



Submission to 'Tomorrow Schools Independent Taskforce,' on report entitled 'Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together'

By Mt Carmel School, Auckland.

Background on Mt Carmel

- Mt Carmel is an integrated Catholic school for boys and girls from Year 0 to Year 6.
- Our school was founded in 1952 by the Brigidine Order with the patron saint being Our Lady of Mt Carmel and we have been successfully educating children for 67 years.
- Our roll is approximately 265 pupils and we have 12 classrooms with a new modern learning environment under construction.
- We maintain high levels of academic and extra-curriculum achievement across the student body.
- The school has strong community involvement and support.

Our Feedback

As a school we applaud the high level goals contained in the report. Many of the desires expressed we are striving to achieve already (eg students from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving as they should) and others the sector has been requesting for some time (eg adequate funding overall, and proper support for Special Needs).

The report recognises that New Zealand's education system is under stress and needs addressing, something we wholeheartedly agree with. Last year as our teaching staff went on strike our Board provided some background to our community on the challenges we saw the teaching profession facing. For context we have included these at the end of this submission.

Whilst we wholeheartedly agree there are significant challenges, we don't feel the answers provided by the task force are going to fix the problems. We actually see a high chance of the opposite occurring and them resulting in several unintended consequences.

1. Creating a layer of bureaucracy that hinders progress

The report recommendations do not adequately recognise the successes of current schools and they are based upon a philosophical rather than practical strategy. The increase in bureaucracy they would cause is likely to create inefficiency in the use of finite resources. Schools are experiencing this already with more and more layers of reporting required that is not assisting to drive better outcomes, but is instead driving teachers out of the profession.

The proposal of a more strongly government-controlled system for all schools ignores the advancements of Tomorrow's Schools. Placing responsibilities at a community level has empowered them in the support and governance of their schools. The proposed new system risks compromising much of that support.

2. Reducing the contribution / participation of communities

Our current community and governance structure is a key element of our success. It is not possible to have responsibility without authority, so by removing authority from schools (eg Principal appointment, property decisions), we do not have the mechanisms to be responsible for our school's future. The proposals in the Report would undermine Mt Carmel's success and its strong relationship with its community.

Appointing the Principal and managing the ongoing employment relationship with them is critical to the success of our school and should remain the responsibility of the governance structure at the school. The community understands its school's needs and is best placed to select a leader that meets these. If the Ministry of Education feels an intervention is necessary, it already has grounds to do so.

Placing limits on voluntary donations restricts school's ability to pursue capital building requirements, property maintenance, other school programmes and support of students. Such a change would remove substantial voluntary funding by parents from the education sector, and consequently lead to a fall in the quality of facilities and resources available to students at schools. This in turn would likely affect student outcomes around wellbeing and academic achievement.

3. Limiting innovation through a desire for uniformity

A 'one size fits all' approach with key decisions controlled by the government through educational hubs will not have the intended effect of raising performance for all. Government should be targeting, facilitating, and where necessary, intervening to support achievement by underperforming schools and / or students to raise overall achievement. The suggested approaches will limit innovation by individual schools. It is this innovation and these individual successes that will improve education and can be adopted for all.

4. Restricting choice and the ability to find the right school for your child

One of the biggest determinants of an individual's success in work or education is 'fit.' By having the ability to choose what school (or work environment) suits us as individuals we are more likely to achieve success. This has always been, an essential factor in the New Zealand education system.

Different schools suit students or their parents better than others. Choice is positive for students and families. The reforms need to concentrate on enhancing poorer performing schools, rather than trying to change or hold back schools that are providing good educational outcomes for their students.

5. Undermining special character and the state integrated schools act

The Report and its recommendations show a lack of understanding of the Integrated Schooling system which accounts for approximately 11% of students attending schools in New Zealand. The key proposals in the Report run contrary to our Integration Agreement with the Crown and through which the school became a state integrated school. That agreement guarantees the preservation of the Special Character of our school in all aspects of school activity along with preserving other important rights.

