



Doncaster East
Pre-School



Bush Kinder

Parent Handbook

2027



Come and play, explore and grow outdoors!



• Welcome to Bush Kinder!

Bush Kinder is kinder out in nature! Research shows that playing outdoors in the bush is wonderful for children's health, happiness and learning, and lots of Victorian kinders already run a bush program with great success.

The idea began in Scandinavia in the 1950s as "forest schools". In Australia we use the same approach so children can play in, and learn from, the natural world around them.

What makes Bush Kinder special?

• Time outdoors

Long, regular play in nature, all year round.

• All weathers

Children feel the weather and seasons change.

• Nature is the toy

No toys or tools. Children play with what nature gives us and leave only footprints.

What will we get up to?

Splashing in the rain, balancing along fallen logs, pretending and make-believe, hunting for bugs and drawing in the dirt with sticks. We'll share stories, swap knowledge and sing songs.

Our teachers will notice each child's progress, skills and interests, and use them to support learning, just like at our regular kinder. They'll also help children take safe risks and face challenges, which is an important part of learning.

Through play, children will connect with, and care for, this special place in a way that can't be done under a roof or inside four walls.

Bush Kinder at a glance

WHEN Mondays

Every second week, 1pm to 5pm, May to November

WHERE Zerbes Reserve Doncaster East

KINDER MOBILE 0490 059 225

Call or text on session days

OUR TEAM 1:7

One adult for every seven children

• Getting started

Permission form

Before your child's first session, please fill in and hand back the **Bush Kinder Permission Form** (regular outing).

Stay in touch

- Please keep your mobile phone **switched on and with you** for the whole Bush Kinder session, so we can reach you and you get any updates.
- Save our kinder mobile in your phone: **0490 059 225**. This is your direct line to our staff, and teachers carry it during Bush Kinder.

• A day at Bush Kinder

1

Before each session, teachers check the site for hazards and fun things to explore.

2

Everyone meets at the **meeting point**. Teachers wait there for 10 minutes, then we head into the bush together.

3

Children are **signed in** on arrival and pop on a hi-vis vest (we provide them).

4

The day runs like kinder: **snack time, group time and exploring time.**

Our team

Our regular teachers and educators, plus one extra educator, run Bush Kinder. We keep the adult-to-child ratio at **1:7**.

- Parent helpers

We love having parent helpers! Every family is given a Bush Kinder session, so please check the roster and make plans to come along.

On your day, please wear:

- A Bush Kinder **hi-vis vest** (we provide it)
- **Long sleeves and long pants**
- **Closed-toe shoes**
- A **sunhat**

We'll send more details about being a helper closer to your session.

- Attendance

Please use your own judgement about whether Bush Kinder is right for your child on the day.

Please **keep your child home** if they are:

- Unwell
- Very tired

- A worry to you because of the weather forecast

This goes for our at-centre sessions too.

Can't make it? Please email us the day before, or call or text the kinder mobile on the day.

Always welcome

Extra parents and guardians are very welcome to stay and join in the session.

Please leave at home

Siblings, sorry! Because of the way the program runs, they can't come. Dogs also need to stay home.

• Session dates and times

Bush Kinder runs **every second Monday, 1pm to 5pm, from May to November 2027**. Mark these dates in your calendar:

10 May	24 May	7 June	21 June
26 July	9 August	23 August	6 September
11 September	25 October	8 November	

• When we cancel

Sometimes Bush Kinder is cancelled ahead of time, at short notice, or during a session. This can be because of extreme weather, staff illness or any other reason the teachers decide on. We cancel when there is:

30°C + Forecast temperature of 30°C or above	40 km/h + Forecast wind speed over 40 km per hour	Storms Forecast of electrical storm activity	BOM Warnings for extreme storms or heavy rain
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Cancelled ahead of time? We'll send a group SMS by **11:00am** that morning, and a normal kinder session will run at the preschool instead.

Not set up when you arrive? That means Bush Kinder has been cancelled.

Evacuated or moved? Our SMS will tell you why, and where to pick up your child.

• What to wear

Please check the weather forecast and dress your child for the day. Remember, **there's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing choices!** Children can have fun in all weather, even rain, and they learn to be resilient and adaptable.

Great Bush Kinder clothes...

- Let children move freely: climbing, balancing and running
- Keep them warm in winter and cool in summer
- Protect them from the sun, bites, scratches and stings
- Include a light rainproof jacket for wet days
- Include **closed-in, flexible shoes** that are safe for climbing and running. Gumboots are great for muddy puddles, but not for climbing or running.

