

Large scale voucher trial in Australia

A trial of vouchers for reading and literacy is kicking off across Australia.

The Tutorial Voucher Initiative (TVI) sees parents and caregivers with children below a national reading benchmark eligible to receive a tutorial voucher valued at up to \$700.

The voucher provides a pre- and post-tuition assessment, and a number of hours of reading tuition delivered one-to-one outside school hours.

The initiative is administered by brokers who are responsible for contracting tutors, confirming child eligibility, providing parents/caregivers with a choice in tutors and managing the TVI's administration.

The scheme also includes monitoring student progress and reporting achievement to help with better targeting of assistance.

It is worth \$20 million in government funding, and 24,000 primary school students have so far been identified as needing extra reading help.

The TVI was developed in 1997 when education ministers from every state and territory and the Australian government agreed to a National Literacy and Numeracy Plan.

Resistance to the plan from teacher unions and state Labour governments means take-up of the offer has so far not been as high as the federal government had hoped for, and finding brokers has also been difficult, with the

government now considering running the service itself.

One New South Wales broker quoted in Australian media said schools would not promote the scheme and would not reveal which children needed help with reading.

National literacy figures released in Australia last month show one in ten Year 7 students fail to meet the national reading benchmark, with one in three indigenous eight-year-olds failing to achieve the most basic reading milestones.

Meanwhile, a voucher scheme in Ireland that started earlier this year allows childcare support to be offered to employees under a 'salary

sacrifice' scheme.

Under the scheme, workers sacrifice taxable salary in return for childcare vouchers which are exempt from National Insurance Contributions.

More information on the TVI is at http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/programmes_funding/programme_categories/key_priorities/tutorial_voucher_initiative/default.htm

A Nine National News review of the TVI's progress to date is at <http://bulletin.ninemsn.com.au/bulletin/site/articleIDs/A7A20230FF689C1BCA2570460025C000>

Details on the Irish voucher scheme are at http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/business_telegraph/story.jsp?story=656990

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Range of election education resources online

If you are looking for summaries and analysis of the education policies on offer this election, there is a range of material online.

The *New Zealand Herald* invited politicians to answer questions on education. Below are links to edited highlights of 45-minute question and answer sessions with Labour, National and NZ First:

Labour: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/index.cfm?c_id=1&ObjectID=10342381

National: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/index.cfm?c_id=%201&ObjectID=10342382

NZ First: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/index.cfm?c_id=%201&ObjectID=10342384

The Herald also asked the three parties to compare Labour's and National's early childhood education policies. Their answers are at http://www.nzherald.co.nz/index.cfm?c_id=1&ObjectID=10342385

The Gifted Children's Association has statements from Labour, National, ACT and the Greens on gifted children's education policies online at <http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/national/politics.php>

Independent Schools of New Zealand has bullet-point statements on independent school education from the major parties at http://www.isnz.org.nz/documents/other/Focus_On_Election_2005.doc

The Green Party's education policy is at <http://www.greens.org.nz/election2005/education.asp>

ACT's education policy is at http://www.act.org.nz/policy_education.aspx

United Future's education policy is at <http://www.unitedfuture.org.nz/policies/education.php>

Progressive's education policy is at <http://www.progressive.org.nz/modules.php?name=Sections&op=viewarticle&artid=146>

Information on the Maori Party's education policy is at <http://www.maoriparty.com/>

NCEA a bottomless pit for draining educational resources'

The NCEA system is a "colossal waste of resources" and no government will admit to the scale of its mistake in implementing it, say top educationists.

