

Central Parent Council Annual Report for 2023

After several covid-ridden years, many things went back to 'business as usual' in 2023. On the other hand, 2023 was once again marked by the war between Russia and Ukraine and the ensuing energy crisis. The crisis did not only hit parents hard, it also drove up costs for childcare organisations. A large team of enthusiastic and passionate KinderRijk staff, who are committed to provide the highest quality care for our children on every weekday, is duly recognised by us, the parents.

The Parent Council is the discussion partner of the chairman of KinderRijk's board of directors regarding issues that are relevant to the parents and the children at all locations. In that capacity, we regularly discussed the consequences of the above developments for KinderRijk, including matters such as: how does KinderRijk deal with cost developments and inflation? What is the impact on fees and keeping childcare feasible? How do we continue to increase involvement by the parents? How are we coping with staff shortages and absenteeism?

By the end of 2022, the Parent Council set another three spearheads for the year 2023: nutrition, sustainability, and the activity offering. Below we have included a summary of our year and what we did at central level to represent the interests of all the children and parents.

Parent Council's spearheads in 2023

Nutrition

A survey on nutrition was conducted among all KinderRijk parents in the last quarter of 2022. The results show that the policy pursued by KinderRijk is considered to be positive to very positive and that the policy is very widely supported. Based on these outcomes, there was no immediate reason to adjust the policy. However, KinderRijk will look into: broadening the supply (more variety); reorganising the meal times (timing and supply).

A working group of KinderRijk members and a nutrition expert started analysing the survey's results. The nutritional policy clearly fully meets the children's healthy basis and growth. The Nutrition Centre's guidelines, which are based on the Health Council's Guidelines for Good Food, are being observed. Although the policy provides clarity, there is sometimes doubt among parents as to whether the offering is adequate. KinderRijk is therefore considering ways to improve communication about the nutrition policy and to provide more details about the offering.

Sustainability

KinderRijk board chair Margreet Hellemons-van Dijk gave a presentation on sustainability at KinderRijk at the April meeting: the current sustainability policy, KinderRijk's current position in this policy and what's next.

The starting points are: choices are based on respect for nature, the environment, society and future generations; sustainable quality and/or reusable alternatives are opted for in the purchase of products; the significance of experiencing nature and nature education for the development of young children is paramount; activities contribute to the ecological awareness of children, parents and staff; KinderRijk's operational management aims at a balance among economic, ecological and social interests.

A Sustainability working group was started at KinderRijk, which is represented by all layers of the organisation.

Activity offering

At the June meeting, Diana Turkenburg- de Haan, programme maker at KinderRijk, gave a presentation on the range of activities offered at KinderRijk and how this offering is set up. She also talked about the systematic work methods by the locations. Inspired by all the items Diana talked about, a presentation on this topic was given at the annual meeting with the Central Parent Council and Parent Committee, which was open to all parents this year.

Parent involvement

Parental involvement remained a focus area for particular attention, to both KinderRijk and the Central Parent Council in 2023. Appropriate childcare is based on a trusted and safe environment where our children can thrive and develop. KinderRijk takes its role as 'partner in parenting' very seriously. Good and frequent communication and interaction with parents and working together are essential to this. The covid period caused a drop in parental involvement and after that, it was a challenge to get parents motivated again to participate in parent committees or the Parent Council.

Yet, with actions such as news releases, recruitment drives, regular contacts with the Parent Committees and the organisation of a theme evening for all parents, the Parent Council managed to continue the upward trend in parental involvement in 2023. However, this topic will continue to be a focus area and is therefore a fixed item on the agenda at every Parent Council meeting.

Annual meeting of the Central Parent Council and the Parent Committees

Every year, the Central Parent Council and Parent Committees meet to coordinate matters together, to get further acquainted and to brainstorm on any spearheads for the upcoming year. In November 2023, the evening was presented as a theme evening and was open to all parents. The objective was to show the activities performed by the Parent Council and Parent Committees, to get in touch with parents who may be interested in participating in one of the two bodies and to gather input from parents on the matters they believe are important. With a turnout of 32 enthusiastic participants, great input from parents and Parent Committees and four persons interested in joining the Parent Committee or Parent Council, we can look back on a successful evening.

