

## **CHARTER SCHOOLS FOR NEW ZEALAND**

*An investigation designed to further the debate in New Zealand on education policy in general and on charter schooling in particular*

## **EDUCATION POLICY RESPONSE GROUP**

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## SUMMARY

- After the 2011 General Election, the ‘National-ACT Confidence and Supply Agreement’ stated that a new kind of State schooling called a charter school system would be set up. Based on similar experiments in Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, these schools would be funded by the State but would be operated by sponsors such as community groups, not-for-profit organisations or for-profit businesses. Charter schools would be set up ‘in areas where educational underachievement is most entrenched’.
- Although it went largely unnoticed, the ‘National-ACT Confidence and Supply Agreement’ three years previously (2008) had agreed ‘to increase the educational choices available to parents and pupils’. A 2010 Inter-Party Working Group Report, ‘Step Change’, written by representatives of the National, ACT and Māori parties advocated a new form of schooling to cater for the lowest achieving 20 percent and the highest achieving five percent. A minority report, ‘Free to Learn’, was issued by the ACT Party, which asserted that these schooling choices should be available to all in an open market.
- It is encouraging that the 2011 National-ACT Agreement accepts that the problem of educational underachievement is due to conditions in the wider society and there is need, therefore, for ‘mutually supportive reforms’ in welfare, primary health, education, youth transition and employment law.
- However, achievement outcome data, so important in current government policy, is not in itself an adequate measure of educational success. Indeed, such narrowness of focus has the potential to distort sound educational practices and to militate against optimum learning and teaching relations, particularly for already disadvantaged students.
- Similarly, education does not exist solely to promote financial or employment success: it serves highly important social purposes including the promotion of equality of opportunity and informed citizenship.
- State schools, in particular, are accountable to the wider community for a range of outcomes as specified in the 2001 Education Standards Act. Private schools are not so obliged and in this regard the proposed new charter schools look more like private schools than State schools.
- An over-riding principle of governance in New Zealand State schools is that each school is accountable to its local community,

which elects the Board of Trustees to represent the parents. The proposal for charter schools is a radical departure from the principles of local governance, social democracy and civic participation in State schools.

- Basic to the National-ACT proposal is the unequivocal assertion that charter schools will raise the achievement levels of New Zealand's so-called 'long-tail' of under-achieving students. However, analysis of the research from countries that have such schools suggests only that the vast amount of data on such schools is inconclusive about their actual effects on student achievement. For example, the much quoted 2009 Stanford University CREDO study reports that across the USA 17 percent of charter schools perform better than the public schools, 56 percent perform about the same, and 37 percent perform worse than the public schools.
- The inconclusive nature of the research is because: (i) 'charter school' is an ill-defined notion: it is not a philosophy of education or a method of teaching; (ii) studies of charter schools in one district, state or country (each with their own histories, schooling traditions and challenges) cannot be generalised to all districts, states or countries; (iii) most studies compare the mean performance of all students which is of little help in determining whether charter schools improve the achievement of the lowest performing students; (iv) it is very difficult to determine whether any reported improvements in achievement have been worth the cost in terms of upheaval to the school system as a whole or consequential effects on non-charter schools; and (v) few researchers who study charter schools are neutral: most already have a clear position on whether such schools are desirable or not.
- Nevertheless, some lessons can be learned from the example of other jurisdictions where a form of charter school has been operating for some time. This report investigates Sweden's 'free schools', England's 'academies' and three case studies of 'charter school' research in the USA.
- In Sweden there are now more than 700 'free schools' enrolling upwards of 100,000 students. Two studies conclude that although there were some short term improvements in student achievement, these were not sustained. Children of highly educated parents benefited most while there was minimal evidence of benefits to children from families (including immigrant families) with low levels of education. However, there was no reported evidence of damage to State schools as a result of competition between schools.

- Another study of the Swedish system, undertaken to promote free schools in Britain, argues that there have been significant benefits from Swedish free schools, especially for-profit schools. It therefore advises the British government to reverse its policy of prohibiting for-profit schools.
- Swedish for-profit free schools have become big business. One analysis illustrates how the companies that operate for-profit schools have become tradable commodities in a global battle for supremacy among trans-national corporations and private investment funds.
- In England, charter school equivalents, currently known as ‘academies’ have been operating since the late 1980s. Some schemes have required such schools to secure partial business sponsorship. Successive government initiatives have encouraged secondary schools to become specialist schools (with expertise in particular curriculum offerings) or academies (directly funded by central government rather than administered via local government). Many of the academies that have been set up by businesses specialise in entrepreneurial education.
- Since the election of the coalition government in 2010 ‘free schools’ have been introduced in England to permit parents, teachers, charities and businesses to apply to establish a primary or secondary school outside local government control. The new free schools in England have not been operating long enough for thorough evaluation to take place.
- The English experience overall suggests that: (i) many schools which seek and are granted the equivalent of charter status do not serve the most disadvantaged students; (ii) reported achievement gains are largely the result of managed changes over time in the school’s student composition; and (iii) less academically able students are often excluded from the new school.
- Charter schools began in the USA in the 1990s in response to perceived weaknesses in many urban schools. There are now some 4,000 charter schools in 40 states and they enrol more than a million students.
- Numerous studies have been funded or conducted by groups that either support or oppose charter schools. Typically, the findings of charter school supporters are vehemently criticised by their opponents, and vice versa. Where study findings are based on the analysis of official databases of student characteristics and achievement outcomes, the statistical methods are invariably criticised as incomplete, misleading or flawed. For example, the Stanford University CREDO study has been widely cited as

showing the very limited success of charter schools in the USA. But two other studies have severely criticised the CREDO study for claimed weaknesses in its selection and application of statistical methods. A lesson for politicians, media, social scientists and teachers in New Zealand is that without a sound base in statistics, none of us is competent even to engage in this debate let alone pronounce on the outcome.

- One particular charter school model in the USA that is widely believed to have led to significant achievement gains for some students from low-income families is the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). Between 80 and 100 percent of KIPP students are African American or Hispanic and 60-75 percent are entitled to Free or Reduced Price Lunches (a measure of poverty).
- A high degree of commitment is expected from teachers, parents, and students. The school day runs from 7.15 am to 5.00 pm, with additional homework each night and sessions are also held on Saturdays and in the holidays. A high standard of behaviour is required.
- Students who enter and stay in KIPP schools tend to perform better academically than similar students in other schools. This does not seem to be due to differential selection policies by the school (although the high degree of commitment required effectively acts as a form of self-selection by students and families).
- Student attrition, however, is high and skewed: those who leave are those who have performed less well or who cannot conform. Forty percent of African American male students leave KIPP schools before Grade 8.
- KIPP claims that thirty percent of its former Grade 8 students go on to gain a college degree (more than four times the rate for such students nationwide) but there is a 30 percent attrition rate of KIPP students from Grade 6 to Grade 8, compared to six percent in other district schools. A fairer comparison would therefore be between KIPP and non-KIPP former Grade 6 students.
- KIPP schools receive much more revenue from all sources per student than comparable public schools, on average \$18,491 per student vs. \$11,991 per student in a public school. Yet, the KIPP schools spend only an extra \$457 per student more than the public schools: what happens to the remainder is not known.
- Even if the most generous interpretation is placed on the results of KIPP schools, the most they can do is *reduce* the achievement gap. They cannot eliminate it since, as a spokesperson concedes ‘the gap is fixed by differences in home literacy, years before students enter school’.

- The emphasis on parental choice, which is central to charter schools, has been operating in New Zealand since Tomorrow's Schools; indeed, since 1989 all State schools have been charter schools. It was assumed then, and is assumed now by National ACT, that greater choice will lead to greater equity in the form of improved achievement by lower achieving students.
- However two of the results of the 1989 reforms were: (i) schools which cater for lower socio-economic students have suffered roll losses and higher socio-economic schools have increased their rolls and (ii) Māori and Pacific Island students are under-represented in the higher decile schools and over-represented in the lower decile schools. For obvious reasons, this has been termed 'white flight' but it is a feature of all choice systems: *those with more resources benefit disproportionately*. Leading researchers in the USA summarise their studies: 'Increasing parental choice is likely to increase separation of students by race, social class and culture *even when the system is specifically designed to remedy inequality*'. (Our emphasis)
- It is of concern that the proposed charter schools will depart from the established convention on school governance: that local schools should be accountable to the local community. The new schools will instead be accountable to their sponsors, who may have no connection with or understanding of the local community.
- Much could be done to improve the governance mechanisms of all State schools rather than subject the system to another major upheaval, the results of which depend more on aspiration than evidence.
- Similarly, we believe that there are arguments for a rather different approach to improved achievement: a focus on research-based teaching approaches to literacy and numeracy, and an associated CSR (class size reduction) strategy especially for students in the first years of primary and secondary schooling.
- The charter school proposal and other current policies are based on the belief that the way to improved outcomes is to foster choice and competition, together with rigorous monitoring and control of teachers (using national standards, performance pay, inspection and the like). In fact the example of the highest performing education system (Finland) suggests that this approach is quite misguided: achievement is better pursued by fostering a teaching force which is highly educated and socially esteemed, avoiding high-stakes public accountability regimes and rejecting streaming and reliance on standardised tests. Finland also embeds its educational policies in a framework of welfare: all students receive a free, two-course warm

meal daily, free health care, transportation, learning materials, and counselling in the schools.

- It should be remembered that New Zealand students are, on average, consistently among the highest performers internationally. It is, then, very important that, in the political enthusiasm for even better performance, we make sure that we do not destroy the remaining organisational flexibility, curricular breadth, and teacher freedom which, arguably, have led to superior results.
- Similarly, given what we know about family background, it is important that the government does not just focus on education but on policies to eradicate child poverty because socio-economic disadvantage has been consistently demonstrated to be the strongest predictor of educational and life chances. It is not apparent that the current National led Government has a coherent policy to address poverty and all its accompanying ills, which include lower educational achievement.
- While the evidence on charter schools and achievement is inconclusive, we are satisfied from the studies that we have examined that there is little evidence to support the view that charter schools will:
  - i. *provide choice for large numbers of low income parents*: charter schools will cream off the most motivated and leave the rest to cope as best they can with what is provided;
  - ii. *promote greater equality*: it is quite possible that a number of individuals will be rather better off but they will remain relatively poorly served in relation to their more advantaged mates: the 'rich' will continue to get 'richer'.
  - iii. *eliminate the 'long tail of underachievement'*: individuals will benefit and the tail may be reduced slightly but equality of educational opportunity will elude the majority until such time as economic and social welfare is promoted ahead of educational reform.
- If the government persists with its policy on charter schools it will need to ensure that:
  - i. *charter schools do not cream off the most motivated students from existing schools* and so impoverish still

further those schools which already labour under financial and social handicaps;

- ii. *charter schools are not captured by business interests*, including overseas corporations which will lead to yet another opportunity for our assets to be sold overseas and our children to be indoctrinated with sectional values;
  - iii. *charter schools do not actively recruit the best teachers* and leave other schools to cope without their leaders;
  - iv. *charter schools do not hire untrained and unsuitable teachers* in order to minimise salary costs and maximise employment contract flexibility;
  - v. *charter schools do not siphon money away from existing grants and programmes* which target those most in need (e.g. decile funding, AIMHI, Strengthening Education etc).
- We believe that the educational agenda of the past few years is misguided. Finland reminds us that there is a better approach: one which favours high levels of teacher education and on-going professional development, avoids centralised controls and refuses to focus narrowly on the assessment of measurable student achievement outcomes.
  - Unless the government proceeds with care, it is quite likely that the charter school experiment, far from improving our education system, will be another costly mistake which will lead to further inequality in educational achievement and leave our most vulnerable children at the mercy of the market. If this is so, history will judge the National led Government (2011-2014) harshly as being so ideologically driven that it left our education system much worse than when it inherited it.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

After the 2011 General Election, the National and ACT Parties' Confidence and Supply Agreement (National Party & ACT Party, 2011) announced that a new kind of school system would be set up called a charter school system. The Agreement stated that:

Many New Zealand children are not achieving their potential and are leaving school ill-equipped to enter the workforce and with limited choices for their future. Underachievement in education often compounds the disadvantages already faced by children in vulnerable, at-risk communities, and can contribute to intergenerational disadvantage, poor health, poverty, joblessness, welfare dependence, criminal offending and social dysfunction. It is one of the reasons for New Zealand's very high rate of youth unemployment. (p. 3)

In order to address this problem:

Both parties agree that to break this cycle a range of mutually-supportive reforms is required in the areas of welfare, primary health, education, youth transition and employment law. (p. 3)

With respect to education, the two parties agreed to:

Implement a system...whereby school charters can be allocated in areas where educational underachievement is most entrenched.... It is clearly believed that charter schools can provide greater flexibility to better meet the needs of their particular community, including the ability to attract high quality teachers and to create quality learning environments to better prepare and inspire children to achieve their potential. (p. 3)

Enabled under appropriate sections of the 1989 Education Act, for example S155 (Kura Kaupapa Māori) or S156 (Designated character schools), a series of charters would initially be allocated in areas such as South Auckland and Christchurch. The Agreement and its Annex are far from clear on what would characterise a charter school in Aotearoa New Zealand. We are told that it would be modelled on overseas examples such as the KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) schools in the United States of America (USA) and the free schools in the United Kingdom

(UK), but this provides little concrete details for the New Zealand equivalent.

### **Charter schools for New Zealand**

While details are sketchy, what we have been told to date is the following.

- i. Groups operating charter schools may include non-profit, community organisations including iwi and Pacific Island groups, school trustees, faith-based educational organisations and not-for-profit and for-profit management groups (likely to operate multiple charter schools).
- ii. A school will be granted a charter by an authorised body.
- iii. Boards of Trustees would be responsible for all aspects of school operations. They may operate the school themselves or contract out management to not-for-profit or for-profit education providers.
- iv. Boards would be free to set the length of the school day and year, set their own teaching practices, raise their own revenues, pay their teachers according to performance and use any approved curriculum/qualifications.
- v. Schools may operate as individual institutions or as a network of schools.
- vi. Funding would continue to be by way of normal operational grant funding and may include funding targeted at disadvantaged groups. Schools may also be eligible for capital funding for school property although the use of private capital is also likely to be required. Schools may rent or own school buildings and where rented may receive equivalent funding to cover rental costs.
- vii. Tuition fees would not be charged.
- viii. Charter schools will be required to accept all students who apply for entrance (until they have reached capacity), irrespective of academic ability, although they may set school zones as long as these do not deny opportunities to disadvantaged students. Where demand exceeds supply schools may choose to conduct entrance on a ballot basis.
- ix. Charter schools would be externally accountable to their sponsors (e.g., universities, iwi, community organisations, a special accountability group within the Ministry of Education) and to external review (e.g., Education Review Office). Charter schools will be required to enter into a contract with their

sponsors who are responsible for ensuring that the schools meet agreed student achievement goals, as well as financial and operational standards.

In February 2012, amid some controversy, Associate Minister of Education and sole ACT MP Hon John Banks stated that Catherine Isaacs would chair the committee to oversee the trial of charter schools. Isaacs is a former ACT president and had been an unsuccessful number two on ACT's 2011 election list of parliamentary candidates (New Zealand Herald, 2012, 1 February). At the end of March 2012, Associate Minister Banks and Minister of Education, Hon Hekia Parata announced the full membership of the committee: former Christchurch Mayor Vicki Buck, founder of two 'alternative' schools in Christchurch, Tony Falkenstein, founder of the Onehunga Business School and private sector CEO, Mike Hollings, CEO of the Correspondence School, Hana O'Regan, Dean of the Faculty of Māori at Christchurch Polytechnic, Margaret Southwick, 'an academic expert in health and education outcomes for Maori and Pasifika', and John Taylor, currently head of alumni relations at Auckland University and former head of two elite private schools, Kings College and Rathkeale College (Dominion Post, 28 March 2012).

### **What are charter schools for?**

In a brief outline of charters in the 'NZ Teacher', Associate Minister Banks justified the proposal in the following terms.

There is an urgent need for charter schools and it grows out of the following paradox: New Zealand has some of the best teachers, and most promising students, in the world – yet we have some of the worst educational inequality.

We know that our teachers can teach – and that our students can learn – because so many of them do it extraordinarily well. Sadly, however, many do not. Our challenge now is to fix New Zealand's legacy of educational underachievement. This is where charter schools come in.

Charter schools have the potential to solve the great paradox: hardworking teachers, promising students and disappointing results. (Banks, 2012, p. 6)

Press reaction to these proposals has been mixed. A New Zealand Herald editorial reported that New Zealand charter schools would be based on the KIPP model in the USA which, the editorial claimed, was underpinned by well-motivated teachers, longer periods in schools, and

committed parents. However, the criticism that they creamed off the best pupils from State schools in their area was also mentioned, and the editorial went on to warn that it would be wrong to see charter schools as ‘some sort of panacea’ for under-achievement (New Zealand Herald, 7 December 2011). In similar vein, a Christchurch Press article indicatively titled ‘No mandate for charter schools’ cited Ian Leckie, president of the New Zealand Educational Institute warning that overseas research from the USA, the UK and Sweden did not support government claims that they would decisively lift educational achievement (The Press, 19 December 2011).

Clearly charter schools represent a major shift in public policy that will have profound effects on children’s learning, the provision and funding of schools, and the relationships between teachers and parents. In the remainder of this report we analyse some of the issues and evidence relating to similar schools in other jurisdictions in the hope that the possible damage can be ameliorated and the proposal serve to invigorate rather than undermine the good work which is undoubtedly being done in existing schools which, as we saw above, is acknowledged by the Minister responsible for charter schools, Hon John Banks. In chapter two, we summarise the preparatory work undertaken by the previous National coalition government following its formation in 2008. This work aimed to provide an ‘evidence-based’ justification for the re-introduction of policy and funding mechanisms to promote school ‘choice’, ‘diversity’ and greater ‘autonomy’ from State control. In chapter three, we examine the nature of the relationship between schools and society, and summarise how the State’s commitment to the funding and provision of a public schooling system in which parents have a major decision-making role, is reflected in the structures and provisions of the 1989 Education Act. In this chapter we also identify where the National-ACT charter school proposal would serve to weaken the State’s existing obligations to students and parents. Chapter four provides an overview of charter school initiatives in other jurisdictions and chapters five to seven examine in detail the effects on educational inequalities of ‘free schools’ in Sweden, ‘academies’ and similar experiments in England, and ‘charter schools’ in the USA. In chapter eight we examine theoretically the relationship between equity and choice in education illustrating the points by reference to developments in New Zealand since the reforms of Tomorrow’s Schools which, like the current proposals, placed choice and competition in the forefront of educational policy. In chapter nine we examine selected research-based alternatives for New Zealand. These focus on literacy, mathematics and pedagogically focused, targeted class size reduction (CSR) strategies. In chapter ten, we look to the education

system of Finland, in which equity and achievement strategies, together with high levels of political and community trust in the knowledge and professionalism of teachers, have combined to produce one of the most successful education systems in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. Finally, in chapter eleven, we conclude our investigation of charter schooling as a whole and on the basis of the comprehensive evidence we have assembled, we make a considered response to National-ACT proposal for a charter school system for New Zealand.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE NATIONAL-ACT CONFIDENCE AND SUPPLY AGREEMENT 2008**

Most people were taken by surprise with the 2011 announcement of this new type of school but behind the scenes much had already taken place, which had past unnoticed by the electorate.

In 2008, the National coalition government was formed on the basis of Confidence and Supply Agreements with the ACT Party, the Māori Party, and United Future. The National-ACT Confidence and Supply Agreement stated that the National-ACT parties were committed ‘to increase the education choices available to parents and pupils [and also] to report on policy options relating to the funding and regulation of schools that will increase parental choice and school autonomy’ (cited in Roy, 2010b, p. 4). To fulfil these commitments, an Inter-Party Working Group (IPWG) was formed with the Hon Heather Roy as Chair in April 2009 (Roy, 2010b). Over the course of a year the IPWG ‘reviewed current practice in New Zealand, and best practice overseas...with visits to schools around the country’ (Roy, Parata, & Flavell, 2010, p. 1).

