

News

Educator slams lack of te reo

By Brenton Vannisselroy

A leading educator has condemned some secondary schools for failing to teach te reo Maori, saying language courses are in a "state of disgrace".

Speaking at AUT University, Dr Stuart Middleton says te reo Maori has experienced a significant revival but more secondary school children are learning French than Maori, one of New Zealand's two official languages.

Middleton finds it staggering that emphasis is put on European languages such as French, Spanish and German — languages not spoken widely within New Zealand.

Despite New Zealand's increasingly diverse society, young Kiwis are still learning the same languages their parents learnt many years ago, says Middleton who is executive director of the Manukau Institute of Technology.

Statistics from the Ministry of Education's Education Counts website say 3000 more New Zealand students learnt French than Maori at secondary school level in July last year.

New Zealand's largest boys' school, Auckland Grammar, does not provide students with an option to learn Maori, but principal John Morris says there are good reasons for this.

"We have never really had any demand," Morris says.

Morris also explains that he has found it "particularly diffi-

cult" to get good teachers capable of teaching te reo up to the high standard Auckland Grammar expects.

He adds that Auckland Grammar is reluctant to introduce a new language that would detract from languages already on the school's curriculum.

Latin is compulsory for half of the third form students who attend the school.

More than 2000 students across New Zealand learnt Latin last year, about 600 more than learnt Chinese, a language which is spoken widely in several New Zealand communities.

Morris says Latin is taught because it follows the charter of the school and is "vital to the special ethos".

AUT's Maori student liaison officer Kitea Tipuna recognises why schools such as Auckland Grammar placed strong emphasis on Latin rather than Maori.

"Latin is based on tradition and for some schools it becomes part of the school's psyche," Tipuna says.

"Te reo Maori has a perception attached to it that it has no international currency."

He says that until te reo has this international currency it should simply not be taught in some schools.

But he believes that it was important for all New Zealand schools to provide te reo Maori as an option.

"Most definitely it should be taught. It is an official language," he says.

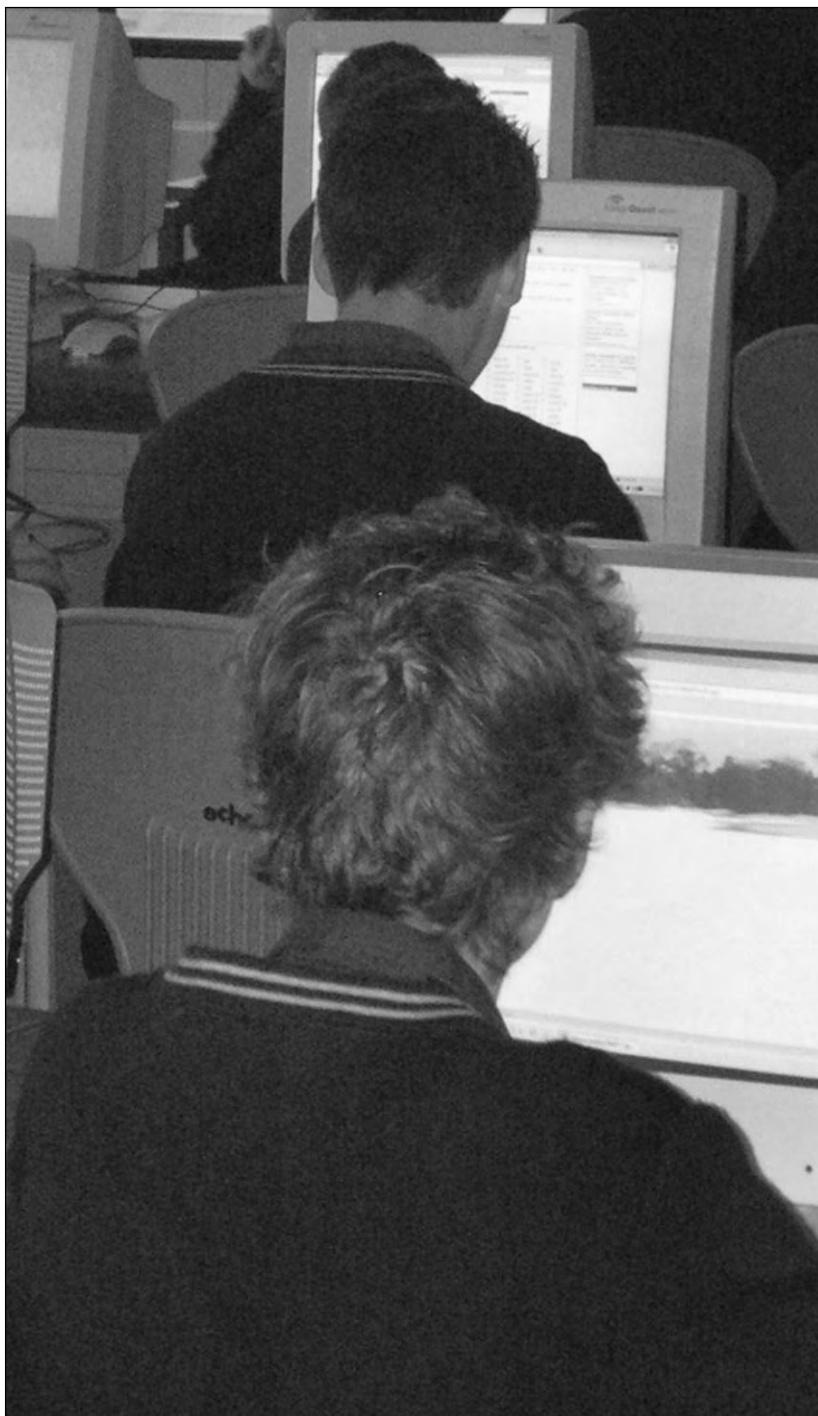


PHOTO: BRENTON VANNISSELROY

MISSING OUT: Auckland Grammar students learn Latin but not Maori.

