

Education Policy: Changes and continuities since 1999

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Introduction

In this chapter we provide an overview of education policy in Aotearoa New Zealand. After providing a brief history, we focus more closely on education since 1999, a period of 21 years during which power was held by a Labour-led Government, a National-led Government, and most recently, another Labour-led Government. We discuss the education policies of these governments, concentrating mainly on school-level education policy. The chapter goes on to discuss five prevailing patterns in education policy development in Aotearoa New Zealand over the period since 1999. We then end with two case studies of recent policy: the promotion of ‘21st century learners’; and the growth of privatisation in New Zealand education. These are both important areas that are revealing about the continuities as well as changes in Aotearoa New Zealand education policy over the last two decades.

Brief history of education in Aotearoa New Zealand

In pre-European Māori society, the passing down of practical skills and knowledge was central to the survival of an *iwi* (tribe). Besides the teaching of practical skills, most *iwi* also had some form of *whare wānanga* (house of learning) in which students would learn and recite oral histories and traditions. These students became responsible for holding and passing this knowledge down to future generations. Operating as a collective, education was a social good for the benefit of the entire *iwi* (Edwards et al., 2007).

The first European schools were established in the early 1800s by Christian missionaries, with teaching initially delivered in te reo Māori to make it easier to convert Māori to Christianity. Māori often responded positively to the missionary schools as they saw a chance to expand their knowledge and become well-versed in both the Māori and Pākehā worlds. Nevertheless the early European schools were assimilatory and the Government

furthered this agenda in 1867 with the establishment of ‘native schools’. Education at this time was primarily a tool to establish social control (Simon, 2000).

In 1877, the Government established a national, centralised, state-funded education system. This grew out of a growing interest in egalitarianism and belief from settlers that New Zealand should not replicate the inequities of the British class system. Initially only a basic primary education was offered, with universal access expanded to secondary schooling in 1903. In New Zealand, as in other countries, universal access to education was seen as the solution to inequality, even though schools often continued to perpetuate existing inequalities through unequal curricula offerings to different groups (Simon, 2000). By 1939 when Peter Fraser, then-Minister of Education, famously stated that all citizens, regardless of their ability or wealth, have the right to a free education, the Government had begun to establish a substantial welfare state, in which education was essential to producing a well-educated and productive society for all (Simon, 2000). After World War II, New Zealand’s economy was performing well, and the policies of successive governments were based on the belief that state intervention was crucial to ensure citizens had economic and social security.

Up until the mid-1980s, the Keynesian policies of successive governments ensured that New Zealand remained a highly-controlled welfare state. However, extensive spending under the Muldoon government meant the country’s debt levels grew rapidly. When the Fourth Labour Government was elected in 1984, it embarked on an “extensive economic liberalisation and deregulation programme” (Dobbins, 2010, p. 158). Education was not immune to these neoliberal reforms, and major changes took place during this period that transformed education into a private good (Davies & Bansel, 2007).

These reforms involved two distinct and contradictory policy agendas, described by Codd (2005) as a “process of simultaneous devolution and control” (p. 194). During the late 1980s and 1990s, successive governments sought to transform New Zealand’s education system through ‘devolution’ of some state control and opening up the system to marketisation (Dobbins, 2010). The *Tomorrow’s Schools* reforms of 1989, which created ‘self-managing’ schools, were followed in the 1990s by further steps away from school zoning, ‘bulk funding’ of teacher salaries, and the introduction of user-pays tertiary education. Simultaneously, there was an increase in managerialism and accountability (‘control’) primarily conducted by ‘steering at a distance’ (Sellar & Lingard, 2013, p. 716). An outcomes-based approach centred on targets and measurable results in school charters and strategic plans, accompanied by external monitoring from agencies such as the Education Review Office [ERO] and Tertiary Education Commission were used to ensure objectives were met. Kohanga Reo,

Kura Kaupapa and Whare Wānanga also emerged at this time, as Maori sought greater self-determination and the revitalisation of te reo.

In response to this period of rapid social upheaval, the Fifth Labour Government, elected in 1999, set out to pull back slightly from the extremes of the neoliberal reforms. The following sections deal in greater detail with more recent education policy developments under the three Governments that have been in power since the new century, with a particular focus on school-level education policy.

