

Education centre up and running by 2011

By **ANDY BENNETT***

ON April 29 the Federal Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, announced Commonwealth funding of about \$8 million to establish and operate a children and family centre in the Bridgewater area.

The children and family centre will provide valuable services that focus on quality early learning, childcare and parent and family support in the Bridgewater area.

It will provide support for all families in the area.

We are now working on a plan to gather the information we need, to make decisions on the centre's services and where it should be located.

We will convene a group that includes local early years educators and local residents to plan how we gather the information we need to make those decisions.

That will include consultation with potential users and organisations that are already involved in providing education and support services to our youngest children and their families..

The application for the centre was a joint Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services effort.

The funds will be managed by the Department of Education as part of the Bridgewater and Southern Midlands Learning Federation program.

I am often asked: "When will all the construction work begin and when can we use the buildings?"

The simple answer is



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that our aim is to have all the buildings and education and training programs up and running by the start of the 2011 school year.

However, it won't all happen at once. Some decisions about what will be built and where the buildings will be located have been made, but we still need to make some important decisions about the 'what and where' of other buildings.

Here are the decisions that are known:

- Gagebrook, Herdsmans Cove and East Derwent Primary Schools will be refurbished to make them more suitable as birth to grade four schools.

Building work will begin when the announcement about third round Commonwealth Government Building the Education Revolution funding is made. The end of July this year is a likely starting date.

- A Trade Training Centre will be built on the previous Bridgewater High School campus site. Pending planning approval, work will begin in September this year.

- A new grade nine to 12 senior school, which will also cater for aspects of adult learning, will be built on the previous Bridgewater High School campus site.

While we are still planning details of the programs that we will offer and the learning spaces that we will build, our aim is to start work in September or October this year.

The outcome for our application for Commonwealth Government funding to build a new Science Laboratory will influence the exact starting date.

- The current Bridgewater High School buildings will be refurbished to make them suitable for the new Middle School. Work will begin early next year.

Here are the key decisions we are yet to make:

- What services will be offered through the children and family centre and where will it be located?

- What adult and community education and community service programs do local residents need and where and how should those programs be best delivered?

That includes how we build on the great work of current service providers.

With the help of local service providers and government agencies we are developing some options, including a site location model to take to the community for consultation.

Our aim is to have the options ready by mid to late June this year.

**Andy Bennett is the manager of the Bridgewater/Brighton Learning Federation*