

Queensland Independent Education Union

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For Immediate Release

Future of community-based education centres at risk

Taking the ‘C’ out of C and K Where’s the focus on Community, Children and Care?

Early childhood education

The future role of community crèche and kindergarten centres is at risk with the Crèche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland (C & K) and the state government apparently intent on relocating the preschool year on to state school sites leaving residual kindergartens in existing community centres.

“The lack of a transparent position from C & K and the state government about the future of community based centres means C & K employees and community centres are now unsure of their future role as providers of early childhood education,” Mr Terry Burke, Queensland Independent Education Union General Secretary said.

“There is an attempt underway to take the C out of C & K; where’s the focus on the community, children and care?” Mr Burke said.

Mr Burke said the ‘preparatory’ preschool year trials flowing from the *“Education and Training Reforms for the Future”* proposals announced by the state government earlier this year, were the smokescreen for the uncoupling of kindergarten and preschool in the C & K community centres.

“The exclusion of Crèche & Kindergarten affiliated centres from these trials highlights that there is no obvious place for such centres as providers of preschool education to young children throughout Queensland,” Mr Burke said.

The trials were initially limited to Education Queensland sites, with six Catholic Schools and three Independent Schools now also participating.

The exclusive nature of the trial structure meant that State Government schools would largely shape the eventual early childhood education model to be adopted throughout Queensland, with minimal input from selected Catholic and Independent Schools, he said.

“C and K’s apparent acceptance of the education department’s trial structure suggests they are happy to rely on government policy positions to shape the education model, while the community-based early childhood sector may be dramatically reshaped.

“It is becoming increasingly apparent that C and K is endeavouring to position itself as the preferred provider of the preschool year and childcare on state government sites.

“Under such a plan, C & K preschool centres would be relocated to the state school site and childcare facilities would be added. The existing C & K centres would become residual providers of kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs.

“These developments would jeopardise the current jobs of C & K employees and question the educational role of teachers remaining in C & K kindergartens.”

Mr Burke said he had real fears for the future of C & K centres in remote areas, with wholesale disruption of existing community centres likely.

“C & K centres in rural and remote areas have a special place in the community and they should not be a play thing of the Minister and C & K.

“QIEU wrote to the Minister for Education and to the C & K employer, asking for the inclusion of C&K affiliated centres in the trial process and received a very ambiguous reply.

“The lack of clear intention from the Minister and C & K on the future of the community centres is frustrating and is neither in the best interests of young Queenslanders nor in the best interests of the communities associated with the centres.

“State community preschools and kindergartens currently number 330 and employ over 1000 teachers and assistants who now stand to be disenfranchised as a result of this exclusive trial structure and process.”

The successful trial sites for 2003 will be determined during August 2002 and an announcement will be made soon after.

The ‘preparatory year’ policy is one in a number of Queensland Government announced initiatives, encapsulated in the “*Getting Ready for School*” policy document.

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