

Rally to highlight Govt teacher ratio cutbacks

By Morgan Tait
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Hastings will host a rally on Sunday for people in Hawke's Bay to show their concerns about government changes to early childhood education funding.

Hundreds of parents and teachers throughout Hawke's Bay will protest against changes that reduced funding to early childhood education centres with high ratios of qualified teachers.

Spokeswoman Hayley Whitaker, of the New Zealand Education Institute (NZEI), the sector's union, said the action was needed to stave off threats to quality education and to demonstrate its view that it's a key election-year issue.

"It's all about kids and parents and the message is really that voters are coming to protest

against something they believe strongly about, showing their belief that early childhood centres are important," she said.

Ms Whitaker said tomorrow's rally could attract more than 700 people.



CHRIS TREMAIN

Several speakers are coming to the event, including NZEI national secretary Paul Gaultier, Heretaunga Kindergarten Association president Bronwen Bertram and Hastings District Councillor Henare O'Keefe.

The rally comes as local National Party MPs publicly

support the legislation changes.

Napier MP Chris Tremain announced this week that the Napier Kindergarten Association disclosed at its annual meeting it was delivering more services for less money.

"The association has achieved this result without reducing the

100 per cent teacher qualified rates without increasing costs to parents and without any loss of jobs, while at the same time increasing access to more kids," he said.

"This is an outstanding result and goes to the heart of the Government's drive to get more value for taxpayer dollars."

Last month, National MP for Wairarapa John Hayes said in opposition to a public meeting in Dannevirke that the changes were made to benefit the system, not hinder it.

"In the past five years spending has trebled [on early childhood education] but there was only a 1 per cent rise in the number of children using the services," he said.

"There were not enough kids being covered and it was using too much money."

■ People will start gathering at 10.45am at Civic Square on Sunday and will walk to the clock tower for the rally start at about 11.30am.

HB Today Fri 15 April 2011

Protesters oppose cuts

Belt-tightening will hurt early childhood education: union

By Morgan Tait
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More than 100 protesters turned out in downtown Hastings on Saturday morning to show their opposition to Government-imposed changes to early childhood education funding.

Spokeswoman Hayley Whitaker of the New Zealand Education Institute (NZEI), the sector's union, said the peaceful rally was to oppose cuts to funding for centres with qualified-teacher ratios of

more than 80 per cent.

"Children, parents, grandparents, whanau, friends, teachers and activists came out in force against the Government's ECE funding cuts, despite the rain and cold," she said.

"They listened to a range of speakers including NZEI Te Riu Roa's national secretary Paul Goulter, Heretaunga Kindergarten Association general manager Bronwen Bertram, parent and teacher Matt Allen, Heretaunga

Kindergarten Association president Pip West, Te Whare Aroha o Nga Mokopuna's administrator Phil Horan and local councillor and passionate advocate for tamariki Henare O'Keefe."

On February 1, funding changes came into effect to reduce spending in ECE centres with more than 80 per cent of fully trained staff.

NZEI said the sector lost \$285 million for teacher training, professional development and running costs — forcing centres to put up

fees or reduce staff.

Education Minister Anne Tolley said the Government's total spend on early childhood education was \$1.4 billion for the coming year — the most ever spent on the sector by a Government.

THESE CUTS DON'T HEAL: Protesters braved the rain and cold on Saturday morning in Hastings to oppose funding cuts to the early childhood education sector.

PHOTO/SUPPLIED



Sadness mixes with delight at Taradale

By Morgan Tait
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One huge loss at Taradale High School was countered by a national-title win this week.

Mr McCawe was a coach of the adventure team who won their title on the same night as his retirement party. Making it more poignant was that he helped develop the event during the 1980s.



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50th party reminder of foibles

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Kids to pay price for funding cuts

WEDNESDAY WRITE-IN

I write regarding Chris Tremain's comments about the Napier Kindergarten Association's annual general meeting last week, and how he saw our achievements as "getting to the heart of the Government's drive to get more value for taxpayers' money".

While applauding our achievements, he seems to have missed the point — you can't use our 2010 results to defend budget cuts which do not take effect until this year.

