



Office of Hon Paula Bennett

Minister for Social Development
Minister of Youth Affairs

20 SEP 2012

Barbara@hef.org.nz

Dear Barbara

Thank you for your query regarding the application of the social obligation for children of beneficiaries to participate in Early Childhood Education (ECE) where a parent wishes to home-school their child. These changes form part of the Social Security (Benefit Categories and Work Focus) Amendment Bill.

At the outset I would like to say that following the Bill's first reading it will be referred to the Social Services Select Committee meaning that the Bill is subject to change. However, it is intended that from July 2013 all beneficiary parents will be required to take all reasonable steps to have their dependent children aged three and over enrolled in an approved ECE programme for 15 hours per week until they start school at either age five or six years.

The ECE programme must be licensed or certificated under the Education Act 1989. Licensed or certificated programmes include:

- early childhood education and care centres (e.g. day care centres, kohanga reo, playcentres, kindergartens)
- licensed home-based education and care services (e.g. Porse, Barnado's)
- hospital-based education and care services
- a playgroup that has been certificated by the Ministry of Education (this means a playgroup that is funded by Ministry of Education and will meet certain standards)
- if before 1 December 2014, a licence-exempt early childhood education and care centre funded by the Ministry of Education (this means a playgroup that is funded by Ministry of Education and so meets certain standards)

and

- charges a fee for children to participate in the programme.

Section 310 of the Education Act 1989 contains further detail regarding this; specifically it details what is not considered to be an Early Childhood Education and Care Centre. This is available online at:

<http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0080/latest/DLM187093.html>.

Educating children under the age of five in the home (unless as part of a licensed home-based care service) does not meet the criteria of being licensed or certificated ECE under the Education Act 1989. Therefore this does not meet the requirements for the social obligation for ECE participation. The child needs to be enrolled in a licensed or certificated service.

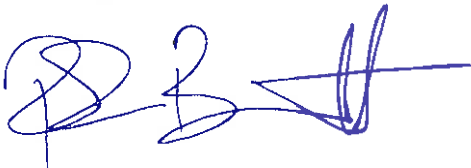
The ECE obligation requires that parents take all reasonable steps to have their child enrolled in ECE. It is my intention that each case will be considered on an individual basis in terms of whether parents are taking all reasonable steps and that where location, cost or availability of ECE is a genuine barrier to meeting obligations parents will not be penalised. If, for example, the child is in a remote rural location with no ECE service available, then this may be considered under the all reasonable steps criteria.

I have ensured that there will be a relatively lengthy process in place that ensures a facilitative process is used, relying on sanctions only as a last resort. This means Work and Income can work with and support parents to meet their obligations. The new process will involve at least three stages of contact over a period of six to eight weeks where Work and Income will work intensively with a beneficiary before any sanction would apply.

The Select Committee will be asking for submissions on this Bill and I would like to encourage you, and other concerned home-schooling parents, to make submissions.

I trust this information has helped to answer your questions regarding the application of the social obligation for ECE attendance. As a parent and grandmother myself, I understand how important it is to be fully informed so we can plan for our children's education and future development.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Paula Bennett', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Hon Paula Bennett
Minister for Social Development