



Submission on the Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together – Whiri Nga Kura Tuatinitini

To the **Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce**

This submission is from:

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1. **Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)** is an independent charity working to eliminate child poverty in New Zealand through research, education and advocacy. CPAG believes that New Zealand's high level of child poverty is not the result of economic necessity, but is due to policy neglect and a flawed ideological emphasis on economic incentives. Through research, CPAG highlights the position of tens of thousands of New Zealand children, and promotes public policies that address the underlying causes of the poverty they live in.
2. CPAG's interest in the review of Tomorrow's Schools by the Tomorrow's School Independent Taskforce stems from our overall interest in the wellbeing of New Zealand's children as well as our particular concerns for the least well off of our children. Given our focus on children living in poverty and material hardship we are particularly pleased with the Taskforce's focus in its review on educational inequality – we support this focus and congratulate the Taskforce both for identifying inequality as the most significant issue within our compulsory education sector and for highlighting this to what appears to us to be a not altogether appreciative public.
3. Our submission will focus on three of the eight focus areas in the Taskforce's report *Our Schooling Futures- Stronger Together*. These areas are:
 - Competition and choice
 - Governance.-.
 - Disability and learning support.

COMPETITION & CHOICE

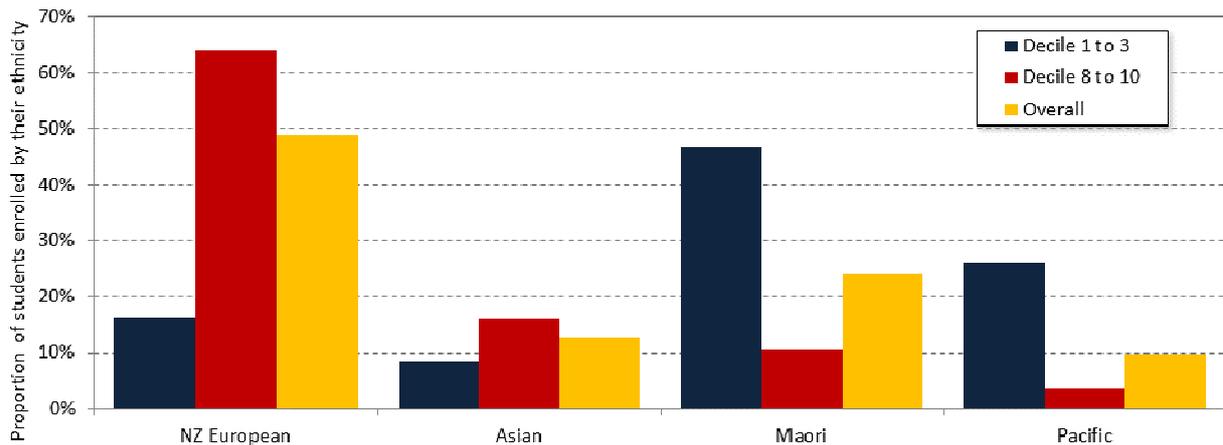
4. CPAG agrees completely with the Taskforce's analysis that the competitive environment established by Tomorrow's School has driven educational inequality. We agree too that this inequality has been at the expense of children living in poor communities and especially Maori and Pacific children. That such inequality should have been created and sustained within an educational system which is largely publicly owned and mostly publicly funded is to us quite appalling.
5. CPAG believes however that these ingrained and enduring inequalities are more a consequence of values and behaviours in our wider society rather than the result of a particular approach to how we have organised our compulsory education system. We accept that the Tomorrow's Schools regime was established to set up competition between schools in the ideological belief that such competition would drive better performance from schools. As we have seen, such a competitive structure simply reinforced middle class privilege and not only encouraged gaming but supported it.
6. Such outcomes are perhaps to be expected given the essentially competitive nature of our society although this competitiveness has probably been accentuated over the past 30 years with the ascendancy of neo-liberalism in our public life. Within such a competitive social environment, education is seen by many parents as a private commodity which is the source of future social and economic advantage for their children. It is easy to see then that schools and school choice are seen in terms of an education market in which competition is a zero sum game. While this may not be a public narrative around education it is unfortunately the dominant behaviour as witnessed by the relationship between house values and school zones and by the decile drift which has been noted in the Taskforce's report.
7. This dominant behaviour suggests to CPAG that addressing inequality within our compulsory education system will require more than a change in governance. This broader requirement is noted by the Taskforce with its recommendation 26 around increasing the share of education funding which is targeted towards inequality. CPAG supports this recommendation.
8. CPAG believes however that inequality is endemic in the whole culture of our education system including parts of teacher practice, the framing of curriculum and the dominant pedagogy. These biases result in such things as deficit thinking, unconscious bias and racism and are noted in the Taskforce's report (p.87). Despite this recognition there is little in the following recommendations which will address the contribution which the teaching profession makes to education inequality. CPAG certainly supports the Taskforce's recommendation 16 which calls for changes in the way in which teachers are recruited, trained and retained and in particular the need to have a teaching workforce which matches the diversity of our students. However, having a more diverse teaching workforce does not ensure that bias against poorer students and racism toward Maori and Pacific students will be addressed. CPAG's believe more needs to be done to address these inequities.
9. CPAG supports the Taskforce's recommendations 4 and 5 around a Treaty led approach to planning the schooling network and a dedicated education hub for kaupapa Maori education. Such initiatives may be successful in expanding kura kaupapa Maori but we note that less than

