

For the future:

The best  
start for  
every child

South  
Australian  
**Labor**





#### Acknowledgment of country.

We acknowledge and respect the Traditional Custodians whose ancestral lands we live and work upon and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge and respect their deep spiritual connection and the relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to Country. We also pay our respects to the cultural authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their nations in South Australia, as well as those across Australia.

# Foreword

It is in the early years of life that the seeds of success are sown. The first 1000 days are crucial to the brain and social development of children. Nearly a quarter of South Australian five-year-olds have started school behind their development milestones – nearly the highest proportion of all states: clearly we must do better.

Labor takes this challenge seriously. We need a comprehensive inquiry into what can be done to better support families in South Australia so that our children are ready for future success. We need to determine a path to offering two years of preschool to all children, as has become standard across the OECD. Australian children are missing out on crucial early education opportunities as we fall behind the rest of the advanced world. We also need to understand how to support families in work while maintaining parenting responsibilities. The length of school days does not suit working parents, and we need to ensure that out of school hours care services are accessible and offering the quality service for children that parents expect.

A Malinauskas Labor government will establish a Royal Commission in Early Childhood Education and Care.

The Commission will examine:

- ▶ The extent to which South Australian families are supported in health, parenting and education and care support and services in the first 1000 days of a child's life, and options for extending these services and support.
- ▶ How universal quality preschool programs for three and four year olds can be delivered in South Australia, including addressing considerations of accessibility, affordability, quality and how to achieve universality for both age cohorts. Consideration of introducing universal three-year old preschool should be undertaken with a view to achieving this commencing in 2026.

- ▶ How all families can have access to out of school hours care at both preschool and primary school ages, including considerations of accessibility in all parts of SA, affordability and quality in public and private schools.

Labor understands that our future will be defined by how we treat our children, by the care they receive and the quality of their education, and we will not let South Australian children down.



Peter Malinauskas MP  
SA Labor Leader



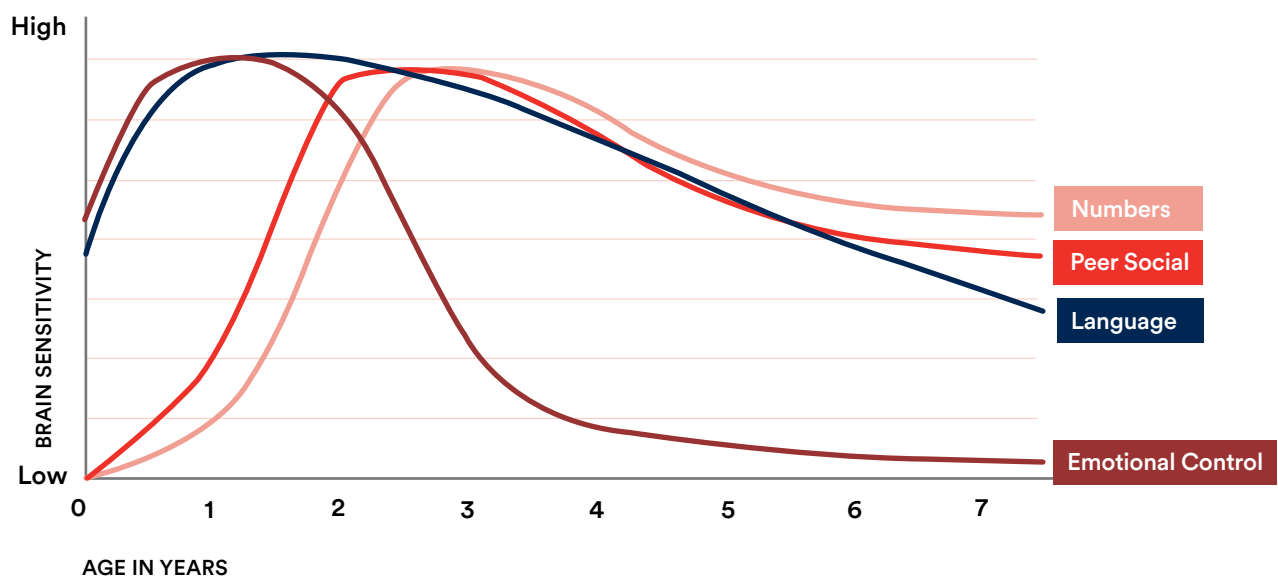
# Why Early Childhood matters

In recent years, research on early childhood has made it clear how crucial the years before school are to the rest of a child's life. It's now understood that around 90 per cent of adult brain development and growth occurs in the first five years of life.<sup>1</sup> This makes the educational support children get before school of paramount importance.

