

Home Education Foundation

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Media Release –Will the Greens’ ECE Policy Really Benefit Children?

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Palmerston North, NZ – The Greens Party yesterday announced as a key part of its election platform that it would be supporting families by seeking to extend the 20 hours’ free early childhood education (ECE) subsidy to 2-year-old children.

But Barbara Smith, National Director of the Home Education Foundation of New Zealand, is concerned that this policy could normalise what she believes is a misguided emphasis on ECE above parental care and interaction.

According to the Greens Party press release, “Good-quality ECE helps children reach their full potential, both in education and in leading healthy and productive lives.”

“Where is their research?” asks Mrs Smith. “Quality education for most preschoolers begins in the home.”

The research, says Mrs Smith, demonstrates that ECE only tends to benefit vulnerable children who would otherwise be neglected at home.

According to Dr Jane Silloway Smith, of the Maxim Institute, “ECE has been shown to benefit children from disadvantaged backgrounds because these children often lack what their more advantaged peers have: a nurturing home environment. Educational researchers regularly report that a nurturing home environment will have a more profound impact on a child’s educational achievement than preschool programmes – a reason often stated for why more advantaged children are not often found to gain much, if anything, educationally from ECE.”

In fact, much of the research shows that ECE disadvantages most children. In one of the most rigorous studies available, the US National Institute of Child Health and Human Development found a strong link between long hours of non-maternal care and behavioural problems such as aggression, demanding behaviour, cruelty, fighting, and so on, even in children coming from usually privileged backgrounds.

In a 2013 Canadian study, researchers from the University of Montreal and the Sainte-Justine Hospital Research Centre said that children who attend daycare were more likely to become obese between the ages of 4 and 10. More seriously, Canadian behavioural psychologist Dr Gordon Neufeld believes that early preschool is causing a socialisation crisis. “When you put children together prematurely before they can hold on to themselves, then they become like [the others] and it crushes the individuality rather than hones it.”

Preschool is also linked to low academic achievement. A 2011 study from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that early childhood education “comes at a cost: children are less likely to discover novel information” and inhibits “exploration and discovery”. Sociologist J Conrad Schwartz found in 1986 that group care was associated with lower intelligence, poorer verbal skills and shorter attention spans.

“The fact is that when children have a lot of one-on-one interaction with adults at home, they do better than at preschool interacting with peers,” says Mrs Smith. “For children with engaged parents who provide learning in the home, preschool is only a drawback.

“Instead of hurting children by pressuring them into ECE, let’s support families by helping parents to do what they do best.”

More research on early childhood education can be found at www.hef.org.nz.

About the Home Education Foundation

The Home Education Foundation has been informing parents for 28 years about the fantastic opportunity to de-institutionalise our sons and daughters and to embrace the spiritual, intellectual and academic freedom that is ours for the taking. Through conferences, journals, newsletters and all kinds of personal communications, we explain the vision of handcrafting each child into a unique individual, complete with virtuous character, a hunger for service to others, academic acumen and a strong work ethic. For more information, please visit www.hef.org.nz.

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