

Cash lift for poorer kindies [NZ] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

About 1000 early childhood centres in poor areas will get extra money next year to try to ensure more children get a better start to their education.

Nearly \$30 million has been allocated in the budget over the next four years for early childhood equity funding. Education Minister Trevor Mallard revealed yesterday how the money would be spent.

The funding would go to licensed and chartered, community-based early childhood centres in poorer communities and isolated areas.

Centres based on a language and culture other than English, or those that had significant numbers of children with special education needs or who came from non-English speaking backgrounds, would be among those to benefit.

Mr Mallard said access to early childhood education was a major factor in how well a child achieved at school.

The money would go to the "bottom 40 per cent" of the approximately 2500 centres around the country. A big aim is to increase participation rates.

Figures show that only about 60 per cent of Pacific Island and 71 per cent of Maori 4-year-olds attend licensed preschool centres.

"We pay for that in poor literacy, increased truancy and poor examination results and unnecessary unemployment for the rest of kids' lives.

"I think by lifting the rates we will be able to make a big difference to kids, which will show right through their school lives."

Tanya Harvey, general manager of the Auckland Kindergarten Association, said the funding was a step in the right direction, but the issues were not confined to poorer areas.

About 20 per cent of the 9000 children enrolled in the city's kindergartens spoke English as a second language. Nearly three-quarters of the 105 kindergartens were affected.

Mrs Harvey said the situation put extra pressure on teachers because they were forced to spend more one-on-one time with kids.

She expected kindergartens in South Auckland and parts of Mangere, Ranui and Henderson to be eligible for the equity funding.

But it was unlikely Akarana Kindergarten in Mount Roskill - where about 75 per cent of the 90 children enrolled speak a language other than English as their first language - would benefit.

The kindergarten is made up of a strong mix of Pacific Island, Maori, New Zealand European, Asian, Indian and some African children.

Head teacher Lesley Pohio said about 20 per cent spoke little or no English when they first arrived at the kindergarten gates.

But Mrs Pohio said the multi-cultural nature of the kindergarten should not be seen as a negative - kindergarten was the ideal time for children to learn and develop their language ability.

She hoped the centre would be eligible for extra funding, which could be spent on more staff.

"The big key is the ratio. That would be a major support if there was another trained staff member in our kindergarten. That allows us more opportunity to work in small groups, supporting children's language acquisition."

-Reprinted from The New Zealand Herald.

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

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