Each stage of brain development is cumulative and, as a consequence, children can enter school with clear differences in the cognitive and noncognitive skills needed for school success. These differences predict later academic achievements and, once patterns are established, they become more difficult and expensive to change.<sup>2</sup>

During the early years, children develop key skills required for positive learning and life outcomes, such as skills to solve problems, think, communicate, control their emotions and form relationships. In particular, self-regulation skills enable children to control their behaviour, emotion and thinking so that they can focus attention, be enthusiastic learners, persist in completing tasks and work in teams as well as independently. **A key period in the development of self-regulation is between the ages of 3-5 as children expand their social world outside the family. Focussed interventions during this period support their healthy development.**<sup>3</sup>

Children's brain sensitivity, by age



1. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/information-for-parents-and-carers/brain-development-in-young-children>

2. Pascoe S, Brennan D, Ibid, p.15

3. Pascoe and Brennan, Ibid, p.15





# Challenges in Early Childhood Education and Care

## South Australian five-year-olds are not all ready for school

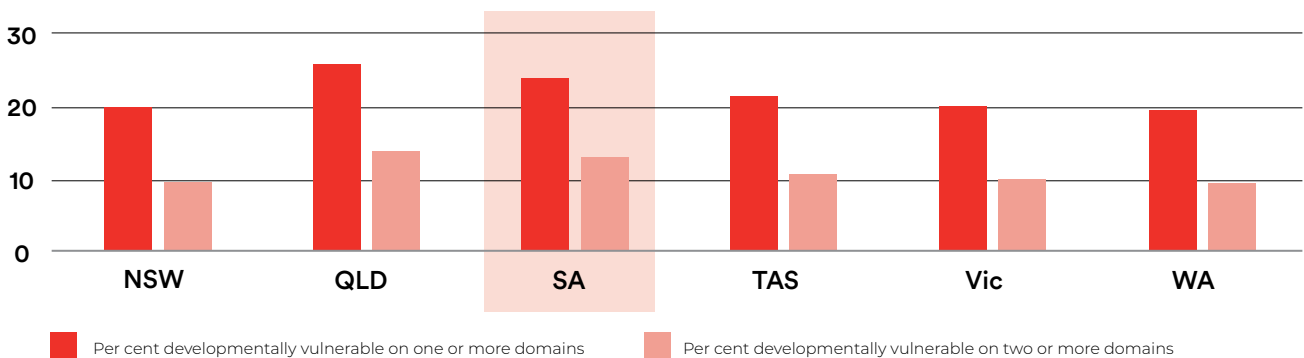
Too many South Australian children are recognised as developmentally vulnerable when they reach school. Nearly a quarter of South Australian children are behind on at least one domain, and 13 per cent are behind on at least two domains.

### HOW DO WE KNOW IF A CHILD IS DEVELOPING WELL?

These five domains are measured in all children at the age of five, every three years, to get a picture of how children are developing across Australia:

- ▶ Physical health and well being
- ▶ Social competence
- ▶ Emotional maturity
- ▶ Language and cognitive skills
- ▶ Communication and general knowledge

State by State results, Australia Early Development Index 2018<sup>4</sup>



4. Australian Early Development Census, National Report 2018, Commonwealth of Australia <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2018-aedc-national-report-2018>.

# South Australia's school students are falling behind

South Australia is falling short of realising the extraordinary potential of its young people.

Every three years the OECD measures the performance of students through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

It tests a random sample of 15-year-olds on maths, reading and science literacy. PISA gives us an assessment of how we are performing in education in comparison to other nations, and over time. The most recent assessment paints an alarming picture.

