

ER 6/1; IPM 3/18/1

27 July 2009

Hon Anne Tolley
Minister of Education
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON

Dear Minister

Thank you for your response to my letter seeking details of the 1.5% staffing cut proposed for 2011. I am disappointed that you were not in a position to provide any detail about your intentions.

You will appreciate that the prospect of the loss of up to 700 front line teaching positions is causing some alarm in secondary schools. Members whose jobs may be at risk are looking to me to provide some reassurance and, if possible, certainty. With that in mind, I wish to make a number of brief points, which cover both matters of fact and perception, since both have impact on how our members view the prospect of cuts to teaching jobs.

1. Robbing Peter to Pay Paul

It appears that the need to find savings of \$50 million per year has arisen because the Treasury advice was that the 1 to 15 ratio for new entrants should not be implemented at this time and the early version of the budget counted this as a saving. The Government subsequently chose to ignore this advice meaning that money had to be found elsewhere to balance the books. I am entirely supportive of improving class sizes at all levels because of the educational advantages smaller classes offer to students, schools and teachers but parents and teachers of secondary age students will not accept that improvements in primary school ratios should be at the cost of the quality of education for students in secondary schools who are working towards national qualifications.

2. Savings or Cuts?

It seems that the government would prefer the use of the word “savings” rather than cuts but any change which reduces a component of the staffing formula will result in real, front-line job losses in schools. Those schools with rising rolls may well retain existing staffing levels for greater numbers of students (a cut to staffing relative to the numbers they would otherwise have had) but for schools without rising rolls, a cut in entitlement staffing will mean real teachers lose their jobs.

The absence of any detail around the cuts is fuelling perceptions amongst members and the public that:

- The government is half-hearted in its support for New Zealand's proud tradition of free public education. This perception will be particularly strong since cuts to state school staffing are proposed while private schools receive a funding boost to assist them to keep their staffing numbers up and profits up while keeping their class sizes down.
- The government is prepared to damage the delivery of secondary education perhaps for ideological reasons. Apparently the education ministry offered up overall a greater level of budget saving than any other Ministry or Department which raises questions about the extent of the government's commitment to state education.

3. Signalled Reductions in Front-Line Staff

Although you have been unable to provide detail about possible cuts to PPTA, it has come to our attention that there seems to have been discussions with some principals about the options. For example the possibility of disestablishing guidance counsellor positions seems to have been floated, triggering a wave of anxious communications from members.

If it is the case that you are exploring ideas already then it would have been appropriate for you to indicate in your response to my last letter the general scope of the options you are already considering since PPTA represents teachers in all roles in secondary schools. We would have immediately pointed out how destructive this would be, particularly in the light of the outcomes from the Taumata Whanonga for which we have such high hopes. It is hard to imagine how cutting into the delivery of pastoral care and behaviour management in schools will benefit students or make the school system more efficient, especially at a time when there is such a focus on dealing with challenging and sometimes dangerous students. Further, since small schools require guidance counsellors to teach, the removal of that staffing will undermine both curriculum delivery and pastoral care, especially in rural areas.

I have received similar concerns from members about discussions relating to Itinerant Teachers of Music and other teacher groups. These discussions may or may not have been substantive, but they are creating growing ripples of concern and anger.

4. There is No Fat in Secondary School Staffing

During the 1990's secondary schools were subject to a series of staffing cuts under previous National governments. Those cuts contributed to documented increases in workloads, reductions in participation in extracurricular activities, decreased levels of professional development, declining job satisfaction and high loss rates from teaching.

In light of the pressures created by those staffing cuts the Staffing Review Group was formed in 2000 to assess the staffing needs of the sector. Significant extra staffing was identified as being required to address those pressures. Extra teachers were added to the secondary system between 2001 and 2006 but the implementation was only partial and a number of the identified needs remained unaddressed. Put simply, there was then, and is now, no fat in secondary staffing. Indeed, the needs of the system are still not being met by the current staffing levels. Since then teachers have been subject to increased workload demands through NCEA, personalised learning for students, a new curriculum and increased professional learning expectations - all good in themselves - but each an added time demand.

The phased introduction of the SRG staffing improvements was coordinated with the introduction of the guaranteed non-contact time in secondary schools. This non-contact time has had a major impact on teacher retention and job satisfaction. Frankly, the increased workload generated by NCEA would be unmanageable without the guaranteed non-contact time. The SRG staffing has also been used to improve class size and increase curriculum options for students.

