



# Future Schooling for New Zealand Children

FEEDBACK FROM THE OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

On the Tomorrow's Schools Review Taskforce Report "*Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together, Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātinini*"

9 APRIL 2019

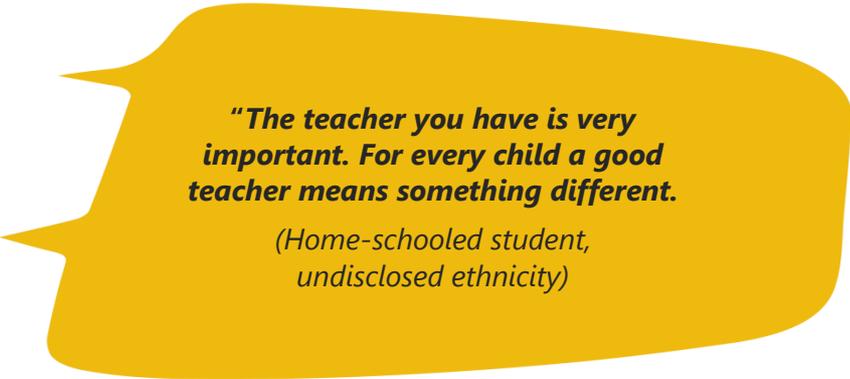


MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

Children's  
Commissioner

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***“The teacher you have is very important. For every child a good teacher means something different.***

*(Home-schooled student,  
undisclosed ethnicity)*

# Future Schooling for New Zealand Children

Feedback from the Office of the Children's Commissioner to the Tomorrow's Schools Taskforce

## WE NEED A SCHOOLING SYSTEM THAT WORKS BETTER FOR ALL CHILDREN

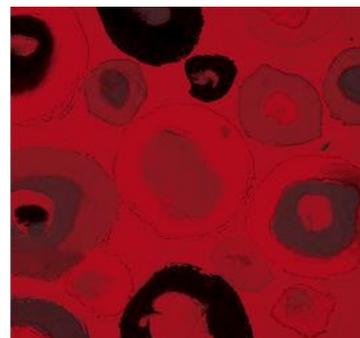
The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) has considered *Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together, Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātitini* (the report<sup>1</sup>) by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce (the Taskforce) from a child-centred perspective. Where its recommendations are likely to deliver a schooling system that works better for all children, we support them. Children and young people have spoken about what they want changed in the education system. Equity and excellence are what they seek. Equity and excellence are desperately needed now, as evidence shows the New Zealand schooling system disproportionately benefits students with high socioeconomic status at the expense of students experiencing financial or material disadvantage, when it should instead be mitigating the effects of poverty.

Students have told us about their experiences in education. Some are particularly poorly served by the current system, including Māori, Pasifika, students with neurodisabilities and those experiencing financial or material disadvantage.

We know about 70 percent of children in Aotearoa New Zealand are doing well, thriving and developing. However, about 20 percent are struggling with disadvantage, and a further 10 percent are facing significant difficulties due to intergenerational poverty, family violence, care and protection, disability, and disconnection from their communities. Similarly, the majority of schools are performing well, but a minority are not able to manage all the challenges faced by their students and communities. We are concerned the report doesn't make clear its commitment to preserving the schools that are doing well while ensuring additional resources and better settings for other schools.

As Guardian of the Conversation, the Children's Commissioner has considered whether the report reflects on the voices spoken by the people of Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly our tamariki. We feel the report shows the taskforce has listened, considered the key issues raised, and suggested a model structure for the education system to provide more equitable access to education for all tamariki in Aotearoa New Zealand.

<sup>1</sup> [conversation.education.govt.nz/assets/TSR/Tomorrows-Schools-Review-Report-Dec2018.PDF](https://conversation.education.govt.nz/assets/TSR/Tomorrows-Schools-Review-Report-Dec2018.PDF)



The Office of the Children's Commissioner represents **1.1 million** people in Aotearoa New Zealand under the age of 18, who make up 23 percent of the total population.

We advocate for children's best interests, ensure their rights are upheld, and help their voices to be heard.

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## OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS WITH TOMORROW'S SCHOOLS

Reflecting back on the design and implementation of 1989 Tomorrow's Schools, it is apparent that the structure was rooted in the ideology of developing a competitive school 'market' and responsiveness to local communities through school autonomy. This was intended to raise quality, but instead it resulted in division. Some of the main issues we have been made aware of include:

- Incentives for schools to compete for students, including attracting students from other school zones, that have resulted in inefficient use of building infrastructure and segregation along socioeconomic lines
- Growing segregation along socioeconomic and ethnic lines that further disadvantages children according to their socioeconomic status and, often, their ethnicity. This is often described as being due to 'white flight' (and 'brown flight') from low decile schools
- Unequal access to education for children with disabilities, stemming from negative attitudes of the community and principal to some children (for example with behavioural learning needs), and how they apply discretionary resources to in-class learning support
- Different service standards at different schools resulting in student outcomes being overly dependent on their parents' incomes or what school they can afford to attend. Examples include:
  - differential ability to attract top-quality, experienced teachers, principals and board members
  - differential ability to attract community 'donations' and fundraising that has exacerbated disadvantage
  - different responses to student behaviours e.g. triggering exclusions from school
  - differential ability to attract international students and the funding they bring to their individual schools while arguably benefitting from property and teaching resources paid-for by government.

Autonomous schools have advantages. They are embedded in communities of families who are integrally involved in the school governance (through boards), curriculum delivery (through volunteering), and additional supports for children (such as food in schools programmes, school gardens, clubs and mentoring, community health and social service provision etc.).

However, the autonomous board structure enables a divide along social lines. School boards undertake important functions that directly impact on children's experience at school, such as property management, appointment of principals, and monitoring children's educational and developmental progress. Schools that can attract highly skilled professionals familiar with governance roles to the board may operate smoothly, while schools without those skills on boards may struggle to keep up with central policies and fail to properly undertake these important roles.

The main solution proposed by the Tomorrow's Schools Taskforce is to shift some responsibilities from boards to geographic Hubs responsible for a network of multiple schools. Each Hub would support boards and schools by providing services across the network (such as consistent professional development, adequate learning supports, leadership development, property management and other services) with the goal of

achieving more equitable and excellent educational experiences and opportunities for all children in the network. School boards will remain, and feed into the Hub governance model to ensure that the diverse needs of individual schools are met within the Hub. This main solution is described in the 'governance' chapter of the report.

To support this main solution of a 'Hub' model, the taskforce has recommended alterations to all parts of the education sector from the Ministry of Education, other education agencies, to teacher and leadership development, and supports for school boards to fulfil their responsibilities.

## **TAKING A CHILD-CENTRED APPROACH**

### **Our Child-Centred Analysis**

We have assessed the potential impact on children of the proposals in the report against our child-centred framework<sup>2</sup>. This is consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>3</sup> (Children's Convention) that we are mandated to promote and uphold. We have considered what children have told us about their experiences in education, drawn from engagements with children and young people such as *Education Matters to Me*<sup>4</sup>, (a joint engagement by our office and the New Zealand School Trustees Association undertaken in 2017 to inform the National Education Learning Priorities). We have analysed the key impacts on children, and the differential impacts on children with disabilities, tamariki Māori and children who are Pasifika, and other groups who have often been disadvantaged by the education system.

