

PRESCHOOL POSITION STATEMENT

All young children thriving and learning

Quality preschools

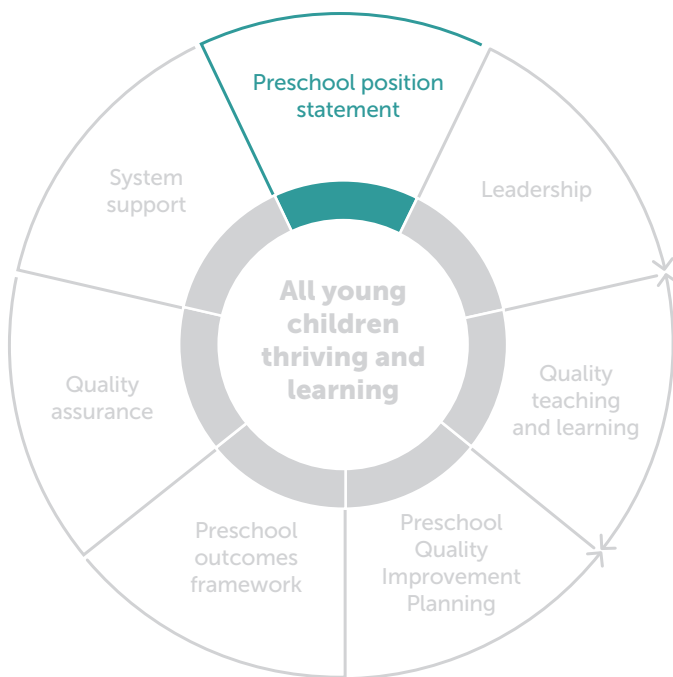


Government of South Australia
Department for Education

Background

This position statement has been developed as a key action of the Department for Education's Early Learning Strategy. It has been developed through consultation with preschool and school leaders, and Local Education Teams. It shares our aspirations for quality in every government preschool and in the experience of children and families who access them. It aims for shared and consistent understanding of our goal of *high-quality educational preschool programs underpinned by excellence in teaching and learning* in every preschool in our system.

The position statement is the keystone of the preschool quality model and provides overarching context and direction for quality in government preschools.



The term 'preschool' encompasses government preschool in all its forms including stand-alone preschools, school based preschools, Children's Centres and preschools integrated with a child care program or service. While the term represents different service settings, our aspiration for preschool quality in each of these services is the same.

The position statement echoes the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education declaration to enable every child and student to *be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face* (Education Council, December 2019).

The statement promotes excellence and equity and recognises the role that quality preschool education plays in establishing the foundation for lifelong wellbeing and learning underpinned by the educational program and practice, relationships that teachers and educators develop with children, and leadership.

8 key themes were identified through the consultation process:



Children



Families and communities



Learning and development



Support and inclusion



Outcomes



Leadership



Teachers and educators



Quality

These themes are non-hierarchical and reflect the essential elements of quality preschool programs that support and enable all young children to thrive and learn at preschool.

Our system recognises and values the work of all educators who work with children to progress learning. This includes teachers, early childhood workers, school service officers and support staff. However, we recognise the professional role and responsibility of early childhood teachers to plan for and assess children's learning and development and therefore use both 'teachers' and 'educators' throughout this resource.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners throughout South Australia and we pay respect to the custodians of the land on which we live and learn. We respect their spiritual relationship with Country and acknowledge that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to those living today.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and we acknowledge the cultural authority of Aboriginal people visiting from other areas of South Australia and Australia

Children



Children in South Australia have the right to high-quality educational preschool programs that support their learning and development in their local government preschool.

We recognise and understand the role that quality preschool education plays in establishing foundations for every child's lifelong wellbeing and learning. Preschool education is about more than preparation for the future; it is also an important time for every young child to simply experience being 3, 4 or 5. It's about children belonging, being and becoming.

We have high expectations for every child and we know this supports children to develop positive beliefs and dispositions about themselves. We believe that all children can and will grow in their learning and development over time and understand that different supports and tailored approaches are needed for this to be true for all children.

We recognise and value the unique experiences and strengths that children bring to preschool. We acknowledge Aboriginal ways of growing, knowing and learning as well as their language, culture and spirit as being important to their learning and development. We make meaningful connections with Aboriginal families and communities to support children's learning, identity and belonging. We value and affirm diversity in children's cultures, communities, contexts and abilities. We start from where a child is at so each child can experience success in their learning and development.

We view children as capable and competent with agency to make decisions and choices as they develop and learn. Children are citizens and community members and have experiences that enable them to make decisions, and consider fairness, empathy and compassion.

