

Productivity Commission into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

RECOMMENDATION

Remove the 'working towards' rating.

BACKGROUND/ISSUE

When the term 'working towards' is used our intelligent, caring and committed educators are made to feel inadequate despite their hard work.

COMMENTS

- Immediately remove the words 'Working Towards' from the document.
- The rating does not accurately describe the overall quality of the service. For example we could be marked 'Working Towards' in only 1 of the 58 NQS Elements. The other 57 were 'Meeting' the NQS.
- Families don't understand the rating system, nor do the majority have the time or inclination to study it. It is difficult for us as professionals in the industry to comprehend and keep up with all the changes, imagine the challenge that parents have in doing this. In addition there is the media who often exploit the rating terms; they appear to have no desire to have a comprehensive understanding as their objective is to increase circulation and ratings rather than use their platform to educate the public.
- It has been my experience over the past 15 years that educators are passionate ethical, hard working and responsible individuals who take their role and position seriously and care for the children we educate. Educators have commented that the term working towards makes them feel inadequate.

RECOMMENDATION

Revise the idea that children should be learning academic skills and focus on social and life skills as a priority for the first 7 years.

BACKGROUND/ISSUE

When pressure is put onto educators by the government to "Educate" children rather than care and nurture children it causes a domino effect. We end up with stressed educators who are taking work home and no longer have a work/life balance, children who are spending time learning academic skills instead of social and life skills and families who are confused.

COMMENTS

- Revise the idea that children should be learning academic skills in early childcare.
- Explore that social and life skills should be the priority for the first 7 years.

- Disregard NAPLAN (please see the Maggie Dent paper and below extraction)
- Model countries who have proven success in education rather than those who are clearly failing

I would like to add that I agree with the paper written by Maggie Dent “The ridiculous pressure to make our kids smart before we ensure they are able to get on with others, communicate and be understood, have hours of joy and delight as kids, learn to cope with disappointment and setbacks and enjoy the freedom of being a magical child under seven is making our children sadder, sicker, fatter and more disconnected than any other generation of children”

Stop Stealing Childhood in the Name of Education: A plea to ask WHY? Adapted from a submission originally made on 11 October 2013 to office of the Federal Education Minister, The Hon Christopher Pyne MP and the Assistant Minister for Education, The Hon Sussan Ley MP by Maggie Dent Bachelor of Education; Dip Counselling Author, educator, speaker

In addition I agree with the following statement also from the above paper;

“So many grown ups can’t manage stress well because no-one helped them enough with stress and distress in childhood, they never set up effective stress regulating systems in the brains...”
 — Margot Sunderland, *The Science of Parenting, 2006*

RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood educators are adequately remunerated, have increased non-contact time and annual leave similar to school age teachers.

BACKGROUND/ISSUE

- Appropriate pay for early childhood educators.
- Work force shortages and lack of experience and qualifications.
- Staff ‘burning out’ due to a heavy work load and lack of work/life balance.

It is important that given the work expected from early childhood educators, that they are adequately remunerated. Like teachers where the government pays their wages or provides a large amount to private providers- it is important the early childhood educators receive an increase wage reflecting the importance of education children.

In addition staff in childcare centres often lack non-contact time and prepare off the clock in their own time. The work force sector of childcare is notorious for a high turnover of staff due to;

- Low wages
- Lack of work/life balance
- Stress and high demand to perform
- Continual changes in the industry and the need to constantly keep up with the changes

Research shows that the education, learning and development experiences from 0-5 are perhaps the most important of our life, and that investing in this age group we would be able to decrease costs of prisons, welfare and mental health costs. In recognising the need for quality in early childhood education and care we need to adequately pay and provide a work/life balance for the people who are providing the service.

No family, staffing team or business wants a high turnover in human resources.

COMMENTS

- Immediately increase the minimum wage to bring in line with other industries. A director in line with school principal's remuneration and holiday breaks. A group leader/educator in line with a teachers remuneration and holiday breaks.
- Address that employer or government grant or subsidise the cost of ongoing training, first aid and medical training, blue card renewal, and other compulsory training.
- Once again it has been my experience over the past 15 years that educators are passionate ethical, hardworking and responsible individuals who take their role and position seriously and care for the children we educate. Educators have commented that their passion for the children that they care/educate is taken advantage of by lack of adequate wages, lack of non-contact time and lack of work/life balance.

ADDITIONAL POINTS

- Increase CCB hours to 60 as the standard for working parent from 50 hours currently (centres open 60 hours per week) this is an ongoing issue as families do utilise centres for 60 hours not 50 hours.
- CCB should be reassessed for individual and two parent/carer families – two parent families have more expenses than single parent and yet they get the same CCB % e.g. two parents can earn \$80 000 and get the same % as one parent also earning \$80 000 but the two parent household would have higher expenses.
- Small not-for-profit organisations put profits back into the centres that make the profits rather than redirecting to other sectors of the business.

School P & C's and community organisations with committees, who often have no experience in running centres, need government support in the form of liaison officers to keep operating rather than handing over to large so called 'not for profit organisation' and profit driven companies. These committee run Long day childcare and OSHC are a valuable part of the industry and if they have a supportive and knowledgeable committee will keep fees low, resources high and have a secure staffing team. This is a benefit to all involved.