



# Charter schools<sup>1</sup>

## A PAPER FROM THE PPTA NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

### 1 Charter schools: don't want them, don't need them

- 1.1 Charter schools, as enabled by Act Party and National Party amendments to the Education Act this year, will be fully taxpayer funded private schools to be operated by private sponsors, with limited protections for students, little or no representation by parents, and little oversight to ensure taxpayer funds are spent appropriately.
- 1.2 Charter schools are the stalking horse for full privatisation of the New Zealand education system:
  - The transfer of public funds to private profits
  - Bulk funding
  - De-professionalisation of the teaching profession
  - De-unionisation of the teaching profession
  - Corporatisation of schools
  - Return of depersonalised, factory style rote learning.
- 1.3 At PPTA Annual Conference last year, delegates were given a stern warning from New Orleans education advocate and charter-school parent, Karran Harper Royal: "New Orleans has a DNR order – do not replicate – you do not want to replicate this failure," she said.
- 1.4 At the same conference, educationalist Pasi Sahlberg explicitly noted the things that high performing education systems don't have – "government-pushed charter schools, privatisation, standardised testing, punitive accountability and confrontation with teachers."
- 1.5 More recently, American visitors Ted Fiske and Helen Ladd, authors of a book about New Zealand called *When Schools Compete: A Cautionary Tale*<sup>2</sup>, offered this comment: "Why on earth would New Zealand want charter schools? You don't need them, you already have self-managing schools."
- 1.6 Not that PPTA members needed reminding that fully public-funded profit-making charter schools, operating in secret, without parliamentary scrutiny

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<sup>1</sup> Although the legislation has renamed these schools as Partnership/Kura Hourua in a failed rebranding exercise, the term "charter schools" better captures the history and direction of these schools so is used here.

<sup>2</sup> Fiske E. & Ladd, H. (2000). *When schools compete: A cautionary tale*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute.



and without registered teachers, would not be in the best interests of New Zealand students. The public are clearly in accord with this view: over 2000 submissions opposing the charter school legislation were received and a poll commissioned by PPTA in May this year revealed that only 8% of New Zealanders thought that charter schools should be able to employ unregistered teachers and only 16% thought the schools should be able to make a profit.

- 1.7 The claim by Catherine Isaac of the Charter Schools Working Group that charter schools will be “the R&D arm of the education system” reveals that the supporters of charter schools see nothing inappropriate in conducting ill-researched and largely unregulated experiments on other people’s children.

## **2 The politics of self interest**

- 2.1 Regardless of public opinion, the bill authorising charter schools took its preordained path through Parliament, confirming this was always a political initiative not an educational one.
- 2.2 The whole process, from the surprise announcement after the election in 2011, to the perfunctory way the matter was dealt with in Parliament, has been an unwelcome demonstration of how easy it is for the powerful and rich to manipulate the political process.
- 2.3 This is part of an international trend accurately described by Robert Wade in a recent publication on inequality in New Zealand:

In many western countries ‘the rich’ have been transforming themselves from an ‘establishment’ elite, concerned to foster the well-being of the whole society as a buttress to their own position (including via progressive taxes) to an ‘oligarchic’ elite, concerned to use public power to redistribute society’s resources upwards to themselves (including via regressive taxes). This elite has acquired a vastly disproportionate influence in politics, civil service and media.<sup>3</sup>

- 2.4 Partnership schools spring from the values of ACT Party.<sup>4</sup> John Banks, Act’s single parliamentary MP, announced that charter schools are:

a paradigm shift for the aspirations for some of the most vulnerable and poorest families in this country where these can deliver a world class business opportunity<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Wade, R. (2013). Inequality and the West. In Rushbrooke M. (ed) *Inequality A New Zealand Crisis*. (p. 43). Wellington. Bridget William Books.

<sup>4</sup> Banks, J. (2013, May 14). Education Amendment Bill: Second reading. *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 690, 9841.

