

Chapter 19

New Zealand – Steering at a Distance and Self-Managed Schools



Cathy Wylie

Abstract New Zealand has a very decentralised system of self-managed schools. Each of the 2431 state schools is governed by parent-elected boards of trustees, who employ the principal. Boards are legally responsible for the school’s smooth running and are accountable to the government through annual reporting. The national curriculum provides a framework which is not prescriptive. The Ministry of Education is responsible for policy and funding at the national level and has 10 regional offices to support policy roll out and schools. The Education Review Office is responsible for reviewing each school, at intervals depending on the outcome of the previous review.

This framework was set up in 1989 in a reform that drew much from New Public Management theory, as well as wanting to bring schools and their communities closer. ‘Steering at a distance’ however has created systemic issues around variability between schools, difficulty in getting improvement and greater equity for disadvantaged students, and too much fragmentation and operation of schools and government agencies in silos. In 2018 a major review process began to address key issues.

Included in this chapter are accounts of three key national policies, and the factors that helped or hindered their realisation in schools.

19.1 A Small Country Experiments

New Zealand is a small country with a total land area of 269,000 square meters. It was originally settled by Māori and colonised by England from the early 1800s. Māori make up 14% of the population, and 24% of current school students. The population of around 4.89 million people live mostly in coastal cities located on the two main islands, with recent growth fuelled by high immigration. Over a quarter of

C. Wylie (✉)

New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington, New Zealand
e-mail: Cathy.wylie@nzcer.org.nz

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the population were born overseas.¹ It is an OECD member, and the 68th largest world economy in terms of purchasing power parity. It is highly dependent on international trade. Although it was one of the earliest welfare states, policy changes from the mid-1980s in the face of a fiscal crisis which liberalised the economy and reduced top income taxes have increased inequality.

The national government has a single chamber, with elections held every 3 years. Since a move to mixed member proportional representation in 1996, governments have usually included minority parties. Unlike many other Western democracies, key social services like education and health are not provided by municipal or regional government bodies.

19.2 The Schooling System

Education in New Zealand is compulsory between the ages of 6–16. It is largely provided by state schools, including state-integrated schools that are largely Catholic. Legally, education is provided free, but most schools ask parents for an annual donation, and integrated schools ask for a contribution to the costs of buildings and land, which they own. Families have the right to access their local school but can also choose other schools. The choice is subject to availability, with spare places decided by ballot in schools that are zoned with a roll cap. Zoning has increased over time, partly as the population grows and the government attempts to contain property costs and counter decreased rolls at schools serving students from low socio-economic areas.

New Zealand's history and geography have resulted in a comparatively high number of schools – 2431 state and state-integrated² in relation to the student population of 800,334 students in mid-2017. Just over a quarter of schools have rolls of less than 100. Average roll size for primary schools is 249, and for secondary schools, 667.

Before 1989, the national Department of Education worked with 10 education boards that were locally elected by all those eligible to vote in local body elections, with secondary schools having their own boards, and primary schools having committees elected by local householders with some responsibilities such as buying books and routine maintenance. Education boards and secondary school boards appointed principals. A national Inspectorate and Advisory Service employed by the Department and working out of the 10 boards supported schools and

¹The country is now 'superdiverse', with more than 200 languages spoken; however, most of the population are English speakers only. English, te reo Māori, and sign language are the country's 3 official languages. Currently, 50% of NZ school students identify as NZ European, 24% identify as Māori, 12% identify as Asian, and 10% identify as Pacific.

²State-integrated schools make up around 11% of the schools, and include those with religious affiliations, predominantly Catholic, that own their land and buildings. Independent schools make up 3.5% of the country's schools.

communicated national policy guidelines. The national Department and boards made resourcing decisions. Schools had latitude within broadly sketched curricula, other than the senior secondary school where the curriculum was framed by national examinations.

In the 1980s it became increasingly clear that though New Zealand prided itself on high average scores in the first round of international assessments, it was not serving all students well. In 1986, 53% of Māori students left secondary school without any qualification, compared with 22% of non-Māori.

19.2.1 A Radical Reform

In 1989 the country made a radical change with all state and state-integrated schools becoming self-managed crown entities, responsible for their own allocation of their government funding, with parent-elected boards of trustees providing governance and appointing and employing school staff. Originally, schools were to receive all their resourcing in dollars, including money for staffing. This was resisted by the teacher unions, who used their links with the Labour government which initiated the review that led to the radical change and convinced the Prime Minister that it was likely to cause inequities between schools and should be investigated. Analysis bore out their fears; but ‘bulk funding’ to schools rather than providing centrally funded staffing was a battle ground between the unions and conservative governments through the 1990s; boards of trustees had varied views, but most were wary of taking on this responsibility. The unions also persuaded the government that the detail of the reforms should be discussed and formed with advisory groups including educators and others who had practical knowledge. These advisory groups performed a valuable role in ensuring some support for schools and students through the transition.

