



Submission on Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together

The Salvation Army New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa Territory

OUR BACKGROUND

1. The Salvation Army is an international Christian and social services organisation that has worked in New Zealand for over one hundred and thirty years. The Army provides a wide-range of practical social, community and faith-based services, particularly for those who are facing injustice or those who have been forgotten and marginalised by mainstream society.
2. The Salvation Army's is not directly involved in the provision of schooling within the compulsory education sector. Our interest in the sector stems from a broader concern for the wellbeing of New Zealand children and in particular the most vulnerable children who more often than not live in materially deprived or socially dysfunctional circumstances. This broader wellbeing concern is of course relevant to education policy and the delivery of education because of the cross-over between the poverty and marginality of New Zealand's poorest children and their educational failure. Too often this cross-over affects Māori children and their whanau disproportionately and this structural inequality is a concern for the Army as well.
3. This submission has been prepared by the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit of The Salvation Army. This Unit works towards the eradication of poverty by encouraging policies and practices that strengthen the social framework of New Zealand. This submission has been approved by Colonel Suzanne Fincham Chief Secretary of The Salvation Army's New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa Territory.

THE SALVATION ARMY'S OVERALL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROPOSED REFORMS

4. The Salvation Army applauds the Taskforce's broad focus on inequality within our compulsory education system and agrees with its analysis that much of this inequality is due to unhelpful competition between schools for students and the budgets which come with students. While the Army agrees that radical change is required to address this long-standing inequality and the competition which contributes to it, we do not share the Taskforce's analysis that these problems are mainly due to the governance model of autonomous self-governing schools run by Boards of Trustees. The Army believes that this inequality and competition is more deeply engrained in our society. Furthermore the Army believes that this inequality is caused by a number of other factors including the values and attitudes of Boards, principals and teachers, the underlying pedagogy and values of our public education system and inadequate and poorly designed funding models.
5. This submission does not strictly follow the framework of the Taskforce's report but addresses four key areas as follows:
 - ▶ Governance and the future role of school boards.

- ▶ Schooling provision including the potential role for kura kaupapa Māori in addressing the educational inequality suffered by Māori students as well as the potential role of the proposed education hubs.
- ▶ School leadership and the role of principals in both the current set of outcomes and under future reforms.
- ▶ School resourcing including future funding and support models.

GOVERNANCE

6. The Salvation Army shares the Taskforce's analysis of the significant failings of our compulsory education system and of the major flaws in its governance and management. The Army also agrees with the perspective offered in the Taskforce's report that these failings are related and to some extent are the result of the present model of autonomous self-governing schools.
7. The most significant failing of our compulsory education system is the educational inequality which it generates and to some extent perpetuates. As noted in the Taskforce's report, this failure has been persistently against students from poor backgrounds as well as those who have Māori and Pacific Island ethnicity. The Taskforce and its report attribute this failure in large part to the competitive environment in which schools operate under the governance arrangements set up by the Tomorrow's School regime. As acknowledged in the report (p.27) this regime was established at a time of considerable social and economic reform which imposed neo-liberalism as the core set of values of the State. Hence, for the past 30 years or so schools have been run as competing entities in the so-called education marketplace where parents, as their children's agents, are customers who are able to shop around for the best educational deal for their offspring.
8. The Taskforce's solution to this competitive regime is to usurp the power of school boards and to all intents and purposes replace them with a still larger education bureaucracy. Within this bureaucracy school principals will have greater authority, through '*delegation back*', and so be able to control operating budgets, staffing entitlements and property expenditures. These changes – it is claimed, will drive greater collaboration across the school network and cause principals and teachers to become more collegial – all in the interests of students and especially those of the most disadvantaged students.
9. The Salvation Army believes that such an ambition is fairly fanciful. We believe this is so for two reasons. As the report notes (p.29) one of the background factors to the poor performance of poorer children in our public education (relative to other OECD countries) is the relatively poor funding provided to addressing educational inequalities in New Zealand. This deficit will most likely not be addressed by developing an expensive network of education hubs which take over many of the roles and functions of Boards. In doing so money which could have been used to address inequalities is instead diverted to another layer of educational bureaucracy.
10. The second reason for our scepticism - that education hubs will drive collaboration and reduce inequalities, is the endemic competition within our society and alongside this the pervasiveness of middle class advantage. The Taskforce's analysis offered in the report

