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Budget launches attack on quality teaching for youngest learners

Today's 2010 Budget is a nice-looking parcel with some nasty surprises wrapped inside when it comes to education, says NZEI.

Overall the Budget threatens to dumb down the early childhood sector by punishing the services most committed to improving quality. The \$280 million removed from funding for centres with 80% or more qualified teachers will mean centres will have to absorb an extra cost of around \$1.50 an hour per child, or pass it on to the parents of young children. This decision will impact 92,000 children in 2000 ECE centres.

Centres will not be allowed to pass on the additional cost to children receiving 20 hours ECE, so NZEI says this means the cost will fall disproportionately on children under 3 and children in ECE for more than 20 hours a week.

"This is going to be costly for children and their families, and it's a kick in the guts for the people who have worked hardest to provide quality for our youngest citizens," NZEI Vice President Judith Nowotarski says. "While we welcome the boost of \$91.8 million over four years for Maori and Pasifika children, this shouldn't be at the expense of quality teaching and learning for all."

Increased ECE costs could well wipe out any tax advantage from the Budget for families with young children. For example, someone on the average salary of around \$44,000 a year gets an \$11.41 increase a week after tax cuts and increased GST; this could easily be wiped out if their child is under-3 or in ECE for more than 20 hours. (See www.nzctu.org.nz for the NZCTU analysis of the Budget).

"NZEI says recognising primary teacher qualifications for ECE is an acknowledgement that "a teacher is a teacher is a teacher" - that there needs to be a united teaching profession. For more details about the implications of the Budget for ECE, go to www.ecetogether.org.nz

Primary

Judith Nowotarski says primary schools, particularly in the light of increases in GST, would have been hoping for more than the 4% increase in the operations grant, but will see it as realistic.

She says NZEI welcomes as common sense the Government's decision to cancel proposed cuts of \$45 million in the teacher staffing budget next year. NZEI welcomes the extension of funding for CRT to all schools with years 7 and 8 students. However, NZEI is disappointed that there are cuts to teacher study grants and other professional development and support.

The proposal to allow schools to cash in unused teacher staffing funding threatened to tempt schools in tight financial situations to increase class sizes. "In fact, every teacher counts," Judith Nowotarski says. "When schools are facing the challenges of the new Curriculum and National Standards this is not the time to provide incentives to minimise teacher:student numbers."

Support Staff

While the 4% increase in the Budget points to more sustainable funding for a fair deal for support staff than last year's 1.9% increase, there is a substantial fish-hook for support staff working in secondary schools. From next year, the operations grant for secondary schools will be based on quarterly roll numbers and the Government expects this to lead to a \$6 million reduction in expenditure.

Judith Nowotarski said the Government was effectively making the conditions of employment of support staff in secondary schools hostage to each term's student numbers.

Special Education

The Budget funds a "Positive Behaviour for Learning" initiative for two years, a positive step, but it relies on frontline Ministry staff being available to provide the training, Judith Nowotarski says.

"As the union for frontline special education workers, we're pleased the Budget

increases the number of hours for Education Support Workers. This will be good if it means that this already highly casualised workforce has access to better jobs, but it does nothing to address the pay rate for ESWs. A 2009 pay investigation concluded they were worth at least \$2 an hour more than their current pay rates."

She says the Budget increase for pay rates for Special Education-funded teacher aides will be positive if it keeps the rates paid to schools in line with negotiated pay increases.

Read more about the Budget

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0800 NZEI HELP (0800 693 443) :: PO Box 466, Wellington, NZ, 6140

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