

20 July 2009

Hon Anne Tolley
Minister of Education
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON

Dear Minister

Tēnā koe

On 10-12 July 2009, 530 delegates gathered at our 46th Annual Conference to address the topic: "Respecting our youngest citizens".

Delegates included respected international and national academics and researchers, representative of iwi Maori and Pasifika communities and grassroots early childhood practitioners from throughout New Zealand.

Thank you for attending this conference and sharing your government's vision for early childhood education.

Delegates were heartened to hear of your commitment to high quality early childhood education for all of New Zealand's children and your belief that teacher qualifications, teacher-child ratios and leadership are integral to quality.

We strongly applaud your intention that at least 50% of teachers working with children under 2 be qualified and registered.

We are very encouraged by your promise of a teacher supply strategy which enables this intent to become a reality.

We are also encouraged by your implicit commitment to regulating the 2012 qualified teacher target which sees 70% of teachers holding a recognised qualification and 30% enrolled in teacher education programmes.

As members of the early childhood profession, we stand tall and proud amongst our international community in no small part because of the investment of past and present governments in our teaching workforce.

Our conference focus on "our youngest citizens" generated substantive discussion and debate about the impact of policy on the experience of children under 2, 25% of whom are enrolled in ECE services.

Whilst undeniably competent and resourceful, if they are to achieve their full potential these youngest children must experience enduring relationships with highly responsive adults who are able to support the development of positive learning dispositions.

As well as passion, teachers in early childhood settings need a deep understanding of how children learn and the ability to engage effectively with children and their families to 'notice, recognise and respond' to learning that is valued by the child's community.

Because of this, conference delegates were extremely concerned about the effects of tertiary funding caps on teacher supply, the significant reduction of professional development funding and the termination of the Centre of Innovation research projects in the 2009 Budget.

We are very troubled by these changes which can only lead to a loss of momentum at a time when more and more young children are entering ECE services.

Pedagogical leadership is crucial to ensuring high quality experience.

We urge you therefore to consider the following recommendations:

1. Lift the funding cap on ECE initial teacher education enrolments until such time as the teacher supply issue is fully resolved.
2. Clarify the government's intention with regard to professional development for the ECE sector and provide assurance of continued future investment.
3. Reinstate government's support for practitioner led research in early childhood education at the earliest possibility so that we can engage thoughtfully with our questions with our communities and make the biggest difference in the lives of children.

We acknowledge that this government faces many competing priorities in the context of an economic recession, requiring hard choices to be made.

Do not allow our youngest citizens to be the casualties. They deserve our very best.

Nāku noa, nā

Nancy Bell
Chief Executive