

# Children at the centre of the education system

SUBMISSION FROM THE OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER ON THE UPDATE OF THE  
*EDUCATION ACT 1989*

14 DECEMBER 2015



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

**Children's  
Commissioner**

# Children at the centre of the education system

The education system exists for children. This needs to be reflected in the Education Act and should be the driving force behind any changes.

The Children's Commissioner has a responsibility to ensure children's rights are respected and to advocate for their interests. A child is anyone in New Zealand under the age of eighteen.

## THE ACT NEEDS UPDATING

The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) welcomes the update of the Education Act, which is due for a review and refresh after more than 25 years. We are pleased to see that a central plank of the update is developing a student-centred purpose statement for the education system. We agree that the education system exists *for*

children. This needs to be reflected in the Act and should be the driving force behind any changes to the Act resulting from the update.

The discussion document poses a number of specific questions, but makes clear the update of the Act is limited in scope. In our view this is a missed opportunity and could mean that the impact of any changes is limited in scope.

We are also disappointed that, as far as we can ascertain, children have not been systematically involved in the update. One of the best ways of determining the best interests of a child is to ask them directly. The timing of the consultation, coming at the busy end of the school year, is a barrier to children and young people getting involved, as is the lack of a child-friendly version of the discussion document and the fact that little face to face engagement with children has been planned.

In preparing this submission, we have attempted to address this gap by gathering the views of a diverse group of children and young people about the education system. Their views are central to this submission, and full summaries of one focus group and two surveyed groups are attached as appendices.

Our engagement with children – while producing rich results – was limited in scope, and is not intended to take the place of more comprehensive engagement by the Ministry

of Education. Rather, we include their voices here to illustrate the kind of information that can be readily gathered by engaging with children, and to demonstrate its potential value to answer questions explored in the update.

**We recommend the Ministry of Education undertakes pro-active and comprehensive engagement with children and young people in the next stage of the update.**

The OCC is available to assist with expertise and support to carry out such engagement.

With this in mind, this submission focuses on three things:

- > Making the case for involving children in the next stage of the update;
- > Answering several of the questions in the discussion document from a child-centred perspective; and
- > Highlighting issues not raised in the discussion document that will help to achieve a child-centred education system.

## THE CASE FOR ENGAGING CHILDREN

In this section, we make the case for pro-actively engaging children in the later stages of the Education Act update.

### Why engage with children

*They will be the beneficiaries of any changes*

The development of a purpose statement for governing legislation would not take place in other sectors without pro-active consultation with the stakeholders who will be most affected. A fairly comprehensive programme of consultation meetings open to

We provide quality, independent advice to our stakeholders and report on matters that relate to the welfare of children.

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*"[The purpose of the education system is] for the teachers to teach us about what we will need to know for the rest of our life."*  
- Survey respondent



Principals, teachers, Boards of Trustees, and members of the public has been held around the country during the public consultation period of the Education Act update. Yet these have not been child-friendly, and no parallel programme of child engagement has been attempted.

*"School helps you to find something you're enthusiastic about. Then it can help you find activities related to that subject and get really good at those. The more you can participate, the more you can achieve."*

- Focus group participant

If we imagine for a moment that major reform of the health sector would be attempted with the only active consultation being with doctors and District Health Boards, without making any consultation material or meetings directly open to patients and consumers we can begin to see what a significant oversight it is not to systematically involve children in the consultation process.

When the Act is updated and amended, it is children who will be impacted by the changes that are introduced. The intention expressed in the discussion document is that they are placed more clearly at the centre of the education system, that all schools, Boards, teachers and parents have a clear sense of what they are there to achieve with and for children, and that children's education and social outcomes improve as a result. If children are not actively engaged in setting this purpose, there is a real risk that it will miss the mark.

*It's their right*

The best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all decisions that affect them.<sup>1</sup> One of the best ways of determining what is in the best interests of a child is to ask them about their views.

*"[The role of the Board of Trustees is] to ensure that no rights of children are being breached and work towards governing the school in an equal and fair manner."*

- Save the Children Youth Ambassador

The education system exists for children. It is clear from the discussion document (and the report of the Taskforce on Regulations Affecting School Performance, which prompted it) that the Minister and Ministry of Education understand the importance of amending the Education Act to reflect this. Yet as

the key stakeholders in the education system, children have so far not been actively included in the update. Children will be the most affected stakeholders of any changes. They have a right to have a say on the future of the education system, and to have their views considered and taken into account by decision makers.

*They are experts and can offer views that won't be gleaned elsewhere*

In addition to having the right to be heard, children have a great deal to offer. Children know the education system inside out. They spend six hours a day, five days a week living and breathing it, and they can offer a user perspective that cannot be found elsewhere. It is important that this user perspective is gathered and included if changes to the Education Act are to achieve the purpose of placing students at the centre.

