



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Playgroup Victoria
Submitting as a: Peak body
State: Vic.

Summary

As a child's education trajectory is impacted by their environment and experiences in the years prior to formal education, it would be advantageous for schools to engage with children and their family at this stage.

Engaging them through playgroup, schools can empower parents as their child's first educator and promote the importance of the home learning environment, to result in more children starting school ready to learn, armed with social skills and basic pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills.

Playgroups are the weekly gathering of children (birth to 5 years) and their parents that provide play-based learning for children and opportunities for parents to come together to support and learn from each other, and additional opportunities are gained by locating playgroups within schools.

Playgroups-in-schools forge and strengthen connections for families to their local school community, develop trust and confidence between the school, staff and parents and support children's readiness for school. Attending a playgroup in a school can lay the learning foundations for children and their parents; a child's first teacher and the primary influence on their development.

Research has found that playgroup attendance is associated with positive outcomes; including lower rates of developmental vulnerability (AEDC) and enhanced home learning environment.

The growing valorisation of the playgroup platform is evident with the Australian Research Council this year awarding linkage funding to a project to create a best practice framework for playgroups-in-schools.

Playgroups in schools are non-resource-intensive and as the peak body we can provide schools with resources and advice to do so.

Main submission

With this submission we seek to emphasise that Australian schools' ability to achieve educational excellence can be enhanced by engaging with children and their families before they enrol in the foundation year; the playgroups-in-schools model is a non-resource-intensive manner to do so. As the peak body we at Playgoup Victoria can provide schools with resources and advice to do so.

A child's education trajectory is undeniably impacted by their environment and experiences in the years prior to formal education. With more than one in five children starting school vulnerable on at least one developmental domain (Department of Education and Training (Cth), 2016) teachers are faced with challenges and a demanding work load. This could be reduced by schools engaging with future students and their families years ahead of enrolment, resulting in more children starting school ready to learn, armed with social skills and basic pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills. Schools can engage families by hosting playgroups-in-schools; this preliminary engagement being the first step to achieve educational excellence.

Playgroups are the weekly gathering of children (birth to 5 years) and their parents that provide play-based learning for children and opportunities for parents to come together to support and learn from each other, and additional opportunities are gained by locating playgroups within schools. They forge and strengthen connections for families to their local school community, develop trust and confidence between the school, staff and parents and support children's readiness for school. Attending a playgroup in a school can lay the learning foundations for children and their parents; a child's first teacher and the primary influence on their development. The importance of this has been demonstrated by Australian longitudinal data which revealed a significant relationship between the home learning environment at age 2-3 years and Year 3 NAPLAN results (Yu & Daraganova, n.d.). Playgroups-in-schools create opportunities for positive engagement between families and schools, supporting learning, development and wellbeing from birth

The Australian Early Developmental Census data connects playgroups attendance with positive outcomes; children who do not go to playgroup are 1.8 times more likely be vulnerable on at least one of the five developmental domains, and are less likely to have a very good transition to school (70% vs. 82%) (Gregory, T., Sincovich, A., Harman-Smith, Y., & Brinkman, 2017). Longitudinal data also reveals an association between playgroup attendance and positive child outcomes including emotional and attentional regulation, expressive vocabulary, and reading-, writing-, and numeracy-learning competencies (Judith Lumley Centre, 2016) as well as an enhanced home learning environment (K. E. Williams, D. Berthelsen, M. Viviani, & J. M. Nicholson, 2017)

The growing valorisation of the playgroup platform is evident with the Australian Research Council this year awarding linkage funding to a project to create a best practice framework for playgroups-in-schools (ARC LP160101759).

As the Victorian peak body for playgroups, we would like to emphasise that playgroup in schools are tool that Australian schools can utilise with existing resources for to achieve educational excellence.