

STATE BUDGET

2021-22

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION HON JOHN GARDNER MP MEDIA RELEASE

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Budget boosts investment in our earliest learners

Greater access to child development professionals, easier connections for parents with increased support for playgroups and a significant investment in South Australia's nation-leading preschool system are key features of the Marshall Liberal Government's \$50.1 million Early Learning Strategy, launching today.

Around a quarter of South Australian children start school developmentally vulnerable in one or more of the following domains: physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, communication skills and general knowledge.

Many of these children do not catch up to their peers at school. To address this, the Early Learning Strategy will increase the number of children developmentally on track when they start school by identifying any issues early so families can receive support as soon as they need it.

The strategy outlines a suite of initiatives including:

- \$35.1 million to expand the reach, frequency and number of child development checks;
- Helping parents in their role as first teachers, including by partnering and providing grants to Playgroups SA and Raising Literacy Australia, to give more families easy access to tips, tricks and resources to support their child's development;
- Investment in new resources for teachers to build on the high-quality learning and development in every public preschool; and
- Providing strategic vision and direction across the early years system, through the establishment of a new Office for the Early Years, within the Department for Education.

At the moment, every family is offered a universal home visit for their baby from the Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) soon after birth, with milestone checks offered at 6-9 months, 18-24 months and at preschool. Unfortunately, many parents are not aware of or do not take up the opportunity to utilise these checks.

Under this new initiative, in partnership with CaFHS and other non-government providers, we will be increasing the reach of screening and enhancing its effectiveness. ***The schedule will be widened to include additional checks at 12 months and 3 years.*** Increased monitoring of children's developmental milestones from birth to school age will reduce undiagnosed developmental delays in children entering the education system.

Minister for Education John Gardner said the Marshall Liberal Government is committed to creating a strong future for South Australian children, and that means shaping their development in the first five years of life.

"Learning begins well before a child starts preschool, but not every student is starting their learning journey on the same base," said Minister Gardner.

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“The Early Learning Strategy, backed by practical knowledge and sector expertise, strong research, and vital input from the community, will inform how we can create conditions for change and improvement in this state.

“It is the launchpad for improving development outcomes for all children. Importantly, it allows for flexibility and growth as the strategy progresses through its 10-year life to move with the needs of an ever-changing community.”

The strategy has been informed by a YourSAy survey, which sought the public’s views on and experiences with preschools, development checks and parenting support.

A total of \$50.1 million, including \$35.1 million allocated in the State Budget 2021-22 for the enhanced program of child development checks, will be spent over four years to deliver on this vision. It also includes \$14.1 million for programs and resources within the Department for Education, including the new Office for the Early Years responsibilities, and \$900,000 in grant funding.