

Independent Review of Education in Tasmania

Public Consultation Paper

Attention: Vicki Bayliss

Independent Reviewer

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Playgroup Tasmania Submission - Independent Review of Education in Tasmania Public Consultation Paper

Playgroup Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Independent Review of Education in Tasmania Public Consultation Paper (the Paper).

For over 50 years, Playgroup Tasmania has supported grass roots community playgroups led by local families and volunteers to provide children from birth to 5 years and their families with connection, social support and play experiences in their community.

Playgroups are essential in enhancing community wellbeing by empowering families with practical skills, building confidence in parenting, and leveraging community strengths. Through volunteer engagement and capacity building, the playgroup model serves as a powerful primary prevention tool, supporting families in their crucial role as their child's first and most significant teachers.

In addition to this we have a strong history of delivering facilitated, early intervention playgroup programs for families to support early linkages to child development support and services – and we are consistently guided by a range of state and federal strategies, priorities, evidence bases and best-practice frameworks in our approach.

Playgroup Tasmania prioritises delivering responsive programs for families with young children – with a focus on the first 1,000 days – and the evidence is strong; children who

attend playgroup are more likely to be developmentally on track on all five domains of the AEDC (Australian Early Development Census) by the time they commence school¹.

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¹ Sincovich, A., Harman-Smith, Y., & Brinkman, S. (2019). [The reach of playgroups and their benefit for children across Australia: A comparison of 2012, 2015, and 2018 AEDC data](#). Telethon Kids Institute, South Australia.

Playgroup Tasmania appreciates the Terms of Reference for the Independent Review of Education in Tasmania (the Review) defines the scope as focussing on Kindergarten to Year 12. However, we strongly believe this scope omits a very significant time for children and their families. The early years is a critically important period where families create foundations for their children's lifelong learning journey at home and prepare for transitioning to formal education settings. The Consultation Paper (the Paper) highlights the Tasmanian Government's investment in the early years, along with the importance of partnerships with families and communities in improving educational engagement and attainment however what the Paper doesn't touch on, is that even with this focus on investment, the most recent AEDC results identify that 1 in 5 Tasmanian children are still arriving at school developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more domains. These figures have not seen any significant improvement since the AEDC was introduced in 2009, despite this significant government investment. In light of this, Playgroup Tasmania believes the Review should be considering what we can do differently to strengthen this investment and to improve these outcomes in the critical early years before children and their families are reaching school.

The role of parents and the home learning environment is crucial in shaping a child's educational engagement and attainment. By providing emotional support, fostering early learning experiences, and encouraging positive attitudes towards education, parents help lay a strong foundation for their child's long-term academic success. These early interventions can lead to sustained academic achievement and a lifelong love of learning.

Recognising the importance of families as not simply a partner but empowering them as the leader in their child's ongoing engagement with education firmly aligns with Theme 2 of the Review: *Strengthening supports and engagement for all learners at all stages of their education.*

The home learning environment

"The home learning environment can have up to twice the effect of early childhood programs, which limits the extent to which even high quality early childhood services can compensate for inadequacies in the child's home learning environment"²

² Melhuish, 2015 cited in Moore, T.G. (2024). **Core Care Conditions for Children and Families: Implications for policy and practice.** CCCH Working Paper No. 6. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute. <https://doi.org/10.25374/MCRI.26065597>

Strengthening a child's home learning environment has been widely supported by research as a crucial factor in improving educational engagement and attainment. The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Annual Statistical Report (2017) highlighted that children who were exposed to more home-based learning activities in their early years had significantly better literacy and numeracy outcomes in the early years of primary school. These children continued to outperform their peers, demonstrating the long-term benefits of a strong home learning environment. The report also explored the relationship between home learning environments and children's engagement with school. It found that children who had a stimulating and supportive learning environment at home were more likely to enjoy learning, engage more deeply with educational activities, and have better relationships with their teachers. This positive engagement directly impacted their academic achievements.

Playgroup Tasmania champions and celebrates the significance of parents and family as a child's first, and most enduring, teacher. Ensuring programs and services are designed to support families to grow the skills and confidence they need and to strengthen their home learning environment is critical to lifting educational outcomes in Tasmania. The role of community level interventions, such as playgroups, in this is two-fold. Firstly, by creating new and stimulating learning environments at playgroup so that young children develop a love of learning; and secondly by providing information, resources and support to parents and families they can incorporate into their daily lives.

Supporting enhanced transitions

Further to the importance of the home learning environment, is empowering parents and primary caregivers to be leaders in their child's transition to formal education settings with research also suggesting that effective transition to formal early education is enhanced by increased parent confidence and demonstrated child readiness³.

Successful transition to school is a significant event for both children and their families, and one that can have a considerable impact on a child's longer-term academic, social and wellbeing outcomes⁴. The NSW Department of Education's 2021 Transition to School Literature Review emphasises the pivotal role of parents and the home learning

³ Sheridan, Susan & Knoche, Lisa & Edwards, Carolyn & Bovaird, James & Kupzyk, Kevin. (2010). Parent Engagement and School Readiness: Effects of the Getting Ready Intervention on Preschool Children's Social-Emotional Competencies. EARLY EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT. 21. 125-156.

