

Confidence in the early childhood education sector 'eroding' ^[1]

Author: Voxy News

Source: Voxy.co.nz

Format: Article

Publication Date: 20 May 2014

EXCERPTS

Confidence in the early childhood education sector is eroding further and the Government has not done enough to help stem it, according to a new survey just released.

The survey, conducted by early childhood national network **ChildForum** ^[2] reveals that many in the sector expect things to get worse over the next 12 months and believe the Government is failing to ensure children receive quality education and care adequately and that those working in the sector are supported.

The online survey was carried out in early May this year, and the 360 respondents included service owners and managers, teachers, parents, and teacher educators.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) felt that things in the ECE sector would worsen in the coming 12 months. This compares to 56% of respondents in a similar survey at the same time last year.

Only 7% of respondents felt things would improve within the next 12 months while 30% thought things would stay the same. Among the respondents who were hopeful things might improve, almost all commented that this was because they anticipated a change of government after this year's election, suggesting that if the National Party were to be re-elected they would not necessarily be as confident of improvement.

ChildForum chief executive Dr. Sarah Farquhar says the results are very worrying and show a mismatch between Government initiatives on the one hand and what the sector viewed to be important.

"The fact that such a high percentage of people now seem to think things will get worse over the next 12 months suggests that the Government should be reassuring those in the sector that it is committed and that it will work to understand what the needs are and address those needs," she says.

"Both the early childhood sector and the Government agree that as many children as possible should be able to enjoy the benefits of quality early childhood education and care, but there are some major issues that are not being addressed and confidence within the sector is slipping. Last week's Budget announcement will have done little to help with only a small funding cost adjustment and no specific focus on quality."

The survey also asked people how they felt the Government was performing in various areas and what its priorities should be.

Responses showed that 31% of respondents were satisfied with the way the Government was working to increase participation in teacher-led services such as childcare. However, concerns were raised that the new initiatives focused too much on increasing participation in all-day teacher-led services over other forms of early childhood education, such as sessional kindergartens and parent-led options such as Playcentre.

Satisfaction with government performance in other areas, such as funding and raising quality for children in early childhood education was lower. Just 15% felt that performance in funding was satisfactory while 24% of respondents were happy with how the Government was addressing quality issues for children and improvement in the sector.

Many respondents commented that too much emphasis was being placed on simply getting children enrolled and increasing the amount of time that children spent in ECE, without checks being made to ensure that issues fundamental to providing quality education and care were addressed, Dr Farquhar says. Others stated that their services were struggling to make ends meet, and that funding needed to be reviewed.

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