



**Early Childhood Australia**  
A voice for young children

**OUR  
VISION:  
EVERY  
YOUNG  
CHILD IS  
THRIVING  
AND  
LEARNING**

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Wednesday 4 December 2019

### **Preschool programs hold the key to lifting student performance**

The declining performance of Australian school students highlights the urgency for next week's Education Council meeting to focus on improving educational outcomes for young Australians.

According to the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, Australian students have fallen below the OECD average in maths, and have dropped in global rankings in reading and science.

'It is going to take a much bigger effort than school-based reform alone to turn the ship around,' Early Childhood Australia CEO Samantha Page said. 'The key to strengthening Australia's education system is early learning.'

'We need to lift investment in early learning in order to lift student results at age 15,' Ms Page continued. 'We know Australia's investment in early learning is below the OECD average.'

'At the moment, one in five Australian children arrives at school developmentally vulnerable. These children are not equipped to thrive and learn from their first day at school. The most effective way to lift student performance at school is to ensure all children have access to quality early learning for at least two years before they start school.'

The latest *State of early learning in Australia* report highlights that while 90 per cent of children classified as being in their year before school (typically four-year olds) are enrolled in a preschool program, only 59 per cent of three-year olds are enrolled (p.14). Australia needs to close that gap.

In 2017, Sue Pascoe AM and Professor Deb Brennan conducted a comprehensive review of interventions to be deployed in early childhood to lift Australia's education performance. The review found growing evidence that children's participation in quality early childhood education improves their school readiness, and lifts NAPLAN results and PISA scores. The reviewers concluded: '*Children who participate in high quality early childhood education are more likely to complete year 12 and are less likely to repeat grades or require additional support. High quality early childhood education also has broader impacts; it is linked with higher levels of employment, income and financial security, improved health outcomes and reduced crime. It helps build the skills children will need for the jobs of the future. Quality early childhood education and care is best considered as an investment, not a cost.*'

More recently, The Front Project commissioned the first comprehensive Australian analysis of the economic impact of early childhood education. The model looked at the impact of the current Australian system, which provides an early education program for 15 hours a week—delivered by a Bachelor qualified teacher—in the year before school. It found that this system offers a significant return on investment (ROI) of 1:2. For every dollar invested now, Australia receives \$2 back over a child's life. It stated that extending this to two years before school will increase the benefit.

'We are calling on all members of the Education Council—the federal, state and territory governments—to agree next week to a rollout of three-year-old preschool across the country,' Ms Page said.

The best investment to prepare children for a lifetime of learning and achievement is two years of high-quality, affordable early learning before school.

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**For interviews, contact:** Paige Pollard 0475 554 999

Useful links:

- *State of early learning in Australia* 2019 report: <http://bit.ly/SOELReport2019>
- *Lifting Our Game* report by Pascoe & Brennan (2017): <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/whats-happening-in-the-early-childhood-education-sector/lifting-our-game-report>
- The Front Project commissioned report by PWC: <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/initiatives/economic-analysis>

*Early Childhood Australia is the peak advocacy body for children from birth to eight years, their families and early childhood professionals.*