We know that learning occurs in the context of positive relationships between student and teacher – and this can be supported or countered by the school environment. This includes: a culture of respectfulness; professional development, supervision and support; and up-to-date, evidence-based pedagogy. The school environment is affected by several things, from choice of principal, to attitudes and competency of boards and ability to access to central government support when needed (anything from teacher aides to property improvements). The core focus of our analysis is the extent to which the wider school system impacts the learning environment and *relationships* between student and teacher.

### **How do children experience school now, and what do they seek?**

Few things affect children's lives more than their educational experiences. Attending school is the greatest commitment children have outside of their homes. Hearing and incorporating the views of children and young people about their educational experiences delivers better and more robust decisions, and ultimately a better system.

We want to ensure that our education system works for children and young people. So we asked them about their experiences, what was working well and what needed to change. Children and young people across a diverse range of engagement groups

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<sup>2</sup> [www.occ.org.nz/listening2kids/child-centred/how-child-centred/](http://www.occ.org.nz/listening2kids/child-centred/how-child-centred/)

<sup>3</sup> [www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx)

<sup>4</sup> [www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/education-matters-to-me-key-insights/](http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/education-matters-to-me-key-insights/)

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spoke about three key factors which they require to have a successful experience in education. These were: a great teacher; a supportive and involved family, and friends.

The six key insights of children's experiences in education identified during the Education Matters to Me engagement in 2017 were:

1. Understand me in my whole world – including within the context of my home life and experiences
2. People at school are racist towards me – treating me unequally
3. Relationships mean everything to me – particularly my relationship with my teacher
4. Teach me the way I learn best – according to my strengths and unique abilities, teach me things that I will use in life, prepare me for my future
5. I need to be comfortable before I can learn – my school's physical and cultural environment impact on my learning and wellbeing
6. It's my life – let me have a say. Involve me in my own learning and let me participate in decisions about school.

The most important of these is having a great teacher. Students described great teachers as those with the time to listen and respond to them, who cared about them and got to know them, who made learning engaging, who were respectful and trustworthy and who had high aspirations for them.

We are sharing these perspectives to remind the Taskforce and decision-makers of the importance of education being centred on the student, not on the system itself. The system should focus on enabling children and young people to have these positive educational experiences.

**We have included children and young people's voices.** Throughout this submission we have included quotes from children and young people. Unless otherwise stated, these quotes are from what we heard in 2017 for our Education Matters to Me reports.

## **Our analysis of the Taskforce Report**

**The Report's recommendations are divided into 8 chapters:**

1. Governance
2. Schooling Provision
3. Competition and Choice
4. Disability and Learning Support
5. Teaching
6. School Leadership
7. School Resourcing
8. Central Education Agencies.

Our feedback is provided on each of these, in order, with more emphasis on chapters that we feel impact children the most, and which children and young people have spoken with us about, and less feedback on other areas. In each section we include our understanding of some of the key Taskforce recommendations, what we have heard from children and young people on the topic and our analysis and recommendations.

Our feedback follows the summary of recommendations.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### Chapter 1 Governance

1. The Hub's main priority should be to ensure equitable access to high quality education for all students within the Hub.
2. Hubs should be required to have meaningful student engagement on strategic directions, and schools should be required to hear properly from students at board level. This may mean two or more student representatives on a secondary school board, and other mechanisms for primary and intermediate schools.
3. The Education Evaluation Office should be able to review schools (not just Hubs) and identify unmet needs of learners by hearing student voices.
4. The potential conflicts of interest arising out of multiple roles in Hubs such as being responsible for the services to the schools, while monitoring them and fielding complaints about them, must be addressed. This must be done before deciding the final structural design of the system.
5. A complaints mechanism should be established that is independent from schools, Hubs and the Ministry of Education, to determine whether children are having their education rights met.
6. School removal decisions should be dealt with by an independent body or bodies from which there should also be a right of appeal.

### Chapter 2 Schooling Provision

7. Legislation should give practical effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi by ensuring the schooling network is developed in partnership with Māori, similar to section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989).
8. There should be more provision of kura kaupapa Māori, especially at secondary school level.
9. The final structural design of schooling provision and policy relating to transitions should focus on the options that result in greatest wellbeing of students, for example minimising drop-out rates and stress, and assisting with smooth transitions between schools and stages of learning and assessment.
10. Develop more flexible pathways to dual enrolment in Te Kura (the correspondence school), to remove stigma and broaden the benefits of using of Te Kura services.
11. We support recommendation 8 that uses school settings to provide wider government supports for a child-centred strategy in partnership with whānau.

### Chapter 3 Competition and Choice

12. We support the recommendations about reducing competition, such as reviewing enrolment schemes and dis-incentivising out-of-zone enrolments, even if it also means reducing choice, providing the quality standards of all schools is high. We support the goal to increase the quality of education for all.
13. There should be an explicit requirement for Hubs to ensure that students with disability and learning support needs have the same access to their local schools as other students.

## **Chapter 4 Disability and Learning Support**

14. Hubs should be evaluated by an independent body such as the Education Evaluation Office to determine how well they are working towards full inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools.
15. A code of education rights should be made available to all students and prominently displayed at all schools to inform students and families of their rights, and teachers, principals, boards and Hubs must adhere to their obligations in relation to these rights.

## **Chapter 5 Teaching**

16. The teaching workforce strategy should receive a high priority, as the teaching workforce is integral to delivering what students have asked for – people who are caring and skilled and who understand children and listen to them, particularly teachers who reflect the ethnic diversity of students.

## **Chapter 6 School Leadership**

17. Principals should be able to be freed from some administrative burdens such as property management and accounting, to focus on quality of learning and leadership of school culture.

## **Chapter 7 School Resourcing**

18. That all practical steps be taken to avoid the Equity Index becoming a label such as not publishing the funding amount for each school. The benefits of equity funding - in terms of equalising our school rolls and creating more diverse schools - would be lost if schools were labelled as 'high or low needs' schools.

## **Chapter 8 Central Education Agencies**

19. The function of monitoring Hubs should be focused strongly on experiences and voices of children in the education system.

## **Overall recommendations**

19. If the Taskforce's recommendations are to be accepted, we call for a child impact assessment process to be applied to policy development and implementation of each recommendation. This would ensure that decisions are always made in the best interests of children, would attend to differential impacts, and would safeguard children's right to have a say and for their voices to be taken in to account.
20. The Education Act should contain a principle putting children at the centre of decision-making and embedding the Children's Convention and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in the same way that the Oranga Tamariki Act will in section 5 when amendments in the Children, Young Persons and Their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Act 2017 come into force on 1 July this year.

## 1. GOVERNANCE AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EDUCATION HUBS

### What the report says

The main proposals by the Tomorrow's Schools Review Taskforce involve changing the system toward coherence, collaboration and networks.