#### **‘Step Change’**

In 2010, the Hon Heather Roy MP, Hekia Parata MP, and Te Ururoa Flavell MP launched the ‘Step change: Success the Only Option’ report on school choice. The IPWG’s stated aim was to contribute to the improvement of the education system as a whole and thus to better education outcomes (Roy, 2010b, p. 4). The report was also a response to the decision of the previous Labour government (1999-2008) to abolish the ‘fully funded option’ (in which management of all salary and operational grants was devolved to the school) and reintroduce schools zones and capped rolls (to restrict school choice mechanisms). The report found that the state of education in New Zealand in terms of literacy was generally positive. However, it was stated that the education system underperforms for a significant minority of students: many do not gain NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) Level 2 or higher; Māori and Pasifika students lag behind; only one in five schools provides appropriate and responsive programmes to gifted and talented students; and the stand down, exclusion and expulsion rates for Māori and Pasifika students are exceptionally high. The report noted that while better educational outcomes are possible for every student; the focus of educational change would be on ‘the roughly 20 percent who are not only

failing but are continuing to fall ever further behind in the current system, along with the top 5 percent of students, who are gifted and talented’ (p. 5).

The IPWG recommended an initiative ‘directed at effecting measurably improved outcomes for the 20 and 5 percent that bookend the current continuum of student achievement with the view that this initiative can be applied, over time, to the system as a whole’ (p. 6). The IPWG reviewed educational policies and initiatives from overseas to offer opportunities for improvement. For example Sweden’s free schools reportedly give ‘students in failing schools access to their school of choice. US charter schools... address the worst educational failure in school districts, and the UK has [a] number of academies that... tackle the worst education problems in local education authorities’ (p. 6).<sup>1</sup>

The report favoured ‘personalised learning’ (programmes tailored to the diverse needs of students) with some schools and teachers possibly emerging as ‘learning brokers’ (p. 8); Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to assist schools with learning plans, feedback and assessment; and flexible curriculum and credential offerings (Correspondence, Cambridge International Examinations, International Baccalaureate). The IPWG also highlighted factors that influence achievement influencing such as student-teacher relationships (Hattie cited in Roy, 2010b, p. 8), cultural competency (Ministry of Education cited in Roy, 2010b, p. 8), formative assessment, reflection, and cultural knowledge (Bishop & Berryman, cited in Roy, 2010b, p. 9) and quality learning facilitation (Hattie cited in Roy, 2010b, p. 9). The IPWG asserted that these recommendations for policy would address the problems associated with the 20 percent of students not achieving to their potential and the 5 percent of gifted and talented students; and would have a particular focus on personalised learning that ‘catches the falling and failing’ (p. 9).

The IPWG presented an eight-step initiative in response to these recommendations aimed at 6-16 year-olds to address the issues associated with the ‘highest- and lowest-performing students’ (p. 10). The following is a brief description of this initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that although the IPWG cited Sweden, the USA, and the UK as examples of countries that were more successfully addressing problems in their educational systems than New Zealand, the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2010, 2011) reported that New Zealand ranked higher than all three in mean scores for reading, mathematics, and science.

*‘Step 1: Student identification’*; based on National Standards (or other age-based assessments).

*‘Step 2: Provider identification’*; based on the capacity to deliver successful outcomes for students, reputation and achievements.

*‘Step 3: Provider prospectuses’*; published information that describes teacher-student ratios, pedagogy, ICT usage, and on how they develop personal learning plans to raise student performance.

*‘Step 4: Student (and family/whānau) choose a principal provider and/or a range of providers’*; a principle provider that may include other providers (such as a learning broker) to tailor their programmes to the students’ personal needs, allowing for greater options to be selected by students or family/whānau and transparency of monitoring and assessment systems across providers.

*‘Step 5: Personal learning plan agreed’*; ‘provider(s) sign up to the students’ personal learning plans and to their successful delivery and achievement’.

*‘Step 6: First (of two) tranche of student performance fee paid to provider’*; the amount of the ‘student’s scholarship would be developed using a formula that weights for the particular student’s needs...Providers will also be incentivised by receiving more per capita than they currently receive’.

*‘Step 7: Performance of student monitored and assessed, amended and supported as necessary including provider, broker/mentor, and family whānau’*.

*‘Step 8: Student succeeds — a second tranche of student performance fee paid as a success bonus to provider’*.

Optional steps may include: a) ‘Student (and their family/whānau) chooses a learning broker mentor’; b) ‘Student (and family/whānau) developing a personal learning plan with a learning broker mentor’ and or c) ‘Learning broker mentor and principal provider negotiate a learning pathway’. (pp. 10-11)

It was asserted that funding for this initiative would ‘be fiscally neutral; and that monies [would] be drawn from existing operational funding component reallocation’ (p. 12).

The IPWG claimed that several beneficial consequences would flow from the eight-step initiative such as ‘attracting top New Zealanders from overseas...or permitting flexibility with training, so that learning mentors are trained on site’ (p. 13); offering flexibility in class size, length of the day and/or year in school, choice for providers to hire and train ‘as learning broker mentors’ and in the allocation of salaries and bonuses (p.

13); permitting the expansion of successful providers to meet the burgeoning demand (for example, State school property may be transferred into a new property specialist Crown entity); allowing students to enrol easily in a school that is out of zone or already oversubscribed (for which it might be necessary to have weighted scholarships that take into account individual needs, paid to the provider and/or split over multiple sites); and finally providers would publish information on how they raise achievement, demonstrating students' progress over a set amount of time. The IPWG speculated that 'If the initiative is successful it can be extended to the remaining 75 percent of New Zealand students [and recommended] that the Minister...establish a Taskforce...to explore this initiative for implementation in the 2011 school year' (p. 15).

### **'Free to Learn'**

The 'Step change: Success the Only Option' report was supported by all members of the IPWG, but another report, titled 'Free to Learn' was released the following day by Hon Sir Roger Douglas MP and Hon Heather Roy MP. This report was the ACT Party minority view on the 'Step change: Success the only option' report. It stated that 'while ACT is fully supportive of the recommendations put forward in 'Step Change'', it believed that the report would have a greater impact if all NZ students were allowed to benefit from these recommendations (Roy, 2010a, p. 1). Roy and Douglas (2010) claimed that the education system would be 'better' if compulsory education were to operate in an open market (p. 8), and be opened up more to public-private partnerships such as the current arrangements in Sweden; an increased school autonomy to release 'the power of the market, that enables teachers to distinguish themselves, and that sees salaries commensurate with competence' (p. 8); the removal of 'credential requirements for teaching and recognise[d] the value of prior learning' (p. 9); a lifting of the 2008 'moratorium on expansion and the cap on Student Achievement Component funding' (for tertiary students), a removal of 'the research requirements for funding on private teacher-training providers' (p. 9); Graduating Teacher Standards and Satisfactory Teaching Dimensions to be replaced with supposedly more 'rigorous professional standards' (p. 9); flexibility for providers to make space for learning (transferring State school property to a crown entity); transparency of information given to parents on the provider's performance; provisions for students to transfer schools, 'reflecting the Swedish policy that has opened up the supply side of schooling [increasing] parent satisfaction and financial efficiency' and the success of USA charter schools in raising student achievements 'to extraordinary

heights’ (p. 9); and a ‘funding mechanism that place[d] value directly into the hands of parents, or on students’ heads [with the added result of] revolutionis[ing] provider behaviour’ (p. 9). The authors recommended the introduction of targeted funding which could be divided and used by one or more sites ‘and used in a state, state-integrated, for-profit or not-for-profit setting...either through scholarships or tax credits on children’s compulsory schooling for parents/caregivers or guardians’ (p. 70).

Roy and Douglas (2010) also drew on policy initiatives overseas to make the case for greater school autonomy in New Zealand. They mentioned England’s academies, Sweden’s free schools, USA charter schools, the ‘quasi voucher (scholarship)’ system in Australia, and National schools, Gaelscoileanna schools, and multi-denominational schools in Ireland as examples of policy changes that give parents greater choice and schools more autonomy. They highlighted Sweden as ‘a benchmark in education reform [offering] genuine supply flexibility, a funding arrangement – a scholarship (voucher) – that follows the child, and independent management of schools’ (p. 24). Using these examples, they asserted the desirability of changes to the New Zealand education system such as easing regulations to permit new education providers to enter the compulsory education sector and allow for school expansion, establishing special character schools, enabling providers to specialise, and permitting schools to lease or licence their learning spaces to alternative providers. They further recommended having ‘professional standards [for teachers], similar to accountancy and law [and lifting] the moratorium on the expansion of presently successful and highly valued private teacher-training providers – such as New Zealand Graduate School of Education in Christchurch’ (p. 33). It was claimed that this would aid in solving the supposed ‘problem of teacher supply [and the fact that] New Zealand is suffering from a dearth of quality teachers and leaders’ (p. 33). It was asserted that these changes ‘could increase the supply of quality teachers through straight competition, as for example, Singapore has done, by making teaching so desirable that would-be and able teachers contend for sought-after places’ (p. 33). The proposed policies would purportedly allow for principals to give incentives to teachers and offer them a career with clear benchmarks for advancement. The authors concluded by speculating that these policy changes ‘would likely inject energy and urgency into compulsory education, and eject unwanted providers [and] stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation with education management organisations and for-profits entering the market, while lessening the expense of schooling’ (p. 71).

These two reports had few noticeable effects in community or policy discourses and on the surface nothing to advance either was done by the National coalition government in its first term. There is, nevertheless, some anecdotal evidence that behind the scenes much was being done to facilitate dramatic changes to education in a second term, for which the government confidently expected to be returned in the 2011 parliamentary elections. However, the agenda was not mentioned during the election campaign by National, and was not given prominence by ACT. In any event, it was widely assumed that ACT would struggle to return to Parliament given its internal political battles in the year prior to the election. Thus, the announcement in 2011 shortly following the election of a commitment to introduce a charter school system came as a complete surprise to most people.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SCHOOL AND SOCIETY

We are pleased to note in the 2011 National-ACT Confidence and Supply Agreement a recognition that educational underachievement is not the responsibility of the school alone and no amount of changes to the administration of schools will, of itself, solve the problem. As the Agreement says, ‘Both parties agree that to break this cycle a range of mutually-supporting reforms is required in the areas of welfare, primary health, education, youth transition and employment law’ (p. 3). We agree that inequality of school achievement is New Zealand’s main education problem and that something must be done to remedy this situation. But we remain unconvinced that the government has a coherent policy strategy covering all the relevant sectors: to be sure, there are individual policies which relate to welfare benefits, privatisation of ACC (Accident Compensation Corporation), health funding, and employment but it is difficult to see how these form a strategy to address the basic problem of poverty and its effects on housing, health, crime, educational achievement and personal relationships. Despite the rhetoric there does not seem to be a coherent policy programme which would in practice remedy ‘the disadvantages already faced by children in vulnerable, at-risk communities, [which] can contribute to intergenerational disadvantage, poor health, poverty, joblessness, welfare dependence, criminal offending and social dysfunction’ (p. 3). Without such a strategic policy programme, charter schools will not reduce educational inequalities.

Two members of our group (Snook and O’Neill) have examined the literature on the factors leading to underachievement. They conclude:

The overwhelming weight of the evidence that we have assembled leads to the view that enlightened principals can shape a learning culture and well educated teachers can foster individual achievement, but this is not enough. There must also be changes in the wider community and this will require changes in social and economic policy, including parent support, pre-school and out-of-school education programmes, and efforts to enhance family and community well-being. Governments which want to substantially reduce unequal educational achievement must institute policies which both reduce social and economic inequalities and directly address the cognitive and affective disadvantages these cause long before schooling begins. (Snook & O’Neill, 2010, p. 15)

It follows that, although changes to educational policy can improve the situation of the low achieving child, they can just as easily lead to further deterioration if, for example, the policy leads to greater segregation of low achieving children or movement of the best teachers to schools which are already advantaged. When such things result, it is true that in education, as in economic life, ‘the rich get richer and the poor get poorer’.

While the statistical relationship between successful schooling achievement outcomes and subsequent economic prosperity for both individuals (earnings) and countries (gross national product) is well-established, it is increasingly recognised by governments that education also contributes to a range of important non-achievement, non-economic indicators of personal and social well-being. According to the OECD, ‘education can play a significant role in promoting well-being and social progress’ (2010, p. 11). Also, education ‘has been shown to be a relatively cost-effective means of improving health and reducing crime’ (p.11). More specifically:

Education helps individuals make informed and competent decisions by providing information, improving their cognitive skills and strengthening their socio-emotional capabilities, such as resilience, self-efficacy and social skills. As such, education can help individuals follow healthier lifestyles, manage illness, increase their interest in political issues and understand why immigrants can bring substantial benefits to society. Moreover, education can offer an ideal environment for children to develop healthy habits and participatory attitudes. For instance, nutritiously balanced school meals can help develop healthy eating habits and complement classes that inform students about the importance of maintaining a well balanced diet and nutrition. Open classroom climate, civic classes that require practical involvement in civic matters and school ethos that promote active citizenship can be conducive to stronger civic participation. (p. 12)

Education, it is argued, also serves important social and educational equity purposes in helping to ameliorate the consequences of before birth and early life disadvantage for significant numbers of children. But in order to do this well, the OECD maintains that governments must work holistically: ‘Policy coherence requires governments to promote strong linkage horizontally (i.e. across ministries of education, health, family and welfare), vertically (i.e. across central, regional and local levels of government) and dynamically (i.e. across different levels of education)’ (p. 14).

Public schooling is compulsory and nominally free for the very good reason that it contributes significantly to public policy coherence across the array of social services in the contemporary State. Private schools as for-profit companies or incorporated not-for-profit trusts have no statutory or civic obligation to contribute to these broader socio-economic imperatives. Indeed, private schools are established solely to satisfy the wishes and needs of particular groups of children and families, not the wishes and needs of society as a whole. The basic morality of private schooling militates strongly against public policy coherence because private schooling is regarded largely as a personal positional good with minimal social or public benefit. In contrast, public schools are explicitly required by the state both to promote common cognitive, affective and civic goals across the population as a whole, and to strive to reduce educational inequalities between students within the local school community, and between the local community and similar communities nationally. Every child is entitled to enroll at the nearest public school irrespective of abilities or the capacity to pay. A public school is regarded as a State service funded through general taxation and provided to the local community for the collective good of everyone in the community. Public schooling is therefore regarded as a social good, a major objective of which is to promote greater equity of educational outcomes and social justice for all (e.g., Olssen, 1999).

### **Characteristics of a State public schooling system**

An integrated public schooling system has consequently long been regarded as essential to the promotion of both social and economic wellbeing across all of society by governments of all political persuasions. Today, in New Zealand, it has the following characteristics.

#### *A national State school system*

New Zealand has had just such a unified national system of State schools since 1877. Between 1877 and 1989, regional education boards administered state primary schools. State secondary schools were administered directly by the state Department of Education, though individual boards had a good deal of financial and administrative autonomy. The 1989 Education Act created a new, direct legislative relationship between the Minister of Education and each school Board of Trustees. The Board membership comprises a majority who are parents of children at the school, elected periodically by the parent body as a whole. However, it remains a national system of locally governed schools subject to common legislation and regulation.

*All State schools are obligated to meet national and local targets for student achievement*

The basis of the national government-local community relationship is the school's charter. This is a formal agreement between the Minister and the individual school's local community Board of Trustees. The charter incorporates both national education priorities legislated by government, and local education priorities decided by each Board of Trustees following consultation with parents of children at the school. The 2001 Educational Standards Act (S61-63B) redefined the mandatory sections of the local school charter in the 1989 principal act to comprise: (i) specific responsibilities to Māori and for the promotion of biculturalism; (ii) long-term priorities for student outcomes and related matters; and (iii) annual targets for student outcomes and related matters and their achievement. All State schools in New Zealand are therefore already 'charter schools' with clearly and comprehensively articulated aims, goals, targets and accountabilities (see below). In contrast, the criteria for registration as a private school are very broadly defined and non-prescriptive (S35C). A private school must be administered by a manager. The manager may be an incorporated trust or private company (S35G). There are no public accountability requirements with regard to the curriculum and the only stipulation with regard to tuition is that it must be 'of a standard no lower than that of the tuition given to students enrolled at State schools of the same class levels' (S35F1). In this regard, the requirements of schools to be established under the National-ACT proposed 'charter school system' would, at first glance, appear to be intended to have more in common with private schools in New Zealand than they do those of existing State schools with all their attendant public accountabilities.

*Mutual responsibilities of the Crown and each board of trustees*

The 1989 Act contains various sections that specify the responsibilities and obligations of both parties to the charter in considerable detail. These responsibilities and obligations are based on broad principles of local community democracy and civic participation in governance by parents of children enrolled at the local school. The Act grants extensive powers to the Minister and Secretary of Education to require boards of trustees to identify and meet students' learning needs, and to permit the Minister and Secretary to intervene in the governance and management of any school where this is not the case. It is therefore difficult to envisage how the National-ACT proposed charter school system would provide any additional protections or rights to students enrolled at a State school, and

their families, beyond those that are already in existence. On the contrary, the proposed system of charter schools would appear to diminish or remove some basic protections and rights.

### *The rights of the student*

The 1989 Act entitles all students to receive education at a local school. For example, under Section 3 every person is entitled to enrol and receive free primary and secondary education at any State school. Section 8 provides equal rights to primary and secondary education for students with special educational needs. Section 11A states that enrolment schemes should not exclude local students. However, Section 11C, 1c also permits schools to ‘identify any special programmes offered by the school and the criteria on which students will be accepted onto any special programme.’ Given that under the proposed National-ACT charter school system, each school would be able to define a specific ‘mission’ and ‘area of specialisation’ (p. 7), this would seem to permit selective intakes of students, based on the charter group and school’s decision about their suitability.

### *The school’s dual local and national accountabilities*

Section 60A accords the Minister of Education powers to specify numerous matters that each Board must enact including: national education goals for the State school system as a whole; ‘statements of policy concerning teaching, learning, and assessment’; the areas and levels of knowledge, skills and understanding to be achieved by students; ‘national standards’ of achievement for students of particular age groups or years of schooling; and national administration guidelines including codes of school governance and administration conduct and planning and reporting requirements. Under the National-ACT charter school system proposal, it would appear that where such requirements continued to exist, groups operating charter schools would exercise some or all of these powers on behalf of the Minister of Education. In this sense, a system of unelected charter school operators (including private sector companies) and a commercial contractual relationship would largely replace the current social democratic principles of State school administration.

### *All State schools are ‘charter’ schools*

Under Section 61 of the 1989 Education Act, all State schools are already charter schools. The National–ACT proposal to introduce a charter school

system of State schools is therefore puzzling. If charter schools already exist, then the real purpose of the proposal cannot be to introduce them. The stated purpose of the charter is to ‘provide a base against which the board’s actual performance can later be assessed’ (S61, 2). Section 66 permits the Board of Trustees to delegate specified powers or functions of the board to a committee provided that at least one committee member is a trustee. But, importantly, the board may *not* delegate the general power of delegation (S66, 3). This Section of the Act reinforces the priority given to local parental body governance of each State school. The National-Act proposal, however, would remove this local governance requirement by permitting boards of trustees to ‘contract out management to not-for-profit or for-profit education providers’ (p. 7). In effect, this could lead to a situation in which neither the charter school operator, nor the contract manager, would have any relationship with the local parent body or community of the school. This contradicts the fundamental social democratic principles of the Tomorrow’s Schools reforms.

Section 75 of the 1989 Act states that ‘a school’s board has complete discretion to control the management of the school as it thinks fit’. Under the proposed National-ACT charter school system, schools would be ‘externally accountable to charter school sponsors’ and ‘will be required to enter into a contractual relationship with sponsors, with the latter being responsible for ensuring that charter schools meet agreed student achievement goals, as well as financial and operational standards’ (p. 8). This also would appear to distance the governance of schools further from locally elected representatives of the parent body.