Minimum wage still too low

By Dyani Baggenstos

New Zealand families are struggling to make ends meet on the minimum wage, according to research released recently by the Ministry of Social Development.

The research shows that the living standards of New Zealanders are slipping dangerously low, with 38 per cent of children living in poverty.

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) says the adult minimum wage is not enough to raise a family on today.

In March this year, the adult minimum wage increased from \$9.50 to \$10.25 an hour. The increase benefitted around 91,000 adult workers and 10,000 youths.

Associate Minister of Social Services and Employment Ruth Dyson says the government's goal is to achieve an adult minimum wage of \$12 by the end of 2008 if the economic conditions are right.

But this promise is not set in concrete and is a major concern for organisations like CPAG, which are working hard to support children and families in hardship.

The government also released an In Work Payment family package this April to provide extra support for child care, yet more than 200,000 children are exempt from the package, and more than half of those excluded are Maori and Pacific children.

Professor Innes Asher, a paediatrician at Starship Hospital, says beneficiary support is grossly discriminating.

"It's quite shocking this exclusion for Maori," she says.

"The unaffordable cost of living is linked directly to respiratory problems in Maori children in New Zealand, and in additional research there is racism in the ways health officials treat asthma patients.

"Doctors are less likely to give health care to Maori," she says. "And Maori children require hospitalisation for asthma almost twice as often as non-Maori children."

The economic spokesperson for CPAG, Dr Susan St John, says the increased proportion of children facing significant hardship since 2000 (from 18 to 26 per cent), comes as no surprise given the warning signs like the increase in foodbank use.

"Our poorest families are being left behind," she says.

"The minimum wage is too low, and family support has been eroded by inflation over the years."

Sharon Clair, NZ Nurses' Organisation Maori policy analyst, says there is a direct link between Maori being over-represented in minimum wage jobs and having high rates of child and family poverty, poor nutrition and health, unemployment and crime.

"Poverty is a reflection of society's lack of respect, consideration and responsibility to its most vulnerable," she says.

The CPAG hopes that the findings from this research will influence future government policy as poverty continues to rise.

Kids struggle to get 5+ a day

By Rachael Sutton

Getting kids to eat their "5+A Day" is proving to be a difficult task for parents.

Recent statistics released by the Ministry of Health show that one third of New Zealand children between five and 14 are overweight, with 10 per cent classed as obese.

Dr Callum Durward, senior lecturer of public health and psychosocial studies at AUT University and a paediatric dentist, says children aren't getting enough of the "right foods" in their diet.

"Children and their parents are hearing the '5+A Day' message but not acting on it," Durward says.

As a paediatric dentist, Durward says he sees the consequences of bad diet reflected in children's teeth.

"These days children are not eating enough of the right kinds of food or drinking enough water and are replacing it with too many soft drinks and energy drinks," he says.

"The popularity of sipper bottles is causing severe amounts of dental decay and the erosion of enamel on children's teeth, and it doesn't make a blind bit of difference whether they're sugar-free or not."

Fiona Hill, mother of eight-year-old Caleb and 11-year-old Shelley, says it is hard to imple-

ment the message of eating five servings of fruit and vegetables a day.

"When your kids are young they are fussy when it comes to food, especially vegetables," Hill says.

She believes getting kids to eat healthily is made even harder by the amount of sugary products on the market that appeal to children.

"Of course they're always going to want to choose a chocolate bar or a packet of chips for a snack over carrot sticks.

"It would be almost impossible for me to try and get my kids, partic-

ularly my eight-year-old, to eat five servings a day."

However, she says she is not worried because she believes kids develop a taste for fruit and vegetables as they get older.

Paula Dudley, general manager of the 5+A Day programme, says that while Hill's belief is true in most cases, the programme is trying to get children to make good food decisions at an early age.

"It's easier to develop habits at a young age rather than try to change bad habits when people are older and the damage is already done," Dudley says.

New Zealand didn't have an obesity problem 20

years ago and she believes there has been an environmental



Healthier Food Plan

5+ a day seeks to educate consumers that what we eat now will affect our long-term health.

Junk food is okay in moderation but must be balanced with healthy foods, such as at least five servings of fresh fruit and vegetables every day!

5+ A Day promotes fresh fruit and vegetables as a healthier, delicious, cost effective, and convenient 'fast' food.

mental shift. "Kids aren't walking to school as much anymore and good cooking skills are being replaced by the easy option of takeaways, so it's harder to create a healthy environment for children."

Dudley says that is the driving force behind the 5+A Day programme.

"Despite what many people think, the message is slowly getting through but it's one of those things that will take some time."

"We need to decrease the tax on good foods, such as milk and fruit, and increase tax on bad things like confectionery that contribute to bad health, both oral and otherwise."

New Zealand is ranked seventh in an OECD league of the world's most obese nations and nearly 250,000 school-age children are overweight or obese.