The Fifth Labour Government (1999-2008)

By 1999 the problem of ‘winner’ and ‘loser’ schools under the *Tomorrow’s Schools* reforms had become apparent and Labour’s main response to this was to pass the *Education Amendment Act 2000*. This brought in enrolment changes to prevent over-subscribed schools picking off the most desirable students and discontinued the bulk funding of teachers’ salaries. It also capped government subsidies to private schools which had been increasing with successive National governments over the 1990s, and started to refuse the integration of private schools where this would create schools that competed with those in the state sector. Reducing contestability, the Wylie review (Wylie, 2000) returned special education to the Ministry of Education [MoE] and School Support Service ‘providers’ of professional development also came under the MoE. A review of the ERO (Rodger et al., 2000) recommended that it take a more supportive ‘assess and assist’ approach to schools rather than just being an external evaluator.

On the other hand, moves to reduce the business orientation of schools were limited. The *Education Amendment Act 2000* revived home zones in a form which allowed schools to determine the areas from which they wanted to draw students, whereas prior to the *Tomorrow’s Schools* reforms it had been the Department of Education which decided on school zones. Consequently, the reform of the zoning system, while ostensibly about addressing equity, in fact quietly allowed the market culture that had developed in schools over the 1990s to continue. Similarly, while salaries bulk funding ended, there was never any doubt that the ‘self-managing’ approach with a devolved operations budget would continue, despite the fraught financial position of many low socio-economic schools. Meanwhile the *Education Standards Bill 2001* signalled a new emphasis on target-setting, although this was typically less controlling and punitive than similar target setting regimes overseas, a point we return to in the ‘prevailing patterns’ section later.

Another example of the growth of managerialism in schools under Labour was that more funding became available on a contestable basis so that schools could only access funds if they were part of a particular initiative or pilot and the funding was only available for a limited term. In the context of schools always looking for sources of funding to top up their operational grants, such ‘honeypot management’ was an effective way to ‘steer from a distance’ by determining the criteria under which schools were given extra funds. Whereas the emphasis of the 1990s had been on school administration following the *Tomorrow’s Schools* reforms, Labour also developed a new emphasis on quality teaching that was also heavily influenced by managerialism (O’Neill, 2005). This new emphasis involved using research in a variety of ways that downplayed the effects of social structure and held teachers responsible for student achievement. MoE documents such as the *Quality Teaching Best Evidence Synthesis* (Alton-Lee, 2003) favoured studies showing the largest teacher effects. Some research and professional development contracts also gave precedence to the power of teaching. For instance, *Te Kotahitanga* was an influential project that strongly dismissed sociological arguments about the impact of socio-economic status on Maori achievement as ‘deficit theorising’ (Bishop et al., 2003, p. 6).

The Fifth National Government (2008-2017)

The National-led Government’s education policy was dominated by a series of signature or soundbite policies, often released during election years. For the 2008 election it was the introduction of National Standards, an assessment system in primary schools, that dominated education policy debates. By 2011 National Standards results were being published as part of a wider emphasis on Public Achievement Information. The first ‘Partnership’ or ‘Kura Hourua’ charter schools were announced in September 2013 and with the 2014 election came ‘*Investing in Educational Success*’, a policy that set up clusters of mainly primary and secondary schools, often by locality. Somewhat less in the spotlight was new funding to independent schools, an attempt to increase class sizes, the cutting back of adult education provision via schools, Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) to build schools, the ‘reorganisation’ of Christchurch schools after the Canterbury earthquakes (Mutch, 2017), the Education Council replacing the Teaching Council in July 2015, an update of the *Education Act* (numerous changes including Communities of Online Learning – CoOLs), and the idea, never completed, of compensatory funding shifting from being based on socio-economic census data (‘decile funding’) to a ‘social investment’ risk index of individual indicators.

At the heart of much of this policy were ideas taken from business, for instance,

Investing in Educational Success was premised on the idea of school improvement through financial rewards for high performing teachers and principals. New Zealand's Prime Minister for most of the three terms, John Key, was a former foreign exchange dealer who was unabashed about running the country like a company - 'NZ Inc'. The Key Government also had right-wing coalition partners to keep onside: the ACT Party was especially influential in the case of Partnership Schools. At the same time, this Government had a strongly pragmatic outlook, often tempering its business orientation to education rather than risk losing electoral support. Democratic processes in education also came under threat during the period of this Government. It was particularly 'tribal' with the Ministerial Cross Sector Forum on Raising Achievement becoming an important echo chamber for influential New Zealand educators over this period. Members of the Education Council, created in 2015, were appointed by MoE rather than being elected representatives, as was the case with the Teaching Council it replaced. Meanwhile, the private means used by this Government to deal with its opponents became known as 'Dirty Politics' (Hager, 2014). The Government was exposed using the services of right-wing bloggers to attack its critics, including many in the education sector (Thrupp, with Lingard, Maguire & Hursh, 2018). In this way the Key Government could marginalise its opponents, whilst still maintaining the kind of friendly and relaxed image that appealed to the New Zealand public.