#### *State powers to intervene in schools at risk*

Section 78H of the Act provides ‘a range of interventions that may be used to address risks to the operation of individual schools or to the welfare or educational performance of their students’. Thus the Minister already has considerable statutory powers to intervene in the governance, administration and management of any State school. These include: a requirement for the board to engage specialist help; or to prepare and carry out an action plan; and government or Ministry powers to appoint a limited statutory manager, or, on dissolution of the board, a commissioner (S78I). The key difference between this section of the Act and the proposed charter school system is that the powers of intervention are limited to those steps required to steps that the Minister or Secretary of Education considers ‘is reasonable to deal with the risk without intervening more than necessary in the affairs of the school’ (S78I, 4). In other words, the underlying assumption is that full governance powers

shall at some stage be restored to the local community board of trustees. Under the proposed National-ACT charter school system, governance powers may be transferred permanently to a charter school group, which may be for-profit or not-for-profit, but in either case is not required to have any local connection or electoral mandate from the parents of children enrolled at the school, as at present.

### *Corporatisation of State schools*

Sections 22 and 23 of the Education Amendment Act 2010 modified the requirement for limited statutory managers and commissioners to be natural persons and permitted instead the appointment of a body corporate. However, no changes were made to Section 94 of the principal Act, which articulates the principle of a majority of elected local parent representatives. In short, the Minister and Secretary currently have sufficient legislative authority to appoint natural persons or body corporates to administer schools on behalf of the State, but only for as long as is required to mitigate a perceived risk to school operations and assure student achievement. In contrast, the National-ACT proposals for charter school system would facilitate permanent transfer of powers and State funding to the private sector, without the agreement of the local parent body.

Sections 79 to 89 of the Act (especially S87) provide for complete transparency of the financial operations of every State school nationally. Under the National-ACT proposals, charter schools would be externally accountable to charter school sponsors, ‘with the latter being responsible for ensuring that charter schools meet agreed student achievement goals, as well as financial and operational standards’ (p. 8). In other words, the proposal would appear to involve reduced public scrutiny and accountability both for individual charter schools and the sponsoring organisation.

### *The overriding principle of governance by parents of children at the local school*

Section 93, 1 of the Act states the expectation that there shall be a board of trustees for every State school. The National-ACT charter school system proposes that groups or networks of schools may be operated, which undermines this principle of local governance of the community school by locally elected parents. While Sections 94 and 95 of the Act permit the involvement of body corporates in governance and for a board to govern more than one school, it is evident from the wording of the Act

that it is not the intention of parliament is that a body corporate should be a substitute for the norm of a locally elected board of trustees from among the parents of children currently enrolled at the school (S96). Section 99 of the Act specifies the desirable attributes of a board. These emphasise the expectation that every board of a State school shall reflect the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of students at the school, and the character of the community served by the school. Boards are also required to have regard to these criteria when co-opting or appointing trustees. This again reflects the principles of social democracy and civic participation that are evident throughout the Act and the Tomorrow's Schools policy. In contrast, the National-ACT proposed charter system specifies no such requirement on charter school operators; indeed the contractual powers of the charter operator would appear to take priority over any local governance entitlements of parents of children enrolled at the school.

Sections 101 and following elaborate the election and operation of boards of trustees. These clearly prioritise local democracy and the preferences of the local community in all governance decisions. It is evident, for example, from Section 103A that the normal practice is for the board to decide when to subcontract management or administration services to an incorporated society or company. Section 105A permits the Minister to mandate an alternative board constitution. However, the clear intent of the Act is to maintain the principle of State school governance by the local board of trustees. In contrast, the emphasis of the National-ACT proposed charter system is for the incorporated society or private company to decide what administrative and management responsibilities to delegate to the board. This, in effect, is a radical departure from the principles of local governance, social democracy and civic participation in State schools. Notwithstanding, Section 156 of the 1989 Act does grant the Minister power to designate a State school as a special character school. However, the special character school must be requested by parents whose children are or would be enrolled at the school, must differ 'significantly from the education they would get at an ordinary State school; and is not available at any other State school that children of the parents concerned can conveniently attend' (S156, 2d).

### *Attracting quality teachers*

With regard to the proposal that charter school operators may employ and pay teachers under different conditions from those that obtain in other schools, this would appear to threaten the principles of uniformity and equity of teacher employment that currently exist. Under section 120A of

the 1989 Act, only teachers with practising certificates may be appointed to permanent teaching positions. Section 74 of the State Sector Act 1988 states that all employees of the education service, including school employees, must be treated as if they were employees of the State Services Commissioner. Every collective agreement must be negotiated by the Commissioner with a union and is binding on employers and employees who are members of the union. Section 91H of the Act enables the Crown to manage its financial liabilities by setting limits annually on the appointment and employment of teachers at State schools. However, these powers are generally intended to apply equally to all schools in similar circumstances. In other words, a principle of the appointment and employment of teachers is that it should be equitable and rational across all schools. These various provisions permit all State schools to appoint the best teachers they can attract without having to be concerned with the affordability of teachers.

### *Financial and ethical issues*

There are other issues which may have long term implications should charter schools become a significant part of the education system. The first is financial. Charter schools will, it is currently suggested, be able to draw to some extent on government funding. The evidence for this becoming a major problem is admittedly historical, but should nevertheless be seriously considered. During the mid-late 1980s for instance, the expansion of private schooling in New Zealand led to a crisis in loan finance for independent school building programmes. Loan applications greatly exceeded allocated funding with the result that the arrangements became unsustainable, leading to Treasury recommending an urgent upwards review of interest rates (ABEP, 1987).

There is also the wider issue of parental and children's rights, a significant feature of the Tomorrow's Schools reforms. Once again in the mid-late 1980s, Treasury files indicate that there was some concern that 'the rationale behind section 109 of the Education Act would be seriously undermined if, for instance, individuals could set up "schools" as fronts for the exploitation and "deskilling" of children' (e.g., Mintrom, 1987). Moreover, much of the opposition of homeschoolers to the notion of a charter continues to be based on the belief that the requirement violates the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights statement that parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that should be given to their children.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CHARTER SCHOOLS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS: INTERPRETING THE EVIDENCE

In this chapter and the three that follow, we consider the evidence on charter school and similar experiments. This chapter summarises the challenges of interpreting the evidence. The next three chapters analyse the country evidence from Sweden, England and the USA respectively.

There is a vast quantity of research evaluating the effects of charter schools (and equivalent models), much of which has been carried out in the USA. Most of the studies have been about achievement as measured by comparing the mean scores on standardised tests of reading and mathematics of students enrolled in charter schools with those who remain at ordinary publicly funded local community schools.<sup>2</sup> Other studies have examined the social and racial composition of students in charter schools; the status, daily working conditions and pay of teachers; the amounts and sources of revenue acquired by charter schools compared to their local community counterparts; the market effects of choice-competition on all State schools in a local community; and the mix that emerges over time in a school system of parent-, not-for-profit-, and for-profit-controlled charter school operators or owners.

This much broader research agenda on the effects of charter schooling is important to be able to assess fairly the capacity of a charter school system to deliver more equitable education for all. Genuine achievement gains for the most structurally disadvantaged students in public schools are to be warmly applauded. The issue, however, is whether such gains in

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<sup>2</sup> John Hattie (Hattie, 2009) synthesised more than 800 studies of the variables which are associated with student achievement. This book has been widely cited by politicians, bureaucrats, and the media to support policies that they favour and to undermine those which they reject. Hattie's analyses figure favourably in Roy (2010b). It is therefore interesting that he found a very low effect size for charter schools (0.2), which is virtually identical to that for class size and a little lower than that for homework. Both of these effect sizes have been used to 'show' that class size and homework make no difference to student learning. Furthermore, in relation to charter schools he adds 'when the lower quality studies were excluded the difference dropped to zero' (p. 76). This group has argued that Hattie's work has major weaknesses and cannot be used to generate or support educational policy (Snook et al., 2009). Nevertheless it must be said that the politicians, bureaucrats and the media have an obligation to be consistent in citing evidence: if Hattie's work 'shows' that class size is irrelevant, it also 'shows' that charter schools make no greater difference to student achievement. From our point of view the low scores on both class size and charter schools arise from the same contaminating source: both 'class size' and 'charter schools' are meaningless as variables: what matters is what goes on in the (small) class and in the (charter) school.

charter schools, when they occur, are: (i) secured by fair means; (ii) the result of fair comparisons between different types of schools; and (iii) realised without further marginalising students in the same disadvantaged community who do not attend charter schools. These are basic matters of social justice. Charter schools are often claimed by their proponents to lead inexorably to greater equity of achievement (see chapter two). Our analysis of the evidence of actual effects suggests that all too often their introduction leads to greater inequities of access and participation, while at the same time having highly variable effects on student achievement, both within a particular school and across a community of public schools as a whole.

We might hope, then, that before New Zealand launches on its planned charter school system experiment, it could learn from this large volume of research, about both potential strengths, and potential weaknesses. Unfortunately, that is not as easy as it may seem especially in relation to achievement.

The research on charter schools and student achievement, though vast, is inconclusive. In our view, it is of limited help in evaluating the policy of charter schools in New Zealand except in suggesting that overall the evidence for the success of charter schools in solving the problems outlined by proponents is meagre. Thus, for example, the much quoted ‘CREDO study’ (Centre for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009a) by Stanford University claimed that across the whole of the USA in terms of achievement 17 percent of charter schools do better, 56 percent are the same as state schools and 37 percent are worse. They found a large variation across states depending on local policies and the nature of charters. They also claim to have found that charter schools are better for lower achieving students, and at the elementary and middle level, but worse at upper secondary level. They also claim that African American and Hispanic students do worse in charter schools. They conclude, ‘In short we know very little— in the broadest sense—about the educational impact of charter schools, beyond a number of conflicting achievement studies’ (p. 7). The same would broadly be true of the other two national contexts we examine later in this report: Sweden and England.

Moreover, we note with some disquiet that charter or similar schooling schemes have been in place in all of these jurisdictions in one form or another since the early 1990s. This begs the question: If there remains no compelling evidence of their efficacy after several school generations’ worth of experimentation with children’s life chances, and with as yet no meaningful and sustainable reduction in overall educational inequalities

within any of the countries where charter schools have been trialled, is it not now time to look at research-proven educational alternatives to the ‘choice’, ‘competition’ and narrow accountability ‘standards’ political ideology that charter schools represent?

### **Charter school studies of achievement are inconclusive**

The reasons why the studies of achievement in charter schools are so inconclusive are varied but include the following.

#### *Unclear definition of terms*

The notion of ‘charter school/free school’ is not defined except for the idea that it has more autonomy from local authorities, funding regimes, and curriculum control. There is no charter school philosophy of education, curriculum or method of teaching. It is not, for example like Steiner Schools or Kura Kaupapa Māori, which have a particular approach to education. This means that there are as many types of charter schools as there are views about schools: some charter schools are very authoritarian and rigidly structured while others are student centred with little compulsion. Some, indeed, are owned and controlled by teachers. Studies that show the superiority or inferiority of charter schools tend to ignore the enormous variety of such schools (and often the enormous variety of public/State schools with which charter schools are being compared.). This basic confusion seriously contaminates any so-called comparisons between ‘charter schools’ and ‘public schools’ in terms of the achievement of their students.

#### *Findings are not generalisable to all charter schools*

In the USA, studies of state systems cannot be generalised to the nation as a whole (much less to other jurisdictions): each state has its own laws, tests, data bases, and funding mechanisms. For similar reasons, studies that claim to report on the USA as a whole are often affected by wide varieties in the results for individual states. There is no universally agreed methodology or database. Each researcher adopts her/his own approach and produces his/her own database. Thus each study is found to be defective by other researchers whose work in turn is then fundamentally criticised by others. It is, perhaps, then not surprising (though it is very worrying) that Kinderra (2012) reports Betts and Tang’s claim that when doing their meta-analysis of charter school research they had to reject 75 percent of studies because ‘they failed to account for differences in the backgrounds and academic histories of traditional public-school students

and those who chose to go to charter [school]’ (in Kinderra, 2012, p. 1). And Betts and Atkinson reportedly claim that most charter school studies ‘use unsophisticated methods that tell us little about causal effects’ (in Kinderra, 2012, p. 1). A Consensus Panel of nine outstanding researchers from different methodological traditions was set up to review all charter school studies. They stated:

Sixteen years after the nation’s first charter school opened in Minnesota, there are 4,300 charter schools serving 1.2 million students in 40 states and the District of Columbia. Yet the quality of these schools across the country varies greatly, ranging from those that rank among the nation’s finest schools to some that serve their students poorly and improve little over time. Thus, the powerful potential of the charter movement – to increase quality public school options for all children, particularly for the minority and disadvantaged students “left behind” in traditional school systems – is compromised. (National Consensus Panel for Academic Quality, 2008, p.1)

Despite this, all members agree on the importance of improving the quality of charter school research. They reviewed and rated more than 40 evaluations of charter school performance released between 2000 and 2005. They found that the studies evaluating charter schools nationally or across states were all ‘fair’ to ‘poor’. Increasingly rigorous methods were more common in those studies evaluating charter schools within a particular district or state, but findings from district or state-specific studies cannot be easily generalized to charter schools nationally because charter school laws and oversight vary so widely from jurisdiction to jurisdiction (p. 1).

*Only mean student performance results are commonly reported*

Most studies use mean performance as the measure of comparison. While this is useful, there is also need for other measures that look at performance at the top or bottom. Why should we focus on mean performance particularly when we are concerned about the performance of those ‘at the bottom’ (or as it has come to be known in New Zealand, ‘The long tail of underachievement’)? A school could readily raise the mean score without improving in any way the achievement of the bottom 20 percent. We cannot judge one school to be better than another simply on the grounds of mean performance of its students on some test or other. Equally, achievement gains on standardised tests are often secured at the expense of other, equally important dimensions of learning, teaching and

children's identity formation (i.e. by 'teaching to the test'). Much more fine-grained qualitative work needs to be done to assess the overall effect of schools. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that even when a school (charter or district) scores really badly parents refuse to allow its closure, insisting that it is nevertheless a good school for their children who are happy there.

*Statistically significant results may not be important or sustainable in everyday practice*

There is also a serious problem in deciding whether the measured difference between schools is important or significant enough to warrant the enormous outlay of resources. In most studies, the measured differences, though statistically significant, are quite small and cannot be directly applied to actual schools let alone overall educational policy. Quite frequently we read a study which says, for example, that charter schools do marginally better than control schools in mathematics, and much the same or marginally worse in reading. Or we find a significant difference at grade 9 which has vanished a year or so later. What are we to make of such data? Björklund and colleagues (2005) argue that if they are to be convincing, the measured differences should be much the same for all subjects and at all levels. Ideally they should also persist into tertiary study and adult life. But such rational criteria are unlikely to be generally accepted by those who undertake research on charter schools (see below).

*Too few charter school researchers are sufficiently objective*

Few researchers of charter schooling are scientifically detached or neutral. They are not primarily interested in the truth of the matter but are already committed to a position on charter schools: either in full support or total opposition. In this respect the research is political as well as 'scientific'. This is not to say that the research is always consciously biased (though sometime it is) but it is clear that a researcher's personal position often affects her/his approach to the research and the interpretation of results. It is significant that the various pieces of research are greeted differentially in the community. Research which 'shows' that charter schools are inferior is greeted fulsomely by State teachers and their supporters while the research which 'shows' that they are better is played up by the media and the politicians who implemented the policy.

## **The role of the media**

Generally speaking, the news media in the USA, the UK and New Zealand tend to represent education, particularly state-provided education as being ‘in crisis’. Hence editorials in major daily newspapers for instance, are prone to take the side of those seeking to introduce reforms, which are presumed to cure the problems. In the UK, education historian Richard Aldrich has critically examined the key role of negative education headlines in shaping public attitudes towards education, post-World War Two (Aldrich, 2000).

In New Zealand, Dorothy Roulston’s examination of five major daily newspapers during the period 1978-1982 underlined their significance in the selection and presentation of negative educational news (Roulston, 1986). During this period the teacher professional associations in particular were associated with industrial action with the newspapers viewing this as detrimental to students (Openshaw, 2009, pp. 47-49). At various other times, newspaper editorials have reported and generated public concern over allegedly falling academic standards in state schools, often linking them to issues of provider capture or to the introduction of new pedagogies and curricula (e.g., Openshaw & Walshaw, 2010; pp. 46-65; pp. 88-97; pp. 148-151). These trends have largely continued until the present (e.g., Roulston, 2006). The news media in this country is almost invariably on the side of those criticising state schools while their contempt for State schoolteachers (more specifically, ‘teacher unions’) is almost pathological. Certainly our observation is that research which seems to show State schools or teachers in a bad light is given enormous publicity even when it is outrageously biased, while any attempt to set the record straight is ignored.

More recently, the media have uncritically backed the government on National Standards, in opposition not only to teachers and principals but also to all experts on education evaluation. It is likely that the same will increasingly be true of charter schools. We can only hope that one day some reporter will eschew the press release and the lazy slogan (‘schools fail 20% of our students’, ‘researchers have shown that class size makes no difference’ and the like), actually try to come to grips with the complicated world of educational research and at least try to report it honestly.

Thus debates about the research design and data collection are often *not* really debates about scientific findings but about whether the researchers and those who comment on the research favour charter schools or not.

This surely accounts for the fact that, particularly in the USA the discussion of various research findings are vitriolic: opponents are not just wrong but wicked.

Not surprisingly, therefore, our group, despite bringing together experts in various aspect of research, and examining the evidence on achievement, has found it difficult to distinguish scientific findings from ideological interpretations. Yet some lessons can be learned from schools in other jurisdictions. In the next chapters we discuss the major thrust of the evidence in Sweden and England as we see it and, in the case of the USA, present three case studies which, we believe illustrate the complexity of the issues and the difficulties in using such precedents to support the introduction of charter schools in New Zealand.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FREE SCHOOLS IN SWEDEN

Until 1992 Sweden had a strong State system with only a tiny private sector. Although results on the international PISA test were very good, concern developed about the ‘low achievement’ of some children. A severe economic downturn with 10 percent unemployment led to serious questioning of the role of the education system. In 1992 the new Liberal government introduced a radical reform through which school choice would be facilitated by means of vouchers to be cashed in at any school, State or private. This led to Sweden being described by some as ‘the most liberal public education system’. There has been a large increase in private school attendance particularly at the secondary level. In 1991 there were a little over 60 non-public schools. By 2009-2010 there were 709, and they enrolled some 96,000 students. These changes have been accompanied by declining resources, increased educational technology and higher student-teacher ratios. Despite the original idea that parents would set up and control schools, the ‘for-profit’ schools are the fastest growing and the market is dominated by one firm whose profit is half a billion SEK per year (making between 8 and 50 percent on turnover). These private providers tend to be over-represented in the high-income areas (Wiborg, 2010). Despite the extreme deregulation entailed by vouchers and competition between schools, the Swedish system has remained under central and municipal responsibility through powerful instrument of control, financial resource, national curriculum and inspection (Wiborg, p. 11).

Having set the Swedish reforms in the context of that society’s history and aspirations - particularly to do with egalitarianism, Björklund and colleagues (2005), economists, compare the two types of school on a number of variables including achievement. They were not able to identify a consistently positive impact of the growth in free schools and student achievement. They found a small positive impact on Swedish and English attainment but a negative impact on mathematics. They sum up their findings: ‘The evidence suggests that the positive effects on schools productivity are not as apparent or as large as many advocates of school reform argued they would be. But neither have the reforms greatly reduced equality of outcome with respect to family background, as many sceptics had feared’ (pp. 130-131). They conclude that there is no evidence of damage to the State schools as a result of competition from free schools as public schools tend to improve their quality because of it, but competition from free schools is no panacea either.

Böhlmark and Lindahl (2007) is a more comprehensive study that looks at the short-term, medium-term and long-term consequences. They find that increases in the number of students in free schools in a municipality moderately improve educational outcomes in Grade 9 (15-16 years) but they find no impact on medium or long term outcomes such as completion of upper secondary level, years of schooling or university attainment. The children from highly educated families gain mostly from education in free schools, but the impact on families and immigrants who had received a low level of education is hardly visible. This and a number of other studies also find that school choice in Sweden has led to further social and ethnic segregation especially in schools in deprived areas as well as to increased costs to the State (Wiborg, 2010, p. 15).