The local education boards were wound up. A new much smaller Ministry of Education became focused on policy, with few operational responsibilities other than funding and property resourcing; it retained curriculum framing, but the operation of secondary qualifications went to a separate government agency. New agencies were also set up using the New Public Management contractual model, to support students with special education needs, to provide curriculum resources; and advisory services were eventually contracted to universities. The Inspectorate was disbanded, with another new government agency the Education Review Office (ERO) set up to regularly review schools in relation to their legislative accountabilities.³

These *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms were premised on three key assumptions. First, that involving parents in the governance of their school would make schools

³Accounts of the reforms and their impact over time are given in Fiske and Ladd (2000), Openshaw (2009), and Wylie (2012).

more responsive, and hence improve quality. Second, that giving parents school choice, basing school funding on roll and setting principal salary rates in national collective contracts in relation to roll size, would give schools an incentive to compete, and that such competition would also improve quality. Third, that separating policy from operations would make both more effective and efficient, and that accountability mechanisms such as contracts and regular reviews would improve performance. The role of the central government education agencies was to ‘steer at a distance’. One Secretary for Education described the relationship between the Ministry and individual schools as ‘tight-loose-tight’. The Ministry would specify policy and the outcomes desired (‘tight’); the schools were free to respond to these according to their specific context (‘loose’); and the schools reported their results in relation to the policy outcomes (‘tight’).

The changes in education were part of deep and systematic economic and public sector reforms from the mid-1980s, largely framed within New Public Management theory, leavened with considerations of improving equity. Ironically, economic restructuring increased inequality, with a rapid rise in poverty levels, particularly for children. In 2017, 27% of New Zealand children lived in low income homes, almost double the proportion in 1982.

The changes in education also sought to acknowledge the increasing importance of the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand’s founding document from 1840. This Treaty frames the relationship between the indigenous Māori and the English Crown that was colonising the country as one of equality and mutual support. It was disregarded in real terms to the deep disadvantage of Māori, who lost almost all their land, and are now highly over-represented among those who have low incomes, poor health, and poor educational outcomes. However, the Treaty of Waitangi finally achieved legal recognition in 1975, and plays an increasingly powerful role in public services, particularly education. One of the intentions for *Tomorrow’s Schools* was to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of indigenous Māori.

19.2.2 The Experiment Under Question

Thirty years on, this radical change is being reviewed. Educational performance and outcomes are generally good, but not as high as many feel they should be, and not for all. Though NZ generally scores above average on the international tests of PISA and TIMMS, its scores have been static or declining since 2003, with a recent decline in the proportion that score at the highest PISA levels. Compared with other countries, NZ has lower equity: student socio-economic status makes more of a difference to student outcomes than in other countries with above average PISA scores. Māori students have improved in some areas, but they continue to be less well served educationally, and their PISA scores are below the OECD average. Schools feel increasingly overloaded. Central government agencies lack the relationships with schools that can support effective policy enactment. Accountability mechanisms on their own do not ensure that policy will travel as intended. Policy intentions

can also be difficult to realise if there is insufficient resourcing for changes needed, and policy changes keep adding to school workloads. Policy that appears poorly designed or insufficiently supported by evidence also meets with resistance, sometimes strenuous and public. There have been increasing calls to involve school professionals and educational experts in the design of policy and its implementation. An independent Ministerial taskforce to review *Tomorrow's Schools* was initiated by the Minister of Education in 2018, with a brief to review the whole system to 'ensure the fitness of the school system to meet the challenges we face, and to achieve equity and excellence'.⁴

Other linked reviews are occurring, with a new centre-left government elected in late 2017 responding to tensions within the education system that have been apparent for some time. These include the development of an education workforce strategy, a review of curriculum, progress and achievement, and the secondary level qualifications, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA).

Overall, the government aims to develop a 30-year strategic approach to education in New Zealand and do so through engaging with those interested in the education system: principals, teachers, students, boards of trustees, parents, businesspeople and community organisations and the public. Two Education Summits bringing together diverse perspectives were held in May 2018, involving 1400 people, and over 15,000 responses were received to an online survey with 4 open-ended questions: What would you do if you were the boss of education? What do successful students of the future look like? What do they need to know and be able to do? What needs to be in place so that all learners are successful?⁵

All this feeds into what this government intends to be a shared vision that can continue through changes in which political parties form the government, ameliorating the impact of a 3-year election cycle which has often led to either too rapid introduction of new policy, or changing policy before it has the opportunity to take effect. Such policy chop and change has made it difficult to provide long-term continuity for continual improvement of educational quality and outcomes. Policy and provision changes emerging out of this work will likely start to take effect largely from 2020, with significant attention paid to deliberate change management processes rather than any 'big bang' like the change to *Tomorrow's Schools*.

