



ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Parliament House
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REPORT TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Pursuant to section 46B of the *Coroners Act 1993*

In the matter of the Coroner's Findings and Recommendation regarding the death of
Ebony Thompson

Pursuant to section 46B of the *Coroners Act 1993* (the Act), I provide this Report on the findings and recommendations of Local Court Judge Elisabeth Armitage, Territory Coroner, regarding the death of Ebony Thompson (the Deceased) (Attachment A refers).

The Report includes the response to the recommendations of the Territory Coroner, by Ms Susan Bowden, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Department of Education and Training (DET).

The Deceased was 22 months old when she was found unresponsive at the Humpty Doo Community and Child Care Centre (the Centre) on 31 August 2023. The Deceased received emergency care from the Centre and Humpty Doo Surgery; however, later passed away in the Intensive Care Unit at the Royal Darwin Hospital on 2 September 2023. The provisional diagnosis of Ebony's death was severe hypoxic brain injury due to out of hospital cardiac arrest. An autopsy was conducted and how the Deceased came to suffer the injury was recorded as 'undetermined'. Given the lack of clear evidence as to how and why the Deceased passed away, it was necessary to hold an inquest in an effort to determine the cause of death.

Recommendations of the Coroner

The Coroner made the following formal recommendations regarding the death of the Deceased:

- '151. **The NT Department of Education and Training** with QECNT will take all necessary steps to advocate for a strengthening of the fencing standard in the National Quality Framework so that fencing standards throughout childcare centres (not just perimeter fencing) are upgraded to reflect Kidsafe recommendations for child safe fencing including for entrapment and strangulation risks.

152. **The NT Department of Education and Training** with QECNT will ensure that its authorised officers are aware of entrapment and strangulation risks arising from fencing (and playground equipment) and require its authorised officers to take active steps to identify those risks and ensure they are addressed when carrying out their functions.
153. **The NT Department of Education and Training** with QECNT will put in place processes to: obtain and consider all Kidsafe Facts Sheets and or other Kidsafe notifications relevant to early childhood safety; ensure that its authorised officers are aware of any such notifications; and ensure that such notifications are shared with all childcare service providers.
154. **The NT Department of Education and Training** with QECNT will ensure that site visit documentation completed by its authorised officers includes a requirement to conduct fencing/barrier and blind spot inspections at regular intervals as determined as appropriate by QECNT and QECNT will maintain and retain current photos of inspected fences/barriers and blind spots.
155. **The NT Department of Education and Training** with QECNT will educate providers as to the benefits of engaging in Kidsafe (or similarly expert) playground inspections and service risk assessments. If playground (or other) safety concerns are identified by an authorised officer, where deemed appropriate, QECNT will require the service to engage in a Kidsafe (or similar) playground/risk assessment inspection.
156. **The NT Department of Education and Training** with QECNT will develop and conduct a supervision audit across all childcare centres in the NT. Penalties for any service that fails to fully participate in the audit and for any failures to rectify identified issues in a timely manner will be specified and should be applied. QECNT will conduct similar audits at a frequency determined by QECNT as considered necessary to ensure supervision standards are maintained.
157. **The NT Government** will undertake a public awareness campaign to alert the general public to the entrapment and strangulation risks of loop and rod topped fencing. If Ebony's family consents, the campaign might be called 'Ebony's Message' (or similar) in the future.'

Response to Coroner's recommendation

A copy of the Coronial Findings was provided to Ms Bowden, on 25 November 2025, in accordance with section 46A(1) of the Act.

A written response was received from Ms Bowden dated 23 February 2026, as required by section 46B(1) of the Act. The response includes the following:

'The Department of Education and Training (the department) accepts all seven recommendations published by the Northern Territory Coroner within the Inquest into the death of Ebony Thompson (the report).

The Northern Territory Government's *Early Childhood Safe Start, Strong Futures Plan 2026*, (the Plan) will enhance the quality and safety of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services across the Northern Territory.

The Plan underpins a whole-of-system approach that supports consistent child safe practices, fosters safe and welcoming early learning environments, and strengthens the quality of early learning opportunities to ensure a strong start for all Territory children.

Importantly, the Plan establishes the following performance targets to measure improvements in sector quality:

1. By 30 June 2026: all regulated Northern Territory ECEC services meet Quality Area 2 (Children's health and Safety).
2. By December 2026: 85% or more of approved services are rated 'meeting' or 'exceeding' the National Quality Standard.

Progress against these targets is reported objectively by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, the national authority responsible for early childhood education and care quality standards.

The Northern Territory has been leading the development of policy options for regulatory change in response to coronial findings as part of the national child safety reform agenda.

