

A yellow sandcastle with a blue star on its side and a blue shovel leaning against it, set against a yellow cloud-like background.

# sandcastles

nursery, long day care centre and preschool



## **Parent Handbook**

### **Part 1 - Centre overview**

(Last updated November 2011)



Contact details and hours for each centre are located on back cover

# Welcome to Sandcastles . . .

Sandcastles is a special place where children, staff and families come together.

A place where children will learn and grow in a comfortable, happy, familiar and positive environment.

A place that your child will enjoy coming to and where their confidence will grow as they develop friendships with other children, staff and families.

We will work to develop warm trusting relationships where we support each other and work in partnership to achieve the best possible childcare experience for your child.

We are committed to the provision of the highest quality childcare services and we constantly update, review and reflect upon our policies, procedures and practices to ensure they always meet the needs of our families.

Each day at Sandcastles we focus on ensuring that we achieve successful outcomes for your child, your family and our staff.

This handbook is a resource for families to refer to throughout the time your child is in care at Sandcastles. It outlines how your centre operates and provides helpful information as your child moves through the various rooms at the centre.



# Sandcastles Philosophy

Each day at Sandcastles we focus on ensuring that we achieve successful outcomes for all children, families and our staff.

Our philosophy is simple, "that every child in our care has the best possible experience each and every day".

At Sandcastles we aim to:

- Provide opportunities for children to learn, through social interactions, to develop and build strong, meaningful relationships with carers and their peers.
- Respect the choices and decisions made by each child, and value the differences each individual brings to our community.
- Foster trusting and caring relationships between staff and families, and support parents as they balance work and family life.
- Provide qualified, experienced and motivated carers who are responsive to children's interests and needs; and are there to guide, facilitate and support children's learning and development.
- Create a stimulating environment where children learn through play, - and present learning programmes that include both planned and spontaneous experiences.

*We look forward to  
welcoming your child  
to our centre.*



# Sandcastles physical environment

Sandcastles is proud to present modern, architecturally designed, environmentally friendly buildings, specifically designed to meet the aesthetic and functional requirements of children, families and childcare staff in a long day care centre.

The location of each centre was specially chosen for its centralised position, and its accessibility within the local community, into which Sandcastles hopes to become fully integrated.

All classrooms are open to view through large windows with plenty of natural light and the outdoor environment, accessible from each classroom.

The environment at Sandcastles is one where your child is free to explore, make choices and discoveries.

All resources and equipment are made available and accessible to children as it supports their changing needs and interests.

The play areas have been thoughtfully designed to promote consistency and security. However, the outdoor environments will be modified from time to time to make sure this important part of the program remains stimulating, exciting and interesting for all of our different groups of children.

All Sandcastles classrooms are provided with developmentally appropriate toys, books, equipment and educational materials to ensure that it provides all the stimulation your child needs throughout their time in care.

Each of the children's rooms has been given an individual name. These are all fun names and are generally associated with the 'Sandcastles' theme such as: **Starfish**; **Seahorses**; Fairy Penguins; **Seals** and **Dolphins**.



# Our classrooms

## Nursery Area

Our nursery classrooms provide babies and toddlers with high quality care in home-like environments. We ensure our nursery provides a rich, comfortable and secure environment where your child will feel relaxed and happy to play and interact with staff and other children.

Our carers provide individualised care to children and create a warm, caring and nurturing environment to help with the development of your child's emotional security. We meet children's physical and emotional needs through daily care routines, one-to-one interactions with each child as well as small group play times.

## Toddler Area

As babies develop, they move into our toddlers program which caters specifically for the 2-3 year age group. The toddlers program balances our nursery and preschool philosophies.

As children develop and move through the various age groups, the programs become more challenging and varied to cater for the emerging needs and interests of the group.

## Preschool Area

Our preschool specifically caters for children who will be attending school.

These classrooms provide high quality education programs within a curriculum framework that values the relationships between children, staff and families. We support learning through providing a range of meaningful, planned and spontaneous learning experiences that are developmentally and culturally appropriate and based on the skills and abilities of the individual and of the group.



# The Sandcastles Team

We recognise staff as our greatest asset. We employ staff with a range of qualifications, skills and experience. We make every effort to recruit and retain the best possible early childhood staff to care for and educate your child.

We have thorough recruitment procedures to ensure all staff have the appropriate skills and experience for the position they hold.

Staff are provided with training opportunities throughout their employment to enhance their skills and keep up to date with current knowledge of best practice in early childhood.

We carry out regular staff appraisals to gain an understanding of the skills, knowledge and attitude of individual staff members. We aim to support the professional development of each staff member and create opportunities for them to develop their proficiency.

