

Brindabella Christian College

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Public Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

Brindabella Christian Education Limited, trading as Brindabella Christian College (BCC), is located in Canberra ACT.

BCC is an inter denominational Christian school located in Canberra. BCC is affiliated with Christian Schools Australia and offer quality Christian education starting from our Early Childhood Learning Centres, catering from 8 months to 4 Year Old Preschool, through to Year 12.

BCC currently manages two Early Childhood Learning Centres, one located at the BCC Lyneham Campus and one located at the BCC Charnwood Campus.

BCC provides an early learning educational system that ensures children transition from the early years of learning to school with not just a satisfactory level of school preparedness but indeed a high level of school preparedness, including Art, Music, Mandarin and Literacy instruction. The BCC educational system connects and transits across child care, preschool/kindergarten/primary school, middle school and senior school.

BCC Early Childhood Learning Centres are an important part of BCC and present innovative Early Childhood Programs.

Both Lyneham and Charnwood Early Learning Centres operate 5 days per week 50 weeks per year - 8:00am to 6:00pm. The 2014 tuition fees include all meals (morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea and late afternoon tea), nappies for children under 3, as well as weekly music and art lessons. Families have the attendance options of 5 days, 3 days (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday) or 2 days (Thursday and Friday) per week.

As the Early Learning Centres operate under a long day care licence, parents have access to the Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR).

The purpose built Lyneham Early Childhood Learning Centre opened its doors in **January, 2010**. Two separate classes are held each day, one for 3 year olds (P3) and a Prekinder (PK) group. The Lyneham centre is licenced for up to 44 children a day.

The BCC Lyneham Early Childhood Learning Centre is able to accept children between the ages of three and six. The maximum number of children attending per session is twenty with two staff members in each PK (Pre-kinder) and P3 (Playschool 3 y/o) class in accordance with licensing requirements.

Our new Charnwood Early Childhood Learning Centre commenced operation in **January 2012** for children from 8 months to 4 years of age. This year we are operating in all four rooms: T1 (babies), T2 (toddlers), P3 (three-year-old preschool) and PK (Pre-kinder). We are licenced for a maximum of 67 children a day at Charnwood.

Our play based curriculums are structured and intentional, and focus on the children's interests, strengths, capabilities, culture, developmental needs and experiences. The curriculum decision making aims to reflect the Early Childhood Learning Centre philosophy and the BCC values and ethos. The very successful play based Literacy for Little Learners (LLL) program is utilised in both PK classes. LLL is built into the preschool program and taught by the PK early childhood teachers during term time.

BCC welcomes the opportunity to provide the following submission. BCC would welcome the opportunity to provide further information, arrange a visit to our Early Learning Centres, or appear before the inquiry, if invited.

Yours sincerely

Jon Hunt Sharman
Chairman
Brindabella Christian Education

Public Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

Submission by Brindabella Christian Education Limited

Executive Summary

1. Australian families are struggling with economic pressures, while the Australian Government is struggling to find ways to improve outcomes for Australian children of all ages.
2. Brindabella Christian College (BCC) supports the Australian Government asking the Productivity Commission to undertake a public inquiry into future options for childcare and early childhood learning, with a focus on developing a system that supports workforce participation and addresses children's learning and development needs.
3. BCC, like the Australian Government, is committed to establishing a sustainable future for a more flexible, affordable and accessible child care and early childhood learning market that helps underpin the national economy and supports the community, especially parent's choices to participate in work and learning and children's growth, welfare, learning and development.
4. BCC takes great interest in education funding structures and educational standards. There is no doubt that Early Childhood Learning Centres (Early childhood education) struggles to provide high quality early childhood education due to the difficulty to attract and retain appropriately qualified staff whilst providing the service at an affordable cost to parents.
5. Currently the cost of enrolling a child in an Early Childhood Learning Centre is astronomical compared to primary education school fees as there is no government funding provided to the service providers (BCC in this case).
6. BCC notes that there is considerable interest from families where an Early Childhood Learning Centre is part of a not-for-profit learning community. Parents understand that young children thrive in an environment of more structured learning and development that also interconnects directly with the traditional school structure.
7. It has been the experience of BCC that the children graduating into Kindergarten classes from the BCC Early Childhood Learning Centre's are more settled, less anxious and enter Kindergarten with an advanced start in Literacy, Numeracy and Creativity. In 2014, BCC has expanded the integrated program to include Chinese (Mandarin) learning which has met with strong support from parents. The improvement in education outcomes is independently supported by NATPLAN testing results.

8. BCC has noticed that parents utilising our two Early Childhood Learning Centres are struggling to retain their young children in early childhood education. The primary reason is the massive cost of living increases, higher taxes, rates, electricity and water prices. This is leading to women in particular, having to give up or suspend their workforce participation to remain at home with their children. This is particularly notable with professional women where they currently receive minimal government childcare subsidy arrangements and subsequently a large portion of their salaries are being soaked up in child care fees.
9. Although the Productivity Commission is considering alternative child care support under Terms of Reference No.4, BCC does not believe that Australian Family child care support is the only option available to improving the current system both in affordability and with improving quality Early childhood education.
10. BCC, believes that the Australian Government can significantly improve the current child care system with a **high impact** but **low cost** strategy that will improve children transition to further education, improve Australia's educational standards, reduce costs to parents in relation to childcare, create greater commercial competition in this sector and support workforce participation.

