



Bush Kinder Handbook

4YO - 2025



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Timetable

Kangaroo Group	Thursday	9.30am - 12.30pm
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Please refer to the transition timetable for the beginning of Bush Kinder

Bush Kinder at Helen Paul Kindergarten

Bush Kinder has been an integral part of Helen Paul's program for its four year old groups since 2015. In addition to sessions on site, the four year old groups have a weekly excursion to nearby Dendy Park, where they spend 3 hours exploring a designated area - with natural play-scapes, wide open spaces and areas of potential interest - in self-directed, adult-supported learning.

In 2025, we will also include a Beach Kinder aspect to our program. More information will be sent to families about this closer to the end of term 1.

Why does HPK have a Bush Kinder program?

We provide a curriculum that will support children throughout their entire life, one that reflects our passion regarding the benefits of being outdoors and engaging with nature. Through intimate knowledge of and connection with the environment, children learn to respect and look after it. Among other benefits, active learning outdoors develops resilience, problem-solving and social skills and supports physical and emotional wellbeing.

What do the children learn?

Children have the opportunity to use natural materials such as stones, grasses, bark and leaves in imaginative play. Making cubbies and shelters, gathering pretend 'food', rolling down slopes, creating transient art, climbing trees, and watching bugs and birds in their natural habitats are all encouraged. There is potential for learning simple bushcraft, and we aim to deepen our understanding of our First Nations people, sharing Boonwurrung knowledge with the children.

Additionally, numerous studies have found that opportunities for regular sustained nature play support children in the following ways:

- *"Increased confidence, motivation, concentration, increased social, physical and language skills... increased social and imaginative play... and positive dispositions towards risk and challenge."* (Sue Elliot, Australian Catholic University 2012)
- *Problem-solving skills are enhanced in the outdoors, "...no other aspect of a child's life offers this degree of consistent but varied chances for critical thinking and problem-solving."* (Kahn and Kellert 2002)

What should my child wear?

Helen Paul Kindergarten’s Bush Kinder program operates in all weather conditions, allowing children to experience nature and its elements across the seasons. Whatever the weather, children are encouraged to take the lead in playing, exploring and learning in a bush or natural environment. For this reason, there are some particular clothing requirements in the Bush Kinder setting that may differ from requirements at kindergarten. As a general rule, please dress your child in comfortable clothing that allows them to easily run, climb and explore.

The following table provides examples of recommended clothing for Bush Kinder sessions:

	Warm Weather	Cold Weather / Rain
Recommended clothing and footwear	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Light, loose fitting long sleeve tops• Long pants• Hat (provided by HPK)• Closed toe sturdy shoes (no thongs or ‘Crocs’, please)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waterproofs (provided by HPK)• Long pants• Long sleeved top• Beanie• Waterproof gloves• Thermals in very cold weather• Closed toe sturdy shoes (no thongs or ‘Crocs’, please)

Sunscreen

Please apply SPF 50 (or higher) broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen to your child before they attend Bush Kinder sessions.

What does my child need to bring?

Cloth bag (named): This is required at the first Bush Kinder session, and will be kept by HPK until the end of the kinder year. It is used to store your child's red Bush Kinder hat (supplied by Helen Paul Kindergarten)

Change of clothes (named): All children participating in Bush Kinder are required to pack a change of clothes (named) as your child may become wet and muddy. Please pack the spare clothing in a wet/dry bag or a plastic bag. It is recommended that the spare clothing include:

- Spare top and bottoms of appropriate thickness/weight for the weather on the day
- Spare underpants (and singlet in winter)
- 2 pairs of socks

Water bottle: filled with water

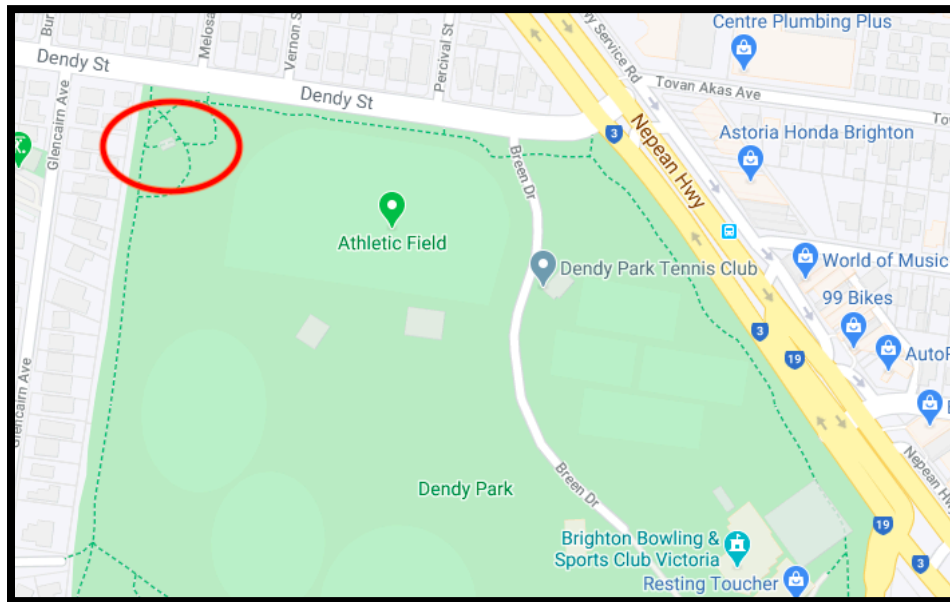
Lunch box: with a healthy snack and lunch. 'Nude food' (no packaging) is encouraged, and items must be NUT FREE

Backpack: At times the children will go for walks in the park while carrying their backpacks. Please ensure your child's backpack is comfortable and easy to pack.