Our team of staff work in partnership with families to provide a service that meets the needs of the children, parents and the teaching team.

Children learn from staff behaviour and consequently staff are expected to be positive role models. Staff model a variety of behaviours including communication skills, acceptance of health and hygiene practices and other appropriate behaviours.

At our centre carers are nurtured and their skills are challenged. We respect the staff's initiative, innovation and attention to quality, as well as their commitment to the children and their families.

## Working with Children Checks

We carry out reference checks on all staff employed at the centre to gain an understanding of the competence, reliability and attitude of the candidates. To comply with the Child Protection (Prohibited Employment) Act 1998 and the Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998, a Working with Children check is done on all full, part-time and casual employees as well as ongoing visitors who will be working with the children.



# Care and education

## What does childcare at Sandcastles involve?

Childcare involves not only 'caring' for your children but also supporting their learning and facilitating the development of knowledge and skills. Throughout their time at our centre, children are provided with developmentally appropriate learning experiences to support their growth and development.

From babies to preschoolers, children's needs are met through staff providing appropriate learning experiences based on individual and group needs and interests.

*Children are provided with appropriate learning experiences to support their growth and development.*



## What is my role as a parent?

We recognise parents as the primary carers and educators of their children. Our carers encourage parents to spend time within the centre as this helps build open and honest communication channels, thereby ensuring each child's needs are met on a daily basis.

We aim to work in partnership with families to achieve continuity of care for children which is essential in the provision of high quality childcare. Interactions and communication between children, staff and families are characterised by warmth, responsiveness, positive support and respect for each other.

We value children as competent and capable learners, collaborators and decision makers who are actively involved in the learning process.

Our centre has an 'open-door policy'. Parents are welcome to call us at anytime or visit their child during the day.

Parents are asked to give feedback on policies and procedures throughout the year, i.e. through surveys and at parent nights. Any changes to policies and procedures are outlined to parents in advance via newsletters and notices.

Centre noticeboards, displays and regular newsletters are used to inform parents of upcoming centre events. Parents are invited to share their ideas and insights on learning programs for children.

Any parental involvement, however small, is always welcome and appreciated. We also recognise, parents should have the option of not being involved (beyond a minimum level of communication with staff each day) if that is their preference.

## Are the children 'just playing' or do you also educate my child?

At Sandcastles, care and education are intertwined in our play-based learning programs. From your child's first day in care we observe and plan learning experiences based on his/her interests, needs and developmental level, at the same time meeting your child's physical and emotional needs.

# Child Portfolios

As part of the care and education program the centre uses Child Portfolios to document evidence of each child's learning and development. Child Portfolios are a collection of observations, evidence of children's work/achievements and anecdotes of your child's experiences while in care.

Child Portfolios become a story of your child's life at Sandcastles, showing skills developed over time, telling stories of play situations and highlighting interactions and friendships being made, a record of your child's interests, likes, dislikes and other events or activities while in care.

These portfolios are used to plan experiences and make appropriate provisions to meet and extend upon the individual needs and interests of your child.

Child Portfolios are available to parents at all times. Parents are encouraged to view, discuss, comment on or add to the portfolio at any time in consultation with your child's Room Leader. Child Portfolios are private and confidential and are available only to appropriate centre staff and parents.



# Programming for Children

Children's programs are planned by the room staff to include play-based experiences for children across all developmental areas to support the development of the whole child.

Staff work in partnership with families and their children to create a program that provides meaningful learning experiences for all children.

We follow the Early Years Learning Framework which describes the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school. The Framework has a strong emphasis on play-based learning as play is the best vehicle for young children's learning providing the most appropriate stimulus for brain development.

The Framework also recognises the importance of communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy) and social and emotional development

Staff ensure the learning programs in each classroom:

- reflects the needs of all children as individuals and groups
- fosters the development of the whole child
- reflects the uniqueness of the centre
- is open and diverse
- provides choices
- supports development of trusting relationships
- encourages respect and empathy for others
- ultimately leads to growth and learning.

*Our learning programs foster the development of the whole child.*



# The Learning Program (Little Steps, Big Steps)

We see 'play' as children's work and therefore provide a relaxed and happy environment where children feel safe and secure to play and interact with staff and other children.

Staff facilitate children's learning by responding to the children's individual and group interests and needs, and provide planned and spontaneous developmentally and culturally appropriate activities and experiences.

**Learning programs provide opportunities for:**

- indoor and outdoor free play activities
- one-to-one interactions
- small group times for stories, drama, art/craft and other activities
- large group times for music/movement games, meal times and other activities
- spontaneous learning experiences
- transition times between activities.
- brainstorming, projects and extended investigations.

We believe play is essential to young children's learning and development.