The Taskforce recommends that the role of school boards be reoriented and re-focused on the strategic direction and annual plan of their school, and on ensuring schools in a network are working together for the benefit of all children in the network. This is a core departure from the status quo and is intended to address the current competition between schools and resultant inequitable education provision. Boards would remain responsible for operations grants and staffing.

The greatest proposed change the Taskforce is recommending is the establishment of proposed 'Education Hubs' that will provide services to all the schools (say 100 to 150) in a geographic area, ensuring all schools collaborate for the benefit of all the children in that community. This aims to reduce the uneven quality of school governance, and hence equalise education provision to children across Aotearoa New Zealand.

However, this does not mean a one-size fits all approach. Boards would remain at each school, and the Hub would need to consult with the community on the types of schooling diversity needed in the area for which the Hub is responsible.

Hubs would be required to implement national policy by delivering governance support, and by providing other supports to schools and principals. The proposed governance support includes property management, accountancy, and professional human resource expertise for principal appointments, for example. Boards could keep some of these roles if they wanted and could show they are able to.

One role that would be taken from the board is the decision to remove a student from a school for disciplinary reasons. This would be done by Hubs, in a way that should ensure school removals are the last resort and follow correct processes. The Hub would be responsible for re-enrolling excluded students at other schools nearby.

Hubs would take a role in strategic leadership identification and management to ensure principals receive leadership training, and schools needing experienced principals could get them.

Importantly, Hubs would be responsible for employing the right number of people needed for additional learning support for children who need extra. This would include resource teachers of learning and behaviour, educational psychologists and teacher aides.

One role of Hubs would be to provide an advocacy and complaint service for parents and students, using a restorative approach.

Another of the roles of Hubs would be to 'monitor the performance of schools in real time and provide support as necessary'. Hubs would be the main monitoring and evaluation mechanism for schools, reporting results to parents in a transparent way.

## What children and young people say

In 2016 our office conducted an online survey of primary and secondary students and asked if they knew what their school's board of trustees does. Only 18% of the 463 respondents answered yes to this question, although some responses indicated a good understanding of key functions. Some students understood that boards made important decisions that affected their experience at school, but they felt distanced from those decisions.

*"They try to make school better (but to be honest all their ideas never work)"*  
(11 year old student).

*"Decides what to fund, manages the business side of the school, stops the school being sued"* (15 year old student)

*"Sort out the money and what they should do to make it a better school"*  
(12 year old student).

*"I think that the biggest decisions are made by people we have never met and they have never met us so they can't know whether it is the right decision for us"*  
(15 year old student)

[All these quotes from "What kids say about education and achievement"<sup>5</sup>]

## OCC comment and recommendations

**We support the concept of the Hubs.** Overall, we are very supportive of the movement towards Hubs as a solution to serious inequity and collaboration issues, provided it is made clear that each Hub's main priority is ensuring equitable provision of *quality education to all students* within its purview. They would do this by ensuring all schools are allocated support according to need, and all schools are following best practice education provision to the diversity of children in their schools. Children's educational success should not be dependent on the socioeconomic status of the school they attend, and Hubs would aim to ensure more equitable provision to all children, thus benefiting children who are currently disadvantaged.

We agree with the proposal of Hubs supporting schools to attract and develop good quality principals, because this would benefit mostly disadvantaged children in schools that currently struggle to appoint experienced principals.

We agree with the Hub coordinating and providing learning supports by employing the right number of people and types of expertise; and ensuring more consistent services for children with disabilities or delayed learning and development, or behavioural issues. This is one of the main benefits of Hubs, and it would be important that this function does not become too limited by funding (this is discussed in more detail in chapter 4).

**There is a need for independent advocacy, complaint and monitoring services.** The advocacy and complaint services need to be truly independent to enable the voice of children to be heard when they seek fair treatment. We know there is a need for independent review of some school decisions that otherwise have no (timely and

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<sup>5</sup> [www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-kids-say-about-education-and-achievement/](http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-kids-say-about-education-and-achievement/) November 2016

inexpensive) recourse options for children and young people and their families. For example, currently when a student is excluded from school, the only appeal mechanism over the board decision is via the New Zealand High Court.

We support having a complaints mechanism. However, having this role sit inside the Hub could be perceived as a conflict of interest. For example, the schools subject to complaints are being supported (or not) by the Hub, which could in turn influence how they respond to complaints.

With regards to the role of Hubs to *'monitor the performance of schools in real time and provide support as necessary'* (page 53 of report): we are concerned that there is a risk that this also poses a conflict of interest. For example, how well a Hub identifies a school's need could determine how well it responds. Similarly, a Hub evaluating schools and identifying one that is performing poorly could, in fact be responsible for its poor performance rather than the school, by virtue of how well it resources the school.

**Keeping students at the centre.** Children and young people have a right to have their views considered in all matters that affect them, including the governance of their school and the wider Hub. Shifting some of the key functions to Hubs opens up space for individual school boards to seek more meaningful student participation in decisions about their daily experiences in school. For example, secondary schools need not be constrained by the minimum requirement to have one student representative on the board, as this is often isolating for the student and is an inadequate means of hearing from students. We suggest that two or more student representatives should be required (in legislation) on secondary school boards, and boards should develop mechanisms for regular student input into key decisions for example polls or forums.

Hubs should be required to have meaningful student input to decision-making, such as through a student advisory group representing the diversity of schools in a Hub, and be required to publish *how* they are hearing from children and young people.

Chapter 8 describes a proposed independent Education Evaluation Office that would evaluate Hubs and the wider education system. We think it should also be able to review schools and identify needs that are not being met. Our experience of monitoring Oranga Tamariki shows us the value of hearing children's voices about their experiences to help us make valid measures of service quality. We recommend the Education Evaluation Office be able to review schools, seek information face to face, and ensure children's voices are elevated in their evaluations.

### Recommendations

1. The Hub's main priority should be to ensure equitable access to high quality education for all students within the Hub.
2. Hubs should be required to have meaningful student engagement on strategic directions, and schools should be required to hear properly from students at board level. This may mean two or more student representatives on a secondary school board, and other mechanisms for primary and intermediate schools.
3. The Education Evaluation Office should be able to review schools (not just Hubs) and identify unmet needs of learners by hearing student voices.
4. The potential conflicts of interest arising out of multiple roles in Hubs such as being responsible for the services to the schools, while monitoring them and fielding

complaints about them, must be addressed. This must be done before deciding the final structural design of the system.

5. A complaints mechanism should be established that is independent from schools, Hubs and the Ministry of Education, to determine whether children are having their education rights met.
6. School removal decisions should be dealt with by an independent body or bodies from which there should also be a right of appeal.

[if I could change anything...]

