



June 2025

Hon. Abigail Boyd MLC
Chair, Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education
NSW Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Email: council@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Chair,

Re: Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care

Goodstart Early Learning is pleased to contribute to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. As Australia's largest not-for-profit provider of early learning, we bring a unique combination of scale, data insight, and community-based experience.

We proudly endorse the joint submission developed by five of NSW most trusted not-for-profit providers – and note its recommendations reflect deep sector experience and a shared commitment to a high-quality and equitable ECEC system that puts children first.

We offer this supplementary submission to highlight Goodstart's journey, evidence, and perspective. It sets out how our organisation has built quality at scale, how we're using data to strengthen outcomes, and why we believe renewed investment in regulatory implementation is critical to uphold the intent of the National Quality Framework (NQF).

About Goodstart

Goodstart Early Learning was founded in 2010 in response to the collapse of Australia's largest for-profit provider, ABC Learning— which left thousands of children, families, and early learning professionals in limbo. In an extraordinary move, four of Australia's most respected social purpose organisations — The Benevolent Society, Mission Australia, Social Ventures Australia, and the Brotherhood of St Laurence — joined forces to found Goodstart with a shared ambition to improve outcomes for children, particularly those facing disadvantage.

Today, Goodstart operates over 660 centres nationwide, including more than 130 in NSW. Each year, we support more than 70,000 children and 60,000 families across Australia. We are one of the NSW's largest employers of early childhood educators, with around 3,000 staff across the state. As a purpose-driven provider, we reinvest every dollar into our people, centres, practice, and community impact—striving to create safe, inclusive, and high-quality early learning environments for every child. Our footprint in NSW also includes Big Fat Smile, as our wholly owned subsidiary.

Our Experience: From Turnaround to System Leadership

When Goodstart was formed, we inherited hundreds of centres with mixed performance and quality – with many not meeting the minimum quality standards. Over 15 years, we have delivered a dramatic transformation, underpinned by investment in our people, practice, systems and infrastructure.

We're for children, not for profit.

PO Box 10120, Adelaide Street, Brisbane Qld 4000
t 1800 222 543 f (07) 3020 3825 abn 69 139 967 794



This has included:

- **Investing in national practice systems**, including Quality Ratings Scales that have an international evidence base proven to improve children's outcomes, contemporary outcomes frameworks for children from birth to school age, and approaches to measuring children's outcomes and progress.
- **Establishing a social inclusion team** with specialised roles in trauma-informed practice, disability inclusion, allied health and infant mental health
- **Supporting our educators with above-award wages**, professional supervision, coaching and mentoring
- **Building our own internal data capability** and tools to monitor and lift quality across our network.
- **Developing our Safety Commitment and comprehensive national safety framework** embedding physical, psychological and cultural safety across our network, supported by a dedicated safety team, centre-based Safety Champions and robust training program in child safeguarding, incident response and injury management.

In 2014, just 57% of Goodstart NSW centres were rated as Meeting or Exceeding the NQS. Today, more than 99% meet or exceed, and our Exceeding rate is above the national average. The number of graduate-qualified teachers has grown from 200 in 2010 to over 2,600. Critically, children experiencing vulnerability now attend Goodstart at the same rate as their peers.

The organisation has become a national proof point: that you can deliver financially sustainable high quality early learning, at scale, while putting children first.

Our Data and Insights

As a large national provider with centralised systems, we have a unique ability to analyse trends and identify systemic issues. We routinely contribute our data to research projects and policy processes across Australia to help build an evidence base for reform.

In NSW, our data and recent experience has shown that:

- **Regulatory delays and workforce shortages are impacting service quality and availability.** Between 2019 and 2024, the number of ECEC services in NSW grew by 9.4%, while the number of quality assessments fell by 8.4%—demonstrating regulatory resourcing hasn't kept pace with demand.
- **Children with disability or developmental concerns are often turned away from some providers.** 8.3% of children at Goodstart have a diagnosed disability or condition, compared to just 6% for the rest of the sector on average, and children with disability attend Goodstart at higher rates and with better retention compared to other children across Goodstart, reflecting the additional investments we make in inclusion. However, achieving inclusive outcomes is heavily dependent on a philosophical and financial commitment from service providers, as government funding does not cover the full cost of additional support workers for children.

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- **Fragmented funding models make it difficult for families to access the full benefits of ECEC.** New South Wales has a lower participation rate of both 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds than Victoria, reflecting the impact of higher levels of State investment in ECEC in Victoria.
- **The higher ratio requirements for teachers in New South Wales centres have a material impact on quality.** Our internal monitoring of the quality of pedagogical practices has consistently shown that our New South Wales centres deliver higher quality practice than other states, particularly in Quality areas 1 and 5 - reflecting the impact of better qualified teams.
- **While at a sector-wide level NSW reports the highest rate of breaches nationally—twice that of Victoria—it records the lowest number of serious incidents.** This could suggest that NSW's compliance activity may be more rigorous, supporting prevention and pointing to the need for deeper analysis of regulatory data.

We welcome the Committee's Terms of Reference, particularly the focus on quality, safety, inclusion and the role of data. We encourage the Committee to work with high-quality providers to draw on provider-level data to understand how the system is working on the ground.

Our commitment to work with the NSW Government

We are committed to ensure that every child in NSW has access to safe, high-quality, inclusive early learning and we believe the not-for-profit sector has a vital role to play in delivering on this vision. With the right policy settings, investment, and collaboration, we can build an ECEC system that meets the needs of all children, families and communities.

I thank the Committee for its important work and would welcome the opportunity to appear in person to provide further evidence and insights.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ros Baxter".

Ros Baxter

Chief Executive Officer
Goodstart Early Learning

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