Tomorrow's Schools Review: Public survey response

As part of the conversation about its review of Tomorrow's Schools, the Independent Taskforce put out two surveys to engage audiences online. More than 2,270 people from across the country had their say.

A three question, quick survey asked people "What is working well?", "What is not working well?" and "What would you change, and how?" about the education system. It received 1814 responses.

This survey attracted a range of community voices, from school students to educators and retirees, and their comments were far reaching. These included:

- hundreds of mentions of learning support needs, largely relating to the need for more support for children with additional learning needs and "*teachers who understand their needs*". This also ties into comments about accessibility of a wide range of specialist services to support students and their whānau;
- comments about *"the world our students are moving into"*, and the relevance of what students are being taught and how;
- equity and social issues that were "*once unusual that are now rife and widespread*"; and
- the need for greater support for teachers and professional development.

People also had a lot to say about communication and the need to give families a voice in the school system – some didn't feel represented by their school boards – and that "*work on mechanisms to enable more parents to engage in the direction of teaching and learning decisions*" was needed.

Along with this broad survey, the Taskforce also considered responses to a detailed, 12 question survey (460 responses). Most people that took part in this survey were either parents of students or teachers/principals and over the age of 35 years, with wide ranging views about the current system.

The detailed survey had questions relating to: the strengths and weaknesses of our current board of trustee model; how we can be more innovative and adaptive; how to better support the needs of all children; working with communities; the negative aspects competition; education agencies; and how we can give active expression to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

All of this feedback was considered as the Taskforce compiled its report and made their recommendations.

How the survey findings fed into the recommendations in the report

The survey results, along with the wide range of other feedback via over 200 meetings, alongside the relevant New Zealand and international research, led the Taskforce to conclude that there are system-wide challenges and that we need a cultural and structural transformation of the education system for all learners to be able to succeed.

As a result, the Taskforce focused on eight key issues: governance, schooling provision, competition and choice, disability and learning support, teaching, school leadership, school resourcing, and central education agencies. Within those eight issues, a total of 32 recommendations were made.

It should be noted that the Independent Taskforce's recommendations are **not** Government policy and the Government has asked the Taskforce to publicly consult on their recommendations until April 2019. No decisions will be taken until after this process has been completed and the Taskforce has reported back to the Minister of Education on the outcomes of their consultation.

Findings and how they fit into the eight key issues
The responses from both surveys were categorised, and broadly aligned to the eight issues. The sections below summarise the key findings from the survey responses and identify the recommendations that respond to the views and concerns raised.

➢ *Key Issue 1: Governance*
The most common response from respondents was that the capability of boards of trustees across schools was variable. Many encounter issues such as challenging interpersonal dynamics and not having the right skills or expertise in specific areas such as finance, property and recruitment. However, respondents spoke highly of the role of boards to represent their communities, regarded as the board's greatest strength. While some respondents suggested that boards of trustees should be removed entirely, most were in favour of improving existing practice through providing more support, training and access to external expertise. There were also a number of alternative governance models proposed. Respondents also highlighted the challenges of the school principal role, heavy workload pressures and difficulties in navigating relationships with boards of trustees.

Three recommendations were made: Board of Trustees responsibilities should be reoriented; that twenty local Education Hubs should be established to better support and connect schools; that local Education Hubs be regularly reviewed by the newly created Education Evaluation Office (EEO).

➢ *Key Issue 2: Schooling provision*
Respondents felt that Te Tiriti o Waitangi should be given active expression, and that te reo should be taught in schools. Access to more health and wellbeing services such as social workers, and in-school services to provide food for children who need it was encouraged. Respondents rejected the "one size fits all" approach and wanted the schooling system to be more accommodating of each student's individuality, to utilise new teaching methods and to ensure quality digital education was provided. They identified that transitions within the schooling pathway can be a "pain point" for students and educators, and to make transitions "smoother" for learners and those that support them. Respondents also indicated there was an overemphasis on encouraging students to attend university and advocated for more opportunities for trades training.

Seven recommendations were made: a future-focused, Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led schooling strategy is developed alongside the Education Hubs; the creation of a dedicated national Education Hub with Kaupapa Māori settings is considered; robust data for seamless transition between schools is made available; phasing in schooling provision to provide more stability and better transitions; national guidelines for wrap-around services in schools are developed; Education Hubs design community-wide, flexible offerings for schools; the role of Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu – The Correspondence School is investigated to better support individuals and schools.

➢ *Key Issue 3: Choice and Competition*
Respondents felt there needed to be more facilitation, time, and resources given to schools to support collaboration. Other prominent ideas raised included competition between schools acting as a barrier that discourages schools from working together.