*"I'd make sure every student had a say.*

*I'd be there to help for students who are leading their lives in the wrong direction and help them create a path.*

*I'd make MY school a happy and enjoyable place to be, where everyone wants to be. When everyone gets up in the morning super excited to go to school.*

*That's what I want to change,..."*

[14 year old girl, Secondary school student, NZ European]

***"Probably to have a better understanding of students. Especially since everyone comes from all walks of life. And I guess to change up the way the teachers format the learning? So it isn't just one way, but make it more interactive so everyone feels included. Probably try to be fair to every student, not only the ones that exceed academically or in sports. And, yeah, just be nice..."***

(18 year-old Secondary school student, Pasifika)

## 2. SCHOOLING PROVISION

### What the report says

The Taskforce looked at current schooling provision and considered areas where the wellbeing of children is currently compromised, such as decile drift leading to inequity, transitions between schools, lack of information sharing, too few kura kaupapa Māori (Māori cultural and language immersion schools), and opportunities yet to be realised using digital technology through virtual learning networks and Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura) the correspondence school.

The Taskforce has noted that, for some students, alternative education services may be the best short-term practical option for the most alienated and disengaged students.

The Taskforce has suggested a whole-of-government approach to ensure schools provide what children need, both in education and in broader services for learners and their whānau.

The Taskforce considered the impact of too many transitions, too close together, taking on board feedback about some negative aspects of intermediate schools. One proposal is to have a longer period in middle school (year 7 to 10) and then senior schools (year 11 to 13). Another is to have full primary going up to year 8 followed by standard year 9 to 13 secondary (only one transition). The report recognises there are places where fully comprehensive (year 1-13) schools are appropriate e.g. in rural areas.

The Taskforce discusses competition and choice in the next chapter.

### What children and young people say

Young people have told us they desire better knowledge of our history in Aotearoa New Zealand, and to learn more about te reo Māori (both Māori and Pākehā say this). Students have told us they want to be able to continue in kura kaupapa Māori schools at secondary level.

*"I would make social studies topic more related to early New Zealand Māori history, not just the Treaty." (Secondary student, NZ European)*

*"I would change how much te reo Māori they teach us (which would be more). Also how much New Zealand history they teach us (also more). By history, I mean more about the Treaty of Waitangi, and the when, and how, the Māori came to New Zealand." (Secondary student, NZ European)*

Some students made suggestions of options that should be considered for New Zealand's school system.

*"...the education system is the problem, please dear god look over at Finland and take their education." (Secondary student, NZ European)*

*"Sometimes I feel what we learn is unnecessary, we should be prepared for the stress and anxiety we face at secondary school, I feel if primary school prepared us for the reality of the workload we probably wouldn't be so stressed." (Secondary school student, Samoan)*

Students in Alternative Education shared their experiences, which were largely about feeling misunderstood, or that people didn't care about them.

*"I was the class clown and the teacher would get annoyed because I was distracting but I felt they didn't give me attention or support me...this touched my heart. I got kicked out of class, then I had gaps and I felt lost. Their attitude was to go catch up on your own."* (Student in alternative education, Tongan/New Zealander/ Samoan/British).

*"I don't get a chance to go to school. I always get suspended first week of term. I'm not sure why. There could be 100 of reasons why but I never got told. So been to 3 AEs. I want to go to school. Like hanging with my mates."* (Student in alternative education, Māori)

*"To feel good about going back to school, the school and teachers would need to be warm, friendly, caring, helpful and believe in me... but they need to be consistent."* (Student in alternative education, Māori).

## **OCC comment and recommendations**

**Aspects of schooling provision are undermining child wellbeing.** We understand that the basis of this review is to reduce the existing inequity in the schooling system. This section considers decile drift, transitions, and adequacy of the range of schooling provision provided. The Taskforce discusses competition and choice in the next chapter, but we see all these issues as being interlinked.

**Need for a more managed school network.** We see value in having a more managed school network. It needs to ensure schools in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods are resourced and staffed properly to provide an equally high quality of education as other schools.

Under the Treaty of Waitangi the government has a responsibility to develop education provision *in partnership* with tangata whenua. We strongly advocate for legislative<sup>6</sup> requirement to give practical effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi by ensuring the schooling network is developed *in partnership*, not just 'in consultation' with Māori. Māori should really be involved in decision-making at all levels. With this change, we support recommendation 4.

In particular, kura kaupapa Māori could be strengthened through an Education Hub developed in partnership with Māori. The current system has been perpetuating the negative impacts of colonisation over generations, and there is a need for transformative change. We know that Māori students achieve better outcomes in kura kaupapa Māori settings than Māori in mainstream schools, and because this group of children would have proportionately greater benefits, we support recommendation 5. This should be in addition to better provision of Māori subjects and support for tikanga Māori across the whole schooling provision.

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<sup>6</sup> There is a precedent in the recently amended Oranga Tamariki Act (1989) (provisions in section 7AA) for legislation to embed practical commitment to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi /te Tiriti o Waitangi by imposing duties of the chief executive, for example (2)(a) *the policies and practices of the department that impact on the well-being of children and young persons have the objective of reducing disparities by setting measurable outcomes for Māori children and young persons who come to the attention of the department.*

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We support the role of Te Kura as having a more integral role in the education of many students, reducing barriers to distance learning, and contributing to virtual school network learning. We suggest that there could be more flexible pathways to dual enrolment that reduce stigma by not requiring certain referral categories. We note that a dual enrolment pathway tailored to the needs of a student could be a protective mechanism to prevent their exclusion from school.

**Alternative education.** Alternative education is not a desirable option for any student for many reasons. These reasons include:

- the time out of school before students can access alternative education
- the fact that too few students return sustainably to mainstream school
- the funding model that means 'care' staff are not always qualified teachers
- the accommodation is often substandard and/or separated from a mainstream school campus, and
- the students in Alternative Education too often go on to very poor outcomes, such as youth justice and criminal offending.

Our view is that student's needs and rights are best met by keeping them in mainstream schools alongside peers and with adequate supports to help schools be more inclusive and keep students engaged in learning.

We feel that alternative education would not be needed if the mainstream schooling sector were broadened to include 'alternative' education options, within schools. This would require more resources, a culture of empathy and tolerance, restorative practices, and earlier identification of – and response to – behaviour and conduct concerns in young children. We continue to advocate for this vision that all students remain engaged in learning at the school of their choice among their peers. If alternative education is to remain a part of the schooling provision, it should not just be a 'holding pen' to keep young people off the streets until they age out of compulsory schooling obligations. It must be explicitly intentional about helping students develop the skills to return successfully to mainstream school as soon as possible.

**Improving transitions.** Transitions are difficult at any age. The Taskforce Recommendation 7 relates to reducing transition points – particularly intermediate schools. One proposal is having only full primary schools (up to year 8) and secondary schools, thereby eliminating the two-year intermediate schools. Another proposal is to develop middle schools (years 7 to 10) and senior schools (years 11-13).

