

30 March 2009

Submission: Pioneer Early Learning Centre

We, a group of teachers from Cashmere High School, are in support of maintaining the status quo of the Pioneer Early Learning Centre as we believe it provides a service that is not replicated in any other centre in Christchurch, or indeed New Zealand. As a teaching group, we represent both past and potentially future users of the centre and consider it vastly important that it remain under Council control.

The Pioneer Early Learning Centre enabled all of us as parents to return to work as it provides a local service that caters for our needs both during term time and during the holidays. It is reliable, offers flexible hours that all of us use in different ways – both casual and fixed days. Pioneer ELC allows us to use the recreational facilities fully in holiday periods as we can use the casual hours of the centre.

In providing excellent childcare facilities for both ratepayers and council staff at Pioneer Early Learning Centre, the CCC is demonstrating that it is a forward thinking and practical council that does not restrict its projects to those that necessarily cater for the widest spectrum of ratepayers, but instead is a body that reflects on the past to build on successful projects for the future.

Pioneer ELC is a well run, valuable asset shown by the ERO reviews and the high level of patronage it receives. This supports the Community Outcome “quality education is available for people of all ages” as listed in the LTCCP. If the Council were to relinquish this valuable and irreplaceable asset, there would be no guarantee that this service would continue to exist at its current level of professionalism and access.

Casual access to early learning child care is another point of difference that makes Pioneer ELC such an important asset to Christchurch ratepayers. The location of Pioneer ELC next to recreational facilities not only enhances those facilities but makes them accessible to a very important sector of our society – parents who wish to use the recreational facilities available. No other childcare facility offers the casual access that enables parents to have time to take exercise. To remove this casual access would restrict the Community Outcomes “a healthy city” and “a city for recreation”. To assume that all parents who have their children enrolled at Pioneer ELC is primarily for work purposes and that recreational opportunities do not overlap with that is erroneous.

The decision to alter the status quo of Pioneer ELC also overlooks the fundamental problem of availability of quality childcare in Christchurch. As parents, our decision to enrol our children at Pioneer ELC was based on visits to other centres and availability of places. There would need to be very strict provisions set in place to ensure that the current level of education and service would be provided if the current management was not continued. This includes hours of operation, the education programs, the availability of casual hours and part days as well as protection of the 20 free hours. If these were not protected, it would have a huge impact on the current and potential future uses of the Centre. Why would the Council leave these matters to chance if the current situation works well for all interested parties? The Pioneer ELC is rates neutral and therefore does not exclusively serve a section of ratepayers. Instead it supports the idea of growing stronger communities in the form of a local childcare centre that supports adjacent recreational facilities with casual access to childcare and succeeds in the Councils agenda to provide quality education to all ages.

We commend the Council for setting up a centre such as Pioneer and invite them to think about the future when making the decisions regarding altering the current provision of such excellent services.

Signed:

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