



Kapooka Early Childhood Centre Inc.

Providing Early Childhood Education and Care Excellence

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RE: IPART Review

Our organisation is a community-based stand-alone preschool funded by the NSW Government and we have been providing education and care to our community for over sixty years.

During the last 20 plus years we have had at least 13 separate funding programs in our preschool sector.

As you can imagine keeping up with the pace of these change is exhausting, exasperating and stressful primarily for our director who along with managing and relaying these changes to our committee, families, and community, also has the day-to-day operation of the service to attend to. Our voluntary committee members who bring significant skill sets and abilities to our organisations are often disillusioned by the significant changes and increased complexities associated with our funding. It deters some from active participation on our committee.

Our 2022 audit indicates that we received \$304,000 in Start Strong Operational Funding and \$73,000 in Disability Inclusion Program – Higher Learning Support Needs. We believe the funding system is far too complex for the small amount of funding that is received and expended by our organisation.

The latest guidelines released in October 2023 are complex and I seek you to follow the link and see for yourself [Start Strong Funding \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/start-strong)

We would particularly like to point out the Disability Inclusion Program (DIP) – Higher learning Support Needs (HSLN). The applications for these children are time consuming and burdensome and as a result we do not apply for all eligible children. We do wonder whether the NSW Government strategically plans to place obstacles in the path of inclusion. This way they do not have to fund the 'real' number of children who require support. If a child has a diagnosis or NDIS number, they should automatically be funded. Services should not be required to complete a lengthy application form and justify why!

The NSW Government needs to reduce the red tape, streamline funding and accountability, and reduce administration on services.

Highly trained and experienced directors, teachers and educators are leaving in droves due to the extreme demands of their work and the complexities associated with operating as an education and care service in NSW. We are concerned about the future, who is going to mentor our next generation of teachers, educators, and leaders if we are all leaving?

The funding system for community-based preschools in NSW is unnecessarily complex, changes frequently and you never get enough advance notice of what these changes may be.

It is now 17 November 2023, and our service has not received confirmation of our SEIFA decile which determines the funding provided by the Department of Education. We do not know what funding we will receive for each child in 2024.

The governments timing and the release of new guidelines, funding calculators, rules, letters to families, are rarely ever released before the middle of the last term of the preceding year.

How can we forecast budgets in a timely, efficient, and effective manner when we are faced with these challenges? How can we determine fees for the coming year? How can we keep our families informed of the costs? How can we plan and implement accurate business plans when the government consistently and continuously makes changes?

There is very little consideration given to the timing of Deloitte Audits. Services are often advised of these in mid-November, and they are often scheduled for submission in February. Like schools in NSW, preschools have stand down time and do not resume until late January – they are closed! The Department of Education should know this! Preschools are placed under pressure to submit these. Often service staff are required to attend during their annual leave to gather and collate the onerous amount of information.

Additionally, on top of an audit they have new funding guidelines, DIP – HLSN applications to complete, lengthy ten page transition to school statements to complete for each child, enrolment for the following year, orientation days, annual leave to organise staffing and contracts to organise for the following year, plus manage the day-to-day operation of the service..... and to top it all off, some might have Assessment and Rating! This is enough to tip anyone over the edge!

The NSW Government has control, and we would like to note that our concerns can be changed! True consultation needs to occur with preschools. Stop 'BURNING OUT' passionate, devoted leaders, teachers, educators, and community volunteers for the sake of bureaucracy. Our first and foremost priority is providing education and care to our children and our families.

Upon signing off we would like to make this clear recommendation about this: **Simplify the funding system and the associated administrative processes and stop changing it.**

Yours sincerely,

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On behalf of the Kapooka Early Childhood Centre Committee.