

Teachers, parents fear review of early childhood education will be 'wrecking ball' for sector ^[1]

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Excerpts

Children are being used as a “political football” and “easy target” for the “wrecking ball” aimed at the early childhood education sector by Minister of Regulation David Seymour, say parents, teachers and experts.

A regulatory review of the early childcare education industry begins this month, the new Ministry of Regulation’s first. Regulations being looked at include those covering education, health, safety, child protection, food safety, buildings and playgrounds.

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There is concern in the sector about what regulations will be removed and why, said Sarah Alexander chief adviser to the Office of Early Childhood Education, a mother of five, and a leading researcher.

“Early childhood is being used as a guinea pig, an easy target. There are alarm bells that it’s not a review for the right reasons, in children’s best interests, as Seymour has not even engaged with the sector,” she said.

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Allowing centres to set their own rules will drive health and safety standards lower, and put children at risk, Alexander says.

Parents echo this concern that Seymour is only listening to certain business lobbyists, says Parents Council spokesperson Camille Furnandiz, who attended this month’s summit.

“Parents are marginalised. Policy-making and consultation processes put provider interests first, and our children become collateral damage,” says Furnandiz.

Instead of slashing regulations, the Parents Council would like to see minimum standards raised and new standards introduced, says Furnandiz.

“We feel there is an urgent need to limit the number of children per class or group and improve teacher-child ratios.”

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New Zealand spends around \$2.3b in early childhood education every year. A Stuff investigation revealed \$450m a year goes to the four biggest service providers.

It’s one of the highest funding rates per capita in the OECD, yet childcare here is among the least affordable in the developed world.

Strengthening regulatory standards should be the government’s focus, not relaxing them, says Renata.

“I want well paid, trained and resourced staff. Great centres and standards. The government and parent’s money should go into those sorts of things, not aiming for large profits that get banked at the end of the year...I couldn’t believe one big provider making \$20million. How much of that goes back to the children?”

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This week, early childhood teachers presented a petition to parliament raising concerns about the speed of the regulatory review.

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