

Exhausted early childhood sector predicts longer waiting lists on back of Government's childcare plan ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A frustrated and exhausted early childhood education (ECE) sector has questioned the practicality of the prime minister's childcare announcement and would rather the Government be "bold and brave" to fix the struggling sector.

On Sunday, the Government announced that from April 1, it will make more families eligible for childcare assistance subsidies by adjusting the income thresholds.

The sector welcomed the announcement, but says it is facing teacher shortages as it waits for full pay parity. In past years, ECE teachers have been paid on average \$6.49 less an hour than their kindergarten colleagues.

"We're in a crisis... teachers are tired," Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood NZ chief executive Kathy Wolfe said, adding the sector as a whole was frustrated.

The subsidy was "well and good", but shortages mean families may be forced onto long already-long waiting lists, she said.

Full pay parity would make a significant difference, she said, urging the government to be "bold and brave".

NZEI president Liam Rutherford said there was a concern there was not enough investment in recruitment and retention of ECE teachers.

"They haven't done this alongside completing pay parity and reducing (child to teacher) ratios. It would have sent a powerful signal to the sector.

"We have got centres having to ask parents to keep children at home because they don't have enough staff to cover students."

He said experienced teachers were leaving the workforce for better pay in less demanding jobs.

"The recipe is straightforward - the Government needs to finish pay parity."

He said Covid brought to the surface "massive cracks" that already existed, and that change would happen "straight away" should full pay parity happen.

When these concerns were put to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern on Monday, she said the subsidy was to "first and foremost make it cheaper for those who are already accessing childcare, then there may be a group of New Zealanders who access it because it's cheaper".

She said the Government had been working to support the sector with ensuring they have enough teachers to manage population demand.

"I understand that we've had 69 ECE teachers who have been able to access New Zealand through the new accredited employer work visa, and also approval to recruit for another 305 roles."

Early Childhood Council chief executive Simon Laube said a stimulus package should have been put in place some time ago.

Laube said between March to July, 48 centres closed and when the council surveyed 260 ECEs in October, 73% were not confident they could fill a vacant role with a certificated teacher.

He called the situation a "perfect storm" and wanted an independent inquiry to ensure teachers were paid adequately, taking into account factors such as rent increases.

Green Party's education spokesperson Teanau Tuiono says pay parity was needed years ago.

Green Party education spokesperson Teanau Tuiono said the Government needed to make sure pay parity issues were sorted out and have a plan as to how to meet the workforce gap.

"We need full pay parity," he said. "We needed it years ago."

National's early childhood spokesperson Penny Simmonds said pay parity was a "failed" Labour Party promise.

“National would ensure that ECE centres are able to attract teachers from overseas and will be looking at other options to increase staffing numbers.”

A Ministry of Education spokesperson said the Government committed to pay parity in 2020, but it would take multiple Budgets to reach full pay parity with kindergarten teachers.

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

Tags: workforce shortage ^[4]
pay equity ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 11 Nov 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/11/exhausted-early-childhood-sector-predicts-longer-waiting-lists-back>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/11/exhausted-early-childhood-sector-predicts-longer-waiting-lists-back> [2]

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[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9161> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/pay-equity>