

NZEI Te Riu Roa Submission on the Ministry Of Education Discussion Paper: *Schools Plus*

1. Introduction

- 1.1. NZEI Te Riu Roa (NZEI) is the professional organisation and industrial union that represents the interests and issues of its 48,000 members. Our members include teachers and support staff in the early childhood and primary sectors, support staff in secondary schools, advisers employed by the colleges and faculties of education in universities, and group Special Education staff employed by the Ministry of Education.
- 1.2. The main objective of NZEI is to advance the cause of education generally while upholding and maintaining the just claims of its members individually and collectively.
- 1.3. NZEI is one of the largest professional and industrial bodies in the country and has a long history of playing a positive role in the education sector. The national structures of NZEI include an elected National Executive, Te Reo Areare (the elected executive of NZEI Māori strand), and a number of specific sector advisory groups including the Principals' Council, the Support Staff and Early Childhood National Caucuses, and the Primary Classroom Teachers' Advisory Group.
- 1.4. For the purpose of this submission, NZEI has had the opportunity to discuss the issues with the Secretary for Education, the NZEI National Executive, and the education sector unions affiliated with the CTU. The *Schools Plus* consultation timeframe has limited the opportunity to widen the consultation to the general membership.
- 1.5. NZEI supports the CTU *Schools Plus* submission and contributed to the primary section of that submission.

2. The structure of this submission

- 2.1. This submission will present NZEI perspectives and comments on:
 - Contextual issues
 - NZEI support

- NZEI concerns
- Economic and social impacts on learning
- The role of primary and early childhood education
- The perceived impact of *Schools Plus* on the early childhood education and primary sectors
- Transition between sectors
- Areas for further Government focus.

A summary is also provided.

3. Contextual issues

- 3.1. The issues addressed in the discussion document *Schools Plus* around training and young people employment are of vital importance to all sectors of New Zealand. Young people, whether they are in school, attending a tertiary institution, or in work, are key stakeholders in the workforce of the future.
- 3.2. If New Zealand is to achieve the goals of economic transformation, and an inclusive and just society, it is critical that all young people have good access to educational and training opportunities, and have positive early work experiences.
- 3.3. New Zealand needs its current and future workforce to be highly-skilled to cater for the changing work environment and be internationally competitive. Ensuring young New Zealanders are qualified, skilled, and able to adapt to that environment is essential.
- 3.4. Career development opportunities that enable young people to participate, contribute and succeed optimally in society must be supported by an understanding of employment rights, the role of unions, and employment relationships and responsibilities.

4. NZEI support

- 4.1. NZEI supports the Government's goal of encouraging young people to stay in school, progress to the best of their abilities, and achieve qualifications.
- 4.2. NZEI further supports the underlying principles and goals of *Schools Plus* and endorses Government's aim to strengthen the relationship between the education sector and the labour market.

5. NZEI concerns

- 5.1. NZEI believes that a strengths-based approach to *Schools Plus* is more valuable than the deficit model approach currently taken in the document, centred on crisis intervention, and focussing on students that are failing within the system.
- 5.2. While supporting positive outcomes for school leavers, NZEI notes its concern that there is a lack of detail of how this is to be

achieved, and responsibilities that may fall on schools are still to be worked out.

- 5.3. NZEI believes it is not enough to describe the 'what'. Resources for implementation of *Schools Plus* need to be examined, and national discussion with all stakeholders about what implementation involves must occur.

6. Economic and social impacts on learning

- 6.1. Education in early childhood education, centres, primary and secondary schools does not take place in a vacuum.
- 6.2. Learners bring a vast array of personal cultural and social experience into the classroom, including the considerable influence of their families and communities. Communities engage with schools and centres in ways that both support education and provide barriers.
- 6.3. There are also social and economic issues that impact on learning. "As a society we need to ensure that children are well fed, well housed and well-clothed so they can get the most out of their learning. We need a wider social and Government commitment to improving the lot of all New Zealand families and communities".¹
- 6.4. NZEI believes these issues are systemic and not limited to primary schools and early childhood centres.
- 6.5. Government's goal of a seamless education system relies heavily on resourcing and supporting quality education in schools and centres and insuring that there is a whole of government response to issues impacting on learning and success.
- 6.6. This goal requires seamlessness in implementation. Coordination of Ministry strategies across a range of programmes including the Tertiary Strategy, teacher education, recruitment and retention, and professional development is needed.