Sahlgren (2010), however, finds quite the opposite. Writing a paper to guide policy making with charter schools in the UK he uses the above studies and others to make rather different points and uses data from the national office to argue that there have been significant benefits from the liberalised policies. This he does by four strategies.

- i. He re-interprets the studies discussed above. For example, discussing Böhlmark and Lindahl (2007) he argues that they find ‘a small but robust effect of competition’ particularly for low income and minority children and argue that this was achieved at a time when resources were being reduced: ‘voucher reform can improve educational achievement even in times of severe turbulence and budget cuts—something which the UK government can learn from’ (p. 7). He also suggests that the effect would have been greater if ‘failing’ State schools had been closed down.
- ii. He cites other studies which he says show that competition has improved standards in the municipal schools.
- iii. He provides his own data to show that parents are more happy with their free school than with the municipal schools (80 percent vs. 60 percent). Teachers in charter schools are reportedly happier too (74 percent vs. 70 percent).
- iv. He argues, on the one hand, that the for-profit schools are more effective than other charter schools and he produces highly technical statistics which, he says, prove this. On the other hand, however, summarising the data, he says that ‘Overall, the effects of post reform for-profit and non-profit schools are comparable’ (p. 19). He then goes on to claim that the for-profit schools are better for students from poorly educated families while the state schools are better for students from highly educated families but ‘do not

have a statistically significant impact among children from low-educated families' (p. 19).

Sahlgren has, predictably, been criticised for failing to control for social class. In reply he argues that 'studies show' that low socio-economic students are over-represented in free schools and hence the data presented under-estimate their success. And he points out that he did not set out to prove the superiority of free schools but only to undermine the arguments that for-profit schools will damage education. Thus he concludes by arguing that the Swedish reforms would not have succeeded without the for-profit schools and urges the British government to reverse its policy of excluding such schools.

It is obviously very difficult to distinguish 'scientific finding' from a 'political agenda' and to extract from the research in Sweden any clear answer to the question: Do charter/free schools work? Indeed, increasingly the question itself begins to sound nonsensical because as we wrote earlier in this paper:

Studies which show the superiority or inferiority of charter schools tend to ignore the enormous variety of such schools (and often the enormous variety of public/State schools with which charter schools are being compared). This basic confusion seriously contaminates any so-called comparisons between "charter schools" and "public schools". (p. 29)

There are, however, other lessons to be learned from Sweden. Over the years the 'free schools' have become big business and consequently the subject of large-scale private equity fund investment battles. To illustrate; around 80,000 or 20 percent of students are educated in 900 State-funded free schools, mostly owned and operated by private providers (Ball, 2012, p. 117). According to Ball, the largest private provider is run by a company called 'John Bauer'. Its portfolio comprises twenty upper-secondary schools, specialising in vocational education and training. The company runs other education related ventures in Spain, India, Norway, China and Tanzania. Ball reports that in 2009, John Bauer was 'bought by Denmark's largest private equity company, Axcel' (p. 118). In 2010, Academia 'the largest general education company in Sweden' (p. 118), including 150 free schools and adult education units, was purchased following a stock market battle between EQT and Providence Equity Partners. The eventual purchaser, EQT, is a family-owned group of Swedish private equity funds with investments throughout northern

Europe. Providence is a US private equity investor which, the previous year, had bought Study Group ‘an Australian-based global private education provider, for \$570million. Study Group has 38 campuses and 55,000 students in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and the USA’ (p. 118). Providence specialises in educational investments including the technology-based Blackboard Inc. and Ascend Learning, which is ‘an urban charter school company operating in New York’ (p. 119). Ascend Learning’s president was a former CEO of another charter school company, Advantage Schools, and before that ‘a former executive vice president of Edison Schools’ (p. 119) [now Edison Learning] a publicly traded corporate Educational Management Organisation that specializes in taking over failing State schools in the US and the UK. And so on and so forth.

The basic point of the network analysis is to show that in Sweden, public schools have literally become tradable commodities, caught up in a global battle for supremacy among trans-national corporations and private equity investment funds.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ACADEMIES IN ENGLAND

In 1988 the Conservative central government in England prescribed a national curriculum and devolved responsibility for day-to-day school governance and management from the local education authority (LEA) to the local community board of trustees level. LEAs were hitherto the broad equivalent of regional boards of education in New Zealand but considerably more powerful as they operated relatively autonomously from central government and each other and over time had developed idiosyncratic schooling cultures. The largest metropolitan and shire authorities served larger student populations than the New Zealand system as a whole.

LEAs were initially permitted to withhold funding for any school support services they chose to continue to provide to schools (e.g. personnel and other professional support services). The remainder was allocated to schools on a per-student formula determined by the LEA. The initial proportion of retained funding varied considerably across LEAs, then limited by central government to around two percent. A four-year transitional period was prescribed, so that schools could more planfully adjust their staffing from a model in which the LEA paid the actual cost of employing a teacher, to a bulk-funding formula based on average teacher costs (Bush, Coleman & Glover, 1993).

The 1988 Act also offered an alternative to ongoing LEA control, whereby schools could choose instead a direct, relationship with central government and the individual community school, known as grant-maintained (GM) status (together with the portion of funding that would have been retained by the LEA). The 1993 Education Act made it possible for independent (private schools) to seek grant-maintained status.<sup>3</sup> Since 1988, several further government-initiated schemes have been introduced as part of a broad political agenda to: (i) replace local with central government level control of schools; (ii) establish a range of curriculum special character schools; (iii) increase private and philanthropic sources of funding for, and involvement in, State schools; and (iv) increase parental choice of and voice in their local community school. Since the mid 2000s, successive Labour and Conservative governments have declared a preference that all State schools should eventually become the equivalent of trust or charter schools. Across all

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<sup>3</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grant-maintained\\_school#cite\\_note-Levinson-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grant-maintained_school#cite_note-Levinson-0)

such initiatives has run the explicit policy goal of reducing structural achievement inequalities of precisely the same sorts that exist for socio-economically disadvantaged students in New Zealand schooling.

Collectively, these English initiatives share many of the characteristics proposed for New Zealand charter schools in the National-ACT Agreement. Given that the English equivalents of charter schools have been in place in various forms for over two decades, it is helpful to summarise the research evidence on their effects. Notably, while central governments in England, from both Right and Left, have typically claimed that these initiatives are both popular among parents and successful for disadvantaged students, independent research evidence is considerably less positive.

An early study of recruitment and examination performance (at the equivalent of NCEA) in 300 non-selective grant-maintained (GM) secondary schools in six LEA areas between 1991 and 1996 (Levačić & Hardman, 1999) reported that: (i) the raw proportion of students in GM schools gaining the equivalent of NCEA1 and NCEA3, and to better standards, was higher in GM schools, and their rate of improvement over time was also better; however, (ii) when contextual factors were taken into account, 'it was found that GM schools' apparently superior performance can be attributed to having lower proportions of socially disadvantaged students and to reducing this proportion over time' (p. 185). The authors concluded that there were a number of possible explanations for the fact that GM schools did not outperform LEA (community) schools, despite their enhanced direct funding from government. First, GM status alone does not necessarily lead to a focus on improving student outcomes. Second, in a competitive schooling marketplace, the public accountability priority accorded to academic achievement creates pressures on schools to attract more middle-class parents and to select their students on ability. Third, the ability of schools to improve examination results simply by recruiting fewer disadvantaged students may have 'diverted' attention from developing superior teaching and learning to that found in LEA community schools.

From 2001, the then Labour government introduced a specialist schools initiative to encourage secondary schools to develop a special character as part of its agenda around school diversity and disseminating 'best practice'. The scheme in part served to replace two earlier, stalled private sector sponsor initiatives for State schools, City Technology Colleges and sponsored GM schools. When the specialist school scheme was introduced schools could apply to become a specialist school in one of

four curriculum areas: Arts, Technology, Sports and Languages. Applicant schools were initially required to secure GBP 50,000 business sponsorship, which would then be matched by GBP 100,000 central government funding towards capital expenditure and an additional GBP 123 per student per annum for the first four years (Gorard & Taylor, 2001). Initially the number of specialist schools in an area was limited but the government signalled a desire to expand the scheme to 1500 secondary schools nationally by 2006. To facilitate expansion, the number of specialisms was increased to seven, to include engineering, science and business and enterprise.

Part of the government's justification for introducing the scheme lay in a research study conducted for the City Technology Colleges Trust, which claimed to show that 'non-selective specialist schools tended to perform better than non-specialist schools after controlling for different levels of entry in GCSE and A-level examinations [equivalent to NCEA Levels 1 and 3]. In particular, it was shown that specialist schools located in areas of high social deprivation had the greatest level of improvement' (p. 367). As Gorard and Taylor point out, however: (i) the analysis ignored the additional funding received by the specialist schools; and (ii) a disproportionately high number in the specialist schools group were formerly single-sex, ex-grammar (selective, academic) or (GM) schools, while the comparison LEA schools included all the former secondary modern schools (non-selective, non-academic). This suggests the possibility that the apparently better results may have been due to something other than the schools' specialist status. The authors also point out that 'the fact that many specialist schools are sited in inner-city and disadvantaged areas does not, in itself, mean that they serve a representative section of the local community' (p. 367), thus it is important to study the actual composition of the schools.

This is what Gorard and Taylor did, looking for patterns of segregation and inclusion in a sample of 28 specialist schools. They focused on data for those schools where student intakes had changed considerably over time. They wanted to know if the dual 'diversity' and 'choice' mechanism of the specialist schools programme was more or less likely to increase social segregation of the student population in local communities.

Their summary finding was that: 'Of these 28 schools, 10 had increasingly privileged intakes over time, as determined by their segregation ratios. Only five schools increased the relative proportion of children eligible for free school meals between 1994, the first year of the

programme, and 2000' (p. 376). The authors concluded that: (i) it is very difficult to reliably assess the costs or benefit of specialist school schemes because there are so many confounding factors, including differential funding, the past history of the specialist schools, and changes that occur in non-specialist schools as a result of the introduction of a new specialist school in the locality; (ii) 'schools that are selective, or are their own admissions authorities, or are specialist tend to increase the socio-economic segregation of school intakes (or retain higher levels in an era when segregation is decreasing more generally)' (p. 380); and (iii) the possibility of increasing segregation is exacerbated when schools control their own admissions policy and the three most frequently used criteria were 'selection by aptitude; interviews for religious affiliation; and the use of the family rule' (p. 376). Overall, according to the authors' analysis, the presence of diversity and choice of schools was more likely to increase social segregation, while choice without diversity was not.

In other words, specialist schools are more likely to be socially divisive and lead to game-playing by over-subscribed schools and parents who have sufficient social capital to play the system to their advantage. As Dainton (2006, p. 26) has aptly put it with reference to later proposals to establish 'trust schools' in England, rather than an empty political rhetoric of government providing 'what parents want' and more 'parent power' for all, 'more diversity, greater choice and more freedom for schools to construct their own admissions policies would give greater power to articulate, middle-class parents: those with the loudest voices and sharpest elbows'.

Dainton was commenting on the then Labour government's 2006 White Paper, 'Higher Standards: Better Schools for All'. She noted that the government justified the new proposals by stating they aimed to give parents more choice of schools, and more control in the running of schools. The Secretary of State stated that the acid test of the proposed reforms would be the extent to which they helped the worst schools and the most disadvantaged students. Dainton noted that while the paper claimed to be based on evidence of 'what works', it was based largely on assertions of what '*would* work' by politicians and officials, and either ignored or contradicted existing evidence (p. 23). Her commentary provides a stark warning to anyone reading the National-ACT coalition's proposals, which appear to be based on identical 'will work' assertive political rhetoric.

With regard to parents, Dainton observes that they are not a homogenous group. To suggest so 'is to deny that parents – and their children – reflect

an increasingly fractured and heterogenous society' (p. 25); and part of the public good role of schools is to promote social cohesion by binding diverse social groups together, not engendering further alienation and segregation. While the Labour government claimed to be creating 'a school system shaped by parents', Dainton notes that the authority to request a new school is not the same as the power to establish one. Moreover, 'it is difficult to see how promoting trust schools, academies and federations, creating new provision for 14-19 year olds, boosting school autonomy, or giving local authorities a stronger role in tackling failure help to improve ways in which parents can influence the shape of the school system' (pp. 25 & 26). Similarly, Warren and colleagues (2011) have reported cases where government and officials have engaged in 'a politics of persuasion' (p. 849) and how 'space for legitimate political debate is regulated' (p. 851) when parents 'mobilised to build opposition' (p. 848) and decided that they did not wish their school to become a trust school.

Dainton makes three points about the way Labour's trust school proposals contradict the research evidence. First, in terms of parents, they fail to acknowledge the important influence of parental involvement and support on student achievement, particularly 'at-home good parenting'; second they ignore a research report by its own officials which concluded that choice and competition did not appear to be effective in raising standards of achievement in schools; third, they ignore OECD findings from PISA studies 'which consistently show that countries with more divided school systems perform distinctly less well, in terms of both overall standards and the spread of attainment, than those which are based on a more integrated and comprehensive approach' (p. 28).

The English experience consistently shows that charter school equivalents tend to develop particular intake characteristics and curriculum specialisms that are not reflective of society as a whole, or of the diversity of people and groups within it. For example, with regard to specialisms Woods, Woods and Gunter (2007) analysed secondary data on 58 academies concerning their sponsors, ethos, values and specialisms. Academies are a form of State charter school that involve private sector sponsors in school governance. They constitute another recasting of the City Technology Colleges business sponsor scheme that was begun in the early 1990s and had limited success, but have been targeted to replace 'failing' schools in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage (Gorard, 2009). The schools receive 'substantial public investment, new buildings, state of the art facilities and changes in leadership' (p. 101). The academies policy also draws on the American

charter school experience (Woods, Woods & Gunter, 2007, p. 239). On the grounds that government itself claims that diversity and private sector involvement in the provision of public education ‘can be used to solve educational and wider social problems’ (p. 237), Woods and colleagues examined how an enterprise culture and entrepreneurial dispositions were manifested in what these academy schools set out to do.

Four ideal forms of entrepreneurialism were identified in the secondary data.

- i. *Business entrepreneurialism* ‘refers to the *application* and *advancement* of the values, principles and practices of the private business sector’ (p. 241).
- ii. *Social entrepreneurialism* is focused on using non-traditional public sector and private sector resources to achieve positive social change.
- iii. *Public entrepreneurialism* ‘concerns the application of entrepreneurial flexibility and creativity in order to sustain and advance public ethos, values and aims, which includes public sector values of public welfare and equality of treatment, public accountability, and commitment to professional and social aims and values wider than those of any specific organization’ (p. 243).
- iv. *Cultural entrepreneurialism* ‘is a concern with meaning: that which gives purpose to individual and social action’ (p. 243).

While the social, public and cultural ideal forms are consistent with the concept of education as a public or social good, the point is that business entrepreneurialism dominates in the data examined by Woods and colleagues by virtue of the way the academies programme is conceived and operated. Thus the authors argue that State school academies are ‘predominantly being constructed as sites intended to enhance the growing influence of private versions of entrepreneurialism’ (p. 237). Over half the 58 academies had a business and enterprise specialism: ‘Advancing the strand of business entrepreneurialism concerned with nurturing a belief in and commitment to competitive entrepreneurial behaviour in a business culture is especially marked’ (p. 250). Over half the academies were sponsored by businesses alone or in combination with other groups. Twenty one of the business sponsors were individuals, all male. The second largest group of academies had faith-based sponsors (18 or 32 percent). Seventy one percent of the faith sponsors were supporting academies with a business and enterprise specialism, a majority in combination with another curriculum specialism. One

example given of the business entrepreneurialism ethos is Business Academy Bexley, which reportedly has a stock exchange pit in the foyer, ‘with surrounding screens displaying stock market information and international news’ (p. 248). As the authors note this, ‘constitutes a potentially powerful symbol of business entrepreneurialism, imbuing a particular kind of meaning in the daily life of the school’ (p. 248).

The authors conclude overall that what is occurring in the academies programme is not centrally about private take-over and ownership of public schools for profit. Rather ‘areas in the public domain are being carved out for enhanced private influence over the symbolic and cultural power to shape educational purposes and practices, facilitating and promoting certain forms of capital exchange’ (p. 254).

This being the case, is there nonetheless any reliable evidence that socio-economically disadvantaged and non-achieving students benefit? Is the achievement gap narrowing?

Gorard (2009) has examined the long-term performance of academies. When he initially showed in 2005 that government claims about the initial success of three academies were illusory, and when government responded that long-run data were required to assess their true effects, Gorard then examined the changes in intake and achievement performance of a further eight academies that opened in 2003, three in 2004, seven in 2005 and 14 in 2006, for which complete data were available.

Among the more than 20 academies included in the final analysis, ‘only around one in five appeared to be gaining appreciably higher results for their students than in previous years’ (p. 112). Gorard concludes that the evidence of the success or failure of academies is still unclear either way. Nor is it clear that academies are doing better than non-academy schools in equally challenging circumstances. Gorard cites another evaluation report to support his view that some of the improvements in results have been achieved at the cost of dispensing with the innovative education approaches that were evident when an academy first opened, and part of the justification for creating them.

Gorard notes that as the academy programme has expanded, the eligibility criteria have in fact loosened and ‘an increasing proportion of the “wrong” schools are being selected to receive the money and attention’. Moreover ‘this situation is likely to worsen with private schools and universities entering the fold as sponsors’ (p. 112), thereby

increasing educational inequities even further. In the author's view, the public funding spent on academies could have been used to better effect by supporting the most deprived schools and students. Finally, echoing Dainton, and citing various national and international studies, he observes that their very diversity may constitute the biggest threat posed by academies given that 'comprehensive systems of schooling not only reduce the SES gaps in attainment but also tend to lead to higher scores overall' (p. 113).

Since the election in 2010, the new Conservative coalition government has stated its desire for all State schools to become either academies or 'free schools'. Free schools may be provided by parents, teachers charities or businesses. They are an extension of the academies programme.<sup>4</sup> They are tax-funded, non-selective, and free to attend but they are not under the control of a local authority. Funding is on an equivalent basis to ordinary State schools. They are subject to inspection by OFSTED (the Office for Standards in Education) and are required to comply with standard performance measures. Free schools are subject to the School Admissions Code of Practice, except that they may give priority to founders' children. They are required to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. The Secretary of State has ruled out religiously fundamentalist groups (e.g., those opposed to evolution) and, has excluded 'for-profit schools'. This restriction is being opposed by Right-wing groups and it already possible for business firms to *manage* schools for profit as in many parts of the USA. Indeed a major Swedish firm has recently been awarded a contract to manage schools in England (The Guardian, 28 January 2012). About 50 free schools were set up in 2010 and 75 additional ones were approved in October 2011 for opening in 2012. Applications to set up more free schools in 2013 closed in February 2012.<sup>5</sup> It is too early for sustained evaluations by researchers. However, there are growing numbers of popular media reports of parents, teachers and other groups opposing central government decisions to turn low performing community schools into free schools against their wishes.<sup>6</sup>

In summary, the independent research evidence from England suggests the following.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free\\_school\\_\(England\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_school_(England))

<sup>5</sup> Relatedly, on 5 April 2012, the UK Department for Education published figures to show that 50 percent of Britain's 3261 state secondary schools were or had applied to become academies, while the figure for primary schools was only five percent (The Guardian, 2012, 5 April). Proponents of academies have argued that schools wish to gain freedom from LEA control, while opponents argue that schools simply seek the additional former LEA funding that is released with academy status.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, <http://antiacademies.org.uk/about/>.