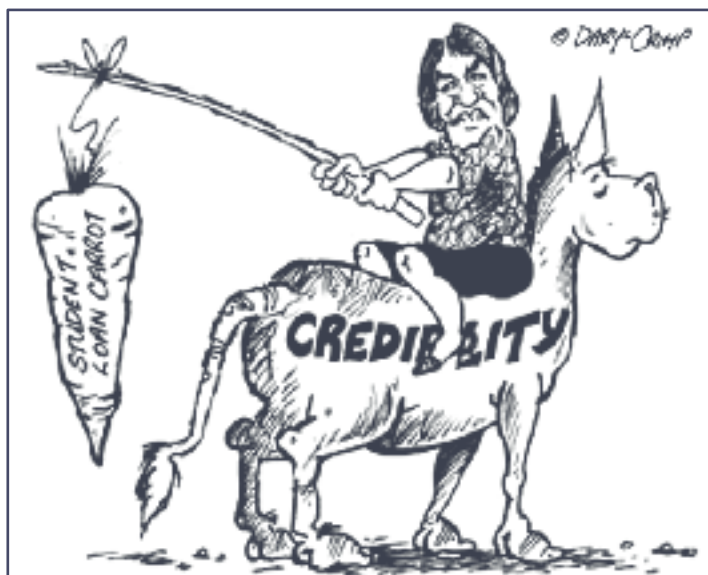
An article in the *New Zealand Annual Review of Education* (NZAROE), by Cedric Hall, Warwick Elley and Reg Marsh, says the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the Ministry of Education have taken an ideological position on the use of standards-based assessment, ignoring evidence showing the immense difficulties in implementing a 'pure' form of standards-based assessment.

The NCEA "has all the hallmarks of being a bottomless pit for draining educational resources" and is "unmanageable".

The NZAROE article questions the capacity of NZQA to administer the NCEA, given the outcomes of its implementation. It also recommends 13 key developments to redress the problems currently plaguing NCEA and Scholarship.

The 2004 NZAROE is at http://www.nzcer.org.nz/default.php?cPath=139_134_181&products_id=1468

A Sunday Star Times article on the report and on variable assessment standards is at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3384365a11,00.html>



'20 free hours' extension better but policy still 'flawed'

Despite the government's surprise move in extending its controversial free early childhood education funding to private centres, the policy still has 'big flaws'.

The government last week announced funding for 20 free hours per week to three and four year olds at all licensed, teacher-led services. Previously, the funding had only been available at community-based centres, leaving big holes in availability throughout the country.

Education Forum policy advisor Norman LaRocque said the extension of the policy was an improvement but big flaws remained, with a key weakness being that the policy capped the amount centres could charge for the 20 free hours.

"It does not recognise that different services have different cost structures and it could force 'high cost/high quality' centres to reduce quality or find other ways of raising revenues – such as increasing non-regulated fees – to cover the shortfall."

If centres could charge fees on top of the 20 free hours parents would be able to choose the quality level they wanted, Mr LaRocque said.

Early Childhood Council chief executive Sue Thorne has been at the forefront of campaigns against the policy.

Mrs Thorne praised the move to extend it to private centres, saying it would redress an inequity that would have given "free early childhood education to millionaires in some parts of New Zealand and nothing to battlers in others".

In a statement last week, the government said the funding had not been available to private centres before because it was not affordable but its financial position had strengthened.

This came one month after Education Minister Trevor Mallard told the New Zealand Childcare Association that the government did not think it appropriate to use taxpayers' money to fund profit-making services, as it did not "guarantee that families get the benefits. In fact, there is a clear quality versus profit trade-off."

It also came hard on the heels of the government admitting there would not be enough capacity at community-based centres for everyone to access the 20 free hours a week when it was introduced in 2007.

"I'm not going to pretend there will be an automatic place for every family that wants one," Mr Mallard told the

New Zealand Herald last week. "We've always had waiting lists."

Mr Mallard's comments followed his announcement of \$6.6 million for building new early childhood centres. The funding comes from the first round of the annual \$12.8 million Discretionary Grants Scheme which helps out community-based groups and early childhood education centres in areas of need.

A statement from the Early Childhood Council is at <http://www.ecc.org.nz/mediareleases/index.php?rt=20&rid=649>

A government fact sheet on the extension of the '20 free hours' policy is at <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PA0508/S00544.htm>

The New Zealand Herald story on the Discretionary Grants Scheme is at http://www.nzherald.co.nz/index.cfm?c_id=1&ObjectID=10341654



Free money for students — election policy creates debate

An election lolly likely to result in a ‘chronic case of tooth decay’ is one leading economist’s description of Labour’s pledge to make student loans interest-free, but it seems that, although the lure of sweets is great, the pledge is not winning over all voters.