7. The role of primary and early childhood education

- 7.1. The contribution of quality early childhood education and primary education in establishing positive attitudes to learning and foundation skills is fundamental to achieving better outcomes for school leavers.
- 7.2. However, it must be stressed that a child's time in early childhood education and primary school is a time for discovery, and building confidence, resilience and positive attitudes towards learning.

¹ Nelson, F. (2008). Comment in: Too poor to learn? *NZEI Rourou*, May 2008, 1.

Interventions in early childhood have been found to make a profound difference in later life.²

- 7.3. The information in *Schools Plus* makes it clear that the Government's goal is to realise the potential of all learners, particularly the disproportionate numbers of Maori and Pacific young people leaving school early without qualifications.
 - 7.4. While better teaching can make a big difference, it is far from being the total answer to student underachievement. Insufficient funding of early childhood education is still a major obstacle in giving poor children a better start in life.³
 - 7.5. Te Whāriki and the New Zealand Curriculum allow for a child-centred approach, allowing learners to interpret and build upon their learning about themselves and their place in a wide range of relationships and contexts.
 - 7.6. While learners in primary and early childhood education may not experience the world of work directly, primary schools and centres provide the foundations for this to occur.
 - 7.7. Literacy and numeracy sit alongside understanding about citizenship and responsibilities, including bringing positive adult role models into schools and centres to work with a diverse range of learners needs.
- 8. The perceived impact of *Schools Plus* on the early childhood education and primary sectors**
- 8.1. NZEI is concerned that the 'downward draft' of what is required in terms of employment skills and career advice for secondary school may have a negative impact on the holistic pedagogy of primary and early childhood education.
 - 8.2. Both the primary and early childhood education sectors have developed a broad and inclusive curriculum that must be maintained.
- 9. Transition between sectors**
- 9.1. Transition between schooling and the workplace is a pivotal point in a young person's life, having a strong bearing on future employment goals and achievements.
 - 9.2. The largest ever group of young people will be making the transition from school to work in the next decade.⁴ It is critical that

² Roberts, H. (2005). What works? *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* (24) 34-54.

³ Thrupp, M. (2008, May). Comment in: Too poor to learn? *NZEI Rourou*, May 2008, 1.

⁴Ministry of Education (2007). *Developing the Second Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-2012*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved May 20, 2008, from http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/downloadable/dl11445_v1/discussion-document-final-word-version-amended-hyp.doc.

all school leavers have access to the next step – whether that step is into tertiary education and training or the workforce.

- 9.3. The transition between school sectors is just as critical as the transition from school to work. The success with which the transition from early childhood education to primary is accomplished can have an immediate impact on children's stress and anxiety levels,⁵ and a long-term impact on their grades and retention, particularly for educationally disadvantaged students.
- 9.4. Research⁶ indicates that a smooth transition between school sectors is one of the key variables that facilitate or hinder student overall learning and achievement, social development/adjustment, and development (or maintenance) of positive attitudes towards school, learning and achieving well.

10. Areas for further Government focus

- 10.1. As in primary schools and early childhood education, a fully resourced personalised programme that includes a range of learning opportunities, pathways and guidance is endorsed as optimal for achieving success in secondary school.
- 10.2. While admirable, it is an immense task to achieve the goal of “every young person being in education, skills development, or structured learning, relevant to their needs and abilities, until the age of 18”⁷.
- 10.3. NZEI believes that it is unrealistic to expect schools to accomplish this alone. NZEI encourages the Ministry to engage with other government and non-government agencies to ensure that the onus of success in *Schools Plus* is not placed entirely on schools.
- 10.4. Young people may wish to make other choices as to their educational or training reference point. In cases such as this, a tertiary institution, or ITO, or an industry training organisation, an employer may be more appropriate.
- 10.5. Further coordination across other government agencies, programmes and departments, and non-government organisations is also required to enable the Ministry to take a lead role, and be supported, in this area.
- 10.6. Initiatives similar and complementary to *Schools Plus*, such as *Gateway* and the *Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR)*, are already in place. Schools are already taking