(pp.68-72) on the nature of this competition and advantage is in our view accurate and insightful. Against this analysis there appears nothing in the proposals offered to materially address these factors. Granted the Taskforce suggests that each education hub should ensure *'that enrolment schemes are fair, and that unhealthy competition is mediated and reduced'* (p.13). But, there are certainly no proposals to limit parents having choice over the school they send their children too and in fact the report discusses as a criticism the limitations which some parents have faced in exercising choice. If choice remains part of the landscape of the compulsory education system then the expression of prejudice against students from poorer backgrounds, students with special needs and against Maori and Pacific Island children will also remain part of this landscape. This prejudice is somewhat illustrated by the decile drift which the Taskforce has identified in its report (p.59) and is reiterated by comments (p.74) that the social stratification which is seen between schools is a manifestation of division with our broader society.

- 11.** The Army is not proposing that parental choice should no longer be part of our educational landscape. We are however of the view that this choice will result in inequalities regardless of how schools are governed. This reason we believe this is because education is seen by many parents as a source of private and personal advantage for their children and that this advantage is a zero sum game. My child's educational success will provide access to limited and restricted places and positions at universities and in professional life. In other words parents- as the effective consumer of services offered by schools, have little interest in professional collegiality and institutional collaboration. So while education is offered as a commodity in quasi-markets where consumer choice is paramount, it seems unlikely that competitive behaviour between schools will reduce – with or without effective school boards.
- 12.** This is not to say that collegiality, collaboration and a significant diminution of inter-school competition isn't desirable and necessary. We are however unconvinced that changing governance models for schools will achieve these outcomes given the way compulsory education is seen as a private commodity by a significant proportion of parents. The Salvation Army believes that a shift in focus away from competition will only come about through stronger leadership from the State and such leadership is not apparent in the model the Taskforce offers of education hubs and principals with still more personal authority.
- 13.** As discussed below in the section on school leadership, the role of principals in driving the competing schools model should not be ignored. Additionally the Ministry of Education's leadership in managing this inter-school competition has been lacking. As mentioned in the taskforce's report, popular schools have been allowed to expand with additional buildings paid for by the Ministry while nearby less popular schools have vacant classrooms and sometimes deteriorating property assets. In effect the Ministry is facilitating this competition in the name of parental choice. Furthermore the mechanism of school zoning is, as has been identified by the Taskforce, an impotent mechanism to control competition as the schools can effectively disregard Ministry requests around zone boundaries and can enrol out-of-zone students on a highly preferential basis which robs nearby schools of the most able students.
- 14.** This historic lack of leadership by the State's education agency will not necessarily be addressed by the model of education hubs although closer controls on principal appointment

and limited tenure of principals may exert some level of control on principals' behaviours. The proposal to provide principals with more personal authority around the allocation of operating grants, staff entitlements and five year property budgets remains a concern for The Salvation Army. This concern is around the lack of effective oversight of a principal's activities given the diminished role of Boards under the proposed governance model and the huge job which each hub will have providing advice, support and oversight to perhaps more than 125 schools.

15. The Taskforce's analysis of the limited capacity of Boards to be effective governors of schools is in our opinion correct and this is especially so for poor, small and isolated communities. Many of such communities are populated by whanau Māori and this limited capacity compounds the disadvantage which many Māori students face within our public education system. While the expectations of boards is in part to blame for this capacity deficit, so too is the lack of support for them. In The Salvation Army's opinion the possibility of better supporting Boards in poorer, small and isolated communities should have been considered by the Taskforce alongside its recommended model of diminishing Boards' role and providing more bureaucratic support to principals.
16. In our opinion the diminished role for Boards under the proposed education hub governance model reduces the extent of communities' control over their schools and disempowers them. We accept that some of the outcomes of this community control were not always benign and that the effective autonomy granted to boards and principals often created division and rivalry between communities. While the taskforce is enthusiastic about community influence especially around things like strategy and curriculum where it matters most, the somewhat selective nature of the Boards involvement in a school's operation and so in the delivery of strategic and curriculum is likely to diminish the sense of ownership which most communities have for their school. If Boards' roles are seen increasingly as token and marginal it is quite possible that fewer people will even be interested in becoming trustees.
17. The Salvation Army applauds the Taskforce's interest in ensuring that iwi and hapu can be more involved the governance of schools within their rohe. We support the idea that manawhenua have a secured place on each Board but think that it is unlikely that manawhenua have the people and resources to contribute effectively to the governance of every school within their rohe. This being the case, it is important, in our opinion, to ensure that there are other mechanisms to ensure some input by manawhenua - including those around statutory requirements to connect schools with local iwi and hapu. Where such connections are happening already they are, we believe, proving very fruitful in extending the world view of non-Māori students and in doing so creating the seeds for a truly bi-cultural nation we hope we will one day become.

