



**NZEI
TE RIU ROA**

NZEI Te Riu Roa Platform for Change 2026

**Vote for quality
public education!**

So all tamariki can thrive

Priorities for action 2027-2030: Five pathways to boost quality teaching and learning for tamariki

This report outlines a vision, policies, funding, and system changes for five areas of education that could together move our public education system from good to great. These five key election demands seek to protect and strengthen the overall system design principles of our internationally recognised, child-centred, Te Tiriti o Waitangi-grounded public education system.

This report does not represent all the changes and areas for investment that educators want to see from the next government, but it does outline enduring priorities expressed by NZEI Te Riu Roa members who work across ECE, primary schooling and learning support in roles as diverse as teacher aides, principals, classroom teachers, librarians, admin staff, kaiārahi i te reo, speech language therapists, early intervention teachers, and kaitakawaenga.

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The NZEI Te Riu Roa long-term vision for education includes:

- A system that upholds Te Tiriti o Waitangi for all tamariki, and where Māori have tino rangatiratanga in education.
- A clear and enduring purpose for education that transcends electoral cycles.
- Professional trust in teachers and leaders to exercise expert judgement.
- A learner-centred approach that responds to the needs, strengths, and aspirations of the child in front of the teacher.
- A strong national curriculum framework that provides direction and coherence, while enabling and encouraging professional and local responsiveness rather than prescription.
- A relentless focus on inclusion, equity and excellence, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to succeed.
- A coherent system in which curriculum, assessment, teacher capability, leadership and accountability reinforce one another rather than pulling in different directions.

The five key election demands NZEI Te Riu Roa members have repeatedly prioritised are:

1. **A teacher aide in every classroom.**
2. **Valuing educators professionally and through fair pay and job security.**
3. **Upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi.**
4. **Defending quality early childhood education.**
5. **Curriculum and assessment grounded in Aotearoa.**

In education as in life, real change takes time. System change in education needs to be intentional, resourced, and designed with and by the teaching profession to embed successfully in every classroom and for every learner.

In each of the five key areas, NZEI Te Riu Roa maps out a vision, objectives, and a sustainable pathway for investment and implementation to ensure that we meet the needs of all tamariki in Aotearoa. These multi-year pathways mean cross-party commitments are needed to support the long-term policy, regulation, implementation, and investment required to embed these changes successfully.

A teacher aide in every classroom¹

The Problem

Our education system's capacity to support all learners has failed to keep up with increased levels of need. This has created a 'learning support deficit', much like the national infrastructure deficit currently receiving bipartisan attention from parliament. Like the infrastructure deficit, the learning support deficit will only be addressed through bipartisan commitment to investment. The following five-year plan for investing in teacher aides offers a basis upon which such commitment can be formed. Investment in teacher aides along with the wider specialist workforce and classroom teachers is a priority for educators.

Our Vision

We have an inclusive education system that is child-centred, rights-based, strengths-based, and respects the mana of our tamariki. Every child that needs learning support has a 'team' around them that operates collaboratively with whānau and supports the child to succeed. Teacher aides are securely employed and can access professional learning and development and clear pathways to learning support and teaching qualifications as desired.

Our objective

A teacher aide in every classroom.

Investing in the teacher aide workforce would transform the capacity of our learning support system without disruptive system reform, because it builds on a core strength - a skilled and motivated workforce - that already exists within our system. Teachers say more in-class support is the surest way to meet student need effectively and quickly.

An implementation plan

We need to upskill and better value teacher aides so that they can be the best support they can be for the learners who need them the most. We need to move away from inconsistent and unpredictable funding for teacher aides which means that more than half of them are employed on insecure fixed-term contracts, many of which are comprised of short-term urgent funding for learning or behavioural supports. A more secure and predictable model would leverage the experience and skill held by this workforce to provide more effective support for learning, as recommended in a recent review.²

Key to achieving this is abolishing the inequitable practice of requiring schools to 'top up' teacher aide funding from other sources. Currently, NZEI Te Riu Roa estimates this 'top up' funding to be costing schools across Aotearoa more than \$115m per annum. Moving toward fully funded teacher aides would also free up flexible funding held by schools, such as from the operations grant, to redirect according to their students' needs.

