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Start strong pay fair: Preschools turn pink for pay rises

Community preschools across NSW are turning pink today as they call on the state government to provide fair funding for long overdue pay rises.

Teachers and educators are wearing pink and decorating their preschools as they ramp up their fight for fair funding to save community preschools.

The action comes after the Fair Work Commission (FWC) ordered the NSW government back to the bargaining table with the IEU, United Workers Union and employer group Community Early Learning Australia on 23 March. More than 100 community preschools are part of the proceedings.

The FWC on 16 February accepted the union's evidence and recommended the state government take all necessary action, including to review and increase funding for community preschools to address the pay disparity between preschool staff and their colleagues in schools.

"Our members are wearing pink today to make the point that this issue is felt deeply by the community, despite NSW government attempts to downplay it in Budget Estimates hearings last week," said Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews.

"Many community preschools have been forced to raise fees for families. Without an increase in NSW government funding to lift pay and conditions, the staffing crisis will worsen and community preschools may have no option but to close entirely."

A preschool teacher with five years' experience earns \$86,264, while a graduate teacher in a primary school earns \$90,177.

"The NSW government has undervalued teachers and educators for far too long, leading to an acute staffing shortage that must be fixed by funding salary increases," Matthews said.

More than 1500 teachers, educators and supporters rallied in Lismore, Coffs Harbour and Sydney in October 2025 as part of their Start Strong Pay Fair campaign for desperately needed funding.

The union is planning another rally in Sydney's Martin Place on 6 May if the NSW government fails to follow the FWC's recommendation to fund pay rises for staff in community preschools.

There are over 700 community preschools across NSW that provide a vital service to families and communities by educating and caring for children aged 3-to-5. The workforce is overwhelmingly female.

Community preschools are run by volunteer committees of parents whose only priorities are children's education and safety – not profit – and funding is derived solely from the NSW government. They do not receive federal government funding.

"Community preschools have low rates of safety breaches," Matthews said. "And a stable and well-qualified workforce is essential for maintaining a child-safe environment."

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

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