According to a Fairfax/AC Nielsen poll in mid-August, Labour was winning the student loan war, with 53 percent of voters favouring its promises of interest-free loans over National’s plan for easing debt, though one-in-five voters remained unsure.

But another August poll – from Kudo-Dynamics – found that although Labour’s student loan interest write-off policy was popular, it was unlikely to attract opposition voters and had strongest appeal amongst those who would already vote for Labour or the Greens.

Despite the short-term attraction of the proposed policy and its endorsement by student associations, its policy rationale has been roundly criticised.

Westpac chief economist Brendan O’Donovan said the proposal was bad policy.

“It sets up the wrong incentives, could potentially lead to an explosion in the stock of debt and the cost would be far higher than the initial estimates,” NZPA reported Mr O’Donovan as saying.

The National Bank also criticised it.

The Vice Chancellors’ Committee said the cost of the policy – \$300 million in a full year, according to the government but likely to be much higher according to others – was likely to hinder substantial improvement in tertiary education resourcing.

A statement from the committee said student votes had taken precedence over staff salaries and the government’s “avowed emphasis on quality and relevance had been subject to a giant u-turn”.

Education Forum policy advisor Norman LaRocque said that instead of focusing on making an already

generous student support system even more generous, political parties should focus on advancing the national interest through the promotion of policies that would expand opportunity for everyone, especially those who were most disadvantaged.

Information on the Kudos-Dynamics poll is at <http://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/newsdetail1.asp?storyID=78407>

A New Zealand Herald article by Norman LaRocque on student loan repayments is at <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/index.cfm?ObjectID=10337872>

An Education Forum hot topic looking at the policy and highlighting research that looks at ways to finance tertiary education is at http://educationforum.org.nz/text-hot_topic_24-25

Income contingent loans help students but need to be well-designed

Income contingent loans (ICL) – where repayment levels are based on income levels – have significant potential as a solution to tertiary education financing challenges so long as they are designed sensibly, and can be made operationally efficient.

A new discussion paper from Australian National University researcher Bruce Chapman shows that the operational and design features of such schemes are of fundamental importance.

The paper says that because of the uncertainty of

students’ future incomes, an ICL approach can deliver good economic and social outcomes because it is the only form of financing “that offers both default insurance and consumption smoothing.”

The paper looks in detail at the Australian experience with an ICL scheme, and says that, in administrative terms, and with respect to revenue, access and income distribution, it had worked; an ICL scheme had also been successfully introduced in New Zealand.

‘Income Contingent Loans for Higher Education: International Reform’ is at <http://econrsss.anu.edu.au/pdf/DP491.pdf>

Opinion

Bulk funding worked well in 1990s and will be a success again

With National proposing to bring back bulk funding for teacher salaries, Education Forum policy advisor Norman LaRocque answers critics who say it did not work first time around.



Norman LaRocque

The case against giving principals and education professionals more power to make decisions on how best to organise their schools is weak.

While the PPTA paints a woeful picture of life at bulk-funded schools, a 1999 Ministry of Education study found that 95 percent of schools surveyed had found it advantageous.

Opponents also cite individual examples to support their case. Well, here's one that does not. The school my children attended opted for bulk funding in 1998. A large majority of the teaching staff, including the teacher representative on the Board of Trustees, voted for its adoption. The decision to adopt it was prompted, in

part, by the arrival of new teachers who had come from bulk-funded schools and were positive about the experience. No doubt such organic growth would have continued had bulk funding not been abolished.

Commonly heard arguments that other bulk-funded education services in New Zealand have seen their funding stay 'static while costs rise' is plain wrong.

For example, spending on early childhood education, adjusted for inflation, grew by \$110 million between 1993/94 and 2003/04 – an increase of over 50 percent (more than twice the growth rate in enrolments over that period).

Operational funding for schools has also risen, not fallen. Following a decline in the recession years of the early 1990s, inflation-adjusted school operational funding grew by around \$300 per student between 1994 and

2001. Although it has since fallen marginally, its 2003 level remained 30 percent higher than in 1994.

Central resourcing does nothing to 'correct' badly designed funding policies. Indeed, bulk funding is superior because it gives schools the flexibility to reallocate funds, whereas central resourcing means that funding is pigeon-holed and cannot be shifted as easily.