*Their views are insightful and valuable*

Children have important and insightful views to share. When consultation is done well, and when concepts are translated into child-friendly language and appropriate methods are used, these views can be gathered and shared to shed considerable light on the questions posed in the discussion document, and offer valuable opinions on the way forward.

*"More laughter and smiles in the schools. [Make sure] it's not all serious, so we can make mistakes."*

- Focus group participant

Children have clear views about the purpose of education and their own ideas about what achievement means to them. They also have clear ideas about how teachers, Principals, and Boards of Trustees can support them to achieve their goals that should be taken into account when making decisions about the future roles and responsibilities of Boards and Principals.

**Engaging with "hard to reach" children**

*Engaging with those excluded from the education system*

As well as engaging with children currently engaged in the school system, it is important that the Education Act update takes into account the views of children and young people for whom the current arrangements have not worked well. The discussion document (and the Taskforce that prompted it) both point towards the importance of

<sup>1</sup> As stipulated in Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which New Zealand is a signatory. See: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

inclusive support for all learners, especially those who have traditionally been poorly served or struggled to engage. In order to make changes that will successfully support these groups, their views need to be considered and taken into account.

Researchers at Massey University have for the past several years been engaged with a large research project on Pathways to Resilience for young people who are users of multiple social services. Many of their participants have been

excluded or withdrawn from formal education at a young age. As part of the project, researchers interviewed young people about their experiences navigating the education system, and produced a valuable report on the findings in 2014.<sup>2</sup>

The young people's voices in this report provide powerful testimony about doing everything that can be done to keep them engaged in the education system, even when the circumstances in their lives out of school and their often challenging behaviours make it difficult.

Hearing from children and young people with unconventional experiences of the education system, including those excluded from it offers the best chance

of improving outcomes for this often poorly-served group.

*Engaging with disabled children and those with special education requirements*

Likewise, it is important to explicitly seek the views of children with disabilities and special education needs, both physical and learning impairments. While our focus group included some children with special needs, the questions they engaged with were of a general nature, and did not explore in any depth their experience of inclusiveness in the

education system. We know that there are real issues here that need to be addressed from the Education and Science

Committee's current inquiry into the identification and support for students with the significant challenges of dyslexia, dyspraxia and autism spectrum disorders in primary and secondary schools.

The need for the Education Act to ensure the education system meets the needs of *all* learners and enables them to achieve their full potential is emphasised in the discussion document and was a strong theme in the consultation meeting attended by OCC staff in Wellington. Again, for this to be given effect in any changes to the Act as a result of the update, the voices and experiences of children with special education needs should be sought and taken into account.

## CHILD-CENTRED PERSPECTIVES ON THE DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

This section draws on the results of consultation carried out by the OCC and Save the Children New Zealand to answer some of the questions posed in the discussion document from a child-centred perspective. We have not addressed all questions; some lend themselves better to children's perspectives, and we did not have the time or resources to consult on all elements of the discussion document.

To gather these views, the OCC conducted a focus group with year 8 and 9 students at a Decile 1 full primary school in Porirua. Save the Children surveyed a class of year 9 students at a Decile 10 secondary school in Christchurch. Save the Children also surveyed 10 Youth Ambassadors aged 14-18 from a range of backgrounds. Full reports of all three consultations are attached as appendices.

We were particularly interested in gathering students' views about the purpose of the education system, and understanding what "achievement" means to them, since a stated goal of this update is to produce a student-centred purpose statement for the act that is focused on raising achievement. Likewise, children can also offer useful insight on some of the more detailed aspects of the update.

*"Treat disabled people better."*

- Focus group participant

*"Maybe the teachers could have asked me 'why are you wagging, do you need more help?' ... and I could have said ... 'I go to class and I sit through it just to get through it but that's it' and they could have said 'well we can give you that extra help, 'cause we believe you know you're on the path' or something. 'Cause at the end of the day I wish I had passed ... like it would have been cool to be sitting here right now going through all my school years and like got NCEA level one, two and three and you know, like I had something out of it. But now everything's like a lot harder."*

- Pathways to Resilience participant

<sup>2</sup> Pathways to Resilience Research Project (New Zealand): Navigating the Education System (Technical Report 8), 2014: <http://www.youthsay.co.nz/massey/fms/Resilience/Documents/Navigating%20the%20Education%20System.pdf>

**Question one: What should the goals for education be?**

The children who took part in our consultation understand that education serves multiple, related purposes. At its core, they think it should prepare them for the future and equip them with skills and knowledge they need to thrive as adults. Future preparedness was not only defined in terms of employment, but also in terms of gaining skills, fulfilling potential, and learning to learn.