This chapter first looks at the overall framing of the New Zealand school system in terms of New Public Management. Next it describes the roles of national government, government agencies, and schools, and their relationships with each other. The role of national organisations that interact with national government and government agencies, such as teacher unions, is also described. Some examples of how particular policies have been enacted in the last 10 years and their impact on schools and student learning are given. I conclude with a summary of the key tensions in

⁴The author was a member of this 5-person taskforce. For more information about this Review, see <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/tomorrows-schools-review/about-the-tomorrows-schools-review/terms-of-reference/>

⁵More about this can be found at <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/education-conversation/what-you-told-us/>

enacting good policy well where the different contributors to the schooling system have been kept apart from one another for too long.

19.2.3 Steering at a Distance

New Public Management has its origins in economic theories of public choice and agency, and in managerialist approaches used in the private sector. Essentially, it resulted in the separation of policy construction from delivery, and in hierarchical accountability mechanisms relying on specified measures for performance. Core difficulties with this approach applied to public services are that operational knowledge is needed to develop workable policy, meaningful performance measures can be complex, accountability of this kind invites attitudes of defence, compliance, and gaming, valued outcomes are difficult to attribute to a single source, and it becomes harder to work across organisations to share useful knowledge. Since 2001, New Zealand has modified its approach to public services to ‘combat problems of fragmentation and siloisation.’ (Whitcombe 2008). Furthermore, fundamental change has also been recently signalled.⁶

At the national level, the government decides education policy, formed from election manifestos and advice from the central government education agencies. Papers that go to Cabinet for decision are also shared with Treasury and other government departments whose work is related, for their comments to be included.⁷ Major changes may be considered by a select committee with members from all the parties in parliament, and any changes requiring a change in legislation go to the whole parliament for debate and voting. The Minister for Education usually works with one or more Associate Ministers who focus on particular aspects of education, such as special education, or tertiary education.

19.3 The Ministry of Education Is the Education System ‘Steward’

The lead education government agency is the Ministry of Education, with 2632 full-time equivalent staff.⁸ Two-thirds of these provide specialist support for students with additional learning needs. Its core responsibilities are in fact provided by

⁶ <https://www.havemysay.govt.nz/option-2/related-documents-2/>

⁷ The coalition government elected in late 2017 has extended an already higher than average level of government transparency by releasing Cabinet papers quite quickly after decisions have been made.

⁸ www.education.govt.nz. The annual report for the 2016–17 year can be found at <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Publications/Annual-Reports/2017-MOE-Annual-Report-web.pdf> and the Briefing Paper for the new Minister at <https://www.education.govt.nz/>

around 1000 full-time equivalent staff. The current Secretary of Education has been a teacher before moving into the public service and taking roles in social welfare, the umbrella State Services Commission, and leading the Education Review Office, which inspects schools. However, many of the Ministry's national level staff have not had direct experience teaching or leading schools.

The Ministry is the 'steward' of the educational system, responsible for its overall wellbeing now and for the future. It provides policy advice to the Minister(s), to whom it is first and foremost accountable. It seeks to communicate policy intentions to schools in ways that motivate principals, teachers and boards to attend to policy goals. This can include embedding them in national guidelines required in school board annual reports.⁹ It can include access to professional development that supports the policy goals. Policy goals are also supported through relevant resources, most provided online, with the previous government requiring government departments to move as much onto digital platforms as possible.

The Ministry of Education is also responsible for the national curriculum design, national data on the school system and student engagement and performance, allocating funding to schools and early childhood services, overseeing the provision of school property that is government-owned, funding school transport and ICT infrastructure, negotiating national collective contracts for teachers, principals, and school support staff, monitoring schools' fiscal viability, and monitoring the performance of the national education agencies and two crown companies, Education Payroll, that manages payment of school staff salaries, and Network 4 Learning, which provides schools with access to a secure online network, uncapped data, and security around their online use.¹⁰

At the national level, the Ministry has recently started to engage more with representatives of the 'peak' bodies, such as teacher unions,¹¹ NZSTA (the national

[assets/Documents/Ministry/Publications/Briefings-to-Incoming-Ministers/BIM-26-September-2017-.pdf](#)

⁹<https://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/legislation/nags/>

¹⁰Both these companies are wholly crown-owned, with a chief executive reporting to a crown-appointed board of directors, including the Chief Executive of the New Zealand Qualifications Agency. The Education Payroll service was formed in 2014 after the private company contracted to run the education payroll failed to provide a reliable service when it switched to an online system, causing serious disruption. Government outsourcing of essential functions on efficiency and cost-saving grounds did not prevent it being seen as responsible for the disruption and additional work needed from people in schools and needing to remedy it. Trust in the operations of the payroll system took some time to restore and diverted the attention of key Ministry of Education staff since it became a political issue.

