

Media release



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Australia's Inclusion Support Program is a gem – ensuring children, who would otherwise be left out, can join early learning

Ten years ago today the Australian Government revamped the Inclusion Support Program for children with additional needs – over that time it has ensured that more than 150,000 children could join their local early learning centre – changing the lives of every child in their kindy or early education room.

The program reforms were recommended by a Productivity Commission Inquiry in 2013 and supported by the then Coalition Government in 2015 and took effect a year later.

The number of children supported by the program with an Additional Educator has more than doubled from 10,400 in 2016-17 to over 26,000 in 2025-26. This in turn reflected the doubling of the number of children with a disability or additional need in childcare - from 22,000 in 2014 to over 45,500 by 2024.

Goodstart Early Learning's Chief Impact Officer Myra Geddes said the program had been a huge success as it makes a big difference to children's lives.

"Inclusion support educators ensure every child, including children with additional needs, are fully engaged in early learning centre's programs," she said.

"The evidence is clear that early intervention to support children's learning when they face additional challenges is far more effective and less costly than trying to address these issues when they start school.

"This vital program deserves continuing and increased financial support with the clear benefits of the program identified by multiple reviews and a doubling in the number of children assessed as needing extra support.

"We also welcomed top-up funding of \$54.8M announced in the Federal Government's budget. This investment is necessary as the base funding for the program and wage subsidy rate has not increased in a decade.

"A decade ago the wage subsidy fully covered costs, but now it covers only around 68% which means early learning centres must cross subsidise the cost of additional educators to support children who need more support.

"The Productivity Commission called for an urgent increase in funding for Inclusion Support so that all children could fully participate in early learning. It also called for a shift to a new funding approach that would better align funding to the needs of children, which we also support.

"Today we can celebrate the support that the Inclusion Support Program has provided for over 150,000 children in the past decade, while committing to ensure that children with additional needs get the support they need to participate in early learning over the next decade," she said.

Table of information below.

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Notes for editors: Goodstart Early Learning is Australia's largest not for profit early learning provider with 665 centres nationwide. For more information, visit goodstart.org.au. Goodstart acknowledges all Traditional Custodians across Australia, recognises First Nations peoples' continued cultural and spiritual connection to the land and we pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

We're for children, not for profit

visit goodstart.org.au

10 years of the Inclusion Support Program by the numbers

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Children with a disability in ¹²	27,000*	31,100	35,200	39,300	43,400	47,500*	49,400	51,300	53,300*	n.a.
Children supported with additional ISP educator	10,400	10,900	11,164	13,037	16,112	17,675	21,004	23,090	26,183	26,521
ISP base funding ³ (M)	\$127	\$137	\$138	\$133	\$133	\$133	\$133	\$133	\$133	\$133
ISP educator rate funding (\$/hr)	\$23	\$23	\$23	\$23	\$23	\$23	\$23	\$23	\$23	\$23
Educator wage rate paid (\$/hr) ³	\$24.08	\$24.88	\$25.75	\$26.52	\$26.99	\$27.79	\$29.20	\$31.01	\$32.32	\$33.60

¹Estimate for each year based on the National ECEC Workforce Census, 2016, 2021 and 2024. ²Funding excludes one off top-ups of various amounts provided annually by the Australian Government since 2021. ³Cert III qualified level 3.3 plus super.