*"To help students in the best way to learn and to help them achieve their goals and dreams."*

*"[Education is] important for your brain so you can learn in the future."*

*"[Education] helps prepare for the future and for life situations, and you get a better chance of getting a job. And it helps you to be confident and avoid conflict."*

*"To teach children life skills and knowledge that they can use for life."*

*"So you can get a job and be able to succeed in life."*

*"To turn the students into young people who can take over."*

- Various respondents

These answers suggest that a student-centred purpose statement for the Education Act needs to be sufficiently holistic to capture the wide range of expectations children have of the education system. The discussion document anticipates a purpose statement that is framed around "achievement." This is not a theme that emerges strongly from the students' responses, but it is not inconsistent with their views, as long as achievement is defined widely enough to encapsulate their diverse expectations.

Anticipating that this might be the case, we asked the students to tell us what "achievement" meant to them. It was clear that they all aspire to achieve and succeed, but this is not defined in terms of attaining particular qualifications or standards. Rather, the most common thread in the children's responses defined achievement in terms of setting and completing of goals. It was generally expressed as an intrinsic value, rather than something externally bestowed, and something which produces a state of happiness or satisfaction.

We conclude from these responses that a wide definition of achievement that

*"[Achievement is] when you're really happy because you were determined to do something, and you reach it. And then you set another goal and work hard."*

*"It means knowing you can do whatever you want. You know it inside even if others don't know it."*

*"To complete something that makes me happy to the best of my abilities."*

*"The completion of doing something well."*

- Various respondents

incorporates concepts of wellbeing, goal-setting, and fulfilment of individual potential will be important for setting an achievement-related purpose statement for the Education Act that resonates with children.

**Question two: What process should be used for setting a national priorities statement for early learning and schooling?**

National education priorities should reflect what children themselves want from the education system.

We asked children what skills and knowledge they thought they would need by the time they left school, to give a sense of the kinds of issues children would like to see prioritised in their schooling. Answers ranged from core literacy and numeracy skills to self-confidence and civic participation.

It would be great to see a set of national education priorities emerge that draw on students' own ideas about what they need from their education and reflect their own aspirations and goals. This will require consultation with children to be built into the process for setting and reviewing national education priorities.

*By the time I leave school I will need...*

*"Maths, reading, social skills, how to write."*

*"Self-determination and social competence."*

*"To be able to read, write, communication skills, and being able to get along with everyone."*

*"Team work. Negotiation. Responsibility. Being fair. Respect."*

*"Knowing about taxes, money, jobs and what life is REALLY like."*

- Various respondents

### Question three: What should the roles and responsibilities of a school or kura board be?

It was clear when we asked children what the role of Boards of Trustees should be in supporting them to achieve their goals that there is limited understanding of the role of Boards among children in the schools they govern.<sup>3</sup> Many students either skipped or answered the question about the role of Boards of Trustees with a version of "don't know," including one powerful statement about the disconnection some students feel from these bodies with significant influence in their school.

*"Quite frankly I don't even know what the role of the Board of Trustees is. All I know is that they have so much power and control over our school when in fact they have no relationship with the students who are attending the school. It's stupid."*

- Save the Children Youth Ambassador

If schools are to focus on a set of child-centred goals and priorities, it will be critical that Boards of Trustees understand the needs and views of their students so that they can make decisions that maximise students' interest and achievement.

#### The role of the Board of Trustees is...

*"To help the school become better keeping in mind the voice of the students and teachers."*

*"To listen to what students want and try and help them achieve their goals."*

- Various respondents

The students' responses clearly illustrate a need for Boards of Trustees to more actively engage with students and inform the student population about their role and decision-making.

The discussion document suggests the Education Act could be updated to give greater clarity about the roles and responsibilities of Boards, including spelling out that it is the role of Boards of Trustees to consult with the community over guiding policies and practices. Based on these responses, we suggest an obligation to engage with children is also written into the expected roles and responsibilities of Boards of Trustees.

<sup>3</sup> We also asked children about the roles of teachers and Principals in supporting them to achieve their goals. Their answers were to these questions were also insightful and are summarised in Appendices B and C.

Some other responses about the responsibilities of Boards to ensure a school environment that meets children's needs and helps them to reach their potential provide useful insight.

#### The role of the Board of Trustees is...

*"To make their school a safe and joyful environment."*

*"To make sure the Principal is doing things right."*

*"To manage the school's money."*

*"To understand what students are needing to be able to stay focused and love learning."*

- Various respondents

### Question six: How should schools and kura report on their performance and children and young people's achievement to parents, family, whānau and communities?

When asked how they thought schools should engage with parents and families, students suggested a range of options including conventional parent teacher interviews and emails, to more innovative ideas such as informal social gatherings, daily updates, and involving parents in all aspects of school operations. Telling parents how they can support their children's learning was an important factor in many responses. One student said they didn't think schools should have to engage with parents "unless the child was being bad," while another summed up the importance of good engagement.

*"Help parents and families be interactive with the students' learning, give them the tools they need to understand what kind of education they need, and the schools using the parents and families to understand what kind of education the child needs."*

- Save the Children Youth Ambassador

### MATTERS NOT RAISED IN THE DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

We wanted to raise some issues for consideration that were not explicitly canvassed in the discussion document. These emerged from the limited consultation we undertook, as well as from our current advocacy and policy work on vulnerable children.