¹¹NZEI represents primary and intermediate schoolteachers and principals, school support staff such as teacher aides and administrative staff, and early childhood education teachers and negotiates their collective contracts with the Ministry. www.nzei.org.nz

PPTA represents secondary school teachers and principals and negotiates their collective contracts with the Ministry. www.ppta.org.nz

NZPF also represents principals www.nzpf.org.nz, and SPANZ represents secondary principals. www.spanz.org.nz

There are also associations representing particular types of schools, such as Māori

school trustees' association)¹² and others with recognised expertise, using 'working groups' to develop shared understandings based on shared information, common reading, and discussion, and ideally from that, agreed policy settings and approaches. Other government organisations such as ERO and the Education Council are also included. Some of this joint work is related to the need for greater consistency between schools: schools themselves have to develop their own policies around legislative requirements,¹³ providing some challenges around creating clear guidelines that are not seen as prescriptive.¹⁴ More wide-ranging policy development within Ministerially-set parameters has related to reviewing school funding formulae, and how a major policy announcement aimed at more collaboration between schools to improve student learning could best take effect. This year, there is a working group to address educational workforce issues and reduce the workload of compliance; teacher shortages have become acute in some areas.

19.3.1 Regional Ministry of Education Offices

The Ministry maintains 10 regional offices. Staff in these regional offices provide advice to schools, particularly around new policy that affects schools. Most of the managers of these regional offices come from educational leadership roles. They work with schools around school property development. Changes to the Education Act in 2017 gave them somewhat more powers to set school enrolment zones. Regional Ministry of Education staff review school charters and annual reports and use information from these and ERO reviews and discussions to identify schools that may need additional support or intervention. The Ministry regional offices have limited discretionary funding, however, and few levers to change school practices. They are understaffed for the work expected of them, leading to stretched staff and higher than desirable turnover rates. Many principals say they have little contact with regional Ministry staff, reflecting the lack of time for Ministry staff to develop ongoing relationships or provide feedback on the annual reports that schools must provide. Moreover, salary levels within the Ministry no longer offer the career pathway from schools as Inspectorate and Advisory roles did before Tomorrow's Schools, leading to variability in quality. Positioning schools as separate crown entities also positioned principals as chief executive officers, increasing their salary rates as well as their responsibilities.

medium- schools, area schools that include both primary and secondary levels, and special schools that are included in national policy discussions.

¹² www.nzsta.org.nz

¹³ Some of these requirements stem from policies that are not specifically related to education, but apply generally, such as increased attention to health and safety in workplaces.

¹⁴ 800 schools now pay a roll-based subscription to access a school policy site to save 're-inventing the wheel'. <https://www.schooldocs.co.nz/>

The Ministry of Education can insist on intervention, putting in commissioners to replace school boards and limited statutory managers to work with principals; this is a last resort. In 2017, 9 commissioners and 30 limited statutory managers were approved. Funding for this intervention should be met by the school itself, though in practice almost half the schools in 2017 had additional Ministry funding to cover these costs. Before this stage, the Ministry offers what support it can, through its own advice, or linking the school with other advice or professional development. However, where boards or principals resist, it can take a long time for improvements to teaching and learning to occur, if they do, and things can also slide backwards.

The NZ School Trustees Association, representing school boards, is also contracted by the Ministry of Education to provide development for and advice to school boards and principals as the school managers employed by school boards, and works with the Ministry of Education around the identification of schools in need of intervention.

Regional Ministry of Education offices also have relations with school sector groups, such as principals' associations and unions. Sometimes this is in the form of a regular meeting to discuss particular aspects, such as support for students with additional learning needs. Learning support specialists and allocation of some resources are also located in regional offices. This support is regarded by many schools as insufficient and unavailable when needed.

From 2017 Ministry funding for professional learning, previously contracted out to consortia of providers, has been allocated at the regional level by a group of Ministry staff and local principals. Individual schools and the new government-funded collaborations of schools, Kāhui Ako, and other non-government-funded school clusters can apply for a number of government-set priority areas, on the basis of their analysis of student needs. If they succeed, they then choose an individual accredited by a national panel drawn from those with proven strengths as a school or curriculum leader, or provider, and work with them to develop a plan to make the best use of the hours they have been allocated. They report on progress to the Ministry of Education every 6 months, using a common format intended to allow a national picture to be formed and regularly evaluated. The new process has raised questions around the uneven capability in schools to undertake such needs analysis and select the individual who can best meet their needs, and the insufficient national supply of proven advisers to work with schools in all areas of the country, and in Māori-medium as well as English-medium schools. As well, while the need for greater individual access to ongoing professional development raised by teacher unions and national subject associations (such as English, Science, History) has been included in policy outlines, it has yet to be resourced.

