

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NEW SOUTH WALES



## **PARTNERSHIPS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT**

FINAL REPORT ON DATA COLLECTION ROUND 1

CATHY THOMSON, TOM LONGDEN, LINDA  
HARRISON AND KYLIE VALENTINE

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Telephone: +61 (2) 9385 7800 Fax: +61 (2) 9385 7838 Email: [sprc@unsw.edu.au](mailto:sprc@unsw.edu.au)

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## **Evaluation Team**

Cathy Thomson, kylie valentine and Tom Longden, Social Policy Research Centre,  
University of New South Wales

### *Expert adviser*

Dr Linda Harrison, School of Teacher Education, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst,  
New South Wales

## **Authors**

Cathy Thomson, Tom Longden, Linda Harrison and kylie valentine

## **Contact for follow up to this Report**

Cathy Thomson 02 9385 7800, fax 02 9385 7838, email [CM.Thomson@unsw.edu.au](mailto:CM.Thomson@unsw.edu.au)

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## Executive Summary

The Benevolent Society works in partnership with Wyong Shire Council, Campbelltown City Council, KU Children's Services and Lady Gowrie Child Centre to deliver Partnerships in Early Childhood (PIEC) in 14 long day centres and preschools (referred to hereafter as centre-based children's services). The PIEC project is funded under the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS), Invest to Grow program. The Social Policy Research Centre has been contracted to evaluate the program.

PIEC recognises the critical role that centre-based children's services play in the lives of children, families and communities. Centre-based children's services provide an ideal environment for engaging families and are often somewhere families turn to when they need assistance. PIEC builds on the existing strengths, skills and resources of major child care providers to promote strong, healthy relationships between children, child care centre staff, families and communities.

PIEC achieves this by placing a child and family worker in the child care and preschool setting to train and support staff to increase their understanding of children's behaviours. This, in turn, will improve their ability to support children and their families. The program fosters children's social and emotional development through a relationships approach to intervention. The child and family worker can also assist families with all aspects of parenting and act as a resource person and "bridge" to support services and programs within the local community.

This report summarises the baseline data collected in March 2006 from staff and parents for the impact or outcomes component of the PIEC evaluation. Using a pre- and post-test design changes in relationships between children and staff and children and parents; the social and emotional development of children; and community connectedness will be analysed over time. These areas relate to the Invest To Grow Priority Areas of 'early learning and care' and 'supporting families and parents'

PIEC operates in three communities in New South Wales: the Central Coast, South West Sydney and East Sydney. The analysis in this report is broken down by area to take account of differences between these localities. It is evident that significant differences exist between the areas, most noticeably in demographic characteristics of the parents. Reflecting the characteristics of the area's population, South West Sydney had the highest proportion of parents born overseas, who spoke a language other than English at home, and relied on government pension or benefit as their main source of income, compared to the other areas. These differences will have to be taken into account when analysing changes over time.

The data collection instruments for this component of the evaluation include standardised scales and relevant sections of the questionnaires designed by the National Evaluators that have been adapted from Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. This will enable comparisons population data at the end of the evaluation period. Staff who knew the children best and parents completed the surveys.

The PIEC model is based on research linking high quality interventions that focus on developing secure relationships between child care staff and children and improved outcomes for children, particularly high-risk children. Children who are securely attached to staff display more competent interaction with adults and more advanced

peer play during child care years. Education and support for parents in fostering secure relationships with children will also be conducted. Therefore the evaluation measures focus on changes in the quality of relationships between staff and children, and between parents and children, and follow the social and emotional development of children over the funding period.

Two scales were used to assess *the relationship between staff and children* and *the relationship between parents and children* and to measure any changes in the attitudes and perceptions of adults from limit setting and managing behaviour to a focus on developmental progression. The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) (Pianta, 2001) is a self-reported assessment of staff's perceptions of the quality their relationship with the children. The baseline data shows that the majority of staff have positive and effective relationships with the children. However, around a fifth of staff indicated they have negative and ineffective relationships with the children. Parents completing the Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS) (Pianta, 2001) indicated over a third have high conflict and over 50 per cent have high dependency levels in their relationships with their children. Approximately one fifth of the Total CPRS scores reported by parents indicate lower overall positivity in their relationships with their children.

Two scales are used to measure changes in children's *social and emotional well-being*. These are age-dependent and the age of the child determines which scale is used at each time period. The Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (BITSEA) is completed by parents and staff for children aged 12 to 36 months. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is completed by parents and staff for children aged three years and over. For the majority of children the scores for both the measures of social and emotional development did not indicate problem behaviours. However, for children aged between 1-3 parents rated around 17 per cent of the sample with high problem and low competence scores indicating *Of Concern* status. For children aged 3 years and over around one-fifth of the sample have difficulty scores in the abnormal range as rated by staff. In contrast only ten per cent of the sample, when scored by parents, have total difficulty scores in the abnormal range.

Access to informal support and links to the community are crucial factors in reducing isolation. Perceptions of the local neighbourhood and the desire to live and bring up children in the local area can be used to gauge social capital and community connectedness. PIEC also aims to link families to relevant support and to the community so the evaluation will track these variables over time. At baseline the majority of parents indicated that their neighbourhoods were safe and clean, they had access to good parks, basic shopping facilities and services and it was a good place to bring up children. However, there were significant differences between the areas with more parents in South West Sydney indicating that they would like to move out of the area, it was not safe for children to play outside and people were unwilling to help their neighbours than parents in East Sydney or the Central Coast.

Data will be collected again in November 2006 and November 2007 so that changes in the various domains can be analysed over time to assess the effectiveness of PIEC in terms of improvement in relationships between children, parents, child care centre staff and communities; increases in social competence and emotional regulation in children; better quality care for children enrolled at the PIEC child care centres and increases in community connectedness and the factors associated with these changes.

## **1 Introduction**

Partnerships in Early Childhood Project (PIEC) aims to build on the existing strengths, skills and resources of major child care providers to promote strong, healthy relationships between children, child care centre staff, families and communities. The Benevolent Society works in partnership with Wyong Shire Council, Campbelltown City Council, KU Children's Services and Lady Gowrie Child Centre to deliver PIEC in 14 centre-based children's services. The PIEC project is funded under the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS), Invest to Grow program. PIEC operates in communities on the Central Coast, and in Sydney's south eastern and south western suburbs.

### **1.1 Overview of PIEC**

PIEC offers a suite of activities that respond to the needs of the local community and the needs of the children, families and staff in each child care centre. Strategies include:

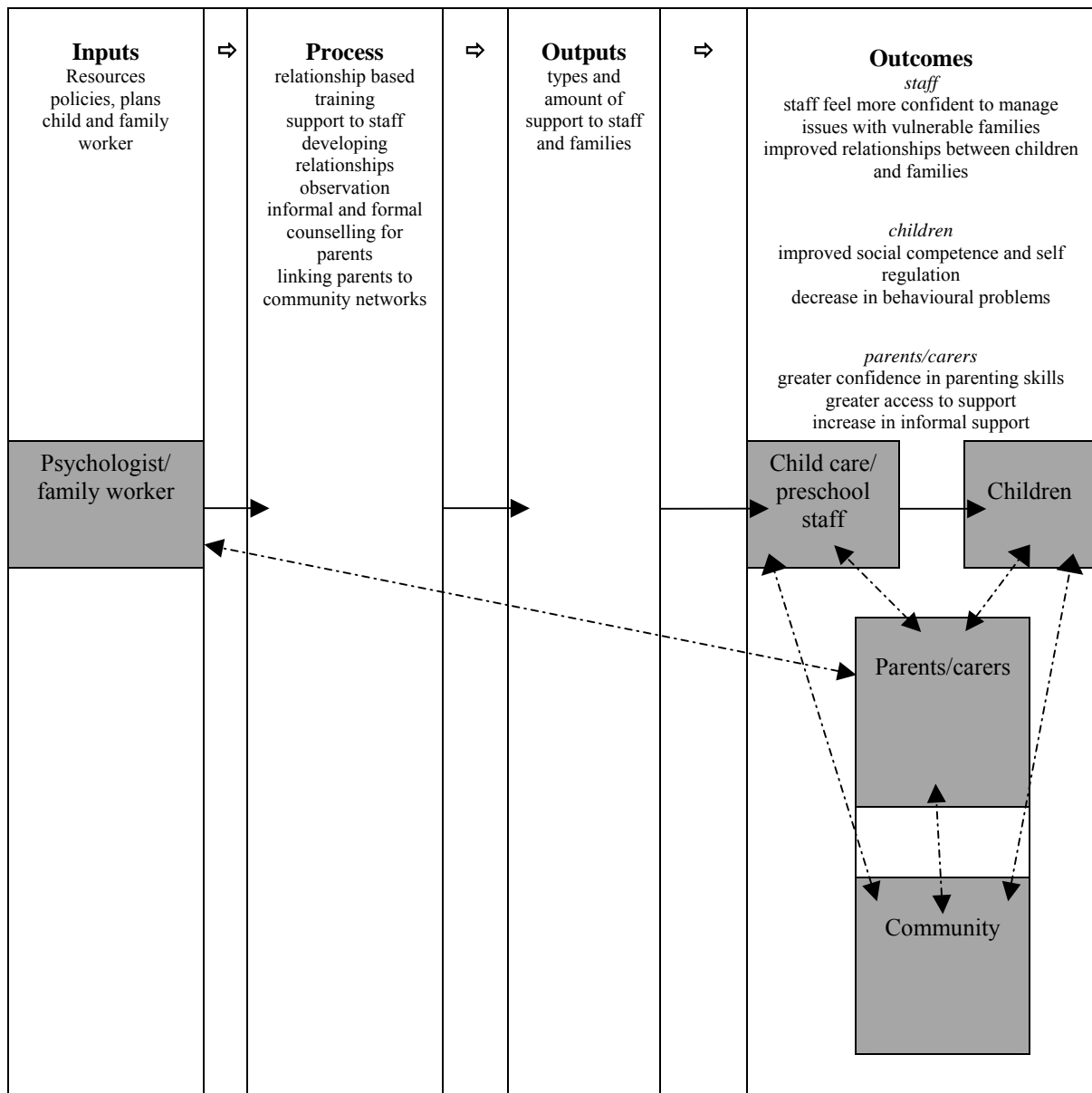
- placing a family worker or psychologist at the child care centre, working with staff, children and families to identify and support high-need children and families;
- providing staff with hands-on training and supervision to increase their understanding of children's behaviours and relationship needs;
- a focus on the important daily transition moments for children, parents and staff (the children's arrival at and departure from the centre);
- supported playgroups and Parents Connect groups in the local community open to families from the centre and also to families living locally whose children are not enrolled at the centre;
- individual support and counselling for parents;
- parenting mornings, focusing on the needs and strengths of parents (PlayPower workshops for parents are incorporated into these activities); and
- links with other local services providers, connecting families to services and to other community supports.

