

## MOOT SPEECH 2019

Whetu Cormick, NZPF President

Greetings to you all.... noting the critical importance of the korero we will have today at this hui...

A very warm welcome to Minister Chris Hipkins, Bali Haque and Dr Cathy Wylie. We understand the very full schedules you have, and sincerely appreciate that you have prioritised addressing us here today.

Regional Presidents, thank you for taking time out of your schools, to travel from Whangarei, Invercargill, Gisborne, Greymouth and everywhere in between - to join us for the *Tomorrow's Schools* debate here in Wellington. Your collective views have never been more important as we move forward to help co-construct the shape of NZ's future education system.

The topic on everyone's lips for the past four months has been the '*Tomorrow's Schools*' report. It is no surprise to us that this was the first piece of work the Minister reviewed, since the policy encompasses the fundamental structure of our education system, and has endured since the 1980s.

Today, I want to take you through a brief history of the context into which *Tomorrow's Schools*' policy was introduced, then show how, over time, practices have evolved resulting in some unintended - or maybe NOT unintended - consequences which have led to the position we are in now. I will then share with you some of the Task Force's recommendations for improving our system, followed by some preliminary results of our survey.

The position we are in now is plagued with inequities, driven by competition, gravely underfunded and overwhelmed by the effects of an inclusion policy - which was implemented without appropriate supports. As a profession we are now facing high stress and burnout and our work as professionals has become greatly under-valued. Our job has become steadily more complex and, for some, an impossible job to do well.

To review the policy that has led us to this place is therefore not only sensible and timely, it is necessary. I commend the Government, and Minister Hipkins, for undertaking the review. I also acknowledge the leadership of Bali Haque for producing the *Tomorrow's Schools* Report and its 32 recommendations. It is now up to us to give our feedback on how much, or how little, needs to change to make a positive difference for the future;

Now, for a brief history of *Tomorrow's Schools'*. This was a flagship policy for the 1987 Labour Government and came out of the 1988 Picot Report recommendations for education. The mantra of that government was choice and competition and it was believed that everything, including education, could operate within a business model, driven by market forces. The *Tomorrow's Schools'* intentions were to raise education quality, lower the cost of delivery and give parents more power to have influence and choice in schooling.

Many, both within and outside of the profession, did not welcome *Tomorrow's Schools'*, referring to the policy as a neo-liberal experiment. They argued, for example, that the decile system of equity funding, drove inappropriate behaviours.

They said it enabled too many schools to profit as 'empire-builders', while others fell into decline as the middle classes fled lower decile schools. The more this behaviour ensued, the more the decile

number became a measure of quality. High decile numbers were equated with high performing schools and low numbers with poor performing schools. Longitudinal studies have shown the drift of students over time from low decile to high decile schools, as evidenced by Dr Liz Gordon's studies, leaving low decile schools with smaller rolls, with less resource and with higher proportions of students requiring higher levels of learning support.

Meanwhile high decile schools have been continuously expanding to cope with their growing rolls. The education system has gradually distanced itself from collaborative practices to become a system of 2,400 distinctly individual schools. Some schools are determined to protect their own patch and garner as much resource as they possibly can - even if that means aggressive marketing, and deliberately poaching students from other schools to increase their rolls, and simultaneously, increase their own salaries. Some would argue that in the 1990s this was a legitimate goal. It was perfectly consistent with the neo-liberal political agenda of the time.

Couple these practices with parental choice and very soon the parents take over. Now we have parental choice influencing housing markets, as more and more clamour to reside in the popular school zones. The idea that a system should cater for all children has become a distant dream. Despite this, we have managed to maintain respectable international achievement rankings. You and your teachers are to be commended for that.

What has changed most dramatically though, is the gap between the high and low achievers in NZ. That gap is now one of the highest in the OECD. We also find that the low achievers are more likely to be truant, to **not** be engaged, and to leave school early.

We also find that Māori and Pacific Island learners continue to flounder in an education system that is not, at its core, culturally responsive and thus not culturally sustaining. Some would argue that it continues to be racist - at worst - and with high levels of bias - at best.

The big questions ahead are all about how to fix the inequities and the unhelpful competitive elements that have evolved over time and ensure that every child has a fair go.

The Task Force sees the answers firstly in a new school governance model where school Boards of Trustees would have reduced powers and responsibilities which would be subsumed under a new entity called 'Hubs'. These Hubs would become the lynchpin between the local Boards of Trustees and national Ministry, and would also be the source of advisory and support services to schools. They would replace regional Ministry offices.