It is worth noting that schools currently have to try to provide teachers with an average class size of 26. A survey commissioned by PPTA in 2007 indicated parents did not want their children in classes over 25. The recent furore over integrated schools charging substantial 'donations' in order to lower class sizes is further evidence of a very sensible belief amongst parents that effective teaching requires smaller classes. Cuts to the staffing formula will result in bigger classes.

The additional staffing implementation and the contractually guaranteed preparation time were part of the independently arbitrated settlement of 2002, which followed 18 months of unprecedented industrial action by our members. That settlement, and the work done by the Ministerial Taskforce of 2003, established the platform for seven years of industrial peace in the sector. During this time schools were able to concentrate on making significant changes in curriculum and assessment, the expansion of their approaches to working with students academically and pastorally and to work on the development of school-based professional learning cultures. The result has been a period of intense professional growth as evidenced by the NZCER 2009 survey on school climate.

Staffing cuts will threaten all of these gains and will risk recreating the staffing crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s when the recession eases (as it inevitably will) and schools are exposed again to an exodus of skilled teachers into non-teaching jobs or jobs overseas.

5. Alternatives to Cutting the Entitlement Salary Budget

As you asked for thoughts on ways to spend money more efficiently in education to accommodate the shortfall created in the Vote Education budget I will briefly touch on areas where you have the power to make more effective and efficient use of state funds.

5.1 **Integrating Private Schools**

Ministers of education of all parties over the last twenty years have lacked the will to resist spending cumulatively tens of millions of dollars in additional property, operations funding and staffing costs to set up very small secondary schools either by way of the Integration Act or through s155 and s156 of the Education Act. Your colleague, Dr Lockwood Smith, predicted this state of affairs in 1992 when he said in 1991:

“What ... is causing me alarm is with the removal of support ... we’re now seeing an increasing number of independent schools... seeking to integrate into the state system. That’s disastrous. It’s going to cost the taxpayer millions – and there is no more money – that means the existing state schools run the risk of getting less.”

The integration of each new private school is a cost to the taxpayer. A moratorium on integration until the economy has recovered will save considerable sums of money.

5.2 **Balancing the Cost of Choice**

There is a trade-off between the ideological position of unfettered choice for parents and the pragmatic reality of the huge additional costs to the state of providing those choices for quite small groups of largely wealthy parents. Each state school creates base staffing, property and operational costs. Five hundred students are more economically educated in one school than in several small schools.

I would be more than happy to work with you to address the expense generated by having a multiplicity of small schools in locations where, in reality, one or two would suffice. This might include the development of a framework to identify essential-to-the-network schools and a planned programme of network reviews.

5.3 **Recognising the Needs of State Schools**

While you have made a promise to private schools to improve their funding, we believe that your prime responsibility with respect to expenditure of state funds is to the state education system, where most students are educated. At the very least, funding to private schools should be restricted to those private schools which have teacher:student ratios and per student operational funding that is worse than those pertaining in similar state schools.

6. **Cuts or Investment?**

Members will question why the cuts need to continue given that the budget shortfall in Vote Education will be covered many times over by the additional government income associated with the recent court decision on the tax

liabilities of the major banks. They will see no reason now for pursuing the cuts in secondary school teacher numbers to address a blunt commitment to make the cut.

Moreover, most countries regard education as an area for investment, despite the tough economic times because failure to do so leaves the country unable to take advantage of any economic upswing. I **attach** a document we will be discussing with members at a round of Paid Union Meetings this term entitled *Secondary Education and the Economic Crisis*. It makes the case for investment rather than cuts as the only meaningful way of rebuilding for the future.

7. **Concluding Comments**

While we recognise that there is currently an environment which justifies fiscal restraint, nevertheless any rational proposal to cut or use education money differently must meet the basic rule that it does not undermine the delivery of education to students in the state system.

Education is a fundamental area of the country's social and economic framework. It impacts on hundreds of thousands of students each year and that impact goes with them for their working life. We do not expect that the sector will remain unchanged as the needs of students change, but we do expect that any changes made will be thoughtful, coherent and in the students' best interests.

I look forward to further discussions on this topic.

Yours sincerely

Kate Gainsford
PRESIDENT