### **1.2 Project Logic**

The PIEC model is based on evidence that the provision of training and layered supervision and support for staff, using a relationships approach, will increase their understanding of children's behaviours and thereby improves their ability to support children, including high-need children, and their families. This will lead to improved relationships between children, parents, child care centre staff and communities; increased social competence and emotional regulation in children; and better quality care for children enrolled at the PIEC child care centres (see Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1.1: Project Logic PIEC**



PIEC is developed from Bowlby’s theory of attachment and human development. Children need a secure base to support their exploration of the world and provide reassurance when they return (Bowlby, 1988). Attachment relationships develop through warm, nurturing, responsive and consistent patterns of interaction between children and caregivers. If children do not feel secure in their relationships with the adults in their environment their ability to understand and regulate their own emotional state and to relate to adults and their peers will be hindered. This can lead to delayed or underdeveloped emotional and social development (Hughes, 1998).

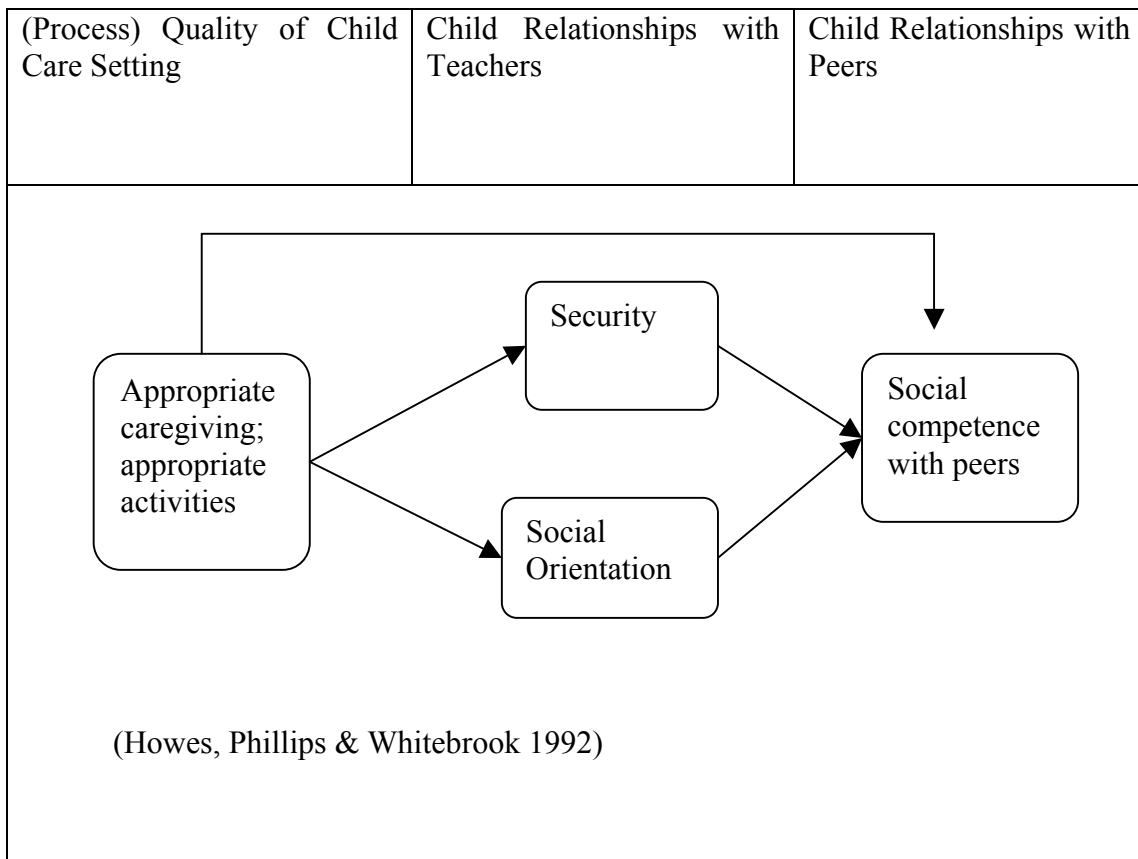
Securely attached children feel confident in the availability of their caregiver when needed, and so develop a sense of self-competence. Secure attachment relationships have been shown to be predictors of social competence, better relationships with teachers and less likelihood of behaviour problems (Wartner et al. 1994). Children who have secure relationships with their child care teachers and caregivers display

more competent interaction with staff and more advanced peer play during the early childhood years. These outcomes are sustained well into the second grade (Howes, 2000; Ladd & Burgess, 1999).

The development of PIEC model is based on research showing that high quality interventions focusing on the development of secure relationships between child care staff and children are linked to improved outcomes for high risk children (Yandell and Hewitt, 1995; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Bowlby’s work focused on child-mother attachment relationships, but children typically form more than one attachment relationship, and may form an attachment with a familiar caregiver in child care. Relationships and attachment in child care settings have been associated with quality of the child care setting, interaction with peers and social competence (Zenah, Stafford & Rice 2005). Attachment theory has been applied to child care settings, hypothesising pathways between the quality of child care, attachment relationships and social competence.

Howes, Phillips and Whitebrook (1992) found that pathways move from the regulatable quality of child care settings (such as adult: child ratios) to the process quality of settings (such as appropriate caregiving and developmentally appropriate activities) to children’s relationships with teachers (securely attached) and peers (social competence). This is illustrated in Figure 1.2. The PIEC intervenes in the *process quality* of child care settings to improve *relationships with teachers* and so *social-emotional regulation* of children.

**Figure 1.2: (Simplified) model of pathway from child care quality to social-emotional regulation**



In order to develop secure attachment relationships between carers and children, PIEC adopts training, resources and staff supervision from the Circle of Security intervention (Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman and Powell, 2002). This program incorporates Ainsworth's ideas of a Secure Base and a Haven of Safety (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall, 1978). The child and family worker provides training to staff in attachment concepts that relate to children's exploratory and security needs. Through training and support staff learn how to be emotionally available when a child's attachment system is activated. For example, the child and family worker can work with child care centre staff and parents to better support a child's attachment needs at the difficult transition times of separation and reunion. This enables the staff to help children to experience a smooth transition into the child care centre and hence they are more ready to focus on their exploration and learning.

Attachment relationships are to be supported through changing staff knowledge and understanding (through supporting them to think about children's behaviour in terms of need rather than control) and changing staff behaviour (through encouraging practices that make them more predictable and available to children). Secure attachment relationships are linked to high quality child care.

In addition to fostering secure attachment relationships, PIEC aims to support families with all aspects of parenting. This will be done through connecting isolated families and linking them to appropriate local services and programs. This will lead to improved family capacity and resources and an increase in social and community connectedness. In order to support parents and families in this way, groups such as supported playgroups and parent information and education sessions are run in some centres; and information and referral to services is offered to parents who need it.

The implementation of PIEC varies from site to site. Some have a stronger emphasis on attachment, and some on connecting families to services. In all sites, however, the PIEC worker supports staff in knowing about and responding to children's needs; supports changes in staff behaviour to build attachment relationships; and helps families connect to services and support as needed.