## Additional matters arising from children's concerns

A strong theme emerging from the children's responses to our questions was the impact of what are sometimes termed "out of school factors" on their ability to learn.

This was also a key finding of the Paths to Resilience work on education, which noted that "the young people who were facing significant challenges in their life outside of school were more likely to focus their attention on managing those challenges than on engaging in the classroom."

The researchers concluded that "education providers could benefit from ensuring that young people have access to support to meet those needs within the school environment."

*"[It's important to go to school] to get away from your parents, because if you're together with your family all the time that's when things can happen. Drinking parties can explode."*

- Focus group participant

This is an important message for the Education Act update. As the Taskforce on Regulations Affecting School Performance noted, "high performing school systems are equitable. They have developed systems that compensate for disadvantage, allowing all students an equal

opportunity to succeed."

Education is one of the most effective long-term routes out of poverty and disadvantage. It can not only mitigate the immediate negative effects of deprivation, but it can lead to reduced poverty in the next generation.

If we are to achieve a high-performing, student-centered education system that maximises the achievement of all children, the role of schools in mitigating against disadvantage should be acknowledged and signaled in the Act.

This could be acknowledged in the goals and purpose statement for the education system, and also expressed in

more specific ways. Some examples are discussed below.

### Schools as community hubs

One example of how schools can help mitigate against disadvantage and support children to fulfill their potential at school is by developing themselves as community hubs.

*"If poor people can't afford lunch, provide lunch."*

- Focus group participant

This approach recognises that schools alone cannot solve the myriad of social and health problems experienced by children living in disadvantaged circumstances but can achieve significant results by partnering with social service and health resources.

There are some examples of New Zealand schools successfully developing innovative community hub models, such as Victory School in Nelson, which hosts a community centre that offers a range of community services and is used by Plunket, midwives, hearing tests and cervical screening for students and their families to access.<sup>4</sup>

Working out governance arrangements for such community hubs currently requires complex negotiation of what is and is not permitted under the Education Act. The Act could be amended to make clear that such arrangements are possible and indeed encouraged.

There is international precedent for this: The Education Act (England and Wales) 2002 gives governing bodies the power to extend the range of services that schools provide, working in partnership with other providers, to become a resource centre for the whole community.<sup>5</sup> We recommend this possibility is explored as part of the next stage of the Education Act update.

This relates to the theme of enabling collaboration, flexibility and innovation in the discussion document. In our view, enabling Boards of Trustees to collaborate with other community organisations and develop community hubs with shared governance arrangements is at least as important as enabling collaboration between Boards, if not more so.

### Early Childhood Education onsite

Similarly, several recent reports, including those of the Taskforce on school regulation, and the Children's Commissioner's 2012 Expert Advisory Group on Child Poverty have identified on-site Early Childhood Education as one potential way to ensure effective transitions to school and support a positive

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.victory.school.nz/community.html>

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents>

start to primary school for children living in poverty and disadvantage.<sup>6</sup>

Boards of Trustees are currently prohibited in the Act from running ECE centres themselves, or using school funds for this purpose (although independent ECEs may lease school land from the Crown). Consideration should be given to amending the Act to allow Boards of Trustees to run ECE centres on school sites to support effective transitions.

### **Additional matters arising from our wider advocacy and policy work**

#### *Vulnerable children*

There are significant changes underway across the social sector regarding how government agencies align services and supports for vulnerable children. For example:

- > The Children's Action Plan and the roll-out of Children's Teams to more local communities;
- > The review of Child, Youth and Family and the move towards a more child-centred approach to supports and services for children in the care and protection and youth justice systems;
- > The Social Sector Board Investment Change Programme, reviewing cross-agency investment planning.

The education system has a significant role to play in all of these areas. The way in which this role is translated or mandated to local schools, as a front-line delivery system for vulnerable children, is an important consideration.

In our view, the Education Act update needs to consider what levers will be required to ensure that the education sector, and especially individual schools, are an effective part of collective efforts to better meet the needs of our most vulnerable children.

#### **Fully inclusive schools**

The OCC operates a Child Rights Line to which parents and children can call for advice about situations in which they feel children's rights are not being upheld. A significant proportion of the inquiries we receive pertain to two issues: the fairness and availability of special education support and the current complaints process.

We hear of many cases where children with special education requirements are not having their needs met at their local schools.

We are aware that a review of Special Education is taking place concurrent with the Education Act Update. We think the two processes should be combined. Crucially, the update of the Education Act needs to include an analysis of the extent to which schools are required to be genuinely inclusive and accessible to all students (including what incentives and disincentives exist for schools to do this), and the level of funding and criteria for accessing special education support.

We also hear from many parents unable to resolve issues with their child's school, and frustrated at the lack of a disputes resolution mechanism independent of the Board of Trustees (other than appealing to the High Court). An accessible and timely complaints system for children and their parents is an element that should be considered as part of the Education Act update.

