



Community Perspectives on Full-time
Kindergarten on School Sites and the
Advancement of a Western Australian
Government-led Play Strategy

October 2025





Community Perspectives on Full-time Kindergarten on School Sites and the Advancement of a Western Australian Government-led Play Strategy

This report brings together the collective voices of Western Australian parents, carers, teachers, educators, preservice teachers, and interested community members who contributed their perspectives during two community engagement events held in October 2025: a Murdoch University held Monday@Murdoch seminar and a presentation at the Early Childhood Australia (ECA) conference.

The purpose of the Play Matters Collective data collection is twofold: first, to gather community insights and lived experiences regarding the proposed introduction of full-time kindergarten programs on school sites in relation to play matters; and second, to explore practical and visionary ways to “get the ball rolling” in progressing a government-led Western Australian Play Strategy. The following five questions were provided:

- 1. What are your initial thoughts about full-time kindergarten on school sites?**
- 2. What should children be doing during full-time kindergarten hours?**
- 3. What opportunities can full-time kindergarten provide?**
- 4. What advice would you share with the CCYP and Minister Winton?**
- 5. A WA Play Strategy - how to get the ball rolling?**

The community insights collected in answering these questions reflect a belief in the critical importance of play for children’s learning, wellbeing, and development. Responses express strong advocacy for policies and practices that prioritise play-based learning, empower early childhood professionals, and ensure equitable access to high-quality early education for all children across Western Australia.

Considering the proposed introduction of full-time kindergarten on school sites, these perspectives emphasise the need to carefully consider the implications for children, families, and educators. Collectively, community voices provide a foundation for dialogue and purposeful action toward shaping a Western Australian government-led Play Strategy that is research-informed, inclusive, and grounded in the rights, needs, and best interests of all children.

Acknowledged and Submitted by:
Associate Professor Sandra Hesterman
Chairperson Play Matters Collective

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Hesterman", written in a cursive style.

Date: 18 October 2025

1. What are your initial thoughts about full-time kindergarten on school sites?

- Children are not ready developmentally to be at school full time.
- While there may be some benefits (e.g., one secure, familiar place for children and families), there are also major concerns about structure, planning, and support required from the Department of Education.
- Full-time kindergarten is too much if the current curriculum push-down continues resulting in less outdoor play and pressure to align with whole-school timetables.
- The approach is inappropriate for the age and stage of kindergarten children.
- It would be a logistical nightmare for schools and not helpful for families.
- Seen by some as a political move (“buying votes”) rather than a child-focused initiative.
- Too much, too soon for young children.
- Educators feel disillusioned and upset, believing the policy benefits parent convenience and dollars, not children’s developmental needs.
- Concerns about implementation logistics where will the space, teachers, and resources come from, especially when current classrooms are already shared?
- A few note it might reduce confusion for children who currently attend multiple settings (school and daycare).
- Children may become very tired attending full time.
- Questions raised about starting age, play-based learning, and whether the model will be developmentally appropriate.
- Worries about loss of childhood and pressure for sequential, academic programs replacing play.
- Several respondents strongly disagree or do not agree with full-time kindergarten.
- Deep concern about impacts on young children’s social and emotional development and the persistent top-down approach to early years education.
- A small number of respondents believe it could be a great idea if implemented properly.
- Some say it could be positive if guided by appropriate early childhood principles where educators and play are valued.
- Questions about whether full-time kindergarten is replacing childcare rather than improving student outcomes.
- Concerns about what children will do during the extra hours fear of increased academic pressure and expectations to “learn more.”
- Concern that other states are directing universal access funding to the early childhood education and care sector, not schools and that WA should follow this model.

- Some don't like the idea and express hesitation about potential "push down" of academic expectations.
- Play-based learning has already been lost in Pre-primary and Year 1-2; full-time kindergarten could accelerate this loss.
- Worries that kindergarten children will end up in uniforms, sitting still, and lining up rather than playing.
- A strong belief that we must reclaim play in the early years, as the shift toward formal schooling has serious consequences for children's social and emotional wellbeing.

2. What should children be doing during full-time kindergarten hours?

- Engaging in art, music, stories, dance, inquiries, sharing conversations, and community projects.
- Experiencing a range of learning opportunities that includes both explicit teaching and play-based learning.
- Re-enacting stories, being read to, engaging in child-initiated play, cooking, hands-on sensory activities, and outdoor/nature play.
- Participating in play-based social interactions and activities that build self-help skills, literacy, and numeracy through play.
- Being given time to develop skills at their own pace, with appropriate downtime and rest.
- Enjoying a balance of indoor and outdoor learning experiences, both planned and spontaneous.
- Focusing on oral language, social-emotional development, physical activity, creativity, and exploration through play.
- Having ample opportunities for play to develop physical, social, and emotional skills, and to learn about the world around them.
- Engaging in play and self-care routines, such as learning to dress, eat, and manage personal belongings.
- Learning through play, with frequent active outdoor sessions and regular rest breaks.
- Experiencing a wide variety of learning experiences that are engaging, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate.
- Spending time to play, rest, talk, and share with others.
- Playing and learning how to play, socialising, dancing, singing, listening to stories, and playing educational games with a strong focus on oral language.
- Balancing structured learning and play for example, morning teaching and afternoon rest/play, or alternating days for teaching and play.

