

# Trial of flexible childcare fails to draw participants

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## EXCLUSIVE

A trial of flexible childcare, including overnight care, established by the previous Labor government has flopped as fewer than one fifth of the families targeted are actually participating.

The \$5.5 million taxpayer-funded trial was introduced by the Gillard government last June, offering after-hours, overnight and weekend care, and more outside-school-hours care. At the time it was announced, then-minister Kate Ellis said "more than 500 families" were expected to participate.

However, only 80 to 100 families have taken part to date, according to federal Department of Education figures. "The flexibility trial program is performing well below the targets that were set when it was announced," a spokesman said.

The trial, which involves emergency shift workers, Good Start childcare centres and family daycare operators, highlights how difficult it is to meet needs for care outside 7am-6pm regular operating hours.

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The department said some families could not afford to pay for more childcare, while others wanted to use only the after-hours care on an ad hoc basis. Providers needed a regular commitment for it to be viable.

There was also an incompatibility between when the extra care was actually available and the times families needed that care, and between where providers were based and where families needed the care.

Assistant Minister for Education Sussan Ley said the take-up of the trial was "underwhelming to say the least". Ms Ley accused Labor of setting up the trial as a "Band-Aid solution" for parents' childcare problems.

The government says it will allow the 12-month trial to run its course.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/trial-of-flexible-childcare-fails-to-draw-participants-20140208-328gn.html#ixzz2tdpnsOQP>