

Child care gets big tick [AU] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

CHILD care one the greatest social experiments of our time is paying dividends, producing smarter, more confident and more social children.

A landmark study tracked the progress of 3000 children aged from three to seven. The research, by six experts from the Oxford and London universities, found those in formal care were brighter and more confident than those cared for entirely at home.

It even found that pre-school care could turn around the often bleak futures of children from poor backgrounds.

Australian experts backed the findings of the British project, known as EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education).

But they warned the quality of care and particularly the presence of highly qualified teachers at childcare centres was crucial.

Dr Dockett backed calls for a major policy rethink in Australia to improve planning and funding and to encourage work-based child care. Only about 5 per cent of Australian employers provide child care for employees.

Key findings of the EPPE study include:

PRE-school experience, compared to none, enhances children's development.

BENEFITS include better intellectual development, independence, concentration and sociability.

DISADVANTAGED children in particular benefit significantly from quality pre-school care, especially at centres with children from a mix of social backgrounds.

QUALITY care is crucial with the best results in services with trained teachers.

PRE-school care reduces the number of children at risk of learning difficulties from one in three to one in five by the time they start primary school.

EPPE found pre-school attendance improved all children's cognitive development and aspects of social behaviour.

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