



Living near a preschool will not earn priority for a place

Description

Living near a preschool will not earn a child priority for a place there. The [Ministry of Social and Family Development](#) (MSF) said on 8 October that proximity-based priority “may not serve all families well”, because families have different needs, preferences and caregiving arrangements.



Children and a teacher in a PCF Sparkletots preschool classroom. Photo: PCF Sparkletots

MSF was answering a written parliamentary question from Mr Cai Yinzhou, MP for Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC. He had asked for the average distance between a child's home and preschool, whether the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) had linked that distance to attendance, including by housing type, and whether proximity would be given priority in allocating places.

Why distance will not be a rule

MSF said there are enough preschool places today to meet demand nationally and within each Planning Area, and that more than 9 in 10 children aged three to six are enrolled in a preschool. Several preschools are within reach of families in every housing estate, the ministry said.

The ministry's reason for not making distance a rule is how families arrange care. Some pick a centre near home, MSF said, while others pick one near relatives or near a parent's workplace. A

priority rule built on home address would cut against the second and third groups.

How centres decide today

Preschool operators generally manage their own enrolment on a first-come, first-served basis. MSF said operators can also weigh other factors, such as whether the child already has a sibling at the centre and how far the child lives from it.

That means distance can still count, but only if a particular centre chooses to use it. There is no national rule, so two centres in the same estate can rank the same child differently.

ECDA will continue to monitor enrolment trends so that families can get affordable, good-quality preschool, the ministry said.

More government-supported centres are coming

MSF's answer comes as ECDA works through the preschool changes announced at this year's National Day Rally. Under those changes, set out in an ECDA factsheet on 28 August, preschool fees will be significantly lowered over the next few years and the network of government-supported preschools will grow, so more families can find an affordable centre closer to home.

ECDA plans a new grant to help eligible operators, including smaller ones, join the government-supported network. Details are still being worked out with the sector and are due later in 2026.

The sector also needs more infant care staff. ECDA expects demand for infant care places to rise as fees fall, and estimates that the sector needs 1,800 more infant care educators by 2030. From September 2026, its Manpower Hiring Grant covers up to 70 per cent of training stipends and up to 50 per cent of course fees for eligible trainees, and the grant has been extended by three years, to 31 December 2030.

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