At the Education Minister Meeting on 20 February 2026, the Hon Jo Hersey MLA, Minister for Education and Training led discussions on policy options to strengthen fencing and supervision requirements under the National Quality Framework.

All Ministers agreed to national targeted consultation on the policy options for change, including regulatory and non-regulatory options on fencing and supervision. National consultations will commence on 11 March until 12 April 2026.'

DET's statement of actions to address the Coroner's recommendations is provided at Attachment B.

I am satisfied that the CEO of DET has considered the recommendations of the Territory Coroner and that they have responded to the recommendations.

DATE: - 5 MAY 2026



MARIE-CLARE BOOTHBY

ATTACHMENT A

Refer to Findings

Attachment A: Statement of actions by the Department of Education and Training to address the Inquest into The Death of Ebony Thompson

Recommendation (report reference)		Actions
<i>Theme: Strengthen legislation/ policy</i>		
1.	The NT Department of Education and Training with QECNT will take all necessary steps to advocate for a strengthening of the fencing standard in the National Quality Framework so that fencing standards throughout childcare centres (not just perimeter fencing) are upgraded to reflect Kidsafe recommendations for child safe fencing including for entrapment and strangulation risks. (Paragraph 151)	The Department of Education and Training (DET) is: - leading the development of policy options for regulatory change to strengthen fencing requirements under the National Quality Framework (NQF), aligned to modern safety requirements. To achieve: - increased State, Territory and Commonwealth awareness of the need to strengthen fencing standards under the NQF. - implementation of stronger fencing requirements under the NQF.
<i>Theme: Strengthen regulation</i>		
2.	The NT Department of Education and Training with QECNT will ensure that its authorised officers are aware of entrapment and strangulation risks arising from fencing (and playground equipment) and require its authorised officers to take active steps to identify those risks and ensure they are addressed when carrying out their functions. (Paragraph 152)	DET is: - executing an audit program for active supervision/blind spots and fence safety and enhancing regulatory routine compliance and monitoring requirements. - building regulator capability through additional professional development, strengthened induction, and routine access to resources and developments, including those issued by Kidsafe. To achieve: - increased regulator capability and stronger regulation practices addressing: - entrapment and strangulation risks related to loop/ rod topped fencing and playground equipment. - service supervision practices and blind spot risk management.
4.	The NT Department of Education and Training with QECNT will ensure that site visit documentation completed by its authorised officers includes a requirement to conduct fencing/barrier and blind spot inspections at regular intervals as determined as appropriate by QECNT and QECNT will maintain and retain current photos of inspected fences/barriers and blind spots. (Paragraph 154)	
6.	The NT Department of Education and Training with QECNT will develop and conduct a supervision audit across all childcare centres in the NT. Penalties for any service that fails to fully participate in the audit and for any failures to rectify identified issues in a timely manner will be specified and should be applied. QECNT will conduct similar audits at a frequency determined by QECNT as considered necessary to ensure supervision standards are maintained. (Paragraph 156)	

Recommendations		Actions
Theme: Build ECEC sector capability		
3.	The NT Department of Education and Training with QECNT will put in place processes to: - obtain and consider all Kidsafe Facts Sheets and or other Kidsafe notifications relevant to early childhood safety; - ensure that its authorised officers are aware of any such notifications; and - ensure that such notifications are shared with all childcare service providers. (Paragraph 153)	DET is: • increasing ECEC sector awareness of playground, fencing, active supervision and blind spot safety information (including issued by Kidsafe), and additional approaches services may implement to reduce playground risks (eg. Kidsafe inspections). • providing the ECEC sector with access to playground safety information and inspections.
5.	The NT Department of Education and Training with QECNT will educate providers as to the benefits of engaging in Kidsafe (or similarly expert) playground inspections and service risk assessments. If playground (or other) safety concerns are identified by an authorised officer, where deemed appropriate, QECNT will require the service to engage in a Kidsafe (or similar) playground/risk assessment inspection. (Paragraph 155)	To achieve: • stronger ECEC sector capability and practice relating to: ○ additional approaches services may implement to reduce playground risks. ○ active supervision and blind spot risks.
Theme: Family and public awareness		
7.	The NT Government will undertake a public awareness campaign to alert the general public to the entrapment and strangulation risks of loop and rod topped fencing. If Ebony's family consents, the campaign might be called 'Ebony's Message' (or similar) in the future. (Paragraph 157)	DET is: • implementing a public awareness campaign in partnership with Kidsafe. To achieve: • increased public awareness concerning entrapment and strangulation risks of loop and rod topped fencing and playground equipment.