

Briefing for the incoming Minister



Introduction

The Secondary Principals' Council of Aotearoa (SPC) represents secondary and area school principals who are members of PPTA. The independent voice of SPC reflects the leadership role principals play in the education system – and provides a crucial perspective that is sought by educational bodies, policy makers and the media.

SPC is an unwavering champion of public education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

SPC is made up of regional representatives from across Aotearoa, plus representatives for Māori, Women and Area School Principals. A chairperson is elected from the group.

Public education is the foundation of a just and connected Aotearoa New Zealand. In an increasingly diverse society, our schools and classrooms are one of the few places where we really do come together.

SPC supports the growth of a culturally responsive secondary education system where schools are places where ākonga Māori and their whānau and all students and families feel a sense of belonging and connection.

Improvements in education systems happen through deliberate, thoughtful, systematic and evidence-based approaches. It is crucial that any changes proposed by the new government are undertaken with support from the profession, reflect our context in Aotearoa, and are supported with funding and time to ensure sensible implementation by teachers and school leadership. Educational reform and policy lurch is harmful and expensive in terms of time, money and attention. Successful reform realistically has a ten-year timeframe and requires careful implementation. This document provides an overview of the key issues facing secondary education and how principals would like



Naku noa nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kate Gainsford'.

Kate Gainsford
SPC Chairperson

Summary



Key Issues

- SPC supports public education that meets the needs of our rangatahi. There should be no barrier to a quality, public education, and we support a flexible, well-resourced, and innovative system.
- SPC supports the growth of a culturally responsive secondary education system that promotes and enhances Māori success as Māori. Schools should be places where ākonga Māori and their whānau feel a sense of belonging and connection.
- For change to be successful in the education sector it needs to be backed by strong research and developed and implemented alongside teachers and school leadership.



The Teaching Workforce

- Recent research by the Secondary Principals' Council¹ indicated that secondary schools were under-staffed by an average of five full time teachers per school. There is a very clear need for a workforce strategy to address current pressures and future needs of the teaching workforce.
- SPC sees benefit in working with government to develop a five-year sector plan for recruitment and retention, which could incorporate the findings of the pay equity review and utilise an alternative approach to collective agreement negotiations in 2025.
- A more structured and systemic approach to supporting leadership must be developed by the Ministry of Education.



Education Sector Issues

- Throughout the country kaiako are leading the development of resources and programmes as part of the NCEA Change Package and Curriculum Refresh (Te Mātaiaho) Initiatives. SPC supports the intent of both initiatives. Delays to the implementation of the literacy and numeracy co-requisites and NCEA Levels 2 and 3 have been proposed to support better implementation.
- The government needs to invest more in redesigning alternative education and providing an end-to-end system of support for children and young people at risk of disengaging from education.
- SPC supports reducing the burden on schools by simplifying and in some instances removing infrastructure management and maintenance responsibilities from boards to centralise key services, such as planned and preventative maintenance.

¹ <https://www.ppta.org.nz/past-events/the-staffing-summit/>

- SPC wants to see well-resourced learning support in all schools for learners with high needs. The multi-teacher model of secondary education makes inclusion challenging and complex. Secondary schools need adequate funding, resources and time allowances to enable effective, flexible, mana enhancing support and options in meeting increased need.
- SPC calls on the government to close the digital divide and the Ministry of Education and the NZ Qualifications Authority to provide direction and advice to ensure the rigour and validity of our national qualifications given the increasing use of digital technologies, including the increased need for learners with Special Assessment Conditions.



Key issues

Public education

SPC supports public education that meets the needs of our rangatahi. There should be no barrier to a quality, public education, and we support a flexible, well-resourced, and innovative system.

The opportunity for schools and kura to be designated special character provides further innovation within a system that is already very highly devolved. Special character designation still allows effective oversight of the expenditure of state funding and checks to ensure ākonga receive a high-quality education.

We support considered, resourced, well implemented, evidence-based change which improves the outcomes for students in the public education system.

Under the Tomorrow's Schools model, competition between schools was intended to improve access to good quality schools through parents exercising choice. There is no evidence that such competition or exercise of choice has improved overall school performance or learner outcomes. The model made it harder to share good practice across schools and led to significant spending of state funds or locally raised funds on such things as marketing rather than the priority of teaching and learning.