<sup>5</sup> Banks, J. (2013, May 14) *Education Amendment Bill: Second Reading - Part 16*. In the House, Parliament TV on demand. Retrieved from <http://inthehouse.co.nz/node/18516>

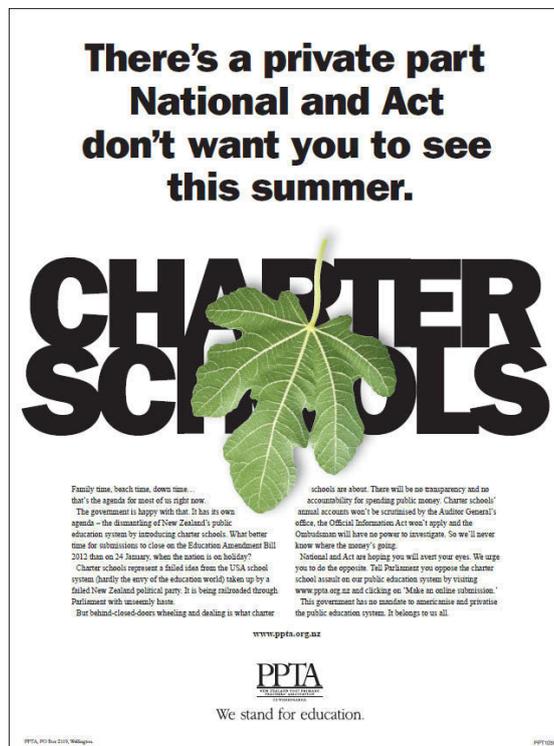


2.5 Banks further announced that

in 10 years' time, we're going to have 50 or 60 partnership schools across the country because they're going to work.<sup>6</sup>

2.6 Bank's rhetoric around aspirations of poor and vulnerable families rings hollow in the mouth of the leader of a party dedicated to privatisation, low taxes for the rich, slashing social spending, reducing the role of the state and removing from families the few protections they have from employers and privateers. Bank's party advocates the exact social inequity that the OECD links firmly with educational inequity for the poorest members of society. ACT's interest is in making more money for the rich 1% who vote for them, by opening up the rich vein of state school funding to private profit, not in improving the educational outcomes of the poor.

2.7 The single parliamentary vote of the Act Party has been used by the National Party<sup>7</sup> to provide a secret door whereby private, profit-taking groups, both here and overseas, can get easy access to public money designated for the education of our children.



<sup>6</sup> Dozens of charter schools on the horizon. (2013, May 12). TV 3 News. Retrieved from: <http://www.3news.co.nz/Dozens-of-charter-schools-on-horizon/tabid/1607/articleID/297459/Default.aspx#ixzz2YzMD986h>

<sup>7</sup> Those who are concerned about the most vulnerable in society will not lightly forget National's anti-Māori Iwi-kiwi election campaign.



- 2.8 It is the understanding of PPTA that American charter school franchises have expressed an interest in opening in New Zealand.

### 3 It's never about education

- 3.1 Still, the legislation could not have gone through without the support of the Māori party. It is difficult to reconcile their support for Act Party policy with educational principle. It remains particularly puzzling in the face of evidence from USA of the "creaming and cleansing" record of USA charter schools from the initial control of the student intake to the systematic expulsion of a large number of Afro-American boys.<sup>8</sup> By this means, charter schools give an appearance of improved achievement.
- 3.2 Pita Sharples was probably speaking from the heart when he responded to the announcement of charter schools by saying that he thought that South Auckland was "the worst place to set up charter schools" and that they would "draw off the best students from neighboring schools".<sup>9</sup>
- 3.3 That was the first and last time he made a critical comment publicly about the charter school policy.
- 3.4 It is extremely difficult to see how charter schools can address the issues we believe are truly responsible for the lower levels of student achievement of Māori and Pasifika students.
- 3.5 Community involvement is a positive factor in Māori and Pasifika student success and this could all too easily be eroded in charter schools. Worse, without community involvement at governance level, Māori and Pasifika students may well suffer disproportionately should similar selection and exclusion practices to overseas models creep in.
- 3.6 The report from the Civil Rights Project at UCLA found that charter schools stratified students by race, class and language and were far more segregated and racially isolated than traditional public schools.<sup>10</sup>
- 3.7 The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) is widely recognised internationally as being a world leader and it already provides considerable flexibility, while providing essential protections, including crucial cultural ones.

