

SPEECH NOTES

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ADDRESS NEW ZEALAND FREE KINDERGARTEN UNION AGM  
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Mr Harrison, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, - I am pleased to have the opportunity to address this your 62nd annual conference. It's the first time I've met with you as I usually handle the tertiary sector. The Prime Minister, and Minister of Education, David Lange, who would have liked to have been here sends his regards and best wishes for a successful conference.

My involvement in education is not confined to the tertiary area for I'm very much aware of the considerable contribution your union and individual associations are making to early childhood education in New Zealand. Our kindergartens are being well-managed, well-administered and well-cared for, and a considerable part of the credit for that state of affairs is yours individually and collectively. Be assured that your contribution to education is neither unnoticed nor unappreciated.



I want to touch on three important issues which are of concern to us all. ~~Firstly~~, I want to refer to the 1988 Budget and to the provision made by the Government for early childhood education. Secondly, I want to pick up the matter of parent education which Margery Renwick has drawn to your attention, and finally I would like to discuss with you the Government's response to the recommendations of the Picot Report as they affect early childhood education.

~~Firstly~~, the Budget. I believe the Budget was a positive one for education in general and for early childhood education in particular. Expenditure in Vote:Education has moved from \$3,118M in 1987-88 to \$3,481M in 1988-89, an increase of 363 million or a hike of 11.6%. Education funding has not been contracted or curtailed. The Government has said it values education and has put its money where its mouth is. We're continuing to invest in education to reap the benefits of a skilled, adaptable, intelligent workforce and a thinking society.

But what of early childhood education? I am vitally interested in early childhood education as I have two preschoolers and one child in the first year of primary schools. Like all parents, I want the best provision for my children. I recognise the need for a parent-state partnership in this provision and I'm pleased to reiterate the Government's commitment to early childhood education.



The Government sees early childhood education as having a priority amongst its social programmes. That's why we have voted your sector an additional \$11.596M in this financial year. Expenditure on early childhood education has risen from \$59.8M in 1987-88 to \$71.4M in 1988-89. That represents a 19.4% increase in funding to early childhood education - considerably more than the general increase in education expenditure.

Some of that additional expenditure has been allocated to enable new policies, or increases to existing policies, to be put into place in early childhood. Let me talk then about the policies of prime interest to you - those that impact on the kindergarten service.

I know that the ratio of two trained teachers to 40 children for a kindergarten session has remained virtually unchanged for 36 years. That ratio has made it difficult for kindergartens to provide adequately for the individual needs and abilities of children. Children are individuals, unique in their particular development, and deserving of differential treatment by teachers and parents alike. In order to provide for quality and meet the individual needs of children, teacher-child ratios in kindergartens have to be lowered from the traditional 1:20 ratio.

The Government has recognised the need to improve the ratio of teachers to children in kindergartens and has continued the phased introduction of the Pupil Session Unit Staffing Scheme as funding and staffing have permitted. An evaluation of the effect of having a third teacher in kindergartens was carried out last year by Dr Anne Smith of Otago University. Her recently released report indicated that in three teacher kindergartens there is a reduction in negative peer behaviours, an increase in verbal and non-verbal interaction with teachers, more positive play, an increase in interaction with parents, and a happier environment. Three teacher kindergartens are obviously beneficial to children to parents and to teachers. Incidentally, these findings are very similar to overseas studies on the effects of improving teacher-child ratios.

Because of the Government's commitment to improve kindergarten staffing and provide quality early childhood education for our young children, 50 additional teacher positions were approved in the recent Budget, at a cost of \$1.5M, to further implement the PSU Staffing Scheme. Prior to the 1988 Budget 104 teachers had been approved and allocated to 114 kindergartens under the PSU scheme and of those 104, 100 had been approved by this Government. The latest addition of 50 brings to 150 the number of teachers added to the kindergarten system since we took office.



You will doubtless recall that a period of five years was originally envisaged as the time frame for the completion of the Kindergarten Staffing Scheme. But you would also appreciate that both available funding and available staffing have been the critical factors in the speed with which the Government has been able to implement improved staffing levels for kindergartens. A major obstacle to faster implementation has been the availability of teachers from the community pool to fill new positions.

As managers of kindergartens you would know that teacher supply is uneven across the country. While there may be surpluses in some areas, shortages apply elsewhere. That's why the allocation of the 50 new positions will be targeted to areas best able to supply the additional teachers, and to those kindergartens which have full rolls, high waiting lists, and special educational needs. I believe that increases to the teachers college trainee entry quotas, coupled with recent improvements in salaries and conditions of service, should be an incentive to attract trained staff to fill the new positions. It may be difficult though for some associations to attract staff through the normal channels. That's why \$100,000 has been set aside as part of this policy for use in advertising and in attracting trained teachers back to the service.

