

Introduction

- Good morning. I am here today on behalf of Hon Anne Tolley MP, Minister of Education. Minister Tolley wanted me to thank you for the invitation to speak here today and to apologise that she was unable to be here herself as she is attending education meetings overseas. As MP for Auckland Central, I am pleased to be here to speak on her behalf.
- The supply of qualified teachers in early childhood education is an important issue for this Government. We encourage symposia such as this, where the opportunity to meet and discuss ideas is welcomed, and Minister Tolley and I look forward to hearing the outcomes of today's discussions.

Education priorities and the role of ECE

- The Government's key education priority is to raise student achievement.
- In the schooling sector steps to achieve this include the Literacy and Numeracy National Standards for Years 1 to 8, and the Youth Guarantee and Trades Academies in secondary schooling.
- Early childhood education, can contribute to raising achievement. We know that participation in quality early childhood education provides better outcomes for children, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- This is why the budget made a quality investment in early childhood education. Nearly \$69.7 million of new money over the next four years will be invested in extending *20 Hours ECE* to Playcentres and Kōhanga reo, increasing participation and parent choice.
- This decision was made against the backdrop of global economic challenges. With the Government needing to make every dollar count, we have focussed on delivering funding to critical areas that make the most difference for our children and young people in education today.
- Early childhood education has a role to play in improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for school age children. The precursors to literacy and numeracy are established in the early years of a child's life.
- Early childhood education can help address family cycles of underachievement and low expectations. Early childhood education can foster the positive attitudes and rich environments that are important for literacy and numeracy outcomes as children progress through school.

- Just one example is that the Competent Children, Competent Learners study in New Zealand showed early childhood education experiences were still contributing to positive outcomes in literacy and numeracy for 16 year olds.

Quality ECE

- Quality early childhood education provision is important to ensure children get the best possible start to their education. But quality in early childhood education presents a challenge to teachers, parents and policy makers alike.
- This is because there is no one agreed way of achieving it. We know that the ability of an adult to build relationships with children and to be responsive to the child is important and this has played a significant role in promoting quality in New Zealand's early childhood services.
- Quality can be achieved through good adult: child ratios, appropriate and stimulating resources for children, professional development for teachers, and good leadership and governance.

Teacher qualifications

- And of course having skilled and qualified early childhood education teachers plays an important role in improving quality and outcomes for children.
- Research shows a link between qualified teachers and quality early childhood education. Through gaining a qualification, teachers learn a number of skills that enable them to promote quality in early childhood education.
- The Government has invested in ways to increase the number of qualified teachers and we now have a solid base of qualified teachers. We are continuing to look at ways to improve the quality of teacher qualifications.
- 61% of staff in teacher-led early childhood services are qualified and registered and a further 20% are studying towards a recognised qualification. 2009 has seen an increase in enrolments in early childhood teacher education programmes.

Increasing participation

- While 95% of children currently attend ECE centres, not all children have this opportunity. This is especially the case in areas such as South Auckland, and among Māori and Pasifika children.
- We need to improve responsiveness to the needs of specific communities – particularly Māori and Pasifika populations. Our approach is to tailor locally-based solutions – such as the Counties Manukau Participation Project in South Auckland. Part of this project is to explore new ways of increasing participation – this may lead us to new ways of using the skills of qualified teachers, such as having teachers supporting playgroups.
- We also want to work towards creating an early childhood sector where workers are confident in responding to the language, identity and cultural needs of all their families. This is especially important for Māori and Pasifika children.
- We need to increase the number of teachers who are qualified to work in immersion services. For example, the proportion of registered teachers in teacher-led Pasifika bi-lingual or immersion services is 45% and 51% in teacher-led Māori bi-lingual and immersion services. This is well below the national average of 61%.
- It is important to ensure that teacher-led services are able to meet the needs of Māori and Pasifika children as approximately 95% of Pasifika and 70% of Māori children enrolled in early childhood education are enrolled in a teacher-led early childhood education service.

Teacher supply

- If participation is to be increased in teacher-led early childhood education services, we need to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of qualified teachers. The Government is committed to attracting highly skilled early childhood education teachers.
- We continue to provide significant support to services to increase the number of qualified teachers. Incentive grants, study grants and TeachNZ scholarships continue to support students, and their services, while they are studying towards a recognised early childhood qualification.
- We are currently investigating the possibility of introducing short, intensive educational programmes aimed at assisting those overseas qualified teachers who are registered with the New Zealand Teachers Council, but whose qualifications cannot currently be recognised as equivalent to a New Zealand early childhood qualification for funding and staffing purposes. Minister Tolley has asked ministry officials to advise

on ways to recognise these overseas teachers in early childhood education. A decision is expected in 2010.

- The Government recognises that some early childhood education services struggle to find teachers and we are working to find ways to alleviate this. No decisions have been made at this time about how the 2010 target of 80% registered teachers will be progressed. Minister Tolley is considering the best way to proceed with the 80% target.
- We want to ensure that our youngest children are getting quality education and care. That's why we have committed to improving adult: child ratios from 1:5 to 1:4 for under-twos. These changes will be phased in over time to ensure early childhood services have enough time to make the necessary changes. We also want to ensure that at least half of the staff working with under-twos are qualified teachers. Minister Tolley has asked ministry officials to explore options for how this might be implemented.

Conclusion

- Thank you for time today. I know that Minister Tolley is looking forward to hearing your ideas, in particular your ideas on how to increase the number of qualified early childhood teachers. I too am interested to hear the results of your meeting, and wish you all the best for your discussions.