

**INQUIRY INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND
CARE SECTOR IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 4 April 2025

Partially
Confidential

I began working in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector in Australia in 2010. My first role was with a small, privately owned service that prioritised quality care and education. The environment was nurturing and well-resourced, with staffing consistently above ratio. Educators were supported and valued, and this was reflected in the positive relationships with families and the high-quality learning environment we provided.

However, after the service was acquired by G8 Education, the culture shifted dramatically. Budgets were tightened, resources became limited, and staff were expected to do more with less. Wages remained low, despite increasing demands. The stress caused our highly respected Director to resign, and she was replaced by an individual lacking the necessary skills and leadership to maintain quality. This resulted in a mass staff exodus.

Since leaving that service, I have heard many distressing reports from both educators and families about a continued decline in quality, high staff turnover, and poor management. A once-thriving, community-centred service became unrecognisable. This experience highlighted for me the damaging effects of large corporate ownership when profit is prioritised over quality outcomes for children and staff.

Following this, I worked at another exceptional service. Again, it was a well-resourced, family-centred environment with high-quality meals, regular incursions, and passionate educators. I was the Director at the time, and we operated at 102% occupancy with a strong, permanent casual pool and no need for agency staff. Staff were committed and proud to work there.

Then Guardian Early Learning took over.

Suddenly, I was handed a strict budget with percentage-based constraints. Despite the service thriving, Guardian implemented cost-cutting measures that deeply affected quality. Our cook, cleaners, and casual staff were all removed. While I was on maternity leave, 30 staff members resigned. Occupancy fell from 102% to just 60%. The service lost its identity and sense of community, and educators no longer felt safe or supported.

We were told to use "under the roof" ratios to reduce staff numbers and were instructed to combine rooms under the guise of "what's best for the children"—when in reality, it was about saving money. Upon returning from maternity leave, I requested flexible working arrangements and was denied. The lack of care and support was disheartening, and I made the difficult decision to resign.

During a period where I worked casually through Expect A Star, I saw further concerning practices across multiple services in the Northern Beaches. At one service, I worked in the 0–2 years room during a heatwave (around 38 degrees). The lead educator refused to give the children access to water outside of meal times. The babies were crying and distressed, and their water bottles had been placed out of reach. I was appalled and immediately reported this behaviour to the Director. It deeply concerned me how often this could have been happening unnoticed.

At another service, I witnessed children left in soiled nappies for far too long, crying without comfort, and being handled roughly. These experiences were deeply distressing and, as a result, I declined to work at several services due to the poor standards of care.

Now, as a parent myself, I find it incredibly difficult to trust any service with the care of my own children. This is a devastating realisation after more than a decade in the sector.

Recently, while completing a practical placement for my final year of an Early Childhood Teaching (ECT) degree, I was placed at a service alongside another student from a different university. She had recently arrived in Australia and appeared to have no understanding of how to build relationships with children—avoiding eye contact and rarely speaking to them. I raised concerns, but they were brushed aside.

It raises serious questions about the current quality assurance processes for educators entering the sector, particularly those on student visas or from overseas. While cultural diversity is important, there must be proper training, mentoring, and assessment to ensure all educators uphold the standards and values expected in Australian early childhood education. Every child deserves responsive, respectful, and competent educators, regardless of the background of the individual.

After 14 years of experience, I am deeply disheartened by the current state of the sector. I will complete my ECT degree, but I have no intention of returning to work in early childhood education. The profession has changed. The passion and dedication of educators are being overshadowed by cost-cutting, lack of support, and declining standards.

We urgently need systemic change to restore quality, value educators, and ensure that children's rights and wellbeing are at the centre of every decision made.