



Editorial: Tomorrow's School's Review

New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work, Volume 15, Issue 2, 85-86, 2018

LEON BENADE & NESTA DEVINE

Co-Editors

Wide-ranging changes proposed by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce (2018) seek to end the 30-year period known as 'Tomorrow's Schools', or, what we earlier referred to as the 'Thirty Years War' (Devine, Stewart & Benade, 2018). Tomorrow's Schools (New Zealand Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988) emerged from the reform period of the mid-1980s, propelling New Zealand to the forefront of neoliberal policy-making. The current taskforce, composed of notable educationists, has endeavoured to arrive at proposals that emphasise educational interests rather than the competitive commercial interests promoted by Treasury in 1988.

The changes in 1988/9 drove schools into competition with each other, and the break-up of the old Department of Education into such functions as those now carried out by the Education Review Office and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority seemingly allowed the State (read Ministry of Education) to assume a hands-off role. This period has seen the ever-increasing division of teachers' work into routinised tasks amenable to endless accountability and surveillance—not to mention a slide into mundane technicism. So, while the Ministry of Education took up the role of distant employer, its influence over teachers' work has been obtrusive. We are therefore pleased to note that the taskforce has recognised the 'tick box culture' that has arisen around teachers' work, and its desire for greater flexibility in appraisal, for instance. Noteworthy too is the suggestion that ERO and NZQA be dissolved, and merged into a new Education Evaluation Office.

A further innovation growing from Tomorrow's Schools was the creation of Boards of Trustees to lead as many self-managed and self-governed schools as there are schools. Here too, the State adopted a 'loose-tight' approach. So, while Boards can exercise significant influence over the lives of their schools, they have been increasingly burdened by the weight of widening legislation and attendant compliance. Thus, apart from embodying the (Treasury) notion that running a school is akin to running a business, Boards have found themselves increasingly removed from what motivates many of their volunteer members, namely to play a role in the education of their children and those in their community.

The current taskforce has arrived at the position that Boards are not consistently effective, and are engaged in tasks beyond their level of competence. The taskforce names property matters and principal appointments as examples (Report by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce, 2018). From the official perspective of Boards, compliance issues *are* a bug-bear, and Boards would prefer to focus on educational issues, which is at the core of one of the taskforce recommendations (2018). Thus, the proposed

changes may be welcomed, as they suggest removing from Boards many of the non-educational compliance requirements.

Some twenty or so 'regional' hubs' would assume these functions, among several others. Broadly, this concept is not entirely new; the old Department of Education had devolved bodies, as does the Ministry of Education. More recently, the development of Communities of Learning/Kahui Ako has enlivened the possibilities for closer collaboration (and less competition) among clusters of schools, although the taskforce has also suggested the current COL/KA structure is inflexible.

There are, needless to say, vocal critics who quickly came to light, claiming, for example, any erosion of the role of Board's to be the thin edge of a socialist wedge (Collins, 2018). These critics also challenge the idea of 5 year contracts for Principals as leading to 'rotating Principals', the scrapping of intermediate schools in favour of junior colleges (Yr 7-10) and particularly they oppose the creation of the regional 'hubs' (Collins, 2018). Their keen opposition means the sector may possibly prepare for a bloody peace to the 'Thirty Years War'.

It is appropriate to end this editorial, however, by highlighting what is possibly the most important driver of the recommendations, and the one that obviously challenges Tomorrow's Schools. In the words of the taskforce: "Unhealthy competition between schools has significantly increased as a result of the self-governing school model. It has also impacted on the ability of some students and whānau to exercise choice" (2018, p. 4). This sentiment is deeply ironic, given that Tomorrow's Schools too was premised on the view that communities deserved greater choice over the education of their children.

REFERENCES

- Collins, S. (2018, 7 Dec). Big schools vow to resist 'Stalinist' school bureaucracy. *New Zealand Herald*, Retrieved from https://www.nzherald.co.nz/education/news/article.cfm?c_id=35&objectid=12173051
- Devine, N., Stewart, G. & Benade, L. (2018). Yesterday's policies for today's schools *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 53(2), 161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40841-018-0117-4>
- New Zealand Taskforce to Review Education Administration. (1988). *Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education* (Picot Report). Wellington, New Zealand: The Taskforce.
- Report by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce. (2018). The 8 key issues. Retrieved from *Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātitini* <https://www.nzsta.org.nz/assets/Tomorrows-Schools-education-reform/2018-Tomorrows-Schools-Taskforce-Report/181207-Tomorrows-Schools-Report-Summary-of-8-Key-Issues.pdf>

The opinions expressed are those of the paper author(s) and not the *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*. Copyright is held by individual authors but offprints in the published format only may be distributed freely by individuals provided that the source is fully acknowledged. [ISSN-1176-6662]