

COMET



MAKING EDUCATION WORK FOR MANUKAU

SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON AUCKLAND GOVERNANCE

Prepared by the City of Manukau Education Trust

Private Bag 94006, Manukau City.

09 968 8773

www.comet.org.nz

ABOUT US

The City of Manukau Education Trust (COMET) is a Council-Controlled Organisation, set up by Manukau City Council in 1999 to provide leadership, advocacy, co-ordination and facilitation services for education to the City.

COMET's Trust Deed establishes it as a Charitable Trust. The objects are:

“to undertake initiatives and support and promote programmes that advance education and educational opportunities for the Manukau Community, including by way of illustration but not limitation:

- *To identify education needs in the Manukau Community and communicate those needs to the relevant Education Stakeholders.*
- *To develop strategies in consultation with Education Stakeholders, to achieve the best delivery of education services to the diverse range of peoples and cultures that make up the Manukau Community;*
- *To act as an advocate for the Manukau Community in relation to all matters concerning education in Manukau City.*

- *To gather information about the provision of education services to the Manukau Community and provide that information to the relevant Education Stakeholders.*

- *To take any other action the Trustees consider appropriate to facilitate the delivery of effective and relevant education services to the Manukau Community.”*
(Trust Deed, 1999)

The ten trustees are representative of the education sector and the community in Manukau.

COMET's relationship to the Council is governed by the **Statement of Intent** agreed each year. The Statement of Intent provides the basis for the ongoing relationship between the two organisations.

COMET's **contract with Council**, reviewed every three years, specifies the services to be provided under the Statement of Intent. Currently, those services are for leadership, advocacy, co-ordination and facilitation for education in Manukau City, with particular reference to the *Tomorrow's Manukau: Manukau Apopo* vision, on which the Long Term Council Community Plan is based.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Local Government Act 2002 makes local bodies responsible for the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of citizens. Education plays a critical role in all of these well-beings. The education infrastructure of Auckland is a significant local asset. This submission argues that, in shaping the future of local government in Auckland, attention needs to be given to how local government bodies interact with education to provide for future skill needs, to address poverty and disadvantage, and to enhance the broader social, economic, cultural and environmental landscapes of the region.

In assessing options for local government structures in Auckland, the impacts on the education infrastructure should carry *equal weight* to impacts on other infrastructural matters (such as transport infrastructure, water and wastewater infrastructure, parks and leisure services, and so on.)

Recommendation: Any changes to regional governance have to enhance the engagement of the people of Auckland in education, and strengthen the linkages between local education institutions and local government strategic goals. A criterion for assessing structures for governance in Auckland must be: how will it deliver on the vision for “an educated and knowledgeable people”?

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

The Local Government Act 2002 prescribes four aspects of community well-being: environmental, economic, social and cultural. Education has a significant role to play in the ensuring these well-beings are delivered.

Cities are globally competitive when they have a strong education system that results in an “educated and knowledgeable people”.

The education infrastructure of a city is a significant local asset

The education infrastructure of a city is a significant local asset. The infrastructure includes its schools, early childhood centres and tertiary institutions, including private providers. It also includes services such as special education services, guidance and careers advisory services, services that support trustees, professional development providers for teachers, teacher training and research institutions, and specialist services for schools such as ICT services. In addition, cities provide facilities which form part of the public access network for community learning, such as libraries and arts and heritage institutions.

One-third of all of New Zealand’s school pupils (that is, 253,000 students) receive their education in Auckland region schools. Each one of these schools has its own governance and management, with a high degree of autonomy in delivery of education services. The tendency for such an atomistic system to spin out into very different strategic directions is partly modified by the requirement of state sector schools to deliver the New Zealand Curriculum and to meet National Education Guidelines (NEGs) and National Administrative Guidelines (NAGs).

Significant tertiary institutions are located in the Auckland region. In New Zealand the education sector includes foundation skills provision for adults, workplace learning and community education as “tertiary” provision. This breadth of provision serves an international student population as well as New Zealanders, with significant localised impacts on the Auckland economy.

Government agencies such as the Ministry of Education, the Tertiary Education Commission and the Education Review Office have offices in the Auckland region, but these offices are not represented in all of the Territorial Local

Authorities – they are regionally focused. Their mandates are very unclear at the community level. The resources of the Ministry of Education’s Auckland office are targeted to policy development, or operational support for schools, early childhood or special education rather than on engagement with wider community issues.

This devolution of decision-making to individual schools, early childhood centres and tertiary institutions has made it difficult for local authorities to find actors with whom they can engage about matters of overall system performance and community aspirations for education. Historically poor aggregate achievement outcomes from the schooling network in parts of Manukau and Papakura, Auckland and Waitakere City – associated with high levels of migration, diversity, and relative poverty has had an impact on skills availability in the adult population to meet labour market demand. This is affecting regional economic growth. These distinct pockets of urban disadvantage demand new kinds of responses to education needs. Because of the complicated network of actors and agencies, addressing issues in the education system requires collaboration and coordination among and between stakeholders, and especially at community level.