### **CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

In this submission we have made the case for greater involvement of children in the remaining stages of the Education Act update, and drawn on the results of our engagement with children to demonstrate the valuable responses they can offer to the questions posed in the discussion document.

We have also drawn on our engagement with children, knowledge gleaned from our wider advocacy functions, to make the case for the Act to be amended to send a clear message that schools can and should be engaged in mitigating the impact of poverty and disadvantage on children's educational outcomes.

This is not something that can be achieved by schools alone, of course, but as the place that children spend six hours a day, five days per week, schools have a vital role to play in addressing disadvantage and enabling ALL children to achieve their goals and fulfill their potential.

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.occ.org.nz/assets/Uploads/EAG/Working-papers/No-16-Education-solutions.pdf>



## Assistance with the next steps of the update

If the Ministry of Education acts on our recommendation to involve children in a more comprehensive consultation in the next stages of the update, the OCC is available to assist and advise on the best ways to do this.

Generic guidance on engaging with children, including information on why it is important, and practical advice about a number of proven methods of engagement is available on our website in a new section entitled *Listening2Kids*.<sup>7</sup>

At minimum, as the new purpose statement for the Education Act is drafted and developed, it would be useful to test the proposed goals with children directly, in order to ensure that the results are fit for purpose.

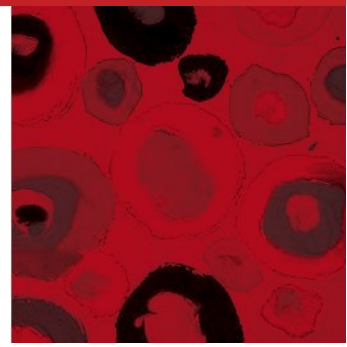
Ideally this would take place before policy options are selected and legislation drafted. While engaging children in the eventual Select Committee process will be valuable, children's views will have more impact if the Ministry engages with them during the development of policy options.

In addition, staff at the OCC are available to participate in any working groups and detailed consultations the Ministry of Education undertakes in the next phases of the update.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.occ.org.nz/listening2kids/>

## Appendix A: Concepts of education and achievement for Year 7 and 8 students in a low-decile school



Below are selected responses from a focus group of twelve Year 7 and 8 students at a co-educational, full primary school in Porirua.

The school is decile 1 and has 3 percent Pakeha, 43 percent Māori, 44 percent Pacific and 22 percent Asian students. The focus group comprised Māori, Pacific, Asian and Pakeha students and included students with autism, ADHD, and children in CYF care.

Their answers will be used to inform the Office of the Children's Commissioner's submission on the update of the *Education Act 1989*.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION?

The children who took part understand that education serves multiple, related purposes. At its core, they think it should prepare them for their future lives and equip them with the skills and knowledge they will need to gain employment and thrive in their adult lives.

- > *It's important for your brain so you can learn in the future.*
- > *You develop social skills and get to talk to people.*
- > *It helps prepare for the future and for life situations, and you get a better chance of getting a job. And it helps you to be confident and avoid conflict.*

We asked what children thought they would need to know by the time they left college, and their answers ranged from core literacy and numeracy skills to self-confidence and civic participation:

- > *Maths, reading, social skills, how to write.*
- > *A lot, so that I can improve my life.*
- > *If you don't learn when you're in college that's going to be hard for you. You have to get prepared.*
- > *To show your skills and don't hide them.*
- > *How to defend yourself, how to vote, how to pay taxes, how to use electronics.*

### WHAT DOES ACHIEVEMENT MEAN TO CHILDREN?

Our participants aspire to success and achievement, but define this widely. They talked about the importance of goal setting and working hard to achieve those goals, but did not define their goals in terms of particular qualifications. Motivating factors included wanting to work hard for their families, but also to achieve their own feelings of personal success:

- > *It means a lot because my parents want the best for me: good job, good family, good life.*
- > *It means knowing you can do whatever you want. You know it inside even if others don't know it.*
- > *Something I can count on in the future.*
- > *[Achievement or success is] for me, to make a friend. Because I have ADHD and not many people are like me... I want to get on with kids my own age and also little kids because when I'm older I want to be an ECE teacher.*
- > *[Achievement is] when you're really happy because you were determined to do something, and you reach it. And then you set another goal and work hard.*

### HOW CAN SCHOOLS HELP CHILDREN ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS?

We asked the children how school could help them to achieve their goals. They spoke of the need for encouragement, respectful relationships, providing basic skills, and access to a range of activities and opportunities:

- > *[Schools can help us succeed by] cheering and encouraging.*
- > *The teachers always want to be treated respectfully, but if they want to be treated respectfully then they need to model it to us.*
- > *[School] helps get all your basics ready. When you go to get your dream job, you might need your reading and writing.*

