



New Zealand Educational Institute (Inc.)

Why a “pay jolt” is needed for school support staff

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The role of support staff

Support staff are the “invisible army” of workers essential to the running of a 21st century school. Schools simply cannot function without teacher aides, librarians, ICT support, office managers, therapists and many other roles. In October, school cleaners and caretakers won a significant increase on the rates in their collective employment agreement, bringing their base pay up from the minimum adult wage (\$12 per hour) to \$14.62 an hour, effective from 1 July 2009.

Support staff have among the lowest pay rates in the public sector. According to Ministry of Education payroll data, at least 40 percent of teacher aides in New Zealand are on the grade A of their pay scale, which has a top step of \$13.53 an hour. A third of school administrative staff are on grade A of their scale, with a top step of \$15.19. Most of these people are employed for 40 weeks of the year, and are not paid in school holidays. The average annual earnings for each group are \$13,482 for 17,000 teacher aides and \$25,182 for 7000 administrative staff.

NZEI congratulates cleaners and caretakers on their recent pay increase. However it is clearly unfair to address the pay of one group of low paid workers in schools without fairly compensating others.

Why do support staff need a “pay jolt”?

More than 50 percent of support staff are teacher aides. They provide 1:1 personalised learning programmes for children with learning difficulties, special needs and/or behavioural problems. The proposed “Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy” will depend heavily on committed and professional teacher aides to support classroom teachers.

Support staff jobs have become far more complex over the past decade: these workers are not parent helpers, doing a bit of part time work; they are skilled employees with a career working in schools alongside teachers.

For each of the dozen or more occupational groups covered by the Support Staff Collective Agreement, the rates of pay they receive working in schools are significantly inferior to the market rates for comparable roles outside schools

What's the problem?

Bulk funding support staff from each school's operations grant was introduced in 1989, when schools became self managing as part of the Tomorrow's Schools reforms. The number of support staff has more than tripled since then, and funding has failed to cope with this massive increase.

Two reports from December 2006 (the Ministry of Education's School Operations Grant Review and ERO's Schools' Use of Operational Funding report) both support what NZEI has been saying: schools are finding it difficult to keep up with the increasing costs of a modern education system. There are now more than 24,000 support staff in schools – in 1989 there were around 7,000. There has been no increase to operations grants that corresponds with that huge increase in numbers.

Both major parties put the spotlight on special education in the election campaign. They were right to do so. The consistent failure to increase ORRS funding for schools in line with support staff pay increases has had the inevitable result of teacher aides' hours of work being reduced to enable schools to make ends meet. The end result is lose / lose – teacher aides' jobs are reduced and students end up with less support.

What NZEI wants

NZEI currently represents 12,500 support staff, or more than 50 percent of the total number in primary and secondary schools.

NZEI is advocating for:

- An immediate "pay jolt" to drag the pay of teacher aides and other support staff out of the severely low paid bracket and match the increases for their caretaker and cleaner colleagues.
- An increase in the operations grant, with funds clearly identified to pay for fair pay for support staff.