A teacher aide in every classroom

Over the next five Budgets³, we can move further towards an inclusive education system by strengthening learning support for tamariki and upholding the value of teacher aides by:

Budget 2027

- Increase dedicated teacher aide funding toward a fully funded service by 2030 with the first stage consisting of \$30.2m⁴ invested to close 20% of the funding gap currently being paid for by schools.
- Begin to move incrementally toward a teacher aide in every classroom, at a ratio of 1:24 for all levels by 2031. This sees an additional 2222 teacher aides introduced annually, at a cost of \$63m.
- All teacher aide funding to be implemented through a new mixed resourcing model, as recommended by the Sector Reference Group (SRG) review of how schools are resourced for teacher aides. This includes the teacher aide funding component of ORS funding. Resourcing for teacher aides through the SRG model will ensure that funding is equitable and follows need at the same time as providing for a secure workforce.
- Introduce non-contact time of 10 hours per term (pro rata) for teacher aides to engage in planning, evaluation, reporting, personal professional development, and research. Funded for five years at a total cost of \$84.5m.
- Establish a dedicated PLD fund of \$75m over five years. This would also upskill kaiako, school-based specialist teachers and teacher aides/kaiāwhina working with mokopuna in areas such as dyslexia, autism and ADHD, child development, mana whenua relationships, trauma informed pedagogies, play-based learning, mental health and wellbeing and culturally sustaining teaching practices. Funding should be secured through the budget process for five years to support provider viability and timely training.

Budget 2028

- Further increase funding toward fully funded teacher aides to close 40% of the funding shortfall.
- Second tranche of new teacher aide deployment with an additional 2223 teacher aides.

Budget 2029

- Further increase funding toward fully funded teacher aides, funding to close 60% of the funding shortfall.
- Next tranche of new teacher aide deployment of an additional 2222 teacher aides.

Budget 2030

- Further increase funding toward fully funded teacher aides, funding to close 80% of the funding shortfall.
- Next tranche of new teacher aide deployment of an additional 2222 teacher aides.

Budget 2031

- Further increase funding toward fully funded teacher aides, funding to fully close the funding shortfall.
- Final tranche of new teacher aide deployment of an additional 2222 teacher aides.

A teacher aide in every classroom

	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	Total'
TA fully funded	\$30,181,887	\$60,363,774	\$90,545,662	\$120,727,549	\$150,909,436	\$452,728,308
Close funding gap %	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%	
Teacher aide in every classroom (1:24 ratio) by 2029	\$63,005,610	\$126,011,221	\$189,016,831	\$252,022,442	\$315,028,052	\$945,084,157
New teacher aides (headcount, average hours)	2,222	4,445	6,667	8,889	11,111	
Teacher aide release time (10hrs per term)	\$14,486,410	\$15,698,056	\$16,909,703	\$18,121,349	\$19,332,995	\$84,548,513
Total TAs	26,569	28,792	31,014	33,236	35,458	

Valuing and respecting educators' professionalism

The Problem

While teaching is ranked as one of the most trusted professions in Aotearoa New Zealand and teachers are deeply respected by parents and whānau, many educators feel undervalued, undermined, and underpaid by their employer – the government.

Valuing and respecting educators' expertise, professional skills, and judgement is the hallmark of successful education systems globally. Unfortunately, the current Coalition Government has:

- Scrapped independent, democratically elected teacher members of the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Scrapped pay equity claims for teachers and the opportunity to review settled claims for teacher aides and other educators.
- Failed to address poor job security for teacher aides and other support staff.
- Conducted insufficient consultation with the sector and ignored the evidence and expertise of teachers and academics during consultation on the new curriculum.
- Started clawing back pay parity for ECE teachers – relief teachers and beginning teachers – and proposed scrapping the quality teacher funding bands.

The Teaching Council

The Education and Training (System Reform) Amendment legislation passed in July 2026 shifted the function of setting the Code of Professional Responsibility, the Standards of the Teaching profession and Initial Teacher qualification standards from the Teaching Council to the Ministry of Education, placing them under direct Ministerial influence.

This is despite the Ministry showing no evidence of how they would be better placed to carry out these functions. This means the Code and standards will lose the political neutrality and consistency they had under the Council, putting them at risk of changing with every new government. This moves them away from the professionals who are the only practitioners and experts of the theory. When the profession set their own Code and Standards, the widest possible group of experts are involved. Conversely, within the Ministry of Education there is no guarantee of professional expertise on advisory groups, the advice of which can be ignored by the Minister. There is also no requirement for broader consultation with the profession or public on the Code and Standards.

Furthermore, the Amendment Act also shifted the balance of power on the Teaching Council's governing council, away from the profession to the Minister of the day. After initially reducing elected seats from 7 to 3, the Minister then did a last-minute amendment to remove all elected positions, leaving only Ministerial positions⁵. These changes mean the Teaching Council is no longer an independent professional body.

