

Poor wages hit childcare ^[1]

Author: Peatling, Stephanie

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EXCERPTS

More than a third of childcare centres employ staff without the required qualifications because of a chronic shortage of workers.

Childcare workers will meet in Sydney next weekend to warn the federal government it might not meet its own targets for reform of the sector unless it can provide more funds to improve wages.

"There is a serious shortage of suitably qualified people," childcare centre director Alice Voigt said.

"We have difficulty finding early childhood teachers in particular because we are competing with schools and preschools where teachers have better pay, school holidays and non-contact time."

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Some centres were being forced to reduce the number of places for children because of a lack of staff even though demand is growing.

About 15,000 workers leave the industry each year due to pay that is just above the minimum wage.

Research commissioned by the Big Steps industry campaign found one third of long day care centres had to seek exemptions from employment standards because they were unable to find staff.

The Productivity Commission is due to hand a report to the government next month on the challenges facing the childcare workforce including training standards and pay. It is expected to recognise the need for greater funding to improve wages.

New standards for childcare centres will be phased in from next year, including requirements for centres to employ more staff with higher qualifications.

The Minister for Childcare, Kate Ellis, said the government had no intention of changing the timetable for the introduction of the standards.

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- reprinted from the Sydney Morning Herald

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