We endeavour to meet the needs of children's natural curiosity by providing a range of opportunities for them to experiment, discover, solve problems and to find out about themselves, other people and the world around them.

We provide open-ended activities and experiences that support growth and development and help children develop competencies and build solid foundations for later learning.

We provide a program that promotes diversity for children and families from various social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

**The learning program always includes the following play areas:**

- music and movement
- construction/manipulative play
- puzzles and cognitive games
- language and literacy
- drawing and writing materials
- art and craft
- dramatic play/home corner
- sensory play such as sand and water play
- nature.

## Projects and Extended Investigations

Projects and extended investigations are conducted by children and staff from ideas that interest them. Extended investigations and projects are developed from children's interests, chance events or a problem, and can be initiated by one or more children or by teachers.

Projects help children thoroughly explore ideas, make discoveries, construct knowledge and solve problems, which leads to learning and understanding.

## Policies and procedures

### What do your policies and procedures cover?

Our centre has a comprehensive and up-to-date Policies and Procedures Manual outlining the care and education practices to be followed throughout the centre.

Our Policies and Procedures Manual has been developed through the compilation of many years of experience in the childcare industry. Our policies and procedures incorporate DoCS regulations, NCAC principles of quality care, current research and up-to-date industry knowledge.

Staff and families are encouraged to have constructive input into policy development to ensure strategies are established to meet the specific needs of the centre.

Centre policies and procedures cover areas including:

- Interactions and Communication
- The Program
- Child Protection, Health and Safety
- Management, Administration and Staff Development

The Policies and Procedures Manual is placed in the foyer of the centre for parents to read and comment on at any time.



# Administration & FAQs

## Who do I call about administrative issues such as billing and CCB enquiries?

The Sandcastles phone line which handles all initial enquiries, waiting list queries, and enrollments for all centres is 1300 662 497.

Once your child is enrolled into Sandcastles, administration issues will be handled by the Centre Manager and Administrator.

Our Centre Manager has administration support to help take care of enrollments, billing, Child Care Benefit, payroll and accounts payable matters. Administration support is provided to help alleviate the pressure on our centre staff which also means the Centre Manager is largely free to focus on the care and education of children at the centre and is available to families.

## What do I do if I want to change my child's days of care?

If you wish to change, increase or decrease the days your child attends care you must contact the Centre Manager.

Parents are required to provide 20 working days notice to decrease days. Any other changes can be made in a time frame agreed upon by the Centre Manager. Please see the Centre Manager when you visit the centre or call the centre.

We will do our best to accommodate your childcare needs.

## What do I do if I want to cancel my child's care?

When you enrol with us you are required to pay a holding deposit. Your holding deposit is held to secure your child's position throughout their time in our care and this will be refunded when your child leaves the centre.

It is a condition of enrolment that you provide 20 working days written notice to the Centre Manager of your intention to withdraw your child from the centre.

Please drop off written notice to the relevant Centre Manager or email [enrollments@sandcastleschildcare.com.au](mailto:enrollments@sandcastleschildcare.com.au)

## When are my fees payable and how do I know what I am paying?

At the beginning of each month you will receive a statement/receipt in your child's pigeon hole for fees debited the previous month. Statements will be for a four or five week period depending on the number of complete weeks falling within that month.

Fees must be paid for every day your child is enrolled, including public holidays and when your child is sick or on holidays. A full daily fee is charged regardless of the number of hours your child attends.



It is our experience that parents do not always read and understand the terms under which their children have been enrolled and this can cause problems later on. We are a small business and the provision of our childcare service is reliant on prompt payment of fees. Therefore, to avoid any misunderstandings in our future relationship we take this opportunity to highlight some of the most important items in the terms and conditions of enrolment.

- Fees are required to be paid by Direct Debit from your nominated bank account or by credit card
  - Should a payment be dishonoured, it will incur an administration charge (this is currently \$40)
  - If payments continue to be dishonoured your child's position within the centre will be terminated
  - Deductions can be made from your holding deposit on termination for fees in arrears
  - Just like any other school, fees are still payable on public holidays or when your child is absent for any reason
  - It is your responsibility to sign your child into and out of care. This is a licensing requirement as well as a condition for claiming Child Care Benefit.
- We also take this opportunity to advise that the Federal Government has made provision for unexpected financial difficulty so that a child's care is not disrupted. Please do not hesitate to contact us if such a situation arises. Direct Debit or Credit Card Authorisation Forms are to be completed upon enrolment to ensure billing can be taken care of in the most efficient way with a minimum of effort on your behalf.

## How do I know if I am entitled to claim Child Care Benefit?

All families are entitled to some type of Child Care Benefit.

