



**Pigeon Mountain School**  
Education with a Heart

# **Pigeon Mountain Primary School**

submission on

## **The Tomorrow's Schools Review**

### **Introduction**

Pigeon Mountain Primary School's vision is to provide 'Education with a Heart'. We aspire to equity and excellence and believe that we consistently deliver both.

Pigeon Mountain Primary School (PMPS) agrees that the current legislation is failing students in a small number of schools (approximately 6%). We also agree with some of the recommended improvements.

However, many of the recommendations are not sound, based on incorrect assumptions and will result in successful schools deteriorating.

## **Pigeon Mountain Primary School**

We are a large decile 8 contributing state primary school catering for students from Year 0 – 6. PMPS is located in Bucklands Beach, Auckland and has approximately 600 students. Founded in 1979, PMPS has had stable governance and leadership with only five principals in 40 years.

We have a diverse mix of students, with over 20 ethnicities represented. The largest ethnicity is Chinese, with 52% of students of Chinese origin.

PMPS has had consistently strong ERO reports, is an Enviro School (Beyond Green-Gold) and is in the process of establishing a Kāhui Ako with neighbouring schools.

As set out in our school charter, we believe that *“Quality provision, leadership, teaching and learning, supported by effective governance, enable our Māori, Pasifika and other students to excel.”*

Set out below is Pigeon Mountain Primary School’s comments regarding each of the eight key issues outlined in *Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together, Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātitini* (The Report).

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| <b>1. Governance: The Board of Trustees self-governing model is not working consistently well across the country.</b> |
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We agree. There are a large number of schools that are doing well. These are generally larger, higher decile schools (of which PMPS is one). However, the system is failing some smaller, lower decile schools, their communities and their students. This needs to change. It is inequitable and is not providing the educational excellence New Zealand students deserve.

Failure is an important part of continuous improvement, with insight often gained more meaningfully from failure than success. However, the key is to reflect on what is not working and fix that component. The Tomorrow’s Schools Independent Taskforce recommendations seek to remove a system that works for the majority of schools, in order to fix what is not working in a minority. This is not the correct approach.

The majority of schools have good governance. Roles for boards of trustees are contested through elections and parents have the choice of a number of qualified people to represent them.

PMPS is one of these schools and has consistently had board members serving more than one term. Its board members have been from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds, with a range of professional qualifications and work experiences, that have added value to the school. These have included accountants, teachers, lawyers, doctors, building experts, police officers amongst others.

At times we have needed additional expertise and have co-opted parents with skills in health and safety, property, links to community and cultural groups, and IT qualifications for specific projects. Collectively we have always been well equipped to deal with any issue, and in our experience significantly more so than the Ministry of Education staff we have interacted with.

Our board members give their valuable time and effort for what amounts to less than the minimum wage. They do this because they are passionate about the school and its students, and are engaged and committed to producing high quality educational outcomes. The vast majority of board members are parents with children attending PMPS, with a personal stake in the educational outcomes of the school.

The Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce governance recommendations disempower boards. It assumes incorrectly that boards do not have the necessary skills and resources.

### Governance "professionals"

Education Hubs are the suggested solution. It is assumed they will be an improvement because they will be staffed by "professionals", however we believe this to be false. Unfortunately the education system in New Zealand does not remunerate appropriately. Ministry staff, principals and teachers are underpaid, meaning it is difficult to attract and retain quality staff.

Education Hubs will need to significantly increase remuneration for governance "professionals" to get close to the quality of individuals that are currently serving on boards for less than minimum wage. This will result in a significant increase in cost, which has not been quantified in the report. In Appendix 1 we set out a rough estimate of what each Education Hub will cost. The estimate calculates a cost of \$2,500,000 per hub, a total cost of approximately \$50,000,000.

Furthermore, the governance "professionals" will have a large number of schools to govern (estimated at 125). Unavoidably they will not have a detailed and nuanced understanding of the school, its community, its staff, its values and beliefs, or its culture. They will be making important decisions about property, health and safety and finance based on a cursory understanding of the issues and the schools' needs.

The intended governance "professionals" will not represent the school community. They will not be elected and will most likely not live in or understand the local community. They will not care as deeply about the school, or have the same level of engagement, as existing boards of trustees, as they will have no direct personal stake in the educational outcomes of the school.

Some schools (often lower decile) are not in the same position as PMPS. Roles for boards of trustees are not contested through elections and parents may not have qualified people to represent them. These schools may have board members serving only one term, or conversely they may serve for too many terms because there is no one to replace them.

