



President's Comment 15

27th May 2010

Dear Colleagues

2010 May Budget: Overall A Positive Result for Education

Given New Zealand's current economic situation and the fiscal restraint in the state sector, the Budget for Education was very positive.

The u-turn on the proposed staffing cuts of \$50 million in 2011 averted what could have been a crisis for many of us. Invariably it would have meant larger classes and fewer options for students. This would have been unpalatable for staff, students and parents. It was a sensible, educational and political decision.

The 4% increase to the operational grant will keep our heads above water. The cash for buildings initiative is to be applauded since it will empower school communities to make better informed decisions about what is a 'best fit' for their students. Likewise, the incentives to save on utility costs is welcomed, provided the grant is set at a reasonable level at the outset.

The cash reimbursement for unused staffing at the end of the year is bemusing. Most Principals report that their staffing entitlement is currently inadequate to meet educational and industrial requirements. In fact, it has to be supplemented through other income streams. It also seems to me that if a school is well managed and in the interests of our teachers, we ought not to plan to have a surplus staffing situation.

Schools with leaky buildings clearly need to have this situation rectified as soon as possible. The expenditure is fully justified. I hope however, that this does not mean the MOE will abandon claims against negligent architects, builders and City Councils. Any monies returned through this avenue could be ploughed back into education!

The decision to fund Year 9-13 students quarterly, on the face of it, makes sense. The rationale that schools should not be funded for students they don't have and those that do ought to have that funding has logic. It will however, create budgeting difficulties for schools with significant cohorts of transient students, which is not a poor reflection on the schools. It is more about the communities they are located in. The Ministry notes that schools can maximize their funding by improving their student retention rates. Estimated savings to the MOE over four years is \$19 million! Could I respectfully suggest that some of that money is targeted to schools to develop programmes to help retain students.

The decision to fund seven Kaupapa Maori primary schools (1-8) to become seven area schools (1-13) at a cost of \$8.4 million came as a surprise. I do not recall any consultation on the matter, including its effect on the secondary school network. We will now have in effect an additional seven secondary schools in New Zealand.

Appreciation to Grant Jones of Newlands College who represented SPANZ at the debriefing with the Minister of Education.

Previous Comments

Comment 14 - 20.05.10

Search & Seizure in Schools, ERO Meeting

Comment 13 - 13.05.10

Health & Safety Guidelines, Aspiring Principals' Programme, 2011 Symposium.

Comment 12 - 06.05.10

Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Trade Academics, Principalship Growing a Thick Skin, PA Conference.

Comment 11 - 29.04.10

Violent Crime & School Bullying, Review of University Entrance, Sound Advice from a Judge, Working Voice & STA, School Balls.

Comment 10 - 22.04.10

Mangatepopo Gorge Tragedy Coroners Report, Technology Curriculum, National Standards, SPANZ Union .

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Updates

Compliance Costs including Health and Safety

Thank you to those colleagues who gave me concrete examples of compliance costs and confusion over Safety Standards. I have copied these to the Minister of Education, under a covering letter, setting out our concerns.

Search and Seizure

I have spoken with Ms Jan Breakwell, Head of the MOE's Legal Division, and written to the Minister seeking clarification of our powers and clearer guidelines in relation to Search and Seizure. Initial indications are positive that this task will be undertaken by the MOE.

Initial Teacher Education

I attended a reference group on your behalf where the issues were vigorously debated. I am satisfied that if the NZ Teachers Council adopts the proposed requirements it will improve the screening requirements of entrants, improve standards of literacy and numeracy and will give an assurance that graduates are able to communicate clearly with our students.

Homework

Following the debate in New Zealand and reading research on the topic, it appears that the following factors are key to its successful implementation in schools:

1. The 'learning' and 'activities' should be directly related to the classroom context. Teachers should avoid giving 'worksheets' which bear no relationship to topics covered in class. Students and parents see them for what they are, time fillers.
2. The homework should provide for the reinforcement of ideas learnt in class. It should avoid new learning material which ought to be introduced and guided by the teacher in the classroom.
3. If homework is given, it should be marked and assessed. Students will quickly give up doing homework if they come to see teachers do not believe it as valuable enough to review.
4. Before giving homework, check:
 - The current workload of students
 - Whether all students have the necessary conditions and support e.g internet access, a quiet place at home, time to visit the library etc

New Boards of Trustees

I trust the election process went well in your schools and that you have a Board that both understands and supports you in your role as Chief Executive and Professional Leader of the school.

Your Board hopefully will never be accused of the following:

- The Board started out considering two alternatives and quickly narrowed it down to eight!
- The Board enthusiastically received the principal's proposal and then over the next hour proceeded to quietly strangle it.
- A Board is a collectivity where the ignorant come to pool nothing, in the hope that they'll find someone who can produce something so that they can all take the credit for it.

Kind Regards



Patrick Walsh
President