Both these proposals have some benefits over the current system. The first proposal reduces the number of transitions, but may not prepare students for the significant change in expectations at secondary school level. Proposal two progressively moves students to more challenging environments, but maintains the same number of transitions (one of which is straight into a year of assessments). Some students have said transitions and assessments are both stressful and having them occur in the same year could be very demanding for some students. Perhaps we need to consider why the secondary school environment looks and feels so different to primary and what we want students to experience. While we certainly want to challenge students to develop to their potential with age-appropriate learning, many of the issues we hear about from secondary students indicate they would thrive in environments that support them to a

greater extent. Things like getting to know them or understanding their learning style and needs. This would challenge secondary schools to be more student-centred.

**Social supports in the school environment.** We see value in schools being a place for broader services for families using a whole of government approach. For example, children’s mental health could be improved, creating spill-over benefits to returns from our investment in their education. Up to a third of children live in families with low incomes, without secure access to healthy food, housing, or essential health or social services<sup>7</sup>. Schools are key community assets and as such could be utilised more effectively by having a holistic vision of what children and their families need and delivering on it. Services that could be added or provided through schools include psychologists, nurses, social workers and counsellors in schools to respond to needs identified earlier than currently occurs.

We suggest cross-government support for a child-centred strategy should include Ministries of Health, Social Development and Children/Oranga Tamariki, Accident Compensation Corporation, Police and District Health Boards and others to ensure extensive wrap-around services are available that can be utilised better through school settings, in partnership with whānau.

### Recommendations

7. Legislation should give practical effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi by ensuring the schooling network is developed in partnership with Māori, similar to section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989).
8. There should be more provision of kura kaupapa Māori, especially at secondary school.
9. The final structural design of schooling provision and policy relating to transitions should focus on the options that result in greatest wellbeing of students, for example minimising drop-out rates and stress, and assisting with smooth transitions between schools and stages of learning and assessment.
10. Develop more flexible pathways to dual enrolment in Te Kura (the correspondence school), to remove stigma and broaden the benefits of using of Te Kura services.
11. We support recommendation 8 that uses school settings to provide wider government supports for a child-centred strategy in partnership with whānau.

*“I hate changing schools because it always feels like I am going to something new where I won’t fit in. But when I came here I was surprised because it felt very comfortable.”*

(Student in learning support unit, Pākehā)

<sup>7</sup> [www.childpoverty.org.nz/#!/#/](http://www.childpoverty.org.nz/#!/#/)

### 3. COMPETITION AND CHOICE

#### What the report says

The main reason for the review of Tomorrow's Schools was resolving the negative impacts of competition and choice on the equity of educational opportunities. However, the Taskforce quite rightly recognised that the problems associated with 'school choice' are not able to be solved within the realm of education policy alone. Socioeconomic inequality and division across society are entrenched, resulting in reduced socio-economic diversity in schools, and it would take a broader societal change to reduce these inequities. However, they stated that the education system should contribute less to this social division than it currently does.

The Taskforce looked at two approaches to reducing school competition, 'hard zoning' (effectively, no choice) or 'controlled choice' (balancing preferences with socioeconomic mix) but concluded we do not have the required societal conditions for either to work. (These conditions included things like higher population density, cheap and available public transport, and high quality education provision at all schools.)

The solution recommended is that Education Hubs: have a planned network for state and state-integrated schools; coordination of zoning that is fairer, not racist and less divisive; dis-incentivising or limits to out-of-zone enrolments and competition for students; and ensuring that students with disability and learning support needs have the same access as other students to their local school. The planned provision would still enable student preferences; for example ensuring Māori immersion pathways are available. The report recommends integrated schools would have to use a fair ballot like all schools, given they are government-funded.

#### What children and young people say

*"Treat everyone as equals and don't jump to conclusions because of race."*  
(Secondary school student, Māori / Pasifika / NZ European)

*"I did want to go to school but I kept getting in trouble for my uniform being wrong when the right jersey for winter cost too much. So it was easier to give up and pretend I didn't care."* (Student in alternative education, Māori)

#### OCC comment and recommendations

**Every child has the right to a high-quality education.** Every child has the right to a high-quality education, and they should be able to get it at their closest public school. This should be the starting point and the goal of all provision.

It is apparent to us that, after 30 years' of Tomorrow's Schools, reducing competition will result in more equitable education for all, with children learning more about diversity, developing tolerance, and having empathy for people different to them.

We recognise that there will always be an element of parental (and child) preference: single-sex schools versus co-educational; kura kaupapa Māori; special character schools like Montessori or Steiner; state integrated schools offering spiritual or religious elements of education, and private schools. No child should be disadvantaged by the school or type of school they attend. We believe Hubs should take quality difference out of the equation for choice.

Therefore, the goal should be to ensure excellence and equity across the board and fairness when choices are exercised. This means having a fair ballot for all state-funded

schools, fair zones that work collaboratively together with other schools in an area, adequate resourcing for kura kaupapa, and a range of options that meet needs especially cultural needs. Any child should be able to access education in te reo Māori (and New Zealand Sign Language for that matter) wherever they live. We believe New Zealand should be working towards a fairer system where every child can access an education that will develop them to their full potential, which means having a diversity of provision available.

**Fair ballot processes.** We support a fairer ballot at all schools, including state integrated schools, because in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a multicultural society, using religion or other reasons to select students arguably contravenes our Bill of Rights Act.

Special character schools have the flexibility to use other ways to maintain certain characteristics that families desire, such as closing during the school day to enable religious instruction of consenting students. We agree these schools should treat people fairly and have the same fair ballot as all state schools.

### Recommendations

12. We support the recommendations about reducing competition, such as reviewing enrolment schemes and dis-incentivising out-of-zone enrolments, even if it also means reducing choice, providing the quality standards of all schools is high. We support the goal to increase the quality of education for all.
13. There should be an explicit requirement for Hubs to ensure that students with disability and learning support needs have the same access to their local schools as other students.

*"I would make ethnicity equal, no one should be higher or lower than any other. I come from a very diverse school, so I would make everyone feel recognised and that their identity matters. No group is greater but understanding each other's qualities by celebrating their culture. Help those who are failing, praise high achievers and support the ones that are really struggling. Invest in my teachers so that they teach with passion, that it's not just about teaching but more than that.*

*You change lives."*

*(Secondary student, Māori).*

## 4. DISABILITY AND LEARNING SUPPORT

### What the report says

The report has identified the key problems in the complex area of disability and learning support noting: impossible choices for principals and boards; conflicts between the education rights of children with behavioural issues and health and safety legislation; increasing costs of providing learning supports; competition for, and rationing of, available learning support resources; lack of continuity between early learning services and school; and inequality across schools in the ability and time delay of students to get assessed and then to receive supports.

The Taskforce's recommendations rely on the Disability and Learning Support delivery model being implemented nationwide, and the Disability and Learning Support Action Plan being implemented. The recommendations 12, 13 and 14 are key to ensuring all children get the supports they need to have access to an education that develops them to their full potential, regardless of their disability or neuro-diversity. The report recommends a key role at every school being a designated Learning Support Coordinator akin to the Special Education Needs Coordinator role (SENCO) sought for all schools through the above Action Plan, and would provide significantly better assurance that children with disabilities would have their needs met.

Hubs would provide seamless identification of student need and support, ensure local provision of special schools and use of their expertise for those with very high needs, and share effective practice.

