

ECE sector sounds warning to government on the need to maintain quality in ECE amid push for increased participation ^[1]

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Excerpts from press release:

Early Education Sector Sounds Warning to Government on the Need to Maintain Quality in ECE Amid Push for Increased Participation

The Government needs to rethink some of its early childhood education policies and practices, according to a new survey from ChildForum.

The survey, which was conducted last month, asked 200 people involved in early childhood education to rate and comment on government policy and practices in the areas of funding, increasing participation and raising quality.

Nearly three quarters of respondents said they were unhappy with current funding levels, while just under a quarter said they were satisfied with funding.

Concerns included inequality of funding between different service types, a lack of accountability around targeted funding and that funding levels left ECE unaffordable for some families, which meant children were potentially missing out.

Half of the respondents said they were dissatisfied with the way the Government was working to increase participation in ECE. The Government has set a target of 98% of new school entrants having attended ECE by 2016, but many respondents to the survey felt that quality was being sacrificed in a bid to increase numbers.

Some respondents said that new centres were simply taking children from existing centres rather than increasing participation. One respondent for example commented: "Government funds went into building a centre locally for the purpose of taking children who were not accessing early childhood education and it is contracted out to a private entity. Now it is full with children who have moved from other centres, so it has not fulfilled the role of increasing participation of a target group of children not participating. Where are the checks?"

Others were concerned that a focus on particular areas was leaving services and families in other areas with little support, for example a respondent commented, "have they forgotten that we have Māori and Pacific Island children in other low decile areas other than up north and in Manukau? Do they not realise that their funding cuts are limiting opportunity for some children in other areas?"

Quality standards were also a worry, with only a quarter of respondents saying they were happy with government policy and practice in this area. Concerns included a lack of qualified teachers, group/centre sizes, and staff to children ratios.

"Government has lowered all the known indicators for quality. We are falling below other countries now, where once we led the way", said one respondent.

Current political polls suggest that the National party will likely be returned to Government after the next election so the fact that those in the ECE sector are unhappy with National's policies is disappointing. It is imperative that the party listens to those on the sector's frontline and addresses the issues if the ECE sector is going to deliver quality outcomes to children.

The survey shows that the sector strongly values high quality and any future policy and funding decisions should be made with the impact on quality in mind.

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

Tags: quality ^[4]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/13/11/ece-sector-sounds-warning-government-need-maintain-quality>

Links

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