### **1.3 Anticipated PIEC Outcomes**

Based on this model it is anticipated that PIEC will contribute to the following short to medium term outcomes for children, families and child care staff. These outcomes predominantly relate to the Invest to Grow Priority Area of 'early learning and care' and 'supporting families and parents'. These outcomes include:

- Improved relationships between children and their parents, children and other children, and children and child care staff;
- Child care and preschool staff will be better able to foster healthy emotional and social development for all children;
- Increased social competence and emotional self-regulation and a decrease in behavioural problems for children;
- Better quality care for children enrolled at the child care centres;

- Greater confidence in parents about their parenting skills;
- Greater access to support services for parents and informal support for their family;
- Child care centres established as a focal point for families in the community;

#### **1.4 Overview of PIEC Evaluation**

The Social Policy Research Centre was contracted to evaluate PIEC. The overall aims of the evaluation include: to provide information that monitors, assists and supports the further development and refinement of the PIEC project (formative/process evaluation); and to assess effectiveness of the PIEC project by monitoring the achievement of positive outcomes for children and families (summative/impact evaluation).

Table 1.1 summarises the evaluation questions, methods, outcomes and data sources. The overall approach is to establish baseline outcome measures in the key Invest to Grow (ITG) priority areas of ‘early learning and care’ and ‘supporting families and parents’, in relation to child and family functioning and ratings of relationships between children, child care centre staff, families and communities. Changes in these dimensions will be measured over the funding period. The evaluation includes three components of data collection and analysis.

The *impact evaluation* assesses whether the project has achieved positive outcomes for children, families, staff and key stakeholders in the Invest to Grow priority area of ‘early learning and care’ and ‘supporting families and parents’.

The formative or *process* component of the evaluation focuses on the development and implementation of the PIEC Project. It will monitor the extent to which services are delivered in the form envisaged by the Benevolent Society. Where the results of the project are not those envisaged, the evaluation design seeks to inform current and future developments of PIEC.

*Performance based monitoring*: the Invest to Grow Performance Indicators as devised by FACS and the progress monitoring template developed by the National Evaluators will form the basis for developing the results-based measures for this component of the evaluation. More information about the evaluation can be found in the PIEC Evaluation Framework.

#### **1.5 Outline of the Report**

This report summarises the baseline data collected as part of the summative or impact component of the evaluation. The following section describes the overall approach to the impact evaluation. Baseline data collected from staff and parents about attachment relationships between children and staff and children and parents and the children’s social and emotional development of the children is outlined in Section 3. Information about parents and caregivers including their demographics characteristics, family relationships, perceptions of parenting skills, access to support and community connectedness is described in Section 4. The final section of the report summarises the baseline data.

**Table 1.1: Evaluation Summary**

| <b>Invest to Grow Priority Area</b>                         | <b>Evaluation Question</b>  | <b>Evaluation Component</b>                     | <b>PIEC Program Outcomes</b>  | <b>Data Sources</b>  |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| Early learning and care                                     | Has PIEC achieved its objectives?   | Impact Evaluation                               | Improved relationships between staff and children, children and children, child to parent | Pinata’s Reflective Functioning scale; Pianta’s Teacher-child relationship scale; staff interviews; Service data collected periodically  |
|   |   |   | Increase in children’s social competence and emotional regulation                         | BITSEA; Strengths and Difficulties Q   |
| Supporting families and parents                             | Has PIEC achieved its objectives?   | Impact Evaluation                               | Better quality care for children enrolled at the child care centres                       | BITSEA; Strengths and Difficulties Q; Service Users Q; parent interviews   |
|   |   |   | Greater confidence in parenting skills  | Pinata’s parent-child relationship scale; Service Users Q; parent interviews   |
|   |   |   | Greater access to support services for parents and informal supports for their family     | Service Users Q; parent interviews   |
|   |   |   | Child care centres established as a focal point for families in the community             | Service Users Q; parent interviews   |
| Early learning and care;<br>Supporting parents and families | What factors supported or impeded the achievement of these objectives?            | Project Logic, Process Evaluation               | All outcomes  | Document analysis; Key personnel interviews; Child care staff interviews or focus groups; Family interviews; Case studies  |
|   | What factors facilitated and inhibited the project logic model being implemented? |   |   |  |
| Early learning and care;<br>Supporting parents and families | What are the most important factors which facilitate improved outcomes?           | Impact Evaluation, Process Evaluation           | All outcomes  | Document analysis; Key personnel interviews; Child care staff interviews or focus groups; Family interviews; Case studies<br>Service data collected periodically; BITSEA; Strengths and Difficulties Q; Service Users Q; |
|   | Is the PIEC effective for all children and families?                              | Performance Based Monitoring, Impact Evaluation |   |  |

## 2 Approach to the Impact Evaluation

This component of the evaluation will assess the impact or outcomes of the project using a pre-test and post-test design. The overall approach is to establish baseline outcome measures in the key Invest to Grow (ITG) priority areas of ‘early learning and care’ and ‘supporting families and parents’, in relation to child and family functioning and ratings of relationships between children, child care centre staff, families and communities. Changes in these dimensions will be measured over the funding period.

### 2.1 Evaluation Questions

This component of the evaluation is designed to address the following questions:

- What were the short-term and medium-term outcomes of the project in the relevant Invest to Grow priority areas?
- What worked for whom and under what circumstances?
- Are further outcomes anticipated?
- In addition to PIEC what other factors were involved in achievement of outcomes?
- Have there been unanticipated outcomes, positive and negative?

### 2.2 Sample

Data have been collected from parents and staff in the fourteen child care centres involved in PIEC. The possible sample for the evaluation was every child aged 12 months and over, who attends a centre two days or more a week. Data was only collected for children whose parents had given written consent. The total response for the baseline data collection, as completed by staff is shown in Table 2.1. A total of 544 are included in the sample. Table 2.2 shows that 420 parents participated in this round of data collection. This number is lower than the total number of children in the sample as some had more than one child at the centre and others gave consent for their children to be involved in the evaluation but did not complete the parent component of the questionnaire.

**Table 2.1 Response Rate**

|                      | Total no children aged<br>12mths over more attending<br>2 days or more per week | Possible sample<br>No. | Total response rate<br>Per cent |
|----------------------|---|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Central Coast        | 206   |                        |                                 |
| East Sydney          | 192   | 276                    | 70                              |
| South West<br>Sydney | 146   |                        |                                 |
| Total                | 544   |                        |                                 |

**Table 2.2 Number of parents participating in the evaluation by area**

|                      | Number<br>Parents | %  |
|----------------------|-------------------|--|
| Central Coast        | 139               | 33.10  |
| East Sydney          | 186               | 44.29  |
| South West<br>Sydney | 95                | 22.62  |
| Total                | 420               | 100.1 round<br>these figures to<br>the nearest % |

### 2.3 Data Collection

The data collection instruments use standardised scales and appropriate sections of the questionnaires developed by the National Evaluators to collect data from child care staff and their parents/carers about themselves and the children for whom they care. These instruments were designed to be self-completed. However, PIEC staff were available to assist staff and families to complete the surveys if necessary.

#### Standardised instruments

Standardised psychological scales were used in the surveys to measure anticipated changes in the relationship between children and staff, between children and parents, and in the social-emotional development of children.

Two scales were used to assess *the relationship between staff and children* and *the relationship between parents and children* and to measure any changes in the attitudes and perceptions of adults from limit setting and managing behaviour to a focus on developmental progression. Only staff who knew the children the best and parents completed these instruments. As these standardised scales required some familiarity with the child it was not possible to externally validate the scores.

The Pianta Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) is completed by staff. The STRS is a teacher-reported measure of the quality of the teacher's relationship with a child. It includes 28 statements concerning a teacher's feelings about his or her relationship with a child, the child's behaviours with a teacher, and the teacher's beliefs about the child's feelings toward the teacher. There is substantial evidence of associations between teachers' ratings of children's conflict, closeness, and dependency, and children's academic and social-emotional outcomes (Mashburn & Pianta 2006).

The Pianta Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS) is a modified STRS scale and completed by parents. It is designed to assess the parent's perception of the quality of the relationship with their child.

The Pianta STRS and the CTRS are not age-dependent and are used on all children.

Two scales are used to measure changes in children's *social and emotional well-being*. These are age-dependent and the age of the child determines which scale is used at each time period.

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is completed by parents and staff for children aged three years and over. This is a UK measure that has been adapted for Australian use and it assesses a child's social and emotional well-being. It consists of 25 items filled out by parents and by teachers/carers. Items fall under five scales: emotional symptoms scale, conduct problems, hyperactivity scale, peer problems scale, and pro-social scale. These scales measure changes in children's cognitive development, social competence and emotional regulation. The SDQ is available in over 30 languages and is being widely used in epidemiological, developmental and clinical research, as well as in routine clinical and educational practice (Goodman & Scott 1999).

The Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (BITSEA) is completed by parents and staff for children aged 12 to 36 months. The BITSEA identifies emerging social-emotional problems in infants and toddlers. It has been shown to be a reliable and valid brief screener for infant-toddler social-emotional and behavioural problems and delays in competence (Briggs-Gowan et al. 2004).