Competition has also made it harder for a significant minority of schools to meet their learners' needs because it has exacerbated ethnic and socio-economic segregation and in so doing has weakened the social capital of these communities.

A quality education cannot be at the mercy of a 'post-code lottery' or the inherited or accumulated wealth of your whānau. All of our schools should be safe and well-resourced, with a full contingent of teaching staff, support staff and facilities. SPC supports initiatives that support equity such as the Equity Index, Period Products in Schools and extending the Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches Programme.

Te Tiriti relationship

SPC supports the growth of a culturally responsive secondary education system that promotes and enhances Māori success as Māori. Schools should be places where ākonga Māori and their whānau feel a sense of belonging and connection.

We support the requirement in the Education and Training Act 2020 that one of a board's primary objectives in governing a school is to ensure that the school gives effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This requirement has the flow on effect of expecting mana whenua to engage with schools on this work when they may not have the resources to do this.

Mana whenua should be supported by the Ministry of Education to engage with schools to develop resources and processes that will ensure mātauranga Māori is authentic and endorsed. School leadership should have equitable access to professional learning for partnership engagement with mana whenua to achieve an authentic Te Tiriti relationship.

Cultural responsibilities within schools are often placed on kaiako with the cultural capacity to lead integration of tikanga and te reo Māori into school practices. The NZ Council for Educational Research National Survey Report 2021 indicates that the additional strain may impact the retention of kaiako

Māori, with data showing ‘Māori were also more likely to want to change schools or leave the profession entirely before retirement, compared with non-Māori teachers².’

Ongoing work is needed to address recognition and provision for kaiako with expertise in language and tikanga and to support the additional cultural workload they carry.

Working with the profession

Successful change management in the education sector needs to have a strong research base and should be developed and implemented alongside teachers. SPC is a professional voice of principals with strong connections to the teaching workforce which makes us uniquely placed to work with government and its agencies on education sector initiatives.

A cooperative approach has proven effective in the introduction of new initiatives to the sector, such as the NCEA qualification, Kāhui Ako, Networks of Expertise, and the Equity Index for resourcing. When the resources and capacities of the profession and the government are aligned, enduring and constructive change can occur.

To pre-empt the periodic tension in collective agreement negotiations, SPC supports alternative approaches previously proposed in guidance from the independent Arbitration Panel (2023) to the Government, the Ministry of Education and to PPTA. It is believed that these approaches offer an opportunity for constructive and purposeful engagement, and we look forward to seeing these progress as a matter of priority.



² [NZCER National Survey Report 2021.pdf](#), p.29

The Teaching Workforce

Supporting leadership

School leadership opportunities and responsibilities are wide, and complex, yet not sufficiently well supported, clearly visible, effective or consistently available to senior teachers, to ensure a reliable pipeline of well prepared senior teachers ready for principalship.

A 2023 Education Review Office (ERO) report on preparing and supporting new principals³ found that there are still areas of the role in which new principals feel unprepared, and where they are not confident to carry out their responsibilities once in the role.

An NZCER report on Wāhine Māori in Leadership⁴ found that cultural leadership was hidden and unrecognised in many circumstances. It recommended specific support mechanisms for new and aspiring leaders along with professional learning and development opportunities crucial to fostering the growth of wāhine Māori in leadership positions.

PPTA has been proactive in supporting principal leadership through the PPTA Professional Learning and Development Centre and through SPCs advocacy. We are saddened by ERO reports that principals' enjoyment of their role plummeted during the COVID pandemic and has not bounced back as much as teachers.⁵ There is a concerning trend for principals to leave their career as a principal 'early' due 'to the excessive and untenable demands of the role.

We strongly advise that a more structured and systemic approach to supporting leadership is developed by the Ministry of Education, including the establishment of a leadership centre as recommended by the Review of Tomorrows schools.

