

**Submission  
No 77**

## **INQUIRY INTO THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SECTOR IN VICTORIA**

**Organisation:** Ethical Interactions

**Date Received:** 12 December 2025



December 2025

Dear Chair and Members of the Select Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission to your Inquiry into the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Victoria.

I lead an organisation of early childhood professionals who provide professional learning support to teachers and educators in Victoria as well as offering advocacy and research to increase children's participation in decision making.

This submission is both personal and professional. It draws on my experiences as an early childhood professional who has worked for twenty years across early childhood policy, research and practice, and conversations that I've had with my team about their work with services professionally and as parents of children who attend early childhood services. The perspective I put forward in this submission also comes from my personal experience as a Victim Survivor of institutional childhood sexual abuse.

Since the very start of the early childhood reform agenda in 2007 early childhood education and care has represented a unique policy area around which people interested in social, education, health and economic transformation could gather to think about different futures together. I am optimistic that these possibilities remain, however I continue to be saddened by the instances of abuse, inadequate safety and poor quality that are reported. I hope we repair and do better for children and their families as a matter of priority.

The Select Committee invites submissions regarding the:

- adequacy of current quality and safety standards
- quality and oversight of educator training, professional development and qualifications
- impacts of Victoria's predominantly privatised system
- impact of workforce conditions
- adequacy of staff-to-child ratio regulations

It is also seeking to understand whether there is sufficient oversight from the Department of Education and any other matter in relation to the adequacy, implementation, compliance and/or enforcement of child safety standards and regulations in the sector.

These issues that are being considered within the scope of the Inquiry are nuanced and require a holistic response. Based on my experience in the sector since 2007 I do not believe that there is one specific element of the system that is wholly responsible for creating these problems on its own. Similarly, I do not believe that the poor quality of services nor the abuse that children are experiencing within them will be corrected by simply making changes to any one of these elements on their own. Instead, I see that the issues have been created by a whole system dynamic, and in particular a slippage in the clarity of focus on the overall goal of the system away from medium-long term social and economic outcomes towards more immediate fiscal and academic progress measures.



In my opinion the reliance on short-term economic, fiscal and simplistic measures such as attendance rates is driving decisions about the quality of educator training, professional development and qualifications as well as workforce conditions and the implementation of staff-to-child ratios in a way that lacks good judgement nor prioritises social value. I do not believe that these poor decisions are being made because of any specific problem that is inherent within the quality and safety standards, nor in the Department of Education's implementation, compliance and/or enforcement of child safety standards and regulations.

I too have witnessed instances of inadequate child supervision, rushed qualifications, risk assessments that focus so narrowly on preventing immediate and visible harm that they inadvertently generate less-visible and/or longer-term harm as well as the deployment of "rapid teams" to polish services the day before assessment visits and so on. I see that these issues are a product of a system driven by profit and are amplified by Victoria's predominantly privatised system of service delivery. I have also witnessed instances of early childhood professionals feeling unable to speak up to their employer because they fear their courage may impact in profound ways on their own employment and visa status in Australia. I have witnessed instances of decisions being made to reduce costs of consumable learning resources, children's food and even disposable hygiene products so that the early childhood program returns a larger profit which in turn can be used to cross-subsidise other community programs that operate at a loss elsewhere in the organisation. I have witnessed safety concerns being hushed to avoid authorities and families becoming aware and withdrawing their children from the service. I have witnessed safety concerns being minimised because "we can't afford for this community to lose access to the service". I have heard "I know, the children really need to be able to paint outside, but the owner just doesn't allow mess, and I can't win this one".

I believe that the drive for profit and improvements in simplistic metrics is generating these problems. I do not see that they are the product of inadequate regulatory and oversight systems, nor are they due to lack of care or commitment by each of the professionals working across the early childhood system in Victoria in services, provider organisations, advocacy groups or government.

In my opinion, professionals working within the system are committed to children and families and are ethical and have good judgement. In order that the social and long-term economic gains of early childhood education and care investment to be realised, the current emphasis on economic activity and fiscal value needs to be realigned to emphasise social value. This may mean that the system is transformed to be driven by motives other than of simply profit, and I suspect this will require change to Victoria's predominantly privatised system of delivery.

Market economies are designed to allocate scarce resources efficiently, however there is no need in an affluent society that safe and quality education and care services for young children be scarce. From a more balanced perspective, I suggest that early childhood education and care is not well-suited to a competitive market environment. Families are not adequately able to judge the quality of the service despite the National Quality Assessment and Rating System, because inherently they cannot see what their children are experiencing. The impact of this opacity is exacerbated by many professionals within the workforce experiencing marginalisation and are sometimes also disenfranchised, and because the children who are placed into the services each day are disenfranchised and dependent on others to access their protection rights.



Overcoming some of these constraints may not be possible, at least in the medium term which is why we need a more sophisticated, inter-related and multi-dimensional approach to maximise the potential for the system to serve everyone in our community, in particular very young children. Increased surveillance and CCTV is not a solution. Some adjustments to the system are needed and these may well be felt in some ways by a lot of us – including myself – who are advantaged by the current system. But it is our responsibility as adults to “become good ancestors” (Biswas, 2023) and consider giving up some of our comforts so that young children and their families can experience safe and good quality early childhood education and care services right now. I recommend that we resolve these issues by realigning the system drivers with the goal of the system, and that this goal be much more ambitious than those measured by simple short-term academic/cognitive or economic metrics. This would involve:

1. Reimagining what we collectively are able to create through an early childhood education and care system (Wall, 2022). I see that bringing together thoughts from education, health, economics as well as more radical perspectives of trans-generational relationships, decoloniality (Biswas, 2023) and economics of abundance (Hoeschele, 2016) into conversations with experts including children, families, professionals, older people, and communities would assist.
2. Building on the strength of diverse perspectives of those who collectively form the early childhood education and care system. I see that understanding who is best placed to make decisions and devolving appropriate decision-making power to local communities of early childhood education professionals as well as children and families would assist.
3. Reviewing and refining the levers that are used to manage the system to reduce disbenefits and unintended consequences that run counter to the system goals. I see that developing greater nuance around the kinds of measures used to determine “success” as they appear over different time horizons would assist.
4. Establishing new approaches to harm minimisation and incident reporting and management. I see that growing cultural humility (Ortega et al., 2025) in which peoples’ reports of their own experiences of harm are believed, especially when those people are children, early childhood professionals and families would assist.

I wish you all the very best with this Inquiry and commend the work that you and your team are doing.

Sincerely

Rachel Flottman  
Director

Biswas T (2023) Becoming good ancestors: A decolonial, childist approach to global intergenerational sustainability. *Children & Society* 37(4): 1005-1020.



Hoeschele W (2016) *The economics of abundance: a political economy of freedom, equity, and sustainability*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Ortega RM, Chang OD, Ortega MB, et al. (2025) What cultural humility teaches us about protecting children. *Child Protection and Practice* 5: 100178.

Wall J (2022) From childhood studies to childism: reconstructing the scholarly and social imaginations. *Children's Geographies* 20(3): 257-270.