

Consultation multilingual childcare

Reaction Hestia Kinderopvang

“The more languages you know, the richer you are”¹

After a wonderful final report from Project MIND, we at Hestia Kinderopvang are very pleased with the government's intentions to create a multilingual day care structure based on this research. We also appreciate the opportunity to express our opinion on the proposed bill.

Project MIND's research describes the great diversity of the provision of a second language besides Dutch ("from 50% to a few hours a week") and it has shown that none of the approaches to multilingual childcare has a negative effect on the development of the Dutch language. It is a good step that the government recognizes the positive influence of multilingualism in childcare and want to carry on by means of this bill. We also welcome the fact that the proposal specifically verifies the continuous learning line between primary education and afterschool care and the inclusion of people who do not speak the Dutch language.

We do, however, take issue with the intention to set the maximum percentage at 50% per day. This is a change to current policy that, in our opinion, is not consistent with any (scientific) basis. We explain our point of view below, based on various interrelated arguments with the subject: **research outcome**, **afterschool care practice**, underlying **reasons (stakeholder input and controllability)**, **increased burden** and **regulatory pressure**, and our own **experience**. We conclude our response with a proposal.

The most important reason: the **outcome** of the investigation does not provide any basis for this change. The research clearly shows that no variant of multilingual care has a negative effect. This is also mentioned in the bill.² In fact, the study argues for a not too strict language policy, especially to ensure the well-being of children.³ In our opinion, a requirement of 50% makes the required room for movement described here impossible. In addition, the recommendations in the report indicate that the best way to organise multilingual childcare depends on the circumstances and context.⁴ This clearly expresses recognition for the fact that organisations (can/are allowed to) approach it differently, and it is precisely this point that should be adopted by the government. The current approach to multilingual childcare works well in all the ways it is implemented. Project MIND's research shows that none of the different methods lead to a negative effect. It feels strange that an investigation is commissioned, and then a change is made that is not mentioned or recommended anywhere in the report. If it was such an important point, why was it not asked to be included in the study?

In addition, the bill refers several times to **afterschool care** (BSO) and how bilingual care has been practiced there for years. There is no mention of 50% per day here; so why should this be for day care? The BSO construction shows that it has worked well in this way for years. What means does this change serve?

Furthermore, we do not agree with the **reasons** given to substantiate this decision. The first of the two reasons for making this adjustment is '**consultation with stakeholders**'. We wonder which stakeholders these are.

¹ Translated quote from EuropaNu (2005), 'Meertaligheid in de EU: de Europese Commissie roept op talen te bevorderen en zet een nieuwe portaalsite op', van

https://www.europa-nu.nl/id/vh5sl3g06ev4/nieuws/meertaligheid_in_de_eu_de_europese

² **Memorie van toelichting bij Voorstel van wet tot wijziging van de Wet kinderopvang in verband met een structurele regeling voor meertalige dagopvang**, p. 2, §2.1.2 'Aanleiding'

³ MIND-team (2021), 'Meertaligheid in dagopvang', Eindrapport Project MIND, p. 87

⁴ Ibid.

They are not introduced further; in the large network of Hestia Kinderopvang we have not come across anyone who specifically strives for this classification. In addition, it is not discussed or recommended in the final report of Project MIND, so they are not included there either. Once again, the question remains: why is study commissioned, if the results are then ignored based on a (not further explained) stakeholder inquiry?

The second reason for the 50% per day policy is that 50% on a daily basis would lead to more **controllability**. However, it is indicated in the same paragraph that bilingual care was already conducted in a controllable and transparent manner by means of staff schedules. This rule therefore only (perhaps) makes it a little easier for the supervisory authorities, but this should not be a compelling reason to uproot the system of many well-run childcare centres.

This is also mainly because the bill refers to the intention not to **increase the load** and to reduce the **regulatory burden**. There will be a lot of administrative hassle for us to be able to demonstrate that multilingual childcare is provided on a 50% basis per day.

We would like to use our own **experience** as an example of why 50% on an annual basis should (at least) remain an option.

The importance of multilingualism in childcare was first 'officially' acknowledged by government authorities in 2015 through the commission for an experiment with bilingualism in childcare, but Hestia Kinderopvang has been working on this since 2010, when we opened our first bilingual location. In 2012, we participated in a study by Utrecht University on this subject and subsequently played a key role in the lobby to expand the possibilities of multilingual childcare. Three of our four locations are now bilingual, and we have built up years of expertise. This has been recognised by the many requests for advice (including from the various municipalities with which we work), the visit of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment to observe our practice, as well as the fact that the care for Ukrainian children has got off the ground under the policy of Hestia.

Our method is therefore demonstrably effective, and this fact should be a major factor in not moving to (only) 50% on a daily basis.

Our proposal:

We understand that the government is searching for a way to create clarity and consistency. However, this idea of 50% per day goes at the expense of an already working process. Our proposal would be to give the organisations the choice: 50% per day or on an annual basis. This can be laid down in the company's language policy, including a method to make it transparent for the inspection.