Valuing and respecting educators' professionalism

Our vision

That teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand have a fully independent, Te Tiriti o Waitangi-grounded professional body.

This body will set the standards for its own profession, just like other professions – such as law and nursing – do. The Teaching Council will have a majority of professionally elected representatives on its governing council to ensure political neutrality.

The Council will respond to the needs and expertise of the profession through robust systems of policymaking that centre collective professional judgement and experience, driven by robust research and evidence. The Teaching Council will maintain its working relationship with the Minister and Ministry of Education.

Our objective

The Teaching Council is restored as the independent professional body for teachers, from Early Childhood Education through to Initial Teacher Education, through the repeal of the Education and Training System Reform Amendment Act.

An implementation plan

Repeal the Education and Training (System Reform) Amendment Act.

Return the Standards of the Teaching Profession and Initial Teacher qualification setting functions back to the Teaching Council.

Repealing the Act would also reinstate the purpose of the Teaching Council to include 'raising the status of the profession' and restore the overall functions removed by the amendment bill under section 479 of the Act, which require the Teaching Council to:

- Provide direction for teachers;
- Enhance the status of teachers; and
- Identify and disseminate best practice in teaching and fostering the teaching profession's continued development in light of research and evidence of changes in society and technology.

Repealing the Act would also return profession-elected representatives to the governing council. The governing council should be majority profession-elected – comprising 10 elected members and 3 ministerial appointments. These profession-elected representatives should include:

- Primary teacher
- Secondary teacher
- ECE teacher
- Primary principal
- Secondary principal
- ECE manager (who is also a qualified teacher)
- ITE provider
- Wānanga ITE provider (provide a very different lens than say uni or another private provider)
- Two dedicated Pasifika and Māori representatives who are any of the above

Valuing and respecting educators' professionalism

Restore Pay equity

The problem

The work of historically female-dominated education staff has been undervalued because of systemic gender discrimination. NZEI Te Riu Roa has championed pay equity for educators, winning a settlement for teacher aides in November 2020 that increased pay between 19% and 30%.

The 2025 amendments to the Equal Pay Act by the Luxon Coalition Government mean that all current education pay equity claims are discontinued. Those impacted include teachers, psychologists, education advisors and service managers working across education. It also means that the reviews of settled claims have stopped for therapists, teacher aides, librarians, science technicians, kaiārahi i te reo and administration staff in schools. For teacher aides, pay rates have slipped backwards by up to 17% against male comparators since their 2020 pay equity settlement and there is now little recourse to address this.

Our vision

A workforce where women's work is fairly recognised and valued and where systemic low pay based on historic gender discrimination is removed.

Legislation systematically entrenches equitable pay across female-dominated sectors including education, healthcare, and social services.

Our objective

Speedy resolution of current claims and reviews of settled claims to ensure the work of educators is fairly recognised and remunerated.

An implementation plan

Speedy resolution of current claims and reviews of settled claims to ensure the work of educators is fairly recognised and remunerated.

- In the first 100 days of government, repeal the Luxon legislation and replace it with an updated 2020 Act so that claims and reviews can resume immediately.
- Consult on improvements to the legislation for additional amendments within the first year of government.
- Commit to implementation timeframes for new claims and existing reviews (with priority to the care and support worker and teacher aide reviews).
- Restore a funding contingency for public sector pay equity claims to reinforce the commitment to delivery of pay equity settlements.

Valuing and respecting educators' professionalism

Secure, quality work for all educators in education

The problem

Teacher aides and other support staff are essential to the smooth operation of schools and ECE services and to successful learning for our tamariki. However, historic undervaluation and systemic discrimination mean these roles are funded through systems that perpetuate low pay, variable hours, and poor job security. Support staff are paid only for the weeks they work, and their hours fluctuate based on overall school budgets and individual student funding from the Ministry and other sources.

In 2023, there were over 20,000 people working as teacher aides within the schooling system, with a wide variety in the work they do, their responsibilities, skills and knowledge, and in their conditions of employment.

An education sector reference group was established in March 2021 to conduct a review of how teacher aides employed by schools are resourced.⁶

Some teacher aide funding is not predictable. As a result, many schools place teacher aides on fixed-term contracts, leading to persistent insecurity of employment. It also impacts schools' willingness to invest in career development, thereby stifling the development of a skilled workforce. Lack of permanent employment contracts devalues the status or tūnga of teacher aides, which impacts outcomes for learners.