11. BCC recommends:

- a. **Expanding the current Education System to the early learning environment, with the subsequent current education funding arrangements applying to the Early Childhood Learning Centres provided by the non-government education sector; and**
- b. **Consideration be given for a whole of education sector approach with the public sector education system also expanding into the early learning environment, when federal, state/territory educational budgets permit.**

Terms of Reference

12. The BCC submission specifically addresses the terms of reference of:
- 1. **The contribution that access to affordable, high quality child care can make to:**
 - a. **increased participation in the workforce, particularly for women**
 - b. **optimising children's learning and development.**
 - 2c. **accessibility of affordable care**
 - 2i. **the capacity of the existing child care system to ensure children are transitioning from child care to school with a satisfactory level of school preparedness**
 - 2j **opportunities to improve connections and transitions across early childhood services (including between child care and preschool/kindergarten services)**
13. Although the BCC specifically addresses the above terms of reference, our comments also generally address the overall spirit of the inquiry.
14. Early intervention is a key component in providing children with the best start to their education and future. Quality Early childhood education starts with appropriately qualified teaching staff. This rarely happens in Early Childhood Learning Centres. However, this can be achieved by financially freeing up non-government schools so that they can rotate appropriately qualified primary teaching staff into their Early Childhood Learning Centres and visa versa, to create career opportunities across both educational fields, thereby improving the standard of Early Childhood education teaching staff. This in turn, optimises children's learning and development.
15. Flexibility of employment will ensure attraction and retention of high quality staff through providing career choice and career development currently not available to Early Childhood Learning Centre staff.
16. Breaking down the artificial barrier between early childhood education and the traditional school structure will improve children transition from child care to school and provide a satisfactory level of school preparedness. The utilization of quality early childhood/primary degree qualified teaching staff provides a connection and transition of students across child care, preschool/kindergarten services/primary school, middle school and senior school.

How is it achieved?

17. Enabling the Early Childhood Learning Centre student numbers to be counted for federal and state/territory school funding purposes where a non-government school also provides Early Childhood Learning Centre/s.
18. The trial or implementation in Australia should commence with expanding the current Education System to Early Childhood Learning Centres, with the subsequent current education funding arrangements applying to the early learning environment.
19. A whole of education sector approach should be considered with the public sector education system also expanding into the early learning environment, when federal, state/territory educational budgets permit.
20. Although we would recommend the expansion of this model to children from 8 months to 4 Year Old Preschool, this process could be staged over a number of budget cycles, commencing with PK (Pre-kinder four and five year olds), P3 (three-year-old preschool), T2 (toddlers), T1 (babies).

Outcome

21. There are a range of positive outcomes. The following outcomes is not an exhaustive list but are significant:-
 - Better qualified Early childhood education teaching staff through fusion between primary school teachers and Early Childhood teachers – this is currently a requirement due to the national quality framework for Early Childhood Learning Centres but has no financial support to make this feasible for service providers.
 - Greater career options, working hour flexibility, family friendly options etc. for primary school teachers and Early Childhood teachers
 - Attraction and retention of Early childhood education teaching staff, as the non-government schools can develop salary bands for Early childhood education teaching staff that broadband into the same salary bands as primary school teachers without needing to increase Early childhood education fees to parents as a result of eligibility to federal and state/territory school funding assistance;
 - Increased number of Early Childhood Learning Centres as a result of non-government schools being encouraged to expand into the early childhood education sector; and
 - Market forces potentially leading to a reduction in Early childhood education fees for parents due to the cross subsidisation being available within the non-government schools for the Early Learning Centre.

Cost & Impact

- Low cost and high impact for federal, state, territory governments, as budgeted costs is quarantined to only where an Early Childhood Learning Centre is linked to a registered non-government school. (BCC believes that actual numbers and therefore recurring cost would be minuscule)
- Non-government schools will be encouraged to share the costs of reforming childcare and early childhood learning as they will fund the establishment of Early Learning Centres through self-funding and where eligible, through current funding grant arrangements etc.

Terms of Reference 3:

Whether there are any specific models of care that should be considered for trial or implementation in Australia, with consideration given to international models, such as the home based care model in New Zealand and models that specifically target vulnerable or at risk children and their families.

22. BCC has successfully provided an early learning educational system that ensures children are transitioning from child care to school with not just a satisfactory level of school preparedness but a high level of school preparedness. The BCC early learning educational system connects and transits across child care, preschool/kindergarten services/primary school, middle school and senior school.
23. BCC believes that our early learning educational system should be considered as a model for the Australian Government and welcomes any site inspection the Productivity Commission would like to undertake of our campuses to view physical structures but more importantly discuss with BCC staff the advantages of our early learning educational system which has the fundamental principle that child care should be the beginning of journey of formal education. Our early learning educational system also enables us to address early vulnerable or at risk children and those requiring special needs as they move forward in their journey of formal education.
24. If the Productivity Commission is interested in considering the BCC early learning educational system as a model to be considered for trial or implementation in Australia and need more information or would care for a site inspection our Principal Elizabeth Hutton would welcome the opportunity to talk through our child care system; the advantages to Australian families of better qualified educational teaching staff within Early Childhood Learning Centres; and the flow on effect in the educational learning of students within primary and secondary school.
25. The BCC current early learning educational system with its transitional model into junior, middle and senior school education has been very effective, with recent improved result identified within NATPLAN testing. This system can be further improved with a change to the current education funding model. Such change would be an excellent investment in education and workforce participation.
