

Government should buy up troubled ABC centres [NZ] ^[1]

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See text below.

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The union representing thousands of public sector early childhood teachers, says the government should step in and buy up all ABC Learning Centres across the country.

NZEI Te Riu Roa says the current financial difficulties of the Australian owned chain, reinforces the point that multi-nationals have no place in the provision of early childhood education.

ABC Learning's shares remain suspended from trade as talks continue with prospective buyers of part of its business. Its financial troubles are being blamed on aggressive expansion which has left the company heavily in debt.

ABC has 116 centres in New Zealand attended by up to 8,000 children.

There has been a proliferation of privately run, for-profit early childhood services in New Zealand, with large overseas corporates often spearheading the growth.

NZEI says research in New Zealand and overseas show they provide an inferior quality education for children through higher teacher:student ratios, less qualified teachers and poorer staff working conditions. They are less accessible and responsive to individual and community need. A recent Salvation Army report showed that thousands of children, particularly in south Auckland, are missing out on an early childhood education due to cost and accessibility issues.

NZEI President Frances Nelson says "corporate early childhood services receive public money but much of it ends up offshore. The government should commit to providing a national network of publicly owned early childhood services as that is the only way to ensure that our young children can access and are getting the best education they can."

NZEI has already called for a moratorium on the public funding for new private services and have been pushing for the creation of new publicly-owned and operated centres.

"The difficulties being experienced by ABC Learning illustrate the risk of leaving early childhood education to the vagaries of the market. Corporates have no place in early childhood education and this should serve as a wake up call to the government that public provision is the only answer. Quality early childhood education is the foundation for all future learning," Ms Nelson say

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- reprinted from the Scoop

For more information go to CRRU's website 'search' link and type in ABC Learning under keyword(s) and under matching choose 'all of the words'.

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

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