



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

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Submission to the Ministry of Education on the Updating the Education Act 1989 Discussion Document

The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing 288 organisations affiliated at either the national level or to one of our 20 branches. In addition to our organisational membership, about 260 women are individual members of branches. NCWNZ's function is to represent and promote the interests of New Zealand women through research, discussion and action. This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ Education Standing Committee after consultation with the membership of NCWNZ. The membership was given a set of questions that were slightly modified from the discussion document, and the submission is organised around these modified questions.

Introduction

If girls and boys leave school and don't want to change the world, we have failed them in education.

- 0.1. NCWNZ members agreed with the idea of the Education Act containing a statement of purpose. The famous Beeby/Fraser statement of the purpose of education was mentioned as still being relevant in many ways:

"The government's objective, broadly expressed, is that every child: whatever his [or her] level of ability, whether he [or she] be rich or poor, whether he [or she] live in town or country, has a right as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which he [or she] is best fitted and to the fullest extent of his [or her] powers."¹

- 0.2. This statement captures the themes of free and relevant education for everyone regardless of circumstance, as a right of citizenship, which enables full and fulfilling participation in Aotearoa New Zealand society. These were the major themes that NCWNZ members expressed as the purpose of education.
- 0.3. NCWNZ members are committed to ensuring a quality, empowering education for all. Education for empowerment builds learners' understanding of how gender, ethnicity, class, and other aspects of identity constrain life chances, and their knowledge of how to challenge these constraints.

¹ Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives, E1, 1939, p. 2

Education plays a key role in the empowerment of girls and women, and the attainment of gender equality in households, communities and wider society.

- 0.4. Members felt that school or kura boards should be responsible for governance of the school, and work together with the principal and staff to provide quality education and a healthy, safe environment with a culture of learning. Boards should be diverse enough in composition to adequately represent the school community, and need support and training to function well – especially in the school areas where experience and skills in governance amongst family members are not widespread. It must also be remembered that board members are volunteers, and should be supported to govern rather than have punitive legislation that will discourage people from standing for boards. There was support for streamlining the reporting process for boards, and in particular, for boards to report on how they have made a difference to the learners rather than simply reporting overall results. Members wished to see broad and multiple measures of performance as indicators of how well a school or kura is doing.
- 0.5. There were mixed views on school starting provisions, although we note that these proposals appear to belong more to a lower level of regulation than to the Education Act.
- 0.6. Amongst the diversity of suggestions for what should be taken into account with changing schools were a few strong themes: consultation and communication, the contribution that particular schools make to their local community, and the reality of the impact on families – especially with regards to travelling times and distances for students.
- 0.7. Diverse views were also evident in responses to proposed changes to the enrolment schemes, another detailed provision that does not appear to be suitable for legislative regulation. Members supported the idea of the overriding concern being that of the welfare of children and accessibility of education for all, and that any involvement by the Ministry of Education would need to be handled carefully and considerately.
- 0.8. A final comment is around the timing of the consultation. The ‘Purpose of Education’ is a very important discussion to be having, yet a six week timeframe that coincides with teachers’ and principals’ busiest time of the year - not to mention for parents and students – is too short and does not fit with principles of genuine and authentic consultation.

Questions from Discussion Document

1. **What should the goals for education be?**
 - 1.1. NCWNZ members agreed with the idea of the Education Act containing a statement of purpose, which might possibly be different to a series of goals for education. This is because the outcomes of education are affected by many different factors, an example health issues. Members also wanted the statement of purpose to cover all types of education, from early childhood through to tertiary and adult community education.
 - 1.2. The theme of **inclusivity** in education was prevalent. Members were united in their opinion that education should be available to everyone regardless of gender, ability level, ethnicity or

socioeconomic status. Such inclusivity was seen to require a matching of the education system to the individual learner, as expressed in this quote: *“education should be readily accessible for all in a manner which is appropriate to the individual. Emphasis must be placed on the removal of barriers to make this happen.”*

- 1.3. Members were clear that education should **enable people to participate in Aotearoa New Zealand society**, as this representative quote shows: *“[The purpose of education is] to impart skills for living and working successfully in NZ society.”* Comments were also made about the need for relevance and appropriateness of education for our society. Ensuring that people understand the history and current importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is one example of how education is made relevant for people living in this country. An example of how education is not equipping all their young people to live in Aotearoa New Zealand society is at Gloriavale school, where the gendered segregation of subjects is defended on the basis that they are preparing their young people for life in their own isolated community². It is unacceptable to NCWNZ that gender inequality in education is condoned by our accountability and monitoring system, and that such a school receives public money to perpetuate gender stereotypes and limit the life possibilities for both girls and boys. Our members are clear that they think public education should prepare young people for life in the wider community first, and ‘special character’ education sits alongside this broad preparation rather than replacing it. This was also the view of members in the NCWNZ submission on the Education Amendment Bill 77-1 in 2013³ which expressed concerns about Kura Houora/Partnership Schools and the potential for them to narrow the curriculum as they see fit.
- 1.4. The concept of a **broad education** was also well supported by members. Words and phrases used were those such as “holistic”, “fullest possible development”, “broad curriculum”, and “produce well rounded members of society”. Education was also seen as lifelong, and one of the purposes of education expressed by a number of different responses was that education should promote a positive attitude to learning.

