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MINISTER'S SPEECH

NEW ZEALAND FREE KINDERGARTEN UNION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,
11 AUGUST, 1986

It gives me pleasure to address the sixtieth annual general meeting of the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union. I suppose we could call this the diamond conference of the Union. While diamonds are a symbol of wealth, and we have not got too much of that right now, we do have a flourishing early childhood service and the Union is to be congratulated for the growth and change which has come about over those years. It is humbling to think of more than sixty years of voluntary effort by many different people in different places - all for a common cause. Children and parents have much to thank you for.

This has been an historic year and a turning point for early childhood education. You could say that the early childhood family is growing up. The family size has been increased with childcare and te kohanga reo recognised as valuable members. It is now possible for early childhood educators to speak with one voice on matters of common concern, and the early childhood education sector now has the same administrative status as the primary and secondary sectors of education.

In December of last year, Government showed the high priority given to early childhood education, by hosting the Forum in the Legislative Chamber. The 140 participants included representatives from national groups concerned with the care and education of young children. These representatives had the opportunity to examine the nature and extent of available services and to make suggestions for future development. The quality of provision and equity of access to services was

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discussed and representatives considered ways they could effect greater co-ordination in the field of early childhood care and education. Recommendations made by the forum will continue to provide a guideline for the future development of Government policy.

With the transfer of childcare from Social Welfare to Education on 1 July, childcare now belongs to an early childhood education service. Any educational programme for young children must have a care component just as any childcare programme has an educational component. Change brings excitement but it can also bring some anxiety. I am pleased at the way the Kindergarten Union has looked forward positively to the transfer. While there is still much to do, the transition has been a smooth one and I commend early childhood organisations for their marvellous co-operation.

The Union is also to be commended for taking the initiative in assisting in the establishment of a national early childhood education body. The Lopdell Centre working party planned for September should allow a proposal to be presented to the early childhood education groups for consideration next year.

You will be interested to know that the Working Party on Three Year Kindergarten Teacher Training has reported to me and that their report is now available to the public. The working party, on which the union had three able representatives, recommended that as from 1987 a three year pre-service training course for early childhood teachers be phased into teachers colleges over a three year period. It also recommended that a period of induction of not less than one year should follow the three year pre-service course.

I have written to each of the members of the working party, including yourselves, indicating that I support these recommendations in principle but consider that it would be premature to implement them in 1987.

There are a number of reasons why the introduction of three year training should not be timed for next year. One of the recommendations of the working party was that discussions take place with the primary service, with childcare groups, and with associated groups on the implications of this report. In accordance with this recommendation it is essential that there be consultation with the childcare interest groups and with the primary service on the broadened nature of the training programme envisaged.

You will be aware that a working party on childcare training, which developed from that on kindergarten training, will be reporting in October of this year. It will be necessary that recommendations concerning the training of childcare personnel be taken into account when developing these new early childhood training courses.

The report has recognised that the implementation of three year training will mean that initially there will be no graduates from some colleges in the third year. This will cause a considerable depletion which the community pool may not be able to sustain. Increased intakes to two year training have begun to address this problem but time is necessary to allow the present trainees to enter the service.

Teachers college facilities are currently under pressure through the demands of increased intakes. Third year kindergarten courses would be difficult to mount at this time, given the need

to provide specialist facilities for early childhood education. In addition, there is the need to plan courses, to prepare staff, to organise recruitment material and information, and to determine quotas which reflect supply and demand factors.

I consider that discussions should be held in the early part of 1987 on such aspects of training as common course prescriptions, national guidelines for teachers colleges in training early childhood personnel, the selection of trainees, certification and accreditation matters, and the professional induction of beginning teachers. I have requested ~~my~~^{the} department to initiate such discussions with the interested parties.

Any training system needs opportunities for ongoing personal and professional development and I am pleased that the Advanced Studies for Teachers Unit has been developing a series of papers which are particularly appropriate for the needs of kindergarten teachers. A new course has been offered each year for the last two years and three papers are now available throughout New Zealand. A further paper, 'Issues and Trends in the Care and Education of Young Children' will be available next year, with two more to come in 1988.

These papers will be at an advanced level and it is expected that they could involve research projects, which may give valuable information relevant to all kindergarten teachers.

