



# Early Education for Every Three-Year-Old Child

Submission by  
The Association of Independent Schools of the  
ACT (AISACT)

October 2018

## Introduction

The Association of Independent Schools of the ACT (AISACT) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the proposed introduction of 15 hours per week of free universal quality early childhood education for three year olds as part of the Early Childhood Strategy.

The ACT independent school sector provides a diverse range of schooling options to families living in the ACT and in the surrounding region, and to families needing boarding school facilities.

Independent schools play an important role in providing educational alternatives to those provided by the government sector. The ACT community is multicultural and diverse and the independent school sector reflects this. It should be a basic premise that parents should have a choice, where possible, about where their child is educated. There are many reasons underpinning parental choice, including pedagogical style, learning environment, faith, values, gender, school culture and pastoral structures.

Independent schools have emerged in direct response to community demand and have a long history of accepting an educational leadership role in the national capital, and a shared role with governments, in setting up schools in the ACT.

In the end, it is about parents finding a school which provides the best 'fit' and, therefore, the best opportunities for success for their child.

All students, irrespective of where they are educated, are entitled to a high quality of education, and it is the responsibility of governments to provide a suitable level of funding for all students to achieve quality outcomes.

The Association represents all eighteen independent schools which together educate 14,514 students, or around 19% of the ACT school population (29% of ACT high school students attend Independent schools). Enrolment in Canberra's Independent schools has historically been very strong, and have seen a 21% increase in student enrolment over the past 10 years.

**Currently eleven of the eighteen independent schools provide for three year olds and four year olds in their provision of education.**

Independent schools in the ACT have a wide range of student populations, with the smallest school having 27 students and the largest over 1800 students.

## Issues

This submission focuses not only on the proposed implementation of free universal access of 15 hours per week for three year olds but also on the existing “universal access” of 15 hours per week for four year olds. Currently, universal access provision for four year olds does not extend to students in Independent Schools. The Association has consistently and routinely raised this issue since the introduction of universal access for 15 hours per week for four year olds in the ACT.

Universal access, the availability of government funding to support the provision of 15 hours per week, has never been made available to all providers in the ACT. A large number of AISACT Member schools provide this service and have for many years, without any support from the ACT government. The demand for early childhood services has grown over the years, with 12 Member schools providing a four year old program. In many cases this is for much longer than the 15 hours available in the government preschools. In addition eleven Member schools already provide for three year olds and also for longer hours in meeting the needs of their families.

It should be noted that many of these schools have received the Exceeding Standard from the regulatory body, and one an Excellent rating from ACECQA, and are therefore exemplars of excellent practice in the ACT.

Member schools also offer outside school hours care. This provides a considerable benefit to parents as it means they do not need to access separate services for the periods where a child is not in the school program, thus meeting the needs of the families in the school community. It also ensures seamless transitions throughout the day for children who are able to remain in the one learning environment, familiar to the child in both surroundings and relationships. This provides for the child a very caring, nurturing and stable setting.

The opportunity for a **sector blind** approach of government support for the provision of early years education for three and four year olds, meeting the needs of **all students** across the ACT should be the priority. You would be aware that access to early education and care is provided in a range of settings in the ACT, not all of them schools, and as such all should be considered equally.

The Association strongly believes that the best option for families in the ACT to support their young children is for the Universal Access for four year olds to be expanded to include those students attending Independent schools. This should also extend to the phased implementation of three year old Universal Access.

Andrew Wrigley  
Executive Director  
**Association of Independent Schools of the ACT**  
October 2018