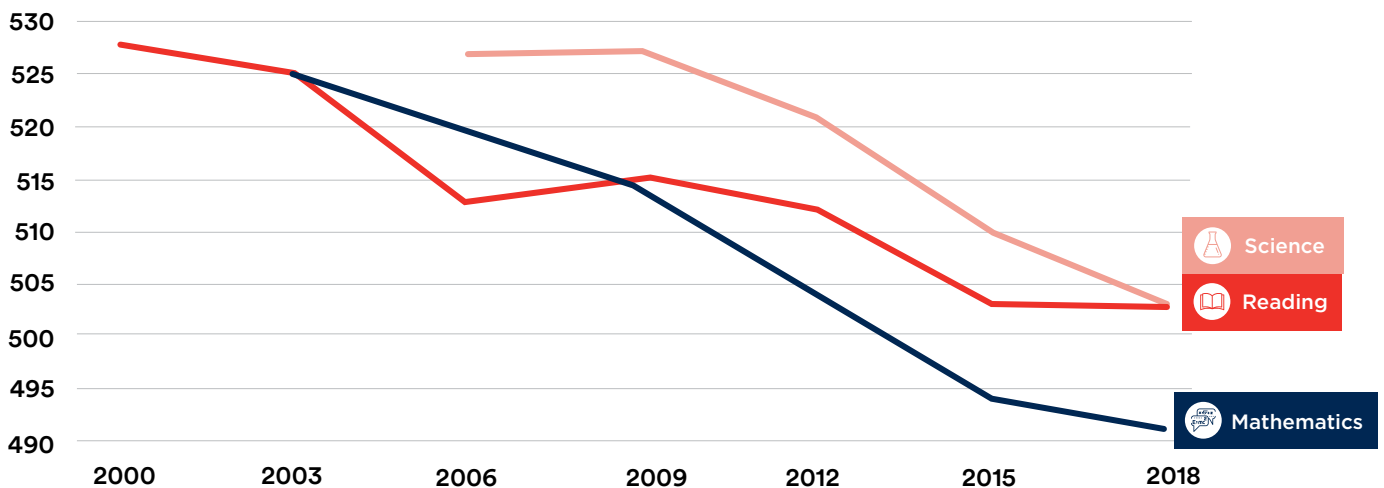
Australia and South Australia's performance in PISA has been steadily declining in real terms and dropping in comparison to more and more nations.



## WHAT DOES PISA MEASURE?

PISA is a test undertaken by a random sample of 15-year-olds across the OECD and partner nations every three years since 2000, and covers real world problems to solve assessing skills in reading, mathematics and science.

Australia's Performance in PISA



Source: OECD

Australia's Ranking	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018
Reading	4	4	7	8	12	16	16
Maths		10	12	13	17	25	29
Science			8	9	14	14	17

Measure	OECD Average	New Zealand	Australia	Australia rank
Investment in early childhood as a proportion of GDP - total	0.81	0.91	0.49	28 of 33
Investment in pre-primary as a proportion of GDP (subset of total)	0.61	0.52	0.20	24 of 26
<b>Participation</b>				
Four-year-old enrolment in early childhood education	85.9	91.8	85.2	23 of 25
Three-year-old enrolment in pre-primary education	68.6	87.3	15	31 of 35
<b>Dosage</b>				
Hours of early childhood teaching in the year before school	911	924	584	20 of 21
Hours per week (based on 40 weeks per year)	22.7	23.1	14.6	20 of 21

