

As you are aware there is a by election in Carlow/ Kilkenny on 22 May. We are writing to you as The Association of Childhood Professionals, an association made up of childcare workers, managers, childminders and other childhood professionals that are working directly with children. As a profession we are committed to strengthen the sector, but it can be difficult due to underfunding and lack of support from the government and our political system. We would ask you as parents and guardians to help us advocate on behalf of our children and ask the questions that need to be addressed when candidates and political parties are canvassing. When childcare is of high quality, it benefits children – and it also benefits the economy and society.

The cost of childcare:

- A typical family in Ireland with two young children aged 2-3 can spend up to 35% of their net income on childcare. In contrast, average fees across the EU are between 10% and 13% of family income.
- Ireland invests only 0.2% of GDP annually in the early years sector when spending for junior and senior infants is accounted for, compared to the OECD average of 0.7% GDP.
- **To improve quality we need to subsidise places, not using tax credits.**
Introducing tax credits will not lead to any improvement in quality and due to the issue of underfunding and sustainability of services it may lead to an increase in childcare fees.
- **Following an in-depth study of 20 countries, the OECD concluded that the most effective way to making childcare more affordable and raise quality standards is to directly subsidise places in services so that fees are lower or fully covered (as already happens in schools and the Free Pre-School Year).**

Supporting the Childcare Worker

- Wages for childcare workers start at €8.65/hour (minimum wage) and according to a survey most qualified childcare workers earn on average between €10.85 and €11.24 per hour.
- Government funded schemes only pay for time spent with children meaning many staff work unpaid hours for planning, staff meetings, training, cleaning etc. This means that after all hours spent engaged in childcare related duties are taken into consideration many childhood professionals can come out with less than minimum wage
- Most childcare staff are employed on a part time basis and have to sign on the dole for the summer months because the “Free Preschool” is only funded for 15 hours per week, for 38 weeks per year.
- **The government need to recognise and adequately fund a pay scale which recognises all the noncontact time needed to run a service similar to that of primary school teachers. Fair wages and supports need to be funded by the government not by parents/ families.**

Supports for children with additional needs

- Currently in Ireland there are little or no supports and resources for children with additional needs in the early years sector. Unlike primary school, the Irish government has no national provision in place for children attending early years education.
- Childcare services usually have to pay for additional staff at the expense of the service or use schemes like CE or Jobsbridge to support these children.
- The government say all children are entitled to a year’s “Free Preschool” but unless the government provides the supports and resources necessary not all children can avail of it.
- **We need commitment to supporting services so they in turn can support children with additional need.**