



NSW Government puts parent-managed Out of School Hours Care at risk of closure

13 December 2021

The NSW Department of Education has announced today that all parent-managed Not For Profit Outside of School Care (OOSH) Services on public school sites will be put out to commercial tender. Parent volunteer-led organisations will be forced to compete with large corporate providers in a race to the bottom on quality of care.

This is a reversal of decades of policy that explicitly recognised parent-managed services as the preferred model of OOSH care in NSW and comes only months after the publication of a report showing that for-profit childcare providers had disproportionately large numbers of serious safety breaches and services that did not meet National Quality Standards. The Department has refused to engage with the sector or parents before making the change, which exchanges the contribution of countless parent volunteer hours for the higher license fees paid by corporate providers.

Network of Community Activities, the peak body for OOSH care in NSW, has engaged in good faith with the Department in an attempt to preserve parent-managed OOSH Services in NSW. In response the Department has hidden behind legal advice it refuses to release and relied on a rushed, opaque and demonstrably incorrect review process to pursue a policy of OOSH corporatisation by stealth.

CEO of Network of Community Activities, Pauline O’Kane, rejects the suggestion that putting parent-managed services out to commercial tender is merely a matter of levelling the playing field. *“The reality is that parent-managed services use the fees they charge for one purpose and one purpose only – to reinvest into the care of their children. These services don’t have the deep pockets of large corporate providers to invest in professional tender writing processes in order to maximise returns for their shareholders”.*

Pauline O’Kane contends that Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning Sarah Mitchell has a duty to parents in NSW to be honest about the motivation behind the Government’s endorsement of this policy change. *“If the Minister thinks she can bury bad news at the end of the year when parents will be too tired to fight, she doesn’t understand the passion parents have for their OOSH. Parents in this state want to be involved in their children’s care and they will see right through a change being forced on them that tries to take advantage of post-lockdown exhaustion”.*

The Department of Education has stated that OOSH Services can become part of a P&C Association in order to continue to be protected from tender. Gemma Quinn, Manager at Network of Community Activities, is concerned that the Department has not done its homework in relation to this suggestion. *“From our meetings it is clear the Department has no legal or practical understanding of the process this would involve, or of the financial costs to parents who have volunteered countless thousands of hours in support of their children’s care. Services shouldn’t be forced into a complicated and risky legal process that the Department themselves don’t understand.”*

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Ross Cunningham was a parent of Thornleigh West Public School who acted as President of a parent-run OOSH that separated from the Thornleigh West P&C Association.

"P&Cs have a very different focus within the school community of fundraising, helping with class activities and supporting communication between the school, teachers and parents - they are not generally set up to run what can be million dollar businesses with large staff employment."

"Running an OOSH under a parent committee brings with it huge benefits of community connectedness, cost minimisation and the ability to draw on committed, capable and qualified executive members who may not be available to either a P&C or quite frankly the private sector."

Premier Dominic Perrottet said in his first speech after being chosen by the Liberal Party to be its next Premier that he would be 'a family Premier, focusing on how we can make life better for working families'. Network calls on Premier Perrottet to recognise that parent-managed OOSH services are the best way of supporting working parents to maintain a close connection and involvement in their children's care.

The result of this change in policy will without doubt be less parental involvement in OOSH care and more services run by corporate for-profit providers. Network of Community Activities has grave fears for the quality of care provided to primary school-aged children in this scenario and will continue to campaign in support of its members and the families of NSW.

Network of Community Activities

Network of Community Activities (Network) is the peak representative body for Out of School Hours Care providers in NSW. Network is a recognised leader in the field of school age care and is the largest membership organisation in Australia dedicated to the advocacy, promotion, resourcing and development of play, recreation and leisure activities for 5-14 year olds.

Established in 1974, Network is one of the oldest not-for-profit peak bodies in the Australian Children's Services sector.

Network strives to resource and facilitate OOSH Services to enrich, inspire and support children to engage in a play rich environment which helps them to thrive.

Network is the proud representative of New South Wales on the National Outside School Hours Services Alliance (NOSHSA), which represents the collective interests of OOSH Services across all States and Territories.

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