### What children and young people say

Children say they want people to be treated fairly and with respect. They want inclusiveness but they don't want bad behaviour; they want students who need help to get it, including behavioural supports.

[what I would change...]

*"I would have each student feel cared for and each student feel equal. When students want to do sports accept everyone into a team."* (Intermediate student, Fijian Indian)

*"I would try to stop some of the bullying at school and help children improve their behaviour."* (Primary student, NZ European)

*"I would get more assistant teachers for children so more children that need help get it"* (Primary student, NZ European)

*"For everyone to pay respect and treat others like your sisters and brothers....."* (Primary student, Pasifika)

### OCC comment and recommendations

**Children have a right to access education.** Under the Children's Convention every child, without discrimination, has the right to an education that develops them to their full potential. Many children with disabilities, additional learning needs (including behavioural learning needs), and delays are missing out on the supports that would help them to become independent, engaged learners for life. It would support both children's rights and the nation's economy if we were to invest adequate resources and care into all children.

Ensuring that “students with disability and learning support needs have the same access as other students to their local schools” (page 76 of the report) is important for all children to have their education rights met.

We note that many people do not know their rights. The proposed advocacy services could level the playing field for all families. We think that recommendations 13 and 14 could be enhanced if every child and parent were informed of their education rights. For example, this could be realised if schools

- were open about informing families of their children’s rights
- complied with the requirements of the Education Act (to be inclusive and ensure all students could access the curriculum regardless of disability status) and
- were required to display ‘code of rights in education’ poster prominently in all schools.

More tools are needed to change societal attitudes to disability and diversity. Schools are an engine for societal change through education of the current generation, so more inclusive schools create a positive feedback loop for an inclusive society.

**Hubs will have role to ensure rights are being upheld.** Hubs will need to monitor schools to ensure full provision and inclusion is happening. Where Hubs for whatever reason are not being fully inclusive, for example placing high needs children into special schools, Hubs should be required to work towards full inclusion by analysing the gaps in provision across schools to create a fully inclusive network. Hubs need to justify if the child is required to attend a ‘special school’ using a child rights and best-interests basis, and not a financial or convenience one. We need legislative changes for better accountability and monitoring mechanisms that can report on inclusiveness in schools.

If Hubs are providing learning supports and supporting schools *and* managing complaints services and evaluating the inclusiveness of schools, these roles may conflict. We strongly suggest that independent complaints mechanisms are available for children and their whānau to investigate whether children are having their education rights met. There is a key opportunity to provide for an independent structure to do this that is transparent, timely, and free to students and their family/whānau.

#### Recommendations:

14. Hubs should be evaluated by an independent body such as the Education Evaluation Office to determine how well they are working towards full inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools.
15. A code of education rights should be made available to all students and prominently displayed at all schools to inform students and families of their rights, and teachers, principals, boards and Hubs must adhere to their obligations in relation to these rights.

***“I would make the students have a say in the order of the events for the day.”***

Intermediate student, NZ European

## 5. TEACHING

### What the report says

The report identifies that we need greater diversity across our teaching work-force; suggesting a workforce plan alongside structural changes that free up teachers to teach and principals to lead (in the next chapter).

It refers to more school-based training for initial teachers, all teachers having access to quality professional development provided by Hubs, and better recognition and qualifications for para-professionals in teaching – teacher aides and support staff.

Recommendation 18 allows for the Teaching Council to develop more flexible guidelines for teacher professional appraisal, including “that it could be done by peers”.

### What children and young people say

Students have expressed to us they want teachers who maintain high aspirations for them, regardless of their ethnicity, or socioeconomic status; they want teachers who will teach them things they want to learn about; they want people to be respectful towards them, and listen to them – especially when things go wrong.

Teacher competency really matters.

*“The way Māori and Pasifika students are treated and viewed. I would employ a more ethnically diverse teaching staff and ensure that there is a wider understanding of Māori and Pasifika culture among the them.”* (Secondary student, Māori and Pasifika)

*“I would like a way to connect with teachers more. Most teachers are there to teach and want nothing to do with the students; but being a teacher who you could get along with and like their students is a lot better for the kids, and could make teaching easier for the teacher.”* (Secondary school student, NZ European)

*“If there were better teachers, teachers that cared, then maybe it would have made a difference. When I went to high school there were loads of people and for ages it felt like we were all just there but didn’t know what to do or how to get help.”* (Student in alternative education, Māori)

*“...everyone no matter their capability should be encouraged and pushed to their full potential by all teachers. Positivity is key.”* (Secondary student, NZ European)

*“The teachers always want to be treated respectfully, but if they want to be treated respectfully then they need to model it to us.”* [this last quote from: Children at the centre of the education system<sup>8</sup>]

### OCC comment and recommendations

**We support the intentions to create a more diverse workforce.** We support the recommendations to create a more diverse workforce, improve initial teacher education, practical learning opportunities for teachers including an advisory service via

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<sup>8</sup> [www.occ.org.nz/publications/submissions/children-at-the-centre-of-the-education-system](http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/submissions/children-at-the-centre-of-the-education-system) December 2015

the Hubs, and better support for para-professionals working, effectively, as educators in schools.

We particularly support the proposal to ensure the diversity of teachers more closely matches the student diversity, and guaranteed employment post-graduation stage. This will be achieved by supporting people from communities in New Zealand to get into teaching careers, rather than recruiting internationally. By supporting our own young people into the teaching profession, particularly Māori and Pasifika, we will create a more culturally-expert teaching workforce for our children. Children and young people have told us they feel more at ease with someone who they feel knows them better, such as people from their own communities. There is evidence that Māori children learn better in high quality kura kaupapa settings<sup>9</sup> than Māori in English-medium schools.

**Teacher training is important.** It is clear from years of hearing about students' experiences in school and in school removals, that initial teacher training and professional development are currently under-developed in areas of child rights, understanding neurodisabilities, culturally competent teaching, te reo and tikanga Māori, and other 'soft' skills that are so important in teachers such as restorative justice approaches to discipline, and the ability to understand children in the context of their wider life.

We support the intention to improve teacher training in general to give teachers the tools and confidence they need from the start of their careers to support children in their classes with challenging behaviour or additional learning needs.

**We need to maintain a high standard of teaching.** With regard to professional appraisals being done by peer review as a mechanism to maintain teacher quality, we want assurance that such a proposal remains a robust process because we still need a high standard of teaching. Children have told us the teacher is the most critical relationship in their education and future.

## Recommendation

16. The teaching workforce strategy should receive a high priority, as the teaching workforce is integral to delivering what students have asked for – people who are caring and skilled and who understand children and listen to them, particularly teachers who reflect the ethnic diversity of students.

*"When you leave a full unit in Māori, you lose stuff. Doing hāngī and performances for tourists is stuff we already know. Our kaiako are white, so don't know tikanga and reo. That's the only bad thing. They see our potential, but they lack culture."* (Student in teen parent unit, Māori).

