

A submission in response to:

Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together Whiria Ngā Kura Tuātinitini

Report by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce

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INTRODUCTION

This submission is prepared on behalf of Macleans College by Steven Hargreaves. Steven is Principal of Macleans College and was previously Principal of Wesley College.

This submission will respond to each of the eight key issues and 32 recommendations, providing critique, support or alternative recommendations in turn.

BROAD CONCERNS WITH THE REPORT

While there are findings and recommendations within the report that this submission endorses, there is much that is found to be fundamentally wrong in the report, which is lacking in evidence and provides vague and unworkable recommendations.

The report proposes sweeping changes to the schooling system in Aotearoa New Zealand on the premise that the system is a failure. There are anecdotes and comments provided by individuals to support the claim that our school system is broken – but very little in the way of statistical evidence. There is no acknowledgement that the vast majority of students, schools and kura are succeeding.

There is an attempt to re-write history on page 11 where a claim is made that there is no evidence to suggest achievement has improved in recent years. Pages 12 and 13 of the NZQA Annual Report show quite clearly that attainment is rising.

Rather than taking a focussed approach to addressing the problems that exist in a largely successful system, the proposal is to put the sector, staff and students through enormous change, disruption and expense to support the relatively small proportion of schools and students that are struggling. The principles of change management (and common sense) do not support this move.

There is strong evidence that the authors of the report had a predetermined outcome and have set about providing “evidence” to support their solutions. The Macleans College Board Chair and Principal attended a schools “consultation” meeting at Ellerslie Racecourse on 11 September 2018. We were spoken to by Bali Haque, Chair of the Independent Taskforce, for some 30 minutes on what his thoughts and plans were and then asked for our opinion. It was clear to all present that decisions had already been made and we were merely there so that the level of support for his plans could be gauged. This was no consultation. There were no open-ended questions or attempts to discover what we thought were the strengths, weaknesses or opportunities within our education system. The recommendations were a fait accompli long before any “consultation”.

Further evidence of bias in the report is the selective inclusion of quotes in the margins of the document. For example, to illustrate the ineffectiveness of boards, a quote is given on page 43 from an unhappy student trustee as “evidence” of the problems getting student voice. I feel sorry for this school but wish a quote from our student trustee was included as it would have given the opposite impression. As an aside this ignores the fact that student input into school decisions comes from other sources, such as student councils. As another example, a quote on page 44 from Youth Law Aotearoa about an unprecedented situation where a student was suspended for eight months is given. There is no statistical evidence given to indicate the extent of the problem or to support the recommendation that boards should not handle suspensions.

The report is littered with loaded quotes such as these. Where are the quotes endorsing the system, highlighting its successes to give balance? Better still, where is the quantitative evidence to tell us the extent of these issues?

A major concern is the lack of focus on quality, or excellence. We can all agree that equitable outcomes are important, but where are the explicit references to providing excellent, world-class opportunities to our students and raising achievement at the top end?

There is repeated mention of unhealthy competition between schools. Where does this come from? Every school plans to do the best for its students. No school makes plans to 'beat' up a school down the road, other than perhaps on the sports field.

The biggest concern, however, is the total failure to address the critical issue facing the sector – the shortage of high quality teachers. The first recommendation about teacher quality is to increase diversity of teachers. This runs counter to research as to teacher effectiveness. Without a major improvement in teacher pay and working conditions we will not attract suitable graduates into the profession. Where is the demand for improved pay and conditions in the report? The "system" can be altered but without excellent teachers the outcomes for students will not improve.

RESPONSE TO THE KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 GOVERNANCE

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the roles of boards of trustees are reoriented so that their core responsibilities are to ...

Most schools have effective boards (only 1 in 16 Boards needed intervention in the last three years). Let effective boards continue in their current form. Provide help where it is needed. A small number of professional “trustees” could support several schools in a region, providing governance advice to each board that needed it. Let boards “opt-in” to having support for property, finance, human resources.

Let boards keep control of Principal appointments, but with input from the Ministry of Education (not the other way round).

Recommendation 2

We recommend that local Education Hubs are established

The hubs will be one bureaucracy replacing another. The Ministry of Education regional offices already have difficulty finding and retaining suitably qualified staff. How will hubs be any different? Where are the experts in teaching and learning, property, human resources, finance, special education and so on, going to come from that are not already available to the Ministry of Education?