19.3.2 The Education Review Office Evaluates and Reports on Schools

The Education Review Office is responsible for reviewing all schools as well as all early childhood education services.¹⁵ It has 216 full-time equivalent staff, including 152 review officers. ERO has four regions, with offices in seven cities. In the 2016–17 financial year it reviewed 700 schools and 1217 early childhood education services. It has limited time to spend in each school.

The brief reports it gives schools are publically available online, and often on school websites. In 2010 government policy resulted in a shift from reviewing each school every 3 years to a differentiated review cycle, depending on how well the school met ERO review criteria. Currently most schools are on a 3-year review cycle; 10% are on a 4–5 review cycle, and 13% are on a 1–2 year review cycle.¹⁶ ERO also uses material from its school reviews to provide national level evaluative reports of the quality of schooling in different aspects, and the implementation of government policy. It has developed research-based evaluation indicators for its work that it encourages schools to use in their own self-review, and also provides evidence about good practice in schools through online reports and videos. Principals are generally positive about the evaluation indicators and use both the national reports and the report on their own school in their own leadership work. Discussions in the course of the review are often valued if the school leader finds the ERO review team providing useful external expertise. However, there are mixed views about whether the review reports give a reliable guide to the quality of teaching and learning in a school (Wylie 2017a, b, p.22). This is partially related to the limited time reviewers have in schools, and their increased reliance on documentation provided by the school.

19.3.3 New Zealand Qualifications Agency - Setting Secondary Qualifications

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is a crown agency whose chief executive is accountable to a Board appointed by and accountable to the Minister of Education. It is responsible for the New Zealand Qualifications Framework whose 7 levels include secondary and tertiary education qualifications. It has 450 full-time equivalent staff, not all working on secondary qualifications, and it employs more on contract for external examination work.¹⁷

¹⁵ [www.ero.govt.nz. The 2016–17 annual report is available at: http://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/annual-report-201617/](http://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/annual-report-201617/), and the briefing paper for the new Minister at: <http://www.ero.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/BIM-November-2017.pdf>

¹⁶ Figures for the 1 July 2016–30 June 2017 year.

¹⁷ [www.nzqa.govt.nz. The 2016–2017 annual report is available at: http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/publications/strategic-documents/ar16-17/our-year-at-a-glance/](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/publications/strategic-documents/ar16-17/our-year-at-a-glance/), and its briefing paper for the new Minister: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Our-role/BIM-2017.pdf>

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) is the 3-level secondary qualification. It is standards based, intended to allow students and schools flexibility in their choice of internal assessments and external assessments. NZQA sets the standards, based on the New Zealand Curriculum. It is also responsible for external moderation of a sample of 100,000 internal assessments made by schools each year, monitoring the accuracy and consistency of teachers' judgements against the standards.

Its moderation workshops for schools, partly spurred by the secondary teachers' union, and supported by the Ministry funding additional professional development days a few years back, were highly valued, not least because they brought teachers together across schools to work together with knowledgeable experts.

NZQA accredits secondary schools to provide internal assessments and has withdrawn this accreditation on occasion where the quality is insufficient. Most schools are on a 3- or 4-year review cycle for their internal assessment systems, with some on a 1–2-year review cycle.

19.3.4 The Teaching Council – Framing the Profession

The Teaching Council's role is to provide leadership and direction to the teaching profession, including the 55,000¹⁸ teachers and principals working in schools and teachers working in early childhood education.¹⁹ Key functions include setting expectations of practice and behaviour, through a Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession, granting and renewing practising certificates, operating a Competence Authority with authority to impose conditions on a teacher's practice to improve their competence or cancel their registration as a teacher, promoting teacher appraisal linked to the Standards for both accountability and development, setting requirements for initial teacher education programmes and approving programmes, and sharing best practice. Recently it launched a bilingual English and te reo Māori national Leadership Strategy drawing on research and evidence and developed with the profession.²⁰

This is an independent statutory body, with more independence than a government department or agency. Until recently, it was governed by a Council appointed by the Minister. The new government has increased the Council members to 13, with 7 elected by teachers, and 6 Ministerial appointments, responding to the profession's disquiet about the previous arrangement.²¹ At the same time, however, the government has recognised that this body has a pivotal role in the system, and its

¹⁸ Some of these work part-time.

¹⁹ The Education Council's Briefing to the Incoming Minister gives more detail: https://education-council.org.nz/sites/default/files/BIM%20Document_OCT_2017_web.pdf

²⁰ <https://educationcouncil.org.nz/content/leadership-strategy>

²¹ The Education Council was also renamed the Teaching Council.

actions need to be coherent with, and contribute to, wider education policy and provision. The Council will need to consult with the government on decisions relating to teacher registration and initial teacher education, and the Minister can issue a government policy statement on matter relating to the teaching profession that the Teaching Council must heed.

