

Friday, 7 May 2021

HELPING ABORIGINAL CHILDREN GET THE BEST START IN LIFE

A record number of Aboriginal children in Victoria have participated in Four-Year-Old Kindergarten for the second year in a row, despite the challenges of the pandemic.

Minister for Early Childhood Ingrid Stitt welcomed the data – based on ABS population estimates – which show full participation in Four-Year-Old Kinder continued in 2020 after being first achieved in 2019, up from 77 per cent in 2013.

The participation rate for three-year-old Aboriginal children in Early Start Kindergarten has also increased from 27 per cent to 68 per cent over the same period.

The Andrews Labor Government is helping to keep Aboriginal participation rates strong despite the impact of the pandemic. This includes \$1.2 million provided for outreach workers to support Aboriginal children and their families to re-engage with kindergarten and the transition to school.

Sixteen services across the state were also offered funding to directly recruit an outreach worker.

The Koorie Kids Shine awareness campaign, which has run since 2015, is another initiative that has helped lift participation through positive promotion of the value and availability of kindergarten in Aboriginal communities.

Last month, updated Koorie Kids Shine materials were released in recognition of National Close the Gap Day, with further materials to be developed throughout 2021.

Strong advocacy and support from key Aboriginal organisations – including Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEI) – and strengthened partnerships between the Department of Education and Training and Aboriginal early childhood and kindergarten services, have also helped to steadily lift participation rates in recent years.

Many Aboriginal children have also benefited from the Labor Government's focus on kinder participation for vulnerable and disadvantaged children through initiatives such as School Readiness Funding, Best Start and Early Childhood LOOKOUT.

Making Victoria the Education State starts with the early years. That's why, in an Australian first, the Labor Government is investing almost \$5 billion over this decade to deliver a full 15 hours per week of universally funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, with the roll-out starting this year.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Early Childhood Ingrid Stitt

"We know a great early childhood education can set children up to be happy, healthy and resilient for life – that's why we're providing high quality kindergarten programs for Aboriginal children at little or no cost to families."

"We are investing to help all Victorian children — no matter where they live or what their circumstances — to have the very best start in life, because no child should be left behind."

Quote attributable to Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gabrielle Williams

"I am thrilled Aboriginal participation rates in kindergarten have remained strong despite the impact of the pandemic – it shows our investments are working and helping all kids get the best start in life."