

Budget to boost education [NZ] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Education appears set to be one of the big winners of this year's budget, with nearly \$100 million to be pumped into industry training and a lot more spending signalled yesterday on early childhood education.

Finance Minister Michael Cullen said in a speech yesterday that the budget would also provide "major new funding in the area of early childhood education".

Human capital was the most important input in a modern economy and the full development of young people was crucial to that, he said.

"Our biggest challenge in that respect lies in not getting our children to the summit but ensuring they can all reach base camp."

Far too many children were falling through the early childhood education cracks, creating a "generation of under-achievers".

Education Minister Trevor Mallard refused to signal yesterday how much more money would go into early childhood education, but said it was in line with plans announced last year to raise the quality of teachers.

Most of the extra spending was set to go into increased "funding rates in order to recognise the fact that salaries are going up".

Some early childhood teachers had already upskilled and all would have to have three-year diplomas by 2012 under the plan, he said.

A failure to increase funding would make parents fork out the additional salary costs and might curb access for children most in need.

-Reprinted from The Dominion Post

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