New early learning centre

KAITLYN GIBBONS



Unity College Murray Bridge ELC director Reagan Hill and principal Francois Pienaar are excited for the opening of the ELC. 393396 **Picture: KAITLYN GIBBONS**

UNITY College Murray Bridge's new Early Learning Centre (ELC) is set to open in early June.

The building for the ELC was planned by the previous principal, who's vision of having an ELC on site accommodated families in the community and provided an opportunity to be with Unity College from two-years-old to year 12.

When new school principal Francois Pienaar took over from Mrs Mathwin-Cox he made sure to follow through with the planning.

Mr Pienaar said the ELC would increase early learning opportunities in Murray Bridge.

"Before I started as principal at Unity College, staff noticed there was a need for an ELC on the school premises and that is why the previous principal Kaye started planning towards that," he said.

"The new ELC will cater for our families and provide long day care [service], not just a kindy but a long day care [service] between [children] aged two to five-years-old.

"The ELC will benefit our community and we will have an ELC program for two groups and we will set up the rest of the ELC with two to four years-old children who will be there for long daycare as well."

One room in the ELC will cater for children aged two to four-years-old which will have a maximum of 16 children per day and another room will cater for children aged four to five-years-old which will have a maximum of 22 children per day and will be operated by a preschool program run by a qualified teacher.

The ELC can take a maximum of 38 children per day in the service.

Mr Pienaar said the ELC program will be based on Reggio Emilia philosophy, which is play based learning.

"We are also incorporating the early years framework and also 'IB' [International Baccalaureate] which our school is renowned for because that's what we believe in our junior school," he said.

ELC director Raegan Hill said having the ELC will also help set children up for their whole schooling journey.

"The ELC will offer a seamless transition for families and it's easy for them to bring on children to one location," Ms Hill.

"The children can start their journey at Unity [College] from the age of two all the way to Year 12, so the students are holding their friendships and relationships and they are also familiar with the school and staff.

"We have had a lot of interest in the ELC so far and lots of families are really excited, obviously it makes their lives a lot easier so they can build foundations from such a young age and bring them across to the junior school and then to senior school."

Mr Pienaar said Unity College philosophy is students first and from construing the ELC Unity College will be able to share that from age two.

He said Unity College had a kindergarten (Concordia Kindergarten) and the community needs to be aware that Unity College is not working against the kindergarten, they are working together.

"There was a rumour that opening the ELC will close Concordia [Kindergarten] but we are working in unison," he said.

It is anticipated that the ELC will open in term two (late June), 2024.

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