- > *School helps you to find something you're enthusiastic about. Then it can help you find activities related to that subject and get really good at those. The more you can participate, the more you can achieve.*
- > *[Schools can provide] the things you need in the future, like sports, languages, and technology.*

While students recognise the role their school plays in supporting them to achieve their goals, they identified some things they would like to change to make this even better. Their responses when asked "what is the one thing you would like to change" were frank and powerful:

- > *Stop the bullying. Make schools a safer environment for kids to learn.*
- > *If poor people can't afford lunch, provide lunch.*
- > *Upgrade school equipment and classrooms.*
- > *Treat disabled people better.*
- > *If a new kid comes from another country, treat them with respect.*
- > *More laughter and smiles in the schools. [Make sure] it's not all serious, so we can make mistakes.*
- > *How are you supposed to learn if you keep getting punished?*

### SHOULD THE SCHOOL DAY BE MORE FLEXIBLE?

Finally, we asked children their opinions about one of the more technical elements of the consultation – should there be flexibility about what time the school day starts and finishes? Here are some of their responses:

- > *[The school day should be] 9.30am – 3.05pm because people always come late because they need to sleep in. Because they do all nighters and stuff.*
- > *[The school day should be] 10am – 4pm because it gives us more time to get ready. It's hard to get up in the morning.*
- > *[The school day should be] 11am – 2pm. [That] doesn't mean we don't like learning, [but] it would mean we have more time to do other things.*

- > *Have the school open for 24 hours one day, and then you don't have to come to school the next day. Because I get tired from school but I don't like going to sleep.*

### SCHOOLS CAN HELP MITIGATE AGAINST THE EFFECTS OF OUT OF SCHOOL FACTORS

Some of the children's responses revealed interesting insights into factors in their home or family lives that have a bearing on their education. For example, the children's responses about the length and timing of the school day revealed that many go to bed late, find it hard to get up in the morning, and sometimes stay up all night.

School for some is a necessary respite or protective factor from volatile situations at home:

- > *[It's important to go to school] to get away from your parents, because if you're together with your family all the time that's when things can happen. Drinking parties can explode. Also your parents can get a break to do their own things.*

Several others talked about the impact of bullying at school, including the encroachment of gang culture into their school life:

- > *We have to stop bullying and gang signs. I am getting sick of it.*

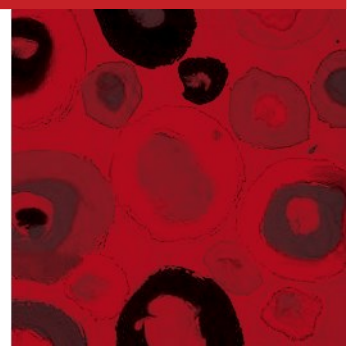
The importance of having enough to eat in order to learn was also mentioned:

- > *If poor people can't afford lunch, provide lunch.*

Responses like these indicate that, while schools cannot shift complex family dynamics or address out of school factors directly, they may be able to help mitigate the negative impact of these factors on children's educational outcomes. Schools can address these factors if they are aware of them and have tools at their disposal to address them in the school (e.g. school food programmes, rest areas, and strong anti-bullying programmes).



## Appendix B: Concepts of education and achievement for Year 9 students at a high-decile school



Below are selected responses from an in-class survey of 23 year 9 students at a co-educational state secondary school in Christchurch.

The survey was initiated by Save the Children New Zealand, and delivered with the support of the classroom teacher.

The school is decile 10 and has 82 percent Pakeha, 10 percent Maori, 1 percent Pacific, 3 percent Asian, 1 percent other ethnicities, and 3 percent international students.

Their answers will be used to inform the Office of the Children's Commissioner's submission on the update of the *Education Act 1989*.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION?

The students understand that the function of the education system is to prepare them for their adult lives. For many, this is expressed in terms of preparing them for employment:

- > *So you can get a good job and be able to succeed in life.*
- > *It sets you up for your adult life and work place.*
- > *To get you ready for a job and just give you the tools to get a new job and income.*
- > *To give us knowledge and education to help us with jobs and finance in the future.*

While employment was important, many also expressed an expectation that the education system would provide a more holistic range of skills and knowledge to prepare for adult life beyond employment:

- > *To prepare children for the outside world.*
- > *To set us up for life.*
- > *To teach children life skills and knowledge that they can use for life.*
- > *The purpose of the education system is so that we can learn and become smart.*
- > *To turn the students into young people who can take over.*

### WHAT DOES ACHIEVEMENT MEAN TO STUDENTS?

When asked what achievement means to them, students consistently responded in terms of setting and attaining goals:

- > *When you have a goal and you get it done that is an achievement to me.*
- > *Achievement to me is the achieved goals people have set.*
- > *To reach a goal or aspiration.*
- > *Achievement means to me, that you achieve your goals. SO for example if you want to beat a score from a previous maths test, and you beat it, you've achieved your goal.*

Completion of something to bring satisfaction was a strong theme in the responses:

- > *When you have finished something to the best of your ability.*
- > *Something that you have completed which is admirable.*
- > *The completion of doing something well.*
- > *To achieve a goal or to pass an exam. Something that makes you proud of what you've done.*

With the exception of one mention of passing an exam, and another of beating a score in a maths test, the students did not explicitly talk about achievement in relation to attaining particular qualifications or specific educational milestones.

