

DET PAEC Questions on notice – Early Childhood Education

Question on notice no:	1
Question:	How has the quality of early childhood services been improved under the National Partnership Agreements?
PAEC Transcript page reference:	5

RESPONSE

I am shocked and appalled that the Federal Turnbull Government has chosen to walk away from their commitment to safety and quality under the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda. Their recent budget shows they have cut all funding to States and Territories for the regulation of safety and quality in Australian early childhood services from 1 July 2018.

The first National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda was introduced by the Federal Rudd Labor Government in 2009.

This National Partnership established the National Quality Framework (NQF), which commenced on 1 January 2012 and has driven improvement in the quality of education and care services.

The NQF is underpinned by the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*, which contains overarching objectives and guiding principles to emphasise the importance of continuous improvement in the provision of quality education and services.

A key feature of the NQF is the assessment and rating of early childhood education and care services against the National Quality Standards.

Data published by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority indicates that at 30 June 2013, 74% of the services assessed in Victoria were meeting the National Quality Standard (NQS), with 51% Meeting the NQS and only 23% Exceeding the NQS. However by 31 March 2018, 84% of Victorian services were meeting the NQS, with 49% Meeting the NQS and 34% Exceeding the NQS.

In addition, 71% of those services initially assessed as not meeting the NQS (those with Working Towards or Significant Improvement Required ratings) improved their rating at the second assessment.

The major funding cut by the Federal Turnbull Government could lead to a significant reduction and inconsistency in regulatory checks across the country and risks letting unscrupulous operators back in the door. It could also lead to major job losses or an increase in fees.

Their decision sends a clear message to Victorian families and the early childhood sector that quality in early childhood education and care is no longer a priority for the Commonwealth.

Question on notice no:	2
Question:	With regards to preschool enrolments and the enrolment rate, please explain the discrepancy between the Victorian budget paper figures (participation rate of 96 per cent) and ABS data - where 73,290 have attended out of a total of 92,204 children.
PAEC Transcript page reference:	7

RESPONSE

ABS preschool data is not directly comparable to Victorian kindergarten participation data as it does not reference the same cohort of children.

The ABS data quoted relates to the number of children estimated as attending a preschool program for 600 hours per year. This estimate includes children who are not old enough to enrol in a funded kindergarten program in Victoria, as well as children enrolled in a second year.

The Victorian kindergarten participation rate measures the proportion of Victorian children in the year before school enrolled in a funded kindergarten program.

The number of children enrolled in kindergarten in 2017 was 78,790. This is an increase of 5,194 children since 2014.

In addition to funding free kindergarten for vulnerable children and low income families, Victoria has in place a range of initiatives to support enrolment and attendance. This includes:

- Working with the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services through the Early Years Compact
- Implementing the Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out of Home Care
- Strengthening centralized enrolment and priority of access processes
- Making pre-purchased places a permanent part of the system
- Implementing the Koorie Kids Shine at Kindergarten parent and community engagement and promotion strategy.

Supporting access and participation was also a key focus of our landmark \$202.1 million investment in the Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan, released in 2017.

The Andrews Labor Government is investing \$58.1 million over four years for school readiness funding, which includes increasing access and participation as a priority focus as well as a record \$123.6 million since coming to government to build, upgrade and expand early years infrastructure to enable more children to attend kindergarten funding an extra 8,250 new three and four year old kindergarten places across Victoria since 2014.

Question on notice no:	3
Question:	Provide further details of the actions undertaken by Government to the prevent the closure of local government run childcare centres.
PAEC Transcript page reference:	8

RESPONSE

All local governments make decisions regarding the services they provide to their communities.

The Andrews Labor Government is committed to undertaking stronger place-based governance and planning for early years infrastructure through the Early Years Compact, a joint agreement between the Department of Education and Training, Department of Health and Human Services and the Municipal Association of Victoria.

The Early Years Compact prescribes that the Department of Education and Training is responsible for supporting “the learning, development, health and wellbeing of Victorian children through the development of state-wide policy and the provision of funding, planning and regulation for early years services and the transition of children from early years services to schools”.

To underpin and support the work identified in the Compact, the Andrews Labor Government is investing a record \$123.6 million to build, expand and improve early years infrastructure across Victoria, funding an estimated 8,250 additional three-and four-year-old kinder places since 2014. A \$43 million investment in the 2018-19 State Budget represents the single largest state investment in early years infrastructure in Victoria’s history.

The Department of Education and Training works with local governments across Victoria to deliver infrastructure that improves outcomes for young children and their families.

My Department works closely with Victoria’s growth councils to discuss planning for kindergarten alongside planning for new schools. Where issues are identified, the Department is working with the local council and local service providers to develop strategies to address these. For example, the Department of Education and Training recently helped Wyndham and Hume Councils respond to an immediate, unexpected demand for additional kindergarten places by providing relocatable kindergartens to address these surges in population.

The Andrews Labor Government’s record investment in the planning and construction of early childhood facilities is also enabling access to high quality centre-based childcare in rural and regional communities such as Bass Valley, Birchip, Heathcote and Chiltern, where centre-based care was previously not available.