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Community preschools in crisis – Union demands action from NSW government

The union representing teachers in early childhood education and care in NSW and the ACT calls on the NSW government to boost funding to community preschools to address the workforce crisis.

Preschool teachers from across the state will meet MPs at the NSW Parliament House over the next two days to outline the threat to community preschools, as the state government introduces legislative reforms to improve child safety in the sector.

“The union has been calling for measures such as more stringent checks on workers and early childhood education and care centres for some time, which are now being implemented,” said Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews. “We welcome these reforms as a first step towards rebuilding confidence in the sector.”

The NSW government’s proposed changes include a 900 per cent increase to the maximum penalty for large providers, \$55 million to boost frontline staff and a legal obligation to put the rights and best interests of children above all else.

However, the union calls on the NSW government to provide fair funding to community preschools, which face an exodus of workers.

There are 710 community preschools across NSW that provide a vital service to educate and care for children aged three to five years, their families and communities.

Community preschools are run by volunteer committees of mums and dads whose only priorities are children’s education and safety – not profit.

Matthews said funding for community preschools is almost solely derived from the NSW government.

“They have rejected our request for increased funding for wages for teachers and educators after months of bargaining,” she said.

Community preschools cater to all children, including children from backgrounds of economic disadvantage and children with additional needs.

“Poor pay and conditions mean community preschools are struggling to attract new staff to their services and are losing staff to other sectors,” she said.

“Community preschool teachers and educators are drowning under increasing workloads, and intense pressure to maintain a high standard of care.”

Matthews said solving the attraction and retention crisis requires employers to treat early childhood teachers the same as their primary school counterparts, including through pay parity.

“Quality costs money,” she said. “The NSW government must fund pay rises for community preschools to ensure the future of services dedicated to high-quality education and care of children.”

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

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