Governance "professionals" supplied by Education Hubs would be best utilised in schools that are failing. In addition, the remuneration board members receive should be equity-adjusted and all low decile schools should be provided with funding for board development. We strongly recommend that some of this development should be provided by the New Zealand School Trustees Association, which largely does an excellent job.

This approach would increase the chance of quality board applicants, increase the governance skill of the successful applicants, and retain the deep understanding, connection and passion of the current system.

Education Hubs could decide which schools need additional governance assistance based on a range of needs criteria. They could assess and deem schools in or out of their sphere of influence. Existing board audit and assurance tools (BoardSURE, NZSTA HR Audit etc) could be mandated to support this approach.

### Ministry performance

Below is a quote from The Report:

*"The distance between schools and the Ministry of Education has led to mistrust of the Ministry, with many seeing the Ministry primarily as a driver of compliance rather than an agency that understands*

*the very real complexities and challenges faced by schools and the communities they and the Ministry serve.”*

The reality is, it is the Ministry’s performance, rather than distance, that has led to mistrust. An example of this is the highly problematic bureaucratic process the Ministry inflicts regarding property. It causes delays, adds no value, is staffed by poorly qualified, inexperienced and frequently transient staff. PMPS has had at least six different ministry representatives in the last five years, one of whom lost all of our signed 5YA contracts and documents.

Ministry staff turnover is mentioned on Page 46 of The Report. The same will be the case for Educational Hubs.

#### Board funding

The recommendation that boards of trustees have discretion to spend only locally raised funds will effectively mean they become similar to parent teacher associations. Boards will not be able to do anything meaningful or strategic with such little funding. Capable professionals with desirable skills will not volunteer their time in a role with little responsibility or influence.

To implement a strategic decision, the board needs access to financial resources, staffing and property. For example, PMPS recently decided to improve its music education and used funds to hire a part-time music teacher, purchase teaching resources and transform an area previously used as storage into a quality music teaching environment. Under the proposals in The Report none of this would have been possible.

The first recommendation on Page 50 of The Report states that principals “would continue to be responsible for/ and have discretion over ... their operational budget”. This is currently a board responsibility. Is the recommendation that principals have sole discretion?

#### Health and safety

We find the recommendation on Page 52 of The Report confusing. Why is the Business Support Services unit providing advice and support to schools on health and safety and financial reporting and monitoring, when this is the role of the Education Hub? We believe health and safety is very difficult to delegate up to the Education Hub as it will not have first hand knowledge of the school or its health and safety issues. It would be very difficult for the PCBUs at the Education Hub to comply with their statutory duties.

#### Secondment

Page 52 of The Report recommends teacher secondment. We believe that any secondment needs to be the choice of the teacher and not mandated by the Education Hub. There is currently a serious teacher shortage and the suggested secondments will further exacerbate this problem.

#### Boards of trustees support

Page 53 of The Report states the support provided by Education Hubs to boards of trustees would mean there would no longer be a need for a national contract with NZSTA to train and support boards. We believe the NZSTA does an excellent job, and through its training and support shares best practice across the country in a way that Education Hubs, with their regional focus, could never achieve. Is it expected that boards will continue without any formal training?

There also needs to be more detail provided around how the Education Hubs will ensure sharing of information between regions. In The Report it is assumed but not explained.

## Education Hubs

The assumption that Education Hubs will be better than current boards of trustees is untested. It is predicated on the belief that current boards lack the requisite skills and do not share best practice with other schools. Losing current boards would mean a loss of democracy, culture, agility, engagement, passion, ingenuity, diversification, ownership, and, in many cases, competence. The Education Hubs will bring bureaucracy, misunderstanding, disengagement, inflexibility, indifference, homogeneity and cost.

Education Hubs should be trialled within schools that want and/or need them. Performance should then be benchmarked against schools with boards of trustees, utilising existing board assurance tools. After detailed analysis, if Education Hubs are proven to be superior, there may be sufficient grounds to look to further rollout.

## **2. Schooling Provision**

We broadly agree with the recommendations, however we strongly disagree with changing intermediates into junior colleges. Our objections are mostly due to practical issues and the fact there is little evidence that junior colleges have a positive impact on student outcomes.

In general, the nature, type, provision and accessibility of meaningful schooling for all New Zealanders is excellent.

The Report has indicated there are issues around inconsistent transitioning between schools. While continued improvement should be an ongoing aim, a complete reworking of the primary, intermediate and secondary school system is unnecessary and would be expensive, disruptive and impractical.

Most intermediates are well-established on limited sites. They do not have the capacity to take on substantial role increases. There would also be a massive underutilisation of secondary school land (up to 40%). It is essential that a full cost benefit analysis of this proposal be investigated before this idea is promoted any further.

