

Successful Challis Community Primary learning program getting national roll out

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Pre-school children at Challis Primary School: Carla Lang (4), Lilly Morris (4), Haylee Kane (4), Aaliyah Wade (4) and Nehemiah Jaber (4). Picture: Marie Nirme

THE model used at Challis Community Primary School to help disadvantaged children has been so successful the Federal Government is now using it in schools across Australia.

Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham said the Turnbull Government would invest \$20 million to integrate the Connected Beginnings program into other sites across the country with the first being Alice Springs.

The program used at Challis Community Primary School is about developing health programs and policies to achieve better outcomes for Australian children as well as getting children ready for school from the pre-natal stage so they have the best chance to succeed at school.

The program has been running at the school since 2009.

The Challis model allows children and families to access a range of different programs including playgroups, early parenting groups, pre-kindergarten (three-year-old kindergarten), parent

workshops, child health services, allied health services (speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, etc), and general family support.

It was first introduced when the school contacted Minderoo chief executive Nicola Forrest about the program.

Assistant principal Louise O'Donovan said before the program began at the school, its literacy levels were below the state average and now they are above.

"It started in 2009 with very minimal services and it has grown," she said.

"We have just smashed it out of the ballpark with our pre-primary data. We were below state average for literacy and readings and not making any improvement and now our data now shows we start about West Australian state average."

Mrs Forrest said all parents wanted the best for their children.

"It picks up from the beginning of the child's life and helps them reach their full potential and make them school ready," she said.

"A lot of people talk about programs about school attendance and keeping kids in school, but if kids haven't had the early years and their ability for them to learn, it doesn't matter how long you keep them in school, they are not going to learn.

"They are going to leave school they are going to be in the community unemployed and unable to get a job."