



Select Committee on the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Victoria

Hearing Date: 25 February 2026

Question[s] taken on notice

Directed to: The Parenthood

Received date: 18 March 2026

1. **Michael GALEA, p. 43**

Question Asked:

... Is there a benefit too for child safety with kinders being co-located with schools, whether they are officially part of the school or not? In that broader oversight framework, is there a benefit that could be seen, perhaps through quality of care, through child safety, with co-located kinders as well?

Response: *See response attached below*

2. **Melina BATH, p. 46**

Question Asked:

Without making work for you, is there any sort of distilled document that you have in The Parenthood that you could provide to the committee just to provide more clarity around that? Have a think about it; take it on notice.

Response: *See response attached below*

3. **Melina BATH, p. 47**

Question Asked:

I am not advocating this – but do you see a way for government to incentivise larger for-profits to go into the regions? How do we solve this? Government should open up centres – that is one. But what about other ideas? Should there be a capital grants program to refurbish community centres or something? Could I get you to take that on notice?

Response: *See response attached below*

4. **Melina BATH, p. 47**

Question Asked:

Can I ask you: in your membership group you talk about carers being part of your base. I want to focus on out-of-home care, foster carers and kinship carers in your membership. They do heavy lifting for government. They look

after very vulnerable and often traumatised children. Can you talk to us about how the early childhood system in Victoria is ignoring them? What do they need more? What do your members in this space need more of?

Response: *See response attached below*

5. **Melina BATH, p. 47**

Question Asked:

My other question in the last little bit goes to that we have got VECRA now and some would potentially say, 'We've got a new authority. The job is done.' You were concerned about certainly the regulator being inside the education department, and now it sits outside. What are some things that you want to see happen to make sure that there is independence, that there is transparency and that there is no informal departmental influence? What will make VECRA a successful entity going forward, and what are the key milestones of that?

Response: *See response attached below*

Response to Question on Notice – Inquiry into the early childhood education and care sector in Victoria

Witness: Georgie Dent, The Parenthood

1. Michael GALEA, p. 43

Question Asked:

... Is there a benefit too for child safety with kinders being co-located with schools, whether they are officially part of the school or not? In that broader oversight framework, is there a benefit that could be seen, perhaps through quality of care, through child safety, with co-located kinders as well?

Response:

There is evidence that stronger integration between early childhood education and the school system can support improved governance, oversight and continuity for children.

Co-location of kindergarten services with primary schools can contribute to stronger child safety and quality outcomes in several ways. School sites generally operate within well-established governance frameworks, child-safe standards and reporting systems, which may strengthen oversight and accountability for services operating on the same site. Co-location can also support collaboration between early childhood educators and school staff, improving information sharing about children's development and supporting smoother transitions to school.

Research has also found that more integrated early learning systems tend to deliver stronger quality outcomes and more consistent oversight than fragmented, market-based systems.

However, co-location alone does not guarantee safety or quality. Strong regulatory oversight, adequate workforce conditions and robust accountability mechanisms remain essential across all service types.

Evidence sources include:

- Productivity Commission (2024), *A Path to Universal Early Childhood Education and Care* – which recommends stronger integration of early learning with the broader education system.
- OECD (2017), *Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education to Primary Education* – highlighting the benefits of integrated systems and collaboration between early childhood and school sectors.
- Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (2021) – recommending greater integration of early childhood services within community and school settings.

2. Melina BATH, p. 46

Question Asked: Without making work for you, is there any sort of distilled document that you have in The Parenthood that you could provide to the committee just to provide more clarity around that? Have a think about it; take it on notice.

Response:

The Parenthood does not currently have a single distilled document mapping demand for early learning services across Victoria. However, this highlights the need for a National Early Childhood Commission - which could compile and analyse the data to assess where demand exists in Victoria and ensure that access is equitable for communities.

Where possible, this would look like a double drop-off situation, where an early learning service would be located on the school site. Ideally the school, the OSHC - if it exists - and the early learning service would be able to pool their educators so that if enrolments fluctuate, educators can move between services to improve retention.

In other circumstances, different models of early learning would be more appropriate for communities - such as in-venue family daycare, mobile early learning, or In Home Care. It would be the responsibility of the Commission to map out the demand and work with communities to ensure that early learning solutions are place-based and meet the community's needs, strengths and challenges.

