

Children  
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee  
Inquiry into the 2025-26 budget estimates hearings

Response to Question on Notice

Portfolio	Children
Witness	Tony Bates, Acting Secretary, Department of Education
Committee member	Nick McGowan, MLC for North Eastern Metropolitan Region.
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Excerpt from transcript

Nick McGowan: Okay. Thank you. Page 33 of the department questionnaire, again, states \$2 billion in funding has been allocated to this program. Are you able to provide any line items that contribute to that funding amount?

Lizzie Blandthorn: The \$2 billion obviously refers to over the four years, and it refers to the whole of the Best Start, Best Life reforms, if you like. It was obviously announced in 2022. It includes free kinder, so for three-and four-year-old; it includes pre-prep; it includes the continued rollout of three-year-old kindergarten, with programs increasing to 15 hours a week across the state by 2029; and it includes early learning and childcare centres, so the Victorian government is establishing the 50 owned and operated early learning centres – the first four, for example, of which opened this year and 14 next year. So it includes all of those elements.

Nick McGowan: Can you provide that line item with the funding amounts for those? Is that possible, line by line?

Lizzie Blandthorn: I do not know that we could necessarily provide that by each line item, but I might ask the Secretary to supplement my answer.

Nick McGowan: Is it possible to disaggregate it?

Tony Bates: Yes, I think it we would take that on notice too. As the minister said, it is a continuation of free kinder, Best Start, Best Life and the rollout of the early learning centres, so we probably can break some of that up in the out years.

Answer

The 2025-26 Budget invests around an additional \$2 billion over four years to continue the Best Start, Best Life reforms that were announced in June 2022.

Details on the funding in this Budget for the Best Start, Best Life reforms is available in Budget Paper 3, page 15, Table 1.7.

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Portfolio	Children
Witness	Hon. Lizzie Blandthorn, Minister for Children
Committee member	Nick McGowan, MLC for North Eastern Metropolitan Region.
Page/s of transcript	13-14

**Excerpt from transcript**

**Nick McGOWAN:** Thank you. Whatever you can do would be most appreciated. Minister, can you also break down for us the capital funding for kindergartens by new builds and upgrades and/or extensions to the existing kinders if possible?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** I do not know that we could do it kinder by kinder, but obviously our Best Start, Best Life reforms include a massive infrastructure investment, which includes kinders on school sites, includes our early learning centres, includes our modular builds and includes things like our Building Blocks partnerships, which also then go to things like Building Blocks grants and our partnership with the non-government sector for kinders on school sites as well, so it is fairly extensive in that regard. Is there something in particular that you would like me to go to, Mr McGowan?

**Nick McGOWAN:** I think we are just trying to understand the capital funding for the kindergartens, with the new builds in particular but also with the upgrades/expansions of the existing ones, if that is possible.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** The 2023–24 state budget provided funding for 35 of the 50 committed early learning centres, four of which opened in 2025 and with 14 more to open in 2026, for which builders have been appointed and construction is underway on. A further six will be delivered in 2027, six in 2028 and five more from 2028. Of the 100 hundred kindergartens, with the majority on or near government school sites, this includes 20 in 2025, 25 –

**Nick McGOWAN:** Sorry to interrupt you, Minister. If you do not mind, can we get the breakdown in terms of the dollar values? Obviously that is what we are keen to understand.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** We can certainly take that away and have a look at what we could provide you, Mr McGowan, but some of it I am not sure that we can provide kinder by kinder. I mean, you are well and truly familiar with things like our kinders on school sites program. I know we have discussed them in relation to some of your own community's interests. Then we have things like the Building Blocks grants, which go to providing grants for either upgrading or modernising kindergartens. Look, we can see what we can provide you. Obviously things like the grant amounts are publicly available. Yes, we can take that away and have a look at it for you.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Yes, please, if you can. Obviously I am keen to see whether Great Ryrie Primary School has a new early learning and childcare centre, but you do not have to announce that today, Minister. I will just put that on notice perhaps.

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**Answer**

Since the 2015-16 State Budget, \$3.6 billion has been allocated to early childhood infrastructure.

In the interests of accountability and transparency, details on individual early childhood projects, including scope, funding and timelines can be found by visiting:  
<https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/>.