

Tasmanian Principals Association supports the change to the school starting age.

The Tasmanian Principals Association (TPA) supports the mooted change to the school starting age from five years to four years, six months.

Approaches to education are founded in a continuum from play-based activity in the earliest years to inquiry-based approaches in the latter years. These approaches incorporate knowledge, skills and development of the child across the range of human capability.

Play-based learning is a foundation component of a child's development. Not only does play-based activity engage children – it provides opportunities for them to interact positively, productively and happily with people, things and ideas around them. It establishes a platform of, and for, positive relationships and an orientation to inquiry and experience which is wonderful, and necessary, for children. These capabilities form the base of healthy and happy lives as well as an underpinning for our state's social and economic development.

The proposed change to the school starting age is an important and appropriate step along this pathway. The change accords with national and international research, including reports by the OECD, and with our experience as school principals. It places our students' starting age in the midst of the other Australian states' and territories' starting ages. It continues the focus on the critical, foundational early years of a child's life.

This is a strategy which is equity based: that is, along with Launching Into Learning (LIL), Learning In Families Together (LIFT) and the work being done in Child and Family Centres, as examples, it addresses the comparatively high level of socio-economic disadvantage in Tasmania. It will bring students in contact with professional monitoring, planning and support a little earlier. Children already well prepared will, like their schoolmates, be accessing education at a similar age to others around Australia.

The TPA was one body involved in the consultation on the review of the Education Act throughout 2015. This included regularly scheduled roundtable discussions with other groups and briefings from Department of Education officials. We have met regularly with the Minister and members of his office, as have other groups. The TPA supports the timeframe for implementation (the first students enrolling under the new starting age will be born in 2016 and enrolled in Prep, the first compulsory year of schooling, for the 2021 school year).

The correlation between family socio-economic disadvantage and educational outcomes, so clearly evident in Tasmania, is extremely challenging for our community to overcome, but overcome it we must. The change to the school starting age is a step forward.

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