



Pulse Survey:

Supporting Play in

Western Australian Schools

October 2026





Supporting Play in WA Schools: Findings from the Play Matters Collective Pulse Survey

1.0 Introduction

Play is fundamental to children’s learning and development, health and wellbeing, participation, and their sense of being and belonging. Yet ensuring that play is meaningfully embedded within Western Australian schools requires more than acknowledgement of its importance. It requires supportive policy, informed leadership, professional capability, adequate time, space and resources, and a collective commitment to safeguarding children’s opportunities to play.

On 3 October 2026, the Early Childhood Excellence Conference 2026, *Future Ready Begins with Play: At the Heart of Early Childhood*, was held at Murdoch University (MU) and co-hosted by Network Teach, Play Matters Collective and MU School of Education. The conference focused on how play provides a foundation for children to thrive in a rapidly changing world while remaining grounded in evidence, policy and practice.

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2.0 A Pulse Survey on Play Matters in WA

As part of the event, the Play Matters Collective administered a brief pulse survey, *Questionnaire: Supporting Play in Western Australian Schools*, to gauge participants’ support for proposed actions aimed at strengthening and protecting play in Western Australian schools. The 120 attendees were invited to indicate their level of support for four proposed actions and to contribute additional recommendations informed by their professional and personal experiences (Figure 1).



The questionnaire also included an open-ended fifth question inviting participants to provide “*other suggestions or comments.*” This enabled respondents to move beyond the four proposed actions and identify additional priorities, concerns and practical considerations for supporting play within Western Australian schools.

Figure 1. Play Matters Collective Pulse Survey: Supporting Play in Western Australian Schools

QUESTIONNAIRE: SUPPORTING PLAY IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Please tick the box beside each proposed action you support.

- ☐ **1.** Western Australia to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into legislation, including the right to play.
- ☐ **2.** Expand the Public School Review (PSR) process to include a seventh domain focused on the National Quality Standard (NQS).
- ☐ **3.** Require each school to develop and implement a school-wide play policy.
- ☐ **4.** Require each school to designate a staff member as a “Play Specialist”, responsible for overseeing the time, space and resources available for play at school.

5. Other suggestions or comments

Figure 1. Questionnaire used to gauge support for proposed actions to strengthen and protect play in Western Australian schools.

3.0 Survey Results

The quantitative findings demonstrate overwhelming support for action to strengthen and protect play in Western Australian schools, with each of the four proposed actions receiving

support from more than three-quarters of respondents.

The strongest support was recorded for incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to play, into Western Australian legislation (96%). This was closely followed by requiring each school to develop and implement a school-wide play policy (95%). A substantial 85% supported adding a seventh Public School Review domain focused on the National Quality Standard.

Importantly, 76% of respondents supported the designation of a Play Specialist in each school. With more than three in four respondents endorsing this proposal, the result demonstrates strong majority support for leadership to champion play and oversee the time, space and resources available for play.

Table 1. Support for proposed actions to strengthen play in Western Australian schools

Proposed action	Support
1. Incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to play, into WA legislation	96%
2. Add a seventh Public School Review domain focused on the National Quality Standard	85%
3. Require each school to develop and implement a school-wide play policy	95%
4. Designate a Play Specialist in each school	76%

Note. Percentages represent the level of support recorded for each proposed action in the pulse survey.

Taken together, the quantitative findings demonstrate strong and consistent endorsement across all four proposed actions. The results indicate substantial support for a coordinated approach that embeds play through legislation, system-level accountability, school policy and committed school leadership.

The qualitative responses below further demonstrate that participants' calls extended beyond simply wanting "more play."

Collectively, survey feedback points to the need for a coordinated, systemic approach to strengthening play in Western Australian schools, particularly in early childhood education, with children's opportunities to play protected through policy and curriculum, supported by knowledgeable teachers and leaders, adequately resourced, and embedded in sustained school practice.

4.0 Consolidated Teacher Comments Organised by Key Themes

4.1 Theme 1: Protecting time and space for play and reducing curriculum pressure

Central idea: Respondents want play protected from an overcrowded curriculum, increasing academic demands, and prescribed teaching practices that minimise children's opportunities for play-based learning.