School staffing

The way in which secondary school staffing is allocated has not changed significantly since 2012. However, schools now face new and increasing pressures, including:

- greater needs in student pastoral care and guidance
- an increasingly complex management environment
- greater expectation of differentiated learning and learning pathways
- greater expectation for community and whānau liaison
- a shift away from streaming and towards integration of students with greater learning needs
- the use of innovative learning environments
- the accelerated development of blended and asynchronous teaching and learning practices
- increasing recognition of the impacts of workload on the wellbeing of principals, senior leaders, middle leaders, pastoral care teachers and classroom teachers
- the loss of international student income that has masked under-resourcing.

³ https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/category/preparing-and-supporting-new-principals?fbclid=IwAR0SqWWkmfPsm7FtRK0eBM_vkQ8iFD0s-GRUQsELpcmWABp7wqbLV_Nmc4

⁴ <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/wahine-maori-leadership>

⁵ <https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/long-covid-ongoing-impacts-of-covid-19-on-schools-and-learning>

Recent research by the Secondary Principals' Council⁶ indicated that secondary schools were understaffed by an average of five full time teachers in terms of meeting both the mandatory requirements in curriculum, pastoral care and administration and community expectations which have become core parts of school life (such as extracurricular activity). The research particularly highlighted under-resourcing of pastoral care and guidance staffing.

There is a very clear need for a workforce strategy to address the ongoing and future needs of the teaching workforce.

Recruitment, retention and workload

Secondary and composite (Years 1-13) schools face increasing difficulty in recruiting and retaining trained and qualified teachers. School-level recruitment data collected by PPTA earlier this year was the worst on record.

As application rates for teaching jobs continue to drop, schools face quality as well as quantity issues in supply, which has significant implications for the workload of school leaders and for the ability of schools to respond to the educational needs of ākonga.

Decreasingly attractive work-life balance, alongside falling relative wages, are major contributors to the problems. SPC is hopeful that the pay equity review process which the sector is engaged in will provide robust evidence of the degree to which salaries are or are not competitive.

SPC sees benefit in working with government to develop a five-year sector plan for recruitment and retention, which could incorporate the findings of the pay equity review and utilise an alternative approach to collective agreement negotiations for teachers to address the problems in a sustainable way.

Initial teacher education

With teacher supply at a critical level and the number of people choosing secondary teaching decreasing each year, it is no surprise that some initial teacher education providers are struggling to keep their programmes going.

The burgeoning of in-school/field-based teacher education programmes to address the teacher supply issue can exacerbate existing inequities between those schools that have extra funds, and those that don't - in this case funds to 'sponsor' a trainee.

A recent PPTA Te Wehengarua survey revealed the following concerns about initial teacher education:

- Lack of support for mentors of teacher trainees – time allowances and payments are woeful for such an important task;
- Lack of specialist subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge;
- Inequities in access to funded teacher education programmes
- Burden on teacher trainees (financial, academic workload vs practicum workload);
- Questions around the appropriateness of those trying to complete a teacher education course while also being employed on a Limited Authority to Teach basis.

⁶ <https://www.ppta.org.nz/past-events/the-staffing-summit/>

Education Sector Issues

NCEA and curriculum change process

Throughout the country kaiako are leading the development of resources and programmes that are part of the NCEA Change Package and Curriculum Refresh (Te Mātaiaho) initiatives. The purpose of the NCEA changes is to improve learning across the separate disciplines' bodies of knowledge. The package also aims to improve the coherence of the qualification and address equity, workload and wellbeing concerns that have arisen. It is helpful to the secondary sector when there is cross party support for major system changes as there was at the point at which the package was introduced.

SPC supported the intent of both initiatives and a one-year delay in the implementation of the literacy and numeracy co-requisites and NCEA Levels 2 and 3. Extra time is critical to support the profession to embed key changes to teaching, learning and assessment programmes in secondary schools. It also allows for some of the critical Te Mātaiaho mahi to 'catch up'.

Deliberate attention to Te Tiriti o Waitangi across both work programmes was overdue and must be allowed to continue. Resourcing and support for this national system shift must continue to be provided to ensure successful implementation.

SPC agrees that attention must also be paid to improving literacy and numeracy but has not supported one specific pedagogical approach to be legislated over another. Schools also need resourcing to be able to successfully implement the common assessments at the new system wide scale required for the literacy and numeracy corequisites.

