

NEWS RELEASE



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SESSIONAL KINDERGARTEN PLACES SAVED IN ELWOOD

Elwood kids soon won't have to travel outside the suburb now to spend the morning or afternoon at kindergarten, thanks to a recommendation made by this week's strategic and policy review committee at the City of Port Phillip's (October 2).

The new Elwood Family and Children's Hub under construction on the grounds of the Elwood Primary School will include 30 sessional kindergarten places. This means that 90 Elwood kids will spend the morning or afternoon several times a week in a kindergarten program run by the centre. Programs for both three and four year olds will be offered as is the current practice.

This decision comes a week after the council awarded the construction contract for the centre to Andeco Construction Group. Construction has already begun on the site and the centre is expected to be ready by mid-2007.

"This is a real victory for the whole of community," said Deputy Mayor and Ormond Ward Councillor, Janet Cribbes.

"The community and council have worked in collaboration to ensure a great outcome for the children and parents of Elwood. We've both had to shift our positions slightly but the result is a centre which will offers families a real choice – long-day care, occasional care and kindergarten program – plus maternal and child health services, meeting rooms for parent groups and suites for visiting specialists such as speech therapists."

Originally, the council planned a second campus to provide sessional kindergarten places at St Columba's Primary School. These were to replace the 26 places lost by the closure of St Bede's Early Learning Centre last year.

Cr Cribbes said that on closer examination it wasn't feasible to build at St Columba's.

"The St Columba's site just wasn't big enough. There were limitations with the site and the price just kept on rocketing upwards. We were forced to go to Plan B," she said.

"Since January, the St Bede's children have been temporarily relocated to York Street in West St Kilda. This hasn't been a great option for many Elwood parents forced to travel to and from St Kilda every day. Having a sessional kindergarten back in Elwood means that parents won't have to burn up so much car rubber. Some will even be able to walk their kids to kinder. Others will be able to combine it with dropping off their other kids by car to Elwood Primary or Elwood College."

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Cr Cribbes said that the Elwood Family and Children’s Hub would offer an integrated service approach under one management committee.

“Families will have access to care, education and health services for their children under the one roof. Their kids can be checked out by maternal and health care nurses when really young, graduate to occasional care, long-day care or kindergarten when older and have access to speech therapists or other health professionals, as needed from time to time,” she said.

Cr Cribbes said that because the centre is located on the grounds of the Elwood Primary School, right next to Elwood College, it would also provide continuity of care.

“Kids won’t have to chop and change. They can attend the hub and then go next door to start preps. Going to high school is just a matter of going next door again,” she said. “You’re lucky to find such stability in education, even in the country. In eighteen years times, some of the kids graduating from Elwood College will have known each other their entire lives. This has to be a positive thing.”

The council will give priority to the 30 sessional kindergarten places going to four year olds, in line with Department of Human Services funding and policies.

The Elwood Family and Children’s Centre will also provide 60 places for long-day care, with the option of an additional 15 occasional care places to operate from the multi-purpose room.

The full council meeting on October 23 is expected to endorse the provision of 30 new sessional kindergarten places at the new centre.

A further report on the proposed community management structure for the new Elwood Family and Children’s Hub will be presented in to council in November.

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