

Senate Committee: Education and Employment

QUESTION ON NOTICE Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018

Outcome: Schools and Youth

Department of Education and Training Question No. SQ17-000736

Senator Paterson, James provided in writing

600 hours of preschool

Question

Is there a specific age or demographic that particularly benefits from 600 hours of preschool a year?

Answer

There is a significant body of domestic and international evidence that demonstrates children in the year before school stand to benefit significantly from participation in a quality preschool program, and that these benefits are likely even more pronounced for disadvantaged children. Children who attend a quality preschool program in the year before school do better when they get there and these benefits persist over time. Australian Early Development Census data demonstrate that children who attend preschool are less likely to be developmentally vulnerable across all five developmental domains upon arrival at school.¹

In Australia, children are generally four years-old in the year before they start school, although due to differences in school starting ages across states and territories, a small number of three year-olds and some five year-olds also participate.

The Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children (a study of over 4000 Australian children), found that after controlling for socio-demographic characteristics, there was a significant positive association between attendance at preschool and Year 3 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results in numeracy, reading, spelling, writing and grammar and punctuation.² On average across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, the odds of low performance for a student with no preschool education are 3.3 times higher than the odds for a student who had attended a year of preschool.³

In the domestic context there is limited evidence that all children stand to benefit from starting preschool earlier at the age of three. There is much stronger evidence of the benefits for vulnerable and disadvantaged and Indigenous children of receiving two years of preschool.

¹ Australian Early Development Census (2015), *Factors found to affect children's success at school*, www.aedc.gov.au/resources.

² Warren and Haisken-DeNew (2013), *Early bird catches the worm: The casual impact of pre-school participation and teacher qualifications on Year 3 national NAPLAN cognitive tests*, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research.

³ OECD (2016), *Low-performing students: Why they fall behind and how to help them succeed*, PISA, OECD Publishing.