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Free Education in New Zealand is a Misrepresentation

“New Zealand’s recent ranking as 4th best place to live in the world, on the basis of, among other things, free education is farcical,” says Christine Low, National President of the National Council of Women of New Zealand.

The Education Act 1989 states that all children from 5 to 19 years are to be provided with free education, but further stipulates that this is through state schools. NCWNZ has long held the view that voluntary donations that parents are expected to pay negates the purported free education, let alone the prerequisite that such free access to education is only applicable to limited educational facilities.

School-leavers, most commonly aged between 15 – 19 years, who opt to further their education are readily burdened with fees and costs.

“To suggest that all youth are provided with free education is a misrepresentation of what is really happening in New Zealand. It is inherently unfair that youth who opt to continue their education by enrolling in further education outside the state school gate, should not enjoy the same right to ‘free education’ as those that remain in High School,” said Christine Low. “For many of these young people, a High School does not provide a suitable learning environment. It lacks the maturity they are looking for, and the access to focused education, which will set them on their proposed career path. To stay in a High School that does not meet their needs is an utter waste of taxpayer money and the youth’s time”

Education commentators frequently report that not all young people respond favourably to the teaching styles and curriculum offered in state schools. Some are more responsive to a different learning environment such as what they can gain from a Technical Institute or University. According

to Stuart Middleton, an Auckland educator and commentator, New Zealand is the only country in the OECD to remove the entitlement to free education and training for young people who leave school at 16.

“Technical Institutes and Universities also derive a significant contribution to their operating costs from the tax-payer; the community,” continued Christine Low. “The community therefore has a stake and interest in ensuring youth can continue their education without onerous fees.”

“While the letter of the law requires education to be undertaken in the state schools, the spirit of the law, which is unqualified access to free education, has been sidelined in the application of the Act,” concluded Christine Low. “The law needs to be modernized to meet the needs of today’s generation – this law is almost 20 years old. It is surely time to take a good look at the funding of education and come up with a plan for realistic and adequate resourcing right across the board, so that ALL children can have equal opportunities.”

ENDS

Further Information:

Christine Low, National President

Ph: 03 357 8887 or 021 065 5565

National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ)

PO Box 12 117

Wellington

Email: ncwnz@ihug.co.nz

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