the correct fee (i.e. the fee to report in respect of the session) is the remaining amount the parent is required to pay for the session of care after deducting the third party contribution.

<https://www.education.gov.au/third-party-payment-gap-fees>

PROCEDURE

Responsibilities of Leadership, Management, Nominated Supervisors and Responsible Persons:

- Positively and clearly communicate all aspects of the policy and take a zero-tolerance approach to compliance.
- Understand and comply with all aspects of this policy and related legislation and support team members to do the same.
- Lead a culture of reflection and regular review of policies, seeking feedback from educators, families, children and other community agencies and professionals as appropriate.
- Support families to access subsidies, including where required ACCS and manage documentation as required. Abide by the requirements in both the Child Care Provider Handbook and the Guide to ACCS (Child wellbeing).
- Comply with all aspects of the Family Assistance Law and refer to the Child Care Provider Handbook.
- Ensure families are advised of fees, available subsidies, applicable bonds, enrolment fees and preferred payment methods at the time of enquiry and enrolment. Keep Family handbooks up to date.
- Ensure families enter into one of the 4 enrolment arrangements. Assist families to complete a Complying Written Arrangement (CWA) using the Enrolment Booking Form where CCS is being claimed.
- Provide 14 days' notice of a change in fees or the way fees are charged.
- Display fees and session hours for approved and funded Kindergarten programs and how subsidies are applied to fees where applicable, for example SEIFA or Kindy Plus.
- Work with families to manage the payment of accounts, set payment plans where required and, in the absence of compliance with the policy of remaining one week in advance, suspend or cancel care.

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- Ensure session hours are accurately recorded and reported.
- Use the End of Care Checklist when a child exits the service.
- Reminders for leadership, educators and families around accurately recording children's attendance.
- Ensure other persons using CCS software or with responsibilities for monitoring attendance are aware of their responsibilities.
- Ensure manual paper back up sign in and out sheets are available in the event of a failure of electronic sign in functions.
- Ensure all information is entered into CCS approved software accurately and promptly.
- Ensure third party payments are managed as per legislative requirements and use the Third-Party Agreement Payment of Fees Form.

Responsibilities of Educators and Other Team Members:

- Be proactive in fulfilling the requirements of this service policy and related legislative requirements.
- Seek further guidance where required to fulfil your requirements.
- Report any concerns or non-compliance immediately to the Nominated Supervisor or Approved Provider.
- Participate in the review of documents and provide constructive feedback to the Nominated Supervisor or WSC Management.
- Ensure accurate records of attendance for children in your group.
- Mark or confirm attendance/absences using the CCS approved software/documentation
- Advise the Nominated Supervisor of any of the following:
 - Child was absent on expected first or last day of attendance
 - Child has been absent for more than 1wk without notice

Responsibilities of Families:

- Fulfil responsibilities under this policy and related legislative requirements.
- Understand that the service must take steps as required under legislative requirements and follow advise from recognised authorities.
- Participate in the review of documents and provide constructive feedback to the Nominated Supervisor or WSC Management.
- Discuss any questions with the Nominated Supervisor or Responsible Person in charge.
- Understand and ensure that fees must be paid at least a week in advance at all times.
- Pay via our preferred method of auto debit through our CCS approved software package.
- Where CCS subsidies have been connected to the service, pay the full fee until subsidies are approved and communicated electronically to the service through the CCS approved software.
- Acknowledge that fees are payable less any subsidies communicated to the service through the CCS approved software. Where a subsidy has changed, families are still responsible for the full fee less any benefits communicated to the service regarding Child Care Subsidy payments. In some circumstances this may be the full fee.
- Request changes to bookings in writing.
- Provide 2 weeks' notice to cancel or reduce booked days.
- Understand that an increase in days is subject to availability.
- Confirm your child's bookings through your MyGov account.
- Notify the service of any changes to Child Care Subsidy hours or %.
- Always sign your child in and out of the service and acknowledge absent days.
- Pay for all days booked, including absences for illness, holidays and public holidays.
- Attend on both the first and last day of care to be eligible for Child Care Subsidy.
- Advise the service of any expected absences.

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- Inform us if you are using another service.
- Monitor your statement for balance owing and absences used year to date.
- Provide a medical certificate or other documentation to meet the Additional Absence criteria for days absent after the initial 42 days or for up to 7 days after the last physical day of attendance when ending bookings.
- Agree to change or reduce days where a child listed under the priority of access requires care. Please be flexible if your reason for care is not for work/study purposes.
- Ensure records provided are accurate and fully completed.
- Accurately record each child's attendance for every day of care including in and out times and names of each person who delivered and collected the child.

COMMUNICATION

- Educators and Families will have access to this policy at all times.
- Information will be included in induction for new educator and be included in service handbooks
- Educators and families will be provided with opportunities to be involved in the review of this policy.
- Educators and families will be provided with information from this policy at the time of employment and orientation.
- Changes to this policy and procedure document will be shared with families and educators.

ENFORCEMENT

The Failure of any person to comply with this policy in its entirety may lead to:

- Termination or modification of child enrolment
- Restriction of access to the service
- Performance management of an employee which may lead to termination

RELATED POLICIES AND FORMS

- Service handbooks
- Enrolment Booking Form
- Enrolment and Agreement Form
- End of Care Checklist
- Third Party Agreement Payment of Fees Form
- Enrolment and Orientation Policy and Procedure
- Arrival and Departure Policy and Procedure

LEGISLATION, RECOGNISED AUTHORITIES AND SOURCES

- Child Care Provider Handbook, Department of Education, Skills and Employment (accessed online Feb 2021) <https://www.dese.gov.au/child-care-package/ccp-resources-providers/child-care-provider-handbook>
- "Guide to Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing)" Version 4 November 2019, Australian Department of Education
- "Guide to the National Quality Framework" Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority September 2020
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (version February 2021)
- Education and Care Services National Regulations (version Oct 2020)
 - 168 Education and care service must have policies and procedures
 - 170 Policies and procedures to be followed
 - 171 Policies and procedures to be kept available
 - 172 Notification of change in policies or procedures affecting ability of family to utilise service
- National Quality Standards

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- 7.1.2 Management systems

CEO DISCRETION

Where applicable, the CEO can apply his discretion as to the enforcement of the procedures outlined in this policy.

REVIEW OF POLICY

This policy remains in force until amended or repealed by resolution of Council. Council will determine review dates as required.

RECORD OF AMENDMENTS and ADOPTIONS			
DATE	REVISION NO	REASON FOR AMENDMENT	ADOPTED BY COUNCIL
September 2021	1	Preparation for Council Adoption	Adopted