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<sup>8</sup> Miron, G., Urschel, J.L., & Saxton, N. (2011). *What makes KIPP work? A study of student characteristics, attrition, and school finance*. National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Study Group on Educational Management Organizations at Western Michigan University.

<sup>9</sup> Sharples opposes charter school trial (2011, December 19). Waatea News Retrieved January 2012 from: <http://www.waateanews.com/News/2011/December/Sharples-opposes-charter-school-trial> [Note item removed when Sharples later backed away from this position]

<sup>10</sup> Frankenburg, E., Seigel-Hawley, G., & Wang, J. (2010) *Choice without equity: Charter school segregation and the need for civil rights standards*. Civil Rights Project / Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA. Retrieved from: <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/choice-without-equity-2009-report>



The curriculum acknowledges the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand. All students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga (p.9).<sup>11</sup>

- 3.8 Without any requirement to adhere to the Curriculum, where will such cultural safeguards for Māori and Pasifika students and their communities be?
- 3.9 Associate professor Damon Salesa of the University of Auckland told PPTA that “we are producing racially segregated neighbourhoods and racially segregated schools,” and that no education system that is separate is actually equal. In particular he warned that charter schools will increase this segregation, and that the genuine desire by Pasifika communities to do better for their children could lead them to be taken advantage of by cynical education corporations.<sup>12</sup>
- 3.10 Neither Māori and Pasifika students nor Māori and Pasifika teachers deserve to be subject to the unfortunate political experiment that is charter schools – particularly when there are indigenous programmes that have been trialed here and have been shown to make a difference for students.
- 3.11 Just as significant but more subtle is the class power relationship that charter schools draw on. The charter school chains have powerful white backers<sup>13</sup>, employ largely white teachers (including those who have come through the fast-track Teach for America training) but white students do not attend charter schools. Charter school students are overwhelmingly Afro-American and Hispanic and generally subject to a test-driven “drill and kill” curriculum that is more about social control than education. Last year we heard from Karran Harper Royal about the charter school practice of “shunning” – punishing infractions by instructing students not to speak or make eye contact with the offender. And, as has been well documented, students who still do not conform are either expelled directly or got rid of by putting so much pressure on parents they remove the child of their own accord.

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<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum: For English-medium teaching and learning in years 1–13*. Wellington: Learning Media Ltd.

<sup>12</sup> Inequality and Novopay dominate activist seminar (2013, March-April) *PPTA News*, 34 (2) p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> For example the K12 charter schools network: “In a development that would have been unheard of a decade ago, about 200,000 U.S. school children are enrolled in full-time online programs. Eleven years after its founding, K12 has 81,000 students in 27 states and the District of Columbia. If it were a school district, it would be one of the largest in America. K12 expects to generate \$500 million in revenue this year—it earned a \$21.5 million profit last year—and its stock has doubled in value since the company went public in December 2007. The financial success of K12 has shown that Milken—the 1980s junk-bond king, convicted felon (securities fraud), and health-care philanthropist—has figured out how to profit from public schools. But while online education may have paid off for Milken and other investors, it’s less clear that K12 is benefiting its students.”  
[http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/11\\_24/b4232076996440.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/11_24/b4232076996440.htm)



3.12 These students are not being taught to think critically about the world they live in but are being taught compliance and obedience. Chris Lehmann of the Huffington Post describes it thus:

To me, when you ensure your own child has an arts-enriched, small-class size, deeply humanistic education and you advocate that those families who have fewer economic resources than you have should sit straight in their chairs and do what they are told while doubling and tripling up on rote memorization and test prep, you are guilty of educational colonialism. And it's time we start calling that what it is.<sup>14</sup>

3.13 Meanwhile the children of the middle class are receiving an education in the flexible, creative, inter-personal skills that are the path to management jobs.

3.14 This charter school experiment is currently budgeted to cost at least \$19 million in funding. This is funding that could have otherwise resourced programmes in schools which have been identified as assisting in improving the education outcomes of disadvantaged groups in our mainstream and immersion schools and kura. These programmes include Te Kotahitanga, reading recovery and reduced class size. The absence of this money will disadvantage tens of thousands of students across hundreds of schools.