	Warm or hot days	Cold or wet days
Great choices	Light, loose long-sleeved top and long pants. Closed-toe shoes. A T-shirt is OK if sunscreen is on the arms.	Waterproof jacket or raincoat, long pants, long-sleeved top and jumper, beanie, waterproof gloves, closed-toe shoes or gumboots. Thermals on very cold days.
Better to avoid	Short-sleeved tops, long skirts or dresses, and shorts.	Skirts and dresses.
No-go	Open-toe shoes, sandals, crocs and singlet tops.	Outer clothing that isn't waterproof.

Children can't join in if they arrive in "no-go" clothing and have nothing suitable to change into.

Pack a full change of clothes in your child's backpack

- Spare top and bottoms (including undies)
- 2 pairs of socks
- 1 pair of gumboots. Please don't wear them all session: they make it harder to move, and children in gumboots can't climb trees.
- A lightweight waterproof jacket
- An extra plastic or wet bag for wet clothes

Please label all clothing and shoes with your child's name.

• What to bring

Please bring

- A **water bottle** with water only
- A **snack** in a sealed, labelled container

Please try to avoid packaging. Any empty packaging will go home with you. Please also keep food allergies in mind when choosing snacks.

We provide

- Kinder hats
- Hi-vis vests
- Sunscreen
- Mosquito repellent

On high UV days, please put sunscreen on your child before the session starts.

• Where we go

Our Bush Kinder spot is **Zerbes Reserve, Doncaster East**. It's just off Blackburn Road and Saxonwood Drive, about a 5 minute drive from the preschool, and easy to reach by public transport.

Why we chose Zerbes Reserve

- Close to the preschool (5 minutes by car)
- Big enough for children to explore and get to know through the seasons
- Toilets and shelter nearby
- Lots of plants, animals and natural habitats to discover
- Natural boundaries that children, staff and volunteers can easily see
- The nearby Doncaster East Girl Guides / Just Dancing Hall is handy in extreme weather
- Plenty of parking

• Drop off and pick up

Drop off and pick up is at the **car park beside the Doncaster East Girl Guides Hall / Just Dancing Hall** in Zerbes Reserve. Follow the circuit road to the Hall (see the map in Attachment 1). There's plenty of parking. Our **meeting point** is in front of the Hall.

At drop off

- Take your child to the meeting point, tell a teacher you're here and **sign them in**
- Running late? Bring your child into the bush kinder site and make sure a teacher knows you're there, then sign them in
- Put on their **hi-vis vest**, and a **sunhat** on days when UV is above 3
- Put their bag on their back or on the picnic rug

At pick up

- Collect your child's things: bag, water bottle, food containers and rubbish
- Tell a teacher you have your child and **sign them out**
- Please wait to chat with staff until all the children have been collected
- Once your child is signed out, you're in charge of looking after them, even if you're still at the site

• Toilets

There are public toilets right next to the Bush Kinder site in Zerbes Reserve, and children can also use the toilets inside the Guide Hall. Staff always supervise children when they use the toilets.

• Medical conditions and medication

If your child has an allergy or other medical condition, please **talk to staff about their emergency plan before the first session**.

Staff bring each child's medication and action plan to every session. Teachers also carry a full medical and first aid pack with emergency medication and equipment, including an **EpiPen** and a **Ventolin puffer**.

• Keeping everyone safe

Doncaster East Preschool knows that a Bush Kinder program has some possible safety hazards. They're very unlikely to happen, but it's our job to have the right policies and procedures ready, just in case.