One scale is used to assess the *child's experience of the child care setting*. The Leiden Inventory for the Child's Wellbeing in Day Care (LICW-D) is a Dutch measure developed to assess children's adjustment in their child care setting. It consists of 12 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale. Four aspects of well-being in day care are included in the Inventory: general well-being, well-being in the presence of caregivers, with group members, and within the physical care setting. As such, it provides a sensitive measure of the quality of the child's child care experience (Schipper, IJzendoorn & Tavecchio 2004). The LICW-D will be used to measure changes in adjustment over the course of the intervention.

All of these scales can be used as continuous variables so that changes in the aggregate scores can be analysed over time. It is also possible to classify the scores according to critical cut off points. The following analysis of the baseline data uses these cut off points for convenience to indicate possible problem behaviours. More complex statistical analysis using the continuous variables will be conducted over the course of the evaluation.



**Table 2.3: Summary of standardised instruments**

| Name  | Age of child | Completed by      | Domain                           |
|---|--------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| Pianta Child-Teacher Relationship Scale                         | All          | Staff             | Relationships and attachment     |
| The Pianta Child-Parent Relationship Scale                      | All          | Parents           | Relationships and attachment     |
| Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)                  | 36 months+   | Parents and Staff | Social and emotional well-being  |
| Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (BITSEA)       | 12-36 months | Parents and Staff | Social and emotional well-being  |
| Leiden Inventory for the Child's Wellbeing in Day Care (LICW-D) | All          | Staff             | Quality of child care experience |

**Other information**

Demographic information was also collected from parents and staff at baseline. Staff were asked about their qualifications, level of education, how long they had been employed at the child care centre of preschool. Parents were asked country of birth, education, current work status and household income, questions about their parenting self-efficacy, perceptions of the local neighbourhood and access to services and support.

Questions on parenting and relationships were adapted from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). This will enable comparison with broad population data in the final phase of data collection. These questions elicit information on family functioning.

Questions on community connectedness and access to services were adapted from the National Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and LSAC. These questions elicit information on social capital. This information also gives important contextual information on the environment in which PIEC is being implemented.

The following sections of the report summarise the baseline data collected in March 2006 from staff and parents.

### 3 Child Data

Data was collected on the characteristics of children; relationships between children and staff; relationships between children and parents; and any emergent problems in social-emotional and behavioural domains.

#### 3.1 Sample Characteristics

Staff in all the centre-based children's services involved in PIEC completed surveys for children whose parents had provided written consent. In most cases staff who knew the child best completed the surveys, which contained general information about the child including their age, gender and the number of days they attended the centre. This information is displayed in Table 3.1 and shows that just over half the sample are boys, with the majority aged over 3 years and attending child care or preschool for 3 days or more. The number of children per age category and the number of days children attended varied significantly across the areas. These differences will have to be taken into account when analysing changes over time.

**Table 3.1: Child characteristics, staff reported**

|                                 | Number        |             |                   |           | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|                                 | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| <i>Gender</i>                   |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Male                            | 102           | 100         | 77                | 279       | 49.5          | 52.1        | 52.7              | 51.3      |
| Female                          | 104           | 92          | 69                | 265       | 50.5          | 47.9        | 47.3              | 48.7      |
| Total                           | 206           | 192         | 146               | 544       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Age of child</i>             |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| 1 year old                      | 18            | 23          | 16                | 57        | 8.7           | 12.2        | 11.2              | 10.4*     |
| 2 years                         | 33            | 42          | 41                | 116       | 16.0          | 22.2        | 28.7              | 21.6*     |
| 3 years                         | 68            | 51          | 41                | 160       | 33.0          | 27.0        | 28.7              | 29.7*     |
| 4 years                         | 72            | 64          | 43                | 179       | 35.0          | 33.9        | 30.1              | 33.3*     |
| 5 years                         | 15            | 9           | 2                 | 26        | 7.3           | 4.8         | 1.4               | 4.8*      |
| Total                           | 206           | 189         | 143               | 538       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>No. days child attending</i> |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| 2 Days                          | 95            | 73          | 71                | 239       | 46.3          | 38.6        | 48.6              | 44.3*     |
| 3 Days                          | 65            | 79          | 41                | 185       | 31.7          | 41.8        | 28.1              | 34.3*     |
| 4 Days                          | 23            | 25          | 13                | 61        | 11.2          | 13.2        | 8.9               | 11.3*     |
| 5 Days                          | 22            | 12          | 21                | 55        | 10.7          | 6.4         | 14.4              | 10.2*     |
| Total†                          | 205           | 189         | 146               | 540       |               |             |                   |           |

Note: \* ( $X^2 p \leq 0.05$ )

† Totals are not identical for all tables due to missing values for some questions and different sample sizes for age-specific instruments

#### 3.2 Attachment Relationships: Child-Staff

The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) (Pianta, 2001) is a self-reported assessment of staff's perceptions of the quality their relationship with the children. The STRS can be used for children of preschool age up to eight years. Child-teacher relationships in the STRS are defined in terms of conflict, closeness and dependency and overall quality of the relationship. Percentiles at or above 75 for the conflict and dependency subscales indicate high levels of conflict and dependency in the

relationship between staff and the child. For closeness and Total STRS scores percentiles at or below 25 indicate low levels of closeness and low levels of positive and effective relationships. Pianta uses these cut-offs as markers for recommending intervention and support for teachers. Table 3.2 shows that the majority of staff's ratings of their relationship with the children they care for fall outside the critical cut off points for all subscales and Total STRS scores. However 16 per cent and 11 per cent of staff report high conflict and high dependency respectively in their relationship with a child (at or above the 75th percentile on the Conflict or Dependency subscales). Thirty-four per cent of staff report low closeness and 19 per cent of staff scores fall at or below 25<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Total STRS scores. There were no significant differences in the subscales or the Total STRS scores between the areas.

**Table 3.2: Pianta Student-Teacher Relationship Scale**

|  | Number        |             |                   |           | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|--|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|  | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| <i>Conflict</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| High conflict (above 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile of normative sample)                          | 30            | 31          | 28                | 89        | 14.4          | 16.2        | 19.2              | 16.3      |
| Low conflict   | 178           | 160         | 118               | 456       | 85.6          | 83.8        | 80.8              | 83.7      |
| Total number   | 208           | 191         | 146               | 545       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Closeness</i>   |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Low closeness (below 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile of normative sample)                          | 66            | 63          | 57                | 186       | 32.0          | 33.0        | 39.0              | 34.3      |
| High closeness   | 140           | 128         | 89                | 357       | 68.0          | 67.0        | 61.0              | 65.8      |
| Total number   | 206           | 191         | 146               | 543       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Dependency</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| High dependency (above 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile of normative sample)                        | 17            | 25          | 20                | 62        | 8.2           | 13.1        | 13.7              | 11.4      |
| Low dependency   | 191           | 166         | 126               | 483       | 91.8          | 86.9        | 86.3              | 88.6      |
| Total number   | 208           | 191         | 146               | 545       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Total STRS</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Negative and ineffective relationships (below 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile of normative sample) | 38            | 34          | 34                | 106       | 18.5          | 17.8        | 23.3              | 19.5      |
| Positive and effective relationships   | 168           | 157         | 112               | 437       | 81.6          | 82.2        | 76.7              | 80.5      |
| Total number   | 206           | 191         | 146               | 543       |               |             |                   |           |

Note: Percentiles from the raw scores have been calculated using the Total Normative Sample Percentile Conversions

Note: \* ( $X^2 p \leq 0.05$ )-there were no significant differences between the areas

### 3.3 Attachment Relationships: Child-Parent

The Pianta Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS) assesses the parent's perception of the quality of the relationship with their child. It is interesting to note that the scores outlined in Table 3.3 differ from those of the staff's ratings of their relationships with the children (Table 3.2). It can be seen that over a third of parents report they have high conflict and over 50 per cent have high dependency levels in

their relationships with their children, indicated by the subscale scores coming in at or above the 75 percentile. Approximately one fifth of the Total STRS scores reported by parents indicate lower overall positivity in their relationships with their children. No significant differences between the areas were evident in any of the subscales or the Total CPRS scores.