SCHOOLING PROVISION

18. The Salvation Army supports the emphasis which the Taskforce has given to developing and enhancing kura Māori including kaupapa Māori educational strands. There is however, we believe a wider set of challenges here around parental choice, pathways into kaupapa Māori education and the teaching and learning of te Reo Māori. We ask that the Taskforce considers these wider challenges more explicitly.

19. Kaupapa Maori education traditionally commences with children first attending Kohanga Reo and then moving into Kura Kaupapa Māori or some other te Reo immersion programme. However the demand for and availability of places at Kohanga Reo has been falling at least since 2000. In 2000 there were 15,750 places available in Kohanga Reo nationally which represented almost 21% of the number of Māori children aged under five years old. By 2018 the number of places had fallen to 12,760 or 19% of the number of Māori pre-schoolersⁱ. Alongside this decline however there has been a very modest increase in the numbers of Māori children attending kura kaupapa Māori. This increase is from around 5,550 students in 2008 or just 3% of Māori children aged 5 to 17 years olds to 7,650 in 2018 or 3.8% of Māori school aged childrenⁱⁱ.
20. There are probably a number of reasons for these numbers and for the related difficulties which the kura kaupapa Māori movement is having in growing. Some of these difficulties have been accurately identified by the taskforce in its report (p.56). Others must relate to parental choice and the obvious lack of appeal of kaupapa Māori education to the vast majority of whanau Māori. What else really explains why less than 4% of Maori children are engaged in kura kaupapa Maori.
21. For The Salvation Army this state of affairs raises a number of other challenges around the continuing educational inequality suffered by Māori children, the tangible choices which whanau Māori are able to exercise around their tamariki's education and the still precarious status of te Reo Māori as viable modern language.
22. It is clear that for the foreseeable and perhaps for the indefinite future most Māori children will be educated in the mainstream westernised education system. This means that the potential for kura kaupapa Māori to address Māori educational disadvantage is very limited and that comprehensive and perhaps quite radical reform of the mainstream system is required in order to close the achievement gaps between Māori and non- Māori children. The challenges here, in our view, are around priorities and imagination and these have not been adequately considered by the Taskforce.
23. In deciding how to reform our compulsory education system the Government will of course be faced with resource constraints. The taskforce is recommending significant increases in funding to support kaupapa Maori education including the establishment of an education hub specifically for kaupapa Māori education. This proposal is supported by The Salvation Army. However such funding will not address the inequality faced by Māori students within the mainstream and as discussed elsewhere in this submission we are doubtful the proposed changes to governance models and the role of principals will do so either. We believe that greater thought and effort needs to be given to reforms which do address these and other inequalities within mainstream education.
24. We acknowledge the emphasis given by the taskforce to lifting the quality of teaching in New Zealand's schools. We acknowledge too the forthright acceptance by the taskforce of the impact which deficit thinking, unconscious bias and racism amongst the teaching profession have had in perpetuating educational inequality and under-achievement amongst Maori and Pacific students.(p.87). Despite this acceptance there is nothing explicit in the Taskforce's

recommendations which addresses these ingrained attitudes and behaviours. This omission, for The Salvation Army, is a major shortcoming in the review thus far.