- i. Schools which seek charter status are frequently the already advantaged, not the disadvantaged or 'failing' schools, which government claims it wants to support.
- ii. Claimed 'charter' school student achievement gains are often illusory, being merely an artefact of managed changes in student composition in the new schools.
- iii. Where achievement gains are made it is often at the cost of greater social segregation in the local community and exclusion of less academically able students from the new school.
- iv. Parents may have less authority in the governance of the privately sponsored and administered charter schools than they do existing publicly administered community schools.
- v. Where new charter schools are controlled by a sponsor (e.g. a business, individual philanthropist, charitable trust or faith-based group), rather than a group of parents, the dominant special character is in most cases some kind of business entrepreneurship, also present but much less frequently is some form of community-focused social entrepreneurship.
- vi. Because such initiatives generally require an additional government subsidy to establish the schools in the first place, there is little evidence that they are a cost-effective or efficient use of public funds.
- vii. Overall, the English experience demonstrates a consistent pattern of reinforcing existing educational inequalities and reducing choice for the already disadvantaged students and families they are supposed to help.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CHARTER SCHOOLS IN THE USA: THREE CASE STUDIES

Charter schools began in the early 1990s in response to perceived weaknesses in many urban schools in terms of the achievement of African-American and Hispanic students.<sup>7</sup> Charter schools are publicly funded schools that operate outside the direct control of local school districts, under a publicly issued charter that gives them greater autonomy than other public schools have over curriculum, instruction, and operations. The first USA charter school opened in 1992, and charter schools have since grown to 4,000 schools and more than a million students in 40 states and the District of Columbia. Charter schools are primary or secondary schools that receive public money (and like other schools, may also receive private donations) but are not subject to some of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to other public schools in exchange for some type of accountability for producing certain results, which are set forth in each school's charter. Charter schools are attended by choice. While charter schools provide an alternative to other public schools, they are part of the public education system and are not allowed to charge tuition fees. Where enrolment in a charter school is oversubscribed, admission is frequently allocated by lottery-based admissions systems. In a 2008 survey of charter schools, 59 percent of the schools reported that they had a waiting list, averaging 198 students. Some charter schools provide a curriculum that specializes in a certain field such as the arts, mathematics, or vocational training. Others attempt to provide a better and more efficient general education. Students take state mandated examinations.

Some charter schools are founded by teachers, parents, or activists who feel restricted by traditional public schools. State-authorized charters (schools not chartered by local school districts) are often established by non-profit groups, universities, and some government entities. Additionally, school districts sometimes permit corporations to manage chains of charter schools. The schools themselves are still non-profit, in the same way that public schools may be managed by a for-profit corporation. It does not change the status of the school. Some states also permit for-profit charter schools and 76 percent of the charter schools in Michigan, for example, are for-profit.

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<sup>7</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charter\\_school](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charter_school), on which this introduction draws.

In the three case studies that follow, we summarise research studies that illustrate the nature of the research on charter schools and the problems in interpreting them.

### **Case Study A: American Federation of Teachers Research**

In the summer of 2004 researchers in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), drawing upon data in a not-yet-published (some say, suppressed) study of charter schools by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), issued a report concluding that charter school students had lower achievement in both reading and mathematics compared to students in regular public schools. The differences were significant overall as well as for some of the very groups of students for whom charter schools are supposed to offer particular benefits, for example, low-income children eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and students in central cities. The AFT study claimed that minorities in charter schools had test scores that were not significantly different from those of their counterparts in regular public schools.

In a much publicised rebuttal, Caroline Hoxby, a Harvard University economist, argued that the AFT report was fundamentally flawed because of its reliance on the NAEP's small and uneven sample (Hoxby 2004a; 2004b). In her own study, Hoxby (2009) compared reading and math scores of fourth-grade students in charter schools to the scores of fourth-grade students in neighboring public schools. For the country as a whole, Hoxby found that charter school students were 3.8 percent more likely to be proficient on their state's reading exam when compared to students in the nearest regular public school; the advantage rose to 4.9 percent when the racial composition of the charter school and the nearest regular public school was similar. The corresponding charter advantages in mathematics were 1.6 percent and 2.8 percent. North Carolina was the only state in which charter students' proficiency was lower in a statistically significant way. Hoxby's research was welcomed and indeed blazoned across front pages by leading newspapers.

Hoxby's analysis, however, was criticised (Roy & Michel, 2011) on two grounds.

- i. Her method of comparing charter schools to their neighbouring regular public schools failed to adequately control for student backgrounds. Roy and Michel argue that overall charter schools serve a relatively more advantaged student body than do their

matched regular public schools and this accounts for any advantage.

- ii. The comparisons which Hoxby uses between charter schools and public schools are faulty. The public schools which she uses for comparison are not genuine control groups. Charter schools are schools of choice, while public schools are required to enroll all from the local area. This is especially true in cities, where most charter schools are located.

In defence of the AFT study, Bracey (2004) argued that the controversy was hard to understand since it had found what almost all other studies had found and he challenged proponents of charter schools to live up to their original promise: improve outputs or close. In particular he cites evidence from the Legislative Office of Educational Oversight (LOEO) ('Not a body hostile to charters') which having studied Ohio's charter schools (called 'community schools') for five years, concluded that the most that could be said is that in terms of academic performance they are doing no better than low-performing traditional schools with similar demographic characteristics. The LOEO considered the situation so dire that they stated if their recommendations were not implemented, the legislature should terminate all charter funding. Bracey goes on to give examples from two other states (Michigan and California) where the situation is much the same as in Ohio. In California indeed the RAND Corporation (Research ANd Development) (again an organisation very friendly to charter schools) concluded that 'charter school students are keeping pace with comparable students in conventional schools'. In light of all the publicity it is sadly not enough to 'keep pace'. They were supposed to do better. And indeed in California keeping pace is not doing very well since California is at the bottom of NAEP state rankings for school achievement.

Bracey concludes with a challenge.

- Charter schools sprang from disillusionment and outrage over the alleged poor performance of public schools.
- Charter schools promised to improve achievement.
- The overwhelming majority of charter schools are small (fewer than 200 students) with smaller classes sizes than found in most public schools.
- Small schools and small classes both act to produce higher achievement. Thus, charters have two advantages over most public schools.

- Yet Charter schools do not perform as well as demographically similar public schools.
- So, where is the outrage and disillusionment over poor charter school performance? (p. 2).

Of course those committed to charter schools would not for one moment admit that they do not perform as well as demographically similar public schools. Thus, this case illustrates well the politically and ideologically charged atmosphere in which charter school debates often occur. A further difficulty is that the sole criterion for judging the effectiveness of such schools is usually a narrow range of achievement data.

### **What are the implications for New Zealand?**

Such narrowness of focus has potentially distorting effects on educational practices. The absolute reliance on one measure of charter school success for accountability and funding purposes is a salutary lesson for the New Zealand context. The potential to distort optimum learning and teaching relations is compounded by the typical charter school contractual requirement to achieve improved outcomes for underachieving students, sometimes year on year. Schools that do well on this one measure are permitted to retain their relatively autonomous charter status, and the flow of public schooling funds that comes with it. Schools that do not, face at least the theoretical possibility of sanctions or closure.

Measured achievement outcomes are very ‘high-stakes’ and, as such, more prone to being recorded, manipulated and reported in ways that maximise the appearance of achievement gains, than in a system that places less importance on such measures, and rather more importance on a broader range of qualitative and quantitative indicators of meaningful learning. Politicians and media who favour charter schooling confidently hold that charter schools in the USA have had marvellous results for the poor and underprivileged, yet they choose to ignore data that show the opposite, and commentaries that reveal damaging effects on children which are caused by an exclusive focus on narrow outcomes.

Just as worryingly, politicians and media fail to understand that an over-emphasis on measurable achievement at the expense of other equally important affective aspects of education pressurises schools toward curriculum and pedagogical conservatism. Charter schools in New Zealand will be required to be both innovative in their curriculum, teaching and learning in order to engage disadvantaged students, and held rigorously to account for improving summative achievement outcomes.

But, as Opfer (2001) has persuasively argued in the context of Georgia state charter schools, summative outcomes-based accountability has tended to make charter schools more conservative in their educational practices:

Charter schools are touted as an education reform measure that gives educators and parents freedom from school policies that constrain educational advancement and control over decisions concerning how to best educate their children. The charter school policy discourse incorporates symbolic political language that encourages educators and parents to believe that they can be efficacious. Yet the pairing of charter schools with accountability obscures the disciplinary nature inherent in this arrangement. Primarily, the pairing of accountability with charter schools hides the conformity required in the curriculum to meet testing demands while implying that schools are free to teach as they see fit. (p. 209)

### **Case Study B: Research by Stanford University and Caroline Hoxby**

A study by the Centre for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University (CREDO, 2009a), entitled ‘Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States’, is one of the largest pieces of research on Charter Schools in the USA. Its results have been widely cited as showing that the overall charter effects on student achievement in reading and maths were negative to neutral. It found wide variations in charter school performance within and between states: some were better than the state schools, others were worse but most were little different from regular schools.

However two studies have criticised the CREDO findings. One study was carried out by the Centre for Educational Reform (CER, 2010), a charter school advocacy group, which argued that the CREDO study is seriously flawed for the following five reasons.

- i. It is not a truly national study as it dealt with only 16 states out of the 40 which have charter schools.
- ii. It does not allow for variations in school type (most charter schools are elementary and there are fewer middle and high schools).
- iii. It ignores the variations in charter laws and in the tests used in different states.

- iv. It uses the ‘free/reduced lunch’ program as its measure of poverty in a school but does not take account of the fact that most charter schools do not participate in this program.
- v. The study restricts itself to three years of education and fails to look at students’ progress over a long period of time.

The other study was by Hoxby (2009), who argued on four grounds that the statistics used by CREDO are totally inadequate to the task for which they are used.

- i. CREDO does not match individual charter students to individual regular school students with similar demographics. Instead, it matches individual charter students to a group of students in traditional schools.
- ii. CREDO does not have data on the admission lotteries so it does not use a randomisation-based method of evaluation.
- iii. Charter students’ achievement is systematically measured with more measurement error than control students (p. 2). Averaging the results from the two groups (charter schools and control group) magnifies the measurement error for the former and reduces it for the latter. (pp. 3-8)
- iv. The study uses ‘identical twins’ (charter and regular school students) but since the nature of the lottery enrolments are not known the ‘twins’ are not necessarily equal since they have decided to make different choices (p. 9).

Hoxby maintains that true matching can only be based on variables that are truly predetermined (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, age) and not on variables such as program participation which are at least partly within the control of the school (p.10).

Predictably, a reply from CREDO noted that:

Hoxby, does not provide any basis whatsoever for discounting the reliability of the CREDO study’s conclusions. The central element of Dr. Hoxby’s critique is a statistical argument that is quite unrelated to the CREDO analysis. The numerical elements of it are misleading in the extreme, even had the supporting logic been correct. Unfortunately, the memo is riddled with serious errors both in the structure of the underlying statistical models and in the derivation of any bias. (CREDO 2009b)

Meanwhile, another Stanford professor, Reardon (2009), has criticised a different study by Hoxby and colleagues, this time on New York City charter schools. Criticisms include insufficient reported data to be able to generalise results to all schools, and extrapolation beyond the data analysed, with the result that ‘the report considerably overstates the effects of New York City charter schools on students’ cumulative achievement’ (p. 14).

Such esoteric disputes over the selection and application of methods typify much of the heated interchange between statisticians on the reported effects of charter schools. Very few people, whether politicians, bureaucrats, media reporters and commentators, social scientists or teachers are proficient in the complex statistics being discussed here. What is evident, however, is that: (i) the ways in which economists conceptualise achievement effects and their analysis may differ markedly from the approaches taken by educationists whose priorities are often broader; and (ii) extreme caution needs to be exercised by non-statisticians whenever claims of significant achievement outcome gains are made for structurally disadvantaged groups of students because the results may simply be an artefact of the manner in which the data were collected and analysed.

### **Case Study C: KIPP Charter School Organisation Research**

The Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) involves a network of schools designed to improve the educational opportunities available to low-income families. KIPP schools seek to engage students and parents in the educational process, increase the time students devote to their studies, improve their social competencies and behaviour and, most importantly, dramatically improve their academic achievement. Ultimately, the goal of KIPP is to prepare students to enrol in and succeed at college. The KIPP Foundation guides the programme. KIPP’s ‘Five Pillars’ distinguish its approach: high expectations for all students to reach high academic achievement, regardless of students’ backgrounds; commitment on the part of students, parents, and faculty to a college preparatory education; more time on learning, both in academic subjects and extra-curricular activities; leadership by school principals, who are accountable for their school’s budget and personnel; focus on results, by regularly assessing student learning and sharing results for accountability and improvement in achievement.

KIPP schools require high degrees of commitment from parents, teachers and students: the school day begins at 7.15 am Monday to Friday and ends at 5.00 pm Monday to Thursday and 4.00 pm on Friday. Each school operates up to four hours on Saturdays and for three weeks in the summer. Estimates vary across the various KIPP charter school district websites but the claim is that KIPP students spend between 40 percent and 67 percent more time in class than their community school counterparts. All students are expected to wear the school uniform and to do all homework set. Parents are required to supervise homework, read to children regularly and to be in constant touch with the school; they are responsible for the behaviour of their child at all times. According to Angrist and colleagues (2010, p. 2), while at school, ‘students are expected to adhere to a behavioral code, which includes speaking only when called on in class and orderly movement between classes. Students receive “paychecks”, points awarded for good work that can be spent on field trips and other perks’ (p. 2). Failure to abide by these rules results in the removal of the child from the school.

KIPP has grown from a core of two middle schools established in the mid-1990s to a network of 109 schools and 33,000 students in 20 states and the District of Columbia (KIPP website, 20 March 2012). Most KIPP schools are middle grades schools. Angrist and colleagues (2010) report that KIPP is the largest Charter Management Organisation in the USA. The KIPP Foundation is eager to assess the effectiveness of the program and identify which school practices may be positively related to student outcomes. To this end, the Foundation sponsors the National Evaluation of KIPP Middle Schools conducted by Mathematica Policy Research.

Mathematica is using both an experimental design and a quasi-experimental design to evaluate student outcomes over a broad range of KIPP middle schools. These methodologies provide sound data on the impact of KIPP on student achievement and college readiness.

The experimental component consists of a randomized control trial in KIPP schools that are “oversubscribed”—with more applicants than spaces available—and that use lotteries to determine which students are offered admission. The lotteries randomly assign sample members into a treatment group (comprised of students with access to a KIPP education) or a control group (comprised of students without such access). Student outcomes over the follow-up period are being measured for both groups using school records, principal surveys, student and parent surveys, and results from a test of higher-order thinking skills.

For the non-experimental component, Mathematica is collecting multiple years of data from school records on KIPP middle school students and students at nearby traditional public schools. The information is being used to rigorously estimate the KIPP effect by comparing outcomes for KIPP students with outcomes for a comparison group of students identified as most similar to KIPP students based on pre-middle-school trends in test scores and other characteristics.

(<http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/education/kipp.asp>)

The most recent report of this evaluation shows there is little evidence that KIPP middle schools are systematically enrolling more advantaged or higher achieving students from their districts (Tuttle et al., 2010, p. xii). Consistent with the mission statement of KIPP, its schools serve a disproportionate share of low-income students and a proportionally high number of African Americans and Hispanics compared to other local schools (p. 11). Black and Hispanic students account for 80-100 percent of school enrolments and 60-75 percent of enrollees are entitled to Free or Reduced Price Lunches (a measure of poverty levels). In contrast, these schools serve smaller numbers of limited English proficiency and special education students than do other district schools. The elementary school achievement levels of students who enter KIPP middle schools vary. Half of the KIPP schools in the samples serve students who, on average, perform less well than their peers in fourth grade (p. 14). A smaller number of schools serve those who perform better than their fourth-grade counterparts, and still other schools serve students whose performance shows no appreciable difference from this same group of peers. The enrolment patterns examined do not provide evidence that suggests KIPP schools benefit from the effects of student selection (p. 15). They did not find systematically higher (or lower) levels of attrition across their sample of KIPP middle schools relative to host districts, though the pattern varied in different locations. Grade repetition rates, on the other hand, are consistently elevated at KIPP middle schools compared to district public schools (pp. 16-17).

Henig (2008) summarised a number of other studies of KIPP and reported the following trends and characteristics.

- i. The weight of the evidence suggests that students who enter and stay in KIPP schools tend to perform better than similar students in traditional public schools.

- ii. This does not appear to be attributable to a selective admissions process. KIPP serves minority and high-need students, many of whom performed poorly before they entered the schools. Some unobservable biases may be present in student motivation and support, but except for a tendency to attract more girls than boys, there is as yet no strong observable evidence of a systematic selection bias.
- iii. Where it has been monitored, student attrition is high and seemingly skewed: those who leave KIPP tend to have been performing less well than those who stay, and at least one study suggests that those who leave were lower performing when they entered. Such attrition, if it were taken into consideration, would reduce the size of reported gains. However, the evidence does not go so far as to suggest that attrition fully accounts for the observed discrepancies.
- iv. Most of the studies are limited to early KIPP schools and students in their first or second year. Studies that follow cohorts over time seem to show that gains persist, but there is no evidence that early gains grow into progressively higher gains in later years.
- v. Few studies look deeply inside the KIPP process; those that do show that teacher enthusiasm is high but that demands on teachers and leaders are great (It has been reported that 25 percent of KIPP teachers left KIPP in the year 2008/2009. Those who moved into a non-teaching position at KIPP or left to teach at another KIPP school are not included in this number).

Of course, as we have argued earlier, it is not enough for a programme to have success in tests while the students are still in school: they need to be sustained in later years, for example, in college entry statistics. KIPP claims that as of March 2011, it had a success rate of 33 percent of its former Grade 8 middle school students completing a college degree, four times the rate of ‘comparable students from low-income communities across the country’ (KIPP, undated).<sup>8</sup>

Even Rothstein (2004) who is very critical of the supposed successes of charter schools, concedes that, alone among the charter schools, KIPP school results are impressive. He argues, however, that KIPP schools like

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<sup>8</sup> However, as Miron and colleagues (2011) point out, the student attrition rate in KIPP schools between Grades 6 and 8 is approximately thirty percent, while in district schools it is approximately six percent. A fairer comparison of KIPP success would therefore be of the proportions of former Grade 6 students who complete a four-year college degree.

many other kinds of charter schools ‘select from the top of the ability distribution those lower –class children with innate intelligence, well motivated parents, or their own personal drives, and give these children educations they can use to succeed in life’ (p. 82). He also cites personal interviews with leaders in the KIPP movement (e.g. David Levin) who concede that while KIPP schools narrow the gap they cannot eliminate it since the ‘gap is fixed by differences in home literacy years before students enter school’ (p. 82). They also concede that although their students in New York do much better than those in other schools they still cannot do well enough to gain admission to the City’s most academically selective high schools. (p. 82).

It would seem then that KIPP schools do ‘make a difference’ (perhaps a substantial difference) to the measured achievements of lower ability children. Disagreement centres on the following.

- i. The demand made on parents and students is so great that the clientele are a highly self-selected group even if, as proponents allege, they are drawn largely from lower achieving students.
- ii. The fact that the roll is almost entirely ethnically based suggests that there are racist overtones: are such groups being targeted for a relatively narrow approach to learning?
- iii. Similarly the rigid form of discipline suggests to some that KIPP schools represent an oppressive form of ‘taming’.
- iv. The lottery does not provide good control groups since much less is known about the achievements of those ruled out from KIPP schools than of those who gain enrolment.
- v. Many of the ‘evaluations’ are in-house marketing exercises which fail to distinguish impartial research (with its in built critical attitude) from self promotion.
- vi. KIPP schools depend on a ready supply of young and energetic teachers: but teachers cannot remain young or even energetic forever. The high turnover of teachers in KIPP schools is significant.
- vii. The efforts of KIPP schools to raise funds through charitable and private source donations mean that they may have significantly greater revenue streams than equivalent public schools.

While data are readily available to compare the demography of students who attend or do not attend KIPP schools, and their respective achievement outcomes, there is much less transparency concerning the

levels of resourcing available to KIPP charter schools, compared to their local community or district public school counterparts.

Instead of comparing student outcomes and achievement gains, Miron, Urschel and Saxton (2011) compared inputs: students and income. In terms of inputs, and echoing the Mathematica report data (above), KIPP schools enrolled much higher proportions of African-American students and much lower proportions of Hispanic students. KIPP schools enrolled a higher percentage of students eligible for free or subsidised school lunches. They enrol approximately half the percentage of students with disabilities and a lower percentage of English Language Learners than school district counterparts.