It is a concern to see that “Education Hubs would be active in leading learning” on page 49, as this was described as the main job of the principal. Are principals to be side-lined completely as elsewhere the report says the principal’s job should focus on leading learning.

If each hub serves 125 schools it is easy to imagine long delays in receiving advice or support for property or finance matters. Should schools want this support, let them opt-in to the hub system. The “timely and high quality advice and support” mentioned on page 49 is unlikely to materialise where 125 are relying on the one office.

The potential for personal conflict between principal and board is highlighted in a quote on page 39. It is easy to imagine potential for conflict between hubs and boards, and hubs and principals, as there is with any groups of people. Portraying hubs as the “silver bullet” to all our woes is unrealistic. They will be just another group of people completing administrative tasks under considerable time and resourcing pressure, working with limited knowledge of the student or school, as the Ministry of Education do now.

The inference that boards are not capable of appointing principals is insulting. Offer support to boards that want help, or include a Ministry of Education official in the process. There is no need to hijack the whole process.

Principals will not accept five year contracts as they know it is disruptive for schools. Principals would become change managers and it would be unsettling for staff and communities as the Canadian model has shown. Likewise, teachers select schools because of a philosophical alignment, or for personal reasons such as a short commute or access to childcare. Moving staff around at the whim of the hub will be disruptive.

The administrative workload proposed in continual monitoring of school performance is excessive and unnecessary. The nature of wellbeing and belonging data proposed to evaluate schools is also not defined and is likely to be vague at best, misleading at worst.

Boards should retain control of their school culture and climate by remaining in charge of suspensions. Schools use exclusion as a last resort. If there is a need for advocacy, then provide it within the existing framework.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that Education Hubs are regularly reviewed

Hubs are not necessary. Better resourcing of the existing school support structures is required, rather than inventing a new bureaucracy.

2 SCHOOLING PROVISION

Recommendation 4

We recommend that a Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led, future focused state schooling network planning strategy be developed by the Ministry alongside the Education Hubs

The purposes of this planning strategy are not made clear at this point.

Recommendation 5

We recommend consideration be given to the formation of a dedicated national Education Hub for Kaupapa Māori settings that provides a strong and coherent parallel pathway within the overall network

Macleans College endorses this recommendation.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that work is undertaken to ensure that student transitions between schools or providers are seamless as they progress through the education system

The lack of detail with this recommendation makes it difficult to comment. Most schools already make considerable effort to ensure smooth transitions for students. Improvement in portability of student data is a worthwhile idea.

Recommendation 7

We recommend the phasing in of schooling provision that provides more stability and better transitions for students, and over time, establishing a school model based on ...

The lack of research provided with regard to the success of various school structures is a concern. An unreferenced anecdote on page 61 is the only “evidence” offered in support of middle schools. An investigation into the middle and senior schools opened in Auckland over the last 10 years would suggest that they do not work and parents have opted for other schooling choices.

If the intention is to provide stability and reduce transitions then full primary schools (years 1 to 8) or high schools (years 7 to 13) should be promoted.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that national guidelines are developed for schools to become full-service sites that offer extensive wraparound services in socio-economically disadvantaged communities

This happens to some extent now, and an improvement in this area has real merit.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that Education Hubs, working with schools and communities, design community-wide flexible curriculum, assessment and timetable offerings for schools. These options should ...

This recommendation cuts across the NCEA Review. It also contradicts Recommendation 1 that boards are responsible for strategic planning, curriculum and assessment practices.

It confirms that hubs are being created to remove decision making from boards and principals.

The recommendation to use school facilities throughout the day and weekend ignores the fact most schools are busy from 7am to 7 pm and throughout weekends. It also ignores basic security and management issues this will create.

Recommendation 10

We recommend an investigation into the role of Te Kura with the aim of more closely incorporating its specialist areas of learning expertise and resource development into Education Hub schooling network provision

Some schools and students may benefit from better access to Te Kura services.

3 COMPETITION AND CHOICE

Recommendation 11

We recommend that each Education Hub has a planned network for state and state-integrated schools. The details of this are outlined below ...

Much of what is recommended here is based on the unsubstantiated idea that there is competition between schools. What exists is community evaluations of a school and families make choices based on those ideas. Families move or make out-of-zone ballot applications on that basis. It is naïve to think community “thought control” and a consequent change in school choice will occur because of a new hub evaluation system being published. Attempts to meddle with school choice will incentivise families to shift, elect to use private schooling and push up house prices further in desirable school zones.