Our preschools provide all children with the opportunity to grow and learn through child centred, play-based approaches which facilitate children's social, emotional, language, cognitive and physical development. Our preschools offer supportive relational environments that foster a child's sense of belonging, confidence, resilience, wellbeing and cultural identity. They aim to make a positive difference for all children through their use of quality early childhood practices.

Children are active participants in our preschool communities. They are connected to the natural and built environs that surround them and are given opportunities to explore, care for and impact positively on these spaces.

A space for children to grow and learn, where their individual needs are recognised, encouraged, supported and celebrated

- preschool leader

Families and community



Children grow and learn in the context of their family and community.

Children grow and learn in the context of their family and we recognise that families are children's first and most important teachers. We understand that supporting families fundamentally supports children and working in genuine partnership with families supports children's learning and development.

As the first universal interaction families have with the education system, preschools have an important role in supporting families and communities to give their children the best start in learning and life. We recognise the value of a positive home learning environment and assist families to support their child's everyday learning at home. We value and respect families' knowledge of their child.

Our preschools are welcoming of families in all their forms and value the diversity of cultural backgrounds and experiences families bring. We recognise that for Aboriginal families the term 'family' refers to parents, carers, families and extended families, Elders and community members.

Educators develop genuine relationships with families. This relationship-based approach means that we can encourage and support families to engage early in their child's learning and development. We know that engaging families in their children's learning brings enduring benefits to children's learning and development over time including in school.

Educators and families develop reciprocal relationships and work in partnership in the best interest of children. Families are encouraged to contribute to decision-making for their children and for the preschool. Educators support families by respecting their views, connecting them with services and building social capacity.

Our preschools reflect and welcome the diversity of their community, and actively contribute to it. We value, encourage and facilitate the engagement and participation of Aboriginal community members including in decision-making processes, governance of centres and co-design of programs and services for Aboriginal children and families.



An inclusive service which provides quality education and care for all children and families within the context of their community
- preschool leader

Learning and development



Children's learning is dynamic and holistic, with each child learning in their own way and at their own pace.

Our preschools aim for all children to progress in their learning and development and understand that individual children will require and receive individualised supports and approaches.

Children learn best through play and hands on experiences, conversation, relationships with others and intentional opportunities to be challenged and extended as they make meaning. Children learn in diverse ways and at differing paces and their learning is dynamic and holistic. Their learning progression is not linear and is influenced by their family and community experiences, their dispositions and capabilities along with their engagement at preschool.

Children's learning in preschool builds on their early learning experiences at home, in their culture and community, and in early childhood services. Learning in preschool includes social, emotional and physical learning and development, alongside and in conjunction with language and cognitive learning and development. This holistic approach ensures a focus on the whole child whilst also setting the foundations for success in literacy and numeracy.

As they develop their identity as learners, children are increasingly able to self-regulate, becoming aware of and able to manage their thinking, emotions and behaviour. These areas are crucial to develop in the first 5 years and are connected with long-term positive attitudes to learning, the development of supportive social networks and health and wellbeing.

Learning is a relational experience and warm, responsive relationships are foundational. Children learn in and through their relationship with others and their environment. Children learn when they have a sense of belonging, are supported to make decisions and to take risks. Our teaching and learning programs are developed with individual children in mind and intentionally connect with where children are in their learning and development, supporting them to take their next step.

Educators work with the principles, practices and outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework and department preschool curriculum resources that support the framework. Educators recognise that each child brings to preschool their own strengths, skills and abilities and makes progress over time with increasingly complex skills and knowledge. Teachers plan for children's learning with an emphasis on providing opportunities for purposeful play supported by intentional teaching. All educators engage in high-quality interactions with children.

Educators monitor children's progress over time so they know where every child is at in their learning and make responsive curriculum and pedagogical adjustments to meet individual and group needs, stretching children towards their next learning goal.

Our high-quality preschools have environments that are accessible and inviting, encourage children to make choices, set learning goals and explore ideas, individually and in groups. Children are enabled to exercise agency and contribute to their own learning.

Intentional learning and development for each child through age-appropriate pedagogy to achieve identified learning goals

– education director

Support and inclusion



Timely and effective support ensures children have the assistance they need to fully engage in preschool.

Our preschools uphold the principles of equity and opportunity so that children have the support they need to engage fully in the preschool program. This includes identifying and addressing barriers such as language, physical, emotional and behaviour challenges, and family complexities, and advocating for children and families to overcome them. The provision of appropriate support enables children to participate fully in and benefit from the preschool program. Teachers and educators are supported by expert knowledge and advice.