It is surprising that the system used to fund doctors, hospitals, early childhood education centres, rest homes, tertiary institutions and government departments can be so controversial in the school sector, especially given the lack of credible arguments and evidence against it.

Complaints rise in education's consumer culture

Universities received more than 20,000 complaints and exam appeals in the past three years as students asserted their consumer rights, the *Times Higher Education Supplement* has reported.

Data provided by 104 institutions under the Freedom of Information Act show that students made 6,796 formal complaints and appeals in 2003. In 2004, the figure rocketed to 8,682.

Government officials and student leaders welcomed the findings as a sign that tuition fee-paying students were standing up for their rights, the *THES* reported.

Hundreds of complaints were made about erroneous exam papers, inadequate facilities and cancelled classes. More unusual grievances include a formal complaint about a "dog in a classroom".

Plugging the cracks

A small private school in South Auckland is taking in pupils no-one else will take and working to turn them around. Charles Stone spoke to Dingwall Trust School's principal Kelvin Hill.

"Our job is to change the children's behaviour to the point where they can re-enter the system," Mr Hill said. "We are different, in that our job is to send the children *out* of our school. We take them in for a short time, then put them back."

The school, in Papatōetoe, began 10 years ago when the Dingwall Trust orphanage established a school catering to its own residents who were not adjusting well to mainstream education. It has a maximum of 14 students at any time between the ages of seven and 14.

The children come to the school with not a lot in their favour.

"A lot of them have no extended family at all, or only places to stay in the weekends," said Mr Hill. "Some have no-one. We do take some kids from the community, who can be referred to us by the family or the school, for group special education, or by Child, Youth and Family Services [CYFS] and other agencies.

"Schools just can't cope with them. There's a lot of violence that comes from them. It gets a bit too difficult in the state system to deal with, in a classroom with 30 other children."

Mr Hill's compassion, deeper than the usual educator's altruism, shines through when describing his pupils' challenges.

"Many, because of the movement they've had in house placement, and thus school placement, have missed out on a lot and are educationally behind



Dingwall School principal Kelvin Hill with a pupil in the school library

their chronological age.

"We have to address that, sometimes rather urgently, which involves working on their self esteem as much as anything else. They need to achieve some kind of initial success to kick-start the process of feeling good about themselves.

"The majority of kids we get here are boys, and we'll fill the book boxes with car books, motorcycle books, skateboard books to entice them into the library; [we will use] anything we hear they're interested in.

"We do woodwork – conventional, old-fashioned woodwork with hammers and saws – because a lot of these kids have been turned off sitting down in the classroom copying off the blackboard.

We'll do things like that to break the day up, and it's a good way to get them achieving success and having a wonderfully finished product to take and show their caregivers."

Individual educational plans are established for all students, and are ability-based, rather than age-based. The students can board on-site during the week at the school hostel as part of an intensive programme to develop their social and living skills and reinforce the work of the school.

Asked about the school's successful graduates, and Mr Hill's tone changed instantly from compassion to outright pride.

Plugging the cracks

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“We see all our children as successes, just having lived what they’ve lived through. We’ve had kids here who have been severely damaged over the course of their upbringing, and I’m constantly amazed that they’ve got as far as they have.

“They’re children that the state system had basically given up on. One fellow, after successfully going back to a state school, five years later came to me and said ‘I didn’t realise it at the time back then, but what you were teaching me ... now I understand’.

“Now he’s back here working.”

Where government funding is involved, Dingwall Trust School finds itself (with a small number of pupils and private status) in an invidious position.

“We just get the normal independent school per-head annual allowance from the capped fund,” said Mr Hill.

“We can also apply to the Ministry for group special education funding of teacher aid hours, and we get a very small amount from families, usually on an ability-to-pay basis.”

Asked which government policies currently restricting the private sector he would like to see changed, Mr Hill was realistic. “It would be nice if, rather than just the bulk-funding idea, they looked at it on an individual, case-by-case basis and took into account the fees that the school was collecting from families to weigh against that. That would identify our very different position from the other schools.”

Very different indeed. This is no Kings, Diocesan or St Cuthbert’s scenario, with hundreds of well-heeled parents happy to contribute. Quite the opposite.