Schools rely on funding for individual students to employ teacher aides, but lose this funding if a student moves on or shows improvement. While such improvement could be maintained or advanced with continued support, removing the funding removes that support, often causing the student to regress.

The application processes for learning support funding are time-consuming, inefficient, and an administrative burden for both schools and the Ministry.

Students must present themselves at their very worst to gain support and those students who have mild to moderate needs are often not supported, even though some support would improve their learning success. Teacher aides are well known for the work they do in supporting learners with a wide variety of behavioural, neurodiverse, and physical support needs but are perhaps lesser known for the work they do in supporting language acquisition and literacy, including English, te reo Māori, and Pacific languages.

Our vision

An educator's working conditions are a child's learning conditions. Everyone working in schools and centres should have secure work, fair pay, and access to professional learning and development to ensure tamariki are best supported to succeed.

Our objective

Change the funding system so that support staff in schools are centrally funded and teacher aides are employed on an annual basis.

Valuing and respecting educators' professionalism

An implementation plan

NZEI Te Riu Roa recommends any incoming government urgently adopt the unanimous recommendations of a sector review group that reported to the Minister of Education in 2024 on how teacher aides employed by schools should be resourced.⁷

It is recommended that teacher aide resourcing be delivered via a two-part “hybrid” resourcing model as a fully funded form of staffing entitlement, where:

- schools receive a base level of predictable, formula-driven teacher aide resourcing each year, and
- schools continue to receive responsive, individualised teacher aide resourcing on an individual needs basis through specific learning support initiatives.

The group recommended funding the predictable resourcing component by disestablishing and consolidating several funding streams into a formula-driven staffing entitlement for schools.

It further recommended retaining some responsive, individualised resourcing to strike a balance between predictability and responsiveness. The group considered that some of these resource streams would be best delivered as a staffing entitlement, with the remainder provided as cash grants.

Toitū Te Tiriti - Upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi

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Mōku te Ao

Under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, we have an obligation to operationalise a system that recognises and uplifts Māori people and their identity. We believe that an education system based on rangatiratanga centres tamariki Māori - with rights to control their own aspirations and destiny – and would work for all children through values of mutual benefit to society.

The problem

The education system has historically played a role in the colonisation process and led to the loss of language, culture, and identity for ākonga Māori and therefore, their whānau, iwi, and hapū. It has failed to provide success for ākonga Māori as Māori, and the result has been highly inequitable outcomes for Māori in schooling. Prioritising and valuing te ao Māori, te reo Māori, and tikanga Māori in kura, schools, and ECE centres recognises the importance of language, culture, and identity to the success of tamariki Māori.

Since the Coalition Government was elected in 2023, it has undermined and attacked the place of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in education and cut the resourcing and support for te reo Māori and mātauranga Māori in the education system and national curriculum. This has included removing funding from Te Ahu o Te Reo, a highly effective Māori language course, in 2023, scrapping specialist resource teachers of te reo Māori in 2025, and making unilateral changes to education laws and the national curriculum (Te Mātaiaho and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa) without meaningful engagement or co-design with Māori over the period 2024-2026.

The Government's removal in late 2025, under legislative urgency, of school boards' obligation to "give effect to Te Tiriti" has been found by the Waitangi Tribunal to breach the principles of partnership, active protection, and good government. The Government has refused to halt or reverse these unilateral amendments to the Education and Training Act or to wait for a second Waitangi Tribunal report on curriculum issues before it mandates radical changes to the national curriculum.

The Coalition Government is also planning to introduce legislation prior to the November general election that may entirely remove the obligation under the Education and Training Act to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and support Māori-Crown relationships.

Educators argue that stripping mandatory obligations to uphold Te Tiriti deprioritises mātauranga Māori, te reo Māori, and equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori.

Despite the removal of the legal requirement, over 1,800 school boards in December 2025 publicly committed to continuing to uphold Te Tiriti in their schools. NZEI Te Riu Roa members are strongly committed to upholding Te Tiriti and working for the success of Māori learners. NZEI Te Riu Roa has taken legal action and claims to the Waitangi Tribunal to challenge the Government's actions.

Te Tiriti sits at the centre of the new 2026 Standards for the Teaching Profession – standards that were widely consulted on with the profession. Teachers are committed to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and understand that this has implications for all of our practice.

Toitū Te Tiriti - Upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi

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Our vision

Educators in Aotearoa New Zealand are committed to decolonising our education system and upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) as the foundation for a bicultural education system that puts the needs of ākonga Māori (Māori learners) first. When tamariki Māori succeed, all children succeed.

