



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

**FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT**

**Public Interest Debate**

4 March 2020

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

**Mr JAMES GRIFFIN (Manly) (16:57:03): I move:**

*That this House:*

*(1)Notes the Government's commitment to making before- and after-school care available to all parents with children at public primary schools by 2021, supported by an investment of \$120 million over four years.*

*(2)Notes that since 1 July 2019 more than 7,500 before- and after-school care places have been created across New South Wales.*

*(3)Notes that the Government has allocated almost \$527 million for early childhood education, which includes extending funding to all three-year-olds and four-year-olds in community preschools—the first Australian State to do so.*

**Ms SONIA HORNERY ( Wallsend ) (17:24:14):**

I welcome the opportunity to debate the motion on early childhood learning in this House today. I note that in the past eight years of the conservative Government this is the first opportunity that I or this House has had to have a serious discussion about early childhood education. It has been eight long years. I want to capture a couple of the points made by the member for

Charlestown and the member for Upper Hunter. I agree that provision of early childhood learning services should be based very much on addressing the need of areas. I will draw on a couple of my experiences as a teacher in Walgett and conversations I had with early childhood teachers way back in the late 1980s. The member for Wyong, as a former primary school teacher and principal, would have some experiences to relate if he were speaking about this too.

Capturing one of the points made by the member for Charlestown, the first question I ask the Government is: Why is the number of new places so very small and nowhere near universal across the State? Why do we have the lowest participation rates in Australia? But I would like to focus on workplace issues that the Government must address. The early learning sector is facing a workforce crisis. We need to know what the Government is doing and what its initiatives are to encourage workforce growth—where are they? Why are degree-trained early learning teachers leaving for the primary sector? Is it because their pay rates and conditions are better in the primary sector than they are in the early childhood sector? Early childhood is the time when all of a person's foundational knowledge is made, particularly up to the age of three.

For example, one of the four areas in the NSW Early Childhood Education Workforce Strategy is to support the workforce to obtain qualifications and experience to prepare them for the workplace. As part of the strategy the Government announced a \$1.3million four-year program of scholarships commencing in 2016 to train 120 teachers for early learning in rural and remote areas. It is four years on and only \$375,000 has been distributed and only eight students have qualified. That is only 6 per cent of the promised 120 teachers. Workers are leaving the sector in droves—they really are. We looked also at the experiences of Victoria and Queensland. Perhaps we need to look at some of the things they are doing.

Before I continue I will give a few examples from the late 1980s when I was first teaching at Walgett. I had some conversations with some infants teachers at Walgett Public School. We had spent some time at Brewarrina, Goodooga, Burren Junction and Collarenebri. They were all the schools that the Teachers Federation used to go around to in those areas even more isolated than Walgett. We would have barbecues and just check that they were all okay. The problems the infants teachers talked to me about in the 1980s have not gotten any better. They talked about the fact that the students were not school ready.

In Walgett most of the children grew up on a mission reserve, unemployment was extremely high and living conditions were very poor. The children turned up at school without knowing how to brush their teeth or how to hold a pencil. Their parents did not have any books because they could not afford them so they had no reading experience at all. Compare that to some of the students mentioned today from some of the better, richer areas. Unfortunately I recognise that it has not got any better for those kids who live at the Gingie mission or the Namoi reserve in Walgett. They are still getting to school not ready. I ask the Government: What are we really doing about those kids with the greatest needs? How is the Government changing the lives of those children for the better?