

4.2 Early education

Why this measure is included

Participation in early educational programs is considered to have a number of benefits for a child. This includes enhanced literacy and numeracy, sociability and concentration, independence, overall cognitive development and preparation for the successful transition to formal schooling.²⁷⁸ Early childhood education is also associated with a lower incidence of personal and social problems in later life such as school dropout, welfare dependency, unemployment and criminal behaviour.²⁷⁹

Research by the Telethon Kids Institute (formerly the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research) demonstrated that children who started their school careers with irregular attendance were more likely to have ongoing irregular attendance, and this had considerable effects on their academic achievement and school engagement.²⁸⁰

Children in Western Australia (WA) have access to Kindergarten, a publicly-funded early childhood education program. Children can attend Kindergarten from the beginning of the year in which they turn four years and six months. Children must turn four on or before 30 June to be able to enrol. Kindergarten is provided at both public and private schools, and typically attendance is 15 hours per week. This program is attended in the year prior to commencing compulsory schooling (Pre-primary).²⁸¹

Table 4.4: Number of enrolments in Kindergarten and Pre-primary programs: number, by sector, Western Australia, 2007 to 2013

	Kindergarten			Pre-primary		
	Government	Non-government	Total	Government	Non-government	Total
2007	18,594	7,253	25,847	19,679	7,827	27,506
2008	19,223	7,716	26,939	19,593	8,183	27,776
2009	20,274	8,222	28,496	20,212	8,619	28,831
2010	21,128	8,948	30,076	20,811	8,760	29,571
2011	22,855	10,436	33,291	22,053	8,492	30,545
2012	23,649	11,251	34,900	24,132	8,751	32,883
2013	23,942	11,376	35,318	25,304	8,938	34,242
Difference 2011 to 2013 in per cent	4.8	9.0	6.1	14.7	5.2	12.1

Source: Data provided by WA Department of Education 2013, custom report (unpublished)

Notes:

1. The non-government school data for 2011 to 2013 is not comparable to the 2007 to 2010 data. This is because, from 2011, a new method was introduced for allocating students in non-government schools to Kindergarten and Pre-primary based on the assignment by schools rather than by using the number of enrolled sessions.
2. Enrolments are as at Semester 2 student census each year.
3. Government includes community Kindergarten students. Non-government includes independent Pre-school students.
4. Kindergarten programs that are run in long-day care centres are excluded from this table.

Table 4.5: Number of Aboriginal students enrolled in Kindergarten and Pre-primary programs: number and in per cent, Western Australia, 2005 and 2013

	Kindergarten		Pre-primary	
	Aboriginal students (number)	Percentage of all students	Aboriginal students (number)	Percentage of all students
2005	1,890	7.5	1,961	7.3
2010	2,186	7.3	2,146	7.3
2011	2,347	7.0	2,192	7.2
2012	2,251	6.4	2,312	7.0
2013	2,275	6.4	2,327	6.8

Source: Data provided by WA Department of Education 2013, custom report (unpublished)

Notes:

1. The non-government school data for 2011 to 2013 is not comparable to the 2005 to 2010 data. This is because, from 2011, a new method was introduced for allocating students in non-government schools to Kindergarten and Pre-primary based on the assignment by schools rather than by using the number of enrolled sessions.
2. Enrolments are as at Semester 2 student census each year.
3. Government includes community Kindergarten students. Non-government includes independent Pre-school students.
4. Kindergarten programs that are run in long day care centres are excluded from this table.

Table 4.6: Kindergarten and Pre-primary students in government schools who are in the 'regular attendance' category: in per cent, by Aboriginal status, Western Australia, 2008 to 2013

	Kindergarten		Pre-primary	
	All students	Aboriginal students	All students	Aboriginal students
2008	73.9	39.6	66.6	32.5
2009	74.7	39.5	68.5	32.2
2010	72.9	40.0	69.1	36.7
2011	72.2	36.1	69.7	34.2
2012	68.9	34.9	67.6	33.0
2013	70.2	34.5	72.4	35.8

Source: Data provided by WA Department of Education 2013, custom report (unpublished)

Notes:

1. In 2013, new National Standards for Student Data Attendance Reporting were introduced. The attendance data covers the entire Semester 1. Attendance data prior to 2013 included only those students enrolled at the end of Semester 1.
2. The 'regular attendance' category denotes students who attend more than 90 per cent of the time.

