

Over 600 ECE professionals, parents, children and supporters participated in a peaceful protest through Emerson Street in Napier. The protest was aimed at the Government's removal of funding for 100% trained teachers in early childhood education.





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**CHILDREN FIRST:** Marchers in Napier's Civic Square protest budget cuts for early childhood education services.

PICTURE / PAUL TAYLOR HBT105406-01

## Protest at child education cuts

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Hundreds of marchers turned out in Napier to protest against budget cuts for early childhood education centres.

Parents, grandparents and children joined with teachers and early childhood workers to show support for retaining subsidies for qualified teachers.

The march was part of a nationwide protest at Government plans to cut \$295 million from the early childhood education sector by removing subsidies to services which employ more than 80 per cent qualified

teachers.

The cuts mean early childhood centres may need to lay off qualified teachers, put up fees or cut costs elsewhere, says Hastings kindergarten teacher Hayley Whitaker, who was "exceptionally pleased" at Saturday's turnout, estimated at more than 600 people.

"We were pleasantly surprised to have that number of people turn out, and be really strong and staunch."

The marchers walked from Civic Square along Emerson St to the Sound Shell, where they heard from local early childhood centre operators.

Phil Horan from Te Whare Aroha O Nga Mokopuna in Flaxmere spoke about the impact the changes would have on Maori and Pacific children if services were forced to put up their fees.

Other speakers included Napier kindergarten association general manager Helen McNaughton, and Labour MPs Stuart Nash and Rick Barker.

Napier MP Chris Tremain was given a rowdy response when he spoke to the protesters.

"He got a really clear message from the group that they were totally unimpressed," Ms Whitaker said.