In addition, if the basis of reviewing the existence of intermediate schools is that they are "*problematic*" in the words of Bali Haque at the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce principals' consultation meeting of 21st March, because "*a number of principals expressed a desire to keep students for an additional one or two years*", then they are clearly not the issue the report makes them out to be.

Page 61 of The Report notes that all intermediate schools agreed with middle schooling. Under the current system these principals' remuneration would increase greatly as the size of their schools would double. The principals are conflicted and their views should be considered with this in mind.

The Report fails to mention or recognise that the growth of junior/senior colleges is directly associated with the growth of the high density housing developments in which they have generally been built. This should not be confused as an indicator of success.

Transitioning between schools currently falls under Kāhui Ako, a relatively new initiative requiring time before any judgement can be made on workability and success. It would be premature and unfair to introduce a new system before allowing COLs the opportunity to address the highlighted issues around transitioning between schools.

Page 17 of The Report notes that the Kāhui Ako model is inflexible and restricts local innovation. We believe many of the changes suggested in the recommendations do exactly the same.

Page 60 of The Report refers to magnet schools. We consider that PMPS is more willing and able to meet the particular needs of students with disabilities and/ or who require additional learning support. We agree with the recommendation of additional funding in the Disability and Learning Support section.

Recommendation 8 talks about broader socio-economic services provided at schools. We agree that making schools full service community sites would be positive and support this whole-heartedly.

### **3. Competition and Choice**

At PMPS we strive to do the best for our students, as well as developing strong collaborative relationships with our neighbouring schools. An example of this is the Kāhui Ako that is currently being established.

However, it should be noted healthy competition is beneficial to the New Zealand schooling system and the students it serves. In all aspects of nature, business and sport, competition between participants brings out the best in the population. If you remove competition it is to the detriment of all participants. Imagine what would happen if New Zealand rugby franchises stopped competing with each other. The quality of rugby within the franchises and across the country would decrease rapidly. Equally, there are numerous examples of the benefit of competition in business. The car industry has benefited from competition throughout its history. Countries that have chosen to largely remove competition, such as Russia, have produced lower quality cars.

Strong community support has created schools that are successful, highly regarded and resultingly sought-out by out-of-zone families and international students.

By contrast, some schools do not have the advantage of highly engaged communities. In-zone students and their families often face a range of socio-economic problems and boards of trustees are comprised of less engaged and appropriately skilled community members. Unsurprisingly these schools are not successful and therefore are not sought-out by out-of-zone families or international students. Without question these schools need additional support and better solutions from the Ministry of Education.

However, destroying competition and diversity, rather than seeking to raise up low-performing schools, is not the answer. Parents and students should always have the opportunity to choose a school which they believe will best suit them and their needs. Removal of choice and the homogenisation of education will be to the detriment of all.

Many parents choose to send their children to different schools based on culture and curriculum. They choose the best fit for the individual needs of the child. The only benefit we see in placing strict enrolment restrictions is that traffic will be reduced.

In addition, an outcome of enforcing school zones will be a further increase in the cost of housing in desired school zones. This will further reduce equity as many families simply will not be able to buy into or rent in these zones.

### **4. Disability and Learning Support**

We agree with all recommendations, particularly recommendations 13 and 14.

## 5. Teaching

The Report does not consider teacher supply and remuneration. We consider this to be a glaring omission. Teachers are not paid enough. The current lack of teachers is already at crisis point, and the aging demographic of teachers and lack of graduates will only compound this problem. The only way to consistently attract and retain quality staff into the teaching profession is to remunerate them appropriately. This should be a major focus of any review of the education system.