4% of Maori students attend such kura at present. This suggests, firstly, that the vast majority of Maori students will attend mainstream education for the foreseeable future and, secondly, that efforts to close gaps between Maori and non-Maori in student engagement and achievement will need to be focused in the mainstream part of the compulsory schooling sector. This mainstream is the source for most of this inequality anyway so most likely this mainstream should be focus of efforts to address the many deficits here.

10. Addressing the inequality which we believe is endemic in the compulsory education system will, in CPAG's opinion require radical change in the way knowledge and learning are conceived in schools, in the cultural values under which they operate and in the relationships between students, their teachers and their whanau. These are to a large extent 'hearts and minds' type changes which require everyone involved in the schools, from boards to principals to teachers. Such change might begin by those involved first appreciating the extent of their shortcomings in providing an education system which was free from racism and unconscious bias against Maori students in particular and students from poorer backgrounds more generally. The consistently poor outcomes for Maori students and for students from lower decile schools are not the consequence of some natural order or state of nature but are produced by a system which is biased and indifferent towards those in the minority or cultural perspectives which are different to the mainstream. The second part of such a 'hearts and minds' change for those involved in governing, managing and delivering our compulsory education system is to care about these shortcomings and then to agree that a change in attitude and approach on their part is required.
11. Strategies, policies and governance frameworks can't change hearts and minds so it would be unreasonable to expect the Taskforce and its recommendations to do so. Public policies can however hold people to account for what has and has not been achieved and this accountability may force changes in behaviours although most likely not 'hearts and minds' type changes. To this end CPAGs shares the Taskforce's scepticism that the Education Review Office has performed adequately in holding the compulsory education system to account. In part this may be because its focus is largely on the performance of individual schools and not for example on a school network in a particular community where student achievement outcomes are substandard. Such a focus is of course consistent with the Tomorrow's Schools model of autonomous independent schools but also exacerbates the competition between schools and the inequalities which come from this. CPAG supports the Taskforce's recommendation 30 to establish an Education Evaluation Office which in effect has an independent watch dog function.
12. CPAG understands that the issue of school zoning and parental choice remains a thorny one which will not be resolved by the Taskforce's review of current school governance and management. The extent to which middle class privilege is embedded in our social and political institutions means that it is almost impossible to have an informed and reasonable public debate about the inequalities and injustices which have been engineered into our compulsory education system. But the simple fact is that the non-poor go to great lengths to separate themselves and their children from the poor. This separation occurs primarily in housing and education markets and school zoning is at the heart of these markets and these choices. There may also be a degree of racism in these choices with Pakeha –NZ European and Asian families working hard to ensure that their children don't attend schools with many Maori or Pacific students at. Ethnic enrolment patterns show a sharp polarisation with Maori and Pacific being