Where do we meet?

Please meet at the sand playground at Dendy Park at 9.30am. There is ample street parking on Dendy Street. This is a great spot to meet as it is an enclosed space with a playground, tables and easy access to toilets.



We will be set up at the undercover picnic tables by the playground.

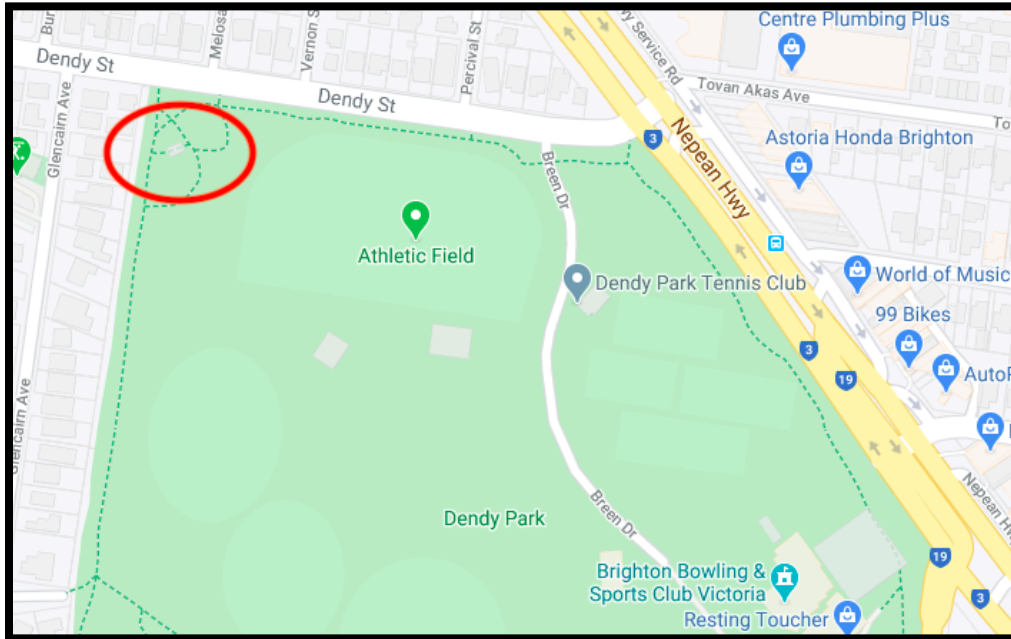
On arrival, please:

- assist your child to find their hat
- put a yellow wristband on your child (provided by HPK and pictured below) which has contact details in case of emergency
- at 9.30am, the teaching team will sign in your child using our iPad
- from 9.30 onwards, please ensure your child is in the sandpit for supervision reasons
- advise the teaching team when you are leaving



Where do I collect my child?

The collection point for children is the same as the drop off/delivery point at the fenced playground on Dendy Street (circled).



When collecting your child, please;

- ensure the teaching team are aware that you have collected your child so they can sign them out electronically
- be mindful of not distracting/speaking with the teaching team until all of the children have been collected
- be mindful that you are responsible for the supervision of your child once signed out, while still at the Bush Kinder site.

What is the structure of a typical Bush Kinder session?

Once all of the children have arrived, we will walk as a group to our Bush Kindergarten location approximately 100 metres from the playground. Here we will set up our base and prepare to explore. Together with the children, we create a boundary for our play using red ribbons. We also talk through the rules at Bush Kinder focussing on how we can stay safe and look after each other. The weather, the children's interests and what's happening at the site all influence what we do for the day. We might stay in our boundary area and engage in sustained play, observe the weather, birds, environment, climb trees and so on. Other days we walk around to explore other areas of Dendy Park.

At 12.20pm we will return to the sand playground and finish with a brief group time. Children can be collected from here and signed out at 12.30pm.



Session Support

At HPK, we are very grateful to families for their support of our longstanding Session Support program. This program allows parents and carers to spend time with their child at kindergarten, which is a very special experience for the children. It is particularly important at our Bush Kinder sessions, and our teaching team require the assistance of **at least one, but preferably two volunteers per session**. Volunteers provide support to the teaching team throughout the session and, in the unlikely event of an emergency, their assistance would be vital.

Thank you in advance for supporting our Bush Kinder program by volunteering for Session Support. We very much appreciate it!

As we are a SunSmart kindergarten, carers helping at kindergarten MUST wear a hat.