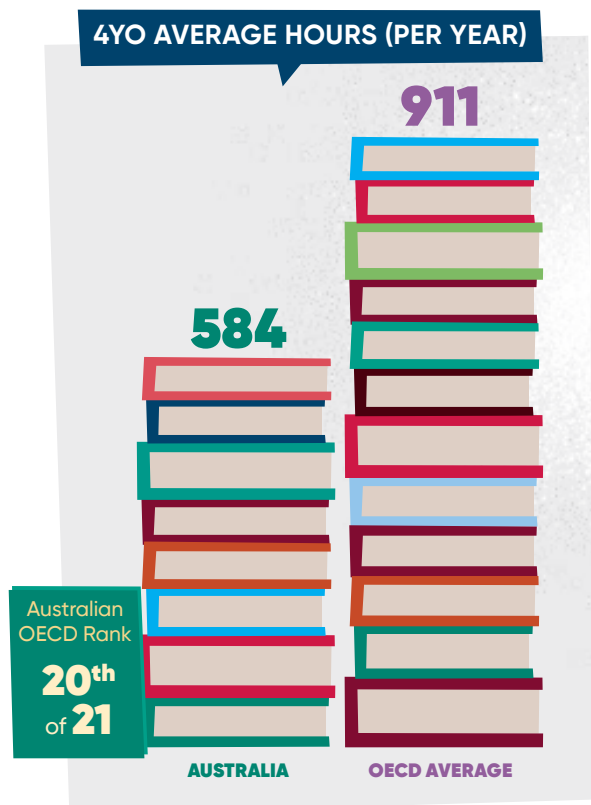
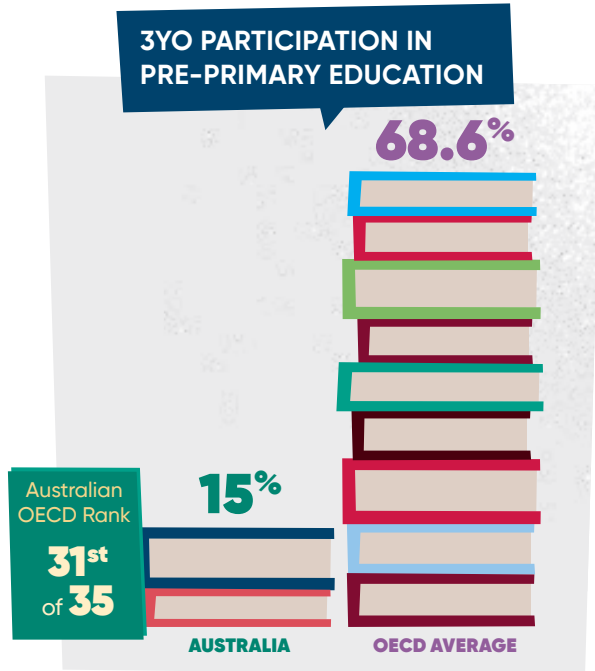
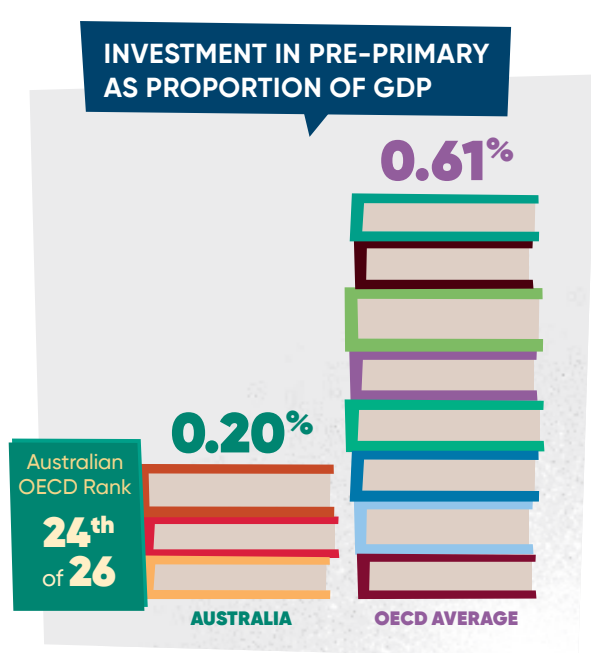
Source: Comparison of Australia and the OECD and New Zealand in early childhood education and care 2017<sup>5</sup>

5. Pascoe S, Brennan D, Lifting Our Game, Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions, Australian Government, Dec 2017, p.59

## Australia underinvests in Early Childhood Education and Care



## Investment in Early Education<sup>6</sup>



6. Pascoe and Brennan, Ibid. p.75



## Australia is being left behind on three-year-old preschool

There is significant evidence that all children, and particularly vulnerable children, do better throughout school if they have attended a high quality preschool for at least two years. Australia is one of the few OECD nations not to universally offer at least two years of preschool. As a result, only 15 per cent of Australian three-year-olds are in a preschool program, compared to the OECD average of nearly 70 per cent.