concentrated in the poorest three deciles of schools while Pakeha and Asians are concentrated in the wealthiest three deciles of schools. This distribution is illustrated in the following graph and is from Ministry of Education enrolment data from 2018. This distribution of course reflects the pattern of distribution of income and wealth within New Zealand society so it may be argued that there is nothing racist or prejudiced about where such a pattern of enrolments. Such an argument does not explain the decile drift which is well known already and identified in the Taskforce’s report. It is probably the case however that this decile drift also involves Maori and Pacific families also transporting their children to schools outside their local area as well.

School enrolments by student ethnicity and decile ranking of their schools - 2018



13. If indeed this polarisation is as intractable as CPAG believes it is, and, given the embedded nature of middle class privilege, it seems to us that parental choice will remain as a primary driver of our education policy. Within such a policy framework the issue of school zoning will remain equally intractable. The likelihood too is that having more stringent school zoning policies perhaps where there are effective financial disincentives for schools not to predate on neighbouring schools will simply accentuate privilege – that only children within a strictly enforced zone can go to an apparently successful ‘good’ school and their parents pay for this through higher property prices within that zone.

14. CPAG believes that the only feasible answer to such intractability and perhaps inevitability is to resource schools in poorer communities and those schools with high Maori and Pacific student rolls to ensure that they too succeed. Such approaches and ambition have long been the intention of strategies of such as Ka Hikitia but what is disappointing with these efforts is what slow progress has been achieved. The Taskforce’s report, in CPAG’s opinion, accurately identifies some of the reasons for this limited progress. These include the patchy and sometimes inadequate support for schools from Ministry of Education. In addition, there is an absence of coherent and comprehensive professional development support for principals and teachers which may assist them to develop and deliver alternative pedagogies and curriculum approaches which are more appropriate to the cultural capital and life experiences of Maori and Pacific students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. CPAG sees significant merit in the development of the proposed education hubs to deliver such support although there remain questions for us around the adequate resourcing of such hubs.

GOVERNANCE

15. While CPAG supports the idea of education hubs as proposed by the Taskforce we remain less convinced that the proposed more limited roles for boards is adequate or appropriate. While it is true that many and perhaps most school boards are ill-equipped to fulfil all the governance and organisational roles expected of them, it does not mean that they should have their roles diminished virtually to one of agreeing with a school's strategy and curriculum offering and from time to time participating in appointment of a new principal.
16. Furthermore while it would be fair to partially attribute the competitive nature of our schooling environment to the governance model of Tomorrow's Schools and hence to the role of Boards, CPAG believes that it quite unfair to blame boards entirely for this as seems to be the tone of the Taskforce's report. The role of principals in driving and sustaining competition between schools needs also to be acknowledged. The Taskforce notes in its report (p.45) that principals are somewhat incentivised to have their school work to a competitive model since their salary increases with the school role. In addition there is greater professional status from leading a large popular school and with larger budgets there is wider discretion for spending on trappings such as overseas trips and swanky offices. The Taskforce itself in its report draws attention to such diversion of funds. (p.70). The Taskforce also acknowledges the role which principals are obliged to play or accept in cases where the a school board is not competent or equipped to adequately govern the school. In such cases principals become the de-facto chairperson and often deferred to by the Board to make all governance type decisions (p.36).
17. The governance/management model being proposed by the Taskforce will significantly diminish the role of boards to a level which might be judged as token. In this proposed model the key relationship is between a lead advisor and principal with the board playing a minimal role. This model has a lead advisor based in an education hub working closely with each principal in her/his management of the each school. (recommendation 23). . Around this *'Education Hubs would assume all the legal responsibilities and liabilities currently held by school Boards of Trustees. This would include responsibility for school quality and performance, principal and teacher employment, 5YA property funding and property development, financial management including final approval of a school's annual budget, health and safety, and human resources services'* Education hubs would undertake all these roles for up to 125 schools which in itself is a massive undertaking given that there is no administrative structure in place to do this.
18. The Taskforce in our opinion has correctly identified a large problem of getting parents interested in the work of boards (pp. 42-43). There are most likely a number of reasons for this including work and family commitments, self-confidence and lack of confidence that making a personal contribution will make any difference to the outcomes being achieved. This sense of a lack of effectiveness is likely to become more widespread if the boards' role is limited to that proposed by the Taskforce. CPAG believes that most school trustees take on this role with a great amount of goodwill and a desire to make a contribution to their children's school which they often see as 'their school'. Their motivation for doing so will most like diminish the more removed and incidental their role becomes to what happens at their school. Parental and community engagement in schools will diminish further if the Board's role is taken over by

