

Cost of childcare as high as €25k a year for just two children^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A survey of more than 150 crèches across the country found that costs can be as high as €25,200 in Dublin.

The national average was more than €19,600 for two children under the age of three.

Last year, half of those at work - 964,000 people - earned less than €28,500 before tax.

The survey by the Irish Independent was conducted over the past week, and compared prices for full day care for two children for one year throughout the country.

The capital topped the list of pricey day-care centres, and the average cost of sending your tots to a crèche was almost €5,000 more than prices in rural areas.

High prices were not the reserve of the capital either, as savings outside of Dublin are not that substantial.

In Cork, one provider was offering services above the Dublin average at €23,400 per annum.

However, parents from the rebel county can generally expect to pay around €3,000 less than their Leinster counterparts.

Prices in Cork did go lower, down to €12,200 per year for two children, but most crèches were closer to the national average at €19,066.

Further west, the dearest option in Galway was €17,680, while the least expensive was €13,520.

Despite the costs, one crèche- owner argued that it is a struggle to keep costs low for parents while ensuring a private childcare business "keeps its head above water".

Michele Akerlind, Director of Cheeky Cherubs Early Years Schools, in Cork, said it was particularly difficult to deliver quality childcare while dealing with numerous State bodies.

"We have no choice. We have to run this business as best we can," she said.

She says some of the costs that parents are faced with are "appalling" and also urges parents to check inspection reports of crèches before enrolment.

"You can't assume if you're going to pay this amount of money that you are getting a good level of quality," she said.

Despite the costs, Ms Akerlind said tax credits for childcare are not a good idea. "If parents get the money directly, that money might not necessarily go to quality childcare."

She added that the issue of childcare costs had to be a priority ahead of Budget 2016 and the general election.

"I think it's really important for parents and grandparents coming up to a general election, when people are coming to their doors, to ask them to put childcare on the top of their list," she said.

Challenge

Laura Haugh, from the online parents' forum MummyPages.ie, told the Irish Independent that finding affordable childcare was a difficult challenge for many families.

"They can just about cope with one child, which is like a second mortgage," she added. "It's when the second child comes into play that mums feel they are being forced out of the workforce."

However, she stated that parents are "not for one second" suggesting that crèche owners should receive less money for what they do.

"We are not looking for childcare providers to be paid any less," she said.

"They are struggling to be able to provide the level of care they are providing."

She said that MummyPages' members support a tax relief option for childcare, which would be similar to current allowances for claiming back medical and health expenses from Revenue.

Fianna Fáil spokesperson for children Robert Troy has said the results of the survey show that the childcare crisis in Ireland is "even more alarming than initially thought".

"The last national survey that we saw put the average cost at about €16,500 nationally. These results show the stark reality of the problem which has been ignored by the current Government now for four years," he said.

"It is time now for Minister [for Children, James] Reilly to tackle this issue once and for all. Every time we raise it with him we are told that there is an Inter-departmental Group studying it."

The Irish Independent's findings come just after a MummyPages report found that 45pc of mothers said the cost of childcare had prevented them from returning to work.

And 95pc of those surveyed agreed that the Government should introduce a tax credit for working parents in the next Budget.

An earlier report in May found that 83pc of parents believed Ireland was experiencing a childcare crisis.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs did not respond to requests for comment.

-reprinted from Irish Independent

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: affordability ^[4]

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