

**2017-2018
ACT GOVERNMENT
BUDGET SUBMISSION**

**A PLAYSCHOOL FOR
GUNGAHLIN.
A THREE-YEAR-OLD
PRESCHOOL.**



Who we are and what is important to us?

A group of Gungahlin parents have come together with the common goal of opening a not for profit community-based Playschool in Gungahlin. Playschools are different from other care options for three year olds. According to the Canberra Preschool Society; 'Playschools are a very special educational model that are unique to Canberra. In other states preschool for 3 year olds can often be accessed via a community based preschool (with fees) that also provides 4 year old preschool. As our preschools are provided for free by the Education and Training Directorate we have a gap in this area' (<http://www.canberrapreschools.org.au/about-us/playschools>).

The model for a Playschool (Preschool for 3 year olds) will be similar to Koala, Possums and Wombat Playschools. Once up and running, the executive committee will be handed over to the parents. Fees will be charged and the playschool will run in line with the National Quality Framework (NQF) even though this is currently not a requirement for playschools. It is important to us that high quality education and care is offered .

Gungahlin is a fast growing region that currently does not have a playschool that provides preschool education to three year olds. We believe there is a significant need for a playschool in the Gungahlin region based on the length of waitlists of playschools in the North of Canberra, and capacity issues spanning the Gungahlin region as a whole. Gungahlin families who value preschool education are currently travelling to other areas of Canberra to access playschools. Long wait lists are resulting, particularly in the Northern suburbs of Canberra, making it difficult for all Canberra families to access three year old preschool education.

What does the research say?

The recently released Mitchell report; 'Preschool – Two Years are Better than One' has recently received National attention. The report by Fox & Geddes (2016) adds to the body of research that supports the need for three year old preschool education.

Fox and Geddes state; '**Starting preschool at age 3 and attending for two years appears to have the greatest impact on child outcomes. For disadvantaged children in particular, one year of preschool does not appear to be adequate for closing achievement gaps that are already present at age 4, although starting before age 3 does not appear to yield significant additional benefits for all children'** (2016).

The report is quite compelling. Fox (2016) summarises;

- Nearly a quarter of Australian children start school without the foundations they need to take advantage of learning opportunities at school. And our school systems are struggling to help them catch up.

- Children from low socio-economic status communities are more likely to experience developmental vulnerability – but half of all children who are developmentally vulnerable come from the top three fifths of the income distribution.
- There are many children across our communities who need the learning environment preschool programs provide; and all children benefit from opportunities preschool provides to develop and master new skills.
- Many children who start school behind their peers struggle to catch up.
- At age 24, 26% of young people aren't fully engaged in employment, education or training.
- Reduced educational opportunity has lifelong consequences for young people and for the broader community and economy.
- **Two years of high-quality preschool is one of the most effective strategies we have to change the trajectories of children.**
- It is a key strategy for investing in the most important economic asset we have - the capabilities of the Australian people (2016).

Another very influential piece of research is the longitudinal HighScope Perry Preschool Project (2005). The HighScope Perry Preschool Project's participants were 3 and 4 year olds. At the age of 40, the preschool group and non-preschool group were compared. There were significant differences between the preschool group and the non-preschool group. It was found that the preschool group had significantly less number of arrests, earned more money than the non-preschool group, and had higher educational attainment. The groups were also compared at other ages, with all measures being better for people who attended preschool as 3 and 4 year olds.

<http://www.highscope.org/content.asp?contentid=219>).

In this study, the cost to the public for sending 3 and 4 year olds to preschool was approximately \$15 000. The cost to the public for not sending 3 and 4 year olds to preschool was approximately \$195 000

<http://www.highscope.org/content.asp?contentid=219>).

There is an abundance of research that shows the significant benefits of preschool for three year olds. It has a significant impact on the individual's life satisfaction and well-being throughout their schooling and into adulthood. Three year old preschool reduces societal problems and costs the public significantly less when these pre-schoolers move into adulthood and contribute to society. There is an international trend for preschool to be offered to three year olds (<https://theconversation.com/time-for-australia-to-provide-preschool-education-for-all-three-year-olds-64665>). Gungahlin is currently offering no preschool option to three year olds

The Issues

Physical space to house a permanent playschool is the biggest hurdle to opening a community-based not for profit playschool in Gungahlin.

For a quality program to be delivered, there needs to be a purpose-built Playschool built in line with regulations. Use of a hall or temporary space will require set up and pack up on a daily basis. This will diminish the quality and the childrens' sense of belonging when the space does not belong to them. Daily whole set up's and pack up's also take time away from planning and program preparation, which will also diminish the quality of the program.

Playschools do not come under the National Quality Framework (NQF), however we would want to approach this project aiming for a hypothetical 'exceeding rating'. We also believe it is only a matter of time before Playschools will be brought under the NQF to ensure the high quality of care and education continues.

What we would like?

The Gungahlin community would like the ACT Government to allocate funds in the ACT Budget for 2017-18 to construct a purpose-built Playschool. The Playschool would pay rent to the ACT government for the use of the building and land. Locating any new Playschools in the near vicinity or as part of new school design, will allow ease of transition from playschool to preschool and school.

Possible sites for a playschool;

- Franklin Early Childhood School (FECS). A playschool could be incorporated into the design of the extension of the school; or
- Between FECS and the recreation park. This block could be used to house the playschool as well as other community facilities. FECS community centre could be relocated to this space to be utilized more by the Franklin community. Moving the community room from school grounds may allow more freedom with the design of the school expansion, also making the community room more accessible to the community. It is currently used by various playgroups, language groups and the Breastfeeding Association.
- As part of a new Gungahlin suburb development

We would be open to other possibilities that meet the requirement of a purpose-built (or purpose-renovated) building and playground space.

Summary

Research supports two years of preschool, which in the ACT is provided in part through the playschool model. Providing two years of preschool education is a key strategy for investing in the most important economic asset we have - the capabilities of the Australian people (Fox, 2016).

Gungahlin has significant population growth compared to the rest of Canberra, which has put significant pressure on school enrolments. Even so, Gungahlin is still the only region without a Playschool. Some regions in Canberra can offer two or more Playschool's to their community. Playschool is an educational service that is lacking in our region and we would like funds allocated to this project to meet the educational needs of three year olds.

Physical building and outdoor space is the biggest barrier to providing this service. Should the ACT Government be prepared to invest in this important venture, the community will take care of the rest by providing a high quality, community-based, not for profit playschool for the Gungahlin region.

References

Canberra Preschool Association <http://www.canberrapreschools.org.au/about-us/playschools>

Fox, S. (2016). *Time for Australia to provide preschool education for all three year olds*.
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Highscope <http://www.highscope.org/content.asp?contentid=219>