

TRANSCRIPT

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SECTOR IN VICTORIA

Inquiry into the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Victoria

Melbourne – Wednesday 25 February 2026

MEMBERS

Anasina Gray-Barberio – Chair

Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

Georgie Crozier

Jacinta Ermacora

Sarah Mansfield

WITNESS

Melinda Crole, President, Outside School Hours Council of Australia.

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. We will now resume the committee's public hearings for the Inquiry into the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Victoria.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you please state your name and any organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

Melinda CROLE: Yes, my name is Melinda Crole. I am here for the Outside School Hours Council of Australia.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Thank you, Ms Crole, and welcome. We are now going to introduce ourselves. My name is Anasina Gray-Barberio, MP for Northern Metro and Chair of the select committee.

Michael GALEA: Hello. I am Michael Galea, Deputy Chair of the committee and Member for South-East Metro.

Georgie CROZIER: Good afternoon. Georgie Crozier, Member for Southern Metropolitan Region.

Melina BATH: Hello. Melina Bath, Eastern Victoria Region.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Sarah Mansfield, Western Victoria Region.

Jacinta ERMACORA: And Jacinta Ermacora, Western Victoria Region.

The CHAIR: Thank you all. I would now like to invite you, Ms Crole, to make any opening statements or comments and ask that you please keep it to a maximum of 8 to 10 minutes so we have plenty of time for discussion. Thank you.

Melinda CROLE: Thank you so much. Good afternoon, Chair and committee members. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into the ECEC sector. My name is Melinda Crole, and I am the President of the Outside School Hours Council of Australia, or OSHCA. I have worked in the youth and community and childcare sectors for over 30 years, and I remain dedicated to supporting the OSH sector to realise the potential it has to enhance the positive outcomes for primary-school-aged children and their parents. OSHCA members represent around about one-third of the OSH services operated in school sites across Australia.

By way of background, our services provide before and after school care to primary-school-aged children. OSH is an essential but often overlooked part of the education and care system. It enables workforce participation, particularly for working parents in dual-income households, and plays an absolutely critical role in supporting Australia's productivity, economic stability and positive outcomes for children of school age. In Victoria alone around about 40 per cent of children attending early childhood education and care services participate in OSH, spending an average of 11.5 hours per week in care. Without our sector thousands of parents would not be able to fulfil their employment obligations or have these additional support structures around them. From the outset I want to be really clear: OSHCA supports stronger regulation and oversight of the ECE sector to support the safety, health and wellbeing of all children, and I highlight that application of these measures must be appropriate for the age cohort we are caring for. Despite its importance, OSH is regulated and funded under systems primarily designed for long day care services catering to school-aged and zero to four or five children, and this one-size-fits-all approach does not reflect the reality of the school-age children.

As multijurisdictional providers we see the inherent challenges faced by OSH providers due to these variations across jurisdictions and differences it causes in cost burden, education harmonisation of the workforce, which is so important, and confusion for parents who ultimately see OSH as an important extension of the school day. Shared spaces provide an outstanding opportunity to enhance the lives of children, and therefore alignment on the benefits of OSH for schools is absolutely essential. It is OSHCA's position that the times before and after school and during school holidays provide an exceptional opportunity to extend educative developmental outcomes for children and to support families. The focus of this primary school cohort within the ECE reform is essential for the ultimate benefit of the children receiving services from providers in the OSH sector.

There is a general misconception that OSH providers are very profitable and have the ability to absorb additional costs; this could not be further from the truth. Labour is the main driver of costs for supplying child care, accounting for 69 per cent of the total cost base of centre-based day care services and 77 per cent of the cost for outside school hours care services. Therefore the balance between fair staff compensation and staff affordability is crucial for the OSH sector's sustainability.

In Victoria, OSH licence arrangements with schools reduce further flexibility and affordability. Schools are increasingly reliant on licence fees as a revenue source and seek to control parent-level fees while offering short-term contracts to providers. Coupled with this, price caps on fees due to the federal government's worker retention grant and concerning ongoing upward trends in licence fees being charged are adding to the cost and discouragement of investment. These pressures already lead to some providers having to consider handing back licenses, with serious implications for families' abilities to access care. OSHCA are seeking alignment across jurisdictions in the way that licence fees are granted and are of the strong view that the model in place in New South Wales and Queensland, whereby licences are granted through education departments, is more transparent and consistent and promotes sector viability.