Table 4.7: Enrolment of 4 year old children in pre-school*: number, states and territories, 2013

Children enrolled, 2013	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
Pre-school									
Government	4,431	7,143	1,567	10,152	22,672	2,504	2,690	2,584	53,745
Non-government									
Community	21,530	23,399	16,156	155	0	0	0	0	61,240
Private for profit	51	167	133	0	0	0	0	0	350
Independent schools	434	1,728	559	455	3,294	214	122	175	6,976
Catholic schools	209	0	114	237	4,926	516	78	0	6,075
Total non-government	22,226	25,298	16,957	839	8,222	731	200	175	74,643
Multiple pre-schools	412	53	0	57	8	8	24	62	622
Total pre-school	27,066	32,491	18,527	11,055	30,901	3,241	2,910	2,820	129,012
Preschool program within a long day care centre	34,678	22,135	39,747	4,214	530	255	155	1,294	103,012
Children across more than one provider type	1,669	2,107	1,171	867	1,057	52	199	517	7,642
Total children enrolled in a pre-school program	63,409	56,732	59,447	16,134	32,490	3,553	3,270	4,636	239,663
Population	95,936	72,116	63,688	19,984	33,063	6,496	3,637	5,021	299,970
Percentage of 4 year-old population enrolled**	66.1	78.7	93.3	80.7	98.3	54.7	89.9	92.3	79.9

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014, *Preschool Education, Australia, 2013*

* A pre-school program is a structured, play-based learning program, delivered by a degree qualified teacher, aimed at children in the year or two before they commence full-time schooling. This is irrespective of the type of institution that provides it or whether it is government funded and/or privately provided. Early childhood education terminology of a preschool program differs across states and territories, and these differences are outlined in ABS 2014, *National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection: Concepts, Sources and Methods, 2013*, cat. no. 4240.0.55.001, Chapter 3, 'Concepts, Methods and Processes'.

** Percentages calculated by the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA using Estimated Resident Population (ERP) data for June 2013 from ABS 2013, *Australian Demographic Statistics, Jun 2013*, cat. no. 3101.0. Care should be taken in making direct comparisons, as states and territories have different starting ages and programs for preschool education.

What is this measure?

The measure is based on information provided by the WA Department of Education and presents the number of enrolments of four and five year-olds in Kindergarten and Pre-primary programs from 2007 to 2013.²⁸² The data includes a breakdown of students by Aboriginal status.

Also shown is regular attendance ²⁸³ data for Kindergarten and Pre-primary students enrolled in government schools from 2008 to 2013.²⁸⁴ This data covers the entire first semester of 2013. Attendance data prior to 2013 includes only those students enrolled at the end of Semester 1.

National data is taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistic's publication *Preschool Education, Australia, 2013*²⁸⁵ and shows the number of four year-old children enrolled in Pre-school education for each state and territory. It is important to note that the total shown for WA is not identical to the total shown in the WA-state table (Table 4.4) due to differing data inclusion limits.

Commentary

In 2013, there were more than 35,000 enrolments in Kindergarten programs and more than 34,000 enrolments in Pre-primary programs across WA.

In the two-year period from 2011 to 2013,²⁸⁶ the number of enrolments in Kindergarten programs increased by 6.1 per cent or 2,027 enrolments and the number of enrolments in Pre-primary programs increased by 12.1 per cent or 3,697 enrolments. The increase was evident across both the government and non-government sector with Pre-primary programs in government schools experiencing the strongest increase (14.7%) followed by Kindergarten programs in the non-government sector (9.0%) (Table 4.4).

