

MEDIA ADVISORY - Embargoed until 5AM Wednesday 14 March 2018

Education matters to me – six detailed reports are now available

- 1. Education matters to me: Experiences of tamariki and rangatahi Māori**
- 2. Education matters to me: Emotional wellbeing**
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The reports are based on responses to an online survey and face-to-face interviews with children and young people. The reports shares views from a diverse group of children and young people, some of whom would be termed 'priority learners' by the Ministry of Education, including many Māori and Pacific Peoples, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, those with diagnosed learning difficulties, and children and young people with disabilities. The reports share insights from children and young people in primary and secondary schools, alternative education units, early childhood centres, kōhanga reo, kura kaupapa Māori, learning support units, home-based schools and teen parent units.

Responses across all areas of enquiry indicated that many schools, kura and other education settings are doing a lot of things well, however there is still much room for improvement. The project was designed to hear from children and young people about what was working well for them, and what could be improved in their educational experiences.

"These detailed reports explore the areas of enquiry that we built the engagement on, whereas for the main Key Insights report, we chose to reflect the world view revealed by the children and young people we spoke to" Lorraine Kerr, President of NZSTA says. "As it turned out, the two perspectives are different. It was important to all of us involved in this project that we should respect both."

Lorraine Kerr and the Children's Commissioner Andrew Becroft say they recommend further opportunities for children and young people's participation in their education system.

"The more we listen to the voices of children and young people, the richer will be our understanding of what can make a great education system in Aotearoa. These reports should be seen as a foundation and incentive for future and on-going engagement with children and young people in education issues and all issues that affect them." says Andrew Becroft.

Key points from each report

Experiences of tamariki and rangatahi Māori

There is no one Māori, tamariki Māori or rangatahi Māori voice or experience. While many of the concerns voiced in this report are shared by Māori and non-Māori children and young people, we also heard about particular issues that tamariki and rangatahi Māori experience differently.

Tamariki and rangatahi we spoke to emphasised the importance of understanding their life outside of school, and their place within their whānau. Many talked about the importance of teachers pronouncing their names correct. Many saw an increase in te reo maori speakers as a way to achieve that. They wanted teachers to know and understand their language. Connected with this was their wanting to feel comfortable and safe to explore their culture.

Some young people spoke about their experiences of racism and people judging them because they are Māori. The sharing and preparing of kai was an important part of connecting and creating belonging in the school environment. We also heard that for those who needed kai, where it was provided through the school, some were too embarrassed to accept it in front of their peers.

The lack of appropriate and meaningful ways to connect in mainstream English-medium schools, compounded by negative expectations of teachers and peers, came through strongly as contributing factors in the experience of many rangatahi who are now in alternative education.

“I was asked to do a haka for some visitors to school because the principal wanted to give a cultural experience. But it was annoying because that’s like the only time he cares about Māori culture.” *(Student in secondary school, Māori)*

Emotional wellbeing

Children and young people talked about the range of significant relationships that exist in their worlds and how these relationships either enable them to achieve or prevent them from achieving. They talked about their peer relationships, their relationships with their teachers, with their learning community, and the importance of the relationship between their learning community and their whānau or family. Many children and young people said that they can’t begin learning unless they have a trusting relationship with their teacher.

Although not specifically asked about, bullying was commonly raised as something that children and young people would change about school. Physical elements of the school environment – such as the uniform or the cleanliness of the bathrooms were highlighted by young people as having a significant impact on their experience. Young people want to be accepted, and allowed the respect to define their own identity.

“I’d make sure everyone had a friend to be with throughout the day because being alone makes you sad sometimes” *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

“Getting my parents involved with my learning and helping me at school” *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

“Good teachers, teachers who are helpful, they make the difference between me achieving and failing.” *(Student in alternative education, Māori)*

“Clean working student bathrooms - hand dryers should work, toilets should flush, we should have toilet paper, there should be soap, the doors should lock, sanitary bins should not be overflowing.” *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

Engagement

Children and young people spoke about a wide range of factors that keep them engaged with school, such as feeling that their teachers know and respect them, understand the way they learn, emphasise their strengths and share high hopes for their future. The support of friends and whānau is also important. When this is absent, it is easier for children and young people to disengage.

For some children and young people school can appear irrelevant and out of touch when the uncomfortable realities they are dealing with are trivialised or ignored. For these children and young people, education still matters to them, and still offers the promise of a better future, but it can sometimes feel as if that promise is being withheld.

“Probably to have a better understanding of students. Especially since everyone comes from all walks of life. And I guess to change up the way the teachers format the learning? So it isn't just one way, but like make it more interactive so everyone feels included. Probably try be fair to every student, not only the ones that exceed academically or in sports. And yeh, just be nice...” *(Secondary school student, Pacific People)*

“Focussing more on the problems in the world and what we can do to help. I think it would be good if we learned to be more aware about equality and whats good for our planet.” *(Primary school student, Canadian)*

“I was the class clown and the teacher would get annoyed because I was distracting but I felt they didn't give me attention or support me...this touched my heart. I got kicked out of class, then I had gaps and I felt lost. Their attitude was to go catch up on your own.” *(Student in alternative education, Tongan/New Zealander/ Samoan/British).*

If I was the boss

We heard that children and young people of all ages want their school to be more fun, to provide them with better opportunities to play¹ and explore for themselves, both inside and outside the classroom. This playful dimension of learning is fundamental to the happiness and healthy development of children and young people. It is also integral to maintaining interest and engagement in school – making it fun.