The proposal to regularly adjust roll sizes and catchment areas has serious and costly property and staffing implications. This proposal indicates we will be building and removing classrooms regularly and also hiring and firing staff regularly. With changing catchment areas will siblings be forced to attend different schools? Families purchase houses based on school zoning. To regularly change zones will impose significant stress on these families, and others who have no certainty over where they will go to school.

Recommendations about managing out-of-zone enrolments are redundant as these mechanisms already exist.

Given that donations are entirely voluntary, how do they affect school choice? As an aside, restrictions on school donations will push up fees for extra-curricular activities – the money to provide these activities is usually subsidised by donations.

The comments about international fee paying students display an alarming lack of understanding. All schools must charge an international fee, determined by NZQA, that covers all operational, property and staffing costs. Of course all schools charge a fee much greater than that, so the net returns to the schooling system are always positive. If international students were removed from the system Treasury would have to find more funding for schools. This objection to international school students reeks of envy and a desire to hobble schools and shrink the funding and opportunities provided to local students.

Recommendation 12

We recommend for state-integrated schools, that ...

Alignment of ballot process and travel subsidy between state and integrated schools seems fair.

4 DISABILITY AND LEARNING SUPPORT

Recommendation 13

We recommend that the Ministry continue to lead national strategy and policy in Disability and Learning Support, and that the Ministry work with the Education Hubs to support their work and learn from effective practice. We recommend the Ministry ...

Increased funding and support for learners that need extra support is to be commended.

Section 4 of the report is light on evidence and quantifiable data. Page 80 states “we heard of too many examples where the families ... were made to feel unwelcome”. This is not desirable but is this a wide-spread problem requiring a policy shift or a few rogue administrators needing to be brought into line?

There is also a loaded quote from a parent on page 79 that calls schools empires and says principals can decline in-zone enrolments. That is completely false and portrays the report once again as biased and not grounded in fact.

Recommendation 14

We recommend that every school is supported to be inclusive through having a designated Learning Support Coordinator, working with the support of its local Education Hub and sharing good practice

Many schools have a Learning Support Department, or equivalent in place now. Extra funding for this would be welcomed. Finding the staff suitably qualified for the role is always a challenge.

There is no need for a hub to be involved in this and structures exist already within the current administration.

Recommendation 15

We recommend that Education Hubs ...

This proposed support structure could be run through the current Ministry of Education model. Extra funding, support and expertise will be welcomed.

5 SCHOOLING PROVISION

Recommendation 16

We recommend that the Ministry of Education work with the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand to ensure there is a coherent future-focused workforce strategy, including ensuring Initial Teacher Education provision is future-based and fit for purpose. The test of this strategy will be whether every school can appoint and retain the teachers/kaiako it requires to deliver excellence and equity

This recommendation acknowledges there has been no workforce strategy and that we need a greater supply of quality teachers, however, the “solutions” offered do not address the identified problem.

Page 87 states “there is some excellent teaching available in Aotearoa New Zealand”. What an insult. There is excellent practice the length of the country. Page 87 also states “too many students feel marginalised” as a continuation of the use of unquantified anecdotes in place of evidence. Further on the same page the report quotes 13 year old research to claim that students have “recently” been talking about how to improve schooling.

The report has failed to address the fundamental problem, namely that top university graduates are not electing to enter the teaching profession because of a lack of pay and poor working conditions. The report also promotes diversity of teachers as the primary solution to teacher quality. There is no evidence provided to support this – only an assumption that because of some variation between teacher and student ethnic make-up we need a diversity focused recruitment policy. Practice and evidence shows that good teachers come from every ethnic group and deliver excellent teaching to students of every ethnic group. Rather than an ethnicity issue it is a gender issue with relatively fewer male teachers having an impact on boys' achievement. The persistent gap between boys and girls achievement receives no mention.

Alongside more flexible teacher training there needs to be simpler means for previously trained teachers to re-enter the profession.

Recommendation 17

We recommend that a Curriculum, Learning, Assessment and Pedagogy unit at the Ministry of Education works with the Education Hubs to ensure teachers/kaiako can ...

There is an abundance of support already available to support schools and teachers with curriculum and pedagogy.

