

Giving children the best possible start in life with quality early learning

With Tasmanian state elections to be held on 3 March 2018, Uniting Vic.Tas is setting out its position on key issues facing the Tasmanian electorate.

Early childhood education and care allows children to achieve their best. It is crucial to learning and living healthy, happy lives into adulthood. Every child deserves to enjoy affordable, high quality early learning for two years before starting school.

What are the issues?

Evidence shows that two years of play-based learning before going to school is more positive than one. But only half of Tasmanian three-year-olds take part in formal play-based learning.

The focus at age three and four has to be on play-based learning. Starting formal school learning before the age of six can result in poorer educational outcomes in the long-term.

Challenges faced by the early learning sector in Tasmania include:

- An unstable, poorly-paid workforce. Significant numbers of educators leave the profession every year
- Affordability. Families spending on average 15% of their income on childcare
- An unpredictable funding framework
- A lack of capacity to care for children with special needs

What should we do?

It is time to recognise that childcare is a crucial element in Tasmania's education system. Providing quality early childhood learning lays a foundation for future learning success. A good start can make the difference that moves the next generation out of poverty.

Uniting supports the introduction of accessible and affordable childcare for all children from the age of three. This childcare is best delivered in a play-based environment and not a school.

Any new funding for early learning should focus on services and staffing, rather than new buildings. Spending should prioritise individualised care, parenting support and more flexible hours.

There is an urgent need to improve early learning education as a career. Tasmanian children deserve a qualified and dedicated workforce. Better training, pay and working conditions will encourage more people to consider early learning as a career. They will also help hold on to experienced staff.