

Submission to the Christchurch City Council in regard to the Draft Long-Term Community Plan (LTCCP) 2009-19 – specifically to the proposal for the Future of the Councils involvement in three Early Learning Centres.

I wish to discuss the main points in my written submission at the hearings to be held between Monday 11 May 2009 and Monday 18 May 2009. **Yes**

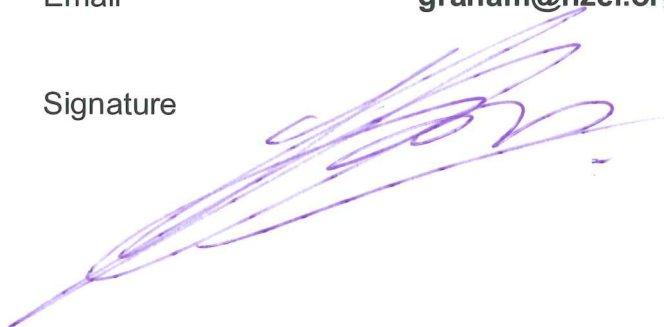
Are you completing this submission:

On behalf of a group or organisation; **Yes**

If you are representing a group or organisation, how many people do you represent?
49000

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Date

April 9 2009



NZEI Te Riu Roa (NZEI) is the professional organisation and industrial union that represents the industrial and professional interests of its 49,000 members. Our members are employed as early childhood and primary teachers, head teachers and supervisors in centres and primary principals, as well as support staff in the early childhood sector and in schools. We also cover special education staff employed by the Ministry of Education, and advisers employed by colleges of education and universities. 4700 of NZEI Te Riu Roa members are employed within Christchurch.

The main objective of NZEI is to advance the cause of education generally while upholding and maintaining the just claims of its members individually and collectively.

NZEI is one of the largest unions and professional bodies in the country and has a long history of playing a positive role in the education sector in particular, and on wider social issues that might affect education or our members.

As part of the process for the 2009-19 draft LTCCP councillors had been provided with a paper "Early Learning Centre Provision" which contained recommendations to outsource the ELC's at Pioneer and QE2 and to sell the Tuam Street ELC as a going concern. Council has since agreed that these proposals form part of the LTCCP.

NZEI believes that these recommendations should not be approved and that the status quo position of the council should continue.

Factors that councillors should be aware of are;

- This proposal represents a major shift in that the CCC will move away from its position, as in the Early Childhood Strategy 2001, where Council confirmed the need to continue its role as a provider of early learning services.
- This change appears to have been conducted without specific public consultation and is based upon a report written by council staff in which council staff have determined that the direct provision of Early Learning Centres is now "*Not seen as core council business*". This is a significant move from current provision. No background information on this claim is provided and there is no evidence that elected representatives have discussed the matter in such a way that affected community members would have been made aware of the claim. Such a process is far from that set out in the Local Government Act, specifically the requirement for a local authority to;

(i) conduct its business in an open, transparent, and democratically accountable manner

- NZEI cannot understand the rationale for the claim by council staff to alter the current council policy. It appears that the reason is totally ideological; an opinion that it is solely based on a particular view of the world. While any such view has validity in itself it is not the place of a report written by council staff to determine what is the belief of the Christchurch community; rather this should be accomplished through a process of full consultation over the existing council policy.
- The council has been directly providing ECE services to the community since 1932 and the quality and public satisfaction with these services has always been of a high standard. The three yearly reports of the Educational Review Office clearly outline this. One of the statements in the staff report that was used as a justification for the proposed change in council policy was that Christchurch is the only council that provides Early Learning Centres in New Zealand. Being unique is not a reason for change.
- There is no public demand for such a shift; rather the ERO reports show both a high level of teaching and learning and users of the service record high level of satisfaction with the council provided service. (95% to 98%)
- There is no financial pressure upon the Council to alter its present policy. The service is 'rates neutral' and there has been an increasing level of financial commitment from central government. Indeed the 2008 Speech from the Throne, delivered by Governor General the Honourable Anand Satyanand, outlined the National Governments commitment to the ECE sector as; *In early childhood education particular focus will be given to ensuring early childhood providers respond to the needs of New Zealand families and that children from less privileged homes are better engaged in pre-school education.* The key factor in ensuring these aims has been the increasing level of Government support especially through direct financial assistance to ECE services. There is no indication that this will not continue.
- There are no new 'costs/risks' that justify overturning a well established and successful CCC service. The 'costs/risks' that are identified in the Status Quo options have been present for a number of years.
- It is the view of NZEI that if such a decision is to be made then it needs to be done in a manner that clearly allows the public to understand the full ramifications of the decision. NZEI sees the situation as clearly fitting Section 93 of the LGA. It is a significant decision.
- We would suggest that before Council moves to renounce its own policy on Early Learning Centres and remove itself from direct provision it should undertake a comprehensive and detailed study of the needs of the community for quality early education provision across the entire city.

