



MAKING EDUCATION WORK FOR MANUKAU

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## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AS A CHAMPION FOR EDUCATION

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**The Schools Plus initiative has much promise. But it will only deliver on achievement for the hardest-to-reach students when a whole-of-community approach is applied. Councils are well placed to facilitate achievement of the School Plus goal, argues Bernardine Vester.**

Schools alone cannot provide the answer to the Schools Plus goal: that all young people are in education, skills, or structured learning, relevant to their needs and abilities, until the age of 18.

It is no surprise to discover that the hardest-to-serve youth – those not in education or training (NEET) in the teenage years - are concentrated in the areas of New Zealand marked by social and economic disparities that challenge community well-being.

Community well-being has been the fundamental purpose of council operations since the passage of the Local Government Act 2002. The jargon of government and councils is about “Desired Community Outcomes”. These are identified through a tightly-prescribed process called the “Community Outcomes Process”. For everyone to agree through this process that the NEETs need to remain in education or training for longer than they do is a starting point for action. As a result, Councils are ideally placed to co-ordinate a system-wide approach to the Schools Plus goal.

Council support for education is a radical concept in New Zealand. But it doesn't require structural change or legislation. It merely requires some rethinking of the way in

which existing structures and processes within the education and local government sectors could be used for more effective outcomes for learning for young people. Without taking responsibility for learning - that is still a central government matter – it is surprising how innovative local communities have been about supporting education provision.

A model of how councils and education could work together, based on examples from around New Zealand, would include the following key elements:

- *Vision* – An agreed vision could be contained in a separate “Education Plan”, or as part of the Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP). Good consultation is required to ensure that the vision is supported by both schools and council and worked into the strategic planning of both.
- *Leadership* - There are some wonderful examples of mayors and education leaders taking the initiative in addressing community education challenges by networking and shaping action together.

- *Shared Data and Information* – The Schools Plus initiative will have added meaning when data directly related to the local context is shared and analysed by those who have to own the solutions.
- *Shared Community Resources* – resources for learning will also include the financial assets of the community – from community and licensing trusts, for example – that can be brought to bear on the Schools Plus goal. Other resources include the cultural knowledge and expertise of local people; and the social capital already available in the community.
- *Shared Action* – nothing works better than jointly owning and working together on an actual project. Purposeful action is important if leaders are to find value in collaboration, and to build the networks needed for addressing the Schools Plus goal.

The Mayor’s Taskforce for Jobs is evidence of the commitment councils make to youth employment challenges. Some communities have already begun to develop “Community Education Plans” which shape the ways in which schools and community organisations can work together. These are fundamentally different to school-owned education plans, because they bring other stakeholders into the overall planning for education services in an area.

A holistic approach to community wellbeing involves more than planning together. New Zealand’s new curriculum places importance on authentic and relevant learning opportunities. Workplace and community-

based learning experiences for learners will be increasingly required to deliver this.

The UK offers an example of how this can be done. Since September 2004, there has been a legal requirement that all students experience work-related learning between the ages of 14 to 16 at Key Stage 4. The recent 14 – 19 Reforms build on this requirement by extending links between employers and educators to better provide work-related provision for those students who choose it. This requirement is facilitated in UK cities through organisations called Education Business Partnership Organisations (EBPOs), many of which are local government entities that build on the networks of councils and their connections to local labour markets.

Workplace learning for school students is not a new idea. The Gateway Programme is the most recent example of a government initiative for achieving credit-bearing learning. But to scale this idea so that larger numbers of young people remain in education or training until the age of 18 requires a partnership between schools and their community that must be facilitated in a different way.

International school-to-work policy shows the way in which this kind of partnership operates best:

- Rather than focusing resources only in schools, government should set up a fund to which local authorities could apply to enable them to set up collaborative mechanisms around the Schools Plus goal.

- A “capability-promoting” centre of expertise should be established, so that local partnerships don’t have to reinvent the wheel, and are supported in making good decisions.
- Offer incentives for businesses to become involved in partnerships for learning, including brokerage for partnership.
- Require schools to provide opportunities for young people to participate in off-site learning, and

provide them with sufficient resources to manage the change process to this kind of learning.

When local governments commit to becoming Champions for the Schools Plus goal, a network of community services and agencies become involved in the learning outcomes for young people. This becomes a powerful lever for collaborative action to address the issue of the many young people in the city who do not reach their potential. A local solution applied to the national goal has to be winning policy – for everyone involved in finding positive outcomes for young people.

*Bernardine Vester is the Chief Executive of the City of Manukau Education Trust (COMET), established by Manukau City Council. A COMET report, ‘Working Together: Mahi Tahi Tatou’, was released on Friday August 8, which contains recommendations to Manukau City Council about a Manukau Education Strategy. The report includes a recommendation to become a “Schools Plus Champion”, [www.comet.org.nz](http://www.comet.org.nz).*