bureaucrats working in the education hubs. Alongside this disengagement may come a falling away of any accountability to communities for the performance of schools.

19. CPAG concurs with the Taskforce that the 'one board – one school' model has contributed to competition between schools (p.45) and suggests that this aspect of the overall schools governance model should have been reconsidered as part of the Tomorrow's Schools review. CPAG also concurs with the Taskforce's analysis that this competition often has no regard for wider community interests. Competition between schools most often occurs at a community level where neighbouring schools compete for the same students. Such competition is often quite divisive pitting groups associated with the competing schools against each other and so damaging relationships and undermining social capital. A move away from the 'one school – one board' model would address this divisiveness and require boards to focus on the integrated interests of a number of schools and with this the interests of the local community and its children. A board which serves a number of schools could be more easily resourced and would perhaps attract people (either as parent representatives or as appointed members) with the skills and time to undertake the governance functions required of them.

DISABILITY AND LEARNING SUPPORT

20. CPAG agrees with the Taskforce's analysis around the discrimination which children with disabilities and severe learning needs sometimes face in enrolling in their local school. We also concur with comments made in the review report around the complexity and unpredictability of processes to apply for help for children with special needs.
21. CPAG believes that there is a social gradient at work in the application for and allocation of educational support for students with disabilities and special educational needs. This social gradient is well illustrated by the proportion of students provided with special assessment conditions for NCEA exams where 3% of students from decile 1 schools received such assistance while 10% of students from decile 10 schools did.ⁱ It would appear that the process of applying for assistance creates barriers to gaining this assistance for poorer families. Such barriers could be related to the need to pay for specialist diagnosis of a child's needs or to the capacity of schools to complete the necessary paper work to apply for assistance. Such barriers and such inequitable outcomes are in CPAG's opinion indefensible within a public education system.
22. CPAG supports all the recommendations relating to disabilities and learning support (recommendations 13 to 15) offered by the Taskforce in its review report. In addition to these changes CPAG believes that children with disabilities and serious learning needs should have their rights to adequate support and equal access to education guaranteed by statute. The most obvious place for such a guarantee or protection is in the Education Act and we ask the Taskforce to consider recommending a rights based approach to protecting the interests and needs of our most vulnerable children.

CONCLUSIONS

23. CPAG is grateful for the work of the Taskforce in highlighting some of the extent of educational inequality within our public education system. We believe that this conversation is necessary and overdue and we applaud the Taskforce's efforts in starting it.
24. In general CPAG supports the Taskforce's recommendations but in finalising these recommendations we ask it to consider or re-consider a small number of issues. These are as follows.
 - The need to consider what systemic changes could be made to address the obvious bias and prejudice which is directed at children from poorer families and toward Maori and Pacific students especially – these changes could perhaps consider changes to pedagogy and other teacher practice as well as curriculum design and school culture.
 - Other models for the future roles of Boards including an option to have one Board per community/suburb rather than one Board per school.
 - A rights based approach to supporting and protecting the interests of children with disabilities and serious learning needs.

ⁱ See report by Simon Collins in the New Zealand Herald of 14 November 2018. Available at https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12156502