



New Zealand Educational Institute (Inc.)

Quality public early childhood education

NZEI Briefing Paper June 2008

NZEI wants to see political parties commit to:

- keeping the ECE strategic plan and 20 hours free ECE
- planned public provision of early childhood services so that every child can access ECE
- ensuring new private services and centres do not have automatic access to public funding unless there is demonstrated need
- developing in the longer term direct public provision of early childhood education (ECE) via a national network of services

Quality early childhood education is now acknowledged as a fundamental platform for a child's on-going learning and achievement throughout life. New Zealand is internationally recognised as a leading innovator in the field, with our Te Whāriki curriculum, the 10 year Early Childhood Strategic Plan, and the introduction of 20 hours free ECE for three and four year olds.

Given the importance of learning in early years, NZEI wants to see more public discussion about the wisdom of letting the current trend of multinational companies dominating the sector continue. NZEI sees an increased role for the state in providing, as well as funding, early childhood education.

When Australian multinational childcare chain ABC hit financial difficulties earlier this year, NZEI called on the Government here to look at buying up its New Zealand services.

That's because early childhood education is too important to be left to the boom and bust of the sharemarket. Yet corporates such as ABC are expanding their services in New Zealand at a faster rate than the community/not-for-profit sector. The current system encourages private commercial operations, but that provision does not meet the needs of the children most needing access to ECE.

NZEI policy calls for a moratorium on any further taxpayer dollars going into for-profit commercial services. Until that policy is achieved, NZEI supports stringent requirements of proof of unmet community need before new or expanded private services are eligible for funding and stronger mechanisms for creating publicly-owned and operated services. Our vision is of a quality public ECE system based around a planned national network so that every child has access to a high quality, local, publicly-owned centre.

In the short term, we want to see debate in the wider community about the best use of taxpayer dollars, and whether corporates should be making commercial gain out of early childhood education. We want an increase in the Ministry of Education's discretionary grant so that not-for-profit services have more access to capital to set up new centres.

While there are many high quality teachers, including NZEI members, working in for-profit centres, New Zealand and international research shows that commercial operators generally employ fewer qualified teachers, have poorer pay and conditions and are less likely to support professional development, non-contact time for planning and assessment of children's learning and other criteria linked to quality teaching.

Quality public early childhood education should be part of a public education service which has:

- central funding for teachers, support staff and property
- one national employment agreement for teachers
- high teacher-to-child ratios
- well-remunerated support staff
- an emphasis on professional learning opportunities
- all teachers qualified.