I reiterate that OSH must be recognised as a distinct and essential component of the education and care system. We support stronger regulation and oversight of the ECEC sector to support the safety, health and wellbeing of children, and we are continuing to work closely with authorities and regulators as part of these regulations. I thank you for the opportunity to participate in this inquiry.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ms Crole, for your presentation. I want to ask you: as the President of the Outside School Hours Council of Victoria, what kind of regulatory model does the Victorian government need to consider when considering the context of the occasional attendance, before- and after-school care, school holiday operations and recreational activities that you provide? Do you have some advice or thoughts around that?

Melinda CROLE: We would love to see the regulations be specific to these age cohorts and also the care types. I think in a perfect world we would also like to see if there is this possibility to have it between, say, five- and eight-year-olds and then eight- to 12-year-olds. There is a lot of difference in agency and in developmental outcomes for those children. One of the tensions also is that there are distinct differences between what they experience through the school day and the requirements of the children, the teachers and the families during the school day compared to what they see in outside school hours care. It creates not only an administration burden and cost, but it creates confusion amongst our little people and amongst our families and our parents and even principals; principals are able to understand what happens within the education system, but for them to understand the difference that is required within the OSH sector is very difficult.

The CHAIR: That is really good. I just want to ask some more about the licensing. You mentioned in your opening statement that in other jurisdictions like New South Wales and Queensland that is granted through their education departments. What is it like here in Victoria? Through what department, if at all, do you get your licences?

Melinda CROLE: The arrangements are made in consultation with the school, and that can be either the –

The CHAIR: Like individual schools?

Melinda CROLE: Individual school by individual school. It is made with the school, which can mean the principal is highly engaged or it could be the parent committee that is highly engaged. What we are seeing is that licence requirement fees are incredibly high in Victoria compared to other jurisdictions where that has gone through a procurement process. We are seeing escalation of that too in the sense that schools are acquiring more

and more to continue to provide the education outcomes that they want or to provide what they want within their school. As an example, licence fees in Victoria can be anywhere between maybe 20 to 30 per cent of revenue, whereas in the other procured states they sit around the 10 to 11 per cent mark. That allows us to use that as rent for the facility and pay for the requirements of what is required within the school, but in Victoria we are seeing a high escalation, and it is on a case-by-case basis that it is negotiated with the schools.

The CHAIR: There is no difference between public education schools and independent/religious schools?

Melinda CROLE: Generally we are finding the licence fees are lower within the private school systems. They are there to support the sector and to make sure OSHC – I call our OSHC ‘our extended education journey’ – is there for the children, but there is a requirement of more licence fees in the state systems, from our experience.

The CHAIR: No worries. I just want to touch on your submission. You said in your submission:

It is time to move away from a baseless bifurcation of the sector based on ownership or financial structure ...

What did you mean by that in the context of your submission?

Melinda CROLE: I think we have an amazing opportunity to get the best quality education and care across primary-age children in Australia that we could see by using outside school hours care as an extension of the school, as something that is there to support the parents and support the child’s education journey across school. I think when we start to have an argument around ‘should it be private or public or social?’ it is not focusing on where we can invest our time and our effort around how we can make sure the right people with the right focus are there to deliver.

The CHAIR: Okay. Also, just on your submission, what did you mean by:

... child safety measures are implemented in ways that are practical for OSHC settings ...

Melinda CROLE: I can give an example to explain what we are saying there, because it is probably the best way I can communicate it. Given that OSHC has got specific licensed space within a school ground, and sometimes that is very restricted by the needs of the principal or by the perceived needs of the school, I might say, that there is not the whole school infrastructure that is there to support the child and the family. We might have licensed space that does not take into account, or we are not allowed basically to use a playground that that child has been using all day, every day during the school day. It becomes very confusing for little brains to say, ‘I’m not allowed to use that playground’ or ‘I’m not allowed to use that toilet’ because it is past 3:30 or it is past school close time. So when we are talking about safety measures and where children have to behave and be in their licensed space, it can get incredibly tricky for them to understand, all right, there is an invisible line at the end of the school day that the OSHC service is not allowed into, and it then is perceived by the regulator as a risk that that child has gone into that space.

