

Waitakere Kindergarten independent review of parent survey results

Reviewer: Dr Sarah Alexander

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In late 2016 the Auckland Kindergarten Association (AKA) surveyed families across its kindergartens. The survey results for each kindergarten have not been made available to parents, as far as is known.

A report of survey results for Waitakere Kindergarten was provided to the reviewer. The report shows the questions that parents at all kindergartens were asked, along with the results particular to Waitakere Kindergarten

The overall finding was that the survey design and questions were not adequate if it was intended that this constitute actual consultation with parents as part of the development of the AKA's plan to make structural changes as announced via an open letter on the AKA's website by the chief executive, Tanya Harvey on 7 March 2017.

To be useful for informing change and providing true evidence of consultation, the survey would need to have asked parents how each of the proposed changes would affect them, their child, and their family; would they still have chosen to enrol at the kindergarten had the changes been in place; and would they still recommend the kindergarten to other families should the changes be brought in.

Furthermore, if the Waitakere kindergarten parents' responses are anything to go by, there is more than a little doubt as to whether parents at other kindergartens support the proposals for hour increases and year-round operation as implied by the AKA in its email to parents on 15th June 2017 that said less than 2 percent of families were opposed.

On 7th March 2017 the AKA publicly announced plans to restructure the operation of Waitakere Kindergarten along with 106 other kindergartens. In an open letter published on the AKA's website regarding restructuring plans no mention was made of the Waitakere and other kindergarten community survey results, but the open letter did suggest that the AKA had surveyed or consulted with parents who do not use kindergarten and may be using other early childhood services:

[We] found many families wanting to take up the kindergarten experience for their children, but were unable to do so because they were working, kindergarten hours were too short, and we did not offer services in school holidays. This has meant that as much as these parents want their children to benefit from kindergarten; what we are providing currently simply doesn't work for them and their families, and as a result, we are unintentionally taking ourselves off their list of possible ECE choices. It is not the kindergarten tradition to exclude families in this manner.

However no link is provided to any survey or information gathered from consulting with parents using other ECE services and/ or not currently enrolled at any kindergarten. Perhaps Ms Harvey and board members may be seeking to change the client base for Waitakere Kindergarten by excluding

families who currently make it their choice of early childhood service unless they fit with its perceived more desirable client base?

REVIEW OF RESULTS REPORT

The results report is one that appears to have been quickly produced using online survey tools. It is not indicated that the survey was carried out by an independent researcher or company – and it appears that the results (for Waitakere Kindergarten) at least were collated internally by AKA staff and may not have been independently checked for accuracy and bias. An ethical concern is that the reported results for Waitakere Kindergarten parents contained some individuals' names.

The questions are wide-ranging and included asking parents what they thought were important aspects of kindergarten, assessment of the physical environment, rating of teaching staff, whether they had read the AKA's annual celebration book, in the celebration book had they read about their kindergarten, would they recommend the kindergarten to a friend, what is the kindergarten doing well, and the main reasons for choosing kindergarten.

Placed toward the end of the survey and after "any other general comments" were questions that mattered most if the survey was intended to be for the purpose of consultation with parents as part of developing a plan for changes:

Q19 I would be interested in sending my child to kindergarten during term break?

At Waitakere Kindergarten 45% of responses disagreed and 20% were 'neutral'.

This question was asked without providing any information for parents to consider alongside it such as: costs, would it be a casual school holiday thing or a regular expectation, and for how many days and hours.

Q20 I would be interested in sending my child to kindergarten for longer hours than what is currently available?

55% of responses disagreed and 15% were 'neutral' according to the AKA's results report for Waitakere Kindergarten.

Other information was not included such as what the definition of longer hours was and what commitment to the longer hours a parent would be agreeing to. Some parents for example may have answered that they agreed to longer hours if they thought this would be extending hours to allow them to work full-time, whereas if they had known that longer hours meant 7 hours they may not have agreed.

Q21 Please add any comments on the kindergarten hours:

Thirteen comments are shown in the results report. Eight comments were firmly against changes to kindergarten hours mainly in relation to how this would affect children, for example:

I think the hours prepare children well for transitioning to school hours.

I'm happy with the 4 half days a week that she's in kindy. It gives me a chance to do things for myself and it gives her a chance to play independently away from me. I'm also happy to have her home with me because she will only be this little for so long.

This is kindy and I would like to see it stay that way. There is no need for it to run longer or offer holiday programmes – there are plenty of day cares available.

Five comments suggested variations in hours that parents thought would suit themselves individually better:

Pick up option of after 3pm would be helpful

We have had sudden medical issues in our family which mean that should kindy have longer hours, or in term break hours, we would utilise that service, perhaps only a half hour longer or an hour longer per day.

I am looking at returning back to work, longer hours would be helpful.

CONCLUSION

The parent survey carried out by the AKA across all kindergartens toward the end of 2016 and prior to the announcement of plans to change kindergartens cannot be viewed as providing an adequate level of consultation to feed into the plans.

The results for Waitakere Kindergarten do not show unanimous parent support for changes to hours and weeks of operation.