The vast majority of KIPP students are in the middle grade years. Enrolments tripled between 2005-06 and 2008-09. Approximately 15 percent of students ‘disappear from KIPP grade cohorts each year’ (p. ii), which is much higher than in local district schools. Moreover, ‘Between grades 6 and 8, the size of the KIPP grade cohorts drop by 30%. The actual attrition rate is likely to be higher since some of the KIPP schools do fill in some of the vacated places after grade 6’ (Ibid.). Of the African-American males who enroll, forty percent leave KIPP between grades 6 and 8. African-American students are more likely to leave than other groups, and girls as a group are more likely to stay.

Based on 2007-08 data from 25 KIPP schools and their local districts, the following revenue patterns were reported.

- During the 2007-08 school year, KIPP received more per pupil in combined revenue (\$12,731 per student) than any other comparison group: the national average for all schools (\$11,937), the national charter average (\$9,579), or their local school districts (\$11,960).
- KIPP received more in per-pupil revenue from federal sources (\$1,779) than did any other comparison group: the national average (\$922), the national charter district average (\$949), or KIPP schools’ host districts (\$1,332).
- None of the 12 KIPP districts reported any private revenues in the NCES finance survey; however, a separate analysis of these districts’ 990 tax forms for 2007-08 revealed large sums of private contributions. Per-pupil contributions for the 11 KIPP districts that we could include in this analysis equaled an average of \$5,760, much more than the \$1,000 to \$1,500 additional per-pupil revenue KIPP estimates is necessary for their program. Two KIPP districts

or groups received more than \$10,000 per pupil in private revenues.

- Combining public and private sources of revenue, KIPP received, on average, \$18,491 per pupil in 2007-08. This is \$6,500 more per pupil than what the local school districts received in revenues. (pp. ii-iii)

Miron and colleagues then compare expenditure patterns and summarise as follows.

As noted above, KIPP receives an estimated \$6,500 more per pupil in revenues from public or privates [sic] sources of revenues. Our evidence on expenditures, show that KIPP reports spending \$457 more per pupil than local school districts. From publicly available sources of information, however, we cannot determine whether or how KIPP spends its private sources of revenues. (p. iii)

Miron and colleagues accept the research evidence showing that KIPP schools improve performance relative to district school counterparts but offer three contributing factors to help explain how they do so (p. iv). First, there *is* a pattern of selective entry to KIPP schools. The fact that KIPP enrolls lower proportions of students with high educational support needs means therefore that the burden falls unfairly on the remaining district schools. Second, there is a high attrition rate with, for the most part, non-replacement of students who leave KIPP during the school year. This means that KIPP schools retain most or all the funding for students who have left, whereas district schools typically do replace students who have left mid-year. Third, KIPP schools have higher combined revenue from public and private sources, and cost advantages because the education support needs of their students are proportionately lower. Together, these three factors serve to exacerbate rather than reduce educational inequalities within communities and districts.

To summarise: it seems that when compared with similar schools, KIPP schools secure improved educational outcomes for the students who enrol and stay the course. However, it is unclear to what extent: (i) the reported gains are a fair comparison with the achievements of non-KIPP schools; and (ii) the reported achievement gains are achieved at the cost of adverse effects on other schools and students in the same school community. Taking all the evidence into account, we simply do not know whether the KIPP model really works for all disadvantaged students, or only for those who can comply with its rigorous 'no excuses' contract. However, even if the most generous interpretation is placed on results of

the KIPP schools, the most that they can do is to *reduce* the achievement gap. It has never been suggested that they can eliminate it.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### EQUITY AND CHOICE

In societies such as ours equality of educational opportunity has been a central value. In recent years, neo-liberal governments have replaced it with a central value of choice. Not wanting, however, to overlook equity they have argued that giving parents more choice will in fact facilitate a more equal system: all parents will be able to get access to the best schools and so promote the welfare of their children. There are serious problems with this argument.

- i. Choice requires knowledge and many of the parents of low achieving children may lack this knowledge and so those who actively choose will be parents whose children are already advantaged. Furthermore, acting on choices often requires resources which many parents of low achieving children lack, for example: motor cars, money for buses and trains, freedom to pick up children during working hours etc.
- ii. In practice, under ‘choice’ systems, it is normally the school which ends up doing the choosing: by selecting high achieving children, redrawing zones, requiring special commitments, and refusing to accept children with special needs.
- iii. The assumption that competition will improve ‘failing schools’ is dubious since schools are not at all like supermarkets and restaurants. The success of schools is largely dependent on the quality of the students attending them hence ‘competition’ in schooling is not about gaining more ‘customers’ but about attracting the children who will easily achieve and so leaving the other schools denuded of the students who provide motivational models for the other students.

These kinds of predictions are borne out by the evidence of what happened under the ‘choice’ policy which followed from Tomorrow’s Schools. This group studied the results of the reforms after ten years and found that ‘Schools which cater for students from lower socio-economic (SES) backgrounds have suffered losses in rolls while those catering for students from higher socio-economic areas have increased their rolls’ (Snook et al, 1999, p. 32) and ‘although Maori and Pacific Island students comprise 25% of the school population they are under-represented in high decile (8-10) schools and over-represented in low decile (1-3) schools’ (p. 34). This has been termed ‘white flight’ but represents a well-known finding in choice programmes in other countries: those with more resources benefit

disproportionately. Two of the leading researchers on these matters in the USA conclude ‘Increasing parental choice is likely to increase separation of students by race, social class and culture *even when the system is specifically designed to remedy inequality*’ (Fuller & Elmore, 1996, p 189). (Italics ours)

### **Competition and equity**

The charter school system proposal attempts to further extend market-liberal principles of competition to state schooling. Charter school groups, which may or may not have a mandate from the local community, will be expected to compete with each other and with existing community schools:

Iwi, private and community (including Pacific Island) groups and existing educational providers would compete to operate a local school or start up a new one. (National Party & ACT Party, 2011, p. 3)

Consistent with existing principles of social democracy and civic participation in state school governance, there may be a logical case to permit community-based groups who represent structurally disadvantaged groups in their local community to seek a mandate to establish a school that reflects the special character of that community and to be accountable *to the community*. National-ACT propose the exact opposite with the board of trustees being directly accountable to the contracted charter school operator. There appears to us to be no logical or moral case for permitting groups or organisations that are not accountable to that community to operate a school in competition with existing local community schools.

Diversity and choice are grounded in abstract, theoretical principles of market operation. Independent educational research evidence, however, is consistent on the consequences of diversity and choice. In a local community marketplace, schools are forced to spend large amounts of resource on developing and presenting a desirable image to the community. Schools that are consequently perceived as desirably different from other schools gain a twofold ‘competitive advantage’. They are able to choose from an oversupply of motivated applicants and, as full schools, they achieve maximum economies of scale.

The other, related assertion in the National-ACT agreement is that a charter school system will raise achievement and thereby secure greater

equity within disadvantaged communities (and also, by implication, across society).

The proposed charter school system is targeted at lifting educational achievement in low decile areas and disadvantaged communities where educational underperformance has become the norm. (p. 7)

This contradicts the research evidence which consistently shows that those who are most adversely affected by school markets are invariably academically low-achieving students who have neither compensatory personal talents (e.g., elite sports or performance arts), nor parents who have the cultural capital (knowledge, skills, contacts, resilience) to ‘play the market’ to their children’s advantage, nor a home environment that is compatible with the school’s expectations about the additional work that the child will undertake beyond the normal school day. The evidence is clear that, as a result of competition, diversity and choice, less advantaged students end up even worse off: competition and choice do not improve achievement or reduce inequalities.

In a competitive market it is logically not in any school’s interests to enrol students who will make its market information look worse than that of other competitor schools. If raising achievement levels of the most disadvantaged is the public policy problem, then its solution clearly does not lie with the market model of schooling, of which the charter school system proposal is merely an extension.

### **School governance and equity**

It is asserted by National-ACT that deregulation of existing State school governance requirements will lead to a diversity of schools that better meet local community needs.

It is designed to provide greater flexibility in governance and management including the ability to attract top quality teachers, prepare and inspire children to achieve their potential and be accountable for doing so, and to better meet the particular needs of local communities. (p. 7)

Broadly speaking, we would agree with the implication of the National-ACT agreement that changes to school governance, and in particular support for parent trustees, are needed in order to promote higher achievement and greater equity in socio-economically disadvantaged communities. However, if this is the goal of government, then surely

positive changes in governance should apply to communities as a whole and all the schools within them. Charter schools are not a necessary vehicle for governance changes to State schools. Indeed, on our analysis, the introduction of charter schools without the agreement of the whole community would most likely adversely affect its well-being and act as an unhelpful distraction to the larger public policy goals of government:

Underachievement in education often compounds the disadvantages already faced by children in vulnerable, at-risk communities, and can contribute to intergenerational disadvantage, poor health, poverty, joblessness, welfare dependence, criminal offending and social dysfunction. (p. 3)

Local community school governance systems should help to build social inclusion, cohesion and equity, not promote exclusion, dysfunction and segregation. There is no evidence that charter schools would help build better communities as a whole if only because there will be no requirement for operators to be members of, and representative of those communities as there is under the 1989 Education Act. Why would they care? Indeed, the intention to permit for-profit educational management organisations to operate charter schools is in our view completely incompatible with supporting social democracy at the local community level.

Based on evidence of the actual effects of Tomorrow's Schools governance over twenty years, and the results from charter school type experiments overseas, we suggest that what is needed to materially strengthen school governance in disadvantaged communities in New Zealand is: (i) explicit regulation *against* inter-school competition, diversity and choice, and (ii) more practical government support *for* local community boards of trustees by providing easy access to the professional knowledge and skills that research has shown parent trustees in these communities often do not have and struggle to access.

After a decade of Tomorrow's Schools, Gordon (1999) commented that: (i) the policy of school *choice* had permitted some parents 'to remove their children from contact with some groups' (p. 250), and encouraged schools to prioritise school image over the needs of children; while (ii) the policy of *devolution* of governance to the school level had allowed boards of trustees to act in their own interests by the 'drawing of enrolment scheme boundaries, suspension policy or the attitude towards special needs students' (p. 251). Both policies had contributed to a further marginalisation of disadvantaged students (i.e. those with challenging

behaviour, those with special educational needs, those not from the dominant culture).

To our knowledge, wherever in the world State schools have been required to compete for students and to be accountable for raising student outcomes, lower achieving and socio-economically disadvantaged students have suffered disproportionately.

Based on the New Zealand experience of complete devolution to the individual school level, with greater inequities predictably the result, Gordon suggested 'five ways forward' (p. 252).

First, something more than selective intervention in individual failing schools is needed. Selective intervention is flawed because 'children always have to fail before something is done' (p. 253).

Second, if devolution of governance is the problem, recentralisation through central planning is a plausible alternative to further marketisation and privatisation. A major advantage of centralisation is that it can reduce social segregation by promoting equity of student treatment across a community of schools. As Olssen (1999) and others have argued, the concept of education as a positional good (available only to some at the expense of others), is incompatible with the concept of education as a distributive or social good (availed equally by all). If greater equity of achievement is the aim, the answer lies in central planning to prevent operation of the marketplace, not to further facilitate it.

Third, re-regionalisation of school administration could permit the bureaucracy to better meet what are in reality very diverse regional schooling needs. This is consistent with the public good principle of a coherent national system of state schools that is sufficiently flexible to respond proactively to diverse needs in a planned way.

Fourth, devolution could be replaced by a genuine partnership model, involving 'a sharing of responsibility and mutually supportive strategies' by a 'supportive state' (p. 253). The 1989 Education Act created the illusion of a level playing field for local community governance. As experience has shown, however, local communities are not equally equipped to undertake their governance responsibilities. Morally, governments are therefore obligated to support parents to undertake their governance role, not simply wait until they fail and then make trustees accountable to a charter school operator as envisaged under the National-ACT proposal. The only practical consequence of the proposal would be

to shift the State's responsibility to support public school trustees onto the private sector, with no greater prospect of success.

Fifth, the Treaty principle of *tinō rangatiratanga* could help acknowledge both the failure of 'the Pakeha state' to meet the educational needs of Māori, 'and that the best way forward is for Māori to be resourced to do the job themselves' (p. 253). This is consistent with our view that cases for disadvantage sections of a local community to be permitted to advance their educational aspirations through self-directed initiatives funded by the state.

### **Improving governance in all schools**

Regular surveys and analyses of the effects of Tomorrow's Schools have also informed Wylie's views of what practical improvements usefully might be made to state school governance. Looking back on the first ten years of Tomorrow's Schools, Wylie (1999) considered the extent to which New Zealand could be considered to be operating an educational voucher system, and what were the actual consequences of this for educational achievement and disparities in education. She noted that, internationally, school voucher systems have three common characteristics: per student funding by the State, school level responsibility for managing and allocating funding, and school enrolment based on choice rather than location or right of entry. To a greater or lesser extent New Zealand schools now exhibit all three characteristics, hence her view that it is already a 'quasi-voucher' system.

One reported consequence of the introduction of per-student funding based on formulae was the 'blurring of the lines between public and private schools' (p. 102). Wylie reported that government funding to private schools had increased substantially during the 1990s, and it became much easier for private schools to integrate with the State system if they chose. Equally, through the Targeted Individual Entitlement Scheme, several hundred scholarships were provided for children from low-income households to attend private schools (p. 104). State schools in Wylie's view had begun to look more like private schools by virtue of increases in 'voluntary donations' expected of parents to support school operations, while also 'gaining a higher proportion of their income from activity fees, and appear[ing] to be making a profit from them' (p. 104). Schools were forced to raise local funds as a result of the declining real value of central government grants: 'but it also has the effect of limiting student choice of schools with high activity fees to those whose families can afford them' (p. 105).

Consistent with Gordon's commentary, Wylie also observed that there was evidence to show that schools operating in such a formula-funding environment had become more self-interested. This self-interest was manifest in a range of informal practices that we would summarise in our words as: improving the student composition of the school by both 'creaming' (desirable students from other schools) and 'cleansing' (undesirable students to other schools); not spending government grants as the donor intended; putting the interests of one's own school above those of the local community of schools as a whole; and failing to deal properly with teacher competence and conduct issues so that the teachers concerned could leave and continue to teach in other schools. Having reviewed the international literature on voucher systems, Wylie bluntly concluded that 'voucher mechanisms are ineffective in improving achievement and capability, or remedying existing disparities between students from different social groups' (p. 107). Wylie in fact reaches exactly the same conclusion as the overseas researchers we have cited throughout this report:

Vouchers only encourage more school selectivity which works against low-income children; furthermore they increase their social segregation. Far from stimulating more diversity, voucher systems tend to encourage more conservative approaches, particularly if national assessment or benchmarks are used to judge schools as successful or failing. (p. 107)

Wylie also summarises from the literature the practical State initiatives that can mitigate the perverse effects of voucher systems:

- administer student selection through a local centre not the school;
- run random ballots for over-subscribed schools;
- exclude infrastructure from school funding;
- provide local centre support for unpopular schools to make changes (without cuts to staffing);
- offer unrestricted access to school advisory services, not dependent on ability to pay;
- provide transport and other assistance to allow children to attend their preferred school;
- cap the amounts schools can charge parents, or matched reduction in government funding. (p. 107)

In the conclusion to a subsequent analysis of the quality of school governance policies and practices in state schools, Wylie (2007, p. 54)

argued that there was little evidence that could be used to justify a large shift away from the current Tomorrow's Schools model of State school governance that relies on elected parent trustees. It was noted that the current model of school monitoring by ERO seeks to identify the relatively small proportion of schools where student achievement is negatively affected. Like Gordon, Wylie argues that it is not good enough to wait until children fail. Another kind of approach to governance is therefore needed, one which focuses more constructively and narrowly on improving student achievement.

We have realised that there needs to be some more connectivity in our educational system for this to occur: that schools are not islands, and that government leadership and support is needed to nourish them. The responsibility for improving student achievement overall and reducing the disparities of educational achievement needs to be shared if we are to make real headway. (p. 55)

Wylie suggests a small number of changes to increase 'connectivity' between the State and individual schools and between the State and the system of schools as a whole.

First, demands on parent trustees need to be much more realistic, and recognise that most trustees can volunteer only four hours per week. Therefore the State has a role to more actively assist schools 'to reduce their need to invent their own solutions, and reduce the time it takes to come to grips with legal or regulatory changes that affect their operations, or become expert very quickly when a new situation confronts them. We cannot expect every school to have this expertise' (p. 56). Equally, new demands must be assessed in terms of both workloads for trustees and the likelihood that they will directly enhance student achievement.

Second, trustees need to be trained and supported to use student and school performance data so that the board can monitor what the school is doing in a meaningful and informed way. This too is a State responsibility.

Third, there is evidence that schools would benefit from specific training and support in the selection and performance management of their principal. Again, based on evidence of what currently occurs, the aim is to prevent avoidable problems occurring, rather than waiting for them to occur before intervening. The State's role is 'to steer a middle passage between respecting the principle of school self-management and providing a safety net, and also to allow a quicker identification of any

local and systemic issues and therefore quicker action on addressing them' (p. 58).

Fourth, board communications and consultations with parents should not attempt to do everything but 'focus on those opportunities they have to communicate with parents about the school's goals and programmes, and the ways that parents can support their children's learning' (p. 60).

Finally, the State should be responsible for providing a disputes resolution service for individual students and parents 'with the dual aims of providing quick resolution to keep students as much as possible engaged in learning, but also tracking issues that need more systemic responses' (p. 60).

## CHAPTER NINE

### OTHER WAYS OF ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS

Proponents of charter schools are quite rightly concerned with the children who do not achieve in the basic subjects of literacy and numeracy. We must, of course, acknowledge that schooling plays only one part in this underachievement. As the 2011 National-ACT Agreement says:

Underachievement in education often compounds the disadvantages already faced by children in vulnerable, at-risk communities, and can contribute to intergenerational disadvantage, poor health, poverty, joblessness, welfare dependence, criminal offending and social dysfunction. (p. 3)

We accept this analysis but have presented arguments and data to suggest that the radical solution of charter schools may not be either necessary or efficacious in the New Zealand situation. We believe that the ‘long tail’ can more effectively be addressed in existing schools by a combination of small classes and differentiated instruction in the early years of schooling. At least this is worth a concerted effort before subjecting the whole system to yet another expensive, disrupting and dubious restructuring.

#### **‘The long tail of under achievement’**

The growing body of evidence of large inequities in school achievement in New Zealand is a major source of concern among educators and policy makers and is widely regarded as the single biggest challenge confronting New Zealand education today. A parliamentary report by the Education and Science Committee (2008) entitled ‘Inquiry into Making the Schooling System Work for Every Child’ stated that ‘evidence from national and international assessments and studies supports the proposition that New Zealand has a disproportionate number of students who underachieve’ (p. 7). The Ministry of Education’s recent ‘Briefing to the Incoming Minister’ (December 2011) stated that:

Despite some overall improvements, the gap between our high performing and low performing students remains one of the widest in the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). These low performing students are likely to be Māori or Pasifika and/or from low socio-

economic communities. Disparities in Education appear early and persist throughout learning. (p. 8)

The Briefing indicated that over the last decade there has been little improvement in early literacy/numeracy with 18 percent of Māori and 16 percent Pasifika not achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills by age 10, compared to only four percent of Non Māori and Non Pasifika children (pp. 8-9).

## **Literacy**

This is not new. For the past 20 years New Zealand has consistently shown comparatively high levels of variability in the test scores from international surveys of reading achievement. This is despite having introduced Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985), a nationally implemented early intervention programme designed to reduce the incidence of reading failure. This it tries to do by accelerating to average levels of performance six-year old children who show early signs of reading difficulty (typically the bottom 15 to 20 percent of readers in any given school). This scheme is very costly for the government (NZD 30-40 million per annum) but it has obviously failed to reduce the achievement gap it was set up to address. It has been strongly argued that the programme fails to work for children most at risk of failing to learn to read, suggesting that the success of the programme is inversely related to the severity of the reading problem (Reynolds & Wheldall, 2007). Others have claimed that gains from the Reading Recovery programme are not sustained in the long term (Chapman, Greaney & Tunmer, 2007; Reynolds & Wheldall, 2007).

