Teaching skills to boost the young

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SCHOOL principals can usually pick out a hippy child, but that does not mean they are always making peace signs.

HIPPY — Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters — is a home-based early learning program that had its national launch in Albury yesterday.

The two-year program where parents and carers take the role of their child’s first teacher has expanded to 25 new locations, including Albury.

The program offers families fortnightly in-home visits by tutors who work with them.

“Principals say they can pick out a HIPPY child because they have the skills to start school,” program national manager Marian Pettit said.

An anti-poverty group, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, manages the program.

It is already delivered by other not-for-profit partner organisations in 50 other locations.

The latest round of programs has a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

The Brotherhood’s executive director Tony Nicholson said research had shown children who took part generally began with numeracy and literacy skills well behind the Australian average.

“After two years they had caught up and their cognitive skills equalled that of other children,” he said.

Assistant Minister for Education Sussan Ley attended yesterday’s launch at the Koori Kindermanna Preschool in Glenroy.

“By working with the child in the year before school and the year after school, we get them on the right pathway to learning,” Ms Ley said.

“There are numerous runs on the board to prove how successful this program is.”

The 25 new indigenous communities being added this year are located along the Murray-Darling rivers, up the eastern seaboard to far north Queensland, as well as in the Northern Territory and the Kimberley.

By next year it will support 4000 children and their families.