However, most school decision-makers (such as principals and boards of trustees) do not see the relevance of local

government engagement in education. This suggests that there are complex relationship issues to be addressed in ensuring that community aspirations for education in its widest sense can be delivered. The quality of the relationships among community leaders who engage with education is particularly important in this process. We would suggest that a super-city approach is likely to reduce opportunities for community leadership in connecting to education.

To achieve the fundamental shifts in thinking, planning, investment and action needed to meet city aspirations, commitment from the education sector will be required.

Despite the challenges of engagement, education appears as a key action element in the Auckland Sustainability Framework and within the economic development strategy and the community outcomes process for some authorities.

The **Auckland Sustainability Framework**¹ is shared by Auckland’s local government bodies, and is designed to guide regional strategies and decision-making for a more sustainable future. It provides a shared vision for and commitment to the Auckland region over time. It contains five “challenges”, sets out eight aspirational long-term goals that require eight fundamental shifts in thinking, planning, investment and action. Delivering on these will require the engagement of the community’s education infrastructure

¹ www.sustainingauckland.org.nz

assets. Like successful cities around the world², a successful future for Auckland will be built on innovation, a skilled workforce, high quality schools and tertiary institutions, high quality of life built on educated and knowledgeable people who contribute to informed, democratic decision-making, and social inclusiveness. The shifts required to the current environment are challenging.

The **Auckland Regional Economic Development Strategy** (the “Metro project”), is a strategy owned by the Auckland Regional Council. It includes the aspiration to produce a skilled and responsive labour force, thereby creating a community able to respond to changing local and global opportunities. It suggests that this can be done through the creation of a “virtuous cycle of business growth and skills development that increases productivity and participation in education, training and the labour force”³.

Current efforts in Auckland to address skills development as a fundamental of economic growth, including those of the Auckland Regional Council, have been frustrated by poor connections to the education sector and fractured and highly localized leadership networks.

² Our Cities are back: Competitive cities make prosperous regions

³ http://www.arc.govt.nz/economy/the-metro-project/the-metro-project_home.cfm

Nevertheless, the potential is significant for local government to act as a broker, facilitator or co-ordinator in addressing local education problems and issues, resulting in desired community outcomes; and as a contributor to strategic goals in the education sector. In return, engagement in education offers local government mechanisms for addressing pressing issues that underpin the four well-beings. There is no quick fix for the deeply complex issues of student underachievement and community engagement in schooling, or widespread skills gaps. However, the reshaping of education as a community issue – not just an issue for parents and teachers – allows for a more holistic approach to the shifts required by the Auckland Sustainability Framework and local economic development plans.

For this reason, this submission argues that the education infrastructure of the Auckland region requires a more committed approach to development and support for education than is generally applied by individual territorial authorities. An intermediary approach through a Council-Controlled Organisation has been the preferred mechanism in Manukau, where the effect of educational underachievement is most marked.

The intermediary approach can sit at the regional or city level, but is likely to be inefficient at the community board level. However, the philosophy of intermediaries operating at the social interface has to be supported at the regional

level. Because structures will have different outcomes in relation to the philosophy applied to them, the test that we would apply to any governance structure for Auckland is: how will this structure deliver on the vision for “an educated and knowledgeable people”?

A test for re-organised governance for Auckland: how will it deliver on the vision for “an educated and knowledgeable people”?

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Section 91 of the Local Government Act (LGA) 2002 prescribes a “community outcomes process”. A community outcome is a statement about the things that are important in a particular community or area, a statement about the desired state of affairs. It is important to distinguish the activities of a Council (outputs) from community outcomes. For example, building a local library is an output activity that a council might engage in, but its net result could be a more “educated and knowledgeable people”. Local authorities are shaped by the LGA as facilitators rather than

leaders, in order to obtain a “whole of community” approach⁴. Under this scenario, it is not surprising that different communities will take different perspectives on priority-setting. What is important in Manukau will not be the same as what is important in other parts of Auckland.

Given the particular demography of the southern portion of the Auckland region, community leadership and commitment to education will be crucial. To achieve “an educated and knowledgeable people” a new kind of dialogue about the role of local authorities in education, and actions that explore the potential of local government to support better education outcomes will be needed.

The “community outcomes process” results in a series of high-level statements about community priorities. The power of high-level outcomes statements is that they provide mandates for action at the sub-district and community levels. However, the higher-level the statement, the less likely it is that communities will feel sufficiently empowered to become involved in the priority-setting process. Regional priorities will have little relevance to education sector actors unless vigorous efforts are made to lift levels of engagement.

