

## **STATEMENT AND NOTES for PRE SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN SURVEY (PARENTS)**

Over recent years the context for the provision of child care, education and support for pre school-aged children in Australia has changed enormously. The social needs of families have changed, with an increasing number of working parents. At the same time, increasing evidence-based research emphasises the critical importance of the early years in the development of a child's spiritual, cognitive, social, emotional, creative and physical well-being, whether that development is facilitated by families and/or quality child care and/or early childhood education where families may be unable to meet these needs.

Catholic education has a responsibility to work in partnership with parents, supporting them to perform their role as the first educators of their children. The important partnership between parents and Catholic education in the religious development and education of children is strongly supported by the Catholic Church.

In order to provide parents with a Catholic option for high-quality early childhood development for three and four-year-olds, the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) established a working party early in 2007 to:

- develop a strategy to increase the attendance time for kindergarten students
- develop a strategy for the implementation of programs for three-year-old children in all primary and composite schools (ie. for those aged less than three years and six months on 1 January).

In November 2007, CECWA considered the report of the working party and resolved that:

- (i) the Catholic Education Office facilitate a survey of parental needs at a school level in every primary and composite school in order to develop an implementation program for extended Kindergarten and the possible introduction of a three-year-old program;
- (ii) the implementation program then be developed to extend Kindergarten hours across the System
- (iii) a project group, including members with early childhood education expertise, be formed to:
  - establish an appropriate educational program for three-year-olds to be known as an Early Childhood Play-Based Learning Program
  - determine the appropriate facilities required
  - determine the actual capital and recurrent costs
  - develop a long term implementation plan for the System.

As a follow-up to the CECWA resolution, two survey instruments have been developed: one for school boards to complete and the other to be distributed to parents for completion. The surveys will provide school boards with a tool to explore accommodation possibilities, as well as enable the Catholic Education Office to assess the level of interest, demand and/or need for extended Kindergarten hours and a three-year-old program within communities.

In light of more recent interest for the provision of care and development in the earlier age groups, the survey includes questions relating to the need for Out of School Hours Care (OSHC), Vacation Care, Play Groups and/or Long Day Care (LDC) – the latter providing programs for 0-3 years-aged children. It is envisaged that a LDC provision would service a cluster of schools and would, preferably, be managed by an outside provider.

**The two survey instruments are attached.**

A project group to consider issues relevant to the introduction of a three-year-old program has been established within the Catholic Education Office. The group will develop clear guidelines relating to an appropriate play-based educational program, the facilities which are considered to be appropriate; and will cost models to which schools may refer in establishing fees and considering capital costs. The registration requirements in order to obtain child care rebates and tax benefits will be explored also. A timeline for implementation in the longer term will be developed based on the survey results.

## **Definitions**

In the wider community, pre-compulsory schooling (ages 0-5) is known as *Early Childhood Services* or *Children's Services*.

**NB: Pre-primary and Kindergarten education is not compulsory in WA.**

*Kindergarten Education* in WA is for children who turn four years of age by 30 June and who are enrolled in Kindergarten at a school, within normal school hours.

*Three-Year-Old Programs* are for children who turn four between 1 July and 31 December and will be provided within normal school hours.

*Long Day Care* is full-time care (before, during and after school hours) for children 0-5 years of age.

*Outside School Hours Care* comprises Before School Care, After School Care and Vacation Care for children aged 5-12 years and enrolled in school. This can include full day care during school holidays and on staff professional development days.

*Playgroups* are for children 0-4 years of age and registered with the Playgroup Association. Parents attend each session with their children.

## **Notes to assist in the completion of the Parent Survey**

The results of this survey will be used as a forward planning document for the Catholic education system. It in no way implies that the school has the capacity to provide these services in the short term.

It is the intention of CECWA, where any of these services are provided into the future, to ensure the highest quality care.

There will be additional fees required for parents to access three, four, or five days of Kindergarten as there is presently no Australian Government funding for Kindergarten and the State Government funds two days only. The estimated additional cost to parents will be up to \$45 per day (\$135 per week), depending on student numbers, for cost recovery of teacher and aide salaries. Likewise, three-year-old programs will need to be self-funded. The cost for any additional capital expenditure, including debt-servicing, will have to be met from school funds – i.e. built into the school fee charged to parents.

Given the need to be cost-neutral, there will be no Health Care Card concession for parents choosing to place their child(ren) in the extended Kindergarten program.

**Enrolment into the three-year-old program does not provide automatic entry into Kindergarten for the following year. The current enrolment policy clearly outlines the priorities given. Preference will be given to children of Catholic families for any program offered by the Catholic school.**

**(NB: See the CEO Website under Catholic Education Commission, Policy Statements – Student Enrolments)**