



2 March 2023

Hon Julia Gillard AC  
Royal Commissioner into Early Childhood Education and Care  
GPO Box 11025  
Adelaide SA 5001

By Email: [RoyalCommissionECEC@sa.gov.au](mailto:RoyalCommissionECEC@sa.gov.au)

Dear Commissioner Gillard

### **Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care**

The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care. The Independent school sector is a significant provider of early childhood education in South Australia with 47 per cent of Independent Schools in South Australia already offering three-year-old preschool or an early learning program as part of their service delivery.

Every three-year-old child in South Australia should be entitled to access and engage in safe, developmentally appropriate and rich learning experiences that are responsive to the diversity of all children and their families. The central aim of three-year-old preschool is for every child to thrive following the first 1,000 days of their early lives. Placing the interests of the child at the centre of decision making provides a common and agreed focus for all key stakeholders, laying the foundation for all children to be lifelong learners and active members of their communities.

We view children as capable, competent and respected citizens with rights. This view is critical when designing, planning, and implementing universal preschool. Our observations of Early Learning Centres (ELCs) in the Independent sector are that they are founded on this view of the child and strongly aligned with the values and principles of their school communities. This promotes belonging, can facilitate greater engagement and supports the development of essential partnerships with families and caregivers. Independent School ELCs engage with contemporary research and partners and use these to inform innovative practices to further develop their relevance and impact.

Children thrive when their families thrive; families thrive when their children thrive. Three-year-old preschool connects families to a range of education and health services and resources and provides opportunity for early intervention when specific support and needs for children have been identified. Meeting the needs and demands of working parents and families is an essential consideration in the early childhood sector. A secondary outcome of three-year-old preschool is that it increases opportunities for parents to enter the workforce, engage with community based activities and services and/or pursue further education and training. This supports the economic, physical, mental, social, and emotional wellbeing of parents, and has the potential to reduce associated risk factors experienced by their children.

Universal three-year-old preschool is an opportunity to address some of the current workforce demands in the early childhood sector. The attraction, supply and retention of educators and early childhood teachers in particular is of concern in the sector. Universal access to preschool creates greater opportunity to change current perceptions held in the early childhood industry. Raising the profile of early childhood educators is critical. In addition, it can provide impetus to necessary improvements in quality initial teacher training (including greater opportunities for internship and practical teaching) and prompt a review of remuneration that is commensurate with skill levels and responsibilities of roles in ELC settings, sustainable for providers and affordable for families.

It is essential that consideration be given to the requisite workforce competencies in delivering three-year-old preschool. These include, but are not limited to, an understanding of developmental theories, research, and world views that inform early childhood practices along with an active commitment to inclusive practices. Workers must be able to build respectful relationships, across a range of contexts, and engage in partnerships with families and wider communities. Skills such as effective communication, leadership, critical reflection, collaboration, ethical and professional conduct and a willingness to engage in professional learning are paramount.

If universal preschool is to be accessible and equitable and a priority for every child, funding support for it must be sector-blind. Every three-year-old, regardless of sector or system, should be funded equally. A universal program should reflect and respond to the diversity of families and communities both operationally and pedagogically. Three-year-old preschool must be developmentally and contextually relevant and adaptable to support the needs of every child and their families.

Regardless of the type of care for three-year-olds, children thrive when their families and educators collaborate and work in partnership to support their development, learning and wellbeing. AISSA member schools which offer Early Childhood Education and Care would welcome an opportunity to speak further with you or to show you their work with the children in their care. Please do not hesitate to contact me to facilitate these connections to support your important work.

Yours sincerely



Anné Dunstan  
Chief Executive