What is required of volunteers at Session Support?

Volunteers will be provided with an information sheet about the rules and guidelines at Bush Kinder. We do ask you to help with supervision, support children to wash their hands, open lunch boxes and help children to notice the bird sounds, the insects, the plants and what's around them.

How many sessions can families volunteer for?

Families are asked to volunteer for Session Support two or three times per term, either at the kindergarten or at Bush Kinder sessions. If work commitments make attending a session difficult it is possible for another special person in your child's life, such as a grandparent or regular carer, to volunteer for you. Of course, if there are vacant sessions on the roster any families who would like more sessions are welcome to take the opportunity.

How do I book in for Session Support?

Your child's teacher will let you know where the roster is located, and how you can add your name to it.

Do I need a Working With Children Check (WWCC)?

We request all duty volunteers provide HPK with a copy of their Working with Children Check as it supports us in maintaining a Child Safe kindergarten environment.

Please visit the [Service Victoria website](#) to apply for a Working with Children Check. For your work with HPK, you are considered a volunteer and, as such, there is no application fee payable. Once you have received your Working With Children Check, please provide the details to our Operations Coordinator at info@hpk.org.au.

What if I can't attend my rostered session?

If you are unable to attend your rostered session please contact your group's liaison officer or teacher as soon as possible so that a replacement can be found. If you need to cancel your Session Support on the day, please phone the kinder on **(03) 9598 6416** to advise that you are unable to attend.

Visitors Sign in

All volunteers must record their name together with the names of any siblings attending duty.

Can I bring siblings?

We find that, typically, children benefit most from having their parent/carer on duty if they can attend without the child's siblings. We do understand, however, that this is often not possible and siblings are welcome to attend provided that parents/carers supervise them closely at all times. Siblings remain the responsibility of parents/carers, and not of the HPK teaching team.

What happens in extreme weather conditions?

Helen Paul Kindergarten is committed to providing a Bush Kinder experience in a variety of (safe) weather conditions, including rain, to allow children to experience nature across as broad a spectrum as possible and without compromising the safety of the participants.

Bush Kinder will be cancelled only in times of extreme weather (as detailed below), or due to staff assessment of suitability on the day:

Weather Condition	Extreme weather determinant causing cancellation
Forecast temperature	36 degrees Celsius or greater
Forecast wind speed	Over 45 kilometres per hour
Forecast of electrical storm activity	Thunderstorm/electrical storm forecast
Flooding at or near the Bush Kinder site	On flooding advice from the Council
Weather warnings of extreme storm conditions and excessive rainfall	On warning issued by Bureau of Meteorology
Forecast air quality	Air quality category of Poor, Very Poor or Hazardous as determined by EPA AirWatch

In addition to the above, Helen Paul Kindergarten has the discretion to cancel a session/s if it views the weather to be unsuitable for Bush Kinder purposes, even if the extreme weather determinants in the above table are not reached.

Further, the Council has the authority to override the Helen Paul Kindergarten determination on safety and request cancellation of a session should the Council feel the Bush Kinder site is unsafe.

If Bush Kinder is cancelled, you will receive a notification via SMS no later than 8am on the day of the scheduled session.

How do I contact the teaching team during a Bush Kinder session?

If you need to contact the Bush Kinder teaching team during a session, please phone them on 0408 283 036.

Please save this number to your mobile phone.

Policies

At Helen Paul Kindergarten, our practice adheres to the requirements of the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010, Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 and the National Quality Standard. Our kindergarten is supported by comprehensive policies and procedures, including the following policies that are specific to the Bush Kinder program. All current policies are available for viewing in the foyer at kinder, and on [our website](#).

- [Protective Clothing 2020](#)
- [Delivery and Collection of Children 2020](#)
- [Identification & Visibility 2020](#)
- [Dog Awareness 2020](#)
- [Snake Awareness 2020](#)
- [Extreme Weather Policy 2020](#)
- [Emergency Evacuation Policy 2020](#)

From time to time we review our policies and we welcome feedback from parents during this process. If you would like to comment on a policy currently under review, please check the 'Policies Under Review' folder in the kinder foyer for details of proposed new or amended policies. After a period of review and feedback, the Committee will decide to adopt a draft policy and then implement the policy including giving 14 days notice to families before making any change to a policy or procedure that would affect fees, have a significant impact on any child or affect a family's ability to use the service.

Bush Kinder Attendance

We understand that not all children will be able to attend Bush Kinder sessions for a number of reasons. Attending the program is not compulsory, and the odd absence due to illness or family holiday is expected. However **it is mandatory that in order to participate in Bush Kinder your child must attend the program from the start of their enrolment in 4 year old kindergarten.**

A variety of skills are taught and developed throughout the year and they are built upon from term to term. If your child does not attend Bush Kinder consistently from the beginning of the program, they will miss out on key opportunities to develop the necessary skill set to participate fully and safely.

The safety of everyone participating at Bush Kinder is of the utmost priority for our teaching staff. Therefore, if your family chooses to opt-out of the Bush Kinder program it is understood that they will be unable to opt back in later in the year.