3. What should the roles and responsibilities of a school or kura board be?

- 3.1. Members who responded were clear that the role of boards was **governance**, and the principal and staff were responsible for management. This was also the point made in the 2013 NCWNZ submission⁴. Members expected the board, in its governance role, to provide vision and policy direction for the school or kura, and to monitor what is happening in the school through receiving reports and asking questions, which will involve data on student achievement as well. The board should have oversight of the whole school and pay attention to the learning environment, including the physical environment, the resources available, staffing, and creating a culture of learning and safety. The quality of education is something that not one person or role is responsible for, but instead it should be seen as a team effort to which the board contributes.

² Gordon, L. (June, 2015) Gloriavale: A question of rights and values. *The Circular*, 583, 8-9.

³ NCWNZ Submission to the Education and Science Select Committee, S13.01, 23 January 2013

⁴ NCWNZ Submission to the Education and Science Select Committee, S13.01, 23 January 2013

- 3.2. Although student achievement was a common theme in the responses, the dominant theme was around the board's role in **providing for quality education and for promoting students' holistic wellbeing**. Members were as concerned for the health, safety, learning, behaviour, wellbeing and happiness of students as for their educational achievement using narrowly defined measures. NCWNZ believes that 'quality education' will naturally be based on gender equality as an ideal, which would contribute to improved future possibilities for both girls and boys.
- 3.3. The **diversity of the board members** was also a concern for respondents. It was felt that the board should be representative of the school or kura community - with one respondent suggesting that this should include members of the business community – and this would necessitate a diversity of genders, ethnicities and skill sets. This view is consistent with the NCWNZ submission on the Education Amendment Bill (No 2) 193-1 in 2014⁵ which argued for “the principle of diversity of opinion and perspective on governing bodies”, in that case with respect to University and Wānanga Councils.
- 3.4. Members were well aware that the consequence of boards which are representative of the community is that in some areas this results in passion and enthusiasm but a lack of expertise. This needs to be recognised through **support and training for boards**, especially in poorer or in rural areas. Members also emphasised the fact that board members are volunteers, and so expectations must be realistic. In the 2013 NCWNZ submission⁶ members raised this point, at that time with regards to legislating to make boards accountable for educational outcomes. There was a concern that such legislation would deter people from volunteering.

4. What planning and reporting should a board be doing?

Note: slightly modified question

- 4.1. There was a diversity of suggestions as to how boards should be planning and what boards should be reporting on, for example one group suggested: “*Reporting on gender equality, rolls, class sizes, test results, teachers and teacher development, maintenance of school buildings and facilities, and short and long term strategic planning to improve across all areas of school achievement and management.*” Although different responses suggested different lists such as these, in general they agreed that the **board should focus on strategic planning and systematic reviews**, consistent with its role as governance.
- 4.2. There was strong support for **streamlining** the reporting systems and reducing duplication – for example, why report on what is in an ERO report? Respondents obviously begrudged boards and principals spending excessive amounts of time on reporting paperwork, time that could be better spent on things seen as more practically useful to the school.
- 4.3. A large number of responses commented that boards should be reporting on how they have made a *difference* to student achievement. These comments rejected the simplistic reporting of overall 'achievement' data as simply the end point of a school's contribution to the students without

⁵ NCWNZ Submission to the Education and Science Select Committee, S14.08, 27 March 2014

⁶ NCWNZ Submission to the Education and Science Select Committee, S13.01, 23 January 2013

knowing where those students started from: **student improvement** was seen as a better measure than straight student achievement. It is for this reason that League tables were disliked by our members. As a variation, another response suggested that board reporting *“shouldn’t focus on outputs (i.e. number who got a particular exam level) but rather skills acquired that allow them to participate in society.”*

7. What should the indicators and measures be for school performance and student achievement and wellbeing?

- 7.1. Members suggested a **broad range of indicators** and measures of school performance, with exam and test results being included as indicators alongside other indicators such as levels of participation in extra-curricular activities and level of parent involvement. This fitted alongside the holistic view that members had for the purpose of education in general. One member suggested that the indicators should be: *“Happy, busy, creative children, enjoying learning and making progress with their skills (physical, cognitive and social).”*
- 7.2. **Indicators that measured students against a norm were seen as problematic**, as it was acknowledged that children have differing abilities, learn at differing rates, and come with differing life circumstances. Whilst some members accepted National Standards as one of the suite of measures to be used, others rejected them as restrictive and unnecessary. Individual student progress was seen as an important measure.