The fact that a school such as Dingwall draws from the same government funds as these others is ironic enough, but the tiny amount of funding it receives by comparison is almost frightening ... leading the school in the past to contemplate integration.

“A few years ago we looked at it and were led to believe that our chances of being integrated were very slim,” Mr Hill said.

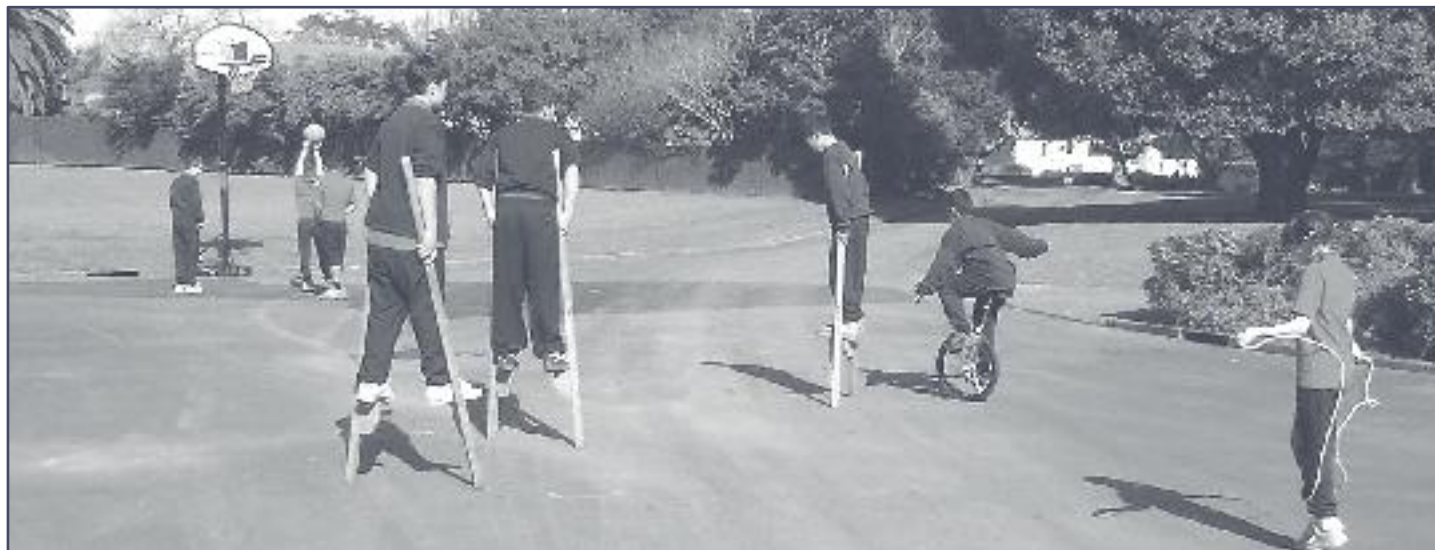
“But then we also feared that if we did become integrated, we would lose our autonomy. And we like the way we do things.”

What is Dingwall Trust?

Dingwall Trust began as an orphanage over 70 years ago. Today, three family homes, the school and its hostel and the trust’s administration office are on the orphanage site. Another two family homes are off-site but close to the main facilities.

The trust’s school takes students who:

- are not in regular attendance at a state school;
- are under threat of suspension because of their negative attitudes to school in general;
- have severe difficulties in coping with the structures and standards of the state school system;
- are far below the potential level of attainment expected of them by age and ability, and who are not catered for by normal class programmes.



Upcoming events

- *Does Private Education Work for the Poor?* 8 September, Washington DC

This conference will look at how private schools are serving some of the poorest people on the planet and how private education is playing a crucial role in serving the educational needs of the poor.

At the conference, British professor James Tooley will present the findings of a two-year global study of private schools for the poor, showing findings from one of Africa's poorest slums – Makoko in Lagos, Nigeria – where 75 percent of the poorest children attend private schools that are better and cheaper to run than their public school counterparts.