⁵ Briggs, F., & Potter, G. K. (1995). *Teaching children in the first three years of school (2nd edition)*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

⁶ Kennedy, S., & Cox, S. (2003-2006). *A study of students' transition from primary to secondary schooling*. Ministry of Education Research Division: Ministry of Education. Retrieved on May 27, 2008, from <http://www.minedu.govt.nz>

⁷ Carter, C. (2008). *Schools Plus discussion document: Message from the minister*. Ministry of Education: New Zealand.

advantages of opportunities for work preparation, experience and placement for a wide range of students within the NZQA framework.

- 10.7. It is difficult to assess the value or place of *Schools Plus* within the raft of current programmes, when it appears there has been no evaluation of the “fit for purpose” or success of current programmes.
- 10.8. NZEI supports the CTU and the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) view that there is a need for a stronger link between, and a more coherent approach to, interface between secondary schools and work/tertiary education.
- 10.9. It is equally important that funding for the implementation of new programmes does not come at a cost to current programmes. Particularly those programmes to address the needs of young people for whom staying in school is not an option.
- 10.10. Maori and Pasifika young people, young people with disabilities and health problems, young parents living with their children, or in one-parent families, or without parents, and young people with caring responsibilities are at greater risk of leaving school with low, or no, qualifications and limited employment options.
- 10.11. NZEI is also concerned about the potentially negative impact on inclusive education transition programmes – schools are already experiencing difficulties placing students with secondary disabilities in work experience programmes.
- 10.12. Programmes to address specific issues for these marginalised groups must be maintained.
- 10.13. Wider views and relationships must be considered than those highlighted in the *Schools Plus* document, including those of iwi, Pasifika groups, community groups, education and training providers and unions.

11. Summary

- 11.1. NZEI endorses the principles and goals of *Schools Plus*.
- 11.2. NZEI believes that it is unrealistic to expect schools to accomplish these goals in isolation. NZEI encourages the Ministry to engage with other government and non-government agencies to ensure that the onus of success in *Schools Plus* is not placed entirely on schools.
- 11.3. NZEI believes that a strengths-based approach to *Schools Plus* is more valuable than the deficit model approach currently taken in the document, centred on crisis intervention, and focussing on students that are failing within the system.

- 11.4. NZEI supports the CTU view that there is a need for a stronger link between, and a more coherent approach to, the interface between secondary schools and work/ tertiary education.
- 11.5. NZEI recommends that a review of existing programmes that encourage young people to remain at school or in training and all school-to-work schemes, including an examination of resources and funding, be undertaken, including an evaluation of relevance and success.
- 11.6. NZEI endorses the CTU and PPTA recommendations that all 16 – 18 year olds are entitled to a fully resourced personalised programme that includes a range of learning opportunities, pathways and guidance. NZEI further recommends that this is an entitlement of all learners.
- 11.7. The role of early childhood centres and primary schools in preparing learners for further learning, and the importance of ensuring successful transition between sectors are considerable.
- 11.8. NZEI endorses the maintenance of sustainable programmes for young people for whom further training or work is not an option.
- 11.9. NZEI supports career development opportunities that enable young people to participate, contribute and succeed optimally in society, and further supports that young people must be supported by an understanding of their employment rights, the role of unions, and the importance of employment relationships and responsibilities.
- 11.10. NZEI believes it is not enough to describe the 'what'. Resources for implementation of *Schools Plus* need to be examined, and national discussion with all stakeholders about what implementation involves must occur.

Frances Nelson
National President
Te Manukura

30 May 2008