

Media Release	September 3, 2009
From NZEI Te Riu Roa	For immediate use

OECD REPORT A WAKE UP CALL FOR CHILDREN'S FUTURES

An OECD report on children's wellbeing is a wake up call that education initiatives alone won't lift the achievement levels of New Zealand's disadvantaged children, says the education sector union NZEI Te Riu Roa.

The report "Doing Better for Children" says despite their relatively poor material living conditions, New Zealand children manage high rates of educational achievement – the fourth best in the OECD - but there is a large gap between good and poor performers.

NZEI President Frances Nelson says children who are not well-fed or housed, may live in an environment of abuse or have health needs that are not being met, will clearly find it harder to learn.

"In times of economic constraint the money the government is spending introducing National Standards could arguably be better directed to addressing the social and economic factors which affect student learning."

The report also says New Zealand spends only half the OECD average on children aged 0-6. It recommends investing more money on younger children to reduce social inequity.

Frances Nelson says early childhood education provides the foundation for all future learning and the report backs up the need to have quality early childhood education and a qualified early childhood teacher workforce in communities throughout the country.

"If the goal is happy, healthy, educated children who will go on to become good citizens, schools must, and are playing their part, but a wider social response is needed to improve the lot of all New Zealand families," she says.

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