More information is at <http://www.cato.org/events/050908pf.html>

- *Independent Schools of New Zealand annual conference*, 7–10 September, Queenstown

Open to all those supportive of choice in education, and the role of independent schools in lifting the quality of education.

More information is at <http://www.isnz.org.nz/conference2005/>

- *Association of Private Education Providers annual conference*, 13–15 September, Wellington

The conference will include awards for training provider of the year, tutor of the year and student of the year.

More information is at <http://www.nzapep.co.nz/conference.html>

- *Schooling for the 21st Century*, 28–29 September, Sydney

The Australia and New Zealand School of Government is holding a forum to identify and propose the major policy challenges for schooling in the twenty-first century.

More information is at <http://www.anzsog.edu.au/21cschools.html>

- *Mobilising the Private Sector for Public Education*, 5–6 October, Boston

This conference will focus on public–private partnerships in education and will feature leading economists, political scientists, policymakers and practitioners with an interest in education policy.

More information is at

<http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg/conferences/MPSPE.htm>

Reforming teacher employment could improve quality, reports argue

Two recent reports looking at different aspects of the teaching profession have both come up with a similar finding – performance pay for teachers could work well.

A Harvard University-published report compares subjective principal assessments of teachers with a traditional way of assessing compensation – education and experience – and with value-added measures of teacher effectiveness based on student test scores.

It finds that subjective principal assessments of teachers predict future student achievement significantly better than teacher experience, education or actual compensation, though not as well as value-added teacher quality measures.

Meanwhile, an OECD report says reforms in teacher employment are needed to improve teaching standards and retain good teachers.

Amongst its recommendations, the OECD report calls for:

- more flexible employment conditions, and schools having more responsibility for staff selection and management;
- evaluating and rewarding effective teaching, and providing more opportunities for career variety.

The Harvard report, *Principals as Agents: Subjective Performance Measurement in Education*, is at <http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~bjacob/principals35.pdf>

The OECD report, *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* is at http://www.oecd.org/document/4/0,2340,en_2649_34859095_34993604_1_1_1_1,0.html

Switching to community-based status sees ECE operation grow

An early childhood education operator, concerned for his centres' future because of what he sees as discriminatory government policy, has turned his once private trust-owned centres into charitable trust-run, community-based centres. We talked to Brian Elliott to see why he made the switch.

Mr Elliott is chairman of the Palmerston North-based First Steps Childcare Trust, a charitable trust that operates 23 early childhood education and care centres throughout New Zealand. Last year he was the chairman of six private trust centres.

After shifting the legal ownership from private trust to a charitable trust, Mr Elliott said he then had the confidence to acquire new centres and grow the business, as he had wanted to do for some time.

"The Education Minister [Trevor Mallard] has made it fairly clear he would like to get rid of private centres. We have always wanted to expand but, under such an environment, there was no way we were going to do that under private ownership.

"While it is very pleasing that the government has widened the '20 free hours' policy to be for private centres as well as community-based ones, it is sad that the government's thinking generally should be so anti the private sector, but it is the reality private owners face."

Mr Elliott said it was a difficult six-month process to get approval from the Ministry of Education to switch to charitable trust status.

"It took monthly battles to get them

to agree. I suspect they were suspicious, but we had our charitable trust IRD Status certificate."

"What we have done was a good option for us. I think you'll find we are a bit of a front-runner, and people will be following in our path."

Once First Steps was set up as a charitable trust, Mr Elliott said the centres were able to access a whole range of support not available to private centres – including grants for special needs, rural support and rates rebates.

"It makes good business sense to run as a community-based centre, but it is certainly irrational that all children in whatever type of centre don't have access to those grants."

Mr Elliott said the government's ideological split between private and community centres was artificial because, at the end of the day, all centres had to make a surplus if they were to survive.

"Private centres make no more of a surplus, and often less, than



community-based centres. The reality is if you don't make a profit you must be making a loss and then you die. It's the same for everyone.

"So, where do those surpluses go? The only difference, it seems to me, is that many traditional community-based centres put their surpluses into some rather strange non-educational programmes."

Under charitable trust status, any surpluses from a centre are distributed on the say of the centre's trustees and

‘Bulk funding liberated our school’

“Bulk funding of teacher salaries gave our school flexibility and responsiveness – the school is a shining and successful example of the policy’s success,” – Onehunga High School’s past chair Craig Weston.



