

Dear Members of the Senate Committee,

We write as Approved Providers of a private long day care & early education centre in Toowoomba, Queensland to express our dismay at the proposed Early Years Quality Fund Bill 2013. The very nature of the bill is divisive of an industry which is struggling to cope with massive changes in regulation and staff qualifications. Staff expectations have been raised and dashed as it is explained that in order to secure the pay rise, the majority of staff in the centre would have to be members of the relevant union. It is worth noting that none of our staff have expressed any interest in joining the union even though they understand that by doing so they may be eligible for a pay rise.

The total absence of clarity as to what happens to the centres whose staff are not approved for a pay rise (apparently some 60-70%) and also what happens in 2 years at the expiration of the fund is providing considerable uncertainty for both staff and parents. The inevitable result of a centre that does not achieve approval for a staff pay rise under the bill and/or whose staff do not wish to be part of a union is to increase fees in order to retain the quality staff which we have spent the past 4yrs acquiring. We have a good team and our centre is recognised by our parents as a centre committed to excellence in early childhood education - a fact that is evident in our 100% occupancy for 50 weeks of each of the past 2yrs - parents want their children to attend our centre and in some cases are booking their children in 12 months ahead of the desired starting date. To increase fees is to disadvantage those of our parents who want their children to have the quality education that we provide and also to put at risk our competitiveness in the local market place. Those parents (and we have some) who are governed by cost alone and to whom a quality education is a spin off, will inevitably leave. This will have the effect of reducing our occupancy, which will flow on to our ability to maintain our standard of resources and the current high standard of early education.

Whilst we applaud the Federal Governments attempts to improve the quality of early childhood education - it is, after all, the future of the nation, we unreservedly deplore the blatant attempt to unionise an industry and the incompetent nature of the management of of the whole question of pay equity of the early childhood sector with other sectors of the community. A far preferable way of achieving equity in the sector would be to grant childcare workers an extra amount over and above the annual review of wages as happened 3yrs (?) ago. We would welcome such a decision which would fairly reward all educators.

Our staff are intelligent people, dedicated to their role of educating the next generation. They do not appreciate being treated with a degree of contempt by a government that appears to be seeking to further its own political ends. Australians have fought and died in many theatres of war in order to maintain a "Fair Go" for all. This bill does not provide a Fair Go for all, rather it provides a partial industry pay rise to those staff who are happy enough to be part of a union and who hope that "somebody" will pick up the tab to continue that pay rise in 2 yrs time. We trust that you as our representatives in the Senate will see the worthless nature of this bill and reject it in totality.

Yours faithfully,

Peter & Lyn Horn
Approved Providers
Rangeville Early Education Centre