
Early Childhood

Although it was disappointing not to have held State Conference last year there has been some silver linings. During the latter part of the Year of Covid 2020, ICPA NSW EC portfolio has had opportunities to use the stories and explanations presented with the 2020 Conference motions to explain several of the difficulties remote students have in obtaining quality EC education as ICPA-NSW were invited as stakeholders into research forums. It is hoped that the information gathered is used to inform policy.

Firstly, as stakeholders in the NSW Curriculum review ICPA NSW was invited to comment on Professor Geoff Masters's findings of the current curriculum and to what extent his recommendations addressed those findings' failures.

The quote below demonstrates the opportunity ICPA NSW took to explain that the following two issues had largely been unaddressed and were able to make that salient point.

1. Remote 3 and 4 yr olds' criteria for priority access to early childhood education

“Services are required to give equal priority of access to:

- children who are at least 4 years old on or before the 31 July in that preschool year and not enrolled or registered at a school.
- children who are at least 3 years old on or before 31 July in that preschool year and from low income and/or Aboriginal families
- children with English language needs
- children with disability and additional needs
- children who are at risk of significant harm (from a child protection perspective).

There is no order of priority assigned to the list of points above. Priority must be given to the groups outlined above before any other groups, including non-equity three-year olds.

The Masters review has acknowledged.

“The early years of school are crucial in establishing foundations for future learning success. By the time they commence school, children are at widely varying points in their learning and development. They have very different levels of social and emotional maturity, language skills, cognitive development and psychomotor development. The challenge in these early years is to ensure that every child, especially those with developmental delays and from disadvantaged backgrounds, gets off to a good start and builds the foundations for subsequent success at school.”

ICPANSW lobbies for the inclusion of remote and very remote children in the above criteria.

If pre-schooling was available for all children, there may not be the widely varying points in their learning and development when they begin Kindergarten. “

2. Lack of practical access to preschool for remote families

ICPA NSW was asked to comment on the following point

“Given the importance of English literacy across the curriculum, adopting the most effective evidence-based approaches to language acquisition, especially for reading and writing”

ICPA NSW gave this answer:

For there to be a realistic goal of language acquisition proficiency for students to be able to participate in the curriculum of upmost importance in isolated areas is access to quality early childhood education. **Currently, in Far Western NSW some 4-year olds are unable to achieve any of their 600 hours pre-schooling.**

- **The travelling mobile resource units must be continually funded.**
- **Preschools must be established immediately in remote locations.**
- **The School Drive Subsidy needs to be immediately extended to pre-schoolers”**

Establishment of remote preschools

In discussion with Nat Heath Assistant Director Aboriginal Services from the Early Childhood and Child Care Directorate (ECECD) ICPA NSW was pleased to learn that there is now a mechanism to establish remote pre schools. The Community Safety Net Service enables Start Strong funding to be utilised to address the lack of practical access to pre school in remote and very remote NSW locations. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/grants-and-funded-programs/start-strong/start-strong-guidelines>

Originally ICPA NSW identified ten such places based on distances, roads’ conditions and the fact that there was already a village school which in most cases had an empty room.

They are:-

- Clare
- Palinyewah
- Marra Creek
- Louth
- Wanaaring
- Weilmoringle
- Carina
- Hermidale
- White Cliffs

Weilmoringle, Louth and Wanaaring are operational. ICPA-NSW would like to research Ivanhoe as it has come to our attention that it possibly requires a preschool and we welcome its inclusion on the department’s list below.

Minister Mitchell explained that some of the places listed above have been considered not remote enough as per their ARIA rating. The ECECD has collated another list. See below. At the time of writing ICPA-NSW is not aware of any of these places having been actioned for pre school implementation by the Minister. ICPA-NSW wishes to further discuss the list below.

- Bulla
- Kulwin
- Ivanhoe
- Hungerford (NSW)
- Milparinka
- Tibooburra
- Tilpa
- Noona
- White Cliffs

The ECECD agrees that the time frame of establishing the two/three which are now fully in operation, had been too slow. Nat explained that CCSA are in agreeance and intend in the future to work on each facet of their governance *at the same time*. ICPA NSW asked that Nat support CCSA in understanding thoroughly the complexities in developing a two person teaching cohort in isolated regions. Furthermore that there needs to be a time advantage achieved through communicating effectively with local people to ensure that there are eager people studying at the minimum the mandatory Cert 3 in Early Childhood Support and then the Diploma in Early Childhood. So that when the building site is finalised to standard and the governance is able to handed over to the chosen provider there are trained people to deliver the preschool.