3.15 Charter schools divert taxpayer funds from state school students to charter school sponsors, negatively impacting local students and school communities, and reducing educational opportunity for all students.

3.16 Recommendation 3 demands the return to the state sector of the \$19 million budgeted for charter schools to be used to fund programmes which are demonstrated to raise achievement for at risk students in mainstream schools, kura kaupapa Māori and bilingual and immersion units.

#### **4 Stamping out charter schools**

4.1 There is a strong tradition of resistance to charter schools which we in New Zealand must join. The film *The Inconvenient Truth Behind Waiting for Superman* tells the story of a community in New York fighting to keep their local public school from being turned into a charter school, and *Academies and Lies: The parents, the politicians and the carpet bagger* tells a similar story this time set in England.<sup>15</sup>

4.2 The opposition parties in New Zealand have all confirmed that there will be no place for charter schools in the educational landscape should they

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<sup>14</sup> Lehmann, C. (2012, July 25). Educational colonialism. *Huff Post Education*. Retrieved from: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chrislehmann/educationalcolonialism\\_b\\_1704362.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=fb&src=sp&co\\_mm\\_ref=false](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chrislehmann/educationalcolonialism_b_1704362.html?utm_hp_ref=fb&src=sp&co_mm_ref=false)

<sup>15</sup> Both these movies are available online: The inconvenient truth about waiting for superman - <http://vimeo.com/41994760>, and Academies and lies - <http://www.academiesandlies.org.uk/>



become government but that may be some time away. In the interim, charter school operators, employees, and charter school proponents need to know that they are regarded as unwelcome interlopers.

- 4.3 Teachers have a particular ethical obligation to resist the attack on public education; firstly because it represents a very deliberate attack on their conditions of work but also because membership of a profession implies a responsibility to care about the welfare and well-being of all students, not just the ones selected to be part of a political experiment.
- 4.4 Recommendations 4 and 5 confirm PPTA's implacable opposition to charter schools.

## **5 The political response**

### **5.1 Don't go there**

5.1.1 It seems highly unlikely that PPTA members would want to work in charter schools, or indeed that they would be successful in winning positions in one as these schools will be decidedly hostile to unions. For the avoidance of doubt, recommendation 6 makes it clear that the best employment advice PPTA can give in respect of charter schools is "don't go there".

5.1.2 There is a reason charter schools have been set up to operate without registered teachers and in secrecy and that is because the sponsors and managers will be paying themselves far more than their teacher-qualified counterparts receive. They need to be free from the transparency and concurrence requirements that govern salaries of school leaders in the public sector. American research shows that management salaries increase in charter schools while teaching salaries reduce.<sup>16</sup>

5.1.3 Initially charter school employees may be offered higher wages as a recruitment device but that will be paid for by increased workload and longer hours. There will be no place for professional autonomy in these schools and the limited capacity for outside scrutiny, and the absence of union support means management bullying will be difficult to expose and stop.

### **5.2 Don't work with them**

5.2.1 New Zealand has a well-regarded and highly-rated education system. Even Andreas Schleicher, deputy director of education at

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<sup>16</sup> Charter schools spend more on administration, less on instruction than traditional public schools: Study (2012, April 10). *Huff Post Education*. Retrieved from: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/10/charter-schools-spend-more\\_n\\_1415995.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/10/charter-schools-spend-more_n_1415995.html)



the OECD, has advised our Minister of Education that “overseas evidence suggests the Government shouldn't bother with its plans for charter – or "partnership" – schools.”<sup>17</sup>

5.2.2 Recommendation 7 instructs members to undertake some shunning activities of their own but directed at the powerful elite who are using children's education to feather their own nests. Teachers are being asked not to put their expertise and goodwill at the service of untrained charter school employees. This will not be easy as the instinct to support and collaborate is strong in the teaching profession. The reality, however, is that individuals who close their eyes to the wealth of evidence showing how harmful charter schools are have put themselves outside the teaching community. We may anticipate that the charter school proponents will feign outrage that teachers would even consider such action but they can hardly demand altruism from others when their own behaviour is so nakedly self-interested.