Zoning and school choice were divisive issues, with some respondents opposed to efforts to constrain school choice (particularly zoning) and others wanting more fairness around access to schools. Overall, competition between schools tended to be viewed negatively.

Two recommendations were made: each Education Hub should have a planned network for state and state-integrated schools including limits on out of zone students and on donations to support choice; there should be alignment of state-integrated schools and state schools and how their enrolment schemes operate.

➢ *Key Issue 4: Disability and Learning Support*
The overall sense was that the education system was falling short in supporting students with additional learning support needs, as well as their parents, whānau and teachers. Schools and families face barriers to accessing support for these students, such as long waiting times and insufficient teacher aide time. Respondents also noted the impact on other students and for teaching staff. Respondents advocated for improved accessibility to in-school support and specialist services, improved teacher capability to support neuro-diverse students, increased funding and resources, and better working conditions and pay for teacher aides.

Three recommendations were made: the Ministry of Education continues with policy/strategy in disability and learning support and works with Education Hubs; every school has a Learning Support Coordinator; there is appropriate funding for Education Hubs to employ specialist staff and to co-ordinate with whānau and schools to meet student needs.

➢ *Key Issue 5: Teaching*
The issue of teacher supply constraints was highlighted, along with variability in teacher capability/quality. To improve teacher capability, respondents called for more access to specialist teachers, more professional development/training opportunities and improvements to initial teacher education (ITE).

Teachers' working conditions was also an area of concern, with an emphasis on workload and remuneration. Respondents stressed the high expectations and large volume of work experienced by teachers, and indicated that administrative and compliance requirements were a key contributing factor. Respondents called for relief for teachers from these workload pressures by reducing their responsibilities and increasing their release time. Respondents expressed the view that teachers are not paid adequately, with many advocating for higher remuneration.

Many respondents cited issues relating to funding, difficult interpersonal dynamics and lack of evidence that Kāhui Ako had improved student outcomes. Some shared ideas on how to improve Kāhui Ako while others felt they should be discontinued entirely.

Five recommendations were made: the Ministry of Education works with the Teaching Council on a future-focused workforce strategy; local Education Hubs provide advisory services and opportunities for development; the Kāhui Ako pathway model has more flexibility; the Teaching Council develops flexible appraisal guidelines for teachers; the Education Hubs has a role in professional learning, development and advisory services.

➢ *Key Issue 6: School Leadership*
Respondents highlighted the challenges of the school principal role, heavy workload pressures and difficulties in navigating relationships with boards of trustees.

Respondents recommended providing more professional development and higher remuneration. A minority of respondents recognised other school leadership roles (such as middle management) and system leadership facing heavy workload demands.

Three recommendations were made: a Leadership Centre is established within the Teaching Council; the role of the Leadership Centre; the Education Hubs' role in developing leadership.

> ### Key Issue 7: Resourcing
There was a desire for increased funding and resourcing in schools. Respondents identified particular areas of need, including classroom supplies and learning support. The model used to allocate funding to schools was also of interest, with divergent views on this issue. Some respondents' emphasised equity, with more funding to students with a greater need, while others emphasised equality, and the view that funding should be the same across the board.

Four recommendations were made: the proposed Equity Index is introduced and equity resourcing increased to a minimum of 6% of total resourcing; primary and secondary schools' staffing entitlements are aligned; Education Hubs work with school principals/tumuaki receiving equity funding to share best practice; Education Hubs carry out school network reviews to ensure smaller schools that are unable to deliver quality education are merged with others, or closed, where this is a practical possibility.

> ### Key Issue 8: Central Agencies
Many respondents thought that the Ministry of Education should have more influence in education delivery, and gave feedback on their role and responsibilities. Many felt negatively about the education agencies, particularly the Ministry of Education. Overall, around half of the respondents felt that the Education Review Office needed strengthening or improving. Respondents also indicated that government agencies could work better together, both education agencies interacting with each other and with other government agencies. Respondents also reflected on whether having a "middle layer" (between schools and the Ministry/other agencies) to support schools with particular functions could improve education delivery by allowing them to focus on educational leadership and pedagogy. Finally, many respondents felt the current accountability settings were inadequate and required change.

Five recommendations were made: the Ministry of Education is reconfigured; Education Hubs are created, replacing the current Ministry of Education regional offices; an independent Education Evaluation Office (EEO) is established to report regularly on overall performance of the system; the Teaching Council is expanded to host a Leadership Centre; and the disestablishment of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and Education Review Office.

For the full analysis of the quick survey, click here, and for a full analysis of the detailed survey, click here.