Initial teacher education, prior to working in schools, was originally provided by Colleges of Education. This moved in the 1990s to universities, and to private providers. Currently there are 25 providers for school and early childhood education initial teacher education, a large number for a small country. There have been increased calls to have more consistency and quality, and overhaul initial teacher education.

19.3.5 Other Government Agencies with a Role in Education

Other government agencies also have some responsibilities in relation to schools and the wellbeing of their students. The Tertiary Education Commission recently took over Careers New Zealand, which provides general advice about careers and pathways. The Ministry of Social Development has funded the provision of social workers in schools serving low-income communities, and the Ministry of Health, some nurses in some of these schools.

In addition, at a high level, the Treasury analyses national educational performance in relation to policy and comments on papers going to the Government's cabinet for decision. The Office of the Auditor-General periodically publishes national reports resulting from reviews of schools' audited accounts, or wider reviews, such as a series of reviews on education for Māori.

19.3.5.1 A Small Capital

The national offices of the government agencies, and also of the teacher unions, NZPF, and NZSTA are all in Wellington, the country's capital, and within walking distance of Parliament and each other. This supports interaction when the government values it.

19.3.5.2 Self-Managing Schools

School boards operate within Government legislation passed by the New Zealand parliament, predominantly the Education Act 1989, which is periodically updated and amended. Schools are required to follow the National Administrative Guidelines. They must provide programmes that incorporate the national curriculum, the New Zealand Curriculum 2007 for English-medium schools, and Te Marautanga o

Aotearoa for Māori-medium schools.²² The national curriculum is not tightly prescriptive, and each school is expected to develop a local curriculum. Each school must develop a strategic plan, and from this an annual plan that includes goals for student engagement and achievement. They also need to undertake school self-review and report their annual progress in relation to their annual and strategic plans to the Ministry of Education and the school's community. As noted earlier, these annual reports usually lead to interaction with the Ministry only if the Ministry sees issues; they are therefore seen by many principals as forms of compliance rather than tools for ongoing improvement.

Each school board through the principal is responsible for employing teaching and other staff. Teaching staff numbers at each school are decided by a national formula related to school roll numbers and student year levels, and staff are paid centrally, in line with collective employment contracts that are negotiated centrally by the Ministry of Education and teacher unions. Operational funding for schools is largely on a per-student basis, with some weighting for socio-economic disadvantage, but less than in other OECD countries. Boards are responsible for the efficient use of this funding to cover other school costs, including other staff such as teacher aides, administrative staff, and property maintenance.

A key responsibility of each school board is to appoint their principal and carry out their annual performance appraisal. Currently, principals must be registered teachers, but there have been no further requirements. Boards can pay for advice to make appointments and appraisals; this advice varies in quality and is not always taken. Boards do not always have good fields to appoint from, particularly in small, rural schools or schools in challenging circumstances. The Ministry contracts the provision of a national first-time principal programme that provides information and ongoing support through links with a coach, usually a retired principal, and a mentor who is a working principal. In some mainly rural areas, there are principal advisors provided through a national Ministry contract. It is intended that the Teaching Council's Leadership Strategy will feed into more systematic development and support.

The more that national educational policy has focused on improving student achievement, and the research shows how pivotal school leadership can be in this respect, the more apparent it has become that the current breadth of principal and board responsibilities works against principals being able to focus on improvement. Only a third of primary principals in 2016 thought they could schedule enough time for educational leadership – or that their workload was manageable, a decrease since 2013 (Wylie 2017b). School leaders' wellbeing and stress levels were a prime trigger for the current Ministry-led project on the education work force, involving the national educational professional organisations.

School boards have provided generally good grounds for a school and its parent community to work together. But this is variable. Around a third of primary school principals thought that their board required a lot of support from the school

²²Ten percent of Māori students attend Māori-medium schools.

management in 2016 (Stevens and Wylie 2017, p. 23) and anecdotally, many principals say that they manage their boards, rather than vice versa. What voluntary boards are legally responsible for can be daunting and has grown more complex over the years. In 2016, a board election year, 43% of schools did not have a vote for their board because there was no contest for the positions. Around a fifth of boards do not have the 5 parent trustees that they should have. Only 22% of parents nationally returned voting papers in 2016. There is considerable variance in board understanding and skills, and in how well they can represent sometimes quite diverse school communities.

Although school boards are crown entities, few trustees see that representing the government interest is a key element of their role: only 3% of primary school trustees in 2016 and 5% of secondary school trustees in 2015. Nor do they see that employing the principal or overseeing the principal's performance are key elements of their role. Providing strategic direction for their school however is key for over 80% of trustees (Stevens and Wylie 2017, p. 7, and Wylie and Bonne 2016, p. 99).

