NEW MINISTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Following the NSW election on 28 March 2015, there is now a Minister for Early Childhood Education, the Hon. Leslie Williams MP. This is the first time in the history of the NSW Parliament that there has been a Minister for Early Childhood Education.

The Hon. Leslie Williams MP has been the Member for Port Macquarie since March 2011. In addition to her role as Minister for Early Childhood Education, Minister Williams is also Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Assistant Minister for Education.

EC Extra sat down with the Minister this week to discuss the new portfolio.

What are your early observations of the sector?
It has only been a few weeks but I am quickly learning just how diverse the sector is. As a Minister and local member, when I talk to parents they often think of care on its own. Of course, the education that is provided by services across the State makes a huge difference to the development of children in their early years and their educational achievement as they mature.

What are your priorities for the portfolio?
Creating a Minister for Early Childhood Education emphasises the importance the NSW Government places on education in a child’s early years and it is this emphasis on quality education that I will focus on as Minister. This will continue the work of Education Minister Adrian Piccoli, who introduced a range of reforms that benefit children in the early years and into their schooling.

Thanks for the time Minister, we hope to speak again soon.
It is my pleasure. I am travelling around visiting services across the State so I am sure I will be meeting many of your readers.

OPERATIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAM – STAGE 2

Stage 2 of the Operational Support Program is underway. Eligible preschools will have access to customised, sector-specific advice and mentoring support delivered by sector specialists: CareWest, Community Connections Solutions Australia (CCSA) and Community Child Care Co-operative (CCCC). These sector specialists will assist eligible preschools to optimise funding, maximise enrolments, structure fees, improve service delivery, and attract and retain qualified staff. For more detail on this important initiative consult the ECECD website.

Eligible preschools that have not yet commenced Stage 1 consultations are urged to schedule an appointment with a Small Biz Connect advisor by calling 1300 134 359.
BI-ANNUAL PRESCHOOL CENSUS IN 2016

The Preschool Census is currently conducted once a year in August. From early 2016 the census of community preschools will take place twice a year.

The move to a bi-annual census will mean there are two Preschool Funding Model (PFM) funding adjustments in the calendar year.

From 2016, the twice yearly funding adjustments will occur in July and December. This will provide the sector with a timely link between changes in enrolments and knowing their funding under the PFM.

In line with the last preschool census, data collection will be managed by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE), and the Early Childhood Education and Care Directorate (ECECD) will calculate funding adjustments. The census periods will be in February and August 2016.

From 2016, the twice yearly funding adjustments will occur in July and December.

The Early Childhood Contract Management System (ECCMS) will be enhanced to collect data for every enrolled child at community preschools. To ensure the system is effective and user friendly, a pilot will occur after the August 2015 census. This will allow time for us to work with the community preschool sector to resolve any issues that may arise with the new system.

The major benefit of enhancing ECCMS is that it will mean we have one system that collects the census data and holds all the funding information. This will lead to more efficient data collection, funding administration and associated forward planning. It will also be easier for services to manage data entry and business processes.

SERVICES AFFECTED BY THE RECENT SEVERE WEATHER

Services which currently access Commonwealth Child Care Rebates and have suffered disruption because of the recent severe weather can contact the Department of Social Services (DSS) Child Care Access Hotline for information and advice about any implications for their payments. The contact number for the Hotline is 1800 670 305. Information is also available from the DSS website at: http://www.education.gov.au/when-contact-child-care-management-system-helpdesk

NSW VACCINATION REQUIREMENTS – ONE YEAR ON

Since 1 January 2014, a child cannot be enrolled in an early childhood education and care service unless the parent/guardian has provided an approved certificate that shows that the child:

- is fully vaccinated for their age, or
- has a medical reason not to be vaccinated, or
- is on a recognised catch-up schedule if their child has fallen behind with their vaccinations, or
- has a parent/guardian who has a conscientious objection to vaccination.

These certificates must be retained as part of each child’s enrolment record by the service.

Early evidence indicates that parents are positive about this important initiative and there is high compliance by services. NSW Health has received positive feedback on the resources developed, including the Immunisation Enrolment Toolkit and a parent brochure.

Services with questions about these requirements can contact their local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055.

REGISTER FOR FREE WORKSHOPS ON THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD

Quality Area 1 – Educational program and practice in the National Quality Standard (NQS) has been identified nationally as an area which services find challenging to meet. In NSW, 32% of services rated so far have received a rating of Working Towards for Quality Area 1.

A series of free workshops focusing on Quality Area 1 will be held across NSW throughout May and June. The workshops are practical, hands on sessions which will be supported by officers from ECECD, local Professional Support Co-ordinators and led by ACECQA.

The workshops are open to all educators and providers, but are particularly targeted at services that have received a rating of Working Towards the NQS or have not yet been rated.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Update your contact details by logging onto the NQAITS portal and/or for funded services by logging onto ECCMS.

You can also get in touch with us by:

- visiting our website www.dec.nsw.gov.au/eced
- phoning us on 1800 619 113 (general) or 1300 755 426 (funding)
- emailing us on ececd@det.nsw.edu.au (general), ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au (funding) or ecextra@det.nsw.edu.au (EC Extra editor)