The CHAIR: It is so crazy, isn’t it? Licensed space, and that is the space the child has been using, like you said, all day at school. My time is up, but I appreciate the answers that you have given us. Thank you.

Melinda CROLE: I do often think – sorry, if I am allowed to say – this is public infrastructure in schools. In some of the best models I have seen internationally, the school is open for extended education at the end of the day and at the start of the day to support parents, and it is handed over to the specialist provider of extended education, OSHC.

The CHAIR: Yes, thank you very much. Mr Galea, thank you.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Ms Crole, and my colleague online, Mr Ermacora, has pointed out that the Outside School Hours Council is appearing outside school hours, so it is a very appropriate time to have you here today.

Melinda CROLE: There we go, last on the list. This is our normal time of work.

Michael GALEA: Excellent. I just want to start with you touched on in your opening remarks that you are supportive of a lot of the reforms. I just want to touch on specifically the national law changes to make the safety, rights and best interests of the child the paramount consideration. Is that something that you support?

Melinda CROLE: I absolutely 100 per cent support that. What we need to do is actually know how to implement it and what that means so that there is no unintended consequence that by making one decision, we are putting at risk another decision.

Michael GALEA: In what sort of way?

Melinda CROLE: In the sense that if we do this, these children are left at risk of maybe not having a provider or not having a capability to attend a service. Throughout the process, we need to remain open to the fact services need to be accessible, affordable, safe, fun for children too, and ensure that parents are very aware of what is required of them when they step into OSHC compared to what they might perceive as something that is required of them when they are in the school environment, and just make sure there is no unintended consequence of children missing out.

Michael GALEA: Yes. Would you agree that an important part of ensuring that safety is that the educators providing OSHC services are fully trained on all these requirements, on the appropriate reporting mechanisms, on things to look out for and all those sorts of other things?

Melinda CROLE: Absolutely. Everybody should be fully trained and aware. We should be building strong relationships. I think we need to also understand that in the primary age setting sometimes the OSHC coordinator is that one constant across the child's entire school journey. They change teachers every 12 months, but they do not change their coordinator. That gives you an incredibly powerful way to help extend the education journey of the children. It is definitely about making sure the right people are in the right place at the right time with the right skills, so we are fully supportive of anything that helps build educator capability. There is a real need for it to be seen as essential as school as well, in my view, and not as a sort of a second-class citizen to the school and education journey. This is really important so those educators feel happy and well when they are in the service and supporting the children and the principals.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. That is a good point about the continuity in some cases. Page 10 of your submission talks about qualification requirements varying across states, that there are no national requirements for qualifications and that each state takes a different approach, that Victoria is the most stringent, that all educators have to hold or be working towards a certificate III, that in Queensland only 50 per cent of educators have to be doing that and that in New South Wales there are no requirements whatsoever. You have called for the harmonisation of that. When you say harmonisation, do you mean bringing all the other states up to the Victorian level?

Melinda CROLE: I think there is a nice mix within the Queensland model to bring different capabilities to the wonderful age group of five- to 12-year-olds, as long as you do have the qualification requirements of staff on the ground too. One of the disappointing things around outside school hours care is that the certificate for outside school hours care is now being taken off the – I do not know which list it is off. It is off the list that allows anyone to deliver it. We have a cert III and we have a diploma, but more of the workforce tend to do the early learning – well, the early learning one is the same, but they tend to look at the early learning skills. I think there is a real gap in what is specific for an outside school hours care education system for us. To build that workforce we need these particular qualifications that are specific for this cohort.

Michael GALEA: Are you saying that Victoria should actually reduce its standards so that only half of educators should have or be working towards a cert III as in the Queensland model? If so, how would that improve child safety outcomes, if you are actually removing the training that you are providing to the people that are working with these children?