**Across the OECD, performance in mathematics increases with more than one year of pre-primary education.** Across the OECD the percentage of poor performers with more than one year of pre-primary education is 10 per cent lower than for those with only one year or less, and 20 per cent lower than for students who had no pre-primary education.<sup>7</sup>



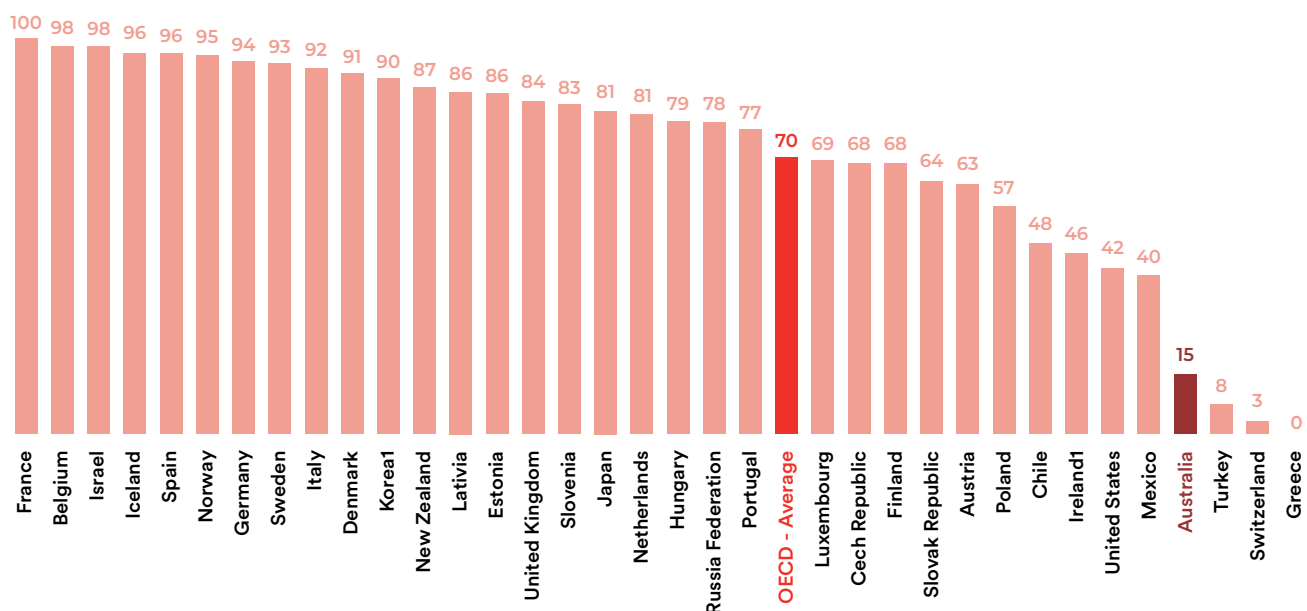
### NEW ZEALAND<sup>8</sup>

Most children in New Zealand (95%) get some form of early childhood education, usually for 20-22 hours a week. For three and four-year-olds, the first 20 hours per week are fully funded by the government.

7. OECD Indicators, 2016, p.301

8. <https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/living-in-nz/education/childcare-preschool>

### Enrolment rates at age 3 in pre-primary education



Source: OECD (2016b), Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators, Indicator C2, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-en>.

## South Australia is being left behind in three-year-old preschool

Other states are starting to look at introducing three-year-old preschool, recognising how important it is to the future of their economies to have well-educated young people.

9. Three-Year-Old Kindergarten ([education.vic.gov.au](http://education.vic.gov.au))

10. [www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/120-million-extra-for-free-preschool-program-to-help-parents](http://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/120-million-extra-for-free-preschool-program-to-help-parents)

11. [www.education.act.gov.au/early-childhood/quality-early-childhood-education-for-three-year-olds](http://www.education.act.gov.au/early-childhood/quality-early-childhood-education-for-three-year-olds)

### VICTORIA<sup>9</sup>

Victoria will be the first state or territory in Australia to introduce funded three-year-old kindergarten for all children.