Requests for an opinion

In 2023, the following requests for an opinion were submitted to the Central Parent Council.

Adjustment to the complaints procedure

In early August 2023, the Parent Council received a request for an opinion on the adjustment to the complaints procedure. The aim was to adjust the procedure to make it less complex and better understandable for the parents and the staff. The adjustment is in line with the model of the parent interest group BOinK, which is also most preferred by the Area Health Authority. The role of complaints officer is now more clearly defined and the accelerated complaints procedure (which was never made use of) has been dropped. The Parent Council issued a positive opinion.

Adjustment to the educational policy, educational policy for Early Childhood

Education/Preschool and educational practice regarding 0-4 years olds

In August 2023, the Parent Council received another request for an opinion, which was for the adjustment to the educational policy, educational policy for Early Childhood Education/Preschool and educational practice regarding 0-4 years olds, which included a code of conduct on the use of a language other than Dutch and added information on systematic working, Educational Practice in View (Dutch: PiB) and cultural diversity. The Parent Council was in favour of the direction taken to enhance the professional level of KinderRijk's educational policy and noted there is a clear upward trend in the activities offering and their visibility. In addition, the adjustment to the code of conduct is preferred in view of the substantial number of foreign-speaking children in Amsterdam and Amstelveen. The Parent Council issued a positive opinion.

Fees 2024

By the end of August 2023, the Parent Council received a request for an opinion on the proposed changes to the fees from 1 January 2024. Together with the fees committee, we had a proper yet critical discussion with KinderRijk's Board of Directors when the proposed fee increase (partly due to high inflation) was explained.

Given the considerable cost-of-living increases, we anticipated that a fee increase (which was not fully offset by an increase in the childcare allowance) could complicate matters for parents. At the same time, there was appreciation for the fact of the major impact of social developments on the fees. On a positive note, KinderRijk continues to invest in its staff and in sustainability measures,

and we were pleased to see that KinderRijk is willing to use its own resources to absorb some of the unavoidable costs (e.g. rising wage costs). Based on this confidence, the Central Parent Council issued a positive opinion.

(Re)introduction of taking extra childcare days

An intensive discussion ensued following this request for an opinion between the Board and the Central Parent Council regarding the point system, swapping and paid days. The Parent Council reviewed the cancellation of the points system, which included discussions on taking extra days. The Parent Council's opinion at the time was that, although it regretted the cancellation of the points system, it was understandable. At that time, the Parent Council had questioned the idea of offering extra care days, as this could create the impression that taking extra care days would be acceptable against payment.

In line with the earlier opinion issued by the Parent Council, the Parent Council is not in favour of the (re)introduction of taking extra days. It intends to keep childcare viable for all parents, including those who cannot afford extra days. The Parent Council and the Board of directors, however, were unable to reach agreement, which was followed by the Board of directors' withdrawal of its request for an opinion.

Changes within the Parent Council

As chairman Avital Laibowitz stepped down as a client of KinderRijk in February, she also said goodbye to the Central Parent Council. Parent council member Rens Koekenbier and chairman of the board Margreet Hellemons-van Dijk expressed their gratitude to Avital, commending her for her years of work for the parent council and her commitment. Rens Koekenbier was appointed new chairman of the Central Parent Council at the same meeting.

Tim Baart joined the Parent Council in February and Ellen Tolsma stepped down in October when Pauline van Nies was added a member. Dennis de Lugt's and Rens Koekenbier's first term of office expired in October. They both agreed to be considered for reappointment for a period of two years, which was unanimously approved.

Should you like to learn more about any of the above topics, about the Parent Committee at your location or the Central Parent Council? Feel free to drop by your location manager or send an e-mail to ouderraad@kinderrijk.nl.