Recommendation 18

We recommend that requirements for the Kāhui Ako pathway model enable more flexibility in clustering arrangements, achievement challenges, and in the use of staffing and funding resources.

This recommendation is endorsed.

Recommendation 19

We recommend that the Teaching Council develop more flexible guidelines for teacher appraisal including team appraisal, peer appraisal, and the frequency of reporting

Page 92 states that the quality of appraisal is variable. The extent of this is unquantified but undoubtedly true. It is naïve to think that new guidelines will improve the quality of appraisal.

Recommendation 20

We recommend that Education Hubs co-ordinate professional learning and development (PLD) and advisory services in order to provide local support and grow and sustain local expertise

The budget implications of much of the laudable but unachievable aims of this recommendation are extreme. This recommendation proposes the employment of teams in each hub to monitor new teachers, provide curriculum advice, provide professional learning and development, evaluate and disseminate innovative practices and manage pools of temporary staff. To be done effectively this will require hundreds of staff. Where will they come from? What will it cost?

Of major concern in this recommendation is the responsibility for the hub to control strategic planning for professional development in schools. This further indicates that the roles of boards and principals are to be diminished.

6 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Recommendation 21

We recommend that the Leadership Centre be established within the Teaching Council

Additional sources of leadership training and support are to be welcomed – although there is already plenty of help available to principals by way of tertiary courses, First Time principals programme and local principals' associations. As with any new job, a first time principal will have plenty to learn, the quote on page 97 phrases this as if it is a surprise.

There are further unquantified and unsubstantiated claims on page 98 about the “wrong” principals being appointed.

If there are a lack of quality principals applying for all jobs it is a symptom of a lack of quality teachers entering the profession, and the inadequate pay (in smaller schools) as the same issue applies at all levels of school management.

Recommendation 22

We recommend that the Leadership Centre ...

This recommendation is unfocused and unwieldy. A simple national programme of support for principals to access advice, further training or guidance would suffice.

Recommendation 23

We recommend that Education Hubs are expected to ...

Much of what is recommended here already exists, for example: principals do support one another across their neighbouring schools, teachers with potential are identified and supported, schools with challenges have means of support available (prior and during statutory intervention), principals have an induction process and scholarships and sabbaticals are available.

Other aspects of this recommendation appear to be additional bureaucracy and control of principals, for example, principals justifying school progress to hub officials.

There is a bizarre comment about reducing competition between schools to free up principals to do their jobs. There is no evidence of schools competing given in the report and further, to believe principals spend their days worrying about “beating” some other school is ludicrous (This Principal, for one, has not spent a single minute of his working career competing against any other school – other than as a rugby coach).

The comments about principal pay need clarification. It is clear principals in smaller schools require higher salaries but to suggest the nature of large schools is not more complex than smaller schools is incorrect.

7 RESOURCING

Recommendation 24

Because the proposed equity index better identifies those schools with the highest proportions of disadvantaged students, we recommend that it is implemented as soon as possible. We also recommend that equity resourcing is prioritised to the schools with the most disadvantaged students, is increased to a minimum of 6% of total resourcing and applied across operation, staffing and property

It is agreed that the resourcing of schools is inadequate and that equity funding should be increased. The work already underway to remove the decile funding system should be continued.

Recommendation 25

We recommend that the allocation of staffing entitlements and management resources is reviewed to ensure that there is alignment and coherence across primary and secondary schools.

This recommendation is endorsed.

Recommendation 26

We recommend that Education Hubs work with school principals/tumuaki who receive equity funding to identify and share best practice around the use of this funding both within and across Education Hubs.

Sharing best practice occurs now within existing structures.

Recommendation 27

We recommend that Education Hubs carry out school network reviews to ensure smaller schools that are unable to deliver quality education services are merged with others, or closed, where this is a practical possibility.

Mechanisms already exist for this to happen, there is no need to create hubs to carry out this function.

Some of the comments in the Resourcing section of the report cannot go unchallenged. On page 111, it is stated that there are no mechanisms to ensure principals make good use of resourcing. This is false. There is a Board of Trustees who have input into the use of resourcing, there is an annual external financial audit, there are ERO reviews and there are principal appraisals that all make sure resourcing is well used.