## 6 Conclusion

6.1 It took ten years of determined resistance to defeat bulk funding. The lesson the privateers took from this was that they had to avoid a full public confrontation which would have the community siding with teachers. The new strategy had to be more clandestine; it is the same old agenda but this time concealed inside the charter school Trojan horse.

## 7 Recommendations

1. That the report be received.
2. That PPTA:
  - i. Finds the evidence that charter schools are destructive of a public education system overwhelming;
  - ii. Notes that on international measures the New Zealand education system outperforms countries which have charter schools; and
  - iii. Assesses charter schools as inimical to a coherent and effective public education system and social cohesion in New Zealand.
3. That PPTA demands that the \$19 million set aside for charter schools be returned to the state school sector and used to fund programmes which are demonstrated to raise achievement for at risk students in mainstream schools, kura kaupapa Māori and bilingual and immersion units.

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<sup>17</sup> Jones N. Shake up time, says schools guru (2013, July 11). *New Zealand Herald*. Retrieved from [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10896522](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10896522)



4. That this conference of PPTA members reiterates its implacable opposition to charter schools.
5. That PPTA continues to fight for the abolition of the charter school legislation.
6. That PPTA members be strongly advised not to apply for positions in charter schools.
7. That this conference instructs PPTA members to refrain from all professional, sporting and cultural contact with charter schools including their sponsors, managers, and employees.

**The 2013 Annual conference minutes record that the following recommendations were passed:**

1. That the report be received.
2. THAT this conference of PPTA members reiterates its implacable opposition to charter schools; and (rec 2 was originally rec 4)
3. THAT PPTA:
  - Finds the evidence that charter schools are destructive of a public education system overwhelming;
  - Notes that on international measures the New Zealand education system outperforms countries which have charter schools; and
  - Assesses charter schools as inimical to a coherent and effective public education system and social cohesion in New Zealand; and
4. THAT PPTA demands that the \$19 million set aside for charter schools be returned to the state school sector and used to fund programmes which are demonstrated to raise achievement for at risk students in mainstream schools, kura kaupapa Māori and bilingual and immersion units; and
5. THAT PPTA continues to fight for the abolition of the charter school legislation.
6. THAT PPTA members be strongly advised not to apply for positions in charter schools.
7. THAT this conference instructs PPTA members to refrain from all professional, sporting and cultural liaison with the sponsors, managers and employees of charter schools.



# “Teaching? There’s nothing to it,” he says.



## His charter school students couldn’t agree more.

If National and Act’s charter schools experiment goes ahead, the education of young New Zealanders will soon be in the hands of untrained, unqualified and unregistered teachers.

And New Zealand’s strong education standards, built up over generations, will start to erode.

It’s all part of the charter school recipe. Yet it flies in the face of a recommendation from the New Zealand Treasury that all teachers at charter schools should be registered.

“This is because,” noted Treasury, “quality teaching is the most important in-school factor influencing student achievement.”<sup>1</sup>

But charter schools are more about money than quality education.

When Catherine Isaac, chair of the New Zealand Model

of Charter Schools Working Group, was asked if unregistered teachers were a way for charter schools to make more money through lower teacher salaries, she replied: “It’s not our business to know how they’re (charter schools) making a profit.”<sup>2</sup>

Not our business, even though these schools are funded with public money? Not our business, to ask why our children will be put in front of untrained and untested teachers?

No, despite their reliance on the New Zealand tax payer, these ‘for profit’ schools will not be our business. They’ll be somebody else’s going concern.

Make no mistake, if it goes ahead the charter schools’ assault on our public education system will be an unqualified disaster.

To oppose charter schools make a submission on the Education Amendment Bill before 24 January, 2013.  
Visit [www.ppta.org.nz](http://www.ppta.org.nz) and go to ‘Make an online submission.’



We stand for education.

PPTA, PO Box 2119, Whēingaru

1. Paper released by Treasury, 20 Dec 2012, available from <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/information/charter/charter/pptaschools.pdf> to 20121116.pdf

2. Interview on TVNZ’s Q&A, 5 August 2012, available from <http://tvnz.co.nz/q-and-a/whāte-ā-whāte-charter-schools-video-5007140> or transcript <http://www.nzcp.co.nz/story/PO1200/50070?code=charter/whāte-catherine-isaac-and-lao-locks.htm>