25. The Salvation Army believes that the current configuration of the education network is a mess and that this mess should be cleared up through strong leadership from Government. The Army supports the sentiments offered in Recommendation 7 (p.66) which specifies the overall structure of the school network. We suggest that whatever network model is adopted, the changes required be executed quickly and decisively to avoid schools – such as intermediates being stuck in limbo for years waiting to be closed. Such postponements do not serve students or their communities well and waste the energy and goodwill of boards and teachers.
26. We agree fully with the recommendations around the rolling out of full service schools particularly in low-income communities. While the development of national guidelines for such ventures is a necessary first step, we believe that considerable work is required behind the scenes to ensure that the various arms of Government have the direction, mandate and resources needed to be able to collaboratively fund and/or provides integrated services on school sites. We are uncertain that the compulsory education sector is best equipped to lead such integration and believe that some leadership is required to avoid patch protection and proprietorial behaviours by principals and Boards.
27. The Salvation Army support proposals for education hubs to have a more directive role in planning the network of state schools and state integrated schools within their area. There are however several complications and a number of tensions in the proposals offered (p.76) and a number of competing objectives appear to be at play in them. For example there is a desire to achieve cooperation and consensus between schools in the design of enrolment schemes. Should these efforts fail, an education hub has the power to direct changes but must first consult with parents/whanau of students and give due regard to *'the provision of reasonable student and whanau choice'*. While the needs of the schools within the network are also an important criteria here there is potential in requirements for consultation around the provision of parental choice and out-of-zone enrolments that those with social and economic power dominate the debate at the expense of marginalised groups.
28. The tensions between directive school zoning, out of zone enrolments and parental choice have to date proven nearly impossible to resolve but they may not in fact be the issues at the core of educational disadvantage and inequality. The core issues may be those around under-funding due to per-capita funding rules alongside poor teaching practices, inappropriate pedagogies and poor school leadership.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

29. The Salvation Army in general agrees with the taskforce's analysis around issues of school leadership and with the proposals offered to address these challenges. In particular we agree that the leadership offered by a school principal is critical to the success of a school and hence to its students' educational success. The Army supports the Taskforce's proposals to identify educational leaders early, to recruit and support them into leadership roles such as principalships and to offer them support and leadership type PDL while they are principals.

30. The Taskforce's report presents schools' professional leadership approaches and models somewhat un-problematically. In particular the Taskforce has framed the problem of competing schools and entrenched inequality as a consequence of the governance model and not related to the attitudes and performance of principals. In this framing, practices such as student poaching, the self-promotion and engrandisement of schools and border-line elitism are driven entirely by Board members with no complicity by principals. The report does acknowledge the obvious incentive mechanism that larger schools mean larger salaries for principals (p.15) but presents the current problems around school leadership as being about training and support and not also about values and attitudes.
31. We have no doubt that school principals are massively influential in deciding their school's strategies and values and in forming its culture. This tendency is in fact alluded to in the report (p.40). As a professional group principals are as responsible for the entrenched inequalities within our public education system as much as any other group or institution involved in this system. Because of this, greater attention should be given to how the values and attitudes of principals may hinder or help with the reforms proposed by the Taskforce. The presumption that a more collegial and collaborative professional environment will emerge through diminishing Board's roles and through professional development and support certainly needs to be questioned.
32. As things are proposed, The Salvation Army are concerned with the additional power and authority which school principals appear to gain with the reforms proposed by the Taskforce. As mentioned above, the proposed new governance model shifts decisions around key operational questions such as budgets and resource allocations to the principal who works with his or her advisor from the education hub. This is straight bureaucratic managerialism. The problem with such models is that accountability back to stakeholders may often be weak. Where for example in this model is there any independent appraisal of principals' performance and so any meaningful scrutiny on the performance of the schools they lead and manage?.

SCHOOL RESOURCING

33. The Salvation Army supports the Taskforce's view '*that the amount of equity funding for the education system is inadequate*' (p.114) and that 6% of Government spending on schools should be targeted to address the needs of the most disadvantaged students. (Recommendation 25 p.115). The Army however is concerned about the proposed shift from the current decile funding to the as yet untested equity index which has been developed by Treasury and Ministry of Education. While the methodology for creating this index is not known by the Army, it is likely to be a hybrid of the child vulnerability index which was the basis of school funding changes proposed by the previous National Party led Government. If this is the case then the use of such an index risks further stigmatisation of schools assessed to have high levels of disadvantage.
34. The Taskforce's report acknowledges that the decile ranking of a school is used by parents as a proxy for the quality of a school (p.15). In the absence of a reliable comparative measure of school quality- such as might be offered through an externally moderated form of national

standards, a credible basis of determining the quality of any school's performance will remain a problem. The continued existence of such a problem invites the use of proxies by parents and families interested in educational advantage for their children. An inequality or vulnerability index rather than an income or resource measure is as easy to use for such a purpose.