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<sup>9</sup> [www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/oecd-review-on-evaluation-and-assessment-frameworks-for-improving-school-outcomes/chapter-1-the-school-system](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/oecd-review-on-evaluation-and-assessment-frameworks-for-improving-school-outcomes/chapter-1-the-school-system)

## 6. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

### What the report says

The report elevates principals as leaders in their wider Hub communities, as opposed to being a head of a single school.

The report identifies that principals are often overworked and stressed, particularly at primary schools because they have fewer funded positions in senior management. By removing some of the board responsibilities often delegated to principals, such as property management and accountancy, Hubs can free up principals' time to provide leadership in schools.

The report also recommends a national leadership centre, placed in the Teacher's Council, and connected to Hubs. The report proposes that principals could be offered five-year contracts to work at different schools, providing diversity of experience while maintaining certainty of employment, and supporting professional development of principals. Changes in principal appointments would still be subject to board agreement suggesting a principal could stay at a school if they and the board agreed, regardless of opportunities provided by the Hub.

### What children and young people say

While few children mentioned principals specifically in their survey responses, some recognised that principals set the cultural tone of a school such as tolerating versus cracking down on racism or bullying. One said they are *'not always there for us'* (Intermediate student, European and Middle Eastern) and others in face to face engagements talked about their experiences with principals in relation to disciplinary processes. Students wanted principals (and teachers) to be fairer (with discipline) and to give them a chance by listening to them.

*"We feel like we are failing when we are constantly reminded that we are not doing well – Principal used to bring out all these graphs to show us how we are failing, and it would just piss us off."* (Student in alternative education unit, Māori)

*"I was asked to do a haka for some visitors to school because the principal wanted to give a cultural experience. But it was annoying because that's like the only time he cares about Māori culture."* (Student in secondary school, Māori)  
[Above quotes from 'Education Matters to Me' 2018<sup>10</sup>]

[The below quotes from: 'Children at the centre of the education system'<sup>11</sup>]

*"The role of the Principal is to make the school the best it can be."*

*"To make sure your school is under control and if there's problems they change it."*

*"To teach about pride in our environment."*

*"The role of a Principal is to make sure that I and the rest of the students achieve our goals."*

<sup>10</sup> [www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/education-matters-to-me-key-insights](http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/education-matters-to-me-key-insights) January 2018

<sup>11</sup> [www.occ.org.nz/publications/submissions/children-at-the-centre-of-the-education-system](http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/submissions/children-at-the-centre-of-the-education-system) December 2015

## OCC comment and recommendations

Great leadership is important to promote inclusive practice, positive attitudes towards children and young people, and modelling of behaviour to other school staff and students.

Leadership is also important in how and whether schools pick up national policies, such as bullying-prevention programmes, and positive behaviour for learning initiatives. Having principals more closely supported and supervised by Hubs could ensure better up-take of evidence-based, national educational policy, which is one of the criticisms of autonomous schools.

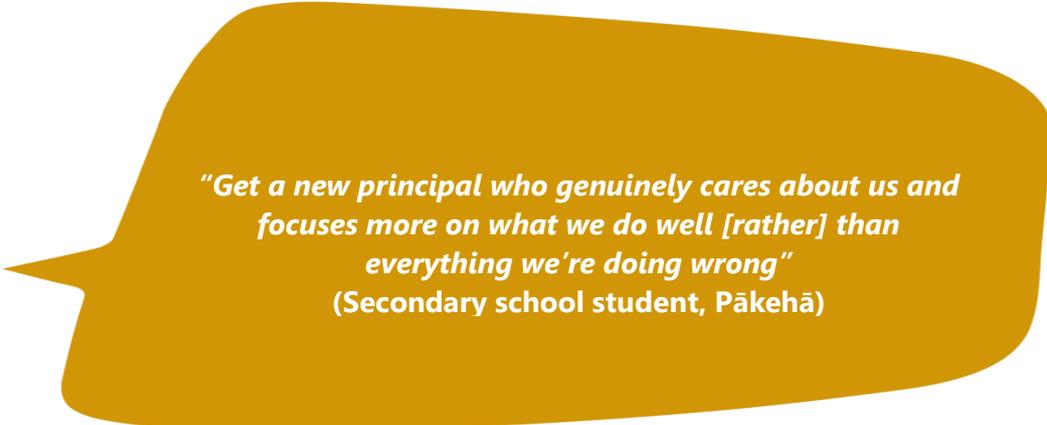
If principals were to work in a more collaborative manner within and across a hub network, we see them as holding accountability and leadership for the 'whole village' which would have a protective effect against the former problems associated with inter-school competition and segregation.

We support provisions that free-up principals to focus on leadership but we have no strong opinions on the nature of employment contracts. We note that there is significant confusion about the rationale for five year contracts, and suggest this could be better explained by the Taskforce.

Providing that principals are energised and leading schools progressively, we believe the report's recommendations would mean they would be 'there for students'; promoting a culture of inclusiveness and cultural responsiveness; and adhering to disciplinary processes that are fair and supportive of students to remain at school.

### Recommendation

17. Principals should be able to be freed from some administrative burdens such as property management and accounting, to focus on quality of learning and leadership of school culture.



*"Get a new principal who genuinely cares about us and focuses more on what we do well [rather] than everything we're doing wrong"*  
(Secondary school student, Pākehā)

## 7. RESOURCING

### What the report says

The Taskforce noted the impacts of lack of adequate resourcing as a core issue, although this was outside the remit of the review. There were some specific issues around the way decile funding had been allocated to improve equity. The recommendations include: implement the Equity Index that better identifies vulnerable children with greater needs; review staffing allocation across primary and secondary schools; that Hubs should support principals to share best practice around use of funding; and that Hubs carry out reviews of the school network to make it more cost effective, e.g. closing schools where it is practical and when they are unable to deliver quality education.

### What children and young people say

When asked what is needed in order for them have positive educational experiences, the most common response from children and young people is that having a great teacher can make a huge difference to them. They want teacher to have the time to get to know them and understand their learning needs. This time is a resourcing issue.

Children have also told us they want better quality classrooms, e.g. less noisy with temperature controls. They seek better emotional environments rejecting bullying and racism, and desiring better responses by teachers to their concerns. They appreciate food in schools, and they want all children to be treated better, including those in poverty and those with disabilities. Just like adults, children seek higher quality standards overall in their 'work place' at school.

*"Stop the bullying. Make schools a safer environment for kids to learn."*

*"If poor people can't afford lunch, provide lunch."*

*"Treat disabled people better."*

*"Upgrade school equipment and classrooms."*

[From 'Children at the Centre of the Education System'<sup>12</sup>]

### OCC comment and recommendations

**Investment in education is a human rights issue.** Many of the shortcomings of the education system we encounter can be traced back to the lack of access to much needed resources. Positive experiences for children are often prevented by conflicting issues, policies or demands, which boil down to solutions not being affordable. A key example is children being removed or excluded from schools because of behavioural disabilities that fall below a threshold for adequate centrally-funded support. These children effectively fall between a gap – between schools unable to afford to provide additional in-class learning support needed for each child (because their needs are too high for the regular class teacher), and the 'need' being assessed as too low to trigger additional funding from the Ministry of Education. Children's lives are jeopardised by lack of investment in their education (as well as mental health and behaviour). Gaps in resourcing is becoming a significant human rights issue for children who are discriminated against because of their neurodisability, socioeconomic status or ethnicity.