Children in 21 council areas can now access up to 15 hours a week of kindergarten. From 2022, three-year-olds across the rest of the state will have access to five hours in a kindergarten program led by a teacher.

The hours will then increase up to the full 15-hour program by 2029.

### NEW SOUTH WALES<sup>10</sup>

New South Wales Government announced in 2020 that it will be committing \$120 million to community and mobile preschools for an extra year of free childcare in 2021.

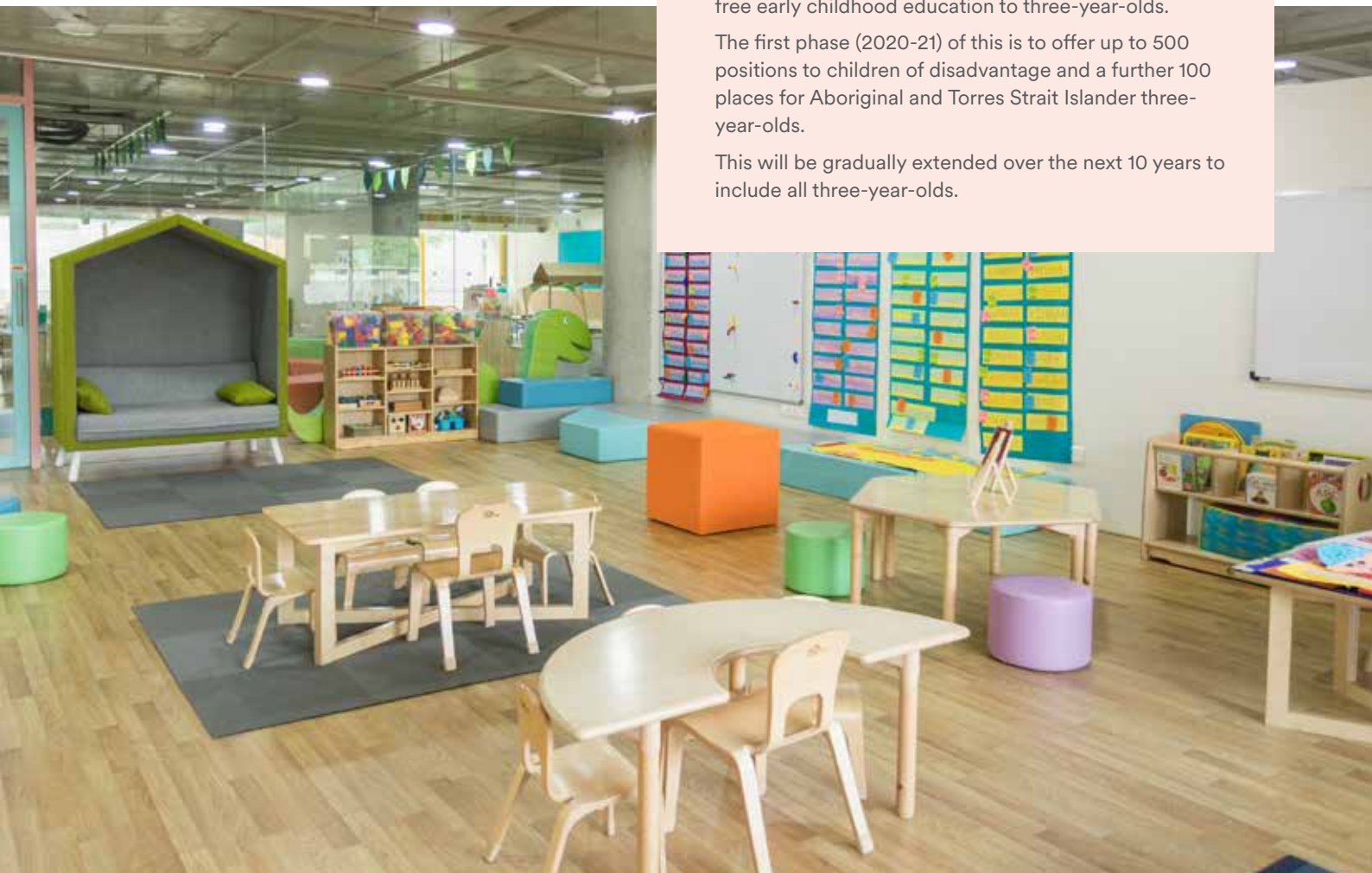
This funding will be made available to approximately 700 State-funded community preschools and 38 mobile preschool services that provide care for over 44,000 three to five year olds in the critical years before school.