Our objective

Centering Te Tiriti o Waitangi at the heart of teaching and learning in all our national curricula, and ensuring school governance and all Crown agencies honour and give effect to their Te Tiriti obligations.

Supporting Māori tino rangatiratanga and mana mokuhake over the education of their tamariki.

An implementation plan

- Restore the mandatory obligation for school boards to give effect to Te Tiriti in the Education and Training Act in the next government's first 100-day legislative programme.
- Retain the 'purpose' objectives of honouring Te Tiriti and supporting Māori-Crown relationships in sections 4, 9 and 32 of the Education and Training Act.
- Pause the rollout of the updated curriculum (Te Mātaiaho and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa and the six learning areas due for full implementation from 2029) until genuine, authentic co-design with Māori and sector groups is completed.
- Invest more in te reo me ngā tikanga professional learning for all educators.
- Build a system-wide advisory system of expert kaiako to support kaiako and ākonga in kura, replacing the Resource Teachers of Māori (RTM) service.
- Initiate a process to build greater mana motuhake (including resourcing) for Kaupapa Māori and Māori-medium education.
- NZEI Te Riu Roa broadly supports the Mātauranga Iwi Leaders Group education manifesto for Election 2026.
- NZEI Te Riu Roa supports the aspirations of Māori education groups, iwi, and hapū for models of education that assert tino rangatiratanga and mana motuhake over the education of their mokopuna. However, we call for models that uphold these aspirations within the public system and that do not carry the educational, professional, and industrial risks of the current neo-liberal charter school model. The current charter school model allows for private profit, unqualified staff, and the undermining of the rights of kaimahi and kaiako to organise collectively.

Defending quality early childhood education

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ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand is a public good that empowers adults and children to learn and grow together. It is a partnership between Government, community, whānau, and ECE services, and a choice for parents, underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and reflecting the rich diversity of communities within Aotearoa. (Quality Public ECE 2020 Vision.)

The main objective of NZEI Te Riu Roa is to advance the cause of quality public education generally while upholding and maintaining the just claims of its members individually and collectively.

NZEI Te Riu Roa is a values-led, Te Tiriti o Waitangi-based organisation. This means that in all areas of work, mokopuna Māori are considered first. We believe that an education system based on rangatiratanga and whakamana would result in a society that benefits all. We call this Mōku te Ao. The review needs to consider this approach and reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

In the early childhood education sector, high-quality education is critical to children's wellbeing and learning. Key indicators of quality include:

- Fully qualified and certificated teachers
- Qualified teacher-to-child ratios consistent with research
- Group sizes small enough to enable responsive relationships
- Pay parity across the education sector.

The problem

The National, New Zealand First, and ACT Party coalition came into power in 2023. One of the promises the ACT Party campaigned on, and which was included in the coalition agreement with National, was to conduct a review of the regulatory framework of the early childhood sector. This promise was made in response to the 2017-2023 Labour-led government's establishment of a 10-year strategic plan for the sector: He taonga te tamaiti, Every child a taonga | Early learning action plan 2019-2029. Private, for-profit providers and their lobbyists had railed against the plan's objectives and actions, which included introducing network management to slow the sprawling proliferation of unneeded private services while improving provision in underserved communities, reintroducing the 100% funding band for services that prioritised quality teaching, introducing pay parity funding for teachers, and initiating a workforce development plan.

As part of the National-ACT coalition agreement, David Seymour was delegated the role of Associate Minister for Education, with responsibility for early childhood education. Minister Seymour got straight to work establishing a new Ministry for Regulation and began an aggressive programme of "reform" for the sector.

Defending quality early childhood education

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Timeline of legislative and regulatory changes to New Zealand's ECE sector under the Coalition Government

Mar 2024

Ministry for Regulation begins regulatory review of the early childhood education sector

May 2024

Education (Early Childhood Services) Amendment Regulations 2024

- Effect: Removed the requirement for a “person responsible” in ECE centres to hold a full practicing certificate, easing staffing requirements.

July 2024

Pay Parity rules for non-permanent certificated Early Childhood teachers are removed.

Aug 2024

Regulatory Systems (Education) Amendment Act 2024

- Effect: Mandated Police vetting for all employees at unlicensed childcare services (e.g. gym crèches).

Nov 2024

Education (Early Childhood Services) Amendment Regulations (No 2) 2024

- Effect: Updated qualification requirements for home-based ECE providers to allow for transitional certification.