Children and young people's ideas for making schools better encompassed the physical environment in the school, the facilities they can use to play on and learn from, the relationship with the teacher, the respect among students, how bullying is dealt with, and things that affect them such as their ability to make choices that affect their life's opportunities.

¹ The right to play is enshrined in the Children's Convention under article 31.

"Air conditioning. The classrooms get so bloody hot that they're unbearable..."

(Secondary school student, NZ European)

"I love free play time and getting outside so that I can actually breathe" *(Primary school student, Kiwi/Canadian).*

"...learn more things that will help us with our life after school, taxes, parenting, life skills etc." *(Secondary school student, Asian)*

"More support when we need it." *(Secondary school student, Māori/Pasefika)*

"...more freedom in what we learn about." *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

"I would change the way we use the iPads and make it so we don't use them so much because they don't help you learn too much." *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

Progress and achievement

Children and young people had a broad and holistic view of achievement in their own lives.

Children and young people said they want to make their family proud. Relationships are a key motivator for them, to attend school and keep trying to improve. They want their teachers to know their goals, and to help them amplify their unique strengths. They talked about the impact of their physical space on their ability to learn, and the importance of relationships, especially when bullying happens.

"Achievement is a difficult term for me because I feel like we are expected to achieve a lot. For me it is about finding happiness and having a sense that I have done something useful today." *(Secondary school student, Samoan)*

"To finish school, to get an education and qualify for a job in the future.

To raise my children better than I was raised. Have no violence around my children. To raise my kids in an environment that is healthy for them and keep my children in my care" *(Student in teen parent unit)*

"Create other courses that can lead to apprenticeships." *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

"The [bathrooms] are actually revolting but it's cause lots of the students vandalise them so I would want new bathrooms and consequences if u muck them up" *(Intermediate school student, NZ European)*

"That teachers notice every one and that they notice the good kids rather than always focusing on the bad behaved ones" *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

Transitions

Many students shared the effort that their schools have put in to enable new students to adjust to their new school or class. However, many children and young people still feel unsure even of the most basic things in their new environment, like where classrooms are situated, or how to get around the campus.

Being given time to establish a sense of belonging and familiarity, through a more comprehensive induction including targeted orientation activities and resources in the first weeks such as buddy systems, maps, and opportunities to get to know staff could help make the process of settling in and being ready to learn quicker and more effective.

Children and young people who experience multiple transitions within each school year or high staff turnover in their classrooms need extra support to develop and maintain relationships with each new teacher. They said they need their teachers (not just the dean or senior leadership team) to notice when something is wrong, find out what is causing it, and support them to find solutions.

“Better relationships with the teachers so we feel more comfortable about changing”

(Secondary school student, Asian)

“Listen to the students more on what’s going on between the students which could be harmful. Put aside the school reputation and listen to the students for a better environment.” *(Secondary school student, Fijian Indian)*

“Not have too many students in a classroom (Like joining two classes together) because then students can’t get as much 1:1 from the teacher and harder to get to know everyone in it.” *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

“Adding a few days at the end of the intermediate year to visit the college and to get more used to the routine” *(Secondary school student, Māori/NZ European)*

“When a teacher changes in the middle of the year a better hand over on what has been taught and what needs to be taught is required” *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

Ends

The Education Matters to Me detailed reports can be downloaded free from www.occ.org.nz and www.nzsta.org.nz

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About the New Zealand School Trustees Association

The New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) is an independent, non-partisan membership association representing school boards of trustees throughout New Zealand. NZSTA works closely with the government of the day to ensure that all boards of trustees are aware of their legal and ethical responsibilities as governors of their school.

NZSTA's mission is to Lead and Strengthen School Governance in New Zealand. We will know we have succeeded in this mission when all schools are effectively governed by a board of trustees whose primary focus is every student achieving their highest possible educational potential.

NZSTA has two complementary areas of activity. Our membership activities provide leadership, representation and advocacy for NZSTA member boards. Our service delivery activities, delivered under contract to the Ministry of Education, provide practical support and advice to all boards of trustees to inform and improve governance and employment practice.

About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

The Children's Commissioner is an Independent Crown Entity, appointed by the Governor-General, carrying out responsibilities and functions set out in the Children's Commissioner Act 2003. The Children's Commissioner has a range of statutory powers to promote the rights, health, welfare, and wellbeing of children and young people from 0 to 18 years. These functions are undertaken through advocacy, public awareness, consultation, research, and investigations and monitoring.

The role includes specific functions in respect of monitoring activities completed under the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. The Children's Commissioner also undertakes systemic advocacy functions and investigates particular issues with potential to threaten the health, safety, or wellbeing of children and young people. The Children's Commissioner has a particular responsibility to raise awareness and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Children's Commissioner's activities must comply with the relevant provisions of the Public Finance Act 1989, Crown Entities Act 2004 and any other relevant legislation.