35. However The Salvation Army is not aware of any research which has identified that New Zealand parents are using the decile ranking of a school as a proxy for quality. While the decile drift identified in the Taskforce's report (p.59) is a statistical fact, it does not necessarily follow that this is because parents are shifting their children to schools in wealthier neighbourhoods out of concern for school quality. The motivation might instead be that such movement is driven by a desire to separate their children from poorer children and perhaps to associate their children with wealthier children. The motivational influence here is that association with wealthier groups improves access to better quality bonding social capital.
36. If dis-association with the poor is a motivating factor in decile drift then the school quality argument as the point of cleavage around educational advantage/disadvantage becomes somewhat more complex. The complexity here is that regardless of the quality of schooling offered in low decile schools or in schools with a 'high inequality index' score, parents will continue to take their children elsewhere because dis-association with the poor is the motivating factor. This means that under funding models based on student numbers, schools with the least desirable equity funding measure (be this decile or inequality index) will also be smaller than average and so more vulnerable financially and operationally.
37. The prospect that schools in poorer communities will be un-favoured and consequently relatively underfunded calls into question the basic funding model for schools. The Taskforce's report (p.112) acknowledges the current funding model disadvantages small schools. Then without any supporting analysis the report concludes that this disadvantage cannot be addressed with money but can only be addressed by closing smaller schools in any given network. The Salvation Army believes that some deeper analysis of this issue is required before such a conclusion can be honestly supported in principle. Further, the prospect of closing smaller apparently financially unviable schools raises a number of other equity issues to do with access and community character which have not been considered here. We urge the Taskforce to provide this deeper analysis and to consider these wider equity issues before continuing with its Recommendation 27 as we believe that this is ill-advised on the present evidence and reasoning.

CONCLUSIONS

38. The Salvation Army is grateful for the brave conversation which the Taskforce has commenced with its review of the Tomorrows School regime. The Taskforce's scope of concerns and the options for change which it offers are challenging and in our opinion these need to be. It is arguable that educational inequality is the only issue which should be addressed through a review of our compulsory education system although The Salvation Army believes that it is and applauds the taskforce for this singular focus. The long-tail of educational failure in our opinion is the single biggest shortcoming of this system and limits our social and economic development as a country.

39. This being said The Salvation Army does not entirely concur with the Taskforce's overall analysis that the governance model of autonomous self-governing schools is entirely to blame for the educational inequality which has become pervasive in our compulsory education system. We believe that this governance model and the competition between schools which it engenders and supports is partially to blame for this inequality but there are also several other contributing factors. Perhaps the biggest contributing factor is the framing of education by a significant proportion and perhaps the majority of parents as a private good and the source of personal advantage. Undoing this framing is unlikely to happen just with a dismantling of school boards especially given other contributing factors such as the role and motivation of school principals and the lack of leadership from Ministry of Education.
40. This bigger picture suggests to The Salvation Army that many of the Taskforce's recommendations are either unnecessary or unhelpful. We suggest that the following overall changes to these recommendations be considered by the Taskforce:
- ▶ That roles of school boards remain largely as they are with acknowledgement being given to capacity constraints faced by Boards in poorer communities and appropriate support given to these Boards by Ministry of Education or the proposed education hubs.
 - ▶ That a cost-benefit analysis or at least a costing be undertaken of the proposed reforms so that relative financial priority be established for these.
 - ▶ That priority be given to additional equity based funding to address inequalities within the compulsory education system.
 - ▶ That a closer study be undertaken of the sources of inequality suffered by Maori children within the compulsory education sector with particular attention being given to cultural bias in pedagogy, teacher practice and training and in principals' leadership.
 - ▶ That a comprehensive network review be undertaken within five years and on a sub-regional basis perhaps based on the proposed education hubs with a view to this review addressing inequitable and inefficient competition between schools within each network.
 - ▶ That school funding models be developed which mitigate against competitive behaviour between schools and limit unnecessary investments in local networks.

ⁱ Data from Education Count Early Childhood Education statistics which is available at <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/early-childhood-education>

ⁱⁱ Data from Education Counts Schools statistics which is available at <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/schooling/student-numbers/6028>