- On a wider note identifying ELC provision as “not seen as core council business’ sends a message that the council is tightening its definition of ‘core service’ and that acceptance of these recommendations for change have wider ramifications, especially in light of the political pressure from central government re council activities such as the Christchurch airport and the port of Lyttleton. It is interesting to note that the council also provides the community with council run gymnasiums, in direct competition to private providers, yet fails to be consistent in its approach and identify these services as ‘not core business’.
- In regard to the Tuam Street ELC the staff report, which was the document provided to councillors as background information, repeatedly refers to the Master Plan for the South of Lichfield Development. The references are however inconsistent. In the Executive summary it states that “*The Master Plan for the South of Lichfield Development is about mixed use and optimising site opportunities. Tuam St Early Learning Centre does not necessarily fit the aims for existing area in the Master Plan*”. ‘Does not necessarily fit’ does **not** mean that the provision of an ELC is unsuitable. Yet the report also states ‘*To close Tuam Street ELC in accordance with the Master Plan for the South of Lichfield Development*’, and when proposing the sale of Tuam Street it states that, “*The master plan for the South of Lichfield development will not be compromised*”. It would seem to NZEI that a LTCCP which contains clear references to the need to promote inner city growth, along with the resulting increasing population density, is totally inconsistent when the LTCCP, in relation to the future of the Tuam Street ELC, recommends selling the ELC, or closing it down if a sale is not forth coming.

Community Based ECE

Incorporated in the LTCCP was a statement that any outsourcing of council ECE facilities would be open to both community based or “for profit’ centres. NZEI strongly believes that this decision is another departure from Council Policy which has strongly supported community based ECE. It is the view of NZEI Te Riu Roa that council should continue to uphold this view.

Research in New Zealand, Australian Canada and the United States shows that community based services are superior. This is not surprising – their main focus is education.

The evidence shows that for-profit services are inferior in three areas – quality, relationships with the community and accountability.

Quality

- In 1998 the Victorian Auditor General produced a report which found clear differences between the quality of community-based and for-profit full-day centres.
- The level and depth of interactions between teachers and children is one of the most important indicators of quality and in all the interactions examined, for-profit services performed worse than community based ones.
- In the area of relationships between staff and families, the report found that “the interactions ...in community-based long day care centres [were] substantially better”.
- Similar differences emerged in the programmes for children, with the private sector offering weaker programmes in terms of children’s development, balance of activities, outdoor experiences and equipment and facilities.
- In the area of programme planning the for-profit centres were also significantly inferior, with little or no regular time allocated in many cases.
- In New Zealand, the Council for Educational Research reported in 2002 on quality and centre ownership. Factors associated with quality such as higher staff ratios and more qualified staff were more likely to be found in community-based centres than in for-profit services.
- Research from the US and Canada strongly reinforces this message. US research by Gelles 2002 showed that directors of for-profit services were more likely to accept lower standards in areas including child:staff ratios, staff qualifications, parental involvement and stability of groups of children.
- In Canada, two researchers from the University of Toronto in 2004 used extensive data to compare quality and found “commercial centres provide care that is significantly lower in quality than care provided in non-profit centres”. Quality in not-for-profit centres was 10% higher.

Community

- The importance of connecting with families in order to make services effective and relevant is well understood. Education is a partnership between families and teachers, and children learn best in a setting that respects their culture and background. For this reason, the Education Review Office in New Zealand and the accreditation system in Australia place great importance on the quality of relationships with families and whanau.

- In a for-profit service which is essentially a business, families can only be customers – they cannot be true partners in the care and education of their children with a high-level decision making role in the running of the centre.
- Improving participation by groups who currently miss out on early childhood education is linked to providing services appropriate to those communities.
- This is outside the mandate of the private sector, because it involves investment in community relationships, with no monetary pay-off. In fact, encouraging participation involves costs that will not be reimbursed. A business cannot primarily be concerned with accessibility.
- Programmes in New Zealand to change practices to make centres more welcoming to Maori, Pacific, or migrant families simply could not happen in a private business.
- Community-based services contribute to the growth of social capital or community, creating some of the linkages, relationships and sense of connectedness that families need for effective child rearing. With high mobility, and the breakdown of the extended family in many cases, these connections are even more important.

Accountability

- Accountability is important because it gives families a voice. In community-based services, it gives parents and the community control of the service. When family members have a sense of ownership of an early childhood service, they are more likely to question what goes on, and are more likely to want to participate and contribute their own skills, knowledge and experience.
- When early childhood teachers are accountable to the families who use the services, they are more likely to work with them, to share their knowledge, and to solve problems cooperatively.
- In for-profit services, accountability is to owners and shareholders who require a return on their capital investment. These are critical differences.
- Profit-oriented services have a history of resisting accountability in the area of regulations and licensing requirements where improvements may cut into profits.

NZEI exists to enhance education generally as well as representing our members' specific interests, and the organisation has a responsibility to advocate for services that give children the best chance in life. Community-based services are superior at educating our children.

References

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