Melinda CROLE: We are in a workforce crisis – a crunch – in the whole of the care sector. But outside school hours care is incredibly difficult to recruit and retain for because of the split-shift nature of the work. Also, unless people can see it as a career-type job – it is a career entry job for some people, it is also a career job for some people who like the split-shift work and the difference in holiday programs. I think it is incredibly important to make sure that we get a rich mix for children, and it is incredibly hard when you have got such a stringent – I do not want to back down on anything that is working. I think we would need to assess this really, really deeply to make sure that we can see where quality is delivered.

Michael GALEA: I am just, I guess, struggling to see how such a move would be aligning with that principle of putting the safety of children as the most paramount consideration. I completely agree that

workforce is a big consideration in this sector and many others. But are we not then making child safety secondary to workforce considerations if we are to reduce the training requirements for OSHC services?

Melinda CROLE: I do not think so. It is about having the right people. I am not for one minute suggesting that we do not have qualified people on the floor – that is not at all what I am suggesting. They need to be qualified, and it is my experience that the more we do look at what that qualification means to the person, it is really, really important. But we need the right qualification with the right skill set for primary-age children just as much as we need the right people.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you, Ms Crozier.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much for being before us this afternoon, Ms Crole. Could I ask you, and I may have missed it: could you give me a breakdown of the mix of profit, not-for-profit and community-run outside school hours care?

Melinda CROLE: In the OSH sector it is around about 40 per cent – I think it is under 40 per cent that are privately operated. It is quite a divested market. It could be run by P & Cs or by schools. It could be run by bodies of the Catholic education system or things like that. So it is quite divested. It is not the same as the long day care market profile.

Georgie CROZIER: As you highlight in your submission, it is a very important part of the early childhood education sector. This committee is looking at safety and quality, and you have made reference to that. In terms of those 40 per cent that are privately operated, if they were not in this space, it would leave a massive gap for children and working families, would it not?

Melinda CROLE: Absolutely. I think there already is a gap for outside school hours care provision across Australia. We need to meet the demand, and we need the balance of for-profit and not-for-profit. I have had the experience of working in both, so I know the importance of both within the sector. Again, it should not be the central tenet of the argument at the moment. It should be about how we can actually deliver the highest quality care. We need to also be able to enter the thin markets. My understanding is there is still around about 35 per cent of schools that do not have an OSH facility that is there supporting the family. We need to consider how we can grow and build the sector to enter the thin markets or markets that are not sustainable by current providers.

Georgie CROZIER: Do you see the private market being part of that solution, or not-for-profits or a mix of all – private, public and not-for-profit?

Melinda CROLE: I think it is a mix of everybody. That is why we are sitting here saying that it is the regulatory frameworks and the requirements of those that are so important to make sure the right people are in there. There is absolutely a need for a mix because I do not know how we meet demand otherwise. I think there is an important choice for families. There are guardrails around OSH that I think we all need to recognise too, which may not necessarily be in the centre-based day care market. We are contracted to the school principals, the schools and the school councils, and they sit around us as a beautiful, rich community of who decides who is the right OSH provider in that particular service. I think there is a real need to understand the difference here and not create a regulatory framework that is not taking OSH into account with what it already has and how it could absolutely be enhanced.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you. You have just described the model that you see, with that framework being in place, and how important that is. But you did mention in answer to one of my colleague's questions what the best models have that you have seen internationally, I think. Can you –

Melinda CROLE: I can. I would have to get the exact country. I know it is up in the Nordic area, but it is where the schools hand it over. They have a view on extended education. At the moment around about 15 per cent of the schoolchildren attend OSH, and it is used. We have done some research with parents that shows that they are still juggling; there is a massive juggle for primary school parents here that we need to really be conscious of and try to address through some of these changes as well. Those models have what I would say is an education principle and then they have an extended education principle, which is based on the play

pedagogy of children and how they enter the day for an education outcome and how they exit the day to relate back to family and community. There are tertiary qualifications in play pedagogy in those countries as well. The schools hand it over, and approximately 80 per cent of children actually attend those types of services.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you. Given the concerns about what has happened in the early education settings over the last 12 months have obviously been very highlighted and are the reason we are having this inquiry, you talk about working in conjunction, in partnership with schools and the principal. In terms of the quality and ensuring that the OSHC educators have got proper working with children checks and proper standards and education, can you just explain to the committee how you see that? Is it a responsibility of the school principal and the school, if they are attached to a school, is it both or is it really the OSHC provider?

