Pay Parity Explainer

Early Childhood Education 2027

Office of Early Childhood Education
Te Tari Mātauranga Kōhungahunga

Pay parity means qualified and certificated ECE teachers are paid the same as school teachers with equivalent qualifications, experience, and responsibilities.

Pay parity is about

1. achieving **equal recognition for ECE teachers** within New Zealand's education system;
2. ensuring teachers are **paid fairly, regardless of the age of the children** they teach;
3. **attracting and retaining ECE-qualified teachers** in the sector;
4. building **a high-quality ECE workforce** for New Zealand's children and families.

.

Pay Equity is not Pay Parity

In July 2019, the Office of Early Childhood Education (OECE) launched a campaign for pay parity for all ECE teachers. At the time, NZEI was focused on pay equity. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, they have different goals:

- **Pay parity** is about ECE teachers receiving the same pay as school teachers with equivalent qualifications, experience, and responsibilities.
- **Pay equity** aims to ensure female-dominated occupations are paid fairly compared with occupations requiring similar skills, responsibilities, and qualifications that have traditionally been male-dominated.

Currently, only ECE teachers employed in free kindergartens receive salaries fully aligned with school teacher pay rates through their collective agreement.

Rule Changes

Recent changes mean fewer teachers must be paid on the pay parity scales, while employers have more flexibility in how they apply pay parity funding.

From October 2024

- Services could count unqualified staff for up to 80 hours per funding period, without showing they had tried to recruit a qualified teacher.
- Relief teachers, casual employees, and teachers not employed on permanent contracts were excluded from pay parity requirements.

From 1 July 2025

- Newly certificated teachers and teachers new to working in the NZ ECE sector could be placed on salary Step 1 regardless of their previous experience or higher qualifications.
- Services could choose to move to lower pay parity funding bands, but not higher ones.

Pay Rate Differences

The highest **"Full Pay Parity"** salary rates set by the Ministry of Education are now well below the salaries paid to school and free kindergarten teachers.

The pay scales for non-kindergarten ECE teachers have remained unchanged since **1 December 2023**, while school and free kindergarten teacher salaries have continued to increase. The table below compares:

- **ECE pay parity attestation rates** (from 1/12/2023); and
- **School teacher salary rates** (from 28/01/2027) and **kindergarten** from 6/04/2027)

Teacher Pay Scales - Full Pay Parity

Pay Step	ECE	School & Free Kindergarten	Percentage Increase (change)
1	$57,358	$64,119	11.8%
2	$59,544	$66,999	12.5%
3	$61,948	$69,616	12.4%
4	$64,133	$73,999	15.4%
5	$67,794	$78,768	16.2%
6	$71,869	$83,874	16.7%
7	$76,261	$90,042	18.1%
8	$81,566	$95,099	16.6%
9	$85,915	$102,475	19.3%
10	$92,175	$107,886	17.0%
11	$96,820		

School and free kindergarten teachers can also reach the top of their salary scale more quickly. Their pay scale was reduced from 11 steps to 10. This means many ECE teachers now take longer to reach the top salary rate and, when they do, they can still be paid less than their school and free kindergarten counterparts.

Manager/Leader - Full Pay Parity

Position	ECE	Free Kinder-garten	Percentage Increase
Relieving Head Teacher	Min wage as not permanent	$114,226	
K2 Head Teacher/ Centre Manager	$101,120	$116,226	14.9%
K3 Senior Teacher	$106,427	$122,139	14.8%
K4	$115,123	$132,827	15.4%

For more information on teacher pay, analysis, and commentaries see https://oece.nz

.

Current Pay Parity Opt-In Salary Scales for Higher Funding

STEP	Step 1 only	Steps 1-6	"Extended" Parity	"Full" Parity
1	$57,358 or $27.58 hr	$57,358 or $27.58 hr	$57,358 or $27.58 hr	$57,358 or $27.58 hr
2		$59,544 or $28.63 hr	$59,544 or $28.63 hr	$59,544 or $28.63 hr
3		$61,948 or $29.78 hr	$61,948 or $29.78 hr	$61,948 or $29.78 hr
4		$64,133 or $30.83 hr	$64,133 or $30.83 hr	$64,133 or $30.83 hr
5		$67,794 or $32.59 hr	$67,794 or $32.59 hr	$67,794 or $32.59 hr
6		$71,869 or $34.55 hr	$71,869 or $34.55 hr	$71,869 or $34.55 hr
7			$74,152 or $35.65 hr	$76,261 or $36.66 hr
8			$76,403 or $36.73 hr	$81,566 or $39.21 hr
9			$78,715 or $37.84 hr	$85,915 or $41.31 hr
10			$81,112 or $39.00 hr	$92,175 or $44.31 hr
11			$85,457 or $41.09 hr	$96,820 or $46.55 hr
K2 (Head teacher - centre manager)			$85,457 or $41.09 hr	$101,120 or $48.62 hr
K3 (Senior teacher, more than 1 centre)				$106,427 or $51.17 hr
K4 (Manager of K2 & K3)				$115,123 or $55.35 hr

Myths and Misinformation

Myth 1: Pay parity discriminates against experienced teachers

Reality: Pay parity funding does not prevent services from employing or paying experienced teachers. It was introduced to ensure teachers are paid according to recognised qualification and experience-based salary scales. Before pay parity, many experienced ECE teachers, particularly in some privately owned services, earned little more than the minimum wage despite years of experience.

The real issue is not the pay scales themselves, but whether employers choose to recruit and retain experienced teachers. Pay parity funding recognises experience through higher salary steps. The challenge is ensuring employers use the funding to support and retain experienced teachers, rather than relying primarily on lower-paid staff at the beginning of the salary scale.

Why this myth is harmful: It wrongly blames the pay parity system for workforce challenges and shifts attention away from employer attitudes and decisions about recruiting, retaining, and rewarding experienced teachers. The myth was formed to justify weakening protections that help ensure public funding intended for teacher salaries reaches teachers and recognises their qualifications and experience.

Myth 2: Pay parity is causing ECE service closures

Reality: There is no evidence that services receiving pay parity funding are more likely to close than other services. Some service-provider representatives told the Ministry of Education and the media that pay parity was creating significant financial pressure and contributing to service closures. However, OECE analysis found no evidence that pay parity-funded services faced a greater risk of closure.

A more likely explanation for financial pressure is the declining real value of ECE funding. The Ministry of Education has acknowledged that, by 2022, the real value of the 20 Hours ECE subsidy had fallen by 18 percent compared with 2010. Services operating below capacity because of local competition may also struggle financially. The evidence points to funding, enrolment pressures and other causes, not pay parity.

Why this myth is harmful: It turns teachers into scapegoats for financial pressures caused by other factors. By blaming pay parity, it reinforces the idea that teachers should accept lower pay and poorer conditions to protect service budgets and provider financial interests.

Related Information and Resources

Wages, Salaries & Conditions of Work Across the Sector – https://oece.nz/public/information/teacher/wages-rates-pay-scales/

A Quick History of Achievements and Opposition – https://oece.nz/public/big-issues/pay-parity/history/

Teacher Facebook group – https://www.facebook.com/groups/pay.parity

Service Funding Rates – https://oece.nz/public/information/fees/government-ece-funding-rates/

Calculating Salary Steps – https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/early-learning/funding-and-financials/pay-parity-opt-scheme-education-and-care-services/calculating-pay-parity-salary-steps