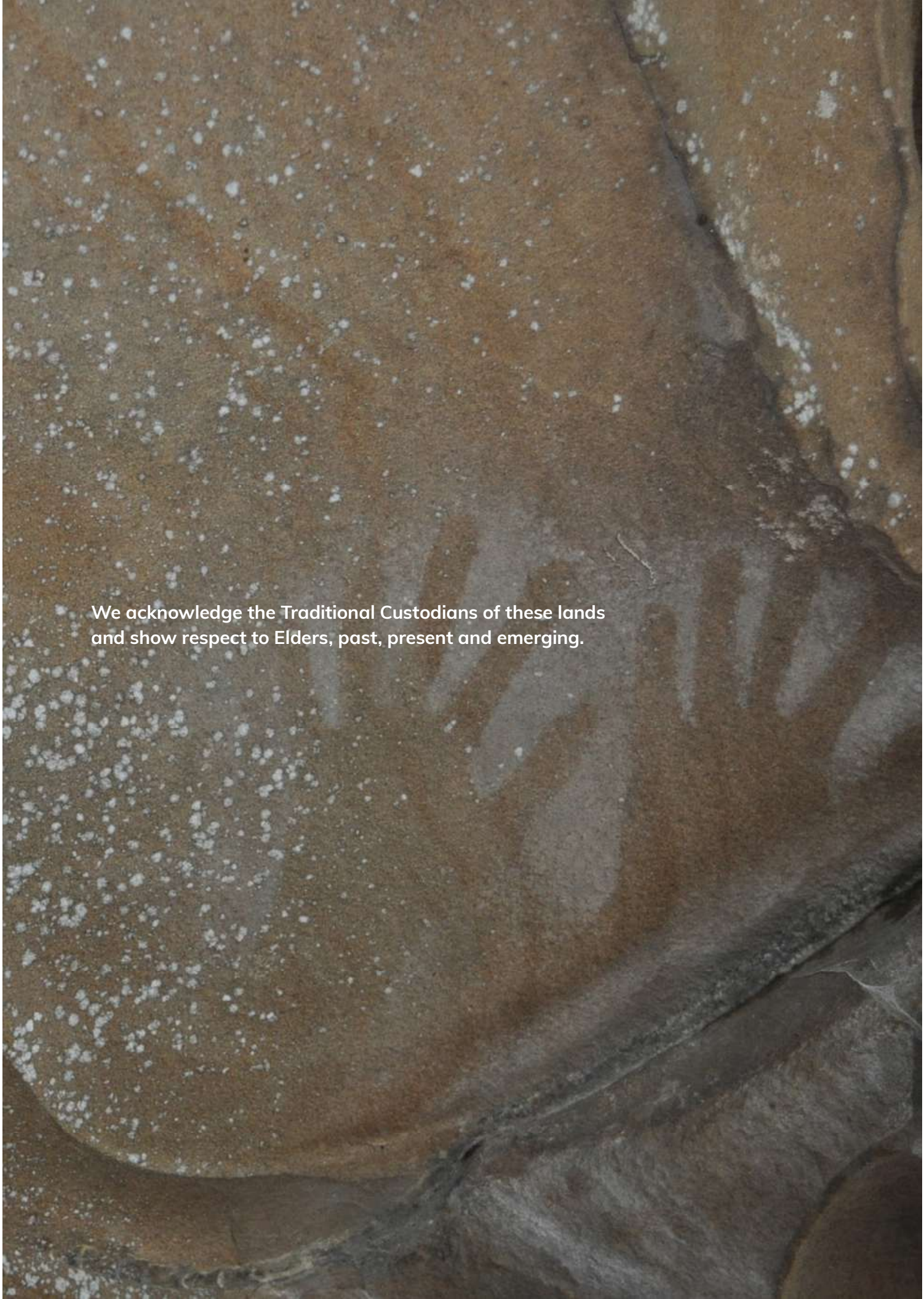


Early Learning Strategy

2026-2035

northern
beaches
council



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of these lands and show respect to Elders, past, present and emerging.

