

Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee

Quality and Safety of Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care System

From: Emma Middlebrook

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I am writing as a parent and community member who has personally visited childcare centres and witnessed practices that I believe are unsafe.

What I observed was:

- Educators being left alone in rooms with very young children, including infants under two.
- When I raised this concern, staff pointed to the current 1 educator to 4 children under two years ratio as justification.

This showed me that the current framework allows unsafe practices to occur daily.

Concerns

1. The 1:4 ratio for children under two is unsafe.
 - Infants require constant attention and care.

- One adult cannot safely manage the needs of four children under two years old at the same time.
2. Sole supervision in childcare centres should be prohibited for all children under five.
- No educator should ever be left alone in a room with children this young.
 - Children under five — and particularly those who are non-verbal — are vulnerable and cannot always communicate their needs or raise the alarm if something is wrong.
 - Sole supervision also exposes children to potential predatory behaviour from adults, which is an unacceptable risk.
 - Removing sole supervision requirements protects both children and educators: it safeguards children while also supporting educators to do their job to the highest standard, with the reassurance of a colleague always present.
3. Technology and privacy concerns.
- Some centres are installing surveillance cameras to monitor rooms. While these may improve accountability, if cameras are connected to Wi-Fi networks, they present a significant security risk.
 - Wi-Fi connected cameras can be vulnerable to hacking and unauthorised external access.
 - If cameras are used, they should be on closed systems with no Wi-Fi capability, to ensure children's safety and privacy are not compromised.

Recommendations

I urge the Committee to recommend that:

1. The 1 educator to 4 children ratio for under-twos be abolished, and replaced with a safer, lower ratio.
2. Any form of sole supervision of children under five in childcare centres be prohibited, to protect children from risk and support educators in their work.
3. If surveillance cameras are installed in centres, they must not be connected to Wi-Fi, and instead operate on secure closed-circuit systems to prevent unauthorised access.

Conclusion

The safety of children must come before cost-cutting or convenience. Ratios and staffing rules must ensure children are never left in unsafe situations, and technology must be used responsibly to protect their privacy and security.

I believe the Committee has a vital opportunity to strengthen the system so that:

- No child under five is ever left in a room with only one adult.
- Infants under two receive the safer care they deserve.
- Educators are supported to do their job properly, always with the reassurance of another adult present.

- Surveillance systems cannot be exploited through insecure Wi-Fi connections.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Middlebrook