**Table 3.3 Pianta Child-Parent Relationship Scores**

|  | Number        |             |                   |           | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|--|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|  | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| <i>Conflict</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| High conflict (above 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile of normative sample)                          | 48            | 63          | 38                | 149       | 35.6          | 33.9        | 40.4              | 35.9      |
| Low conflict   | 87            | 123         | 56                | 266       | 64.4          | 66.1        | 59.6              | 64.1      |
| Total number   | 135           | 186         | 94                | 415       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Closeness</i>   |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Low closeness (below 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile of normative sample)                          | 5             | 7           | 6                 | 18        | 3.7           | 3.8         | 6.5               | 4.3       |
| High closeness   | 130           | 179         | 87                | 396       | 96.3          | 96.2        | 93.5              | 95.7      |
| Total number   | 135           | 186         | 93                | 414       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Dependency</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| High dependency (above 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile of normative sample)                        | 74            | 96          | 60                | 230       | 54.8          | 51.6        | 63.8              | 55.4      |
| Low dependency   | 61            | 90          | 34                | 185       | 45.2          | 48.4        | 36.2              | 44.6      |
| Total number   | 135           | 186         | 94                | 415       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Total STRS</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Negative and ineffective relationships (below 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile of normative sample) | 32            | 37          | 27                | 96        | 23.9          | 19.9        | 29.0              | 23.2      |
| Positive and effective relationships   | 102           | 149         | 66                | 317       | 76.1          | 80.1        | 70.0              | 76.8      |
| Total number   | 134           | 186         | 93                | 413       |               |             |                   |           |

Note: \* ( $\chi^2 p \leq 0.05$ )

Percentiles from the raw scores have been calculated using the Total Normative Sample Percentile Conversions

### 3.4 Social and Emotional Development

Two standardised scales are used to capture the social and emotional development of the children as outlined in Section 2.3. The SDQ is used for children aged 3 years and above and the BITSEA is used for children aged from 12 to 36 months. Staff and parents complete these instruments.

The BITSEA is designed as a screening instrument to identify children under 3 years of age who may be experiencing problems in the social-emotional and behavioural domains of development. A high Total Problem Score (at or above 75<sup>th</sup> percentile) or low Competence Total Score (at or below 15<sup>th</sup> percentile) indicate *Of Concern* status. Table 3.4 shows BITSEA scores reported by parents. Around 17 per cent of the sample of children had high problem scores and low competence scores indicating *Of Concern* status. More parents in South West Sydney rated their children as having high problem and low competence total scores indicating greater levels of social-emotional or behavioural problems than the other areas.

**Table 3.4: BITSEA Scores Reported by Parents**

|  | Number        |             |                   |            | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|--|---------------|-------------|-------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|  | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas  | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| High Problem (scores fall at or above 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile)   | 6             | 10          | 8                 | 24         | 13.3          | 16.9        | 20.0              | 16.7      |
| Not of concern   | 39            | 49          | 32                | 122        | 86.7          | 83.1        | 80.0              | 83.3      |
| <i>Total number</i>  | <i>45</i>     | <i>59</i>   | <i>40</i>         | <i>144</i> |               |             |                   |           |
| Low Competence (scores fall at or below 15 <sup>th</sup> percentile) | 5             | 8           | 9                 | 24         | 11.4          | 13.8        | 22.5              | 16.9      |
| Not of concern   | 39            | 50          | 31                | 118        | 88.6          | 86.2        | 77.5              | 83.1      |
| <i>Total number</i>  | <i>44</i>     | <i>58</i>   | <i>40</i>         | <i>142</i> |               |             |                   |           |

Note: \* ( $X^2 p \leq 0.05$ )

The staff form of the BITEA parallels the parent form. At this stage, however, due to the small sample size of the comparison group the publisher has not provided cut off scores and *T* scores. If comparison scores are not available by the second round of data collection the analysis will use differences in the mean scores for the problem and competence scores to examine changes over time.

The SDQ is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire that asks about 25 attributes, some positive and others negative. Scores are normally used as continuous variables, but can be classified for convenience as 'normal', 'borderline' and 'abnormal'. Approximately 10 per cent of a community sample scores in the abnormal band for any given score, with a further 10 per cent scoring in the borderline band. Table 3.5 shows the SDQ scores broken down into normal, borderline and abnormal, as reported by staff. On average approximately one fifth of the children have total difficulties scores at the abnormal range. Around 18 per cent of the conduct and hyperactivity subscales and 17 per cent for the peer problem subscales scores are in the abnormal range. Staff in South West Sydney and on the Central Coast have indicated significantly higher levels of total difficulties, conduct and hyperactivity problems in children attending their centres than East Sydney.

**Table 3.5 SDQ Scores reported by staff**

| Staff completed            | Number        |             |                   |           | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|                            | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| <i>Total Difficulties</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 101           | 91          | 53                | 245       | 70.1          | 77.1        | 60.2              | 70.0*     |
| Borderline                 | 11            | 8           | 15                | 34        | 7.6           | 6.8         | 17.1              | 9.7*      |
| Abnormal                   | 32            | 19          | 20                | 71        | 22.2          | 16.1        | 22.7              | 20.3*     |
| Total number               | 144           | 118         | 88                | 350       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Emotional Symptoms</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 132           | 108         | 79                | 319       | 91.7          | 91.5        | 89.8              | 91.1      |
| Borderline                 | 3             | 4           | 6                 | 13        | 2.0           | 3.4         | 6.8               | 3.7       |
| Abnormal                   | 9             | 6           | 3                 | 18        | 6.3           | 5.1         | 3.4               | 5.1       |
| Total number               | 144           | 118         | 88                | 350       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Conduct Problems</i>    |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 106           | 99          | 59                | 264       | 73.6          | 83.2        | 67.1              | 75.2*     |
| Borderline                 | 10            | 8           | 5                 | 23        | 6.9           | 6.7         | 5.7               | 6.6*      |
| Abnormal                   | 28            | 12          | 24                | 64        | 19.4          | 10.1        | 27.3              | 18.2*     |
| Total number               | 144           | 119         | 88                | 351       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Hyperactivity Score</i> |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 100           | 100         | 66                | 266       | 69.4          | 83.3        | 75.0              | 75.6*     |
| Borderline                 | 12            | 6           | 2                 | 20        | 8.3           | 5.0         | 2.3               | 5.7*      |
| Abnormal                   | 32            | 14          | 20                | 66        | 22.2          | 11.7        | 22.7              | 18.8*     |
| Total number               | 144           | 120         | 88                | 352       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Peer Problem</i>        |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 106           | 86          | 60                | 252       | 73.6          | 71.7        | 68.2              | 71.6      |
| Borderline                 | 15            | 14          | 11                | 40        | 10.4          | 11.7        | 12.5              | 11.4      |
| Abnormal                   | 23            | 20          | 17                | 60        | 16.0          | 16.7        | 19.3              | 17.1      |
| Total number               | 144           | 120         | 88                | 352       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Prosocial Score</i>     |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 80            | 66          | 59                | 205       | 55.6          | 56.4        | 67.1              | 58.7      |
| Borderline                 | 29            | 24          | 8                 | 61        | 20.1          | 20.5        | 9.1               | 17.5      |
| Abnormal                   | 35            | 27          | 21                | 83        | 24.3          | 23.1        | 23.9              | 23.8      |
| Total                      | 144           | 117         | 88                | 349       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Total impact score</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 131           | 118         | 78                | 327       | 90.3          | 97.5        | 90.7              | 92.9*     |
| Borderline                 | 2             | 1           | 6                 | 9         | 1.4           | 0.8         | 7.0               | 2.6*      |
| Abnormal                   | 12            | 2           | 2                 | 16        | 8.3           | 1.7         | 2.3               | 4.6*      |
| Total number               | 145           | 121         | 86                | 352       |               |             |                   |           |

Note: \* ( $X^2$   $p \leq 0.05$ )

Table 3.6 shows SDQ scores reported by parents. Overwhelmingly most children fall within the normal range for all subscales and the total difficulties score. Ten per cent of the sample fell in the abnormal range for total difficulties score. Around 20 per cent of the children are rated in the abnormal range for hyperactivity and 16 per cent in the abnormal range for peer problems. There are stark differences between the areas, most noticeably in the total difficulties scores and the conduct subscales with South West Sydney having the highest number of abnormal scores and East Sydney the lowest.