Dec 2024

Report from Regulatory Review of ECE sector is published

May 2025

Pay Equity claim and process legislation is repealed.

Employment Relations (Pay Deductions for Partial Strikes) Amendment Act 2025

- Effect: Amended sections 16–18 of the Education and Training Act to align with new strike pay deduction rules. w

July 2025

More changes to the pay parity scheme were announced – this time removing the rules for salary assessment and step placement for new graduates, migrant teachers, and other certificated teachers starting in the early childhood sector (i.e. moving from primary or secondary schools to ECE)

Oct 2025

ECE Funding Review Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) established

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Nov 2025

- Education and Training (Early Childhood Education Reform) Amendment Act 2025
- Established the Director of Regulation for ECE and
- Added “parental labour market participation” as a statutory objective for the ECE sector.

April 2026

New ECE Licensing Criteria Implementation

- “reducing the regulatory burden on ECE providers” by streamlining licensing requirements.

This aggressive programme of reform has focussed on reinforcing the free market model of the provision of early childhood education, where profit is king, rather than addressing the needs of tamariki, whānau, kaiako, and kaimahi.

NZEI Te Riu Roa has run an annual nationwide survey of kaiako, kaimahi and whānau since 2022⁸. In the 2025 report, a third of early childhood educators said they had frequently considered leaving the sector during the previous six months. The number one reason teachers cited for wanting to leave was burnout, followed closely by high workload, feeling the sector was heading in the wrong direction, and uncertainty over the future of the pay parity scheme, which seeks to align early educators’ pay with that of primary teachers.

The current regulated minimum ratios of teachers to children are inadequate. In our survey, 79% of teachers said the ratios didn’t allow educators to satisfy health and safety requirements. More than 90% were concerned that these ratios don’t allow for the learning conditions that create quality education. This is especially notable given that 96% agreed or strongly agreed that children are needing more social, emotional, and learning support these days. However, learning support is difficult to access, according to 92% of respondents.

Our vision

Our youngest tamariki deserve the very best quality teaching and learning if we are to give them the foundations for success in life, uphold the mana of children and their whānau, and ensure their hauora and wellbeing.

Quality early childhood education is a human right, a public good, and essential social infrastructure.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, early childhood education is a public good that empowers adults and children to learn and grow together. It is a partnership between Government, community, whānau, and ECE services, and a choice for parents, underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and reflecting the rich diversity of communities within Aotearoa.

UNESCO has used the principle of education as a public good to advocate for adequate public funding for quality education (GPE, 2016), to argue that education should be available to all, and to reaffirm the role of the State as the main duty bearer in ensuring the right to education. This implies a primary responsibility of the state in the provision and funding of educational opportunities.

Our objective

For every child to access free, quality, planned public early childhood services that are community-based, locally responsive and culturally sustaining, with education facilitated by qualified teachers.

Defending quality early childhood education

An implementation plan

A. Reinstate Pay Parity

The introduction of pay parity funding by the Labour-led government from 2021 saw pay rises of up to \$40,000 for some kaiako, and the implementation of a union pay scale for a privatised sector. This was the result of decades of campaigning by union members and leaders. Though the implementation of this funding has not been without issues, services report lower staffing churn and improvements in quality teaching and learning.

Steps

- Reinstate funding attestation rules to apply to all employed certificated teachers.
- Increase funding rates by 15%.
- Increase Base, Extended, and Full pay parity salary scales to meet the Unified Base Salary scale for kindergarten, primary, and secondary teachers.

B. The Government must make a strategic decision that developing a public system of early childhood education is in the best interests of children. It must work to implement this in the 2026-2029 term of government with a strong programme of legislative change and consultation with the sector.

To effectively turn the tide away from a privatised, profit-focused education system, a strong position must be taken, then supported by an effective plan to implement change.

The Government must back up its commitment to this shift with clear incentives for quality practice within a public model of provision.

Public early childhood education services will require a system of support that develops 'backroom' efficiencies and enables teaching staff to focus on providing quality education.

Steps

Social License

- Build momentum towards public provision by using current funding mechanisms to incentivise opting in to public provision – for example, by increasing the funding band for public centres with 100% qualified teachers.

Quality

- Restart progress on the objectives of He taonga te tamaiti, the ten-year ECE strategic plan.
- Amend Regulated Ratios from 50% - 80% qualified and certificated teachers

Regulatory/Legislative

- Seek cross-party support for including this goal in the Education Act.
- Develop an integration model with appropriate legislative instruments to move services that voluntarily transition from private to public (similar to that used with special character schools in the compulsory sector - Education Act 1989, part 414, section 33).

