

## **SUBMISSION TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**

### **RE: CLOVER PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL – Application to extend the range of year levels from year 10 to year 13.**

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#### **Executive Summary**

*COMET SUPPORTS the aspiration of Pacific people for “being bilingual” – contributing to New Zealand’s economic future in both English and to their cultural community through their own language.*

*COMET SUPPORTS bilingual education for young people in the Otara schools network.*

*However, this process for reshaping schooling to meet local needs is flawed.*

*There is no consideration of how the whole network of school services in Otara could or should or does deliver on the community’s aspiration.*

*The proposal from Clover Park Middle School must support overall network provision, offer quality, and be sustainable.*

*Delivering education that offers young people a bilingual future has merit. COMET RECOMMENDS that the opportunity for a community conversation on this theme be actively pursued.*

*COMET RECOMMENDS to the Minister that legislation be amended to provide a mechanism for network decision-making that encourages schools and the wider community to work together to provide for their future, shape quality provision, and sustainably meet emerging community needs across all schools in a local network.*

#### **I. A flawed legislative process**

Any school can apply at any time to change its status. Clover Park Middle School is currently a “restricted composite” school. Unlike Te Whanau o Tupuranga – which is classed as a secondary school, and operates on the same site as Clover Park Middle School – Clover Park Middle School is restricted to delivering education programmes to years 7 to 10 students. It currently enrolls some students in Te Whanau o Tupuranga, while providing them with a programme of learning which is outside the special character status (for the provision of bilingual education in Maori and English).

Section 151 of the Education Act - [The Minister] “may...require the Board to provide education for the class levels specified in the notice; and the Board must provide education at the school accordingly.”

The application to the Minister for a change in the year levels of the restricted composite school takes place in a context that is well-rehearsed in Otara. In the 1990's, Otara experienced a traumatic re-visioning of local schooling provision through the unilateral ambitions of intermediate schools to become middle schools; and a heavily publicised ERO report which was highly critical of the schooling provision in the area. In the context of the self-managing schools model, the competitive educational environment of the day destroyed professional relationships among school leaders in the suburb.

In their second evaluation report to the Ministry of Education<sup>1</sup>, Auckland Uniservices researchers Robinson, Timperley and Bullard (2000) raised the issue of Problem-Solving across Self-Managing Schools. With reference to a discussion about the history of consultation about schooling structures in the Otara area, they concluded:

“There are features of all school choice and self-management policies, and of New Zealand’s in particular, which encourage schools to understand their interests as distinctive and individual, rather than collective. The more school communities emphasise their distinctiveness and the validity of their local knowledge base, the less their capacity to tackle or prevent problems that arise between schools and school communities. As school leaders focus on and are rewarded for their work in their own school, they become less aware of inter-school issues, they lack incentives to tackle them even if they are aware of them, and there may be disincentives to becoming involved. Since many educational problems cannot be tackled at the level of the individual self-managing school, or may be tackled in ways that make the overall situation worse, mechanisms are needed which enable self-managing schools to take a more collective approach to certain problems.” (p42).

In a culture of school autonomy, “...school leaders expect to have control over their own schools, and no responsibility, unless they choose to assume it, for the inter-school implications of their own operations” (ibid, p24).

In the 1990s, school leaders questioned the relevance of the wider community to the decision-making process for changes of class of school. The Ministry of Education reportedly sought to develop an “Otara Plan” for schooling provision across the network (ibid, p26), but no-one in the community had any ownership of such a plan. The final solution was to shape a “forum” of board chairs – the beginning of the Otara Boards Forum - in which, through a considered community response, the application of two schools to become middle schools was rejected in favour of an approach that would strengthen schooling in the wider network.