Implementing identical early learning services across the regions would likely result in underutilisation and limited community buy-in. Community-led solutions, supported by a reform body such as the National Early Childhood Commission, with the capacity to analyse demand across the state, are therefore essential.

Thrive By Five's National ECEC Reform Blueprint offers a clear pathway forward for a comprehensively reformed system through the establishment of a National Early Childhood Commission.

3. Melina BATH, p. 47

Question Asked:

I am not advocating this – but do you see a way for government to incentivise larger for-profits to go into the regions? How do we solve this? Government should open up centres – that is one. But what about other ideas? Should there be a capital grants program to refurbish community centres or something? Could I get you to take that on notice?

Response:

Limited access to early childhood education and care in regional and rural communities reflects a well-documented market failure. In areas with small populations or higher operating costs, the private market has not consistently delivered sufficient services.

The Productivity Commission has found that the current childcare market-based model struggles to provide adequate supply in thin markets, including rural and remote communities.

Policy responses that could address these gaps include:

- Direct public or community provision, including services delivered by local governments, schools or community organisations.
- Targeted capital investment, such as grants to build or refurbish early learning facilities in regional areas.
- Support for not-for-profit providers, which research indicates are more likely to reinvest resources into staffing and service quality.
- Workforce incentives, including relocation support, housing assistance and improved pay and conditions to attract educators to regional areas.

While incentives for private providers may assist in some circumstances, evidence suggests that relying primarily on for-profit expansion has not resolved access gaps in underserved communities.

Evidence sources include:

- Productivity Commission (2024), *A Path to Universal Early Childhood Education and Care* – identifying market failure in “thin markets” and recommending stronger public planning and provision.
- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (2023), *Childcare Inquiry Final Report* – documenting geographic shortages of services and limited competition in regional areas.
- Mitchell Institute (2022–2023) early learning reports highlighting persistent childcare “deserts” in regional Australia.

4. Melina BATH, p. 47

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Response:

Children in out-of-home care are among the children who benefit most from access to high-quality early childhood education and care. Early learning participation has been shown to support cognitive development, emotional wellbeing and stability for children who may have experienced trauma or disruption.

However, carers often face barriers accessing services, including affordability, availability and administrative complexity.

Measures that could improve access include:

- Priority access to early childhood services for children in out-of-home care.
- Fee relief or simplified subsidy arrangements for foster and kinship carers.
- Trauma-informed training and support for educators to ensure services are equipped to support children with complex needs.
- Improved coordination between early learning services, child protection and family support systems.

Improving early learning access for children in out-of-home care should be seen as an important component of Victoria's child development and child protection systems.

Evidence sources include:

- Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (2021) – identifying early childhood services as key protective environments for vulnerable children.
- Productivity Commission (2024) – highlighting the importance of inclusive early childhood systems for disadvantaged children.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) research on outcomes for children in out-of-home care.

5. Melina BATH, p. 47

Question Asked:

My other question in the last little bit goes to that we have got VECRA now and some would potentially say, 'We've got a new authority. The job is done.' You were concerned about certainly the regulator being inside the education department, and now it sits outside. What are some things that you want to see happen to make sure that there is independence, that there is transparency and that there is no informal departmental influence? What will make VECRA a successful entity going forward, and what are the key milestones of that?

Response:

The establishment of the Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority (VECRA) represents an important step toward strengthening oversight of the early childhood education and care sector.

Evidence from recent reviews has highlighted the need for stronger regulatory transparency, independence and enforcement in the sector.

Key elements that will support the effectiveness of the authority include:

- Operational independence from policy-making functions within government.

- Transparent public reporting on compliance activities, enforcement actions and sector-wide trends.
- Strong investigative and enforcement powers to respond promptly to safety or quality concerns.
- Proactive, risk-based monitoring rather than reliance solely on complaints-based enforcement.
- Adequate resourcing and specialist expertise, including inspectors with early childhood and safeguarding expertise.

These elements will be important to ensure the regulator can maintain public confidence and provide effective oversight of a large and diverse sector.

Evidence sources include:

- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (2023), *Childcare Inquiry Final Report* – identifying transparency and accountability challenges in the sector.
- Productivity Commission (2024) – recommending stronger regulatory oversight as part of early childhood system reform.
- Victorian Government reviews of early childhood regulation following recent sector safety concerns.