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<sup>12</sup> [www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/children-at-the-centre-of-the-education-system/](http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/children-at-the-centre-of-the-education-system/) December 2015

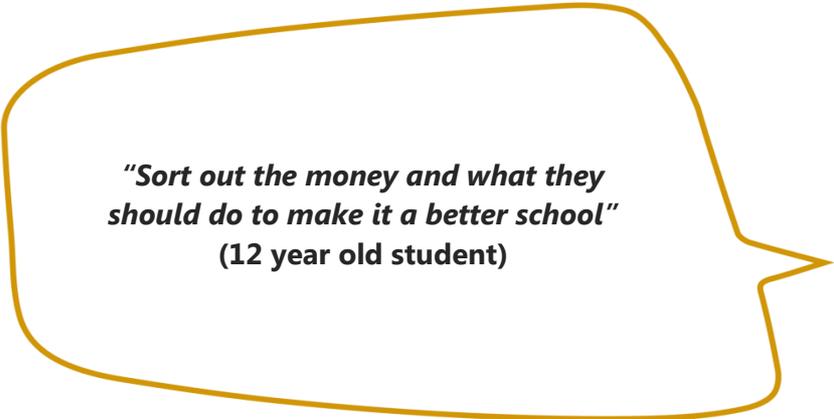
**We support non-stigmatising, increased equity funding.** We support recommendation 23 that talks about a more useful way to allocate equity funding. However, if the Equity Index is not confidential, the stigma on schools of receiving equity funds would be even greater than the previous stigma of 'low decile'. In the past, a school's decile funding category was made public, and people used it as a scaling measure to avoid schools with the greatest socioeconomic deprivation, erroneously assuming low 'school quality'. As families avoided low decile schools, their rolls dropped and per-student funding dropped for the schools, further depriving them of much-needed resources.

The point is that making the decile-funding status publicly available, resulted in further disadvantage to those exact schools that the 'equity' system was designed to support. There may be no difference with a new Equity Index if it were to be made publicly available and become a 'label' on each school. There are existing accountability systems for the use of government funds that make transparency of 'Equity Index' funding unnecessary. Each Hub will be responsible for reviewing the educational quality of schools in their network and reporting their findings to parents, so parents will be able to obtain more useful information about school quality.

It is arguable that there is good reason for such information to be withheld under the Official Information or the Privacy Acts, for the protection of children who are vulnerable. The Equity Index is based on schools with greater numbers of 'high risk' vulnerable children such as those who have parents in prison, whose families depend on welfare benefits and who are in touch with care and protection or youth justice systems, etc. We would argue that the wellbeing of these children overrides the public interest in this matter.

### **Recommendation**

18. That all practical steps be taken to avoid the Equity Index becoming a label such as not publishing the funding amount for each school. The benefits of equity funding - in terms of equalising our school rolls and creating more diverse schools - would be lost if schools were labelled as 'high or low needs' schools.



***"Sort out the money and what they should do to make it a better school"***  
**(12 year old student)**

## 8. CENTRAL EDUCATION AGENCIES

### What the report says

The Taskforce recommends one new agency to replace the Education Review Office, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and the evaluation part of the Ministry of Education. They call it the 'Education Evaluation Office' that would report to Parliament. It would be responsible for evaluating the whole system, i.e. Hubs, using key performance indicators. In turn, the review process for schools would sit in Hubs, who would report to parents how schools are doing. The Ministry of Education would be reconfigured as a leader of pedagogy and curriculum.

### What children and young people say

Children and young people want systems and structures that are fairer, that are high quality, and that support them to achieve qualifications that meet their individual aspirations and needs, from trade academies to university entrance. They talk about teachers being crucial to their education, learning and wellbeing.

[what I would change is...]

*"More students' decision-making around school affairs"* (Secondary student, NZ European)

*"Rebuild all of it and make it cleaner as well as try and get high quality teaching staff."* (Secondary student, NZ European)

### OCC comment and recommendations

The Education Review Office currently checks individual schools for safe environments for students. Reviews need to be seen as fair and efficient. If Hubs were to monitor schools, there is a risk of losing the 'independence' in the review mechanism. If the proposed Education Evaluation Office could only review Hubs, then they lose the voice of children, because those would be reported via Hubs, which become 'gate-keepers' to the students' voices.

In monitoring the education system, we believe it is critical that one aspect of that be how children and young people are experiencing the system.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner has a role to monitor services to children by Oranga Tamariki / Ministry for Children and it is our strong view based on experience that there is a huge advantage in face to face engagements with children when monitoring their experiences.

To create a child-centred system and avoid creating an inward-looking system, we recommend that the Education Evaluation Office has the ability to 'evaluate' or review individual schools as a mechanism to check on how Hubs are providing services to children. This review would necessarily include hearing the views and experiences of children and young people.

### Recommendation

19. The function of monitoring Hubs should be focused strongly on experiences and voices of children in the education system.

## SUMMARY

The Taskforce calls for transformative change. The proposals are bold and visionary. We have heard from children who are disenfranchised in the current system and who deserve better.

One of the Children's Commissioner's four main priorities is for *all* children and young people to benefit from access to a full education. It is no longer acceptable that significant portions of our population of children are not getting the education they deserve because of the impacts of systemic inequality.

The vision for our future education system would benefit from embedding rights of children, particularly Māori, as described in international conventions to which we are signatory. There is precedent in the recently amended Oranga Tamariki Act in doing so.

Some may think that creating a system designed to help minority groups will be at the expense of 'the majority' – we can be assured from international evidence that the whole system and all children benefit from greater diversity within schools, and fairer access to learning. A long tail of underachievement serves no-one, neither our economy, society, our families nor the individuals who find themselves failing to thrive in the current system. Aotearoa New Zealand can support our collective mental health, economic productivity, and societal cohesion by eliminating this tail, and assisting all children to develop to their full potential – to remain engaged in learning, and to feel hope for a future pathway in which they can thrive and live a good life.

That is our vision for education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### Recommendation

21. If the Taskforce's recommendations are to be accepted, we call for a child impact assessment process to be applied to policy development and implementation of each recommendation. This would ensure that decisions are always made in the best interests of children, would attend to differential impacts, and would safeguard children's right to have a say and for their voices to be taken in to account.
22. The Education Act should contain a principle putting children at the centre of decision-making and embedding the Children's Convention and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in the same way that the Oranga Tamariki Act will in section 5 when amendments in the Children, Young Persons and Their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Act 2017 come into force on 1 July this year.

*"Focussing more on the problems in the world and what we can do to help. I think it would be good if we learned to be more aware about equality and what's good for our planet."*

(Primary Student,  
Education Matters to Me 2018)