Craig Weston

in prominent newspaper and online advertising. He said the advertisements were likely paid for through members’ subscriptions but not all teachers agreed with the union’s position.

Mr Weston said the Auckland high school was “liberated” by bulk-funding and some innovative and significant educational initiatives had resulted from it.

“More than any other single measure it was a catalyst for significant change and improvement in the school

Mr Weston has spoken out following criticism of bulk funding by the Post Primary Teachers’ Association

in prominent newspaper and online advertising. He said the advertisements were likely paid for through members’ subscriptions but not all teachers agreed with the union’s position.

Mr Weston said the Auckland high school was “liberated” by bulk-funding and some innovative and significant educational initiatives had resulted from it.

“More than any other single measure it was a catalyst for significant change and improvement in the school

and contributed to the successful reputation the school currently enjoys.

“Our school is low decile, the type the PPTA claimed would founder due to lack of skills in dealing with large sums of money. It did not happen.

“The claims that cheaper teachers would be hired were nonsense. No principal would compromise quality of teaching for economic advantage.

“We used the advantages created by bulk funding to hire more teachers, and teaching conditions were enhanced through the creation of smaller classes.”

Mr Weston said there had been some staff upheaval following the school’s introduction of bulk funding but it had been orchestrated by union heavyweights from Head Office and “division and discontent did not traumatise the staffroom”.

The vast majority of staff realised that the reality of bulk funding was totally different from the message they had been sold from Wellington. They had worked happily ever since, and – one would imagine – would be very receptive to the re-introduction of bulk funding, he said.

Twenty-six Onehunga High School teachers recently wrote to the New Zealand Herald questioning how Mr Weston could claim that the school’s staff would be very receptive to bulk-funding’s re-introduction.

Mr Weston said the teachers’ view should be respected, but the evidence from the previous introduction of bulk funding was that many, who were at first opposed, saw the benefits of what it delivered to the classroom and acknowledged that it had worked well.

Switching to community-based status sees ECE operation grow

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not to the trustees.

“In the case of First Steps, they go to improving provision and the expansion of the operation to benefit more children and families”.

Mr Elliott has contracted day-to-day management of the 23 centres to Kidicorp, a listed early childhood education management company,

borrowing funds from the company to buy the 17 new centres.

Having Kidicorp looking after the daily running of the centres meant that parents with children at First Steps centres did not have to get involved in the ongoing administration and maintenance that was often their lot in smaller community-based centres.

“Professional managers are becoming common in most good community centres. Most parents work all day and they need professionals

to look after the centre’s day-to-day management.

“You want to spend your evenings with your children, not helping out down at their centre.”

First Steps centres: community-based but offering parents all the benefits of a professionally run organisation – could this be a template for the future of the early childhood education sector?

The First Steps website is at
<http://www.firststeps.co.nz/>

briefs

Quote of the month:

“... magic potions that deliver economic nirvana – most are just snake oil ... good policy making is more than just handing out lollies through tax cuts and spending.”

• National Bank chief economist Dr John McDermott reported in the *New Zealand Herald* commenting on the Labour government’s promise to remove interest from student loans for graduates who remained in New Zealand.

The *Herald* story is at <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/index.cfm?ObjectID=10338852>

A *Subtext* story on the government’s policy is on page 4.

Education a key election issue for Maori

Maori electorate voters believe education is the key issue at this election, according to a recent *New Zealand Herald* survey; and many believe greater investment in education is a way of ensuring a better future for their children.

A *New Zealand Herald* story looking at the political parties’ election platforms for Maori education is at http://www.nzherald.co.nz/index.cfm?c_id=1&ObjectID=10339664

A graph looking at the ups and downs of Maori education is at <http://media.apn.co.nz/webcontent/image/gif/ACFIBAM4aWzs.GIF>

Bribes for limited ECE places

Bribes for early childhood education workers are becoming common in Melbourne from parents trying to bypass long waiting lists.

The *Herald Sun* has reported that parents are offering to refurbish centres, supply toys and “pull strings” in order to get to the top of the longest lists.