I congratulate the union and the Kindergarten Teachers Association for their co-operation in initiating quick action on this policy. The Department of Education has already sent questionnaires out to kindergartens eligible to receive an additional teacher. Your deadlines for processing, for selection, for advertisement and for consideration by appointments committees, are tight, but I believe you'll meet them as I know you are very well served by your union officers and representatives.

I said I was going to talk about the Budget but I want to divert you for a moment at this point. The policy giving approval for the 50 additional PSU teachers, also contained funding for teacher travel, for inservice education, for relievers, for additional trainees and for 1.25 additional senior teachers and related travel. This additional senior teacher staffing will augment a further initiative of the Government earlier this year when, as part of the kindergarten teachers salary claim, (which, by the way cost in excess of \$3M) approval was given for the appointment of the extra senior teachers required to introduce the new staffing entitlement of the Kindergarten Professional Support Scheme. The one senior teacher to 40 teachers basis for staffing the professional support scheme should enable you as associations to be better served and for teachers to be better supported.



I must further congratulate your constituent associations for their preparedness to share the resource of the senior teachers across association boundaries and spheres of management. The formation of associations into eight management committees is a model of co-operation rarely seen amongst competing employing authorities. I wish the scheme well knowing that it is a vital means to enhance the quality of education offered to young children. I know you are hoping to have the new senior teachers appointed by next term and trust that you'll be able to well use the additional 1.25 senior teacher equivalent approved in this recent Budget.

I would also remind you that as part of the salary settlement earlier this year \$105,000 was earmarked for assisting associations in advertising and in creating incentives to help attract staff to areas where there has been difficulty in finding and retaining teachers. I trust this fund will achieve its objectives particularly in areas like Waiouru and Wairoa.

I must reiterate that early childhood education is a priority with this Government. The start in life and in education that children get in their early years shapes the kind of adults they become. That's why this year the Government has not only provided a salary increase for kindergarten teachers, additional staffing for the kindergarten professional support scheme, staffing incentive grants, and

50 extra teachers, it has also provided an increase in grants to playcentres, funding support for the establishment of Pacific Island language nests, funds for non-formal parent education, support for parents through extra early childhood community workers, and grants to Parents Centres - all as new policies within the 1988 Budget.

I'd like to touch briefly on each of these initiatives - not just because they are early childhood initiatives and part of the Budget, but because they are within the Government's emphasis on parent education and reflect the importance that the Government attaches to good parenting practices and skills. Parents are a child's first and most important teachers. The services you provide and the support given by the Government can't and shouldn't supplant the vital, educative, caring role of parents. Rather we should both assist and support parents in carrying out their society-forming responsibilities. Together we should pursue the goal of providing the best possible environment for parents and children to grow and learn.

Providing support and education for parents is a sound investment for our society both for today and for the future. Parents have the power to shape and mould the society of tomorrow by the parenting they engage in today. That's why the Government has approved seven policy initiatives, amounting to \$2.4M in this Budget, which are



designed to support and assist parents in the vital role of parenting. You may recall that the Roper Report recommended that community-based networks should be developed to help parents in the crucial role of bringing up children. These initiatives are entirely consistent with those recommendations, and reflect the strong belief that this Government has that good parenting provides a sound basis for a happy and successful life.

Let me touch on each of the policy initiatives separately before I turn to parent education in the kindergarten setting.

Firstly, playcentre funding.

Playcentre's philosophy has been to include all the family as members and to involve parents fully in all aspects of the movement. Education and support are provided through parent-helping in the centre; parent education programmes; and opportunities for parents to support one another and to share their concerns and ideas. The involvement of parents with their children in the early years is essential for bonding and attachment. Playcentre policies have stressed the need for separation to be gradual and for parents to realise the importance of attachment to ensure children feel protected and develop a sense of security. Playcentre's policy of involving parents in leadership and management

roles has given parents, particularly mothers, skills training which has been a spring-board to achievement in public life. Over 4000 parents are involved each year in new parent education programmes, including field-based training which was pioneered by playcentre to provide training for parents in rural and isolated areas.

They now receive as part of the Budget, funding for under two and a half year olds, increases to their liaison grants, and an increase in the grant to the Playcentre Federation. The total increase of \$350,000, not only recognises the valuable parent support function of playcentre - but will help to foster it.

\$927,000 in a full year has been allocated to assist the development of Pacific Island language nests. Pacific Island parents have taken the initiative to establish language nests to foster the self-esteem of young children, to support families, and to assist parents to gain confidence in their parenting skills. The Government recognises the value of such initiatives and has elected to provide monetary support. A trust is to be established and it will be their responsibility to provide management oversight, similar to your own union, to the language nests. I look forward to their prospering. They will provide both cultural diversity and harmony to our society.



The emergence of culturally appropriate early childhood services is a new demand. The Government is responding to this need. I challenge you to examine the type of programme you are providing for your local community. How well does it meet the cultural identities of the families? Could you do things differently? Could you provide programmes which appeal to all the cultures in your community?

