

Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Public Enquiry Submission
Submitted by R Polman of Annerley QLD on 28 August 2014.

Thank you for the opportunity to present a submission to this enquiry. I offer my submission as a parent who has used child care services in the past and also as a concerned citizen who knows families that use child care services in the present.

The general concerns raised by Users of Child Care services appear to be

- High daily cost
- Availability of places
- Availability of staff who meet the current stringent requirements
- Pay scales for child care staff

When my first child attended childcare in 2004 at the age of 2, child care life was simple, but very effective. My wife and I saw child care services as a vehicle to provide a number of specific services:

- Child minding to allow parents to re-enter the work force
- opportunity to mix with other children and learn social skills
- provision of a secure and happy place for children to be
- learning how to be separated from parents before the start of school
- getting and fighting germs to build up immunity before starting school

Child Care in 2004 met our needs perfectly and we have a healthy, well-balanced and social son now 12 years of age. In those days, child care services concentrated on play based learning; water play; our centre included a mud patch which our son absolutely loved; and craft etc. Once our son was over the separation stress, he really enjoyed himself and learned how to make friends and share.

By the time our daughter entered child care in 2007, we noticed things were starting to change. Education was creeping in. Forms were getting more complicated. New rules were being made - many of which we thought were a bit over the top. And of course, fees were rising.

Today, fees have risen dramatically; the ratio of staff to kids has been reduced and now children have to learn how to read and write forcing child care centres to employ staff with teaching qualifications. While we are no longer involved in the child care system, I very much feel for parents of today who have to put up with all the extra rules and regulations and education that is required now by, dare I say, "well meaning" governments. Children are being expected now to be able to read and write before starting prep.

I think the current situation is absurd. I feel the whole system should be unwound back to the ideals that were in place when my son attended child care. Primarily, a child care centre should be a place where children are cared for and where children learn how to socialise, play and share. That's what children need to do at that stage of life. That is what children enjoy doing in their early years. There shouldn't be a need to employ teachers. Leave the education stuff to "big" school where it belongs.

It should be remembered, and it was mentioned in a newspaper article I read today which prompted me to make this submission, that child care policy was, and should primarily be, about looking after the children in a safe and happy environment so that parents could go back to work. Somehow it has now become another step of education and I don't think it should be part of the education system.

I've already acknowledged that I believe childcare should be primarily about looking after children. But when thinking about this great push to provide education in childcare by employing teachers and forcing extra costs onto child care centres, I actually feel sorry for those parents and children who choose not to utilise child care services.

While child care policy is about helping parents get back into the workforce, I don't believe this should also disparage those parents who decide they want to stay at home to look after their children. Child Care can be great, but nothing can beat having children looked after by their parents and playing with other kids in the neighbourhood.

And so, I feel for what now happens to those parents who choose to stay at home until their children go to school. The current system of education in child care now produces two groups of children.

1. Those children who went to child care and received educational services
2. Those children who stayed at home and didn't receive this education

The problem is that child care is not compulsory. Of course, added to that, child care is becoming too expensive. And so the Prep teacher will find a vast difference of skills between children in the two groups. Repercussions of this issue could be that the stay at home children may feel inadequate because half the class knows a lot more. The child care children become bored because they have to learn again what they already know. The teacher has the problem of working out how to deal with both groups to produce an education program that is inclusive for all and doesn't alienate those children who stayed at home with parents.

School is where children learn to read and write. Why must we duplicate these services in child care? Why can't we leave child care to do its core role of minding children and teaching them how to get on with others?

To make child care more available and more affordable, I believe the only solution is to remove the formal education aspect of child care and reinstate the child staff ratios of early 2000. If this were done, I believe the benefits would be

- Costs of running a child care centre would reduce;
- Daily fees for Child Care services would reduce;
- Children will be much happier;
- Children will all be at roughly similar educational standards at the start of Prep
- With the reduction of red tape, more child care places would be available.

I hope my comments will be of some help.

Yours faithfully,

R Polman