- Developing social and emotional skills, exploring their environment, and learning about who they are and where they belong ideally in partnership with their families and communities.
- Combining early literacy (reading, phonics, basic maths) with play and social skill development.
- Experiencing transitions, routines, play, inquiry, exploration, and time to problem-solve and build social-emotional resilience.
- Engaging in daily life tasks: packing bags, eating, cooking, dressing, toileting that foster independence and self-regulation.
- Enjoying play-based, hands-on, sensory learning that supports oral language and social-emotional engagement.
- Taking part in nature play, developing social confidence, and sharing ideas in groups.
- Participating in shared meals (e.g., fruit time), extensive outdoor play, screen-free exploration, cooking, craft, and individualised, developmentally responsive activities.
- Having learning time in the morning, followed by rest and free play in the afternoon, or going home to families after midday.
- Engaging in child-led inquiry and experiential learning connected to their interests, nature, and the community.
- Having ample time for conversations, supporting well-being, identity, and confidence, and ensuring the program meets each child where they are.
- Ensuring no push-down of the curriculum, no pre-primary academic integration, no formal assessments, and no preschool outcome testing learning should remain playful, holistic, and developmentally appropriate.

3. What opportunities can full-time kindergarten provide?

- May offer a financial benefit for parents, but many believe this comes at the detriment of children's wellbeing and development.
- Provides consistency for children and families through a single, familiar environment.
- Offers more time to learn and may support family routines, especially for parents who work full-time.
- It can provide family support and access to informal learning opportunities for children who may not receive these at home or through early learning centres.
- It could serve as a play-based alternative to childcare, although some note the risk of increased anxiety for young children.
- Raise concerns about pressures on three-year-olds if expectations for full-time attendance begin before they turn four.

- Highlights a lack of understanding or training among some administrators early childhood education is a specialised area that should be taught by qualified kindergarten teachers.
- Risks academic push-down, reducing family time as children spend too much time at school rather than with caregivers.
- If the focus becomes phonics and formal instruction, children will experience a loss of play and reduced joy in learning.
- Potential for cognitive overload and stress, negatively affecting child wellbeing.
- Concerns about wellbeing expectations placed on teachers to manage toileting, eating, and basic independence while also meeting academic targets.
- Repeated worries about curriculum push-down, direct instruction, and loss of play opportunities.
- Children may become tired, and teachers may feel pressured to introduce more curriculum instead of focusing on play.
- Risk of teacher burnout and reduced capacity to meet children's needs due to large class sizes and long hours.
- Long days can lead to child exhaustion and diminished engagement.
- Concern that the curriculum will undervalue social and emotional learning, with teachers pressured to meet academic benchmarks.
- Risk that programs will be "filler activities" rather than language-rich, wellbeing-focused, play-based learning.
- Fear of too many academic expectations, long hours away from family, and emotional strain on young children.
- Loss of play and limited parental involvement, with fewer opportunities for families to assist in transitions.
- Some schools may impose inappropriate, formal programs without accountability, leaving educators at the mercy of individual school leadership.
- Seen by many as socially and emotionally inappropriate, with increased curriculum pressure and less family interaction time.
- This could lead to academic stress and family breakdown due to unrealistic expectations on both children and teachers.
- Strong opposition to blended kindergarten–pre-primary classes, as experience shows this leads to formal curriculum exposure too early.
- Clear consensus that kindergarten, whether part-time or full-time, must remain play-based, focusing on social, emotional, and language development (both expressive and receptive).
- Absolutely no commercial programs should be introduced learning should remain authentic, play-rich, and developmentally appropriate.

