

Teachers with training best for pre-school



Antony Phillips
editor@hbtoday.co.nz

AFTER four decades, I still remember kindergarten. My teacher's favourite colour was orange and so it instantly became my favourite too. There was a petrol pump built by dads at a weekend working bee at which we could fill up our pedal cars. Whenever anyone had a birthday, there was animal biscuits and coloured milk.

And we little kids learnt a lot — well, I think we learnt a lot. One thing is for sure, we were scared but excited about going on to the big world of primary school because we had been properly prepared for learning and we wanted to know more.

There is a benefit to preparing children for school and the best people to do that are teachers trained in early education.

Employing qualified teachers will become a lot less likely for pre-schools, however, as changes announced in the Budget mean that from November, there will be no additional Government funding to do so.

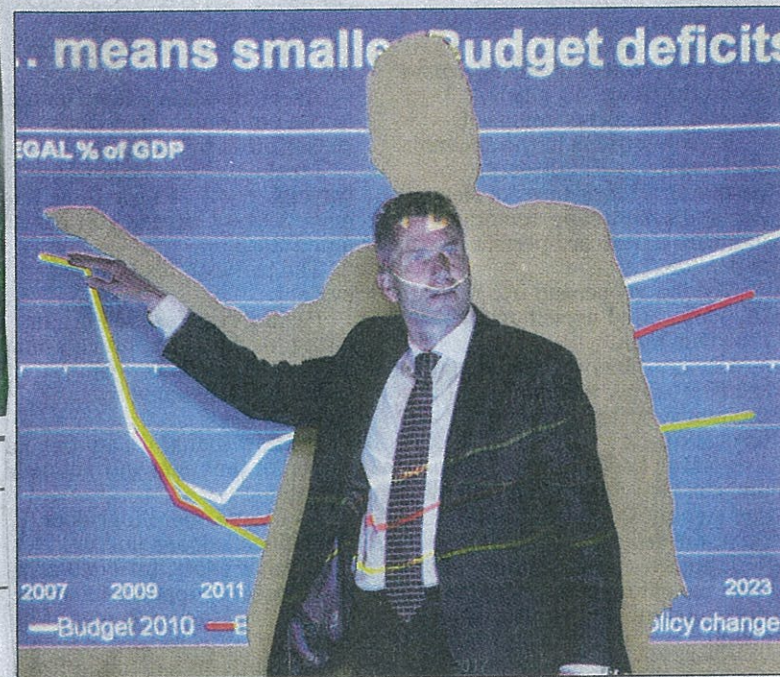
At present, early childhood centres at which qualified teachers make up more than 80 per cent of the staff receive higher funding rates than other centres. From November, there will be no additional funding for those centres.

In other words, there will be a lot lower likelihood that children will be prepared for school by teachers qualified to do so.

Napier MP Chris Tremain sought to explain the Government's budget changes at a public meeting last night and was grilled by the Napier Kindergarten Association which is understandably not happy.

The association says it has been told to either reduce staff numbers or increase fees in order to pay qualified teachers.

Mr Tremain temporarily dodged a bullet by proposing a later meeting to discuss the issue but he will be taken up on the offer and the Government's change of stance on funding for early childhood education will take some explaining. Because, frankly, trained teachers are best placed to prepare our children for school.



INFORMING: Chris Tremain says the Government's rationale for changing the early childhood education funding system is to reduce funding disparities between centres. PICTURE / DUNCAN BROWN HBT101853-04

MP fronts up on kindy funding

by Caitlin Nobes
caitlin.nobes@hbtoday.co.nz

Women from the Napier Kindergarten Association grilled Napier MP Chris Tremain last night about the Government's early childhood education funding.

About 20 people attended a meeting in Clive Square Memorial Hall in Napier where Mr Tremain explained the Budget and answered questions.

The Napier Kindergarten Association asked the MP about the process that had derailed what

had been a long-term government target to have 100 per cent trained teachers in early childhood education centres.

Under the previous Budget early childhood centres where qualified teachers made up more than 80 per cent of the staff received higher funding rates than other centres.

From November, there would be no additional funding for those centres.

Kindergartens only employ qualified teachers. But kindergartens estimated funding

would decrease by 13 per cent despite an overall increase to the early childhood sector.

Napier Kindergarten Association general manager Helen McNaughten said the Government had suggested kindergartens could make up the loss of income by either reducing staff or increasing fees. The regional branch of the organisation had not finalised its strategy and still had to consult with teachers.

She said the MP offered the organisation the chance to meet him later to discuss the issue.

It would be a good opportunity to explain the key issues and what the changes meant for kindergartens and families in Hawke's Bay.

"Trained teachers have the skills to understand and recognise the development of children and to be able to identify when children may need specialist support or

even when a family might need additional support," she said.

Mr Tremain said the role of a Member of Parliament was to be available and to give people an opportunity to express their concerns.

The Government's rationale for changing the funding system was to reduce funding disparities between centres and increase accessibility for low-income families, he said.

Education was one of the few areas to receive a funding increase in the Budget.

Other meeting attendees asked about the Emission Trading Scheme and about blind trusts.

"The hardy souls who braved the cold got an overview of the Budget and the initiatives taken and it gave them an outlet to voice concerns. I think that's a good thing," Mr Tremain said.

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CARING ABOUT KINDIES: Napier Kindergarten Association representatives Helen McNaughten (left), Beth Huddleston, Sharon Faulknor, Deborah Neilson, education manager Eileen Kennedy and Jo Cox ask questions. PICTURE / DUNCAN BROWN HBT101853-03

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