

A lot to learn about child care [AU] ^[1]

Author: Horin, Adele

Source: Sydney Morning Herald

Format: Article

Publication Date: 18 Mar 2006

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Children don't die, and they don't starve, in poorly run child-care centres. But they can have a miserable day. And the effects of sustained incompetent care - too few hugs, too little or too much stimulation - can be lasting.

...

Child care is a huge political issue for other reasons - cost and access. The Federal Government is expected to address these problems in the May budget. But quality must also be a consideration. The Government should not inject more funds into child care unless it can ensure the extra money boosts quality, not profits.

...

The Government can no longer take a back seat on quality. It already funnels \$1.7 billion into the system through the Child Care Benefit. Yet it cannot ensure centres charge reasonable prices, or provide a good service.

It is possible for the Government to exercise more clout on child-care standards - an area where it shares responsibility with the states. If it can tie extra funds for schools to its pet initiatives, such as flying the Australian flag and parent-friendly report cards, it can intervene in the interests of child-care quality.

Australia has built an edifice of regulation and accreditation around child care over years. The Australian system has been well regarded, especially in the era when non-profit centres dominated the field.

...

But in recent years child care has come under enormous pressure and undergone profound changes.

...

The private sector dominates and big corporate players are influential. In many areas, it is a seller's market, with parents desperate to secure a place.

...

In this new climate there is growing disquiet that the edifice of regulation and accreditation is shaky. There are concerns that state regulations, set and monitored by the Department of Community Services, and the federal quality assurance system, implemented by the National Childcare Accreditation Council, are no longer up to the job. The Herald this week highlighted the flaws in both systems. A process of self-improvement and inspection that ends up accrediting an unbelievable 96.5 per cent of long-day-care centres to the same quality standard strains credulity. When the crucial ingredients of a quality service - qualified staff, plenty of them and low staff turnover - are in short supply, the near-universal pass rate raises questions. The system is either measuring the wrong things, or allowing too many substandard centres to scrape over the line. And it gives parents too few tools to distinguish between high quality centres - and there are plenty of them - and substandard ones.

The Government cannot evade concerns about quality by pointing to the high accreditation rate, or by attributing false power to parents.

Parents cannot walk from a poor centre if there are no alternatives; and it cannot be assumed parents are astute enough to intuit what happens in their absence. It is up to state and federal governments to re-evaluate the process for raising quality - before more money flows into child-care coffers.

...

The Howard Government has grasped the importance of the preschool years to lifelong development. Departmental heads, including from Treasury, have hosted visits from high-profile experts on early intervention, including the Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman. They have been left in no doubt that dollars spent on quality services for young children reap economic and social benefits down the track.

Quality child care is not cheap. But Australia can't afford poor quality child care. It is much more costly in the long run.

- reprinted from the Sydney Morning Herald

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

Tags: quality ^[3]

privatization ^[4]

legislation and regulation ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/06/03/lot-learn-about-child-care-au>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/06/03/lot-learn-about-child-care-au> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/quality> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/privatization> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/legislation-and-regulation>