

15 August 2025

Attorneys-general meeting – Union supports working with children reforms

The union representing teachers in early childhood education and care in NSW and the ACT welcomes united efforts by Australia's attorneys-general to standardise Working With Children Checks (WWCC). This follows distressing allegations of abuse in both the early childhood education and care sector and the out-of-school-hours sector.

"This is an important reform supported by the union," said Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews. "We look forward to detailed consultation about the proposal. For example, it is unclear if the reforms would incorporate all existing WWCC requirements, under state law, which apply more broadly than early childhood education and care."

Matthews noted that in NSW, employees and volunteers who have unsupervised contact with children—such as in schools and sporting clubs—are required to hold a WWCC. She added that the existing system of registration for degree-qualified teachers may also need review to avoid duplication of requirements. It is also unclear whether a national WWCC scheme would operate alongside proposals for a national registration system for early childhood educators, which might take into account performance issues that are broader than criminal conduct.

Federal Attorney-General Michelle Rowland said standardising Australia's WWCC system will be a top priority at today's meeting. Rowland added that she would like to see the "banned in one, banned in all" proposal rolled out across all states and territories within the next twelve months.

The union acknowledges that the vast majority of teachers and educators are doing an exceptional job under difficult conditions and deserve more support.

"This is a positive step towards a much stronger child safety culture and restoring confidence in the sector, but it requires greater national coordination," Matthews said.

"Teachers and educators are leaving the sector at unprecedented rates due to burnout and dissatisfaction—particularly from excessive workloads caused by the volume of paperwork."

Staff turnover, workload, and burnout remain key challenges that must also be addressed.

The IEU calls on both state and federal governments to work together in developing a coordinated and considered approach to these issues.

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

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