

Exceeding Expectations

OUR ELC & THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

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In 2009, the Australian Government introduced the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. This recognises the importance of quality education in the early years to ensure the wellbeing of young children. The drive for change is based on clear evidence that the early years of children's lives are crucial for their future development and wellbeing.

In May 2013, the St Leonard's College Early Learning Centre (ELC) had its National Quality Standard Assessment and Rating visit which considered the following:

- Educational Program and Practice
- Children's Health and Safety
- Physical Environment
- Staffing Arrangements
- Relationships with Children
- Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities
- Leadership and service management

The purpose of the rating and assessment of children's services is to ensure that programs across Australia are meeting the existing regulations while striving for continual improvement.

The staff in the ELC met to develop our Quality Improvement Plan for the Centre, linked directly to the Framework. This was a wonderful opportunity for us to collaborate and thoughtfully reflect on all of the quality areas. We acknowledged what we do well and the areas where we strive to improve.

Our learning environment is strongly influenced by the practice and principles of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project, highly regarded in the Early Years Learning and Development Framework and amongst educators worldwide. Through our strong, positive image of children and our respect for their amazing capabilities, we recognise that all children have potential, curiosity, and interest in constructing their learning. Our learning environment supports these positive



qualities and provides engaging experiences to enrich children's learning and expand their joy in exploring their world.

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As a team, we value the importance of relationships that promote collaboration and communication both with and between children, families and staff. Positive interactions with each child promote a strong sense of belonging and build trusting, caring relationships which enable children to explore their environment and gain a deeper understanding of the world. ELC children and staff stay together for two years, allowing each child to feel supported in order to enhance the opportunities for learning.

Our many collaborative learning opportunities, such as small group research projects or community projects involving all families, provide children with

the opportunity to learn in a group, and to scaffold and extend each child's learning. Taziana Filippini, writing in 1998, explained the importance of this approach:

In Reggio, the child is not seen as an isolated human being, but as always in relationships, in human, social, cultural and historical context. The child's development is a process of individual and group construction. Nothing exists outside



relationships. The child is the most important element of the school, but the child is not enough. We put at the centre the relationships between children, parents and teachers. That is the centre, for the child does not exist in isolation.

It was reassuring for staff and families that what is already strongly embedded in our daily practice was acknowledged and celebrated by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. The Senior Authorised Officer summed up its assessment thus:

The service has achieved an overall rating of Exceeding in the National Quality Standards. The service performed particularly well in the area of educational program and practice. This was attributed to the efforts of educators to continually engage in a process of reflective practice which ensured that the educational program was stimulating, and enhanced children's learning and development. Staffing arrangements across the service ensured that all children had access to committed educators who supported good quality standards and provided continuity of care for children. The physical environment was designed to support positive relationships and to maximise children's level of interest and engagement in the program. This was supported by effective leadership with systems in place to drive continuous improvement. The service is to be commended for their positive participation in the National Quality Standards.

With a strong team of capable and knowledgeable educators and involved and supportive families, we strive for continual improvement.