**Table 3.6 SDQ Scores, by Parents**

| Parent completed           | Number        |             |                   |           | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|                            | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| <i>Total Difficulties</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 71            | 110         | 37                | 218       | 79.8          | 89.4        | 69.8              | 82.3*     |
| Borderline                 | 6             | 8           | 5                 | 19        | 6.7           | 6.5         | 9.4               | 7.2*      |
| Abnormal                   | 12            | 5           | 11                | 28        | 13.5          | 4.1         | 20.8              | 10.6*     |
| Total                      | 89            | 123         | 53                | 265       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Emotional Symptoms</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 81            | 108         | 44                | 233       | 90.0          | 87.8        | 83.0              | 87.6      |
| Borderline                 | 1             | 6           | 4                 | 11        | 1.1           | 4.9         | 7.6               | 4.1       |
| Abnormal                   | 8             | 9           | 5                 | 22        | 8.9           | 7.3         | 9.4               | 8.3       |
| Total                      | 90            | 123         | 53                | 266       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Conduct Problems</i>    |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 59            | 96          | 27                | 182       | 65.6          | 78.1        | 50.9              | 68.4*     |
| Borderline                 | 8             | 12          | 9                 | 29        | 8.9           | 9.7         | 17.0              | 10.9*     |
| Abnormal                   | 23            | 15          | 17                | 55        | 25.6          | 12.2        | 32.1              | 20.7*     |
| Total                      | 90            | 123         | 53                | 266       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Hyperactivity Score</i> |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 68            | 109         | 40                | 217       | 75.6          | 88.6        | 75.5              | 81.6      |
| Borderline                 | 9             | 7           | 4                 | 20        | 10.0          | 5.7         | 7.6               | 7.5       |
| Abnormal                   | 13            | 7           | 9                 | 29        | 14.4          | 5.7         | 17.0              | 10.9      |
| Total                      | 90            | 123         | 53                | 266       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Peer Problem</i>        |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 67            | 91          | 32                | 190       | 74.4          | 74.0        | 60.4              | 71.4      |
| Borderline                 | 12            | 13          | 7                 | 32        | 13.3          | 10.6        | 13.2              | 12.0      |
| Abnormal                   | 11            | 19          | 14                | 44        | 12.2          | 15.5        | 26.4              | 16.5      |
| Total                      | 90            | 123         | 53                | 266       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Prosocial Score</i>     |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 75            | 110         | 43                | 228       | 83.3          | 89.4        | 81.1              | 85.7      |
| Borderline                 | 12            | 4           | 6                 | 22        | 13.3          | 3.3         | 11.3              | 8.3       |
| Abnormal                   | 3             | 9           | 4                 | 16        | 3.3           | 7.3         | 7.6               | 6.0       |
| Total                      | 90            | 123         | 53                | 266       |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>Total impact score</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Normal                     | 86            | 121         | 48                | 255       | 95.6          | 98.4        | 90.6              | 95.9      |
| Borderline                 | 2             | 1           | 1                 | 4         | 2.2           | 0.8         | 1.9               | 1.5       |
| Abnormal                   | 2             | 1           | 4                 | 7         | 2.2           | 0.8         | 7.6               | 2.6       |
| Total                      | 90            | 123         | 53                | 266       |               |             |                   |           |

Note: \* ( $\chi^2$   $p \leq 0.05$ )

### 3.5 Experience of the Child Care Setting

The Leiden Inventory assesses caregivers' or teachers' perceptions of how comfortable the child is in the child care centre or preschool, using a 6-point scale. Questions rate the child's feelings and behaviours, in general and as seen in their interactions with staff, other children, and with the play environment. A total scale score is formed by summing ratings for each of the 12 items. For most children, staff ratings of wellbeing were good to high; that is, equivalent to 4, 5 or 6 on the 6-point scale. For about 15 per cent of children, however, ratings of wellbeing were less than optimal; that is, less than 4 on the 6-point scale. Scores differed by area, being

significantly higher for centres on the Central Coast. There was no difference in scores for the two Sydney areas.

**Table 3.7: Leiden Inventory of for Child Wellbeing in Day Care**

|  | Number        |             |                   |           | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|--|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|  | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| Poor overall wellbeing<br>(total score falls below 48,<br>equivalent to less than 4 on the 6-<br>point scale)        | 17            | 38          | 26                | 81        | 8.1           | 19.8        | 19.7              | 14.8*     |
| Good to high overall<br>wellbeing (total score of 48 or<br>above, equivalent to 4 and above on<br>the 6-point scale) | 193           | 154         | 121               | 468       | 91.9          | 80.2        | 82.3              | 85.2*     |
| Total number   | 210           | 192         | 147               | 549       |               |             |                   |           |
| Mean total score   | 60.0          | 55.4        | 57.5              | 57.7**    |               |             |                   |           |

Note: \* ( $\chi^2$   $p \leq 0.05$ )

\*\* (F ratio  $p \leq 0.01$ ; Central Coast > East Sydney, South West Sydney; East Sydney = South West Sydney)



## 4 Parent Data

This section reports on parent characteristics and their parenting self-efficacy and links to support and the community. These relate to the ITG Priority Area of ‘supporting children and families’ and four PIEC objectives:

- Greater confidence in parenting skills
- Greater access to support services for parents and informal supports for their family
- Child care centres established as a focal point for families in the community
- Better integrated services system

### 4.1 Parents’ Demographic Characteristics

Basic demographic information was collected from parents and caregivers. Table 4.1 shows that there were significant differences between the areas for all variables except Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. The majority of parents or caregivers in the sample were born in Australia. South West Sydney had the highest proportion of parents or caregivers born overseas (32%) and who spoke a language other than English at home (28 %) compared to the other areas. Over 40 per cent of parents in East Sydney had completed a university degree with an additional 26 per cent completing a TAFE or college diploma. In contrast, Year 10 was the highest level of education completed for just over a third of the parents on the Central Coast and in South West Sydney. Over 60 per cent of parents were employed either full-time or parent time on the Central Coast and in East Sydney compared to around 40 per cent in South West Sydney. Reflecting the current employment status, it can be seen that in South West Sydney over a third of parents relied on government pensions or benefits as their main source of income in contrast to East Sydney where this was the case for only 6 per cent of the sample.

**Table 4.1: Parent characteristics**

|  | Number        |             |                   |           | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|--|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|  | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| <i>Country of birth</i>                            |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Australia  | 119           | 131         | 64                | 314       | 85.6          | 71.2        | 68.1              | 75.3*     |
| Overseas   | 20            | 53          | 30                | 103       | 14.4          | 28.8        | 31.9              | 24.7*     |
| <i>Language spoken at home</i>                     |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| English  | 131           | 151         | 68                | 350       | 94.9          | 83.9        | 72.3              | 85.0*     |
| Other  | 7             | 29          | 26                | 62        | 5.1           | 16.1        | 27.7              | 15.1*     |
| <i>Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin</i> |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Yes  | 4             | 5           | 3                 | 12        | 3.0           | 2.8         | 3.5               | 3.0       |
| No   | 131           | 171         | 84                | 386       | 97.0          | 97.2        | 96.6              | 97.0      |
| <i>Highest Level of Education</i>                  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| University Degree                                  | 22            | 76          | 21                | 119       | 15.9          | 41.8        | 22.1              | 28.7*     |
| TAFE/college diploma                               | 32            | 48          | 15                | 95        | 23.2          | 26.4        | 15.8              | 22.9*     |
| Vocational certificate                             | 12            | 14          | 6                 | 32        | 8.7           | 7.7         | 6.3               | 7.7*      |
| Year 12 or equivalent                              | 21            | 30          | 19                | 70        | 15.2          | 16.5        | 20.0              | 16.9*     |
| Year 10 or equivalent or below                     | 51            | 14          | 34                | 99        | 37.0          | 7.7         | 35.8              | 23.9*     |
| <i>Current status</i>                              |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Full-time paid work                                | 38            | 35          | 21                | 94        | 27.7          | 19.0        | 22.8              | 22.8*     |
| Part-time paid work                                | 46            | 82          | 18                | 146       | 33.6          | 44.6        | 19.6              | 35.4*     |
| On leave from paid work                            | 5             | 9           | 3                 | 17        | 3.7           | 4.9         | 3.3               | 4.1*      |
| Full-time parent                                   | 25            | 37          | 25                | 87        | 18.6          | 20.1        | 27.2              | 21.1*     |
| Studying   | 11            | 9           | 8                 | 28        | 8.0           | 4.9         | 8.7               | 6.8*      |
| Other  | 12            | 12          | 17                | 41        | 8.8           | 6.5         | 18.5              | 9.9*      |
| <i>Household's main source of income</i>           |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Wages/Salaries                                     | 95            | 158         | 50                | 303       | 73.6          | 88.3        | 57.5              | 76.7*     |
| Govt benefit, pension or allowance                 | 29            | 10          | 31                | 70        | 22.5          | 5.6         | 35.6              | 17.7*     |
| Other  | 5             | 11          | 6                 | 22        | 3.9           | 6.2         | 6.9               | 5.6*      |

Note: \* ( $\chi^2 p \leq 0.05$ )

## 4.2 Parent Community Connectedness and Support

Parents were asked to nominate the kinds of services they had used in the last 12 months, the reasons for lack of service use if any, and their views of the local neighbourhood. These questions elicit information about community amenity, social isolation and support. It is anticipated that PIEC will increase access to services and support for families who need it.

Table 4.2 shows that participation in services specific to being a parent was higher in Central Coast and Eastern Sydney than South West Sydney. Around 31 per cent of Central Coast parents and 40 per cent of Eastern Sydney parents participated in a playgroup, compared to around 15 per cent in South West Sydney. Use of general and family medical services (GP, early childhood nurse) was also lowest in South West Sydney. Use of counselling services was highest in the Central Coast. In contrast, psychiatric service use and welfare/community service was highest in South West Sydney. Around eight per cent of South West Sydney families used charities, compared to around two and four per cent for Eastern and Central Coast families respectively.

