

Key Issues and Trends in New Zealand Education 2013

1. Political and social expectations of educational institutions are higher than at any time in New Zealand's history. Education is seen as a particularly powerful lever to unlock a better future for New Zealand as a country, and for individuals. For example:

Schools are expected to cater for *all* students, ensuring their engagement in learning, so that by 2017 at least 85% of all 18-year olds have gained NCEA Level 2 or its equivalent.

There is concern at New Zealand's high proportion of young people who are NEET: neither in education, employment or training between the ages of 15-24, with a greater emphasis on tracking individual student progress over schooling levels and ensuring they have a meaningful pathway to future education and employment

Linked to this, there is concern that New Zealand adult qualification levels do not match the high skills needed for a more productive economy. This is reflected in the current government target to improve qualification levels among 25-34 year olds; only 53% of this early career group have Level 4 qualifications, which indicate reasonable skill levels.

There are also concerns that student access to meaningful pathways that align with the country's needs both economically and socially are constrained by the range schools can offer; by schools or students opting for courses and standards that are seen as more achievable (an issue raised in relation to science provision by Sir Peter Gluckman on 23 September 2013), and by affordability of post-school education.

Within these general concerns, the need to improve the educational engagement and outcomes of Māori and Pasifika students is prominent. Māori are currently 23% of New Zealand school students, and Pasifika, 10 percent. Both of these are growing populations. Some gains have been made, particularly since the introduction of NCEA, but not at the rate needed to meet expectations, and the need for a high-skilled population.

Māori expectations of government-funded education include Māori students experiencing success as Māori, and many see its contribution to revitalising Te Reo Māori as key. Again, progress has been made, but not enough, and there is still insufficient teaching capability to fully support Māori expectations here.

New Zealand's high immigration rates have also increased the need for many schools to cater well for students for whom English is not their native language.

2. Digital learning has the potential to change educational opportunities. It is widespread in New Zealand, but highly variable in quality and quantity. Online teaching and assessment resources have increased exponentially in recent years, but they have yet to revolutionise teaching and learning. We are standing on a threshold in terms of expectations of change, without a clear open door forward and processes for real change to occur. The Network for

Learning will provide many schools with fast Internet access, but this on its own will not be enough. The Internet and use of cloud computing also offers tremendous opportunity for more school-parent partnerships to support children's learning. This opportunity is dependent on home Internet access, which is less likely for parents in low-income families.

3. While there is a greater emphasis on parent-school partnerships, with current policy emphasising the importance of parents having information on their child's school progress against national norms, home resources to support learning are uneven. In 2008, 19% of children and young people lived in homes experiencing hardship; hardship rates were even higher for Māori (32 percent) and Pacific children and young people (40 percent). Poverty has a real bearing on student engagement and achievement in formal education. If poverty increases in New Zealand, affecting the quality of young children's development and experiences, the work of schools in low-income areas will be increased.
4. New Zealand's education system lacks the infrastructure it needs to ensure that all schools are connected with the sources of evidence, support, and challenge they need to keep improving teaching practice and learning outcomes. (See the article attached.)
5. Government funding for education is hard-pressed to match the expectations of what education will provide, including the investment needed for the country. There are some inherent inefficiencies in the current structure of the education system that need addressing if better use is to be made of government funding.
6. Census results which would have a bearing on these issues would include:
 - a. demographic shifts, including qualification levels at different ages and of parents; location; languages spoken; disability
 - b. shifts in indicators of family resources, such as housing, Internet access
 - c. relationships between qualification levels, employment status, occupation and income
 - d. confidence in using Te Reo Māori.

We would be happy to discuss these issues and trends further.