19.3.5.3 How Does Policy Influence the Work of Schools and Student Learning and Achievement?

New Zealand schools generally pay heed to what is legally required of them, and comply with national regulations and requirements, particularly where these are needed to gain resources or to maintain reputations. National policy that has involved educationalists in its formation or fleshing out is most likely to also lead to schools doing their best to put it into effect. Policy that comes with good quality support in the way of timely guidance or professional learning, and additional funding to cover relievers so that staff have time to understand a new policy and work together on it over time so that it can be enacted well in their particular school is most likely to travel from the national level to schools. Most policies take time to travel into the daily work of schools and will vary in their effect.

19.3.5.4 A Treasured Policy

The national New Zealand Curriculum 2007 exemplifies these points. It began as a revision of the first national curriculum framework introduced in the 1990s, which suffered from too rapid an introduction, and fragmentation into many 'achievement objectives'. In the early 2000s the Ministry of Education led work to redevelop the curriculum into a more streamlined document that for the first time incorporated pedagogy, teaching as inquiry, and key competencies such as critical thinking and relating to others, that were to be woven through subject areas. The way it went about this was to draw together a convincing basis for the approach, and to involve school leaders and teachers, along with business and community leaders, in discussions about the direction and then the shape. Well respected expertise coupled with strong relationship skills were critical to the Ministry being able to win meaningful

support for the New Zealand Curriculum. This process provided wide buy-in to the new Curriculum. It was provided in draft form first as well allowing ‘early adopters’ to try it out and give feedback. It was published in 2007, but not made mandatory for schools to use until 2010.

Schools have generally been enthusiastic about the NZ Curriculum, and regard it as a ‘national treasure’. It has provided a benchmark to measure other policy against in terms of how it was developed, as well as its content and the scope it gives schools. The NZCER national surveys showed a marked rise from 2007 to 2010 in teachers’ reporting that they used pedagogical practices associated with the NZ Curriculum, and that they worked more with each other in ways associated with effective professional communities. It also showed the challenges associated with understanding what is a sophisticated framework and using it to make deep rather than superficial changes (Burgon et al. 2012).

However, this progress stalled from 2010, after the hasty and deeply contested introduction of National Standards in 2009 (Wylie and Bonne 2014). These diverted energy and resources at both the national and school levels from the work needed to continue to develop and embed the NZ Curriculum. School practices around the NZ Curriculum vary more widely than desirable in terms of effectiveness; however all would say that they respect and use it.

19.3.5.5 A Disputed Policy

A change of government in late 2008 brought in a more conservative government led by the National party that had included the introduction of national standards in its policy. The National Standards in reading, writing and numeracy that ‘will describe all the things children should be able to do by a particular age or year at school’ for students from school entry at 5, till end of Year 8,²³ were coupled with mandatory reporting to parents, and annual reports on each school’s performance. This was a radical change for New Zealand, and was strongly opposed by NZEI, the NZ Principals’ Federation, and assessment experts, and by the Boards Taking Action Coalition, which had 225 school boards saying they would not set National Standards related targets in their school annual plan. Some areas boycotted the initial training. Submissions from parents showed that concerns about the effects of the National Standards outweighed positive views (Wylie et al. 2009). While educators and others were relieved that the new policy did not involve a move to national testing, they were concerned that the policy change would narrow the curriculum, and create school league tables, without improving student learning overall.

The new government was determined to move quickly. This meant an over-hasty creation of National Standards, insufficient support to understand and use them to

²³New Zealand students can start school on their individual 5th birthday. Almost all students start school at age 5. Primary schools run till Year 6 (when students are around 11 years old), or Year 8; 2-year intermediates provide education at Years 7–8. Secondary schools cover Years 9–13. Most students stay until at least Year 12, when they are generally aged 17.

make an overall teacher judgement for every student in each of reading, writing, and numeracy, and hence widespread mistrust of them. Many felt that how the National Standards were used in one school was not the same as in another, making comparisons between schools unfair, and the national picture, unreliable (Thrupp 2018).²⁴

Incorporating the National Standards into the national education guidelines that schools had to legally follow and report on gave the Ministry the levers it needed. Schools that did not include national standards targets into their charters would not have them signed off by the Ministry, and without that sign-off, they could not access Ministry-funded professional learning development. Schools were also told that if the targets were not included, a limited statutory manager would be put into the school. At the same time ERO had introduced differentiated reviews, and schools that would otherwise have been in the highest performing band (a return time of 4–5 years for the next review) would not be if they had not included National Standards targets.