### ACT<sup>11</sup>

In 2020 the ACT Government released 'Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT'. Part of this strategy is the provision of 15 hours a week of free early childhood education to three-year-olds.

The first phase (2020-21) of this is to offer up to 500 positions to children of disadvantage and a further 100 places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander three-year-olds.

This will be gradually extended over the next 10 years to include all three-year-olds.



# Opportunities for Early Childhood Education and Care

## Better Family Support

Knowing that the first 1000 days are crucial in a child's development, there are many services that can be offered using the power of health and education services. While South Australia has some good programs, it is essential we keep abreast of the best way to start children's lives well.

A positive and engaging home learning environment is stronger than a parent's education and class in creating good outcomes for children. Fully integrated, two-generation, programs which provide services to both parents and children,

can address the needs of both children and their caregivers, and assist adults to develop the core capabilities necessary for success in parenting and the workplace.<sup>12</sup>

Family factors such as parents' education and socio-economic status are important influences on the quality of the home environment. However, what parents do with their children has been found to exert a greater and independent influence on their educational attainment. **Children whose parents engaged regularly in home learning activities were found to be less likely to be at risk for special educational intervention.**<sup>13</sup>

12. Monks H, The Impact of Poverty on the Developing Child, Colab Evidence Report, <https://colab.telethonkids.org.au/siteassets/media-docs---colab/colab---poverty-and-the-developing-child-research-overview-screen.pdf>, 2017, p9

13. Pascoe S, Brennan D, Lifting Our Game, Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions, Australian Government <https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/early-childhood-education/whats-happening-in-the-early-childhood-education-sector/media/documents/Lifting-Our-Game-Final-Report.pdf>, Dec 2017, p.18





## Three-year-old preschool

Preschool is the foundation stone of a child's education. Preschool programs in Australia teach a curriculum designed for young children. It is play-based learning and focused on developing the skills that will serve children throughout their lives.

There is a significant amount of evidence that all children, but particularly disadvantaged children, do better throughout school if they have had quality preschool for at least two years.

One study found that high quality preschool continues to influence outcomes throughout schooling. **At ages six to eleven, children who had attended a high quality preschool had statistically significant better attainment in reading and maths.** At age 16, better school results were attributed to those who had attended [...] preschool for two to three years (51 score points), compared with those who had not attended preschool. The study also found that students who attended preschool were more likely to go on to higher academic study.<sup>14</sup>

**A child who has attended two years of a quality kindergarten program will, on average: have better cognitive and social skills when they start school (including better development in language, pre-reading, early number concepts, non-verbal reasoning, independence, concentration and social skills); have higher exam scores at 16, including better grades in English and Maths; have better social and emotional outcomes at age 16; and be more likely to take more final year exams and to go on to higher academic study**<sup>15</sup>

Three-year-old preschool is not about sitting in rows listening to teachers – it is about learning while playing.

Early childhood education is not the same as school education. Early childhood education is delivered through play-based learning, and skilled educators use intentional play-based learning to introduce concepts in ways that connect with a child's interest<sup>17</sup>

It is time we caught up with the rest of the advanced world, or we risk being left behind as a nation. Victoria, New South Wales, and the ACT are beginning to introduce three-year-old preschool, and we don't want South Australian children to be missing out.

To make the transformative move to universal preschool for three-year-olds in South Australia we need to understand the full complexity of how this will work. It will require co-operation across the whole community: government preschools, private school early learning centres, community early education and care centres and for-profit long-day-care services.