The application by Clover Park Middle School to extend its restricted composite status from year 10 to year 13 involves a legal process requiring consultation. There is a legal definition of what constitutes consultation. The basis of this requires that the views of “stakeholders” be taken into account in decision-making. Those views, however, do not necessarily reflect the inter-school implications of changes to school class or to year levels of students. The basis of the application is the philosophy of bilingual schooling and an integrated curriculum. The implied reason for extending the range of years is that this kind of schooling is not on offer elsewhere. If not, why not?

The flaw in the legislative process that created such difficulties in the 1990s remains today. Some ten or more years on, the mechanism of the Otara Boards Forum appears irrelevant to the process that the Ministry has put in place for the Clover Park Middle School application.

Clover Park Middle School is isolated within the network of schools in Otara. There is nothing to require this school’s board to communicate with its contributing school boards, or the secondary schools that it is supposed to feed into. The evidence is that it has not.

By the same token, there is nothing to require neighbouring schools to consider the philosophical and educational integrity of Clover Park Middle School’s position on bilingual schooling as a response to community needs and aspirations.

Ministry of Education processes have done nothing to support professional relationships within the leadership network of Otara schools, and it is our view that this application is likely to exacerbate network tensions and relationship dysfunctions within the network. There is a gap in the legislation: a mechanism for network decision-making.

## **2. Pasifika people have expressed an aspiration to have a city policy for “being bilingual”**

This submission is made in the context of the Manukau City Council Vision *Tomorrow's Manukau: Manukau Apopo*, which contains a Desired Outcome for “An Educated and Knowledgeable People”.

In 2007, in association with the Pacific Islands Advisory Committee (PIAC), a paper<sup>2</sup> was presented to the Manukau Education Conference about shaping a city policy on “Being Bilingual”.

That paper noted that 31% of Manukau's people are currently already bilingual, and that there is economic opportunity in building and strengthening that capacity, as well as recognising the inherent cultural and heritage values of language maintenance and preservation.

By Working Together with community leaders and education stakeholders, schools in the network can more readily respond to community aspirations and offer leadership in meeting them.

While the leadership of PIAC is important in building community commitment to a city policy for “being bilingual”, and there was a clear commitment at the conference to a bilingual future for young people, the nature of wider Pasifika expressions for schools to support “being bilingual” is unclear.

## **3. “Being bilingual” - what is it?**

The nature of “being bilingual” is intuitively understood by those who are bilingual. The understanding arises from the ability to live in two worlds - to participate in the social and economic English-speaking New Zealand mainstream; and to participate in the social and economic and cultural life of one's ethnic community.

Becoming educated in a bilingual context requires fluency in *both* languages and cultural contexts, and according appropriate weight to each.

In New Zealand, discussion of bilingualism has occurred in very limited contexts: perhaps, as an idea linked to the Maori renaissance; as an idea owned by some educators with special training in language; perhaps as a community liability or as a ‘generational’ issue that can be overcome over time and with better (English) schooling achievement.

Many informants in the preparation of this submission were unclear about the difference between immersion schooling and bilingual schooling. Clover Park Middle School is *not* proposing an immersion programme, which prefers one language over another as a medium of instruction, for heritage and social or economic or other reasons.

There was general agreement, however, about the importance of valuing a student’s culture and encouraging young people to be as fluent and competent in their home language as in English.

“Being bilingual” is a whole-of-life activity. It adds complications as well as richness to an individual’s social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being. It is not limited to a particular year of a child’s education, or a particular stage of life. For this reason, a whole network of services is required to meet the community’s aspirations.

#### **4. “Being bilingual” requires a network of educational services**

The Clover Park Middle School application responds to the issue of the importance of language preservation and maintenance. However, it does not offer a whole-of-network view about how services might be delivered. It proposes a solution that sits outside the wider provision of educational services to the Otara community.

The application needs to be seen in the context of the opportunity that the whole of the education network in Otara provides to be an instrument for achieving a community aspiration for “being bilingual”. This requires wide community conversation, discussion and debate. How and where should such a community conversation be led and held? Where is the leadership and support that is required?

