

Access to education opens the pathway to the future: Maori Party

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The huge potential of young people, and the youth of the Maori population, make education a critical focus for the Maori Party.

At the party's policy launch today in Flaxmere, education spokesperson Te Ururoa Flavell said 46% of the Maori population are 19 years and under.

"This is a massive contrast to the total NZ population – where only 29% are 19 years and under. We have to get it right for them, for us – for it is the children of today who inherit the earth – who will care for us in our old age."

The policy shows a strong emphasis on early childhood education, with a focus on quality programmes and easy access.

In the compulsory education sector, the Maori Party is calling for professional development for teachers and stronger incentives for schools, to engage their Maori students better, and to raise their expectations of success.

The principle of open access is carried into tertiary education, with universal allowances at the same level as the unemployment benefit, and more apprenticeships and industry training.

Mr Flavell says education is about transferring knowledge between generations, so his generation should not charge the next for the education he received for free.

He listed statistics showing Maori under-achievement at school, and the lower incomes and job security that result. He said these issues are especially problematic in an economic downturn.

"But education is not just about readiness for the workforce. Education enables young people to make good choices about their future; it is also vital to equip students for life," he said.

"We also ascribe to the view, that the people are best able to determine their own solutions. And so we want to encourage greater freedom to supplement Maori educational outcomes with whanau, hapu and iwi models of education."

The Maori Party would allow Playcentres and Kohanga Reo to offer 20 hours of free early childhood education, and increase services in poor areas. ECE centres would teach healthy lifestyles, computer skill and encourage the use of home languages and dialects.

The teaching workforce in primary and secondary schools would be boosted, especially Maori language teachers, and support staff paid more. A Maori Education Authority would oversee development of iwi-based education services.

Tertiary student fees would gradually be reduced, and loans only be repaid after graduates started earning 150% of the average wage. Industry training, especially in sectors like fishing and farming where Maori are big players, would be increased.

Policy on Maori language and broadcasting was also released today. It established that iwi control of te reo should be maintained, with the Crown supporting their efforts to revitalise and develop their languages, including through mainstream cultural institutions.

The Maori Party also proposed establishing a Centre for Maori Language Excellence, and steps to protect iwi ownership of traditional intellectual property.

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