Many of you would appreciate the value and importance of community preschool workers. In fact, some of your associations such as Auckland, have directly employed such workers to promote the involvement of parents and children in kindergartens. Community preschool workers have, in the past, worked with parents and children in targeted communities to facilitate both parent and early childhood education. Rae Julian, now a Human Rights Commissioner, undertook research on the community preschool workers scheme last year, and found that a continuation and expansion of the scheme was warranted. Because of the valuable contribution that such workers make to parent education and family support the Government has voted almost \$1M extra in a full year to upgrade the salaries and conditions of service of the existing 30 full-time equivalents workers. It has also re-designated them Early Childhood Community Workers and given them greater responsibility in parenting work and support. A further 17 such positions. Such workers will be able to support parents in their own homes and communities,

work across all the early childhood services, and encourage families to use these services. They are to promote good parenting practice and quality early childhood education.

Finally in this raft of parent education initiatives, the Government has approved \$150,000 for parent education and support through non-formal means. \$130,000 will be distributed through CILANZ, the newly established Committee for Independent Learning Aotearoa/New Zealand, to parent groups who do not generally get involved in mainstream parent education courses. The non-formal learning sector comprises those learning opportunities available, in general, outside of the teaching institutions, and is characterised by its flexibility in responding to learning needs and the skilled enthusiasm of its mainly unpaid workers. A number of recent reports, including the Roper Report, have highlighted the need for parents to have access to education and support during all stages of a child's development. Groups such as whanau support, New Mother's Support, community houses and Parentline, have been developed by parents for parents, and can respond to parenting issues in a non-threatening and appropriate way. Additionally, \$20,000 will be made available as a grant to the Federation of NZ Parents Centres.

All in all that's quite an injection of new money, \$2.4M to be exact, into parent education and consequently into early childhood education. But the Government supports the notion



that early childhood education can't be divorced from parent education and support. The two are interdependent, are inextricably linked - the quality of parenting, indisputably determines the quality of early childhood education. That's why the two must always be treated in concert.

The importance of acknowledging and involving parents as prime educators of their children has been confirmed by research. "The variation in parental attitudes can account for more of the variation in children's school achievement than either the variation in home circumstances or in school." - National Children's Bureau (1967). In America, Bronfenbrenner and the Head Start Consortium, have indicated that including parents in early childhood education seems to be more effective in terms of long-term gains. This point was reiterated by Dr David Weiakrt, keynote speaker at the 4th Early Childhood Convention held in Wellington in 1987 - "There (should be) good parental involvement, good administration, inclusion of the family and the group at large in the on-going programmes. These things are essential for high quality programmes."

But could I now come closer to home and look at parent education in the kindergarten setting. I understand that Margery Renwick has already reported to you on research findings related to such issues as home visiting, group pre-entry sessions, kindergarten teacher support for parents,

and parental expectations for kindergartens. As one would expect the extent of contact between teachers and parents varies from kindergarten to kindergarten dependent on the personality, experience and commitment of individual teachers as well as the economic status, ethnicity, and personal circumstances of families associated with the kindergarten. A second finding is that although parents value their contact with teachers, they are most likely to turn to family and friends for support. This may well be a function of the role parents and teachers see kindergartens as playing. Both parents and teachers view the kindergarten as primarily for children - and parents tend to judge a kindergarten by the quality of the experiences provided for children rather than the amount of parent support provided.

Teachers certainly wish to encourage parents to be involved in the kindergarten; they want to support parents in their parenting role; and they want to support parents with their own and their childrens problems. These are admirable and worthwhile objectives and ones which as employing and controlling authorities you would wish to foster and to help facilitate.

Again teachers saw both advantages and disadvantages in parents helping during programme times. While parent help can assist in lowering adult child ratio, improving teacher/parent relationships, and in understanding child



development, care must be taken to ensure that approaches, methods, roles, and organisational requirements are understood by all those involved. Again I see a crucial role for you as managers in ensuring that the complementary role of parents and teachers is conducive to the effective working of kindergartens. Parents want to be welcome, they want to participate and means should be found to give creative expression to that desire.

One of the benefits of the Government's initiative last year in introducing three year preservice training is that future teachers will have had training and gained skills in working more closely with parents in a number of early childhood settings. I understand working with parents has a strong emphasis throughout the integrated course.

Teachers also want to help parents with their problems and those of their children according to Margery's research. It may well be that the introduction and flexible use of the third teacher in PSU kindergartens could assist with this objective. It is certain that what affects parents impacts on their children. Support of parents by kindergarten teachers is a worthwhile activity, and one which should be encouraged to the benefit of all concerned.

Could I finally turn to the Picot Report. I note that your conference theme refers to this particular conference as your last.

(Dr Anne Meade)

I would like to conclude by wishing you a profitable and successful conference.