1. *Less push for curriculum outcomes and content-heavy approaches. Allow more time for play, including outdoors.*
2. *Time, space and resources for play need to be heavily emphasised. Too much time is spent on literacy and maths.*
3. *Outdoor classrooms.*
4. *Kindergarten and Pre-primary should have longer "play times" than the rest of the school.*
5. *Reduce PowerPoints, as this decreases time for play and increases students "shutting down".*
6. *Reduce PowerPoints and prescribed programmes.*
7. *Mandated time allocation for outdoor play in K-2.*
8. *Stronger guidelines specifying the percentage or numerical amount of time for play in classrooms and outdoors.*

9. *SCSA: stop curriculum “push down” into early childhood.*
10. *Curriculum expectations are too high. Schools should continue play up to Year 3 and beyond. Play seems to stop after K–PP.*
11. *Highlight the Early Years [school aged children aged 3–8 years], not just Kindergarten, as many perceive play as something that cannot be continued beyond this year level.*
12. *So many programmes for learning are run in schools now. It would be valuable to have more integrated play-based approaches.*
13. *Less explicit “death by PowerPoint”, which is reducing play.*
14. *Play needs to be considered for the whole primary school, not K–PP only.*
15. *More play, less paperwork.*
16. *Play needs to be entwined through curriculum outcomes because the curriculum is so jam-packed, resulting in time-poor classrooms.*

Key message: Protect meaningful time, space and resources for play across the early childhood and primary years, rather than allowing curriculum pressures and prescribed approaches to squeeze play out.

4.2 Theme 2: Professional learning and teacher capability

Central idea: Respondents want school leaders to understand not only why play matters, but how to facilitate high-quality play-based learning.

1. *More professional learning available for teachers and schools for the delivery of play-based programmes.*
2. *Ongoing training on play for all stakeholders.*
3. *Training around play-based learning.*
4. *Mandated professional learning for school leaders on ECE pedagogy and the importance of play.*
5. *Teachers need specific and practical strategies to implement play while also meeting curriculum requirements.*
6. *Free professional learning on ECE, with coaches supporting groups of schools/districts.*

7. *Play needs to be mandatory. Please teach/lecture this at university. Pre-service teachers are struggling.*
8. *Mandatory PL for every school leader, at least in ECE, and teachers.*
9. *Support play in the primary teaching degree to ensure all pre-service teachers are exposed to it.*
10. *University review to include more hands-on play experiences.*
11. *Extra training about the importance of play in teacher education and for parents.*
12. *Teachers' professional development on play should be connected with AITSL.*
13. *Compulsory PD in schools on the importance of play, repeated until the message is embedded.*
14. *More in-depth education about the importance of play-based learning and how to facilitate it effectively.*
15. *Play Specialists need networking and hands-on training. Courses are not enough. Appointment of a play specialist alone is not enough. Play Specialists need to be properly trained for play to become embedded within schools.*

Key message: Build sustained professional capability in play-based pedagogy through teacher education, practical professional learning, coaching and professional networks.

4.3 Theme 3: Leadership, Play Specialists and shared responsibility

Central idea: Respondents see leadership as crucial. There is strong support for designated play expertise, alongside recognition that play must be a shared responsibility.

1. *Administration needs to be educated about ECE and the importance of play so leaders advocate from the top down.*
2. *Designate a staff member for each year group.*
3. *Establish a professional network for each school's representative/Play Specialist for information sharing and peer support.*
4. *A "play worker" might be preferable to "Play Specialist"; otherwise, are we implying that play is only for specialists or experts? Will teachers say, "That's the specialist's role, not mine"?*

5. *Early Years, Middle and Upper Primary staff should all share and understand the importance of play, potentially through a committee.*
6. *Each school should have an ECE-trained Deputy Principal. School leadership needs accountability to a play body around play in schools.*
7. *“Play Specialist” or committee encompassing Kindergarten/Pre-primary/Lower Primary.*
8. *Policy needs to express to our administrators what teachers know about play.*
9. *Continue working within school networks as an advocate for children’s play.*
10. *A Play Specialist is particularly important to ensure children’s right to play is implemented and embedded within schools.*
11. *Many schools have an NQS lead. Aligning that position explicitly with play is important.*
12. *Have a Play Specialist for each year level K–7, aligned with early childhood.*
13. *One Play Specialist per year group, rather than one specialist limited to K–PP.*
14. *Teachers should implement play with professional autonomy. Play should be encouraged without excessive micromanagement.*
15. *Play Specialists need networks and hands-on training, not simply appointment to the position.*
16. *There is a need for year-level Deputies, including an ECE-trained/qualified teacher in the ECE Deputy role, with relevant early childhood understanding and knowledge.*

Key message: Schools need designated expertise and leadership for play, while ensuring that responsibility for play remains shared across the wider school community.