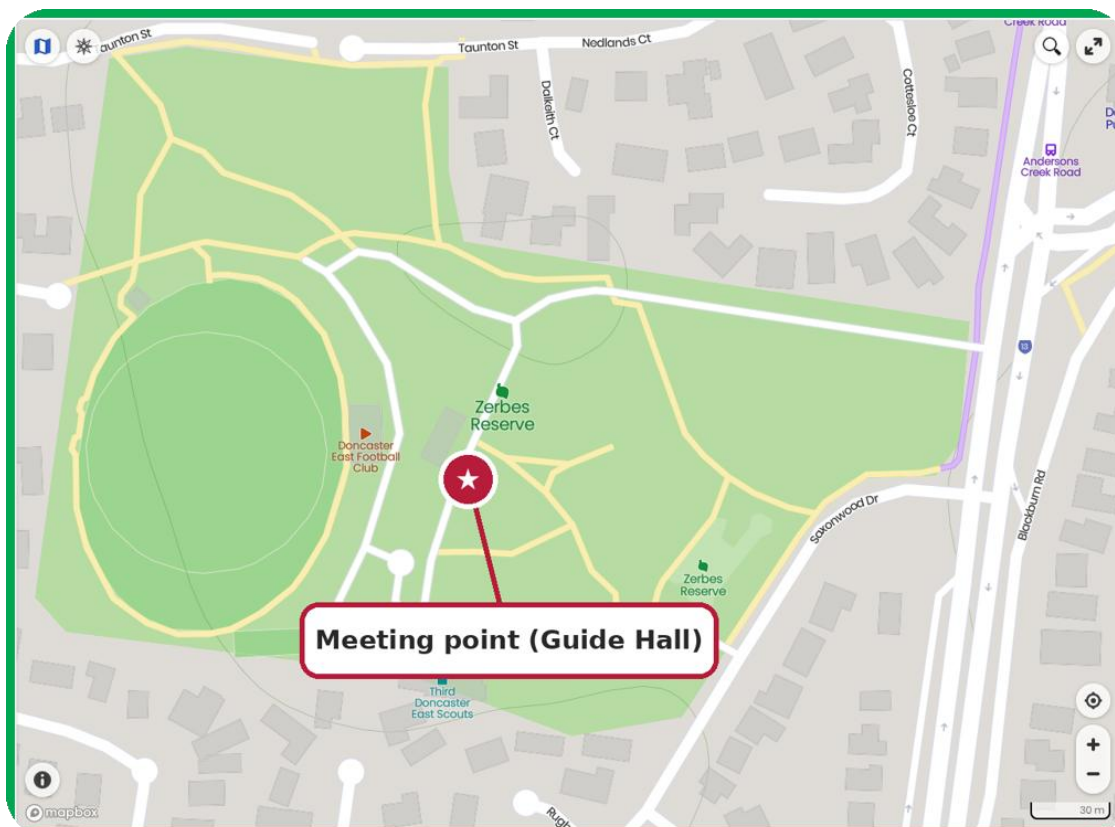
You can see our full risk-and-benefit evaluation at the preschool. Just ask a teacher and we'll happily give you a copy.

We'd love your feedback! We keep looking at how Bush Kinder is going, and we'd like every family to be part of that. Talk to the teachers any time, or email the Committee of Management:

doncaster.east.kin@kindergarten.vic.gov.au

• Attachment 1: Where to find us

Zerbes Reserve – drop off and pick up at the Guide Hall.



What the meeting point looks like



• Attachment 2: Emergency meeting places

If we need to move, the group will take the **shortest safe route** to the right assembly point.

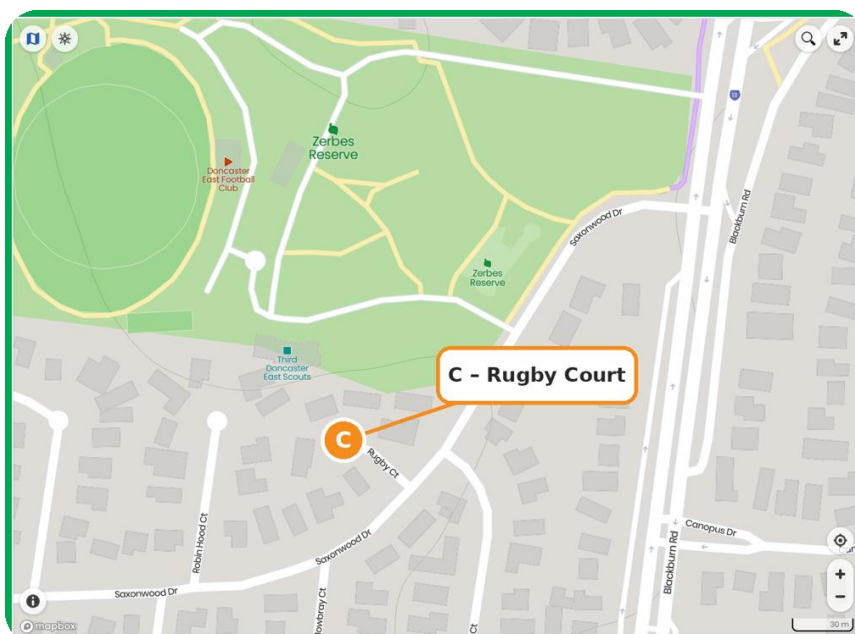


A. Torrential rain, hail, electrical storm or extreme winds

Go to **Assembly Point A (Guide Hall)** and wait until it's safe to carry on. We recommend waiting 30 minutes after the last electrical storm activity. If the weather isn't easing, we can shelter inside the Guide Hall.

B. Other emergencies, when we don't need to leave the reserve

Go to **Assembly Point B (middle of the football oval)**.



C. Other emergencies, when we need to leave the reserve

Go to **Assembly Point C in Rugby Court**. Exit the driveway into Zerbies Reserve, turn right and walk along Saxonwood Drive, then turn right into Rugby Court.