⁴ See also *Realising the potential of the Community Outcomes Process*. A paper prepared by McKinlay Douglas Ltd for Local Government New Zealand, December 2004.

While restructuring of local government in the Auckland Region provides opportunities for taking the “best practice” work in local government/education sector relationships currently taking place and applying it for more effective impact across Auckland, there are dangers in a governance model that results in reduction in community input into defining priorities. The relationships and structural connections required for action “on the ground” at the local level are fundamental to “community governance” over educational outcomes. International best practice is to shape and support those relationships through the work of intermediaries.

THE EDUCATION SECTOR EXPERIENCE OF GOVERNANCE REFORM

System performance is not just a matter of structure or the quality of governance

It is an internationally popular political response to make administrative reforms when there is public frustration about outcomes. The *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms of 1989 were about education system structures and governance processes rather than on learning outcomes. The sector provides a ‘case study’ of governance reform.

There is no doubt that devolution to school-based decision-making has created strong local ‘ownership’ of schools. However, the devolutionary model has significant

weaknesses. Firstly, there exists in New Zealand a large gap between top-performing and under-achieving students – one of the widest internationally⁵. It took at least ten years after the reforms for the realisation to crystallise that student outcomes were little different under the new structures than they were under the old: the gap between those who perform well and those who perform poorly remains significant. While there is both an ethnic and geographic dimension to this, it is sobering to note that system performance is clearly not just a matter of structure or the quality of governance. Yet, it would be difficult to imagine a winding back of the reforms on the basis that student achievement – arguably the key outcome for education - hadn’t improved. The participatory democracy of schooling in New Zealand is a powerful outcome in itself, engendering levels of loyalty and commitment to the self-governing model even when governance itself is problematic.

Our experience in working in the education sector suggests that changing the structure won’t necessarily change the outcomes. Change takes time. It took at least ten years for

⁵ International studies such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) support the view that New Zealand has a ‘tail’ of underachievement that needs addressing.

the education sector to switch its focus from structure to outcomes. Change can also have unintended effects.

A schooling network can be powerfully affected by single-school decisions unless there is a strong moderating influence on self-interest. This is most evident in zoning decisions, but is also true about other school practices. A public education system, like a public transport system or a local government system, is composed of inter-related entities and interests. All School Boards of Trustees are expected to develop Annual Plans and Strategic Plans that identify school priorities and align those priorities with budgets. The school's strategic direction is a 'local decision'. Consequently, school strategic planning may not be connected to higher-level community or central government planning processes. While the principle of subsidiarity is important, the education sector experience provides a cautionary note about making explicit in the governance arrangements the interdependence of decision-making for regional strategies, city plans, district plans, community strategies, and neighbourhood plans. Community self-interest needs to be balanced by wider city perspectives. A connective framework is required.

The importance of mandating the concept of "being part of a network", thereby helping people to view themselves as part of a wider, resource-rich community, cannot be over-emphasized. To shape the wider community settings impacting on the learning of children, collective and collaborative approaches are required that involve a wider

group of stakeholders. In the education sector this involves "cluster" or "network" approaches which are entirely voluntary, and therefore under-resourced and difficult to manage. Some twenty years after the devolutionary reforms were put in place, the supports for schooling improvement work are still fragmentary. Collaboration needs to be specifically addressed in the governance arrangements.

EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Our submission concludes with reference to learnings already gained about the importance of social structures to economic development. A Ministry of Economic Development review of the regional partnerships programme has this to say:

"There is a need to assess existing [economic development] strategies vis-à-vis their relationship to social development strategies.... International research suggests that strategies that are too narrowly focused on economic factors without wider consideration of social issues and/linkages with other key strategies are likely to fail, particularly in disadvantaged regions,

*where economic strategy development cannot be divorced from social conditions. Both regional and sectoral strategy development processes have highlighted the need to include social factors when considering business growth”.*⁶

In the end, high-level strategic goals and outcomes statements have to be translated into actions at the most local level. There are very different philosophical underpinnings among Auckland’s existing territorial local authorities, different understandings of the community outcomes process and its potential and very different internal structures to manage and shape action. For this reason, a one-size-fits-all approach to community outcomes priorities undermines democratic participation.

The need for action and engagement in education is barely recognised in some parts of the Auckland region, and highly innovative models for action and engagement are being developed elsewhere.

We would urge the Royal Commissioners to consider that it is not just the governance structure that will shape Auckland’s future, but also the very different philosophical

approaches to the requirements of the Local Government Act that attend to the aspirations of communities.

This is a reminder that the place of education must be addressed in the new governance structure for Auckland, and this is particularly important for the southern city.

⁶ Ministry of Economic Development, 2003 Regional Partnerships Programme Review.

<http://www.med.govt.nz/upload/8545/final.pdf>