### *Explicit instruction in word-level skills and strategies*

In response to this, three of us (Tunmer, Prochnow, Greaney) have been engaged for many years on an alternative strategy for reducing the literacy achievement gap. This is based on the belief that New Zealand's relatively high level of disparity between good and poor readers can be explained in terms of literate cultural capital and a constructivist orientation toward literacy education which is favoured by the Ministry of Education. Tunmer, Prochnow and Greaney hold that New Zealand's relatively wide spread of scores is largely the result of Matthew effects (rich-get-richer and poor-get-poorer) triggered by a predominantly constructivist approach to reading instruction that fails to respond adequately to differences in literate cultural capital possessed by children at the beginning of school. Literate cultural capital is a generic term

referring to literacy-related knowledge and abilities at school entry that are an outgrowth of activities in the home environment that support early literacy development (e.g., familiarity with ‘book’ or ‘decontextualised’ language and basic understanding of concepts and conventions of printed language promoted by adult storybook reading and talking about story content).

Research carried out in New Zealand and elsewhere indicates that children enter school with large individual differences in the experiences and competencies (i.e. literate cultural capital) essential for acquiring literacy, and that children who possess higher levels of literate cultural capital at the beginning of school profit more from literacy instruction, learn to read sooner, and read better than children who do not. Supporting this claim is a large body of research showing substantial predictive relationships between preschool measures of reading-related skills and later reading achievement (Tunmer & Nicholson, 2011). Research carried out in New Zealand has shown that a composite measure of literate cultural capital at the start of school (when the mean age of the children was 5 years, 1 month) accounted for almost 50 percent of the variance in Year 7 reading comprehension performance even after the effects of socio-economic status and ethnicity were held constant (Tunmer, Chapman, & Prochnow, 2006). The findings further indicated that children from low-income and/or culturally diverse backgrounds had considerably less literate cultural capital when they arrived at school than did children from more advantage backgrounds.

### *Parents and resources*

Regarding the latter finding, many low-income parents want to support their children’s educational attainment and do so. However, they typically do not possess the amount of resources and literacy-focused socialisation practices that middle-class parents can access for their children (Nash, 1993, 1997; Nash & Harker, 1992). These foundational resources and practices are often passed from one generation to the next and afforded recognition by schools, especially those that adopt constructivist methods in which direct, explicit instruction in reading skills is seen as conflicting with ‘natural learning’, the view that learning to read is essentially like learning to speak. In the constructivist approach to literacy education the focus is on learning to read by reading with a heavy reliance on sentence context cues to identify unfamiliar words. Minimal attention is given to explicit instruction in word-level skills and strategies (e.g., phonological awareness, alphabetic coding skills), which research has shown are of primary importance in beginning literacy development.

Children who do not possess sufficient levels of essential reading-related skills at the outset of formal reading instruction (and who are not provided with supplementary instruction to develop these competencies, especially phonological awareness) will be forced to rely increasingly on ineffective word identification strategies such as using picture cues, partial visual cues and contextual guessing, the continued use of which inevitably leads to literacy learning difficulties, avoidance of reading, inattentive behaviours and withdrawal from literacy learning tasks (i.e., negative Matthew effects). As a consequence, these children are prevented from taking advantage of the positive developmental spinoffs of reading achievement (e.g., vocabulary growth, ability to comprehend more syntactically complex sentences), which are referred to as positive Matthew effects. The negative and positive Matthew effects arising from the constructivist approach to literacy education provide an explanation of New Zealand's comparatively high percentage of reading failures and unacceptably large gap in literacy achievement.

### *PIRLS Results*

In support of this account are findings from the 'Progress in International Reading Literacy Study' (PIRLS) 2001. An analysis of the data revealed that for specified differences in literate cultural capital possessed by children at school entry (as assessed by the 'Early Home Literacy Activities Index', the 'Index of Home Educational Resources' and the 'Index of Parents' Attitudes Toward Reading'), the New Zealand approach to literacy education was consistently associated with much larger differences in future reading achievement than most other participating countries (Tunmer, Chapman & Prochnow, 2004). A very similar pattern of results was obtained from an analysis of the PIRLS 2006 data (Tunmer et al., 2008). Research has further shown that incorporating into New Zealand classroom literacy programmes supplementary materials and procedures designed to help children develop awareness of sound sequences in spoken words and make greater use of letter-sound patterns in identifying unfamiliar words produced significantly greater gains in reading achievement than the standard constructivist approach to literacy instruction, especially for children from low-income, culturally diverse backgrounds (Tunmer, Chapman & Prochnow, 2003). Overall, the results of these studies indicate that the literature-based constructivist approach to teaching literacy in New Zealand is generally beneficial to children with larger amounts of literate cultural capital at school entry, but much less so for children with more limited amounts which, it is argued, explains the relatively high level of disparity between New Zealand readers in later grades.

In support of an interaction between school-entry reading-related skills (high vs. low literate cultural capital) and method of teaching reading (constructivist vs. explicit approaches) are the results of studies showing that first grade classrooms having the greatest impact on literacy achievement both overall and with the children who possess limited amounts of literate cultural capital, were those classrooms that had considerably different instruction across groups of children in the classroom (e.g., Juel & Minden-Cupp, 2000). These findings suggest that greater attention needs to be placed on differentiated (or individualised) instruction, where teachers use research-based assessment procedures and instructional strategies to cater to the differing skill needs of beginning readers from the outset of schooling, with particular attention focused on ensuring the development of phonemically based word-level skills and strategies by all children during the early stages of reading acquisition. In support of this approach is research indicating that children in first-grade classrooms that individualised reading instruction by taking into account child-by-instruction interactions made greater gains in reading achievement than children in control classrooms (Connor et al., 2007), Children with more limited amounts of literate cultural capital at school entry generally derive greater benefit from more explicit approaches to beginning reading instruction than from constructivist approaches, and vice versa for children with higher levels of essential reading-related knowledge and skills at the beginning of school.

## **Mathematics**

One of us (Walshaw) has written widely in the area of mathematical knowledge and numeracy education (e.g., Anthony & Walshaw 2007). Walshaw's reading of the literature has shown that within classrooms, teachers facilitate learning for diverse learners by truly caring about student engagement (Noddings, 1995). Research in this area has found that effective teachers demonstrate their caring by establishing learning spaces that are hospitable as well as academically 'charged' (Palmer, 1998). They work at developing interrelationships that create spaces for students to develop their mathematical and cultural identities (Macfarlane, 2004). Teachers who care work hard to find out what helps and what hinders students' learning. They have high yet realistic expectations about enhancing students' capacity to think, reason, communicate, reflect upon, and critique their own practice, and they provide students with opportunities to ask why the class is doing certain things and with what effect (Hackenberg, 2005). At the same time, research quite clearly demonstrates that pedagogy focused solely on the development of a trusting climate and on listening to students' ideas does

not get to the heart of what mathematics teaching truly entails. Classroom work is made more enriching when discussion involves co-construction of mathematical knowledge through the respectful exchange of ideas (Watson, 2002). When teachers work at developing inclusive partnerships, they ensure that the ideas put forward are, or become, commensurate with mathematical convention and curricular goals.

A context that supports students' growing awareness of themselves as legitimate participants in the production of mathematical knowledge creates a space for both the individual and the collective. Many researchers have shown that small-group work can provide the context for social and cognitive engagement (e.g., Slavin, 1995), while others have cautioned that limited-English-speaking students are less inclined to share their thinking in group process (White, 2003). Some students, more than others, appear to thrive in class discussion groups (Baxter, Woodward & Olson, 2001). A personal reluctance to participate and the low social obligations and cognitive demands unwittingly placed by teachers on some students have the effect of excluding them from full engagement in mathematics (Planas & Gorgorió, 2004). Within the classroom, all students need to participate. And they all need time alone, away from the demands of a group, to think and work quietly (Sfard & Keiran, 2001). This line of research has also revealed that classroom grouping by ability has its problems as a pedagogical practice. Teachers who teach lower streamed classes tend to follow a protracted curriculum and offer less varied teaching strategies. This organisational practice has a detrimental effect on the development of a mathematical disposition and on students' sense of achievement.

### *Effective Teaching*

Effective teaching for diverse students demands teacher knowledge. Studies exploring the impact of content and pedagogical knowledge have shown that what teachers do in classrooms is very much dependent on what they know and believe about mathematics and on what they understand about the teaching and learning of mathematics. Successful teaching of mathematics requires a teacher to have both the *intention* and the *effect* to assist pupils to make sense of mathematical topics (Jaworski, 2004). A teacher with the intention of developing student understanding will not necessarily produce the desired effect. Unless teachers make good sense of the mathematical ideas, they will not develop the flexibility they need for spotting the golden opportunities and wise points of entry that they can use for moving students towards more sophisticated and

mathematically grounded understanding (Schifter, 2001). Sound teacher knowledge is a prerequisite for accessing students' conceptual understandings and for deciding where those understandings might be heading. It is also critical for accessing and adapting resources to bring the mathematics to the fore (Ball & Bass, 2000). There is now a wealth of evidence available that shows how teachers' knowledge can be developed with the support and encouragement of a professional community of learners (e.g., Thomas, Tagg & Ward, 2002).

Studies have provided conclusive evidence that teaching that is effective is able to bridge students' intuitive understandings and the mathematical understandings sanctioned by the world at large (Marton & Tsui, 2004). Consistently emphasised in research is the fact that teaching is a process involving analysis, critical thinking, and problem solving. Language, of course, plays a central role. The teacher who has the interests of learners at heart ensures that the home language of students in multilingual classroom environments connects with the underlying meaning of mathematical concepts and technical terms (Christensen, 2004). Teachers who make a difference are focused on shaping the development of novice mathematicians who speak the precise and generalisable language of mathematics. The responsibility for the distinguishing between terms and phrases and sensitising their particular nuances weighs heavily with the teacher, who profoundly influences the mathematical meanings made by students in the class (Khisty & Chval, 2002).

Effective teaching at all levels ensures that mathematical tasks are not simply 'fillers' but require the solving of genuine mathematical problems (Stein, Grover & Henningsen, 1996). For all students, the 'what' that they do is integral to their learning. The 'what' is the result of sustained integration of planned and spontaneous learning opportunities made available by the teacher (Watson, 2003). Planning is done with many factors in mind, some determined by the individual student's knowledge and experiences, and others mediated by the pedagogical affordances and constraints and the participation norms of the classroom (Cobb & McClain, 2001). Extensive research in this area has found that effective teachers use tasks that allow students to access important mathematical concepts and relationships, to investigate mathematical structure, and to use techniques and notations appropriately and that they employ such tasks over sustained periods of time (e.g., Mousley, Sullivan & Zevenbergen, 2004). Tasks of this kind provide students with opportunities for success, present an appropriate level of challenge,

increase students' sense of control, and develop valuable mathematical dispositions (Middleton, 2001).

In brief, what a vast body of literature has revealed is that quality teaching enables students to develop habits of mind whereby they can engage with mathematics productively and make use of appropriate tools to support their understanding. Importantly, it has revealed that quality teaching is a key resource for addressing students' current disaffection with mathematics.

All such teaching, both for literacy and mathematics requires closely targeted instruction patterns which may be very much dependent on there being small classes particularly at the beginning levels. Indeed there is evidence to support such an assumption.

### **Class size**

There has long been considerable debate on the merits of class size reduction (CSR) as a policy strategy to 'reduce the achievement gap'. Three main arguments are used by opponents of smaller classes: (i) they are very expensive; (ii) the measured effects of smaller classes on student achievement outcomes are modest compared with the effects of many other interventions; and (iii) there is little evidence that teachers change their pedagogical practices when the class is made smaller. On this basis, CSR is often rejected as a necessary element of policies that aim to reduce inequalities of student achievement. In our view, such a stance needs to be revisited in light of the most recent research evidence on the ways in which smaller classes are shown to affect the learning of the most disadvantaged underachieving and disengaged students.

One of us has surveyed the literature on the effects of class size on achievement (Harker, 2003). His conclusion, echoing Molnar (1999), is: 'There is no longer any argument about whether reducing class size in the primary grades increases student achievement. The research evidence is clear: it does' (p. 1). Harker goes on, however, to make some significant qualifications.

- i. One needs to be careful about relying on 'effect sizes' to monitor achievement over a period of time, particularly when comparisons are made between classes at different grade levels. Effect sizes are derived from the difference score divided by the standard deviation

- (a measure of the spread of scores). As students move through the grades, the variability (and hence the standard deviation) increases thus reducing the effect size measure. Different measures, for example grade equivalents, can reveal ongoing benefits of class size reduction that ‘effect size’ masks.
- ii. Studies that simply measure the correlation between class size and a limited range of achievement outcomes do not delve beneath the surface of the statistics to ask what is going on in classrooms. Quite obviously a smaller class size in itself has no educational effect unless teachers use the reduced number to teach differently.
  - iii. The effects of class size are not the same in all cultures: throughout Asia large classes are the norm and yet children still manage to learn quite successfully. ‘It cannot be assumed that a scenario that succeeds in one country will do so in another’ (Harker, p. 13).

It is interesting to speculate that cultural differences may help to explain the finding in the latest PISA study that ‘class size made no difference to attainment’ since all the schools in the top group (except Finland, Canada and New Zealand) were in Asian countries such as Singapore and Japan (New Zealand Herald, 2012, 20 February). Thus the authors may have mistakenly generalised the ‘class size doesn’t matter’ assertion from Asian schools to all schools in all other countries. That generalisation would, in our view, be very unsafe.

A major study that showed significant gains for smaller classes was the STAR study. This was set up as a result of some inconclusive debate about class size. Smith and Glass (1980) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on class size and concluded that ‘well-designed studies produced quite different results from studies with minimal controls’ (p. 429). Adopting stricter criteria they found that small classes have a decided advantage in relation to the attitudes of students (effect size 0.47) and teachers (effect size 1.03—very dramatic) and also in relation to test performance in reading (0.30) and mathematics (0.32). It is important to note here that the measured effects of smaller classes were greatest in the kinds of measures not included in analyses that focus on achievement only.

However, these findings were challenged and the STAR project was set up to try to resolve the impasse. It studied 76 elementary schools in Tennessee in a randomized experiment. ‘Small’ was defined as 13-17, ‘large’ as 22-25 students. Teachers and students were randomized into small and big classes. The study of achievement was carried out after two years when 6,750 children were subjected to standardised tests of

reading and maths on a pass/fail basis where 80 percent was a pass. Effects sizes varied but there were some at 0.64, 0.66, and 0.62 (Finn & Achilles, 1990). As a consequence, the authors claim that ‘there was a clear positive effect’, particularly for minority groups and particularly in the early years. Predictably, their research has also been criticised.

Goldstein (2002, p. 6), for example, finds significant weaknesses in the STAR experiment.

- i. The STAR experiment had all three ‘treatments’ running in all the contributing schools. Hence the independence of the ‘treatments’ would be compromised by the normal interactions of school life.
- ii. The study was ‘zero’ blind since all participants were aware of the ‘treatment’ they were receiving (as if, in a drug experiment, those taking the placebo know that they are).
- iii. There was no entry assessment to provide the basis for claims about increased achievement.

Nevertheless, re-analyses of the STAR data using more sophisticated multi-level modelling techniques tend to support the main findings of positive effects on achievement (Goldstein & Blatchford, 1998).

Scholarly differences about the nature and extent of measurable gains that result from CSR initiatives are one thing. However, as Harker notes, such studies tell us little about what goes on in classrooms and what influences may contribute to achievement gains. In Britain, Blatchford and colleagues (2003) came to the conclusion that previous studies lacked the design features that would enable sound conclusions to be drawn and they set up The Institute of London Class Size Study. They drew their sample from 8 LEAs, 199 schools, 330 classrooms and 7,142 students. They found many positive results for various process and affective aspects of smaller classes and, in relation to attainment, they found that ‘There is clear effect of class size on children’s academic attainment over the Reception year and there is a clear case for small class sizes during the first year of schooling for both literacy and numeracy’ (p. 164). The superior results for literacy were particularly obvious for lower ability children. While the effects on individuals tended to continue into the second year, the researchers found no clear evidence of class size differences beyond Year 1. Their data provide another cautionary tale: in comparing classes of 15 with classes of 23 large differences were found; but there were only negligible differences between classes of, say, 20 and 25 (sometimes in favour of the larger class!). This again indicates that

‘small’ and ‘large’ are not clearly defined terms and one must constantly be aware of what a particular researcher means by them.

That everything depends on changes beyond simple class size reductions was demonstrated by Murnane and Levy (1996) who looked at the effects of additional resourcing (USD 300,000 per annum per school for five years) in a sample of fifteen extremely poorly performing (as measured on mandatory state wide achievement tests) Texas primary schools serving low income, minority group children. Thirteen of the fifteen schools showed no significant changes in student achievement over the course of the study. In these schools, the additional resourcing was used primarily to reduce class size by hiring additional teachers. The results indicated that class size had made no real difference to achievement. The other two schools also used much of the money to reduce class sizes, but they also did other things: the principal worked with parents and teachers to confront the problem of low achievement; children with special needs were included in regular (now smaller) classes; teachers’ pedagogies were changed by introducing reading and mathematics programmes previously only provided to gifted and talented children in the district; health service provision was brought into the schools; parents became heavily involved in school governance. After five years, attendance at these two schools was among the highest in the city and test scores had risen to the city average. This indicates that reducing class size may have only a small effect when considered in isolation but that’s not the issue. What matters is that reducing class size permits the teacher (and children) to do things differently.

This is acknowledged by the New Zealand Ministry of Education when commenting on the PACE literacy research conducted by Phillips and colleagues (2002) in South Auckland.

The project findings point to a significant relationship between class sizes for new entrants and the gains made in their achievement levels.... For maximum benefit from this kind of approach, it is recommended that class sizes for children in their first year of schooling in low decile schools should not exceed 18.... The study showed that while class size did make a difference, the smaller the classes the better the outcomes, but only in conjunction with professional development. Without professional development, class size may make no difference. (unpaginated)

Interestingly, the issue of class size was emphasised by the co-principal of one of the schools in the PACE study:

The success of the programme has also been attributed to the board of trustees' decision last year to reduce junior class size from 28 students to 15. "This has had an amazing impact because the programme has to be done with groups of three children. When you're involved with each group for 10-15 minutes at a time you can't have large numbers in the classroom unless you have the support of a teacher aide. Smaller numbers mean teachers are able to interact a lot easier with the groups and on a more regular basis'. (Stewart, 2001, unpaginated)

The claimed successes of the PACE programme have been ascribed to innovative teaching techniques but could just as easily be ascribed to the smaller classes, or more likely, to the interaction between the variables. This reinforces our contention that there is need for both smaller classes and differential instruction if 'the long tail of underachievement' is to be tackled.

The longitudinal programme of research by Blatchford and colleagues (2003, 2009, 2011) in UK primary and secondary schools has been able to distinguish the changes in classroom environment, teaching and learning that occur in smaller and larger classes. They found that class size effects are 'multiple', and not related to achievement outcomes in a simple linear fashion. Their research programme has identified the following attributes of class size differences as important contributors to student achievement.

- i. Class size differences demonstrably affect the interactional framework of the classroom as a whole (i.e. the size and number of within-class groups, with consequences for curriculum coverage and the quality of students' work).
- ii. They demonstrably affect the teacher (i.e. task time with students, individual support for learning, classroom management and control, teacher stress/compensatory efforts).
- iii. They demonstrably affect the student (i.e. active involvement with the teacher, student attentiveness/off-task behaviour, and peer relations).

For children at the beginning of schooling, there are significant potential gains in reading and maths in smaller classes. Children from ethnic minorities and children who start behind their peers benefit most. There is also a positive effect on behaviour, engagement and achievement, particularly for low achievers, where classes are smaller in the lower

secondary school. Larger classes produced more groups of students in the class and larger numbers of students within the groups. This had negative effects on teaching, learning and students' concentration. In smaller classes, teachers were more likely to spend time with individual students. In smaller classes, Blatchford and colleagues found that students are more likely to be engaged in learning and less disruptive; in larger classes they are more likely to just passively listen to the teacher; in smaller classes students actively interact with the teacher about their learning. While small classes reportedly have demonstrable benefits for all students in terms of teacher attention, they may be particularly beneficial in the first years of primary *and* secondary school and, in the latter, especially for lower attaining students who otherwise have been shown to be more likely to disengage from learning.