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Executive summary

Early Learning Services are valued as an essential part of Council's commitment to a healthy and engaged community.

Our integrated early learning services and play-based approach sets the benchmark for early childhood learning across the Northern Beaches.

Council's early learning services are accessible, equitable and flexible. They enable community connections and support community values.

International and Australian research over many years has demonstrated the positive social and economic impacts of early education and care.

There are current and emerging local factors which effect the delivery of early learning services including:

- changing populations
- the need for accessible services
- changes in the early childhood education and care sector as well as the workforce
- potential impacts of the low and mid-rise housing policy.

This updated Early Learning Strategy (the Strategy) is designed to ensure Council's services best meet the needs of the community over the coming 10 years and beyond by addressing improvement opportunities across four outcomes:

1. Integrated services
2. Accessible services
3. Workforce planning
4. Voices of children.



Why quality is everything in Early Childhood Education and Care

Northern Beaches Council is based on Sydney's Northern Beaches and administers a 254 square kilometre region for over 270,000 residents.

The Community Strategic Plan 2040 captures the Northern Beaches community's vision for -

> *A safe, diverse, inclusive and connected community that lives in balance with our extraordinary coastal and bushland environment.*

One of the practical way's Council contributes to this vision is through the provision of high quality and affordable early learning services. In particular, Council seeks to support children with inclusion support needs, as well as families on low income or living with disadvantage.

Northern Beaches Council provides early learning services for several interconnected reasons:

- Supporting the area's diverse communities and families and helping to meet their needs.
- Helping to address gaps in the services supplied by the market.
- Setting a quality benchmark for early learning.

In this Strategy, the term 'early learning services' refers to a wide range of childhood education and care services. These include:

- Long day care: a service that provides an early childhood education program delivered by a qualified teacher or educator, which provides all-day care for children from birth to school age, usually operating 10-11 hours per day.
- Pre-school: a service that provides an early childhood education program for children aged 3-5 years, delivered by a qualified teacher during NSW school terms, usually operating 7.5 hours per day.
- Family day care: a service that provides home based early childhood education programs delivered by a qualified teacher or educator, which provides all-day care for children from birth to age 12 in homes or approved venues catering for small groups of up to 7 children, with a maximum of 4 under preschool age.
- Occasional care: casual care offered from one hour to a whole day for children birth to school age.

Research into the economic costs of high-intensity and crisis services has identified a range of positive economic impacts of early education and care.

Often, children, young people and their families can avoid crisis if they have earlier access to appropriate or targeted support.

High-quality early childhood education is known to be an effective early intervention approach which can significantly reduce the demand for later intervention services over time.

This Strategy will ensure that Council continues to deliver early learning services that are recognised in the sector, locally valued and support the effective early growth and development of our next generation.

Strategy on a page



Outcome	1. Integrated services	2. Accessible services	3. Workforce planning	4. Voices of children
Objective	Council manages a portfolio of integrated and multi modal services that provide flexibility for families	Council provides early learning services to give families choices that cater to their diverse needs, are conveniently located and are affordable	Council is engaged and committed to fostering children's wellbeing and education by providing consistent and quality care through the provision of a stable workforce	Council will actively listen to and include children's perspectives, ideas and feelings about their education and care, recognising children as active participants in their own learning and as individuals with unique thoughts and experiences
Actions	Further establishing an innovative 'multi modal model' across existing centres which see multiple service types provided from one location Explore more ways in which Early Learning can collaborate with other services such as schools, care and residential services for older people and allied health to provide community connections	Review operational opportunities to increase flexibility for families while maintaining affordability and support service cost neutrality Seek funding opportunities which arise to develop additional Council-run centres in the upper Northern Beaches and/or Frenchs Forest area or align to impacts of the low and mid-rise housing	Engage with and plan for staff to develop appropriate skill sets required to deliver high quality early learning Continue to support the professional development and continuous learning for early childhood educators Continue to advocate along with other councils for better remuneration of educators	Implement structured programs for children's voices to be heard and actioned at all services Empower and support educators to feel confident including children's voices in the program and wider community initiatives
Key measures	Number of families with children enrolled across different service types Number of children participating in the Brighter Beginnings Health and Development Check Program	Number of children enrolled with higher inclusion support needs, from 'at risk' or vulnerable families, families with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background and families where languages other than English spoken at home	Number of trainees employed across the services Number of Educators accessing study support Staff retention rates Staff satisfaction survey results	Children's voices regularly included in Educator reflections and program