Melinda CROLE: It is in the main the responsibility of the OSHC provider. There is an agreement with the schools, and in Victoria it is a department of ed agreement that says that we will maintain the standards of what is required by us under the law. I think if we are going to talk about how we look to the future and we look at how the national quality framework works, at no point when we are being assessed as a provider is the school necessarily brought in or responsible for that assessment.

Georgie CROZIER: So it is the OSHC provider. Have you had concerns about the working with children check?

Melinda CROLE: I have professionally had concerns about the working with children check since the royal commission nationally.

Georgie CROZIER: Were you aware that the Ombudsman made recommendations to the government? That is a nodding yes.

Melinda CROLE: Yes, I am aware.

Georgie CROZIER: It was in September 2022, and nothing was done.

Melinda CROLE: Well, 10 years ago harmonisation of the working with children check was a recommendation out of the royal commission, and it has still not been achieved in Australia.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. Thank you for appearing today and for your submission. I was interested when you were talking about the difference in licence fees in Victoria and that it is actually in the public school sector where they seem to be a bit higher. Do you have any ideas about why that might be the case?

Melinda CROLE: Only anecdotally, so we would need to do some more research. We get told by principals they need that money for the school. I have heard stories like, 'I need that money to buy the tissues for the school. I need that money to help support the fete' – or whatever might be happening. 'It now helps my children go out on excursions because the cost of those types of things has been escalating.' They are generally the anecdotal conversations we hear back. It might be that they need an air conditioner or fan or whatever it might be.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Basic infrastructure or basic services.

Melinda CROLE: That is what we get in the conversation as we look to secure the operations of the service.

Sarah MANSFIELD: It is effectively a bit of a cost shift. We know that there is a big funding shortfall – it is not a secret – with Victorian public schools. They are missing a big chunk of money.

Melinda CROLE: We have often said that maybe it should be that the childcare subsidies fund this within a school when you are looking at the flowthrough from outside school hours care providers.

Sarah MANSFIELD: But the answer to it might be just to fund the public schools better so that they do not need to be hiking up your licence fees.

Melinda CROLE: I think we also need to make sure that we have got, I will say from an OSHC perspective now, really stringent procurement processes. We see that as really an important part of how you absolutely ensure quality but you also ensure affordability and access, because it is our experience too that when it is procured through a department, the department also helps you access the classroom or the satisfactory space that you require within the school. I think having that additional help in talking to schools and making sure that they can see the benefits of OSHC and what is reasonable for an OSHC service is really important.

Sarah MANSFIELD: We have had some discussions across different parts of the sector around reporting culture and things that might help or hinder that. Can you speak to the experience in OSHC of reporting? Is it a space where generally educators and providers are encouraged to report incidents when they occur?

Melinda CROLE: It is my experience in OSHC especially that there is lots and lots of reporting happening because there are actually lots and lots of eyes on you already. I think, again, to make sure the regulations fit for OSHC and fit for the age groups is something that is really important, because you get a lot of reporting that in my mind is sometimes an administration burden beyond anything else because it does not fit the actual environments of schools. As an example, there are lots of parents and lots of children that hang around after school to play on the play equipment. Some schools do not mandate that they leave, some do and then others encourage community use of school infrastructure as well, which means OSHC services are working within that. They are not as controlled environments as they might be within centre-based day care – never lose sight of a two-year-old, never, ever, ever, ever. For a five-year-old, in school settings, there are some places within schools where children can go and play and of course they are in line of sight of educators, but it is a little bit different from these very controlled environments in long day care. I think there is a ‘report, report, report’ culture because there are so many different stakeholders that have line of sight over OSHC providers, including the principal. In most cases, if something has happened to a child or a family, then the principal becomes very aware of it, just like the OSHC provider does.