While the application from Clover Park Middle School may deliver to the immediate aspirations – as expressed by the Clover Park Middle School parent community – the assumption of thereby delivering to the wider community aspiration for “bilingual education” – by offering “choice” - is premature.

## **5. School Outcomes / Student Achievement**

Does bilingual schooling deliver the outcomes that the community is looking for?

The Robinson, Timperley and Bullard report from to Ministry of Education (quoted above) noted the shaky evidence for bilingual approaches as a mechanism for improving student achievement.

“The underlying assumption [of the interviewees] appears to be that improving achievement is likely to occur through teachers giving greater recognition to Pasifika children’s culture, improving the interface and understandings between home and school, increasing bilingual provision and resources and giving more positive publicity to the achievement of those who have succeeded...The concern we have raised...is that most of these strategies have been tried in some form, but few have been evaluated systematically in terms of their success in raising student achievement.<sup>3</sup>”

However, the report did note that assessment tools for measuring student achievement in bilingual settings are not available. The most secure evidence that exists for student outcomes from the national network of education provision is NCEA data – this is not available in intermediate or middle schools, but is available from the Clover Park campus, through data for Te Whanau o Tupuranga, and from the secondary schools in Otara.

COMET analysis of publicly-available 2007 data suggests the following outcomes:

- **46.4%** of Te Whanau o Tupuranga students achieved the Level 1 literacy requirement in year 11 (compared with **76.9%** nationally; **59.8%** for Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate Senior School; and **79.3%** for Tangaroa College students). The number of students at year 11 at Te Whanau o Tupuranga was 32. The literacy requirement may be assessed in English or in Maori.
- For Level 2 numeracy, **53.6%** of students at Te Whanau o Tupuranga met this requirement (compared to **84.6%** nationally, **64.1%** at Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate and **75.9%** at Tangaroa College.)

Small numbers can make data misleading. For example, **100%** of year 13 students studying at Year 13 at Te Whanau o Tupuranga gained NCEA Level 3 – but only 4 students were at that level. This means that **75%** of those year students gained university entrance (compared to the national average of **50.7%**, **51.5%** at Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate - 68 students, and **55.7%** at Tangaroa College – 122 students). The data could point to the value of small numbers at senior levels; or to high drop-out rates prior to reaching year 13. It is too soon in Te Whanau o Tupuranga's development to make valid conclusions about NCEA-related outcomes.

Data about achievement in English *and* in Pacific languages is available. Both Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate and Tangaroa Colleges offer language classes. The provision at Clover Park will offer an "integrated" programme for Pasifika students. It is not clear whether provision in the neighbouring secondary schools for years 11, 12 and 13 students already offers this.

## **6. The viability of the change of year levels**

The principal and board of Clover Park Middle School have created a 'niche' for bilingual schooling from a soundly researched philosophical basis.

The number of children at the school (148) is significantly less than the surrounding population might suggest. It is unclear whether this is because of the curriculum philosophy of the school or because of other factors.

It is fair to say that the relationship between professional leaders in Otara has been openly characterised as one of distrust and poor communications. This may have impacted on the roll of the school.

For whatever reason, large numbers of families who might otherwise be in the school zone choose year 7 to 10 education at other schools. A financially viable approach to delivering bilingual education at the Clover Park campus would require larger numbers at senior secondary school level than is projected. We have reservations about the viability of high quality educational delivery in a bilingual setting for Pasifika families when the numbers are so low, and when relationships within the network do not support the potential of the school to grow its numbers or even maintain them.

