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3<sup>rd</sup> September 2014

To the Commissioner,

Alstonville Community School Inc. is a not for profit community run preschool in Northern NSW. As a newly established preschool run by the community for the community we are concerned by some of the recommendations made within the Productivity Commission draft report and write to address these.

Community preschools are offering quality early childhood education and have performed highly in the ratings system compared to other service types. This fact is recognized in the Productivity Commission Draft Report. This is the result of passionate early childhood teachers leading fellow educators to provide quality early childhood education. This commitment to early childhood education comes despite a lack of pay equity with similarly qualified colleagues in primary and secondary education. Quality in NSW Community Preschools has not come as a result of excess funding; rather, the truth is that many of our educators and teachers just go *above and beyond* to ensure children don't miss out.

Community preschools often embody the true essence of holistic educational practice with a child centred approach in collaboration with families and other professionals while incorporating sustainable practices in building communities. This comes as a result of their management structure – usually a voluntary management committee made up of parents and interested community members that is focused solely upon what is *best for children*.

Children's wellbeing and the growth of a strong, healthy and cohesive society should be the primary aims when considering the provision of any type of education and care for young children.

In view of this with regard to Draft Recommendation **7.9: Dedicated preschools should be removed from the scope of the National Quality Framework and regulated by state and territory governments under the relevant education legislation.**

The NQF, as a system for creating and maintaining quality learning environments, is not perfect. However if there is to be a move away from the NQF we feel it is imperative that there is earnest and effective communication between the state and territory governments and the major stakeholders in the industry with a collaborative approach toward implementing an effective system that will ensure quality educational outcomes for children.



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We would also advocate that the cost of community preschools, who are offering a similar level of education, should be brought in line with those preschools attached to primary schools where there is no cost or low-cost to parents.

With regard to **Draft Recommendation 12.9: The Australian Government should continue to provide per child payments to the states and territories for universal access to a preschool program.**

We would advocate that the National Partnership Agreement to provide Universal Access should continue, not only in the short term, but as a more permanent arrangement between the Commonwealth and the States. We also believe that funding should provide preschool for children in the **two** years before school, with priority given to children who are in the year before school. It is well known that National and international research supports this stance and the 'return on investment' in early years is substantial.

We feel that it is also important to recognize that preschools are vital in ensuring that children in rural and regional areas have the same opportunities as their peers in cities and towns. Small rural, regional community preschools are often the hub of their local community, closely tied to the needs of local families, and in many cases, the only accessible community service. It is essential that these preschools be supported to remain viable and attendance at these should be free or low-cost to families. Funding of 2 or 3 year old children is one way that this viability can be maintained in these areas.

As a community preschool we are also concerned that attendance at preschool should be linked to the receipt of the Family Tax Benefit. We are concerned that this could disadvantage children and families that are already disadvantaged. Reducing the cost of preschool education to families would be far more effective way of ensuring attendance. We also have concerns about the supply-based funding arrangements as this makes financial viability difficult in rural and regional areas where enrolments fluctuate and where a preschool is a vital service regardless of the number of enrolments.

As a member of the Northern Rivers Preschool Alliance we would welcome the opportunity to work closely in assisting to take forward these new proposals collaboratively.

Kind Regards,

Katherine Buckley  
President