Sarah MANSFIELD: You have made this argument in your submission that we almost need maybe even a separate standard because it is such a different environment to a long day care setting.

Melinda CROLE: We would love to see that considered. We would then also love to see the regulators have distinct departments and assessment officers that know OSHC and are not judging OSHC services based on their experience and learning or the outcomes that they see within the long day care sectors and centre-based day care.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Do you think the assessors get adequate training on the difference between the two sectors?

Melinda CROLE: Generally our experience is they are very, very much more centre day care based, skilled and experienced than they are in OSHC. I think the regulators are trying, but you have also got a workforce that has come through centre-based day care in a grander way than has yet come through OSHC. There might need to be some changes, but we would like to see that specifically considered.

Sarah MANSFIELD: If there are OSHC services that have problems with how they are operating or have had a number of genuine safety issues, what are your views on the adequacy of the regulatory response to that?

Melinda CROLE: With all that we have been discussing, I think we need regulators that are there more frequently. We need to continue to work with them. There need to be opportunities for the system to help support providers to get where they need to get to, especially in thin markets with low workforce utilisation. We need support structures around them as well. Interestingly for OSHC, contracts also – what is the right word – can be terminated. If you have got someone who is not happy with you, the school is not happy with you or they perceive you as not doing what they really want you to do, there is a safety net there around contract termination as well.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you. As a parent who has used a service like this in the past in my local town, I appreciate the work. I want to go to that; if we look at a parent, the parent has worked long and hard all day, and they know that at 3:20 the child will transition across to the service. That service might include a snack because children are hungry and they need to be fed regularly. There might be some activity because kids have also been sitting down in the classroom, so they might want to get out and have a run. Sometimes on staff – I am going to walk into that a little bit – it may be that there is a student teacher or somebody studying who might be a great sport person and having them on your staff can really add value to the experience of the child, but they have not necessarily achieved a cert III – is that kind of where you are going?

Melinda CROLE: Absolutely. I think some of the great people we see in our services are our coaches, who have a great capability to work with children but not might not necessarily have the cert III in outside school hours care. But they have a capability to work with children, and they bring a richness to what they do.

Melina BATH: Perfect – and it suits their lifestyle as well, whatever that might be. But we are not saying that they are any greater risk, because they do not have the qualification; they still must meet all the standards, working with children, police check et cetera. Is that where you are?

Melinda CROLE: A hundred per cent, yes.

Melina BATH: The other thing that is very important, I think; the parent picks the child up, tea is in the fridge because you made it in the morning, some of the homework is already done and some of that learning is already achieved, so the KPI for the next day for that child or the end of the week through maths or whatever can be assisted. Is that part of the role as well?

Melinda CROLE: Absolutely. I think that is the beauty of OSHC. When you think about it, the children are together in an age cohort too of the five to 12s. It is actually their very first step into community and working with children across the different age cohorts. They can choose activities within the service on the night. You will always have a difference in children too. That is the importance in the diversity of the programming, hence the diversity of the staff. Some will want to get out and kick the soccer ball, some will want to do their homework, some will want to do really creative things like craft activities and some will just want to sit and read because they are tired as well. That difference in what we are doing with the children and the difference in their agency is part of how we deliver. They tell you what they want to do, and they can be part of the programming conversation and they can be part of really talking about what makes them safe and how they feel safe within a service, so I think there is a difference.

Melina BATH: Thank you. It really is a valuable service. You have got 350,000 families across Australia. Do you have an idea roughly how many are you serve in Victoria? Take it on notice if you need to.

Melinda CROLE: I will take it on notice, I am sorry.

Melina BATH: Thank you. I would just be interested, because I do not believe any inquiry – not that we are – should be sweeping this as not an important sector. To my mind it is, and particularly in regions where you have got to travel. It is not easy to walk home necessarily either. Your recommendation is to go through the education department for the licence, but you are not suggesting that you take away the autonomy of the school or the school community or the principal. It is just setting the –

Melinda CROLE: No, the procured states put you through the process and you fill out all the important things that that school wants to know. Then the decision actually still sits with the principal or the school council, but they also have parameters around what they are allowed to ask and where you are allowed to be. They tend to get to know exactly what they need to provide in that relationship as well.