Implementation

- Prioritise kaupapa Māori and Pacific language services in the development of a public ECE model.
- Amend the purpose of ECE Regulations to remove "labour market participation."
- Place conditions on the receipt of all public funding (across the sector) to ensure it is used solely to deliver high-quality teaching and learning.
- Centrally fund salaries for services that are or have opted into the public provision model, delivered via collective agreements or Fair Pay agreements.

Defending quality early childhood education

- Increase the quantum of the current 20 hours free subsidy to any service joining the public system and extend funding over time to include two-year-olds in public provision.
- Develop a strategy for the acquisition of existing ECE-designated land and property – in consultation with sector leaders (including Kindergarten Associations) – to enable the transition to a public early childhood sector.

C. Enhancing quality teaching

Qualified teachers are key to high-quality early childhood education and to achieving education goals and long-term positive social outcomes. Teachers are leaving the profession in unprecedented numbers because of pay and conditions, while the number of teachers in training is inadequate for replacement, let alone workforce growth forecasts.

The public system should provide exemplary employment standards for teachers and all staff to improve quality across the sector.

Steps

- Restore Pay Equity legislation within the first 100 days of the new government.
- Protect 100% qualified teacher funding to incentivise quality and strengthen resourcing for Initial Teacher Education to ensure sufficient lecturers to work with students upgrading/new students.
- Workforce development planning must include scholarships and paid placements for all prospective ECE student teachers, with students fluent in reo Māori and/or Pacific languages prioritised.
- Implement Fair Pay agreements for ECE as a priority.
- Seek cross-party support to regulate for 80% qualified teachers immediately, with plans to regulate for 100% by 2030.
- Require services opting in to public provision to meet, and be funded for, the goal of 100% qualified teachers, quality adult-to-child ratios, and exemplary working conditions codified in Fair Pay and collective agreements.
- Fund and align minimum non-contact time entitlements for teachers with the Kindergarten Teachers Collective Agreement (KTCA).
- Address gender wage injustice through speedy, funded settlement of pay equity claims and mandated targets to address the gender pay gap.
- Establish pay equity settlements as sector standards, expressed via collective agreements and Fair Pay rates.

D. Planned public provision and vertical integration

Planning provision that strengthens local communities should be the aim, as it is with the compulsory education sector. A system devoid of planning has reinforced the competitive market approach in the ECE sector.

Planned provision will ensure children and families have access to services that are located where needed and responsive to local needs, including cultural requirements.

Vertical integration of ECE services with schools would facilitate the transition of children along their learning journey, support professional collaboration around Te Whāriki and other curricula, and strengthen the links across public education. It could create financial efficiencies and ease access and convenience for parents and whānau.

Steps

- Introduce a moratorium on the approval of any services establishing new centres without proven need.
- Ensure all new centres in areas of low provision are public centres – preferably linked into a hub combining “enhanced” kindergarten and community services.
- Require all new-build schools to automatically consider including ECE services in their design and construction.
- Prioritise locating new public ECE provision on or adjacent to existing school sites, similar to the design of some Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Māori, and Wānanga.

Defending quality early childhood education

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E. Making it a reality

Advancing quality public early childhood education in the next term of government (2026-2029).

Steps

Funding for quality 2026-2029.

- Immediately restore the pay of all early childhood teachers – including new, relief, and fixed-term teachers – to pay parity rates.
- Reject all recommendations from the 2025-2026 ECE Funding Review that seek to dismantle pay parity, lower quality, and extend the market model.

An independent Curriculum and Assessment Council

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The Problem

The process undertaken by the Ministry of Education since 2023 to refresh the National Curriculum (both Te Marautanga o Aotearoa and the New Zealand Curriculum) has not met the expectations of the education sector in terms of engagement, consultation and co-design. As such, it has ignored, in whole or in part, the input of young people, education experts (including teachers), and iwi, hapū, and whānau.

Subsequent frameworks, wāhanga ako and learning area drafts have not upheld Te Tiriti o Waitangi, are narrow in scope, and do not match current pedagogical and child development evidence. Moreover, the structure of the curricula, including the learning areas and wāhanga ako already in use, is difficult to implement at best, if not unworkable in practical terms in many education settings.

The pace of consultation and change has been unreasonable, and children are not at the centre of this curriculum reform. The unnecessary speed to implement a curriculum that the sector says is not fit for purpose has layered multiple demands on an already under-resourced sector. This will have significant negative impacts, including on the recruitment and retention of teachers.