The Federal Government provides funding for all Australian residents' children using childcare via the Family Assistance Office (FAO). This funding, known as the Child Care Benefit (CCB), can be claimed either as a reduction in the daily fee or as a lump sum at the end of each financial year.

To claim the CCB as a fee reduction you must register with the FAO.

If you wish to claim Child Care Benefit (CCB) weekly or as a lump sum at the end of the financial year, you must register with the family Assistance Office (FAO) on 13 61 50. You will need to tell them the Childcare Provider Number for Sandcastles. This number is provided to you upon enrolment.

Once registered, the FAO will authorise us a reduced fee. The exact amount of the fee reduction is means tested and will depend on your family income level.

It is your responsibility to ensure we have your FAO reference number. This CRN uniquely identifies each child and will allow reconciliation of each child's usage of care when you complete your income tax return at the end of each year.

Weekly usage data is submitted electronically to the FAO for each child.

Invoices issued by the centre detail the days for which you are entitled to funding and the amount of CCB funding being provided to you.

**YOU SHOULD KEEP THESE INVOICES FOR YOUR TAX PURPOSES.**

For more information on CCB please see the Fee and Benefits section of our website at [www.sandcastleschildcare.com.au](http://www.sandcastleschildcare.com.au)

- Parents need to supply their CRN details on our enrolment form to formalise this process and to ensure they receive the 50% rebate each quarter.



## Who do I call?

If parents require any assistance they can contact the centre directly regarding any matters relating to their child's developmental progress and education. Each Sandcastles centre has a separate direct contact number where you can speak to the Centre Manager or room staff.

Please note: this is an unlisted number provided only to parents enrolled at the centre in an attempt to keep phone calls at the centre to a minimum, allowing centre staff to focus on the care and education of your child.

- Please use the centre direct number to contact us if your child is unwell and will not be attending care.

*Our aim is to develop trusting and caring relationships between staff and families.*



# Waiting list registration and bookings

## Waiting List

For a Waiting List Registration Form please see the 'Enrol Now' section of our website at [www.sandcastleschildcare.com.au](http://www.sandcastleschildcare.com.au) or call 1300 662 497 for a Starter Pack.

Please complete a Waiting List Registration Form and pay \$50\* (a non-refundable administration fee) to place your child on our waiting list.

## Bookings

Once we have your child's name on our waiting list we will contact you to let you know when a position becomes available for your child.

We ask for a administration fee to place your child on our waiting list, we tend to only attract families who definitely want a position at Sandcastles, therefore our waiting list is not as extensive as other centres and we would hope to be able to offer you a position when you need it.

Once you have accepted a position at Sandcastles, we ask you to complete a Child Enrolment Package.

We ask for a holding deposit to secure your child's position. The deposit is held separately from your fees to secure your child's position throughout the time in care. The deposit will be refunded when your child leaves the centre as long as all fees are paid up to date (see Fee and Benefits section of our website).

## What are your operating hours?

Please refer to the back cover for the opening hours for each centre. All parents are asked to arrive at least 10 minutes before closure to allow time for staff to share information about their child's day before leaving.

Train strikes, traffic accidents etc. are taken into account, but it is the parent's responsibility to ensure that their child is collected on time. If possible, parents should call the centre to inform the staff of any delay.

If a parent is late, the staff members staying back will ask parents to complete and sign a 'Late Collection of Child' book. Parents who are late will be charged late fees.

# Orientation

Once you have accepted a position, paid your holding deposit and completed all forms, your Centre Manager will contact you to arrange an orientation visit to the centre for both you and your child, prior to your start date.

We want all children and families to feel comfortable within the centre environment and to form trusting and warm relationships with centre staff.

We arrange for new families to have an orientation visit to the centre to enable children and parents to become familiar with room routines and types of learning experiences.

## Your Child's First Day

Once you have completed all of the above your child will be ready for his/her first day.

It is important that you and your child are ready and properly prepared for the first day of childcare.

Please allow time to talk to carers and share information about your child's individual daily routine and your child's experiences the previous night and earlier that morning. This will help ease your child into care.

Thank you for considering Sandcastles Nursery and Long Day Care Centre.

*We look forward to meeting you  
and your child.*



## HARBORD VILLAGE

The Harbord Village centre is located at  
74-76 Lawrence Street, Freshwater NSW 2096

Hours:

Monday to Friday 7.30am - 5.45pm

## CHATSWOOD

The Chatswood centre is located at  
Level 4, 1 Cambridge Lane, Chatswood NSW 2067

Hours:

Monday to Friday 7.30am - 6.00pm

For further information about any centre, please refer  
to our website

[www.sandcastleschildcare.com.au](http://www.sandcastleschildcare.com.au)

or call 1300 662 497

