

Integrated Early Learning Centre Needed for Leongatha

At its meeting today, South Gippsland Shire Council resolved to commence the design and construction of an integrated early learning centre in Symmons Street, Leongatha.

The project is the result of a detailed review of early years infrastructure needs and demand in South Gippsland which identified Leongatha as the highest priority location requiring additional early years infrastructure. In 2020, South Gippsland was the first Gippsland council to introduce 15 hours of three-year-old kindergarten which placed increased pressure on existing facilities across the municipality.

A new early learning centre in Leongatha will provide quality early childhood education for local children. The new service will contribute to the economic development of the region by supporting access to employment and training and increase productivity for economic growth.

The centre would provide for better coordination of learning and support for children, enable service providers to work collaboratively and provide parents with easier access to services.

Council has allocated \$3 million towards the \$5 million project and intends to submit a funding application to the State Government's Building Blocks Infrastructure Grants Program for further support.

Council has been working alongside Leongatha's early learning childcare providers in development of the project and will undertake further community consultation once concept designs are completed.

South Gippsland Shire Chair Administrator Julie Eisenbise said the new centre is fundamental to supporting the future of childcare and education in South Gippsland.

"There has been a significant increase in expectations of early childhood services with the implementation of three-year-old kindergarten, increased demand for services and changes to service standards. An integrated early learning centre in Leongatha is required as our current providers are operating at full capacity.

"This new centre would reduce enrolment pressure on kindergartens in Meeniyah and Mirboo North and help meet the lack of kindergarten places expected in the future under our current arrangements.

"With a projection of a deficit of at least 68 kindergarten places and 113 childcare places in Leongatha by 2031 it is more than clear that action needs to be taken in this space now. We hope that the State Government looks favourably on our funding application once complete so the project can progress as soon as practical," said Ms Eisenbise.

Council continues to monitor demand for early years infrastructure across the Shire and will build these into future budgets as appropriate.