10. What do you think about schools and kura having the flexibility to introduce cohort or group entry?

- 10.1. Much of the Discussion Document is aimed at getting input on the overriding principles that should be in the legislation, leaving detailed guidelines for second or third tier regulation. This (and the next) question appears to be out of place in such a review, belonging more to the lower level of regulation than something that should be in the Act.
- 10.2. Respondents had very mixed views on the question of cohort entry to school or kura, even within responses from individuals. There were some strong messages that came through. One was that **children should not start school before their fifth birthday**, as they were seen as generally not ready at this age (and not always ready at age five). Another message was that of those who supported cohort entry, it was felt that **intakes should be more than once a year** – once a term was an often suggested time frame.
- 10.3. The fact that starting school on one’s fifth birthday is a long standing **tradition** in Aotearoa New Zealand was mentioned as a consideration, both for and against cohort entry. These two quotes consider the impact on tradition from different perspectives:

“When a child turns 5 it is a special day, a new era in their lives and they need to get the special attention they deserve that day from a teacher.”

“A spin-off of separating birthday and school-starting could possibly be more consideration as to when children do start. Very few children do not go to school when they turn five, yet the

provision is there for them to take longer in the early years. Some may do better taking advantage of that but the cultural message is very strong.”

11. What do you think about making attendance compulsory for children once they have started school or kura, and before they turn six years old?

11.1. There was an almost **even split** in responses from members between those who supported compulsory attendance for children who have started school and those who prefer the status quo. Some of those who supported the proposal simplified their response to *“school should be compulsory from the age of five”*, which gives an indication of how such an initiative is likely to be viewed. The supporters viewed the establishment of **good attendance routines** early in a child’s school life as important. In contrast, those who supported the status quo generally felt **that parents should retain responsibility for making decisions** with regards to young children’s wellbeing and for managing their transition to school. These respondents felt that flexibility and leniency were important, and the invoking of truancy provisions was unnecessarily punitive.

14. What should be taken into account when making decisions about opening, merging or closing schools?

14.1. There were a diverse range of suggestions to guide decision making around planning school provision. However an overriding theme was the need for **widespread and authentic consultation**, where the needs and views of the whole community are taken into account. The need for accurate information and transparent, regular and reciprocal communication was strongly supported. As one respondent said, *“The local community should initiate and drive the decision and the Ministry facilitates the process.”*

14.2. Another major theme in the responses was the need to consider the **contribution that a particular school makes to its local community**, which often extends beyond simply a place of education for children. Some schools are the hub of their community, some schools have a special character that is particularly valued, and some are particularly trusted by specific ethnic communities – these are things to take into account with merging and closing schools.

14.3. Respondents agreed that changing demographics required changes to schooling provisions, but any planning should take into account the **lived experiences of families** who will be affected. This was mentioned particularly in regards to travelling times for students in isolated areas. Changes to the smaller schools might make sense on paper, but the real impacts on the students involved must be considered. One respondent commented on *“the importance of preserving schools in isolated areas where they may be a vital factor in the socialisation of students.”*

15. What do you think about the proposed changes to the management of enrolment schemes?

15.1. This was one of the least answered questions in the responses received from NCWNZ members, probably reflecting the detailed nature of the question as opposed to the other questions that asked about overarching principles. Proposed changes such as this belong more to lower level regulatory mechanisms, not the Education Act.

15.2. Once again, there were very mixed views, with almost equal numbers supporting and not supporting the proposed changes. There were variable opinions and experiences over whether enrolment schemes as they are currently enacted were in need of change. The principle of **accessibility of education** underlay many of the comments, both for and against the proposal. One strong theme, however, was that in order to ensure that education is accessible for all, **schools needed support, advice and resourcing more than a punitive approach**. Where it was deemed necessary for the Ministry of Education to step in, then members cautioned for a skilled and careful approach. One respondent summed it up as: *“The point is that if the Ministry is going to override schools it must be careful to (a) listen and (b) be fair to all. Friction between a school and the Ministry is very energy absorbing, so it would have to be for a very good reason.”*

Summary

NCWNZ members are generally in favour of an Education Act that sets out overarching principles, with more detailed guidelines being in lower tiers of regulation. They view the purpose of education holistically, with student achievement as measured in test scores as only part of the picture. NCWNZ members support quality and inclusive education regardless of gender, ethnicity, ability or socioeconomic status, which takes into account the different ways in which people learn and develop. They also support authentic consultation between schools, communities and the Ministry as a way of developing the best solutions to local issues. Above all, NCWNZ members support an education system that enables people to lead happy and fulfilling lives.



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