South Australia also needs to work with Australian government to ensure South Australia is treated more equitably. South Australia is disadvantaged currently in federal funding arrangements because we offer free preschool through SA government funded services. Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria rely on long-day care services to offer preschool alongside child care, taking advantage of federal child care subsidies and fees paid by parents.

14. Pascoe S, Brennan D, Ibid, p.41

15. Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj, I., Taggart, B., Toth, K. & Smees, R. (2014). Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education Project, Department for Education, United Kingdom.

16. Fox S, Geddes M, Ibid, p7

17. Pascoe, D. Brennan, Ibid, p.14



## Supporting working parents

Balancing work and parenting is challenging: in Australia it is harder than in most countries, which means that we have fewer women in full-time work than nearly all the rest of the OECD. Only Japan, Switzerland and the Netherlands have lower levels of full-time female workers.

Nations that perform better in school results also have lower rates of part-time female workers<sup>18</sup> – there is a strong link between mothers being supported to get into the workforce and having strong support for children from the earliest years, which in turn lifts school results.

Access to early childhood education and care for children increases opportunities for parents, especially mothers, to participate in the workforce. Women's disproportionate responsibility for caring for children, combined with the lack of appropriate, affordable early childhood education and care, is a significant barrier to women being employed or working more.<sup>19</sup>

While out of school hours care is widely available in South Australia, it is usually not available for children in preschool, making those short days particularly challenging. There are also questions about the quality and value of some out of school hours care, and not every family has the access they want and can afford. Lifting the quality and accessibility of out of school hours care will make a difference to how well families can engage in preschool, and in getting parents into the workforce, increasing family incomes.

18. <https://data.oecd.org/emp/part-time-employment-rate.htm>  
19. Pascoe S, Brennan D, Lifting Our Game, Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions, Australian Government, Dec 2017, p.35



# Labor in Government:

## A Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care in South Australia

Labor will establish a Royal Commission to inquire into and report on how South Australia's early childhood education and care services can support young South Australians to have a quality start to their education regardless of social background. In inquiring into these matters.

Consideration will be given to the benefits of increasing workforce participation by parents through improved access to early childhood education, out of school hours care and the importance of sustaining the ongoing viability and affordability of non-government early education and care services.

### Background:

In recent years research on early childhood education has made it clear how crucial the years before school are to the rest of a child's life. It's now understood that around 90 per cent of adult brain development and growth occurs in the first five years of life.<sup>20</sup> This makes the educational support children get before school of paramount importance.

It is acknowledged that too many South Australian children are developmentally vulnerable when they start school. Nearly a quarter of South Australian children are behind on at least one domain, and 13 per cent are behind on at least two domains on the Australian Early Development Census.<sup>21</sup>

It is recognised that there is a strong link between the socio-economic status of a family (primarily the parents' education levels and occupations) and the developmental vulnerability of children when they start school.

Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT are introducing three-year-old preschool programs, and at present 15 per cent of Australian three-year-olds attend preschool, in comparison to an OECD average of nearly 70 per cent.

Parents trying to work while raising their families find access to early childhood education and care, and the length of preschool and school days a challenge, along with the accessibility and quality of out of school hours care. This is one of the reasons Australia has a lower proportion of women working full time than most OECD nations.

The commission will inquire into and report on:

- ▶ The extent to which South Australian families are supported in health, parenting and education and care support and services in the first 1000 days of a child's life, and options for extending these services and support.
- ▶ How universal quality preschool programs for three and four year olds can be delivered in South Australia, including addressing considerations of accessibility, affordability, quality and how to achieve universality for both age cohorts. Consideration of universal three-year old preschool should be undertaken with a view to achieving this commencing in 2026.
- ▶ How all families can have access to out of school hours care at both preschool and primary school ages, including considerations of accessibility in all parts of the state, affordability and quality in public and private settings.

The Commission will hear from people who are experts in early childhood development, leaders in preschool and long-day care services in the public, private and community sectors, unions representing workers in early childhood education and care, and importantly, parents.

20. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/information-for-parents-and-carers/brain-development-in-young-children>

21. Australian Early Development Census, National Report 2018, Commonwealth of Australia <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2018-aedc-national-report-2018>







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