4.4 Theme 4: Recognising play as intentional learning and a child’s right

Central idea: Respondents want play to be understood as legitimate, intentional learning, while recognising that play also has value beyond measurable academic outcomes.

1. *Play is so important. Learning is not just knowing or meeting specific goals. All children are different. Curriculum needs to reflect this.*

2. *Policies should position play as intentional teaching and learning. Play is not an either/or proposition.*
3. *Truly believe students/children learn through play.*
4. *Parents need to understand that meaningful play benefits learners and that learning does not have to involve paper-and-pen activities to achieve academic outcomes.*
5. *Play-based learning needs to be clearly defined as intentional play.*
6. *Play-based learning needs to be clearly defined to show that it is distinctly different from gamifying learning, “fun” or merely using toys.*
7. *Play is a right of the child, supported by a substantial body of evidence.*

Key message: Play needs to be recognised as a legitimate and intentional context for learning while simultaneously being valued as a fundamental right of childhood.

4.5 Theme 5: Policy, accountability and moving from words to implementation

Central idea: Respondents emphasised that policy must be accompanied by implementation, monitoring and accountability.

1. *Policies are just documents that exist unless there is someone checking that they are in action.*
2. *Develop a state/nationwide award for schools or principals championing play and prioritising inquiry, creating visible recognition for good practice.*
3. *The Education Department should provide a template for schools to use and adapt.*
4. *Private schools already report on NQS using Quality Improvement Plans for re-registration. DoE should also undertake authentic reporting.*
5. *Provide a draft Play Policy that schools can adapt or use as a sample, so developing policy does not become “just another thing to do”.*
6. *Consider an independent audit or review of NQS self-assessment.*
7. *How do we gain consistency of quality, balanced practice across schools? How do we balance this against curriculum pressures? Ensure ECE staff and administration have a shared understanding of play in classrooms.*

8. *Integration between Early Years and Primary Education, for example through collaborative learning events. Initiatives may “bleed out” if they are not taken up by each teacher.*
9. *NQS review requirements need consideration, rather than simply adding NQS requirements onto existing review processes.*

Key message: Policy alone is insufficient. Play requires clear expectations, implementation mechanisms, monitoring, accountability and consistency across schools.

One participant captured this issue succinctly:

“Policies are just documents that exist unless there is someone checking they are in action.”

4.6 Theme 6: Funding, resourcing and equitable implementation

Central idea: Respondents recognise that schools cannot implement ambitions for play *without adequate structural and financial support.*

1. *There is no money in school budgets to do this unless it is Department-funded.*
2. *How can under-resourced schools facilitate this [more playful learning].*
3. *Government-funded/supported three-year-old pre-kindergarten.*
4. *Allow children attending Kindergarten to be counted as school-age children in Family Day Care because children attending Kindergarten are able to attend OSHC programmes.*
5. *Consider the importance of play in relation to “Thriving Kids (NDIS)”.*

Key message: Implementation requires sufficient and equitable funding, staffing, resources and structural support, particularly for schools with fewer resources.

5.0 Conclusion

The Play Matters Collective Pulse Survey reinforces teachers' urgent call for government action to strengthen and protect play in Western Australian schools. The strong quantitative support across all four proposed actions, together with participants' **qualitative feedback**, demonstrates clear support for children's right to play and for embedding play more strongly within education policy and practice.

These findings are particularly timely as the WA Play Strategy is currently being developed by the Office of Early Childhood with the WA Play Strategy Advisory Committee. The Strategy is intended to champion children's right to play, articulate the value of play for health, happiness, learning and development, and promote opportunities, spaces and support for play across services, settings, government agencies and the wider community. [\[wa.gov.au\]](http://wa.gov.au)

The Pulse Survey therefore provides valuable teacher perspectives that can inform consideration of the role of schools within the emerging WA Play Strategy and contribute to a shared vision in which every child has meaningful opportunities to play, learn and thrive.

- End of Report -

Acknowledged and Submitted by:

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Hesterman".

Chairperson Play Matters Collective

Date: 8 October 2026