4. What advice would you share with the CCYP and Minister Winton?

- Parents should have a choice about what setting best suits their child whether an early childhood centre or a school-based kindergarten.
- Kindergarten staff must prioritise children’s wellbeing, with unstructured play at the heart of the program.
- Ensure continuity and sequence in teaching and learning, with appropriate classroom spaces that are safe, welcoming, and child-sized.
- Principals must respect the importance of play in early childhood and avoid curriculum push-down no EDI (Explicit Direct Instruction) or overuse of PowerPoints; longer outdoor play times are essential.
- Reinstate a fully play-based kindergarten, aligned with the Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines and the Early Years Learning Framework without pressure from the WA curriculum.
- Recognise that many behaviour issues and anxiety in children today stem from reduced play opportunities and excessive academic expectations.
- Ensure school leaders understand play-based and social-emotional learning and are familiar with the WA Kindergarten Guidelines and EYLF.
- Maintain a no-formal-assessment policy in kindergarten assessment should be for and in learning, not of learning.
- Upskill all levels of the school system in understanding the importance of kindergarten and fund every school to implement the Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines, National Quality Standard (NQS), and EYLF.
- Kindergarten programs must be staffed by qualified early childhood teachers, with appropriate ratios and ECE training.
- Provide support and training for schools on how to deliver authentic play-based programs not programs based on “Talk for Writing,” “Talk for Reading,” or USF-style scripted instruction.
- Policymakers should spend a full week in a kindergarten to experience the realities of the environment before making decisions.
- Listen to early childhood teachers not just principals, administrators, or politicians.
- Acknowledge the unrealistic expectations placed on teachers to “fix” or “sort out” children within a formal framework.
- Do not improve or extend the current system until existing play-based practices are supported and strengthened.
- Reaffirm that play is extremely important for young children’s wellbeing and learning.
- Consult all stakeholders carefully during the trial reflect on both positive and negative feedback before making final decisions.

- Recognise that increased contact time means increased preparation time and a greater need for support staff to maintain quality play-based learning.
- Extend the initiative to all schools, not just a small pilot each year.
- Employ and empower qualified teachers and leaders who align with current best practice in early childhood education.
- Kindergarten should create a love of school and learning through play and focus on wellbeing, which supports pre-primary teachers later.
- Ensure school programs are monitored for alignment with the EYLF and early childhood standards.
- Without a clear, mandated commitment to play-based and developmental programs, we risk another generation of disengaged learners.
- Play and developmentally appropriate practice must be part of the public school review process, and the EYLF and NQS should be mandated in strategic planning for all schools.
- Every school should be required to provide K-2 programs consistent with the Early Childhood Education provisions in the Education Award.
- Learn from international best practice, such as Finland's model for life and learning, where play and late school entry support better outcomes.
- Acknowledge that WA children already start younger than in other states research shows later starts lead to better developmental and academic outcomes.
- For children to learn effectively, they must experience a strong sense of wellbeing and belonging.
- Kindergarten must focus on social-emotional wellbeing, oral language development (receptive and expressive), and adequate rest or sleep opportunities.
- Avoid overreliance on screens or preplanned activities that ignore children's individual interests and developmental needs.
- If kindergarten becomes full-time, it must remain a play-based learning environment- it cannot be compromised by a "school readiness" agenda.

5. A WA Play Strategy - how to get the ball rolling

- Strong community outreach and engagement to promote the value and joy of play.
- Develop strong public messages embedded in TAFE and university programs that connect adults to the understanding that play is both fun and beneficial, and relevant to all aspects of life.
- Ensure equal access and upskilling opportunities through professional development for school leaders, principals, and directors to help them support early childhood staff who understand play, child development, and how children learn.

- Collaborate with local councils for example, the City of Gosnells who are already doing great work for children and families.
- Make parks safe and welcoming for children and families; open school playgrounds during out-of-school hours to encourage play in community spaces.
- Subsidise children's sports and consider an app or certification for "play professionals."
- Address equity and access:
 - How will low socio-economic areas be funded and supplied with resources?
 - How will rural and remote areas access resources not readily available in metropolitan regions?
- Support and protect opportunities for all families to play together through playgroups, home play, and child-led play experiences.
- Prioritise play-based learning in early childhood education, including the early years of formal schooling.
- Reverse the curriculum push-down push play-based learning back up into the early years of schooling.
- Design community spaces that invite and support play, ensuring they are accessible and inclusive.
- Involve consultation with early childhood-qualified school leaders to guide developmentally appropriate practices.
- Establish clear, achievable goals and publicise the community value of play to build wider support.
- Foster parent empowerment and permission to play, reinforcing that play is 100% evidence-based and taught in universities.
- Promote re-education of school leaders about the pedagogy and value of play.
- Strengthen stakeholder engagement, including children's voices, in conversations toward a collective understanding of play and its value.
- Ensure access from birth to age 8 to initiatives that support educators, early childhood teachers, and parents in understanding play and child development.
- Align with national regulations and standards including school registration, the National Quality Standard, the EYLF, and Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines to legitimise play-based practice in all early years settings.
- Investigate where schools and principals go wrong in implementing play and why teachers cannot embed it effectively.
- Work on bridging the gap between play in EC centres and primary school education.
- Clarify and promote the meaning of play, play-based learning, child-led play, and intentional teaching through play always including the child's voice in the process.