With very small numbers projected for the Clover Park Middle School proposal, consistently high quality staffing and curriculum delivery options are at risk. There is evidence to suggest that small schools are very costly to manage. In addition, in a Canadian literature review<sup>4</sup> on school size and its effects, Dr Kenneth Leithwood, a professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, concluded from 59 studies that the optimum school size is approximately 300 elementary students and about 600 students at the secondary level in schools serving a disadvantaged student population. While this may not hold in the Manukau context because of the variables that apply, the long-term sustainability of schooling focused on bilingual learning at only one school is questionable.<sup>5</sup>

Schools with the largest groups of **Samoan** students in the Otago area (over 100 students, 2006 figures)

	Number	% of total roll
SEHC	526	42.3%
Tangaroa College	514	45.1%
St John the Evangelist	296	95.8%
Chapel Downs Primary	244	37.3%
Ferguson Intermediate	202	39.1%
Flat Bush School	174	40.3%
Mayfield School	172	33.9%
Dawson Primary	159	34.8%
Redoubt North	152	28.6%
Yendarra	145	38.8%

Schools with the largest groups of

**Tongan** students in the Otago area (over 50 students, 2006 figures)

	Number	% of total roll
SEHC	220	17.7 %
Tangaroa College	130	11.4%
Mayfield School	102	20.1%
Dawson Primary	76	16.6%
Ferguson Intermediate	70	13.6%
Flat Bush School	58	13.4%
Yendarra Primary	57	15.2%

Schools with the largest groups of **Cook Islands** students in the Otago area (over 50 students, 2006 figures)

	Number	% of total roll
Tangaroa College	220	19.3%
SEHC	171	13.8%
Dawson Primary	109	23.9%
Bairds Mainfreight Primary	107	30.8%
Ferguson Intermediate	104	20.2%
Flat Bush School	91	21.1%
Chapel Downs Primary	87	13.3%
Mayfield School	84	16.6%
East Tamaki Primary	72	26.2%
Yendarra Primary	60	16.0%

Clover Park Middle School's proposal must be sufficiently sustainable for these communities to preserve and maintain their linguistic and cultural heritage.

If Clover Park Middle School's numbers are not sustainable, what is the contribution that these other schools could or should be making to the aspiration?

## **CONCLUSION**

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The legal process that accompanies proposals of this nature encourages a very narrow view of "community". Clover Park Middle School's application is a response to the legal opportunity to request a change in year levels.

However, there is no legitimacy given to the role of the Otara Boards Forum in this process – which was established with the support of the Ministry of Education in the 1990s to meet the need for a "whole of network" approach to education in Otara. Nor does the process give legitimacy to the views of the language/ethnic communities of Otara. For a proposal built on the linguistic and cultural heritages of the Pacific, the consultation process that the Ministry of Education applies is deeply flawed.

One solution to the gap is to amend legislation to provide a mechanism for network decision-making that encourages schools and the wider community to work together to provide for their future, to shape quality provision, and to meet emerging community needs across all schools in a local network.

COMET therefore recommends to the Minister that provision of education that creates a bilingual future for all of Otago's young people needs to be actively pursued rather passively arrived at. The application illustrates a process which depends on individual school initiative rather than an active and cohesive approach to wider network needs and community aspiration.

The Minister's decision needs to take into account **the importance of the network** to the success of the vision for a bilingual future for *all* of Otago's young people.

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE

3 July, 2008

#### REFERENCES:

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson, V., and Timperley, H., Bullard, T., 2000: *Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otago Evaluation: Second Evaluation Report to the Ministry of Education*. Ministry of Education, Research Division, November. Contract Research from Auckland Uniservices Ltd.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.comet.org.nz/images/pdfs/010%20being%20bilingual%20discussion.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Robinson, V., and Timperley, H., et al 2004: *Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otago Evaluation: Final Evaluation Report to the Ministry of Education*. Ministry of Education, Research Division. Contract research from the School of Education, University of Auckland.

<sup>4</sup> [www.canada.com/reginaleaderpost/news/story.html?id=d18717e1-cf59-40e0-b9aa-f70218246132](http://www.canada.com/reginaleaderpost/news/story.html?id=d18717e1-cf59-40e0-b9aa-f70218246132)