Strategic line of sight

The Community Strategic Plan 2040 and Better Together 2040 set the strategic directions and goals for a safe, diverse, inclusive and connected community.

The Early Learning Strategy sets a path for the Early Learning service at Council to deliver on the following strategic directions from those leading strategies.

Northern Beaches Community Strategic Plan 2040
Goal 8 – Our community feels safe and supported

- Improve health and wellbeing through fair access to information, health and support services.
- Work collaboratively to ensure everyone is safe from harm and danger in public and at home.

Goal 9 – Our community is connected and inclusive

- Build an inclusive and resilient community and breakdown institutional and social barriers to enable all people, irrespective of age, gender and identity to participate in community life.
- Celebrate diversity in all forms as essential to an inclusive and engaged community.
- Enhance community access to education and lifelong learning.



Better Together 2040 Social Sustainability Strategy
Strategic direction 1 - A Safe Community

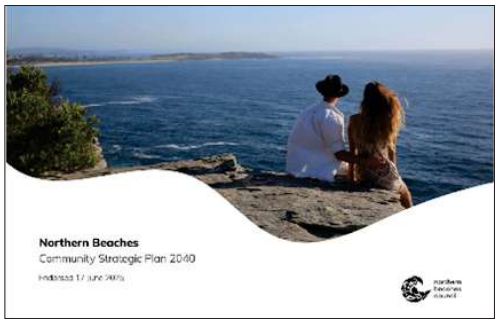
- Safe Places

Strategic direction 2 - An Inclusive Community

- Value of all people is recognised, respected and embraced
- Ensuring equity and inclusion

Strategic Direction 3 - A Connected Community

- Services programs, programs and facilities are affordable and accessible to all
- Sense of belonging to life on the Northern Beaches.





Developing the strategy

Our first Children's Services Strategy
The Children's Services Strategy was developed to guide the delivery of education and care services for children and families in our communities. Community engagement was undertaken as part of the development of the strategy including focus groups, intercept surveys, telephone interviews and customer satisfaction surveys. The Children's Services Strategy was adopted by Council on 21 May 2021.

What we achieved
Since adoption in 2021 the following strategic actions from the Children's Services Strategy have been achieved:

- North Harbour Preschool opened, offering community preschool from a new location in North Balgowlah.
- Dee Why Preschool opened within Dee Why Children's Centre, offering long day care and community preschool within one location.
- Multiple connections have been established between the services and their local aged care facilities.
- The George Institute in collaboration with the University of New South Wales completed a research based Intergenerational Program at Dee Why Children's Centre.
- Manly, North Harbour and Dee Why Pre-schools successfully took part in the National Applied Trial of the Preschool Outcomes Measure, led by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).
- The services successfully transitioned to a cost neutral budget in 2022.
- A significant improvement in staff retention rates.
- Received and distributed the Federal Government's Worker Retention Payment, further incentivising worker retention.
- Educational approach materials developed and distributed.
- Recipient of a NSW government Office of Local Government grant to fund two Early Childhood Diploma traineeships.
- Recipient of a Professional Development Grant from the Federal Government Department of Education to fund educator wages to attend the Northern Beaches Council Bi-annual Early Learning Conference.
- Belrose Children's Centre received the 'Excellent' rating from ACECQA for the second time.