⁴ OEDC 2017, cited in Transition to School Literature Review, NSW Department of Education, 2021 <https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/about-us/educational-data/cese/2021-transition-to-school-literature-review.pdf>

environment in facilitating a successful transition to school for young children. The importance of the role of the parents includes:

Emotional support: Parents play a critical role in preparing their children emotionally for school. Children are more likely to have a positive experience if parents display calmness and enthusiasm, reducing the child's stress and anxiety during the transition. Equally, if parents are anxious, children may struggle more during this period

Parental attitudes toward school: The attitude that parents have towards schooling impacts how a child perceives their own school experience. When parents are supportive and positive about school, children are more likely to have a smooth transition and develop positive emotions toward learning

Participation in transition programs: Parents who engage in school-led transition programs, feel more confident and prepared for the change. This also helps children adjust to the new routines and expectations and promotes a positive view of school.

This is particularly important for children and families who may benefit from additional support including those with a developmental delay and/or disability and those from migrant backgrounds. As one migrant mother said, "I am really worried when school rings me regarding my child because I don't understand what they are saying, it's really scary for me".

For families from a migrant background, schools may need to provide language support for both the children and their families from the first engagement with the school, this will help support feelings of being heard, valued and included. Additionally, providing cultural sensitivity training for staff is essential to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to understand and respect diverse cultural backgrounds allowing them to create an inclusive learning environment.

Broader community engagement should also be considered. Schools can host cultural events and workshops that celebrate diversity and invite families to share their traditions. This creates a platform for schools to better understand unique challenges faced by migrant families and adapt new ways to better support them.

For families with children with developmental delay and/or disability it is important that schools take a child-centred and collaborative approach to supporting and empowering families to transition to a new, trauma informed, formal education setting.


This approach should prioritise open communication between families, teachers and any specialists engaged with the family to ensure that each child's unique needs and strengths are recognised and addressed. Engaging families early in the transition to

school process fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment allowing them to contribute positively and effectively. Involving a comprehensive support team in a child's learning journey is crucial for reducing the risk of family burnout and advocacy fatigue. This collaborative approach not only fosters sustainable attendance but also ensures that every child is provided with the education that meets their needs. Creating a community wide support network reinforces the importance of collective involvement in nurturing a child's education experience. By prioritising these connections, we can better support families and empower all children to thrive in their learning environment.

The responsibility does not just sit with schools and other formal learning environments, community and social support organisations, like Playgroup Tasmania, also play a crucial role in supporting families and children transition smoothly to school, particularly for those who may face additional challenges such as disability, social isolation, or language barriers. Their involvement can significantly enhance educational engagement and attainment through:

- Providing Early Inclusion and Support programs eg Playconnect+.
<https://playgrouptas.org.au/playgroup-types/playconnect> (also see case study at Appendix A)
- Supporting family engagement through empowering parents who may feel disconnected or disengaged from the education system and formal learning environments.
- Building social and emotional readiness through programs such as playgroups and providing a strong foundation for families and children to enter school with confidence.
- Facilitating partnerships between schools and families particularly when there are communication barriers or issues of trust.

In conclusion, Playgroup Tasmania strongly encourages the Independent Review of Education in Tasmania to consider what we can do differently in the early years to achieve better outcomes for children before they are entering school. The Review must consider the role of parents as leaders, the home learning environment and enhanced transitions to school as crucial in shaping a child's educational engagement and attainment. By providing emotional support, fostering early learning experiences, and encouraging positive attitudes towards education, parents help lay a strong foundation for their child's long-term academic success. These early interventions can lead to sustained academic achievement and a lifelong love of learning.



AppendixA: Playgroup Tasmania_ Transition to School Program Case Study

In January and February 2024, Playgroup Tasmania successfully delivered a seven-week Transition to School program as part of the PlayConnect+ program in Launceston. This program is designed for children aged 0-8 years and their families who are experiencing disabilities and/or developmental delays.

Throughout the transition to school program, a total of 11 parents/caregivers and 16 children actively participated in the sessions. The program was deliberately structured to align with the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework, which is founded on evidence illustrating the strong correlation between safety, wellbeing, and learning. Our objective was to ensure that every child and their primary caregiver attending the PlayConnect+ program was equipped with the necessary skills and support to establish a solid foundation for their school journey, ultimately enabling them to reach their full potential.

Each session was centred around a key theme linked to the "Starting School Skills Checklist," from resources designed to assist primary school students on the autism spectrum. The skills incorporated into our sessions included:

- Food and drink management
- Toileting
- Personal organisation
- Sensory processing

We observed that many children demonstrated the ability to complete these tasks independently however parents often fell into the habit of performing these tasks for them.

To facilitate skill development, and children's confidence to participate, we set specific goals for each session which included:

- Hanging up school bags on designated hooks
- Independently collecting lunch boxes and drink bottles for morning tea
- Engaging in more structured group activities
- Putting on and taking off shoes
- Lining up between activities

- Practicing independent toileting and handwashing
- Using smocks for art and craft activities

At the commencement of the program, we asked families to complete a survey which included questions regarding their children's engagement in activities, their perceptions of their ability to support their child's development and their assessment of their child's school readiness on a scale of 1-5. Initial responses from parents indicated a low level of confidence in these areas.

By the conclusion of the seven-week program, we noted a significant improvement in parents' feedback.

Key reflections shared by parents included:

- "I have really underestimated what my child can do. When I give them time, basic instructions, and encouragement, they can achieve more."
- "My child has been able to follow instructions that I didn't think were possible."
- "I feel at ease knowing that kindergarten will be a little easier next year. Louie* now carries his bag into PlayConnect+ and hangs it up on the hook."

This program demonstrated a positive impact on both the children and their families and reinforced the importance of fostering independence and confidence as they prepare for transition to school.

*deidentified.