**Table 4.2: Receipt of services for child or family members in the last 12 months**

|  | Number        |             |                   |            | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|--|---------------|-------------|-------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|  | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas  | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| <i>Type of service</i>   |               |             |                   |            |               |             |                   |           |
| Playgroup or parent-child group                                | 43            | 75          | 14                | 132        | 30.9          | 40.3        | 14.7              | 31.4      |
| Parenting education courses or programs, Parent support groups | 28            | 32          | 9                 | 69         | 20.1          | 17.2        | 9.5               | 16.4      |
| Maternal and child health nurse                                | 37            | 51          | 22                | 110        | 26.6          | 27.4        | 23.2              | 26.2      |
| Hospital emergency ward  | 69            | 79          | 42                | 190        | 49.6          | 42.5        | 44.2              | 45.2      |
| Hospital outpatient clinic                                     | 32            | 48          | 22                | 102        | 23.0          | 25.8        | 23.3              | 24.2      |
| GP services  | 125           | 170         | 76                | 371        | 89.4          | 91.4        | 80.0              | 88.3      |
| Adult mental health services                                   | 4             | 8           | 4                 | 16         | 2.9           | 4.3         | 4.2               | 3.8       |
| Migrant or ethnic resource services                            | 0             | 4           | 0                 | 4          | 0.0           | 2.2         | 0.0               | 1.0       |
| Speech therapy   | 43            | 26          | 10                | 79         | 30.9          | 14.0        | 10.5              | 18.8      |
| Dental services  | 47            | 102         | 25                | 174        | 33.8          | 54.8        | 26.4              | 41.4      |
| Paediatrician  | 39            | 39          | 33                | 111        | 28.1          | 21.0        | 34.7              | 26.4      |
| Other medical specialists                                      | 46            | 63          | 25                | 134        | 33.1          | 33.9        | 26.3              | 31.9      |
| Other medical services   | 23            | 30          | 9                 | 62         | 16.6          | 16.1        | 9.5               | 14.8      |
| Disability services  | 4             | 6           | 3                 | 13         | 2.9           | 3.2         | 3.2               | 3.1       |
| Church or religious groups                                     | 22            | 31          | 15                | 68         | 15.8          | 16.7        | 15.8              | 16.2      |
| Counselling services   | 22            | 13          | 9                 | 44         | 15.8          | 7.0         | 9.5               | 10.5      |
| Other psychiatric services                                     | 5             | 16          | 11                | 32         | 3.6           | 8.6         | 11.6              | 7.6       |
| Housing services   | 4             | 3           | 6                 | 13         | 2.9           | 1.6         | 6.3               | 3.1       |
| Charities  | 5             | 3           | 8                 | 16         | 3.6           | 1.6         | 8.4               | 3.8       |
| Other child or family support services                         | 4             | 13          | 5                 | 22         | 2.9           | 7.0         | 5.3               | 5.3       |
| <i>Total</i>   | <i>139</i>    | <i>186</i>  | <i>95</i>         | <i>420</i> |               |             |                   |           |

Note: Multiple responses so total percentages add to more than 100.

One of the aims of PIEC focuses on increasing parents' social capacity and community connectedness. Parents were asked a number of questions about their attitudes towards their local neighbourhood and links to the community to gain some measure of their community connectedness. It can be seen from Table 4.3 that there are significant differences between the areas on most variables. Table 4.3 shows that in all areas the majority of parents agreed with the statement that their neighbourhoods were safe and clean. Most parents, particularly in East Sydney (97%), indicated that there were good parks, playgrounds and play spaces in their neighbourhood in contrast to only 50 per cent in South West Sydney. The majority of parents in all areas indicated they had access to close, regular and affordable public transport, although for just over 20 per cent on the Central Coast this was not the case. Parents in all the areas indicated they had access to basic shopping facilities.

However, when asked about access to basic services such as banks and medical clinics there were marked differences between the areas. In East Sydney only 8 per cent felt that there was limited access to basic services in contrast to over a quarter of parents on the Central Coast and just under a fifth in South West Sydney. Parents were also asked if they agreed with statements about whether it was safe for children to play outside during the day and whether people were willing to help their neighbours. Although the majority of parents agreed with these statements in all areas it is evident that more parents in South West Sydney felt that it was not safe for children to play outside during the day or that people were willing to help their neighbours than parents on the Central Coast or East Sydney.

**Table 4.3: Parents' perceptions of the local neighbourhood**

|   | Number        |             |                   |           | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|---|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|   | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| <i>Safe neighbourhood</i>   |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Strongly Agree/Agree  | 111           | 158         | 68                | 337       | 79.9          | 85.4        | 72.3              | 80.6      |
| Disagree Strongly/Disagree  | 24            | 26          | 24                | 74        | 17.3          | 14.1        | 25.5              | 17.7      |
| DK/NA   | 4             | 1           | 2                 | 7         | 2.9           | 0.5         | 2.1               | 1.7       |
| <i>Clean neighbourhood</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Strongly Agree/Agree  | 121           | 156         | 60                | 337       | 87.1          | 84.3        | 64.5              | 80.8      |
| Disagree Strongly/Disagree  | 17            | 28          | 31                | 76        | 12.2          | 15.1        | 33.3              | 18.2      |
| DK/NA   | 1             | 1           | 2                 | 4         | 0.7           | 0.5         | 2.2               | 1.0       |
| <i>Good parks, playgrounds and play spaces in this neighbourhood</i>                      |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Strongly Agree/Agree  | 97            | 178         | 47                | 322       | 69.8          | 96.7        | 50.5              | 77.4*     |
| Disagree Strongly/Disagree  | 38            | 6           | 44                | 88        | 27.3          | 3.3         | 47.3              | 21.2*     |
| DK/NA   | 4             | 0           | 2                 | 6         | 2.9           | 0.0         | 2.2               | 1.4*      |
| <i>Access to close, affordable, regular public transport in this neighbourhood</i>        |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Strongly Agree/Agree  | 100           | 174         | 84                | 358       | 72.5          | 94.6        | 89.4              | 86.1*     |
| Disagree Strongly/Disagree  | 29            | 7           | 6                 | 42        | 21.0          | 3.8         | 6.4               | 10.1*     |
| DK/NA   | 9             | 3           | 4                 | 16        | 6.5           | 1.6         | 4.3               | 3.9*      |
| <i>Access to basic shopping facilities in this neighbourhood</i>                          |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Strongly Agree/Agree  | 125           | 176         | 89                | 390       | 89.9          | 96.2        | 94.7              | 93.8*     |
| Disagree Strongly/Disagree  | 14            | 7           | 5                 | 26        | 10.1          | 3.8         | 5.3               | 6.3*      |
| DK/NA   | 0             | 0           | 0                 | 0         | 0.0           | 0.0         | 0.0               | 0.0*      |
| <i>Access to basic services such as banks, medical clinics etc. in this neighbourhood</i> |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Strongly Agree/Agree  | 101           | 169         | 76                | 346       | 73.2          | 91.9        | 80.9              | 83.2*     |
| Disagree Strongly/Disagree  | 37            | 14          | 18                | 69        | 26.8          | 7.6         | 19.2              | 16.6*     |
| DK/NA   | 0             | 1           | 0                 | 1         | 0.0           | 0.5         | 0.0               | 0.5*      |

Note: \* ( $\chi^2$   $p \leq 0.05$ )

**Table 4.3: Parents' perceptions of the local neighbourhood (cont.)**

|  | Number        |             |                   |           | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|--|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|  | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| <i>Safe for children to play outside during the day</i>                              |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Strongly Agree/ Agree  | 108           | 119         | 58                | 285       | 78.8          | 65.4        | 61.7              | 69.0*     |
| Disagree Strongly/ Disagree  | 26            | 58          | 32                | 116       | 19.0          | 31.9        | 34.0              | 28.1*     |
| DK/NA  | 3             | 5           | 4                 | 12        | 2.2           | 2.8         | 4.3               | 2.9*      |
| <i>People around here willing to help their neighbours</i>                           |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Strongly Agree/ Agree  | 110           | 150         | 61                | 321       | 79.1          | 81.5        | 65.6              | 77.2*     |
| Disagree Strongly/ Disagree  | 22            | 29          | 21                | 72        | 15.8          | 15.8        | 22.6              | 17.3*     |
| DK/NA  | 7             | 5           | 11                | 23        | 5.0           | 2.7         | 11.8              | 5.5*      |
| <i>If I need information about services in the community I know where to find it</i> |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Strongly Agree/ Agree  | 100           | 139         | 66                | 305       | 72.5          | 75.6        | 71.0              | 73.5      |
| Disagree Strongly/ Disagree  | 28            | 36          | 18                | 82        | 20.3          | 19.6        | 19.4              | 19.8      |
| DK/NA  | 10            | 9           | 9                 | 28        | 7.3           | 4.9         | 9.7               | 6.6       |

Note: \* ( $X^2$   $p \leq 0.05$ )

Access to informal support can be a crucial factor in reducing isolation for families. Table 4.4 shows that difficulties in getting support 'often' or 'very often' were highest in South West Sydney and lowest in the Central Coast. Around 10 per cent of respondents in all areas reported difficulties 'sometimes' or 'never'.

Participation in community service activities can indicate connectedness to the local community. It is interesting to note that the majority of parents are not involved in these activities, perhaps reflecting the amount of time required to care for young children and to participate in paid work.

