Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together

Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātinitini

Report by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce

Report Summary
He Whakarāpopototanga

Background to the review

In April 2018, the Tomorrow's Schools Review Independent Taskforce was appointed by the Minister of Education to carry out a review of the compulsory schooling sector.

We were asked to consider if the schooling system is fit for purpose, and to focus on developing a system that promotes equity and excellence and ensures that every learner achieves educational success. This includes the ability of governance, management and administration of schooling to meet the needs of all New Zealanders, the environment in which schools operate, and how to give active expression to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Our approach

We developed a set of purpose statements and design principles of the things we considered to be the key priorities for a future education system. These have framed our approach to the review.

We have consulted widely to gather diverse views and experiences of, and information about, the schooling system. These are reflected in our findings and recommendations.

Our overall findings

On some outcome measures, many of our students do well at school. However, the system is not working well enough for our most disadvantaged children and young people. This is not fair or just. It costs all of us when the system does not deliver for everyone. Conversely, when we get it right there will be substantial economic and social benefits for us all.

There is no evidence to suggest the current self-governing schools model has been successful in raising student achievement or improving equity as was intended by its originators. In fact, the performance of our students has plateaued and in some areas deteriorated, while the gap between the best performing and worst performing students has widened. Children from disadvantaged homes, too many Māori and Pacific families, and those with significant additional learning needs remain those most poorly served by the system.

Equally important, wellbeing data, such as the prevalence of bullying and self-harm among adolescents, tell us that there is an urgent need to collectively support schools to address complex community and societal challenges.

We struggle to address these system-wide challenges because our current schooling system has been designed for autonomous self-governing schools, not for networked and connected schools and their communities. The current system does not, and cannot provide any assurance that we have the capability or capacity to collectively improve outcomes for all our children, particularly for those in disadvantaged communities.

Of course there are success stories—examples of schools that have been able to innovate and 'buck the trend'. But these isolated successes are hardly ever adopted across the system as a whole. Innovation and success are difficult to scale up because currently we have few mechanisms to enable system-wide improvement to be initiated, supported and sustained.

The way forward

If we are to build a schooling system where all our learners/ākonga succeed, we need a cultural and structural transformation.

Tinkering with the existing system simply will not work, especially if future generations are to be well prepared to cope with the large and complex economic, social, and environmental challenges we face.

We need a different way of thinking about our schooling system while continuing to provide for genuine community engagement in local schools. This means we have to cut through the assumptions that underpin 'self-governing schools'. Instead, we need to focus on an explicit commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and developing a coherent, connected and interdependent system based on collaboration, support and improvement.

This report analyses eight key issues and makes detailed recommendations. Please see the 8 Key Issues Factsheet.

> We struggle to address system-wide challenges because our current schooling system has been designed for autonomous self-governing schools, not for networked and connected schools and their communities.