

Introduction

Preschools in government schools operated by the Department of Education and Communities provide educational programs to children one year before starting school and are an integral part of the school in which they are located.

Departmental preschools aim to ensure that “all children experience learning that is engaging and builds success for life” (*Early Years Learning Framework page 7*).

In recent decades advances in brain research have highlighted the impact of early experiences in a child’s life and it is now known that the most rapid brain development occurs in the years before school. This means increased attention and effort must be placed on creating the best possible early learning environments.

It is believed that play shapes the structural design of the brain. Play creates a brain that has increased flexibility and improved potential for learning later in life (Lester and Russell, 2008). Therefore play-based learning environments offer children the opportunities and experiences needed to promote healthy brain development.

A number of longitudinal studies including Lifetime Effects: The HighScope Perry Preschool Study through Age 40 (2005) from the United States and the the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) from the United Kingdom have clearly shown the benefits of preschool education, not only for the children themselves but also for the long term financial and social benefits to the whole community.

The EPPE research led by Iram Siraj-Blatchford, et al., (2003) found that quality preschool experiences support better cognitive and social-behaviour development for children and that disadvantaged children in particular benefit significantly from quality preschool experiences.

Department of Education and Communities preschools provide for the most disadvantaged children in the local community. They provide secure, positive and stimulating learning environments which acknowledge children as capable individuals who are respected, supported, challenged and valued as active learners as well as citizens of today and tomorrow.

Teachers in departmental preschools offer quality, play-based learning programs which respond to the abilities and interests of each child and provide a balance of child initiated and adult initiated learning experiences to promote children’s development.

Being part of a school, departmental preschools also benefit families and children by supporting the continuity of learning and facilitating a smooth and positive transition to school.

Purpose of the Handbook

This Preschool Handbook is a resource to support the management and operation of departmental preschools. It articulates the operational requirements of the *Education and Care Services National Regulations* (2011) and reflects the national Early Years Learning Framework. It supports schools in meeting the requirements of the seven quality areas within the National Quality Standard.

The Handbook has been specifically written to support staff who have a role in the operation of NSW departmental preschools, including preschool staff, principals and supervisors.

Updates to the Handbook will be posted on the website.

The sections of the Handbook include:

- Introduction and purpose of the Handbook
- Access – enrolment, attendance and records management
- Wellbeing – health and safety procedures
- Staffing



- The program
- Information and resources
- A copy of the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia.

Please note that throughout the Handbook, the term 'parent' is used broadly to mean a person having parental responsibility for a child, for example, carers and/or other extended family members.

Useful references

Effective Provision of Preschool Education project. I. Siraj-Blatchford, et al, 2003. <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/153.html>

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. <http://acecqa.gov.au/resources-and-templates/>

Early Childhood Australia Inc 2010 *Play and Learning Every Child* Vol.16 No.3.

HighScope <http://www.highscope.org/>
<http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=232>

Heckman, James "The Economics of Investing in Early Childhood", http://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/webdata/resources/files/Heckman_Tramblay_Snapshot_April_2006_B4F68.pdf

The national context

The National Agenda

In recognition of the importance of the first five years of a child's life, the Australian Government, in partnership with states and territories has made important changes to early childhood education and care.

In 2008 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) initiated an early childhood reform agenda to ensure that all Australian children get the best possible start in life.

Initiatives under the national agenda include a commitment that all four year olds are able to access a quality early childhood education program in the year before formal school; the introduction of a National Quality Framework; and the development of a national Early Years Learning Framework.

On 1 January 2012, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care was introduced. It is an important reform which will deliver a higher standard of care for children in the critical areas of education, health and safety and will provide comprehensive information for families.

A key aspect of the National Quality Framework is the National Quality Standard which is accompanied by an assessment and rating process. The National Quality Standard is linked to the Early Years Learning Framework. It is comprised of seven quality areas which are made up of standards and elements against which preschools will be assessed and rated.

Information on the National Quality Framework can be found on the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) website:
<http://www.acecqa.gov.au/>

The Early Years Learning Framework

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia was developed to ensure that children in all early childhood education settings experience quality teaching and learning and was distributed to all early childhood services in 2009.

The Framework has a strong emphasis on play-based learning and recognises that play is the best way to stimulate brain development for young children's learning. It describes the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, including the transition to school.

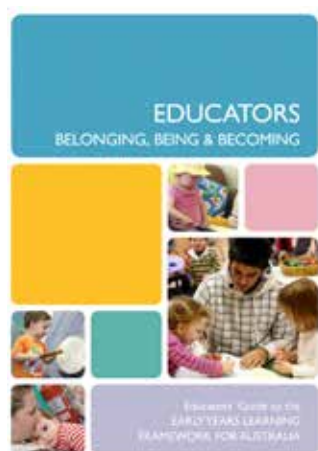
A copy of the Early Years Learning Framework is found in section 6 of the Handbook.



In 2010 the Australian Government produced *Educators Belonging, Being and Becoming* which is a guide to support the use of the Framework.

The guide is found on the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) website:

<http://acecqa.gov.au/SearchResults.aspx?keywords=The+early+Years+Learning+Framework>



Location of preschools operated by NSW government schools



A list of the preschools is in Appendix 1.1.