I have been scanning through the results of our membership survey on Boards vs hubs (survey Qu 6) and principals' views are quite divided. I ask you today, if hubs are to address the inequities in our system, and reduce competition how will they do that? Will the functions suggested to promote collaboration amongst hub schools, be the answer? The recommendations are that:

- **all** schools in the hub will be responsible for **all** learners in the hub
- hubs will provide pools of learning support experts
- hubs will have curriculum and business advisories
- they will employ and appraise principals
- they will evaluate schools and
- provide leadership advice...

Will these functions actually make the differences we are looking for? And will we have the injection of funds necessary to fill all of these roles? Will we have the personnel to fill all of these roles.

Or will the hubs just become another bureaucratic nightmare to navigate? Will they limit the self-management aspects of schools that principals value and take away our autonomy? If principals are employed by hubs, will we lose our voice? Will our ability to speak out about Government education policy be curbed? These are all questions for us to grapple with today and NZPF is looking to you to set the direction for us all.

Many would argue, that if the majority of schools are doing well in New Zealand, why do we need major changes? Of course that's easy to say if you are one of those higher decile schools, with a growing roll and supportive well-heeled parents. But what if you are one of the lower decile schools, struggling to put a Board together every three years when elections come round? To make the system fairer, should those schools have more equity funding? Should teachers and principals of smaller low decile schools be paid at a higher salary rate? Should high decile principals and teachers be paid at a lower salary rate? How else might equity of learning outcomes be achieved in these schools, which have higher proportions of challenged youngsters? And if we turn our focus solely on equity, will we be compromising excellence?

These are the sorts of questions we will grapple with today.

We may not solve all of these issues during our debate, but there are some things, Minister, that are very clear from our membership survey so far.

The first is that a teaching and learning unit for curriculum learning and assessment advice would be welcomed by over 80% of us. Similar numbers would welcome a business support services unit.

Two thirds would also welcome an independent evaluation office to evaluate hubs, and provide regular performance reports to parliament and the public.

That said, the idea of hubs monitoring schools' student success, well-being and achievement and reporting to parents, yielded very divided views.

Many principals feel our system is gravely underfunded and no matter what structural changes are made, nothing will change without a substantial injection of funding to match, especially in the areas of learning support and specialist provision. Some were critical of the review saying there is no acknowledgement in the report that the vast majority of schools are performing very well and the focus should be on building the morale and status of the profession.

Another very clear message we are getting is that principals do not want 5 – year contracts. We are struggling with the rationale for this recommendation. It would be disruptive to principals and their families; It would be unsettling for school communities; If a school needed improvement, 5 years is not enough. So why have 5 year contracts?

Also, if Boards of Trustees were to have diminished responsibilities, 80% of principals do not want Boards advising on curriculum and assessment. They also think that if there are to be hubs, they should be based on the number of students not the number of schools. Surprisingly, or maybe not surprisingly, two thirds of principals do NOT want to be employed by hubs.

These are just preliminary results but give a taste of how principals, across the country, are feeling about the *Tomorrow's Schools* review.

Before I end my korero and hand over to the Minister and Bali Haque, I invite you all to reflect on the following questions:

1. How do we stem the growing negative effects on the health and wellbeing of principals and teachers (see Phil Reilly's study) - from burnout, depression, stress, workload and excessive hours of work?
2. how do we give every child a full suite of learning opportunities no matter what their parents income is, no matter what street they live in, no matter whether they attend a large or small school, or whether they live in an urban or rural area?
3. how do we address the inequity of learning outcomes for Māori and Pacific Island children?
4. How do we provide the most appropriate learning for our moderate and most challenged young people?
5. How do we maintain local community involvement in schools, yet not overburden parents with the complex duties currently required of Boards of Trustees?
6. How do we establish a schooling system that is well supported both for teaching & learning and for its business and compliance functions?
7. How do we establish a Leadership Centre that is relevant to the NZ context, that provides accessible, affordable PLD for leaders that will continuously enhance the quality of school leadership across all schools, and build a culture of respect and ambition for more middle leaders to aspire to the next level?
8. How do we raise the status of the profession, while ensuring our teachers have the time to get the job done and are paid a fair salary to acknowledge the important work they do?

9. How do we bring a balance to the needs for public accountability and the desire for continuous quality improvement?
10. How do we shift the entrenched competitive mindset of **my** school to **our** schools; **my** children to **our** children?
11. How do we design the best system structures for our education system so that it will endure - well into the future - and beyond the next 30 years?

I know each one of you is passionate about the learners in your schools becoming successful, responsible adults. And I know you would not be here today if you were not committed to helping make our future education system the absolute best it can be.

Thank you for your commitment and I look forward to some exciting, passionate and constructive debate on the questions in front of us.