Our current service levels
There are 11 Council-owned early learning services in the Northern Beaches LGA, providing 691 approved places across:

- seven long day care services
- three pre-school services
- one occasional care service
- family day care (Council recruits and supports 40 family day care educators to provide small group care and education to 246 children using this service).

These services support:

- 236 children from an English as a second language background
- 67 children from low-income families
- 59 children with high support needs.

Table 1
List of current Early Learning Services delivered by Council

Suburb	Name	Centre type	Places per day
Balgowlah	North Harbour Preschool	Preschool	40
Belrose	Belrose Community and Children's Centre	Long day care	78
Brookvale	Brookvale Children's Centre	Long day care	45
Brookvale	Brookvale Preschool	Occasional care & Long day care	29
Dee Why	Dee Why Children's Centre	Long day care	52
Dee Why	Dee Why Preschool	Preschool	40
Fairlight	The Roundhouse Children's Centre	Long day care	79
Manly	Manly Community Pre-school	Preschool	60
Narrabeen	Narrabeen Children's Centre	Long day care	56
Seaforth	Harbour View Children's Centre	Long day care	52
	Northern Beaches Council Family Day Care	Long day care	160
Total			**691**

All statistics on this page collected January 2026.

Feedback from children and families
Customer satisfaction surveys are carried out annually, with the services achieving an average satisfaction rating of 94% over the last 5 years. Families indicate that they most appreciate the safe environment provided for the children, along with the provision of creative expression and physical active play experiences, that Educators show genuine interest in the children, the organisation of the services and the approachable and supportive service Directors.

Identifying opportunities for improvement
Learning from implementation of the strategy over the last 5 years and the ongoing feedback from children and families, the following opportunities for improvement have been identified and will drive action in this strategy across the four outcomes:

- Explore further intergenerational program opportunities.
- Apply for funding opportunities to support quality as they become available.
- Continue to advocate along with other councils for permanently better remuneration for Early Learning staff.
- Apply for any available Start Strong Preschool Funding to introduce the Dee Why multi modal model across multiple services.



Outcome 1 - Integrated services



Objective
Council manages a portfolio of integrated and multi modal services that provide flexibility for families.

Why focus here
This outcome responds to feedback that families are seeking greater flexibility in accessing early learning.

What we do
Our services are always looking for ways to better integrate to support flexibility. Current practice which allows that flexibility includes:

- Dee Why Children's Centre, which offers a multi modal option for families with the co-location of long day care and preschool.
- Brookvale Children's Centre which offers a multi modal option for families with the availability of occasional care places.
- All services in partnership with NSW Health offer the Brighter Beginnings Health and Development Check program.
- Family Day Care which offers a multi modal option for families with the availability of Outside School Hours Care (OHSC) places for school age children.
- Maintaining an average cost-neutral operating model for service delivery which provides flexibility for families and increases service efficiency.

Actions
- Further establishing an innovative 'multi modal model' across existing centres which operates multiple service types provided from one location.
- Explore more ways in which Early Learning can collaborate with other services, such as schools, care and residential services for older people and allied health to provide community connections.

Key measures
We will measure success in this outcome through:

- The number of families with children enrolled across different service types.
- The number of children participating in the Brighter Beginnings Health and Development Check Program.

Outcome 2 - Accessible services



Objective
Council provides early learning services to give families choices that cater to their diverse needs, are conveniently located and are affordable.

Why focus here
Accessibility means different things to different families. For some families it is the ability to afford services at all. For others it means services located close to home, school or work.

Some families seek services which meet the specific support or programming needs of their child.

What we do
Accessible is a foundational element of Council's early learning services, demonstrated in many ways including:

- Providing quality, inclusive and equitable practices for all children enrolled with a particular support focus for children with higher inclusion support needs.
- Prioritising enrolment referrals from family support agencies for our communities' most vulnerable families.

