

Early childhood funding boost doesn't go far enough, government told ^[1]

The government's been told that preschoolers can't wait four years for funding that is urgently needed now.

Author: Chiang, Jessie

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EXCERPTS

The \$21 million funding boost over four years is aimed at pre-schoolers with learning and behaviour problems who are missing out on extra support.

It is expected to halve the current waiting list for services and Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said that nearly 8000 more children would benefit.

Teachers, parents and early childhood centres have applauded the move but said it did not go far enough.

Child Forum, a network for early childhood education centres, said it was great news - but its chief executive, Sarah Alexander, said it would be better for the funding to be for two years not four.

"We're worried that there will still be children left on waiting lists and that is not what we want to see," she said.

"Due to funding in other issues, many childhood centres struggle as is to provide quality care for children who don't have additional learning needs."

The Early Childhood Council is hoping the money will go towards speeding up the process for children to be assessed so they get faster access to help.

The council's head, Peter Reynolds, said in some cases the waiting list for assessments could be up to six months.

"It's a huge frustration for those parents - our hearts go out to them," he said.

"Many of those parents have had to fight and scrap every step of the way for every inch of support they get, not just in terms of education but social support as well."

Giovanni Tiso, whose daughter is autistic, has been one of those parents frustrated at having to wait waiting too long for support like teacher aides.

"Our daughter had to wait a year before we got a teacher aide and it was almost time for her to go to school by the time she got one," he said.

Mr Tiso said while the government's heart was in the right place, it is not just about more funding.

There also needed to be more leadership from the Ministry of Education to ensure early education centres knew what support they should be providing to special needs children, he said.

New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa president Lynda Stuart said she was confident the extra money would change children's lives but said staff needed a boost too.

"Does it go far enough? No, we've got education support workers who work with the young children, who have been waiting for a pay equity settlement," she said.

Ms Ardern said Thursday's Budget would not be able to solve everything but there would be more good news for education.

Those who spoke to RNZ about the funding boost for pre-schools said they were eager to see what else will be allocated for what they call a sector in desperate need.

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

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