Lastly, legally, Mt Carmel's Integration Agreement has enshrined in it that the School shall at all times be conducted and operated so as to maintain and preserve the School's Special Character. Special Character is reflected in all aspects of school life. The school retains responsibility for planning, executing and paying for capital works and associated facilities required to meet the school's needs.

Summary

Whilst it is great that the issues facing education are recognised and steps are being undertaken to address them, we feel many of the recommendations need further development. We have discussed this with other schools in our student pathway and would like to see the following occur.

- Target low performing schools, but don't compromise or discourage those performing well. Analyse, assess and implement successful programmes from high performing schools.
- The report refers to successful programmes already in place in some schools which should be introduced to schools with identified needs to increase achievement and outcomes (this does not require a nationwide network of hubs catching all schools).
- Use resources to address key issues such as recruitment or allowances to benefit qualifying schools.
- Transparency of the effectiveness of the new initiatives the MOE should be developing is vital. This should not be about building up the MOE but developing more targeted strategies to address the problems where underachievement is occurring.
- Leave State Integrated Schools to govern in accordance with their unique agreements with the Crown, to fulfil special character requirements and capital property cost responsibilities.
- Provide adequate funding and support to allow schools to properly support Special Education needs as opposed to the current approach of relying predominantly on teacher goodwill and existing operational grants



Annette Donnelly
Principal – Mt Carmel School



Andrew Martin
Chair – Board of Trustees

Challenges New Zealand's education sector faces – Board communication to our parents, September 2018

On August 15th the teacher's union (NZEI) initiated a strike brought about by the many challenges they see education facing. There are significant issues in the education sector affecting our School, our children, and the wider community that we all should be concerned about.

There have been a variety of opinions being put forward in the media about the challenges NZ's education sector faces. To summarise these we asked an educational consultant the Board works with to give us his view. Here's what he's been recently experiencing as he's consulted across 30+ schools in the greater Auckland area:

1. Teacher shortage / recruitment of teachers. There is a desperate shortage of teachers across both the primary and secondary school areas in NZ. This has occurred because of the combined effects of increased numbers of school aged students, difficulty in recruiting people into teacher training in NZ and initiatives such as Kahui Ako (Communities of Learning) which are taking experienced teachers out of classrooms for periods of time. This shortage has flowed over to the relief teacher pool and many schools are now finding it very difficult to source suitable relief teachers to cover for staff who are unwell or attending professional development courses.
2. Auckland affordability challenges. The situation in Auckland is further compounded because of the costs of housing / rents and also traffic issues. Teachers are now moving out of Auckland to more affordable locations. Schools are being forced into making temporary appointments, combining classes and forgoing some professional development opportunities for their teachers.
3. Increased numbers of students who present with special needs. Primary schools in particular are faced with assisting increased numbers of Special Education needs students who require individualised support and interventions delivered by specialists in this field. Schools are struggling to access the level of support required to meet the needs of these students and teachers are having to deal with very difficult situations that are outside the scope of their expertise.
4. Assessment and reporting of student learning. The demise of National Standards was warmly received by the vast majority of primary schools but there is some anxiety at the moment about next steps and what the Government may be planning to fill the void. Schools are developing their assessment and reporting programmes independently without a national strategy or direction on what excellent processes might look like.
5. Review of "Tomorrow's Schools". The Tomorrows Schools review has potential to create significant changes in the schooling sector and many are feeling anxious about the impacts and process of change. There is good reason for the teaching profession to be concerned based on previous significant change initiatives (e.g. National Standards, NCEA) that were not well implemented.
6. Staff wellbeing. All of the above is impacting staff wellbeing. Schools need support to ensure that staff wellbeing is strongly considered in strategic and operational planning.

Given all this, it's important that we're aware of the challenges the education sector and our teachers face. This is an important discussion and one we need to see resolved in the best fashion possible.