The department shares your concern about the lack of applicants for kindergarten teaching positions in some areas, and, in response to a request from the Kindergarten Teachers' Association the placement of kindergarten trainees in these locations is being considered. This has traditionally been an effective means of encouraging teachers to apply for positions in specific areas. One of the main concerns of kindergarten teachers who have been out of the service for some time, is the lack of opportunity for refamiliarisation with teaching and the chance to learn about new

developments. District officers early childhood education, will run refresher courses in those areas where there is a teacher shortage and where there is a sufficient number of teachers out of the kindergarten service. I hope that refresher courses will encourage teachers out of the service to come forward, either for relieving work or to apply for permanent positions.

I want to now turn to the additional staffing approved in the recent Budget. Ten additional teacher equivalents have been approved, to continue the phased implementation of the pupil session unit/staffing scheme. I know it does not approximate the 80 approved last year, but I had to consider whether or not the kindergarten service could sustain such a rapid increase in the total number of positions available. I believe it could not, and I think you would agree with me. It's a difficult enough task for associations to fill their current vacancies with good qualified teachers without exacerbating the situation by creating positions which may not be able to be filled at all.

Ten additional positions will be manageable, particularly as I understand that they will be allocated to those kindergartens with high rolls and special educational needs. You will know that responsibility for assigning those positions has been given to the Committee on Staffing on which you have representation.

At last, the introduction of permanent part-time employment in the kindergarten service is on the way to becoming a reality. The drafting of regulations has taken time but they should be forthcoming in the next few months. Permanent part-time positions will allow greater flexibility to teachers who wish to work less than full-time, but who are reluctant to relinquish their status as permanently appointed teachers. It is envisaged that this will be especially useful for women with children and seems to be particularly relevant to the kindergarten service.

In 1985 the Kindergarten Support Scheme Evaluation was published. The data which Anne Meade gained from the research, provided answers to two key positions-

. How is the Kindergarten Support Scheme working?

. How can the scheme be improved?

Now in 1986, a representative group of NZFKU, NZFKTA and the department has begun a series of meetings to review the Senior Teacher/Senior Head Teacher Support Scheme. They will examine the main issues and consider ways to improve the scheme.

I wish the group well in its task and trust that more effective support will be the ultimate outcome for teachers.

I am aware that the Kindergarten Union and members of the department, along with KTA are looking at diversification in the kindergarten service. Although the prime function of the kindergarten is seen to be a sessional service with trained staff, there are areas where this provision may not meet the needs of all communities. For too long in education we have given people what we think they need. I am pleased that the Kindergarten Union is doing a survey of the kindergarten community to find out what is expected of kindergartens. When we consider flexibility in terms of group size or session hours, we must also consider kindergarten buildings, conditions of service and policy changes to staffing and salaries. This is not to call into question the nature of the service offered by kindergartens. But it does us all good to be introspective, to challenge the status quo, and to examine traditional ways of doing things. Such reflection is the way to development, to innovation, and to the congruence of need with satisfaction.

It is pleasing to know that the Kindergarten Teachers Association is giving high priority to the promotion of taha Maori and Maori

language in kindergartens and I believe they have your support. There is an enormous amount of goodwill from kindergarten teachers and I hope that more teachers will begin consistently to make taha Maori an integral part of their programmes. The Early Childhood Division of the department has set taha Maori as one of its priorities, and resources and support are available from the education officers, early childhood education.

The kindergarten service has several fluent Maori-speaking women who are highly competent teachers. It is important that they receive encouragement. It is also important that the ability to speak Maori be considered a decided advantage for those applying for teachers college. I believe that our future as a nation of the South Pacific will be greatly affected by our cultural attitudes. It is in the early years that these attitudes are formed, and kindergartens have a part to play in helping New Zealand become a bicultural society.

One of my present priorities is to find ways to help counteract the growing violence in New Zealand. Kindergartens have an important role in the prevention of violence in our communities. They do this in two ways - firstly, by helping children find non-violent methods of coping with anger and frustration or settling disputes, and secondly, by providing a model for young parents so that they too can learn about strategies of non-violent interaction. Although kindergarten teachers do not consider parent education to be their key role, they should never underestimate the power of example and the value of the support they give parents.

As the senior organisation in the expanded field of early childhood education, the Kindergarten Union has a leadership role in helping to develop co-operation and co-ordination. The Union has shown a co-operative spirit in its involvement on various working parties such as the transfer of childccare, three year kindergarten teacher training, diversification discussions, training qualifications, and the senior teacher/senior head

teacher scheme. You are all busy people, and I thank you for the time and effort you put into early childhood education. I am sure this conference will be a successful one. I hope you meet the objectives you have set yourselves and that you will all look forward to the challenges of the coming year.