

Gavin Pearce and Angie Bell visit childcare centres in Tasmania

While the federal government last week upped the subsidy paid to parents with children in care, the federal Liberal early childhood education spokeswoman is on a national fact-finding mission to guide her party's policy.

Angie Bell was invited to the North-West electorate of Braddon by local MP Gavin Pearce who said it was time to work on recruiting early childhood educators in a sector, he says, has long been undersold.

Ms Bell said there were challenges in accessing childcare places right across the nation, including Tasmania's North West where both the centres she visited reported long waiting lists.

Footprints Early Learning Centre in Burnie has 26 staff, including management, and services 150 families.

"Nine million Australians live in childcare deserts where there are three children wanting every place available," Ms Bell said.

"It is all about staffing the centres, there is a workforce crisis right now. Enrolments are being capped and demand for places is likely to increase due to the increase in the childcare subsidy."

Those changes to the subsidy, laid out in the government's October budget came into effect on July 10.

It has been lifted from 85 per cent to 90 per cent for families with a combined income of less than \$80,000.

Labor says the changes will leave more than one million families better off.

The subsidy drops by one per cent for each additional \$5000 of annual income, until it ticks down to zero at \$530,000.

Ms Bell said she expected some childcare centres to increase their fees in line with the subsidy increase wiping out the forecast benefit to families.

Mr Pearce said the staff currently employed across the sector were in danger of burn out if workforce issues were not addressed.

He said respect for those working in the sector also needed to rise.

"They are educators not carers, and the responsibilities of the job are immense. It is a skilled job which adds value to the economy as it allows people with children to work - many in small business where both parents needed to be on deck," he said.

ENDS

Article by Helen Kempton