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Pay talks for school support staff as they battle pay inequity

Pay negotiations get underway today (Thursday 31 March) for thousands of school support staff just as a report highlights the huge level of pay inequity they face.

Support staff such as teacher aides and administrators are essential in supporting children's learning and in the day-to-day management of schools but are among the lowest paid workforces in the country, with minimum starting rates of just \$14 an hour.

An independent job evaluation report commissioned by their union NZEI Te Riu Roa shows the extent to which their skills and responsibilities are not fairly recognised. It compared support staff pay and skills with the male dominated jobs of corrections officers and cleaners and caretakers. It found pay discrepancies at all levels and differences of as much as \$7.95 in terms of starting rates between some support staff and corrections officers.

"The findings really come as no surprise but they are telling in terms of the level of pay inequity which is out there," says NZEI National Secretary Paul Goulter.

"The government continues to systematically ignore evidence of pay inequity and has shut down all moves aimed at closing the gender pay gap. It is denying thousands of women the opportunity to improve their pay rates, advance their careers and be treated professionally."

The job evaluation report also recommends that support staff be paid centrally by the Ministry of Education in the same way as teachers. Support staff are currently funded through each school's operational funding – the majority don't get paid during term-breaks and can see their hours cut if schools are forced to juggle their budgets. The report says that is a barrier to equitable pay, income security and professional development.

"School support staff put a lot of time and professional effort into schools and children's learning. It shouldn't be such an uphill battle for them to be valued for the work they do and have the increasing demands of their jobs recognised," Mr Goulter says.

When pay talks start today NZEI will be seeking to negotiate a fair deal for support staff which would raise minimum rates to \$15 an hour and better recognise the professionalism of the work they do.