

C&K's 2013 Federal Election Strategy

Providing the best possible start in life for all children.

All children deserve the best start in life – including places and relationships where they can be safe and happy, with opportunities to reach their health, learning and social development potential. This is important for children, families and the future of our nation.

We know the early years of a child's life have a profound impact on their future development, learning, health and wellbeing. The evidence is now unequivocal. Children who have a poor start in life are more likely to develop learning, behavioural or emotional problems which may have far-reaching consequences throughout their lives and, in turn, the lives of their children¹. Conversely, children who have a positive start to life are more likely to have better outcomes throughout their life including better school grades, better self esteem, fewer social problems and fewer health problems, and are less likely to be teen parents, use drugs or be involved in crime². Therefore investing in early childhood education and care can save dollars and improve the well-being of our society by reducing social problems and the need for high cost health and community services.



About C&K

The Crèche and Kindergarten Association Limited (C&K) is a not for profit organisation and one of Australia's leading providers of kindergarten, childcare, family day care services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs. C&K provides the highest standards of education and care and are proud to have been at the forefront of early childhood education and care in Australia for over a century. Children come first at C&K.

C&K provides high quality education and care programs for 18,610 children at 336 kindergarten, 28 long day care and 6 family day care services. C&K is the major provider of kindergarten programs in Queensland with more than 14,700 children participating in a C&K kindergarten program in the year before full-time schooling.

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are our most vulnerable group of children with significant levels of disadvantage on measures of infant health, school achievement and maternal well-being. Indigenous children are twice as likely to die before the age of five as non-Indigenous children³. Continued commitment to improving the early childhood development experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is central to achieving the Closing the Gap targets.

Quality early childhood education and care

In today's society, early childhood education and care services are a part of everyday life for many Australian families and influence children's early development. There are now more than 1 million children in childcare. The cost of childcare has risen at three times the rate of inflation, with the average daily cost of childcare across Australia now \$79.90⁴. Empowering families to make informed choices about high quality formal early childhood education

¹ Council of Australian Governments (COAG), Investing in the Early Years - A National Early Childhood Development Strategy, 2009.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Marriner, C., Mini baby boom puts squeeze on parents, The Age, August 11, 2013.

and care programs that are accessible, affordable and inclusive is essential.

The evidence continues to demonstrate that the quality of early childhood education and care services matters⁵. Quality early childhood services can provide children with opportunities for learning and development that exceed those available in their families, particularly for vulnerable children. International research shows that the qualifications of early childhood education and care staff is the most important determinant of quality, with clear links demonstrated between a higher proportion of qualified and experienced primary contact staff and a higher quality service. In addition, our nation stands to gain a productivity boost if it can ensure affordable, quality childcare is available for all families.



C&K is committed to providing high quality early childhood education and care programs for young children from birth to eight. This commitment is demonstrated by employing teachers and directors who are university qualified in early childhood education, implementing an internationally-recognised curriculum - C&K *Building waterfalls* - and providing targeted support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and early childhood services.

Priority Actions for Early Childhood Education

C&K calls on governments across Australia to demonstrate their commitment to providing high quality early childhood services for all children by:

1. Maintaining and working toward full implementation of the qualification requirements under the National Quality Framework (NQF) within the original timeframe.
2. Investing in the early childhood workforce through the provision of training, qualifications and improved levels of remuneration for all.
3. Continuing targeted funding to increase enrolments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kindergarten services.
4. Providing recurrent funding for the 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres established across the nation with Australian Government funding, including 10 centres in Queensland.
5. Providing \$450 million recurrent funding to jurisdictions to sustain universal access to kindergarten programs for all children in the year before full-time schooling.
6. Reducing red tape and compliance costs for services and government regulators resulting from the introduction of the NQF.
7. Improving access and length of availability for Special Child Care Benefit for disadvantaged children, particularly those exposed to child abuse and neglect.

At C&K, we believe these actions will benefit Australia's children, who all have a right to access the early childhood opportunities that will help them fulfil their potential. A commitment to quality early childhood education and care programs for Australian children cuts across party politics, provider types, sector divisions and service models. C&K will continue to work in partnership with the elected Government and other early childhood education stakeholders to operate high quality early childhood education and care services.

⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2006), 'Starting Strong II, Early Childhood Education and Care', OECD Publications, Paris.

Action 1. Maintaining and working toward full implementation of the qualification requirements for early education and care services under the National Quality Framework (NQF) within the original timeframe.

This means that by 1 January 2014, the vast majority of early childhood education and care services will have access to an early childhood teacher, half of all educators will hold (or be actively working towards) an approved diploma-level qualification or above, and the remaining educators will hold



(or be actively working towards) an approved Certificate III level qualification or equivalent. Recognising that some services may need extra time to reach these requirements, appropriate mechanisms such as temporary waivers for staff qualifications are available within the NQF. Rather than delay action, governments and services need to work together to reach the new standards - our children's future depends on it.

Action 2. Investing in the early childhood workforce through the provision of appropriate training, qualifications and improved levels of remuneration for all.