The final question in this table relates to community cohesion. The highest 'yes' response is from South West Sydney, where around 37 per cent said that they would move if they could. In addition significantly more parents in South West Sydney indicated that the local neighbourhood was not a safe place to bring up children. Approximately 16 per cent of parents on the Central Coast and 18 per cent of parents in East Sydney would like to move away from their current neighbourhood.

**Table 4.4: Community links**

|   | Number        |             |                   |           | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|---|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|   | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| <i>How often do you feel that you need support or help but can't get it from anyone</i> |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Very Often/often  | 11            | 18          | 12                | 41        | 7.9           | 9.7         | 12.9              | 9.8       |
| Sometimes   | 63            | 91          | 41                | 195       | 45.3          | 49.2        | 44.1              | 46.8      |
| Never   | 65            | 76          | 40                | 181       | 46.8          | 41.1        | 43.0              | 43.4      |
| <i>How do you feel about your neighbourhood as a place to bring up children?</i>        |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Very Good/good  | 100           | 150         | 54                | 304       | 71.9          | 81.1        | 58.1              | 72.9*     |
| Fair/poor   | 39            | 35          | 39                | 113       | 28.1          | 18.9        | 41.9              | 27.1*     |
| <i>Do you participate in any ongoing community service activity</i>                     |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Yes   | 36            | 45          | 20                | 101       | 26.3          | 24.5        | 21.3              | 24.3      |
| No  | 101           | 139         | 74                | 314       | 73.7          | 75.5        | 78.7              | 75.7      |
| <i>Would you currently like to move away from your neighbourhood?</i>                   |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Yes   | 22            | 33          | 35                | 90        | 15.9          | 17.8        | 37.2              | 21.6*     |
| No  | 116           | 152         | 59                | 327       | 84.1          | 82.2        | 62.8              | 78.4*     |

Note: \* ( $\chi^2 p \leq 0.05$ )

### 4.3 Family relationships and functioning

PIEC also aims to improve the parent-child relationship by providing parents with information and support so that they gain greater confidence in their parenting skills. In order to measure this parents were asked a series of questions about their parenting. Overwhelmingly the majority of parents in the sample (over 90 %) indicated they had an affectionate relationship with their child, felt close to their child and enjoyed listening and doing things with them. However, Table 4.5 shows that in some aspects of parenting, most noticeably explaining to their child why he/she was being corrected (17 %) and talking it over with their child when he/she misbehaved (15%) occurred only sometimes, rarely or never. There were no significant differences between the areas with the exception of overall parenting. Around a fifth of parents thought they were an average parent or a person who has some trouble at being a parent. Significantly fewer parents in South West Sydney compared Central Coast and East Sydney thought they were an average parent or a person who had some trouble being a parent. Information from these questions will be compared to data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children when that data is available. This will allow comparison to a cross-section of the broader population.

**Table 4.5: Parenting Self-Efficacy**

|   | Total Number  |             |                   |           | Per cent      |             |                   |           |
|---|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
|   | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas | Central Coast | East Sydney | South West Sydney | All Areas |
| <i>Thinking about your child over the last six months, how often.....</i>                         |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| <i>... did you talk it over and reason with your child when he/she misbehaved?</i>                |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Always or almost always   | 64            | 82          | 54                | 200       | 46.4          | 44.6        | 57.5              | 48.1      |
| Often   | 55            | 77          | 32                | 164       | 39.9          | 41.9        | 34.0              | 39.4      |
| Sometimes/rarely/never or almost never  | 19            | 25          | 8                 | 52        | 13.8          | 13.5        | 8.5               | 12.5      |
| <i>....tell your child how happy he/she makes you?</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Always or almost always   | 74            | 93          | 63                | 230       | 53.2          | 50.0        | 66.3              | 54.8      |
| Often   | 52            | 72          | 23                | 147       | 37.4          | 38.7        | 24.2              | 35.0      |
| Sometimes/rarely/never or almost never  | 13            | 21          | 9                 | 43        | 9.4           | 11.3        | 9.5               | 10.2      |
| <i>....give your child reasons why rules should be obeyed?</i>                                    |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Always or almost always   | 54            | 78          | 44                | 176       | 39.1          | 41.9        | 46.8              | 42.1      |
| Often   | 58            | 82          | 32                | 172       | 42.0          | 44.1        | 34.0              | 41.2      |
| Sometimes/rarely/never or almost never  | 26            | 26          | 18                | 70        | 18.5          | 14.0        | 19.1              | 16.8      |
| <i>...explain to your child why he/she is being corrected?</i>                                    |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Always or almost always   | 51            | 83          | 45                | 179       | 36.7          | 44.9        | 47.4              | 42.7      |
| Often   | 64            | 81          | 33                | 178       | 46.0          | 43.8        | 34.7              | 42.5      |
| Sometimes/rarely/never or almost never  | 24            | 21          | 17                | 62        | 17.3          | 11.4        | 17.9              | 14.8      |
| <i>....have warm, close times together with your child?</i>                                       |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Always or almost always   | 93            | 113         | 58                | 264       | 66.9          | 60.8        | 61.1              | 62.9      |
| Often   | 40            | 64          | 32                | 136       | 28.8          | 34.4        | 33.7              | 32.4      |
| Sometimes/rarely/never or almost never  | 6             | 9           | 5                 | 20        | 4.3           | 4.8         | 5.3               | 4.8       |
| <i>...enjoy listening to your child and doing things with him/her?</i>                            |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Always or almost always   | 80            | 116         | 63                | 259       | 57.6          | 62.4        | 66.3              | 61.7      |
| Often   | 51            | 62          | 28                | 141       | 36.7          | 33.3        | 29.5              | 33.6      |
| Sometimes/rarely/never or almost never  | 8             | 8           | 4                 | 20        | 5.8           | 4.3         | 4.2               | 4.8       |
| <i>...feel close to your child, both when he/she was feeling happy and when he/she was upset?</i> |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| Always or almost always   | 98            | 134         | 65                | 297       | 70.5          | 72.0        | 68.4              | 70.7      |
| Often   | 35            | 48          | 24                | 107       | 25.2          | 25.8        | 25.3              | 25.5      |
| Sometimes/rarely/never or almost never  | 6             | 4           | 6                 | 16        | 4.3           | 2.2         | 6.3               | 3.8       |
| <i>Overall as a parent, do you feel you are...</i>  |               |             |                   |           |               |             |                   |           |
| A very good parent  | 55            | 66          | 52                | 173       | 39.6          | 35.7        | 54.7              | 41.3*     |
| A better than average parent  | 52            | 77          | 26                | 155       | 37.4          | 41.6        | 27.4              | 37.0*     |
| An average parent/ A person who has some trouble at being a parent                                | 32            | 42          | 17                | 91        | 23.0          | 22.7        | 17.9              | 21.7*     |
| Not very good at being a parent   | 0             | 0           | 0                 | 0         | 0.00          | 0.00        | 0.00              | 0.00*     |

Note: \* ( $X^2$  p  $\leq$  0.05)



## 5 Summary

Information collected for the impact evaluation relates to the primary domains in which PIEC is expected to cause changes: attachment relationships between children and caregivers; social-emotional development; and family functioning and community connectedness. The analysis in this report is broken down by area to take account of differences between these localities. It is evident that significant differences exist between the areas, most noticeably in terms of the demographic characteristics of the parents. Reflecting the characteristics of the broader population in the area South West Sydney had the highest proportion of parents born overseas, who spoke a language other than English at home and relied on government pension or benefit as their main source of income compared to the other areas. These differences will have to be taken into account when analysing changes over time.

### *Attachment Relationships*

The baseline data shows that the majority of staff have positive and effective relationships with the children. However, around a fifth of staff indicated they have negative and ineffective relationships with the children. In contrast parents completing the Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS) (Pianta, 2001) indicated over a third have high conflict and over 50 per cent have high dependency levels in their relationships with their children. Approximately one fifth of the Total CPRS scores reported by parents indicate lower overall positivity in their relationships with their children.

### *Social-emotional development*

For the majority of children the scores for both measures of social and emotional development did not indicate problem behaviours. However, for children aged between 1-3 approximately 17 per cent were of the sample were rated by parents as having high problem scores and low competence scores indicating *Of Concern* status. For children aged 3 years and over around one-fifth of the sample were rated by staff as having difficulty scores in the abnormal range. These scores vary across the areas. In contrast only ten per cent of parents rated their children in the abnormal range for the total difficulties score.

### *Community connectedness*

At baseline the majority of parents indicated that their neighbourhoods were safe and clean, they had access to good parks, basic shopping facilities and services and it was a good place to bring up children. However, there were significant differences between the areas with more parents in South West Sydney indicating that they would like to move out of the area, it was not safe for children to play outside and people were unwilling to help their neighbours than parents in East Sydney or the Central Coast.

Data will be collected again in November 2006 and November 2007 so that changes in the various domains can be analysed over time to assess the effectiveness of PIEC in terms of improvement in relationships between children, parents, child care centre staff and communities; increases in social competence and emotional regulation in children; better quality care for children enrolled at the PIEC child care centres and increases in community connectedness and the factors associated with these changes.

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