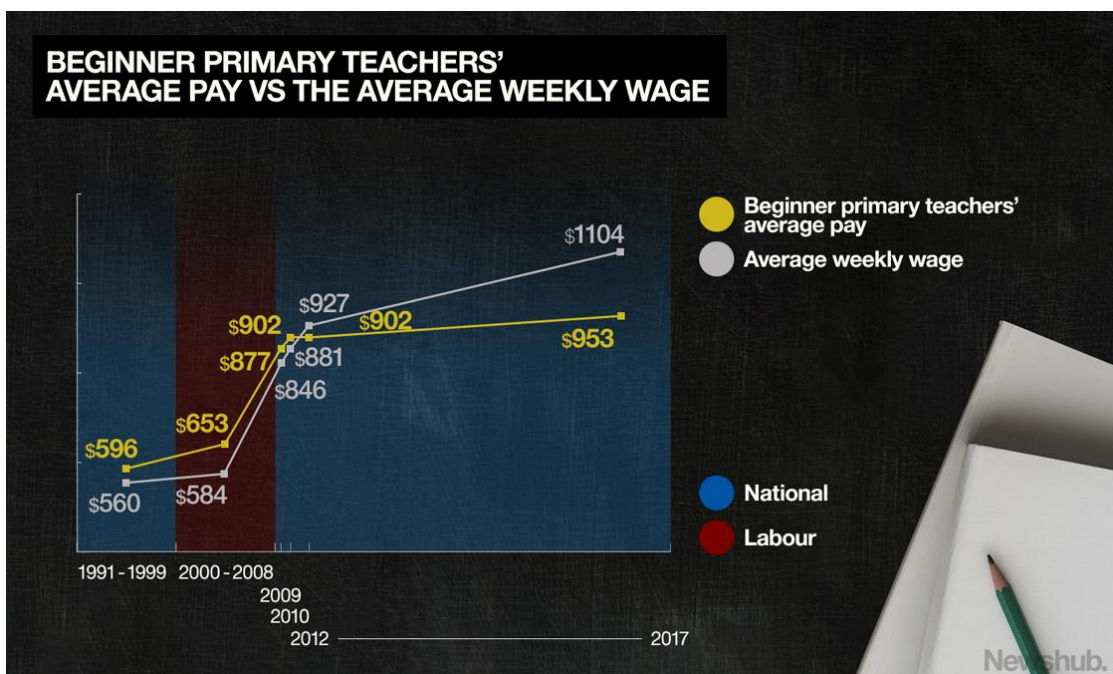
As can be seen in the graphs below, teachers' wages have not kept pace with the average weekly wage. By contrast, backbench MPs' salaries have sky-rocketed.

It is deeply unfair to blame the education system's structure for all shortcomings, when the primary drivers of student outcomes are underpaid and have been from the onset of Tomorrow's Schools. Teaching needs to be a well-paid and prestigious job that our best people aspire to.

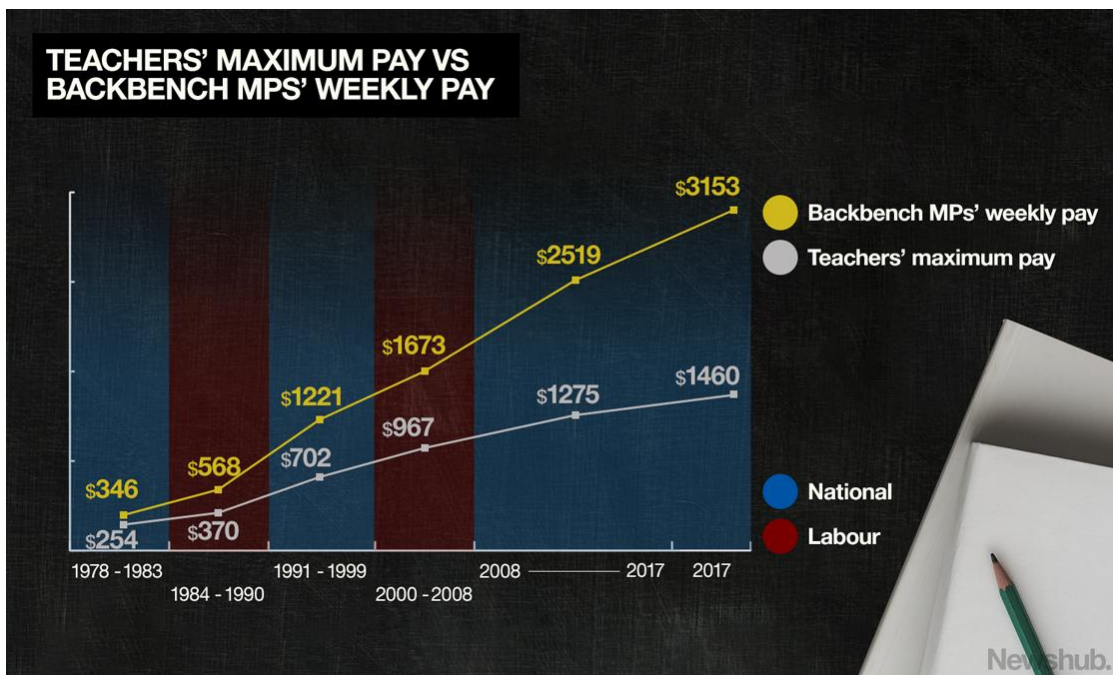
We broadly agree with the other recommendations contained in the document, however we believe they will have a negligible affect without providing teachers with the appropriate remuneration.