The important point here is the clear implication of the research for the learning of the very groups of students that the National-ACT charter school proposal aims to help: the achievement of weaker students in primary and secondary schools in New Zealand (largely Māori and Pasifika students and/or those from poorer families) could benefit tangibly from them being in smaller classes where teachers have the knowledge, skills and opportunities to better meet the learning needs of students who are otherwise more likely to disengage from learning .

While statistical analysis of the measurable relationship between class size and student achievement provides relatively modest support for a CSR policy, sophisticated multi-level analysis of what actually occurs in classrooms provide strong support for targeted reductions in class size together with teaching strategies that emphasise differentiated instruction. On our analysis, it is targeted and properly supported pedagogical intervention in the classroom, not a charter school choice and voucher mechanism that holds the key to enhancing achievement within the school.

It seems intuitively obvious that in smaller classes teachers are more likely to have the time to focus on the specific learning needs of children; that is, provide differentiated instruction. The ability to determine what instructional approach works best for which children to maximize the effectiveness of beginning literacy instruction for all children and reduce the literacy achievement gap will require high levels of teacher knowledge and professionalism and sufficient time to implement such practices during early schooling. In Treasury thinking terms, it would be the most cost effective way to reduce negative Matthew effects in literacy

and mathematics achievement which have negative downstream consequences for individuals, social cohesion, and economic progress.

### **Teachers as central**

There seems to be general agreement that teachers make the main in-school difference and, for once, this is borne out by the research. However, those on the Right tend to argue that this means that there should be much more supervision and accountability, more explicit skill training, precise objectives, and incentives such as performance pay. They tend to regard John Hattie (2009) as their sole authority on these matters but while Hattie does emphasise the importance of teachers he does not favour all these kinds of policies. He says, for example, ‘School leaders and teachers need to create school, staffroom, and classroom environments where error is welcome as a learning opportunity, where discarding incorrect knowledge and understandings is welcomed, and where participants can feel safe to learn, re-learn, and explore knowledge and understanding’ (p. 239). He goes on to add that what is needed for school improvement is ‘a caring, supportive staff room, a tolerance for errors, and for learning from other teachers, a peer culture among teachers of engagement, trust, shared passion, and so on’ (p. 240). These are the very attributes which low-trust schemes of accountability inevitably destroy.

It is frequently assumed by government speakers that the aim of improving success rates at NCEA Level 2 is dependent on: (i) better achievement at primary schools (hence the importance of national standards); and (ii) better teaching of the essential skills at secondary schools. Terry Crooks, an internationally recognised specialist on assessment, has closely examined data from the 2010 NCEA results. He draws attention to the often overlooked fact that quite a large number of students who fail to achieve Level 1 in Year 11 go on to do so in Year 12, and who fail to achieve Level 2 in Year 12 do so in Year 13. There are different achievement rates for different groups of students (Pakeha, Asian, Pasifika, Māori) as is now well known but it is not always recognised that this is related to *retention rates*. The ultimate success for these four ethnic groups looks quite different because of differences in the percentages staying from Year 11 to Year 12 and Year 13. This factor gives Asian students a final advantage over NZ European students, and Pasifika students over NZ Māori students. By the end of 2010, the following percentages of the 2008 Year 11 students had attained NCEA Level 2: 74 percent of Asian students, 68 percent of NZ European

students, 58 percent of Pasifika students, and 43 percent of NZ Māori students. He goes on to argue:

As I interpret the data, only a small percentage of students (almost certainly not more than 10%) leave year 8 so inadequately prepared for secondary schooling that they have little chance of completing NCEA level 2. Perhaps one third of that small group (3% of the school population) would have little chance of attaining NCEA level 2, whatever the quality of their primary schooling. In my view, it is far more likely that New Zealand would improve the percentage of students who attain NCEA level 2 if we focused on addressing the factors that lead students to not persist in secondary schooling than on addressing the standards that students attain in primary schooling. (Crooks, 2012, 8 February)

That is to say, working on National Standards at primary school and on ‘results’ in years 9-11 at secondary schools is not the way to improve pass rates at NCEA Level 2. This requires better retention rates at years 12 and 13. Creative and inspiring teachers in all subjects may encourage students to stay on in school, which would be better than a narrow focus on skilled performance. The government needs to be aware that too much focus on narrow accountability (i.e. ‘test results’) can operate against attainment by low achieving students: we need to retain them in school not bore them into leaving.

## CHAPTER TEN

### WHERE TO NEW ZEALAND?

During the past 30 years, successive governments have put their faith in the ‘market economy’ to solve all social and educational problems. From the outset, these promised financial savings, greater fairness and improved service. Much of this has proved illusory. In most areas (e.g., power and transport) competition has led to price increases not price decreases. Within the education system, competition has resulted in huge increases in what parents and older students have to pay. Some utilities, such as rail, sold to the private sector at a premium, have had to be bought back by the State after being allowed to run down. Within the various private industries as well as the remaining State institutions, equality of treatment has vanished: workers are paid as little as the business can get away with while the various managers and ‘executives’ are paid vast sums, even when their results are dismal. Few citizens who have telephoned corporations and been put through a litany of numbers to press, believe that service has improved.

Not daunted by these developments, the current coalition government seems determined to continue the privatisation agenda (i.e. prisons, ACC, roading). In education, the government has latched onto the privatisation model from Britain, USA and Sweden in which, as we have shown, the evidence is, to say the least, equivocal.

Sahlberg (2007) draws on the quite different Finnish experience of educational reform efforts since the 1970s and, in effect, argues that what is absent from the orthodox reform agenda is an acknowledgement of the importance of life-world (in this instance, the applied and social aspects of learning that mirror everyday activities). He advocates ‘flexibility and loose standards’ as opposed to standardisation, ‘broad learning combined with creativity’ instead of an undue emphasis on literacy and numeracy, and ‘intelligent accountability with trust-based professionalism’ (p. 152).

Proponents of New Zealand’s charter schools might seek to dismiss this approach as outdated liberal-progressive ideology, but for the simple fact that it works. It works educationally and it works in terms of equity. Finland has one of the most successful education systems in the world. (OECD, 2008, 2011). Without falling into the trap of looking at Finland’s results uncritically and ignoring the particular history and culture of that country, we suggest that a responsible look may have paid off handsomely. New Zealand could not replicate Finland, even if it wanted

to, but educational policy could have been firmly headed in a different (and arguably more successful) direction.

Like New Zealand, and most developed countries, Finland developed a complete public school system, open to all. But during the past 20-30 years (almost co-terminous with our reforms) Finland took a distinctive road.

Firstly, all basic school teachers must hold a Masters degree to become permanently employed. In the late 1970s primary school teacher preparation was converted from a three-year programme at teachers' colleges to four- or five-year university programs and teachers must continually update their professional knowledge and skills. It is the most competitive field open to school leavers and only those who graduate at the top of their class at high school can consider a career in education. The average acceptance rate into schools of education is only 10 percent. Presumably as the result of this, Finnish citizens hold teachers and school principals in the highest esteem and accord the profession a higher status than medicine or law.

Secondly, in the 1980s Finland abolished standardised tests. Instead of test-based accountability in schools, the country—because of the high quality of its teaching force—instituted a trust-based system to allow teachers freedom to teach creatively. Students, too, were given autonomy to learn in different ways. System-wide excellence in student learning has been attained at reasonable cost, using education policies quite the opposite of market-oriented strategies prevalent in many other countries. All this has been achieved while total expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP for all levels of education declined from 7.9 percent in 1992 to 6.3 percent in 1995 and to 6.0 percent in 2005. The equivalent figures for New Zealand were 5.92 percent in 1995, 6.04 percent in 2006 and 6.42 percent in 2009). In Finland there are no 'charter' schools or anything resembling them. Ninety eight percent of educational funding comes from the State.

After streaming was abolished in all secondary schools in the mid-1980s and learning expectations made similar for all students, the achievement gap between low and high achievers began to decrease. The fact that all children enrol in identical comprehensive schools regardless of their socio-economic background or personal abilities and characteristics has resulted in a system where schools and classrooms are heterogeneous in terms of pupil profiles and diverse in terms of educational needs and expectations (Väljärvi & Malin, 2003). Students engage in rich

curriculum experiences and progress through them at their own rate. Learning is personalised while encouraging of independence and interdependence among students in order to develop the skills and dispositions required to participate fully in a ‘knowledge society’. Comprehensiveness, the leading idea in implementing the basic values of equity in education, also means that all students receive a free, two-course warm meal daily, free health care, transportation, learning materials, and counselling in their own schools.

Children’s educational needs are therefore both interpreted broadly and addressed ‘comprehensively’ in Finland. This is no doubt because children as living persons are consciously placed at the centre of the schooling policy and classroom ‘life-world’, and not simply treated as abstract numbers in a growing ‘system-world’ of aggregate achievement outcome data. Unfortunately, it is increasingly the case that the reverse appears to hold true in New Zealand.

In our view, New Zealand government must at all costs avoid destroying the vestiges of flexibility, richness of learning and trust in teachers’ commitment that remain in our schooling system. After all is said and done, New Zealand students are on average consistently among the very highest performers internationally. Laudable government goals to address deeply embedded structural educational inequalities should therefore not be permitted to compromise what already ‘works’ for the large majority of our students. Government goals also need to look more broadly and holistically than schooling policy alone for socio-economic disadvantage must be tackled at source. At the heart of this approach must lie a targeted commitment to eradicate child poverty and hardship because socio-economic disadvantage has consistently been demonstrated to be strongest predictor by far of educational and life chances (Snook & O’Neill, 2010).

As Fergusson and colleagues (2011) have clearly demonstrated in the longitudinal ‘Christchurch Health and Development Study’, childhood poverty and hardship is strongly associated with lower educational attainment, but also a host of other social and economic inequalities:

As expected, children reared in poor families fared less well than children reared in more affluent families in terms of: educational achievement; earnings at age 30; rates of welfare dependence; crime; mental health problems and early pregnancy/parenthood. In general, disadvantages in these areas increased as family income declined. (p. 24)

Having examined the contributing factors, the researchers concluded that a ‘two-pronged’ approach was needed to address child poverty: ‘in which policies are developed to: (a) reduce income inequalities and child poverty; and (b) address the range of psychosocial problems that are more common in low income families’ (p. 27). In terms of the latter they gave three examples: early intervention, school-wide policies ‘aimed at addressing behavioural and educational disadvantages’ (p. 27), and community-based programmes to provide support and assistance for parents.

There are a small number of school-based targeted initiatives that have been trialled in New Zealand on a small-scale, which, in our view, if developed to scale for, say, all low decile schools could form important components of a consistent ‘pan government’ approach to better meeting the socio-economic needs of all structurally disadvantaged children and young people. More practically, they would help to mitigate the adverse effects of poverty and hardship on children’s daily lives and daily learning. For example, we note the health, well-being *and* educational advantages for students in decile one secondary schools that were achieved through the ‘Healthy Community Schools Initiative’ (Ministry of Health, 2009), which provided students in selected decile 1 schools with ready access to health and social services within the school. During the period of the evaluation, literacy, numeracy and NCEA results at all three levels were reportedly higher in the participating schools than in other decile 1 secondary schools. The behavioural data on truancy, formal discipline procedures and retention rates were more mixed. The evaluation nevertheless summarised the findings of better educational outcomes, lower truancy rates and higher retention rates. Similarly, the ‘Multi-Agency Support-Services in Secondary Schools Initiative’ (MASSiSS) (Child, Youth & Family, 2008) was ‘designed to provide early assistance to young people in order to prevent social problems becoming more serious and thus creating a possible barrier to a young person’s academic progress and success’ (p. 10). This initiative aimed to appoint social workers to secondary schools as part of a multi-agency strategy keep adolescents engaged in school and to strengthen the family and community supports that would contribute to this.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, in 2009 the then Minister of Education rejected as unaffordable a proposal for more social workers and counsellors to combat student violence in low decile secondary schools, while in 2011 the Minister of Social Development announced an extension of the social workers in schools scheme to all decile one to three schools in order to combat child abuse and neglect. What appears to have been forgotten in all this is the evidence that providing health and social services in low decile schools also improved learning (New Zealand Herald, 2009; Trevett, 2011).

Meanwhile, at primary school level, the Ministry of Health funded ‘Fruit in Schools’ (FiS) initiative aimed to promote healthy eating by offering students in low decile schools a piece of fruit on each school day, and encouraging schools to promote healthy lifestyles through funding a lead teacher to work with ‘partner agencies’ (Boyd, Dingle, Hogden, King & Moss, 2009). The evaluators (2005-2009) reported the initiative to have had a positive impact on healthy lifestyles at child, school and family levels, and to improve partner agencies’ access to low decile schools and strengthen the public health infrastructure. Students in the scheme were more likely to maintain or improve healthier lifestyles than a comparison group. The benefit of the changes were summarised as:

Students at low-decile schools are more likely to experience poorer longer-term health outcomes than their peers at higher decile schools. The Healthy Futures study showed that FiS schools increased their focus on health and wellbeing and created a “protective climate” around students, and that students at FiS schools were learning skills that were setting them up for the future; and had positive attitudes towards school. These positive views are important because a sense of connection to school is associated with lower engagement in risky health behaviours, as well as improved academic success. In turn, improved academic success is associated with better longer term health. This suggests that FiS has the potential to make a positive difference to the longer term health and education outcomes of these young people. (p. viii)

The Child Poverty Action Group has pointed out the wider equity issues of ‘food security’ and hunger for children who attend low decile schools. On the basis of research studies that show children who are hungry cannot and do not learn effectively, Wynd (2009) argues the case for a national school breakfast programme for children in low decile schools at an annual cost of NZD 25 million (decile 1&2 schools) or NZD 36 million (including decile 3 schools) (p. 7). This it should be remembered is in the context of a total annual schools budget of NZD 8,100 million (2011-2012).

This body of evidence supports our contention that equity problems (‘the long tail’) cannot be solved by teachers alone: it is an issue for the whole society. Nevertheless teachers are vitally important. It is assumed in Finland that what makes a difference in student attainment is not standards, assessment, external inspection or alternative funding schemes but well defined and well targeted instruction. As the level of teacher professionalism gradually increased in schools during the 1990s, and the

prevalence of effective classroom design and teaching methods increased, achievement levels rose, and the gap between the high and low achieving students diminished. These are fundamentally important lessons for New Zealand.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### CONCLUSION

In response to the government's proposals for the setting up of charter schools, we have analysed the relevant arguments and examined some of the available research. We have come to the following conclusions:

- (i) We concur with the statement in the National-ACT Confidence and Supply Agreement that '*Both parties agree that to break this cycle a range of mutually-supporting reforms is required in the areas of welfare, primary health, education, youth transition and employment law*' (2011, p. 3). However, we do not detect that the government has a coherent social policy programme to address poverty and all its accompanying ills: mental and physical health, inadequate housing, lack of jobs, poor self-esteem, and educational disadvantage. Without this multi-pronged attack, changes to educational policy cannot remedy low achievement since this is intimately linked to low household incomes and insufficient family resources.
  
- (ii) While the evidence on charter schools and achievement is inconclusive, we are satisfied from the studies that we have presented that there is little evidence to support the view that charter schools will:
  - *provide choice for large numbers of low income parents*: charter schools will cream off the most motivated families and leave the rest to cope as best they can with what is provided;
  - *promote greater equality*: it is quite possible that a number of individuals will be rather better than they otherwise would have been but they will remain relatively poorly served in relation to their more advantaged mates: the 'rich' will continue to get 'richer';
  - *eliminate the 'long tail of underachievement'*: individuals will benefit and the tail may be reduced slightly but equality of educational opportunity will elude the majority until such time as economic and social welfare is promoted ahead of educational reform.

(iii) We have presented arguments for believing that there are much better ways of achieving these aims within the present school structure by:

- reducing class size in early primary and lower secondary schooling;
- tackling literacy and mathematics in the light of evidence;
- enabling rather than controlling teachers;
- retaining students beyond Year 11.

(iv) If the government goes ahead with a charter school experiment, it will need to carefully evaluate progress in the light of issues which we have isolated. In particular, it will need to take steps to ensure that:

- *charter schools do not ‘succeed’ by selectively enrolling the most motivated students from existing schools* and so impoverish still further the schools which already labour under financial and social handicaps;<sup>10</sup>
- *charter schools are not captured by business interests*, including overseas corporations which may have little real concern for NZ interests and constitute yet another opportunity for our assets to be sold overseas and our children to be indoctrinated with sectional values;
- *charter schools do not actively recruit the best teachers* from other schools, leaving them to cope without their leaders;
- *charter schools do not hire untrained and unsuitable teachers* in order to minimise salary costs and maximise employment contract flexibility;

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<sup>10</sup> Ironically, this has already occurred in the school being promoted as a model for charter schools: Tū Toa, a charitable education trust, was originally set up with assistance of our own University. It has succeeded in part by carefully selecting Māori students with elite sporting and university level academic promise, effectively ‘creaming’ Palmerston North’s high schools of role models for other Māori students. Now called Tai Wananga, it received approval and funding from the Minister of Education to establish ‘special character’ schools in Hamilton and Palmerston North (see Roy, Parata & Flavell, 2010; Bleasdale, 2012).

- *money is not siphoned away from existing grants and programmes which target those most in need (e.g. decile funding, AIMHI<sup>11</sup>, Strengthening Education, etc.).*

We believe that the educational agenda of the past few years is misguided. Finland reminds us that a better approach embraces high levels of professional formation and ongoing professional development and eschews centralised controls and excessive assessment of student progress.

In New Zealand, government initiated or ministry sponsored educational experiments have a long history of ‘success’: all innovations seem to ‘work’. The reason is, of course, that those who introduce them make sure that they are well funded and that the ‘evaluation’ is carefully controlled to ensure favourable outcomes. As the government prepares for another experiment with our children, we can only hope that it will be rigorously monitored with objective data being kept for analysis by impartial researchers. In particular it is important that transparent data be kept on home background and prior achievement of students, the nature of the teachers employed and the financial arrangements for the charter schools (including private and corporate contributions).

Unless the government proceeds with care, it is quite likely that this experiment, far from improving our education system, will be another costly mistake which will lead to further inequality in educational achievement and leave our most vulnerable children victims of the market. If this is so, history will judge the National led Government (2011-2014) harshly as being so ideologically driven that these two parties left our education system much worse than when they inherited it.

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<sup>11</sup> Achievement in Multi Cultural High Schools (Hawk, et al., 1996)

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## **ABOUT THE EDUCATION POLICY RESPONSE GROUP**

The Education Policy Response Group (EPRG) has a history dating back to the early 1980s. It is an ad hoc, eclectic grouping of policy scholars and other interested staff and postgraduate students in the College of Education at Massey University. Its purpose is to meet when necessary to prepare considered responses to major government education policy initiatives and other topical educational debates.

The EPRG's first venture was an analysis of the proposed Core Curriculum issued by then Minister of Education, Hon Merv Wellington, in 1983. Prior to this investigation of charter schools, its most recent report was a critical appraisal of Professor John Hattie's 2009 book, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-analyses Relating to Achievement*.

The following were involved in the group which produced this report:

- Ivan Snook, Emeritus Professor of Education
- John O'Neill, Professor of Teacher Education
- Jenny Boyack, Senior Lecturer in Education
- Seth Brown, Senior Lecturer in Education
- John Clark, Associate Professor of Education
- Keith Greaney, Senior Lecturer in Education
- Richard Harker, Emeritus Professor of Education
- Roger Openshaw, Professor of Education
- Jane Prochnow, Senior Lecturer in Education
- William Tunmer, Distinguished Professor of Education
- Kathleen Vossler, Senior Lecturer in Education
- Margaret Walshaw, Professor of Education

The Group met on seven occasions from February to April 2012.