We recognise the benefit of providing additional supports when children need them to enable them to achieve their learning and development goals. Preschools access a range of tools, resources and professionals for timely and effective assessment of children's learning and development needs. We know that interventions and supports are most effective

when they are applied at the right time and in the right way. Teachers and educators offer differentiation in curriculum and practice to ensure individual children's learning and development needs are met.

Teachers and educators work with families to learn about what each child knows, can do and understands so they can engage with and respond to children with diverse learning needs. Specialist support services enable teachers and educators to access the professional support and guidance they need to ensure all children are included in our preschools and making progress in their learning and development.

Preschools are most effective when they are supported by high-quality systems, at the local and state level. These systems are responsive to the needs of preschools and efficient in their provision of services.



Outcomes



Every child at preschool makes progress towards learning and development outcomes.

Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (DEEWR 2009) outlines 5 broad learning outcomes for children. These relate to children's identity, connection and contribution, wellbeing, communication and learning. Broad outcomes are most appropriate for young children as they are the foundational areas of lifelong learning and development. They are interconnected and interdependent and allow every child to progress towards them.

Our preschools ensure that the progress of every child is monitored and intentionally planned for and barriers to progress identified and addressed. Multiple viewpoints, including that of teachers, educators, the child and their family are sought and considered. A principle of the EYLF is that teachers hold high expectations for all children and their learning progress, so care is taken to build on children's strengths and capacities.

Teachers actively plan for improving outcomes for every child holistically and in partnership with families. They are guided by knowledge of children's typical learning and developmental trajectories, or pathways, and these support teachers and educators to strengthen curriculum decision-making to progress children's learning. We understand that children will demonstrate outcomes in their own way, at their own pace and over time. Developmental monitoring ensures that children are demonstrating age-appropriate developmental milestones that underpin successful learning and provide a platform for developmental progression.

With the support of educators, teachers use formative assessment strategies to monitor and assess children's learning and regularly report to parents on children's progress and outcomes. Assessment of children's learning is ongoing and underpinned by qualitative and quantitative strengths based data. Data and evidence is collected and analysed as a basis for planning for goals and outcomes for individuals and groups of children. Formal assessment tools that use standardised measurement are used only as necessary for a specific, usually individual, purpose.

Assessment of children's learning and development against expected outcomes supports continuity of learning from preschool into school. Optimal development in all developmental domains along with positive dispositions for learning will give children the foundations for a successful transition to school.



An educating community that welcomes and supports every child and family to thrive through a high-quality educational program that values and teaches thinking for success in their life learning journey.

- preschool leader

Leadership



Strong educational leaders guide high-quality evidence-based practice and plan for continuous improvement.

Preschool leaders intentionally lead the team, lead the teaching and lead the learning in preschools. Preschool leaders also enact administrative and organisational leadership by providing day-to-day management of the preschool, ethical and responsible decision-making and effectively managing resources. Leadership is recognised by our system as a primary driver of quality in our preschools.

Intentional leadership is essential for enhanced outcomes for children in our preschools. Preschool leaders inspire and develop preschool teams to implement high-quality teaching and learning programs that foster learning and development outcomes for children. They lead reflective practice to drive improvement and ensure specific actions are taken, leading to improved learning and development outcomes for all children.



Strong leadership with a clarity of purpose and intention with systems in place to ensure specific actions, leading to improved learning outcomes for all children

- early childhood leader

As leaders of teaching and learning, preschool leaders understand, advocate for and apply the early childhood education evidence base in their work. Preschool leaders have knowledge of curriculum content and pedagogy and lead the team to apply this knowledge intentionally and consistently. Leaders are supported in their critical educational leadership role with resources that assist them to translate research into practice including leading practice papers and preschool curriculum resources.

Preschool leaders impact outcomes for children through developing and maintaining a collaborative culture of ongoing learning and reflection to drive improvement. Reflective practice is at the centre of preschool culture and leaders guide all educators to support each other to critically reflect to challenge and improve their practice.

Preschool leaders actively plan for and lead professional practice and learning for their team. They lead the team to set goals for children and for themselves. They develop a positive team culture using the Early Years Learning Framework planning cycle to consistently observe, analyse, plan, implement and reflect on children's learning and guide educator reflection and practice.

Children in our preschools experience high-quality educational preschool programs because our preschool leaders understand and uphold our commitment to the principles and practices that ensure quality.

Teachers and educators



Knowledgeable, skilled and supported teachers and educators ensure each child progresses in their learning and development.

