Australian children at risk of being left behind on early learning



Children are at risk of being left behind, the Australian Education Union warned, as new OECD data shows Australia's poor performance on early learning.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the findings in the OECD's Education at a Glance 2021 report pointed to the urgent need for reform in the early years.

"We spend half the OECD average of 0.6 per cent of GDP on pre-primary education for three to five-year-olds, equal third lowest of OECD nations" Ms Haythorpe said.

"Australia has the fourth highest level of reliance on parent out-of-pocket costs to fund pre-primary education and we rank 41 out of 44 OECD nations on preschool attendance in the year before school.

"Not only are our youngest children at risk of being left behind their peers internationally, many will miss out on the lifelong benefits of early learning.

"Governments across the country need to urgently consider how they can make preschool more accessible for all children. These include reforms to provide access to free preschool programs reducing out-of-pocket costs for parents, extending funding for two years of preschool to include three-year-olds and reducing complexity in the early learning system.

"These reforms would help ensure every child has the opportunity to benefit from a high quality preschool experience in the critical years before school.

"Children who have the opportunity to attend preschool are more likely to start school ready to learn, more likely to finish school ready for life and more likely to participate in paid employment. They're healthier and have higher levels of social participation.

"The AEU calls on all governments to prioritise a nationally consistent approach to early learning reform giving all children the best start to their education."

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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