Mr Tremain stated we were delivering more services for less money. This is incorrect. Last year the additional hours our services were open for were funded at the 100 per cent rate that was in place before the funding cuts took effect.

Furthermore, we have been progressively increasing available participation hours since 2007, rather than just as a response to the funding cuts announced in 2010, as was implied. It seems ironic to applaud us for maintaining 100 per cent trained teachers, while cutting the funding for doing so at the same time.

As a community-based, not-for-profit early childhood education organisation the government has always got more value for taxpayer dollars from our kindergartens. We have delivered for more than 50 years the highest-quality education at the most affordable cost, and

in the areas the Government wishes to target. Rest assured the taxpayer dollar has been well looked after by kindergartens — being placed back into our communities rather than for the benefit of profit-driven investors.

From the government funding we receive, our association subsidises the fee costs of every family attending to the extent that 98 per cent of our families are accessing up to 28 hours of ECE per week free of charge. However, as we now face the full effects of the funding cuts coupled with the rising costs of operating our kindergartens, our ability to continue to support fee subsidies this year is in jeopardy.

What has not been taken into account by the Government's drive to get more value for taxpayer dollars is the real (but not measured in dollars) benefit to families in crisis, children with special needs and lower-income families of having access to the skills and knowledge of trained teachers — something parents spoke passionately about at our AGM and for which they urged the funding to be restored. What is also not taken into account is the growing evidence of the benefits of high-quality early childhood education for the child and society.

Perhaps before politicians quote the "trebling costs of ECE in the last five years for only a 1 per cent rise on the participation levels" as justification for the cuts, they should review the Ministry of Education website for the actual statistics.

The trickle-down effect of the cuts has begun and will affect our families and staff. As an organisation already delivering true value for the taxpayer dollar and high-quality education in the areas the Government is targeting, this broad-brush approach to cutting funding hurts the very people providing what Mr Tremain so roundly commended.

As for parents, you should be concerned about the Government's lowering of the standards for trained teacher ratios — ultimately, it's your children who will pay the price.

Helen McNaughten
Napier Kindergarten Association

Doing more with less

I write to congratulate the Napier Kindergarten Association. Despite a reduction in Government funding the association disclosed at its annual general meeting that it will deliver more

services for less money during the 2011 year. The 2010 accounts report that the association made a surplus of \$328,816 even though they had budgeted for a \$139,739 loss. This surplus was up from \$274,272 in 2009.

This represents a total profit of more than \$500,000 in just two years. On top of this, their balance sheet shows investments of \$1.85 million and equity of \$1.4 million.

I was interested to know what the budget forecast for this year would be (given the funding fall) and was told that a \$70,000 deficit was budgeted — significantly less than the \$139,739 budgeted deficit for last year.

The report says that the fall in funding will be addressed by introducing Friday afternoon sessions, opening for five more days, diversifying Marewa and Taradale to five-day licences and by trimming some expenses.

This has resulted in more services for less money. An outstanding achievement!

The association have achieved this result without reducing the 100 per cent teacher-qualified rates, without any loss of jobs, while at the same time increasing access for more kids.

Their sound financial management will add to the additional funding of \$207 million allocated to early childhood education (ECE) in Budget 2011. In some

areas of New Zealand, four in 10 children arrive at primary school having had no ECE.

The Napier Kindergarten result will allow more access to ECE for kids in disadvantaged communities, helping to ensure better educational outcomes.

This is a great result and shows what can be achieved in tough economic times.

Chris Tremain
MP for Napier

Brass and pipe bands

What a fantastic show by the Port of Napier Brass Band and the Sticks and Drones Pipe Band at the Napier Municipal Theatre on Sunday afternoon.

For anyone who thinks pipe bands or brass bands are too "last century" and not "sexy" enough to bother with, think again! You missed an exhilarating and uplifting afternoon.

The music was so smooth, full and emotive. The bonus of having Celtic and Scottish dancers was icing on the cake.

A big thank you to all the musicians and performers for showcasing the enormous talent we have here.

Hope to see more of you all, especially the combination of both bands playing together. Hats off to all of you.

L. Pyke
Napier