Waiting time has blown out more than two years for many community-based centres. One waiting list – at the City of Port Phillip has now reached 1,935 – an increase of more than 300 since January.

The *Herald Sun* story is at http://www.heraldsun.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5478,16307918%25E2862,00.html

Private students more likely to get to university in Australia

Australian school students are more likely to go to university if they have been to a private school, and state school students increasingly opt for the trades, statistics reveal.

A transcript of a radio interview with Australian educationalists looking at the issue is at <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2005/s1412698.htm>

Blair orders more school choice

British Prime Minister Tony Blair has ordered officials to make it easier for popular schools to expand after the failure of measures to improve parent power in education, the *Times* has reported.

A *Times Online* story is at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-1735661,00.html>

Three public schools go charter in San Diego

Public education is getting a radical makeover at three San Diego schools that are becoming charter schools after struggling for years to overcome chronic underachievement.

The *Union-Tribune* reports the San Diego school board has allowed the schools to break away from district management and become independent. The teachers union opposed the move, and some trustees expressed reservations as well, but parents and community leaders – who gathered signatures door-to-door for the charter petitions – persevered.

The schools are also getting new staff and a make-over as part of the switch.

A *Union-Tribune* feature on the move is at http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20050815/news_1m15charter.html

Peruvian university raises cash through bond issue

Universidad de San Martin de Porres (USMP) is to raise US\$30 million from issuing bonds – the first such issue by a private Peruvian university.

The bond is secured by future tuition receipts of six USMP faculties.

More information is at <http://www.harolddoan.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=4983>

Troubled teens education becoming big business in US

More and more parents of troubled teenagers in the United States are turning to special private education programmes – no matter the cost, and at the same time, the number of programmes available has soared.

The *New York Times* reports that the programmes differ from the tough boot camps and the long-term psychiatric stays common 20 years ago. The new “feel good” programmes combine therapy and education, often in an outdoor setting, at an average cost of US\$5,000 a month.

Those numbers have drawn the attention of some big money investors, who see a growing need for the services the programmes provide.

The *New York Times* report is at <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/17/business/17teen.html?oref=login>

Cutting university red tape could save £15 million each year

Cutting university bureaucracy in Britain could save up to £15 million per year, the head of Britain’s red tape watch dog claims.

That would be enough money to pay for one or two extra academics in every institution, according to the Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG).

The head of HERRG told the *Times Higher Education Supplement* that the money could be saved by a more coordinated approach to data-gathering and regulatory inspection regimes.

Regulating agencies should place more reliance on institutions’ internal audits unless there was a risk of failure, Dame Patricia Hodgson told the *THES*.

KIPP’s charter schools doing well

Twenty-seven United States charter middle schools managed by KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) have posted “large and significant gains” in student achievement, according to a report by the Educational Policy Institute.

KIPP has 48 schools and describes itself as a “network of free open-enrolment college-preparatory public schools in under-resourced communities”.

Using data provided by KIPP, the institute found that 1,800 mostly low-income black and Hispanic fifth-graders showed gains significantly above average for urban schools in reading, language and mathematics from 2003 to 2004.

Some experts have cited KIPP, begun by two teachers in 1994, as an example of what disadvantaged students can achieve if given more time in smaller schools, as well as firm homework requirements and well-trained principals with the power to hire and fire teachers.

The report is at <http://www.educationalpolicy.org/pressreleases/PR050811.html>

A Washington Post story on the KIPP result is at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/10/AR2005081002216.html>

More information on KIPP is at <http://www.kipp.org/>

Milwaukee charter school numbers up

The number of schools participating in Milwaukee’s renowned voucher programme could jump by close to 20 this year. At the same time, the focus of one local group supporting vouchers will shift from opening new schools to strengthening existing ones.

This story is in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel at <http://www.jsonline.com/news/metro/aug05/348106.asp>

Famous French free tertiary education not what it seems

France is well-known for its supposedly universally free tertiary education but, in reality, fees are often charged, and many students bypass the state system for a private education, according to a *Guardian* feature.

Nearly 15 percent of university students choose private institutions, most of which are engineering or business schools.

The *Guardian* story is at <http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/worldwide/story/0,9959,1542701,00.html>

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