When asked what skills and knowledge they thought they would need by the time they left school, mastery of core subjects, especially English, Maths, Science, and Social Studies was mentioned by several students. Others mentioned specific subjects they would need for their chosen careers:

- > *Graphics, to be a photographer.*
- > *Art NCEA.*

- > *Most things that I will need is high grades in English, PE, Health, Maths and everything hospital wise.*

Variations on the theme of “people skills” were also important to a number of students:

- > *How to get along with people and to be able to listen/following instructions.*
- > *The knowledge and skills of working with other people that we may not know.*
- > *When I leave school the skills and knowledge I will need is the skills on how to work well with others if we like them or not.*
- > *Team work. Negotiation. Responsibility. Being fair. Respect.*
- > *You will probably need social skills.*

Several others also expressed a desire to know about and be able to operate in the “real world”

- > *Knowing about taxes, money, jobs and what life is REALLY like.*
- > *How to manage money.*
- > *Common sense.*

## HOW CAN SCHOOLS SUPPORT STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS?

The most common responses here were variations on “teaching them the skills and knowledge they will need.” Other common threads concerned providing a wide range of educational opportunities, and designing learning programmes based on what individual children are interested in and want to learn:

- > *They could ask people what they want to achieve and make a programme or something to help those people.*
- > *Schools can support students to achieve their goals by doing activities based on what they want to learn and how it's helpful to after school.*
- > *Schools can support students to achieve their goals by asking what they want to achieve in life, like I want to become a professional athlete, so the school could get me a coach so I could achieve my goal.*

Support through challenges and encouragement were also important factors in these responses:

- > *Support them. Make sure by the time they leave they have everything they need. Pushing them to achieve.*

- > *Offering a good education and encouragement.*
- > *Help them through problems at school.*

The students were also asked about the specific roles of teachers, Principals, and Boards of Trustees in supporting them to achieve their goals.

They saw the role of the teacher as chiefly one of imparting knowledge in the classroom, incorporating making lessons memorable, interesting, and maintaining classroom discipline (“keep [students] under control”).

They saw the role of the Principal as chiefly one of school leadership, including managing teachers, discipline, and setting direction for the school:

- > *The role of the Principal is to make the school the best it can be.*
- > *To make sure your school is under control and if there is problems they change it.*
- > *To teach about pride in our environment.*
- > *The role of a Principal is to make sure that I and the rest of the students achieve our goals.*

Interestingly, many students either skipped or answered the question about the role of Boards of Trustees with a version of “don’t know,” indicating they know little about the current role and function of school governance boards. Among those who gave substantive answers the most common response was that boards should focus on fundraising.

- > *To fundraise for school necessities/trips.*
- > *To fund trips and buy important things we need to learn.*
- > *Being the ones who find the funds for events.*
- > *Fundraise money for equipment that benefits the school.*

Other thoughts about the role of boards included:

- > *To make sure the principal is doing things right.*
- > *To make their school a safe and joyful environment and place.*
- > *To manage the school's money.*
- > *Organise and decide the fate of the school.*
- > *To make sure the kids are where they should be.*
- > *Give the school guidance and money.*
- > *The role of the BOT should be to see if the school needs improving and to make change.*

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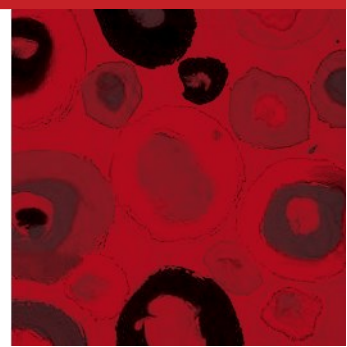
## HOW SHOULD SCHOOLS ENGAGE WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES?

Finally, we asked students how schools should engage with parents and families. The most common responses were through parent/teacher interviews, email and in person. Telling parents how they can support

their children's learning was an important factor. One student said they didn't think schools should have to engage with parents "unless the child was being bad."



## Appendix C: Concepts of education and achievement for ten Save the Children Youth Ambassadors



Below are selected responses from a survey of ten Save the Children Youth Ambassadors aged 14-18.

The responses were supplied via an online survey delivered by Save the Children.

The Youth Ambassadors cover a wide range of ethnicities: African, Afghani, Asian (Indian, Sri Lankan, Burmese), Maori, Pakeha and Pacific.

Their answers will be used to inform the Office of the Children's Commissioner's submission on the update of the *Education Act 1989*.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION?