Bali Haque wrote an excellent opinion piece for Fairfax on February 7, 2018 headlined Teachers should be on \$164k a year, where he argues that teachers are grossly underpaid given the demands of modern teaching. He also draws attention to backbench MP salaries:

*"Interestingly back in the 1970s experienced teachers and MPs were paid roughly the same salary. And \$164,000 a year would attract and keep the very best people possible in this most demanding of jobs."*  
– Bali Haque



Source: Newshub



Source: Newshub

The Report says the quality of teaching is the major ‘in school’ influence on student success. We agree and we need to attract the best people by remunerating them appropriately.

**6. School Leadership**

We agree with all recommendations, other than those relating to the creation of Education Hubs.

**7. School Resourcing**

We agree with more resourcing, and particularly with Recommendation 24. However, equity funding cannot be taken from high decile schools. The pool of funding needs to be larger, not redistributed.

High decile schools get significantly less funding than low decile schools per student per year. For example, Decile 10 schools are funded (TFEA) at \$914.87 per student less than Decile 1A schools. High decile schools try to make up the gap in funding by taking international students and by asking for donations.

The Report recommends restrictions on international students and donations. However, if international students and donations are restricted without additional funding from the MOE, higher decile schools will be unable to afford to provide the same level of quality education.

PMPS receives \$867.54 less per student in TFEA funding than a Decile 1A school. The school donation for PMPS is \$230, meaning there is a comparative gap of \$637.54 per student or \$137,000 per year for the entire school roll.

**8. Central Education Agencies**

We largely agree with these recommendations.



## Conclusion

The Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce has employed deeply flawed processes to justify sweeping changes to New Zealand's education system. Resultingly, erroneous and unsubstantiated assumptions have driven much of The Report's recommendations .

Not only does the report lack substance or evidence for many of its recommendations, the consultation sample size is insignificant and does not represent the wider population's opinions on the future of schooling in NZ. This is absolutely the case for the flawed consultation that has been conducted with education professionals currently working within New Zealand schools.

A total of 2274 online surveys, 94 formal submissions and 316 comments on social media represents 0.06% of the New Zealand population. To develop widespread recommendations from such a small sample is not best practice.

Furthermore, little evidence from the surveys, submissions, conversations or social media contributions is used to justify The Report's recommendations.

Face-to-face consultations taking place around the country have also been deeply problematic. Bali Haque has begun many of his responses to public concerns with the phrase, "We think...". The leader of a team proposing massive changes to the education system needs to "know".

Feedback from our community on their participation in the consultation has been distressing. The online survey is predicated on the creation of the Education Hubs outlined in The Report. There are no alternatives offered, and no opinions sought on options which are not intertwined with the Education Hub concept. This is very clearly poor practice, leading participants in a predetermined direction and offering no leeway to consider options which do not include the immediate and irreversible creation of Education Hubs.

We are concerned that the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce is now intending to review submissions, dissect their findings, and report back to the Minister at the end of April. This is a timeframe of little more than three weeks and, given the massive importance of their recommendations, we consider it inadequate. It strongly suggests The Report recommendations will largely be adopted as they stand and the submission process is merely box ticking.

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It is without question that a minority of New Zealand schools do not provide excellence in education. This is inequitable and needs to change.

However this is not the case for the vast majority of New Zealand schools. Most schools are high performing and succeed in serving their students and communities by providing the best possible education.

When part of something is not working, common sense suggests to focus on fixing the broken part. We strongly oppose the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce's recommendations to fundamentally change what is already working extremely well.

The Report's recommendations will alienate key stakeholders in our schools, particularly parents, principals and teachers. It will add significant costs, and recreate the bureaucracy the Tomorrow's Schools legislation was created to remove, essentially weakening our education system by revisiting the past.

The Report is flawed and its recommendations will be highly damaging to the future of New Zealand's education system. Our children deserve much better.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Projected Annual Cost per Education Hub**

#### **Staff Costs**

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| Property             | x 5 |
| Accounting           | x 3 |
| Health and Safety    | x 2 |
| Human Resources      | x 2 |
| Admin and Operations | x 2 |
| Management           | x 1 |
| Total Staff          | 15  |

In order to attract and retain quality staff it is assumed the average wage in each Education Hub would be \$100,000. The staff costs per hub would therefore be \$1,500,000.

#### **Other Costs (including offices, travel, and overheads)**

The cost related to Education Hubs is assumed to be two-thirds of the cost of the staff = \$1,000,000.

#### **Total Cost per Hub**

Staff Costs \$1,500,000 and Other Costs \$1,000,000 combined total \$2,500,000.

Total Cost of all Education Hubs

\$2,500,000 x 20 Hubs = \$50,000,000