Melina BATH: Okay. Thank you very much. In terms of your recommendations, and you do have quite a few there, let us look at your takeaway for this inquiry. What do we recommend government do as the most feasible for Victoria to adopt in the short term?

Melinda CROLE: Short term would be to really consider the regulatory environment for the five- to 12-year-olds in a primary school setting, which is very different. And then I would say as a priority for the affordability and accessibility, we need to consider how we are procuring in Victoria.

Melina BATH: Then, and I am not putting words into your mouth, but in relation to understanding and facilitating oversight of this sector also having somewhere in the bowels of the education department a room that says 'OSHC'.

Melinda CROLE: Correct. 'I am an OSHC assessment officer.' 'I am the OSHC department of the regulator.'

Melina BATH: Yes, sure. Okay. Thank you very much. And finally, in terms of families, how do you regulate and respond to the parent? You do not write end-of-school reports. It is literally just a walk-in walk-out. Make a comment on that if you would like to. Funding – it was a long time ago and I forget how I paid for it. How is it paid for by the user?

Melinda CROLE: It is paid for by the user, but with the childcare subsidy attached to the fee, so only the out-of-pocket is paid. It is paid in arrears of the care being given, and then the CCS is applied before the parent has to pay the fee. The affordability part of OSHC is really considerable when you are thinking that that out of school hours session at the end of the day is anywhere between, say, \$25 and \$35 for the 3.5 hours, which is well under the rate cap in the majority of OSHC services. We know our families sit on around about the 60 to 70 per cent percentile of CCS support, so they can be paying \$5 or \$6 for that afternoon of care.

Melina BATH: And is there trouble chasing up funds?

Melinda CROLE: You always have some debtors, but generally not. I think it is a very affordable, accessible part of the care system. That is why it is so important.

Melina BATH: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Ermacora.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Hi. Thanks very much for coming in. I just wanted to get a sense of your customer group. What percentage of parents in a school might use after-hours care?

Melinda CROLE: Look, it varies. But as a general rule across Australia we are looking at anywhere between, say, 12 and 15 per cent. I can absolutely attest to where there is a really strong relationship with the principal and where the principal sees these times, before- and after-school care, as being so important, you will get an uptick in what that looks like. I have got this amazing example of where one principal said to us, 'I'm having a lot of trouble with my grade 2 teachers and the children in the school. We want them all to come to the morning program. They can have a great breakfast. They can get some regulation activity before they head into the classroom.' And he saw this amazing uptick in the outcomes for those grade 2 children by attending a program that was highly designed to make sure the children were ready to step into the classroom. So in that case, that school had around about 40 per cent of the school population attending.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Wow, what a great way to solve a problem.

Melinda CROLE: Absolutely. And I think that is what I am saying – there are a lot of opportunities to not just support the families. There are probably a lot of opportunities to support some of the teachers and some of the issues maybe schools are facing as well.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I am not sure if you know this, but what industries are – obviously shift workers, so nurses, medical and health professionals. Do you have a profile of the occupations or sectors that your parents are from?

Melinda CROLE: Generally the majority are those that need to be onsite. I think we saw a decline in OSH participation with the working from home opportunities that popped up for white collar workers, so to speak. But yes, definitely the growth corridors in cities are where the greatest need is because you have got transport requirements of families to get to and from their workplace as well. So that is where we probably see the mass of attendance.

Jacinta ERMACORA: So in today's economy that would also include delivery workers and similar kinds of occupations.

Melinda CROLE: Most working parents who do not have the ability to flex hours or flex where they work is what OSH is absolutely supportive to.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes, that is very interesting. I do not really have anything further to ask. I could ask more questions, but I think that is enough. I think you have been very informative.

Melinda CROLE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ms Ermacora. Well, I think that brings our session to a close. Ms Crole, I want to thank you for your evidence and your presentation before the committee today, noting that you will receive a copy of the transcript for review in about a week's time before it is published on the website. And I believe there are some requests for information on notice, so when you can, if you could provide that to the secretary in due course.

We will now close today's hearings. Thank you all for tuning in.

Committee adjourned.