So schools complied. By 2016, over two-thirds of teachers thought the curriculum they taught had narrowed, and a third of principals thought that National Standards drove what the school did. Just under half the teachers thought they had had enough support and guidance to feel confident about their work with the National Standards (Bonne 2017). Early suggestions from NZEI that the standards needed to be moderated between schools to ensure consistency, and that shared moderation and reporting of the standards for a group of schools could pay dividends were ignored.

While teachers paid most attention to the students identified as ‘below’ the standards to bring them ‘at’ the standard, and gains were seen in the proportions of students at or above the national standards in individual schools, overall there were no improvements in student achievement.

The whole experience around National Standards, and the ignoring of both critique and suggestions to make the most of them left a legacy of mistrust between schools and not just the government, but also between schools and the Ministry of Education.

The Labour party included the end of National Standards in its election manifesto, and this was one of the first decisions made by the Labour-led coalition government that took office in late 2017. A Ministerial Advisory Group on Curriculum Progress and Achievement which includes curriculum and assessment experts (including a key player in the construction of the New Zealand Curriculum) has recently tackled the complex issues around how best to create meaningful and contemporary assessment that focuses on progress as much as attainment, across the curriculum.²⁵

²⁴Martin Thrupp’s book provides a full picture of the genesis of the policy, the disputed ground it created, and case studies of how different schools incorporated national standards according to their own understanding and context.

²⁵<https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/curriculum-progress-and-achievement/>

19.3.5.6 A Policy That Exposes the Lack of Connection in the Schooling System

Improving the achievement of Māori students was one of the goals of the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms. Significant attention to improving their learning opportunities and success was kindled in 2002 at the national level with the Hui Taumata Mātauranga hosted by Ngāti Tūwharetoa, a key Māori iwi (tribe), with the Minister of Education and Secretary of Education attending. In 2008, a key strategy was released after public consultation on a draft that had been developed under the previous, different government. This indicates broad political consensus about the importance of schools changing what they did and how they did it: in a relationship of respect and reciprocity so that Māori students had their identity and culture affirmed, and their strengths built on, rather than approaches built on assumed deficit.

Ka Hikitia – managing for success – aimed to finally ensure action on the often stated intention to improve schools' responsiveness to Māori students, by bringing together the evidence about effective practice and setting out goals, actions, and targets for the period 2008–2013.

However, an analysis of the initial year of this policy showed that *Ka Hikitia* was lost in the priority given to National Standards and more than 14 other Ministry of Education strategic initiatives and actions (Goren 2009). Its goals were unrealistic also without a clearer plan for the short, medium and long term, and more attention to using what was known from effective teachers and principals so that more New Zealand schools would know how to change.

The lack of progress as *Ka Hikitia* came to the end of its initial 5-year period led the Auditor-General to focus on Māori education from 2012 to 2016, as the next phase of *Ka Hikitia* ran from 2013 to 2017. The Auditor-General's summary report in 2016 notes some modest gains since *Ka Hikitia*, but also too wide a range of Māori students' results among individual schools performance on the National Standards and the secondary qualification, NCEA. Her recommendations during this time included better engagement with schools, embedding *Ka Hikitia* within day-to-day Ministry work, improving accountability and reporting, and that the Ministry of Education 'identify and target resources to support the activities that have been the most effective in putting *Ka Hikitia* into effect.' (Controller and Auditor-General (2016, p.30). Schools also needed to learn from others with effective practice, and to become better at using information on student performance to improve teaching.

19.3.5.7 The Limits of Steering at a Distance

New Zealand's 30-year experience with keeping the government educational authorities at a remove from schools, without a 'middle layer' has brought it to the point of seeing the need for much stronger connections if its education system is to progress, and better meet the needs of all its students. There is too much variability of quality among schools. Schools have become used to operating with considerable

autonomy, and some principals are now wary of working with a middle layer. There is certainly no way that new structures would improve the quality of education if they operated in a hierarchical or bureaucratic way. But many principals and boards would appreciate reducing some of their load, allowing them to focus more on teaching and learning rather than, for example, the state of school buildings. They would also appreciate the central government agencies taking an active role in ensuring sufficient numbers of teachers and ensuring a good supply of good quality principals. There is a desire for readily accessible advice related to curriculum and pedagogy, and regular opportunities to discuss the school's progress in a low-stakes way.

From both the educational authorities' and schools' perspective, there is also a desire for policy that will be effective: that draws on good evidence and research, has realistic timeframes for implementation, and good support during that implementation. Both seek to overcome the mistrust between schools and the government agencies that has become increasingly evident in the schooling system. There is hope in the final report of the *Tomorrow's schools taskforce* report and the government's positive response to most of its recommendations²⁶ that these needs will be met, and the fundamental issues of an education system with a New Public Management premise addressed, through the introduction of a suitable 'middle layer' and closer connections.

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