Our Vision

A system for curriculum and assessment change that moves beyond short-term political cycles, is educator- and expert-led, and is grounded in evidence and a partnership that honours and enacts Te Tiriti o Waitangi. A culturally responsive system of co-design that starts with the education sector, iwi, hapū and whānau, and learners themselves.

Our objective

The establishment of an Independent Curriculum and Assessment Council with bipartisan political support. The Council's structure, including its relationship to Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, Kaupapa Māori, and Māori-medium education, would be established and co-designed through partnership with iwi and Māori education representatives. NZEI Te Riu Roa also supports the efforts of Kaupapa Māori educators to establish their own education body.

An implementation plan

The mandating and implementation of the six learning areas of both Te Marautanga o Aotearoa and The New Zealand Curriculum should be paused immediately, and the Ministry must follow recommendations of the Waitangi Tribunal to engage with educators, experts, and Māori.

An independent Curriculum and Assessment Council

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Genuine consultation must take place, as the curricula need fundamental re-alignment, not mere tweaking. This includes reasserting the centrality of Te Tiriti o Waitangi to Te Mataiaho framework, along with inclusion as foundational elements; ensuring knowledge of content is balanced with, and doesn't replace, a focus on building competencies and skills; and ensuring the curriculum can work when teaching across year levels and through tuakana-teina relationships.

For curriculum, assessment, and accountability reform measures to be meaningful, lasting, and stable, major changes should only be made when the system is ready, after thorough testing, and with considered and resourced implementation. The challenge is not reform itself but its pace, scale, and sequencing. Sustainable reform is built on structure, not speed.

The Education and Training (System Reform) Amendment Act must be repealed, as it allows the Minister of Education to make national curriculum statements without a review or report from the Secretary for Education under section 90B.

Prior to this Act, the Minister could already set national curriculum statements without a review or report. So, while the introduction of section 90A to the Act acknowledges the need for a systematic approach to reviewing the curriculum, it does not guarantee curriculum change that is bipartisan, sector- and needs-driven, or which upholds Te Tiriti o Waitangi.⁹

Rather, the inclusion of section 90B into the Act undermines 90A completely and hands political power over the curriculum to the Minister of the day, overriding not only the teaching profession and academic experts, but also the Secretary for Education and the Ministry of Education itself.

NZEI Te Riu Roa supports the proposal for a cross-party framework for curriculum reform, implemented by an independent Aotearoa New Zealand Curriculum and Assessment Council. NZEI Te Riu Roa supports the NZ Principals' Federation thorough Curriculum Reform discussion document as the starting point for work towards such a council.

Endnotes:

1. The entitlement to a teacher aide in every classroom is in addition to teacher aides funded through ORS support for individual students.
2. Ministry of Education, *The review of how schools are resourced for teacher aides*. Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2023. Accessed 24 March 2025: https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-10/Finalreport-The-sector-groups-preferred-option-for-how-schools-are-resourced-for-teacher-aides.pdf?VersionId=MAJpXeSn_ZZFqu7MK9s8qrSz5CWxbkIO
3. This pathway is based on a 2025 report by NZEI Te Riu Roa, *Kia Mahi Kotahi* - see https://www.nzeiteriuroa.org.nz/assets/downloads/Kia-mahi-kotahi_Working-together.pdf
4. The projected costs above and in the table below are based on 2025 estimates and would need to be adjusted for inflation.
5. <https://www.nzeiteriuroa.org.nz/about-us/media-releases/government-amendments-to-strip-teacher-representation-and-independence-from-teaching-council>
6. *Teacher Aide Funding Review 2026_Briefing for Treasury.docx* - based on the Sector Reference Group's final report: https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-10/Final-report-The-sector-groups-preferred-option-for-how-schools-are-resourced-for-teacher-aides.pdf?VersionId=MAJpXeSn_ZZFqu7MK9s8qrSz5CWxbkIO
7. *Ibid.*
8. NZEI Te Riu Roa – Kōriporipo
9. 90A Review of national curriculum statements by Secretary
(a) The Secretary must, on an ongoing basis: Plan for a rolling cycle of reviews of learning areas, subjects, and wāhanga ako referred to in the national curriculum statement made under section 90; and
(b) conduct those reviews
and 90B (4) The Minister may exercise the power in subsection (1) whether or not the Secretary has reviewed the national curriculum statement or reported on it under section 90A.