Preschool teachers and educators are relational, responsive, knowledgeable and intentional in their work with children. They are committed to ongoing learning and reflective practice and have high expectations for every child. In our preschools, teachers and educators have specialist knowledge in how young children learn and in pedagogical approaches to promote and enhance learning and development.

Teachers and educators work together and with families to develop a statement of philosophy to express their shared beliefs and understandings about their work with children and families. These statements of philosophy align with the themes outlined in this position statement and are the guiding document for all teachers and educators. Each person in the team lives the principles of the philosophy on a daily basis.

Each member of the team has an important role in planning for children's learning. The preschool leader, teachers and educators can articulate the goals and strategies the team is working on to improve their own practice and to improve children's outcomes. The team collaborates to develop the educational program and each team member understands how the curriculum and practice connects to approved learning frameworks and philosophy. All educators understand and can articulate why they do the things they do.

Effective preschool teams consider children's needs, ideas, theories and interests to plan for individuals, small groups and the whole preschool. They work with and alongside children, co-constructing knowledge and building thinking skills, social connection and dispositions. They use intentional teaching strategies and high-quality interactions to invite, challenge and provoke children as they extend and deepen their experiences and learning.

Teachers use a range of tools, resources and programs to guide their planning for children's learning. Programs that support the explicit teaching of concepts may assist to increase educator knowledge. Effective teams recognise that in practice they are best incorporated into everyday routines to support play-based learning and children's agency rather than through direct instruction with the whole preschool group.

Effective preschool teams take time together to develop shared understanding and purpose. The provision of ongoing, supported professional learning and mentoring ensures that teachers and educators are able to maintain their focus on quality outcomes for children in contemporary, research-based and practice-driven ways. They are encouraged to inquire and reflect within their teams and in groups of peers. Integrated, whole team professional learning, developed over time is most effective in supporting teacher and educator effectiveness.

Differentiated, play-based learning that is continually reflected on to provide opportunities for continual learning improvement for children

- preschool leader

Quality



Preschools demonstrate high-quality practice at all times in the best interest of children's outcomes.

There is a wealth of research to show that high-quality early childhood education benefits individual children and our society. Children who attend preschool are less likely to be vulnerable on entry to school and maintain this advantage throughout their schooling and beyond. Planning for and measuring quality is necessary to support all children to maximise their potential.

We are committed to the provision of a high-quality preschool system in all of our preschools. Our goal for high-quality educational preschool programs is underpinned by excellence in teaching and learning for all. We know that if every preschool is the best it can be, then our whole system and every child in it, will benefit.

Quality has two elements – 1) structural quality and 2) process quality. Structural quality refers to system level inputs and supports such as centre facilities and resources, staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications, along with an effective, responsive and supportive system. Quality is driven through an embedded culture of improvement through ongoing self-reflection on outcomes for children.

Process quality focuses on the nature of interactions between the child and teacher, child and child, teacher and parent, teacher and teacher, as well as the nature of centre leadership and teacher pedagogical skills. Process components influence everyday early childhood education and care settings, and they directly influence the quality of a child's day-to-day experience. These aspects of process quality are fostered and supported in a high-quality system through leadership, mentoring and professional learning.

The National Quality Standard rates services against benchmarks in seven areas. The path to quality begins with a minimum expectation expressed in compliance and regulation and our department aspires for all of our preschools to achieve the 'exceeding' rating to raise the bar on quality. We have a key focus on exceeding practice in quality areas 1 - educational program and practice, 5 - relationships with children and 7 - governance and leadership because we know that these are the key levers of quality and support children's learning and development outcomes.

Quality teaching and learning is driven through the Early Years Learning Framework planning cycle. Planning for ongoing quality improvement in educator practice is driven by the Preschool Quality Improvement Plan through the improvement cycle. Use of these models and deep understanding of the National Quality Standard demonstrates commitment to high-quality practice at all times and will ensure our preschools achieve our goals and aspirations.

Our commitment to quality in every department preschool and in the experience of children and families who access them is underpinned by the 8 themes outlined in this position statement.

PRESCHOOL POSITION STATEMENT

Key Messages

Quality preschools

Children in South Australia have the right to high-quality educational preschool programs that support their learning and development in their local government preschool

Children grow and learn in the context of their family and community

Children's learning is dynamic and holistic, with each child learning in their own way and at their own pace

Timely and effective support ensures children have the assistance they need to fully engage in preschool

Every child at preschool makes progress towards learning and development outcomes

Strong educational leaders guide high-quality evidence-based practice and plan for continuous improvement

Knowledgeable, skilled and supported teachers and educators ensure each child progresses in their learning and development

Preschools demonstrate high-quality practice at all times in the best interest of children's outcomes





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