The provider for Weilmoringle is the Mary McKillop whereas Louth and Wanaaring preschools' provider is to be the Cobar Shire. In discussion with Joanne Morley at Cobar Family Day Care ICPA NSW was pleased to understand that the two person on site, travel remuneration and waivering of qualifications in order to begin are all issues the CFDC are addressing with their start strong funding.

ICPA NSW was able to reiterate the above points during a zoom meeting with Dr Lynda Pinnington-Wilson
Rural and Remote Education Program Coordinator | Rural and Pathways.

“ ICPA NSW advocates for practical pre school access in remote and very remote communities and that the ‘remoteness’ of these communities be tested by case by case ease of access to early childhood education parameters. **Preschools – Taking far too long to choose providers, site & staff.**”

This meeting also afforded an opportunity to action another early childhood motion.

“Access to Preschool via Bourke Walgett School of Distance Education

Recommendation: To overcome students going to other centres and to provide a more accessible pre schooling, the distance education modules of Preschool should be rolled out through the Bourke Walgett School of Distance Education to ensure local students attend their local DE centre.”

ICPA NSW has in a teleconference with Mike Tom, Rural and Distance Education Bathurst, in September 2020 understood the above motion will be actioned as of first term 2021.

ICPA NSW pointed out the following discrepancy, in the post conference letter to Minister of Education and Early Childhood, Sarah Mitchell. In a teleconference with Minister Mitchell on 12th August 2020 ICPA NSW mentioned this again citing the example of an EC teacher having to travel, at her expense, over 200 ks a day to teach preschool. Minister Mitchell spoke about the need to address this to attract quality EC staff to remote locations and asked ICPA NSW to follow up with details in a letter.

“That ICPA-NSW request the Minister for Education and Early Childhood to amend the lack of salary parity between four year trained early childhood teachers and four year trained primary and high school teachers”.

It is necessary for the Department of Education (DoE) to take over the salary payments of early childhood teachers so that they can be offered the same salary package as their four-year trained colleagues who are working in primary and high schools.

Many early childhood and childcare centres are unable to offer early childhood salary packages which are equal to those in state primary and high schools.

Currently, the pay gap is so significant it is virtually impossible to recruit and retain teachers in early childhood centres and new recruits often use early childhood jobs as a steppingstone into the better paid positions in the primary school sector.

Attracting and retaining teaching staff is particularly unsustainable in the remote context because the early childhood packages are without comparable incentives such as holiday pay, provision for housing, access to professional support and travel to attend professional development.

Silver linings for 2020 are hard to find however I feel sure people are relishing in the chance to communicate so much more effortlessly via online forums and appreciate isolated families’ marvellous ‘doing school at home’ skill set honed over generations.

ICPA-NSW values continued open communication with the various departments who control the ‘levers’ to allow sustainable access to quality education in far western NSW. ICPA-NSW appreciates the positive rhetoric from the current NSW government however several of the understood and agreed to issues have now been tabled for too long.

Postscript

Of interest is the following article in The Sector which publishes early childhood news, views, and reviews from the ECECD and is a platform to “discuss opportunities to market your services to ECECD”. ICPA NSW was actually the first and only – although there had certainly been local discussion about the need for pre schooling- lobby group to action at Government level for remote preschools to be established in areas where DE preschool was the only option.

“In 2017, following the launch of the [Rural and Remote Education Human Resources Strategy](#), CCSA advocated strongly to the NSW Government for children in remote

communities to be able to access a high-quality early childhood education program – and it doesn't get much more remote than [Weilmoringle](#).

A very remote community in the Upper Culgoa floodplain, Weilmoringle is 180 km north of Bourke, near the Queensland border. With a population of 70, there is no access to services like transport or, until the intervention of CCSA and other partners, early childhood education.

Aunty Josie, a Weilmoringle community member, said she'd often dreamed of a preschool for the community; "we'd asked and tried to get funding, but with no success".

The [Start Strong Community Safety Net pilot program](#) provided a mechanism to the [NSW Department of Education](#) to provide funding to very remote areas with small populations – and thus the Gidgee journey began"

Deborah Nielsen

Early Childhood

~~~~~ooOoo~~~~~