

Legislative Council

Hansard

Tuesday 19 November 2024

[excerpt...]

Saltbush Child and Family Learning Centre

[11.37 a.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I rise today to speak about a wonderful addition to the Kingston region of the Nelson electorate, the Saltbush Child and Family Learning Centre. With the centre's opening on 1 August this year, it became the latest of the now 18, I believe, child and family learning centres based in communities all around our state. I would like to congratulate the government for its decision to extend the number of child and family learning centres statewide, building on the incredibly successful initiative first conceived and funded by the previous Labor-Green government and continued admirably under the current government.

I am especially pleased to see the Kingston community welcome a child and family learning centre and have the opportunity to benefit from this much valued and place-based model that has demonstrated such success in other locations around our state. The opening of the Saltbush Child and Family Learning Centre on 1 August came after a lengthy design and development stage that involved extensive consultation and co-design with the local community. A local enabling group was formed, including representatives, educators, and service providers from the local community to be partners in the development and design of the centre.

Over the 18 months the centre was being designed and built, the child and family learning centre staff were already on board and getting out into the local community, delivering pop-up play and learn sessions at least twice a week across the Kingborough area. Now, with the centre fully operational, there is a continuation of the outreach into the community with pop-up sessions still being held throughout the Kingborough area. In fact, there are some upcoming festive season pop-up sessions to be held in the local parks in Kingston and Blackmans Bay, where children and families can come along and do Christmas craft - something not to miss.

I cannot express warmly enough my high regard for the child and family learning centre model and the wonderful work being done through them in our state and now in my local patch in Kingston. The basis of the child and family learning centre vision is our shared commitment to Tasmanian children having the best possible start in life. The centres are safe, inclusive, and welcoming places where families can access a range of integrated services and wraparound supports in the heart of their local community, typically co-located with a local primary school. The Saltbush Child and Family Learning Centre is co-located with Kingston Primary School and I have already noted in recent social media posts that there are delightful opportunities for shared activities between the school and the centre.

I recently had the opportunity to have a lengthy visit with the Saltbush Child and Family Learning Centre, hosted by the wonderful centre leader Rachael Hawkins. I thank the minister's office for helping arrange that.

During my visit, I had the chance to see in person that safe, inclusive and welcoming environment. For example, to share a few observations from my visit: there were smiling community members inside the centre who greeted me as I came through the door. They were happy to chat about the activities that they enjoyed at the centre, and the support that they were receiving. There was a wonderful mix of cultures and backgrounds amongst the many families attending the centre that day. This included a notable number of dads attending the centre with their children, engaged in a whole range of activities, and also grandparents bringing along their grandchildren.

The centre is a beautiful physical space. The inside of the centre was an open, airy, lightfilled, calm and comfortable space with all kinds of purpose-built play areas, gorgeous kid-sized furniture and oodles of play equipment for imaginative play. There are also lovely private consultation rooms along the quiet side of the centre, separated from the play areas. These are for appointments with the regular services that come onsite for that integrated approach to make access easier. These include child health and parenting services, CHaPS services, midwife appointments, and a psychologist regularly.

A particularly fun and striking feature which I have no doubt is a favourite with the kids at the centre is a slide which goes from inside the centre through an external wall, and down into a play area outside. It does not get much more fun than that, I suggest, if you were a three-year-old rocking along to the centre with your parents. The outdoor play areas on the northern side of the centre have a lovely, sunny outlook, a big sheltered undercover area, an exciting water play area as well. There are pathways wandering through a lovely garden. An absolute highlight is a gorgeous mural of local fauna and flora, which is featured on a garden wall, done by Tasmanian artist Mel McVee, with assistance from local children and families.

I cannot neglect to mention an essential ingredient of any welcoming centre: a great coffee machine, which I know would be a godsend to all parents visiting the centre, especially on those days when it has been a struggle to even get out the door at home, with perhaps a toddler and a baby in tow.

I extend my thanks to Rachael and her team at the Saltbush Child and Family Learning Centre for taking time to show me around and give me an introduction to the exceptional space. I offer my heartfelt admiration and gratitude to them for the excellent work that they are doing to further enhance and build the very special Kingston community. In closing, and in case you were wondering, this lovely new centre is named after the Saltbush plant, which you will find throughout the Kingborough area. It reflects the fact the area is where the coast and the bush meet. I must say, although it is still so new, the Saltbush Child and Family Learning Centre is already proving itself to be an essential heart, building connections in our local Kingston community.

Members - Hear, hear.