Around 6.4 per cent of Kindergarten students and 6.8 per cent of Pre-primary students are Aboriginal children. These proportions are slightly lower than the proportions recorded for 2011. In absolute figures, the number of Aboriginal children in Kindergarten programs decreased from 2,347 in 2011 to 2,275 in 2013 while the number in Pre-primary programs increased from 2,192 in 2011 to 2,327 in 2013 (Table 4.5).

In terms of 'regular attendance',²⁸⁷ around 70 per cent of Kindergarten students and 72 per cent of Pre-primary students attended regularly in 2013. Due to changes in attendance reporting standards, the 2013 attendance data is not comparable to previous years.

Aboriginal students are significantly less likely to attend regularly than their non-Aboriginal peers. In 2013 only around 35 per cent of Aboriginal children enrolled in Kindergarten or Pre-primary programs were recorded to attend regularly (Table 4.6).

National data included is taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistic's report *Preschool Education, Australia* and shows the number of four year-old children enrolled in preschool education, compared to their representation in the population. Care should be taken in making direct comparisons, as states and territories have different starting ages and programs for preschool education (Table 4.7).

The national data shows that in WA, nearly all (98.3%) four year-old children were enrolled in Pre-school education in 2012. A significant majority (69.8%) were in government-provided Pre-schools, with most of the remainder in non-government Pre-schools. Queensland had the second highest proportion (93.3%) of four year-olds enrolled in Pre-school education (Table 4.7).

Strategies

National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education, Council of Australian Governments (extended to 2014)

The National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education has been extended to December 2014. The agreement has committed to maintaining universal access to early education through the provision of 600 hours per year of Kindergarten, ongoing professional development for staff and enhancing transition to school. This agreement has a focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Further information is available at www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education.aspx

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014, Council of Australian Governments

This plan will be undertaken at the national, state and local level to close the gap between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. These actions are linked to six priority areas that evidence shows will have the most impact on closing the gap, including readiness for school. The plan is available at http://scseec.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/ATSI%20documents/ATSIEAP_web_version_final.pdf

Aboriginal Education Plan for WA Public Schools 2011–2014, Government of Western Australia

Readiness for school is one of the key focus areas of this plan. Strategies include better access to Pre-school facilities, general support for parents, screening of young children prior to Year 1 and case management for children assessed as not ready for school. The plan is available at www.det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/strategic-documents/aboriginal-education-plan-2011-2014

Want to know more?

Data on early education

The Australian Bureau of Statistics publishes data on Pre-school education in all Australian states and territories, available at

Research, reports and articles

In 2009, the WA Auditor General released the *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*. The report is available at https://audit.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/report2009_09.pdf

Other information

Further information on WA education policy is available from the Department of Education website www.education.wa.gov.au

The Schools and You site includes information for parents and the community about public schooling. <http://det.wa.edu.au/curriculumssupport/earlychildhood/detcms/navigation/category.jsp?categoryID=14350457>

The State government has committed to the establishment of 16 Child and Parent Centres on selected public school sites in vulnerable communities. A range of children and family services, such as early learning programs for three year-olds, playgroups, child and maternal health services and parent programs are provided



by procured non-government organisations. Further information is available from <http://det.wa.edu.au/curriculumsupport/earlychildhood/detcms/navigation/category.jsp?categoryID=14350457>

Under the Closing the Gap: Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership, WA has received funding to construct and operate five Children and Family Centres in WA. These centres are predominantly for Aboriginal children from birth to eight years of age and their families, and will offer a range of early learning and child and material health programs. Further information is available from <http://det.wa.edu.au/curriculumsupport/earlychildhood/detcms/navigation/initiatives/children-and-family-centres/>

Hancock K, Shepherd C, Lawrence D and Zubrick S 2013, *Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts*, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth. Available from www.telethonkids.org.au/media/472779/final_report_2013.pdf