On page 112 it is stated that “we think” the link between school roll and principal’s salary incentivises principals to grow their school rolls. It would be prudent to show evidence of this claim. The fact is that supplementing a school’s roll with out-of-zone students will do very little to alter a principal’s salary due to the broad banding of salary steps. It is purely speculation by the authors to state that principal salary structures induce competition between schools or encourage principals to grow the school roll.

Pages 111 and 112 contain some ambiguous statements about the complexity of leading a large school. It is implied that leading a large school is not more complex than leading a small school. This ignores the increased scrutiny faced by leaders and the detailed structures that need to be managed in a large organisation. Further, every decision carries higher stakes because it relates to the education of more students, possibly thousands.

The statement on page 111 that principals of smaller schools face more varied job demands than those of larger schools is false (this Principal, having led a 350 student decile 1 school, and also a 2500 student decile 9 school, can comment with certainty on that claim).

The earlier statement in the report that “some principals use smaller schools as stepping stones” is not a negative. This is the natural progression of leadership and occurs within and between organisations in every sector. It is, of course, an indication of a leader growing and learning new skills, just as a Head of Department becomes a Deputy Principal and a Deputy Principal becomes a Principal.

The leadership of a large staff is also demanding and complex. It would appear the research mentioned on page 112 confirmed that leaders of large organisations are paid more, but that is not what the authors wanted to find, so they have opted to do more research.

8 CENTRAL EDUCATION AGENCIES

Recommendation 28

We recommend that the Ministry of Education is reconfigured

It is agreed that the Ministry of Education faces challenges in developing and delivering policy, however, re-labelling education as an “ecosystem” and stating that a new Ministry would be “transparent, agile and responsive” will not make any tangible difference. The key to the success of the Ministry is cutting bureaucracy and giving staff at the ground level the authority to make decisions.

Page 117 states that new central agencies will have “strengthened capabilities and capacities” as if there is a ready workforce of more capable staff lining up to work in this new agency. Staffing any new agency will be a major challenge, as these workers will be difficult to find – a situation faced in most sectors of the economy.

Recommendation 29

We recommend that Education Hubs are created. More details about Education Hubs are at page 48

The Education Hubs, as proposed, are just another layer of bureaucracy designed to grab control of schools and side-line boards of trustees.

Some schools need support with property, finance and human resources. They should be allowed to opt-in to the support offered by a central agency (Ministry of Education). Schools should not be compelled to give up these functions. This would allow the central agency to better support those schools who need the help. An agency expected to provide administration support to 125 schools will require an enormous staff (in the hundreds). Without a large, experienced and capable staff in this central agency, schools will be left queuing for advice, with the other 124 schools in the hub.

Recommendation 30

We recommend that an independent Education Evaluation Office is created

Rather than creating a new agency, with the cost and difficulty associated with building a new organisation from the ground up, it would be simpler to re-purpose the Education Review Office.

The differentiated reviews on page 122 indicate a prudent use of resources. It is only sensible to require schools with a long history of stable and successful performance to be reviewed less frequently than those schools that face management difficulties. The proposal of a “one-size fits all” approach is alarming. The implication that schools falsify data for ERO needs to be substantiated. It is just not possible to falsify achievement, attendance or suspension data as it is publicly available.

Recommendation 31

We recommend that the Teaching Council is expanded

More detail on the nature of this recommendation is needed. There are a number of leadership development opportunities available to leaders, and aspiring leaders, through “gazetted” professional learning and development, local associations and formal and informal networks. Sabbaticals and scholarships are also available in addition to personally funded tertiary study.

Recommendation 32

We recommend that the Education Review Office and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority are disestablished

As per comments made in response to Recommendation 30, there is no need to replace the Education Review Office. A focused re-purposing would be more effective and cost-efficient.

The recommendation to disestablish the NZQA cuts across the NCEA Review.

The comments on page 126 that the NCEA achievement standards have become the senior curriculum for most students is true. Moving assessment policy and implementation to the Ministry will not solve the problems of learning being assessment driven and the curriculum being replaced by achievement standards.

CONCLUSION

On page 134 of the report it is stated that any change will be co-designed and involve iterative consultation. It is hoped that that is the case, because it did not occur in the development of these initial 32 recommendations. There must be acknowledgement that most of what takes place within our schooling system is very good, that most students receive an excellent education and are well-prepared for life beyond school.

There must be a reconsideration of this drastic “baby out with the bath water” approach; to change that would place enormous stress on the education system and those within it.