The students consider the purpose of the education system is to prepare students for their future lives. For this group, future preparedness was not defined in terms of employment, but rather in terms of gaining skills, fulfilling potential, and learning to learn.

- > *To teach children about the real world and the skills you need.*
- > *To help children develop so that they have a bright future ahead of them.*
- > *It is to provide the best possible ways of learning for students.*
- > *To help students in best way to learn and to help them achieve their goals and dreams.*

### WHAT DOES ACHIEVEMENT MEAN TO STUDENTS?

The students have a wide conception of achievement incorporating ideas of personal satisfaction, mastering new skills, and attaining goals. None mentioned particular qualifications.

- > *Learning a new skill.*
- > *Receiving praise at the end of a long time spend studying.*
- > *To give all your effort and to do your best to get where you want to be.*
- > *To complete something that makes me happy to the best of my abilities.*
- > *State of satisfaction.*
- > *Reaching my goals and knowing that I've put 100 percent in everything I do.*

When asked what specific skills and knowledge they thought they would need by the time they finish schools, they listed a range of skills and attributes. The most common responses related to social skills and life skills, as well as literacy and numeracy.

- > *I feel like I will need the skills and knowledge on how to get on in life. This includes understanding how to plan and set out, or organise everything so that I can have a stable living environment in the future.*
- > *Self-determination and social competence is needed the most.*
- > *To be able to read, write, communication skills and being able to get along with everyone.*
- > *An idea of reality, time management skills, confidence, understanding world affairs and politics, understand how to get a job and live a sustainable life, basic maths and English knowledge, how to work with other people, ability to create and achieve goals.*

### HOW CAN SCHOOLS SUPPORT STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS?

According to this group, schools can support students to achieve their goals by listening to what their students want to know and are interested in, and tailoring learning opportunities around them, as well as encouraging, supporting, and making learning fun and interesting:

- > *By being positive about what the students are interested or disinterested in [...] By paying attention to the strengths of individuals, [students] are most likely to achieve their goals.*
- > *Have teachers encourage us more, add more fun into our learning to keep our interest, help us set goals and also help us to achieve them.*

- > *By having different strategies of helping students to find learning easier because everyone learns differently.*

One student mentioned the importance of teaching and learning methods keeping pace with changes in society and technology:

- > *Change the outdated teaching methods to cater to students in the 21st century.*

This group of students had clear ideas about the respective roles of teachers, Principals and Boards of Trustees in supporting students to achieve their goals.

The teacher should use multiple methods and strategies to engage and involve students with different interests and temperaments. They should also be someone who inspires and empowers the class:

- > *To accommodate every student and be able to develop a relationship with the student in a way that will motivate their learning.*
- > *In the 21st century, the role of the teacher has changed. For young students, and older ones still, the role of the teacher needs to be to teach, but they also need to encourage students to find their own information. Students work differently, as they are all individuals, and teachers need to realise this.*
- > *To teach, to inspire, to inform, to encourage, to empower.*
- > *To fuel the students' passion to learn, teach them the basics but also teach them the stuff that matters, make it interesting and relatable, give the student the drive to educate themselves.*

The role of the Principal is one of leadership, with important functions including to set the tone and direction for a school, listen to students' voices, and to motivate and empower teachers and students:

- > *To oversee all teachers and to listen to students to hear what is working in the school and what is not.*
- > *Principals need to be there to support and listen to their students. They need to seriously consider students' experiences.*
- > *Providing motivational atmosphere for the teachers and students.*
- > *To empower others to become leaders. Their higher goal is to work themselves out of the job so that if they are not around, the organisation functions just as successfully as when they are.*

This group of students were uncertain about the current role and function of Boards of Trustees, so found it difficult to answer what they should be doing:

- > *I am not sure, as I am still unsure what exactly the Board of Trustees does.*
- > *Quite frankly I don't even know what the role of the Board of Trustees is. All I know is that they have so much power and control over our school when in fact they have no relationship with the students who are attending the school. It's stupid.*

Those who had ideas about what the Board of Trustees should be doing thought listening to student voices was very important:

- > *To help the school become better keeping in mind the voice of the students and teachers.*
- > *To listen to what students want and try and help them achieve their goals.*

Other suggested roles for Boards in supporting student achievement were providing funding opportunities and scholarships, making decisions about where money is spent, ensuring the school is a safe environment, and upholding children's rights:

- > *To understand what students are needing to be able to stay focused and love learning. To ensure that no rights of children are being breached and work towards governing the school in an equal and fair manner.*

## HOW SHOULD SCHOOLS ENGAGE WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES?

Finally we asked the students how schools should best engage with parents and families. They suggested a range of options including the conventional parent teacher interviews and emails, to more innovative ideas such as informal social gatherings, daily updates, and involving parents in all aspects of school operations. One student summed up the importance of good engagement:

- > *Help parents and families be interactive with the students' learning, give them the tools they need to understand what kind of education they need, and the schools using the parents and families to understand what kind of education the child needs.*

