

13th January 2015
MEDIA RELEASE

Queensland at risk of being left behind in early childhood education

Queensland's longest established and largest kindergarten provider says the future of early childhood education across the state is under threat and should be on the radars of all political candidates for the January 31 election.

C&K has released six key points affecting the early childhood education and care sector including concerns that:-

- \$85 million in funding has been axed from Queensland kindergartens
- Queensland risks heading back to the lowest kindergarten attendance rate in Australia
- Young children learning through play is at risk
- One in four Queensland children is 'developmentally vulnerable'
- High and complex needs have doubled but funding has not kept pace
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more than twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable than non-Indigenous children.

The C&K Association's CEO Michael Tizard says while funding for the sector is largely the responsibility of the Federal Government, the states are responsible for service delivery and this will suffer unless there is some funding certainty going forward.

"We acknowledge the efforts of the Queensland Government in lobbying for funding, but there is still a high level of uncertainty and Queensland has lagged behind other states in committing to funding kindergarten programs long term.

"Other states have agreed to fund early education programs regardless of commitments made by the Federal Government and we want Queensland to do the same and show policy leadership in this area", he said.

Currently kindergarten services in Queensland are funded under a national partnership agreement between the Federal Government and states and territories.

The current funding has only been extended to the end of 2015 and will depend on the Federal Government's response to a Productivity Commission report tabled late last year.

The Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) is also calling for long-term bilateral agreements with the Federal Government to ensure funding certainty and improve universal access to early childhood education.

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The current system ensures all four year old children have access to at least 15 hours a week of kindergarten education in the year before they attend school but Mr Tizard says the future of this is uncertain due to funding question marks.

“At C&K we have nearly 400 centres across Queensland and the work our staff do is vital in helping prepare more than 20,000 children for school”, he said.

Australia currently ranks number 34 of 38 OECD countries on early childhood education enrolment rates.

Mr Tizard says a large amount of work has been done in recent years to turn this around, particularly in Queensland where participation rates have risen from 29% to 97% in recent years.

“The last thing the early education sector in Queensland wants to see is this boost in participation rates go backwards due to lack of funding”, he said.

“We encourage people to canvas their local candidate on whether they are committed to quality early childhood education for all Queensland children.

“Every single child has a right to a quality kindergarten experience, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances are.”

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