Many schools have been part of the pilots of the new NCEA standards and are now starting to see the benefits as the changes start to take effect. It is important that changes are continued and the support to the whole sector is strengthened so that the most significant reform of NCEA since the qualification was introduced in 2002 can be a success.

Attendance

The issues around school non-attendance are wide-ranging and complex and there is no easy fix. Internationally there has also been a decrease in school attendance.⁷

Schools cannot raise attendance rates on their own. SPC considers there is an urgent need for support from the Ministry of Education, both locally in the form of support for whānau on the ground and nationally in the form of a targeted campaign informing parents about the importance – and their legal responsibilities – of schooling. We need more pastoral and guidance staff in our schools to help identify students who are struggling, for a variety of reasons, and to work with these rangatahi and their families to keep them engaged at school before we lose them. Relationships with students' whānau and caregivers are hugely important.

The government needs to invest more in redesigning alternative education and providing an end-to-end system of support for children and young people at risk of disengaging from education. Funding is needed urgently for more learning support coordinators across the school sector.

⁷ [ERO release of their latest report on attendance](#)

School property

Managing school property issues, including rebuilds, redevelopments and refurbishments continue to be an exceptionally demanding and often unsatisfying part of the principals' role. A lack of clarity about roles and the interface between school boards' maintenance and management roles and responsibilities and Ministry of Education and contracted third parties add to the burden. Timeliness of support and access to resources for building projects continues to be a challenge. The impact of significant property demands on the role of the principal is not well recognised, nor equitably addressed.

SPC supports the recommendations in the Review of Tomorrow's Schools of reducing the burden on schools by simplifying or removing infrastructure management and maintenance responsibilities from boards and centralising key services, such as planned and preventative maintenance, whilst including local knowledge and educational expertise to be at the core of design. Not only would this significantly improve the quality of school property, it would deliver efficiency gains, but it will also free up the time of principals and senior leaders at schools to focus more on lifting equity and excellence for all learners/ākonga.

Learners with high support needs

SPC wants to see well-resourced learning support in all schools for learners with high and moderate needs. The multi-teacher model of secondary education makes inclusion challenging and complex. We need adequate funding, resources and time allowances to enable schools to provide flexible, mana enhancing options in meeting increased need.

We call for the complete roll-out of learning support coordinators (LSCs) to include all secondary schools, so there is at least one in every secondary school. This would remove the inequity of less than half of schools and students being able to access this resource. SPC is committed to improvements in outcomes for Māori students with highest needs. The disproportionately high numbers of Māori being labelled with 'behaviour' problems and the data on exclusions for Māori learners reinforce the view that the system does not provide appropriately for Māori.⁸ The impacts of colonisation and racism can be seen in additional [high] need data that has not improved for Māori over the last several decades.⁹ Effective, culturally responsive, professional development must be available for all teachers to address pastoral and learning needs .

SPC firmly believes that workload is currently a barrier to providing best support for learners with highest needs. More staffing and more manageable workloads will enable teachers and principals to do their work in a sustainable way.

Teaching with digital technologies

The rapid development of digital technologies and the globalised nature of economic systems are creating an entirely new set of educational challenges for the world to adapt to.^[1] Making the most of digital technologies (emerging, advanced, GenAI) will require trust, inclusion, workforce capability, data capability, and systems and processes to manage these. It certainly demands the removal of barriers that mean access is not available to all.

The current and increasing digital divide must be addressed. SPC calls on the government to close the digital divide and the Ministry of Education and the NZ Qualifications Authority to provide policy

⁸Massey University (2021). Children with Additional Needs: Report to the Accord. Final Report. (June)

⁹ Massey University (2021). Children with Additional Needs: Report to the Accord. Final Report. (June)

direction and advice to ensure the rigour and validity of our national qualifications given the increasing use of digital technologies.

The provision of quality professional learning for teachers is vital, and we advocate for the supports required to ensure teaching with digital technologies is pedagogically sound, inclusive, and equitable for all. We want teachers to be confident in their digital knowledge and understanding, and able to make best use of the opportunities these technologies provide. These supports can include funded quality professional development for teachers, sound policy direction and advice ensuring the rigor and validity of our national qualifications.