To date, initiatives that subsidise or remove fees for staff to gain or upgrade their early childhood qualifications have been beneficial as services strive to meet new qualification requirements. Initiatives have included government-funded programs that have removed the regulated course fees for students undertaking a Certificate III, Diploma or Advanced Diploma, and scholarships for existing staff to gain an early childhood teaching qualification. A consequence of developing an increasingly professional workforce is the need to pay professional wages. While the Australian Government has set aside \$300m to pay for staff wage rises of between \$3 and \$5 an hour next year, the money covers less than half of Australia's education and care workforce and runs out after two years. Increased funding such as that offered under the Early Years Quality Fund, needs to be sufficient to cover all qualified staff and available on an ongoing basis.

Action 3. Continuing targeted funding to increase enrolments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kindergarten services.

Currently, targeted funding support is provided under the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act for a range of early childhood programs including Indigenous Support Units, National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, and Supplementary Recurrent Assistance. Funding for these early childhood programs was extended to December 2013 while new funding arrangements were intended to be developed by the Australian Government via extensive planning, engagement, consultation and change management with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and funded organisations. To date, there has been no consultation and the funding arrangements for 2014 are unknown, providing uncertainty for C&K and other funded organisations. Any changes to this funding will have significant implications for the viability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kindergarten services in Queensland and the enrolment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Action 4. Providing recurrent funding for the 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres established across the nation with Australian Government funding, including 10 centres in Queensland.

Children and Family Centres provide access to early learning, childcare, and parent and family support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. There is uncertainty about the ongoing provision of direct Australian Government funding for the operation of these Children and Family Centres beyond the June 2014 expiry of the Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership Agreement. C&K operates the Children and Family Centre in Mackay and early agreement on future funding will assist C&K and other service operators in their forward operational planning. Importantly, future funding models need to take into account that an ongoing focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is important if the Children and Family Centres are to contribute to the Closing the Gap targets, as originally intended⁶.



Action 5. Providing \$450 million recurrent funding to jurisdictions to sustain universal access to kindergarten programs for all children in the year before full time school.

In 2008, all Australian governments endorsed a National Partnership Agreement to ensure every Australian child has access to a quality early childhood education program in the 12 months before full-time schooling, for 600 hours per year, delivered by a four year degree qualified early childhood teacher. As a result, significant advances have been made in kindergarten participation, most notably in Queensland where participation has increased from 29 per cent in 2008 to 77 per cent in 2012. This achievement is even more significant when population growth for this cohort is taken into account. From 2008 to 2012 the estimated number of four year olds in Queensland has risen from approximately 54,000 to 65,000. In the same period, the number of four year olds participating in kindergarten has grown from about 12,000 to 52,800⁷. Nationally, 89 per cent of eligible children were enrolled in kindergarten in 2012, up from 77 per cent in 2008.

As the major provider of kindergarten programs in Queensland, C&K and its services need funding surety to plan their ongoing operations. The current 18 month extension to the original National Partnership Agreement is a poor outcome for the many non-government organisations including C&K, which have invested their own resources and partnered in good faith with state government agencies to deliver on the objectives set by the Australian Government (i.e. 600 hours, four year qualified teacher). Despite repeated statements of being committed to maintaining universal access to quality early childhood education programs for all children, the Australian Government has stepped away from its 2008 commitment of providing its share of recurrent funding to help sustain universal access to early childhood education. C&K calls on the Australian Government to honour the original commitment and provide \$450m recurrently for jurisdictions to sustain universal access to quality kindergarten programs.

⁶ Australian National Audit Office (May, 2013). *Indigenous Early Childhood Development: Children and Family Centres*, Audit Report No 38. 2012-13. Performance Audit Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Commonwealth of Australia.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012). 2012 Preschool Education, Australia (cat. No. 4240.0). Commonwealth of Australia.

Action 6. Reducing red tape and compliance costs on providers and government regulators resulting from the introduction of the NQF.

In the two years since the introduction of the NQF, a number of unintended administrative consequences have emerged that detract from a service’s business of providing quality early education and care. It is timely to examine how the complexities and regulatory burden can be reduced while maintaining the integrity and quality standards of the NQF. For instance, one simple change would be removing the requirement to have supervisory staff certified by regulatory authorities. Service operators are best placed to determine who is an appropriate person to take on a supervisory position at their service.



Action 7. Improving access and length of availability for Special Child Care Benefit for disadvantaged children, particularly those exposed to child abuse and neglect.

The benefits afforded to all children through high quality early childhood education and care are even greater for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, such as children who have experienced trauma through child abuse and neglect. It is well documented that participation in quality education programs provides a stable and positive environment that can help these children build resilience and overcome trauma. It also provides vulnerable parents with some respite. Unfortunately, it is often our most disadvantaged children that miss out on quality early education programs due to issues of access and affordability. C&K calls on the Australian Government to examine options to expand and improve accessibility to the Special Child Care Benefit for children exposed to, or at risk of, abuse and neglect. These children often commence their schooling well behind their peers, and access to quality early education programs for at least 24 months prior to full-time schooling, delivered by degree qualified teachers, may go some way to closing this gap.

Authorised by Michael Tizard, Chief Executive Officer, C&K, 14 Edmonstone Street, Newmarket Q 4051

Michael Tizard has recently commenced as Chief Executive Officer at C&K. With a background in child protection, family support and early childhood education and care, Michael has a strong interest in improving access for disadvantaged children and families, and in integrated service approaches. Michael has experience in developing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to build strong and culturally safe child and family services and together with C&K’s outstanding work in this area, believes that C&K has much to offer in supporting the government’s Closing the Gap initiatives.



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