Actions
- Review operational opportunities to increase flexibility for families while maintaining affordability and support service cost neutrality.
- Seek funding opportunities which arise to develop additional Council-run centres in the upper Northern Beaches and/or Frenchs Forest or align to impacts of low and mid-rise housing.

Key measures
We will measure success in this outcome through:

- Number of children enrolled with higher inclusion support needs, from 'at risk' or vulnerable families, from families with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background and from families' where languages other than English are spoken at home.

Outcome 3 - Workforce planning



Objective
Council is engaged and committed to fostering Children's wellbeing and education by providing consistent and quality care.

Why focus here
Highly trained, engaged and committed staff are essential to realising positive long term social and economic outcomes from early childhood education and care.

What we do
The programming of activities and establishing nurturing relationships with families and children are important aspects of Council achieving and maintaining its high-quality ratings.

- We follow Child Safeguarding principles as a critical part of keeping Educators and children safe.
- Educators are required to demonstrate ongoing understanding and competence in applying service policies.
- We provide traineeships for Educators completing their Cert 111 and Diploma qualifications.
- We offer study support including paid study leave and an Education Bonus on successful completion for Educators studying for a higher qualification.
- We support student work experience and placements and promote employment opportunities at school expos.

Actions
- Engage with and plan for staff to develop appropriate skill sets required to deliver high quality early learning.
- Continue to support the professional development and continuous learning for early childhood educators.
- Continue to advocate along with other councils for better remuneration of educators.

Key measures
We will measure success in this outcome through:

- The number of trainees employed across the services.
- The number of Educators accessing study support.
- Staff retention rates.
- Staff satisfaction survey results.

Outcome 4 – Voices of children



Objective
To actively listen to and include children's perspectives, ideas and feelings about their education and care, recognising children as active participants in their own learning and as individuals with unique thoughts and experiences.

Why focus here
Children have the right to be heard in decisions affecting their lives, this is a core principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Listening to children's voices empowers them by giving them agency and fostering critical thinking, whilst also providing Educators with insights for better decision-making for their education, care and safeguarding to ensure programs and support genuinely meets their needs and uphold their rights.

What we do
Council has been recognised as an industry leader in educational approach and inclusion of children's voices for many years. This practice is demonstrated through:

- The Meeting of the Mind's Café at Belrose Children's Centre, a weekly meeting between children and Educators.
- Participation in the Front Project's Future Visioning Conversations with children.

Actions
- Implement structured programs for children's voices to be heard and actioned at all services.
- Empower and support educators to feel confident in including children's voices in the program and wider community initiatives.

Key measures
We will measure success in this outcome through:

- Children's voices are included in educator reflections and programs each week.

Actions

The actions listed in this Strategy are presented against the four outcomes and will be implemented through the life of the plan and monitored annually.

Where applicable, more detailed actions will be documented each year in Northern Beaches Council Operational Plan and the Early Learning Annual Business Plan.

Council will monitor and report on the following key measures through the Strategies and Plans Action List Register.

Outcome	Key measure	Baseline	Reporting timeframe
1. Integrated services	Number of families with children enrolled across different service types	40	Annual
	Number of children participating in the Brighter Beginnings Health and Development Check Program	150	Annual
2. Accessible services	Number of children enrolled with higher inclusion support needs	40	Annual
	Number of children enrolled from 'at risk' families	10	Annual
	Number of children enrolled from families with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background	10	Annual
	Number of children enrolled from families where languages other than English are spoken at home	150	Annual
3. Workforce planning	Number of trainees employed across the services	8	Annual
	Number of Educators accessing study support	4	Annual
	Average years of staff tenure	5	Annual
	Staff satisfaction survey results	75%	Annual
4. Voices of children	Children's voices are included in educator reflections and programs each week	Weekly	Annual





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