

Children REVISED
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 4 years to continue the Best Start, Best Life reforms that were announced in June 2022.

This includes:

- **\$867.4 million** for **Free Kinder**, available to Victorian three- and four-year-olds at participating standalone and long day care services.
- **\$415.6 million** for **Pre-Prep**, which will see Four-Year-Old Kindergarten transition to a universal 30-hour per week program of play-based learning (“Pre-Prep”) from 2025 to 2036.
- **\$593.9 million** for the continued rollout of **Three-Year-Old Kindergarten**, with programs increasing to 15 hours a week across the State by 2029.
- **\$80.6 million** for **Early Learning and Childcare Centres** – the Victorian Government is establishing 50 government-owned and operated centres in areas with the greatest need.