The Sixth Labour Government (2017 to present).

The latest Labour-led Government had an uncertain start after forming a coalition with the minor party, New Zealand First. With only a slender majority in the House, its first term would become heavily dominated by consultation activities. There was a wide-ranging 'Education Conversation' which also included Education Summit events in Wellington and Christchurch. There were also about 15 reviews of aspects of the education sector, including the peak review, the taskforce to review *Tomorrow's Schools* (Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce, 2018). Lying behind the reviews and consultation was the stated intention to have a 30-year plan for education, a worthy but unlikely goal given the extent to which education policy has been contested in New Zealand over the last few decades. There are likely to be many lessons to learn from the consultation processes around the reviews, including the efficacy of very large advisory groups and the suitability of public consultation meetings for matters of considerable organisational complexity.

By 2020, most of the reviews had reported and the Government has responded. A key recommendation of the Tomorrow's School Independent Taskforce was establishing semi-

regional Education Hubs as Crown entities and the Government responded with the establishment of an Education Service Agency within MoE (Ministry of Education, 2019). The Ministerial Advisory Group on Curriculum, Progress and Achievement (2019) sought a ‘system that learns’, with a greater emphasis on educational data and information needs and MoE now has a substantial continuing work programme in this area. The review into NCEA recommended greater accessibility, strengthened literacy and numeracy, a simpler structure with fewer, larger standards, and clearer future pathways (Crown, 2019). But 2020 is an election year and with the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing recession it is uncertain how many of the proposals resulting from the consultation programme will actually be implemented.

The Labour-led Government’s activities in education have not all been about consultation; there have been some policy developments clearly intended to stamp out a new direction for the education sector after almost a decade of National-led policy. By 6 November 2017, less than two weeks after forming a government, it was announced that National Standards would be ending. Over the following year the Partnership School policy was also gradually undone, with all 13 continuing schools becoming ‘state-integrated’ schools a tidy solution for a government that wanted to shut down existing and future development of charter schools in New Zealand. A third noteworthy shift was to rename the Education Council the Teaching Council and to reintroduce democratic processes and a stronger remit for it as a professional organisation representing teachers. Finally, a new emphasis on teaching New Zealand history in schools, especially about the wars between Māori and the colonial government in the mid-19th century, has been signalled. At the same time, there have been important limits to how much the Labour-led Government has been willing or able to genuinely move away from some of the policy settings of earlier governments.

Prevailing patterns in education policy in Aotearoa New Zealand since 1999

There are five main generalisations we draw about education policy over these two decades. First, although education policy after 1999 shifted away from the overtly neoliberal policy of the previous decade to some versions of ‘Third Way’ education policy, each government brought a different flavour and emphases over this time. Labour (1999-2008) took some of the rough edges off the neoliberal project – or “neoliberalism with a social conscience” (Thrupp & Irwin, 2010, pp. xvii) – as it sought to balance economic competitiveness with social justice. There was limited repudiation of the market along with an increase in

managerialism in some areas (Thrupp & Irwin, 2010). In education policy, this was most obvious in the focus on building a ‘knowledge economy’ (Wood & Sheehan, 2012). This left the door open for National to move New Zealand educational politics back to a more neoliberal approach again, but with much pragmatism, as mentioned above (Thrupp, 2017). Labour, elected in October 2017 has made a strong pitch to break free of both the policies of the previous government (removing National Standards and integrating Partnership Schools into the state system) and the legacy of the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 90s (Tomorrow’s Schools Independent Taskforce, 2018) but it also remains quite constrained by the ideologies of earlier times (Barker & Wood, 2019).

Second, there has been great deal of pragmatism exercised by all of these New Zealand governments. The typical effect of this has been to create policy that is not as overtly neoliberal as similar policies in other English speaking countries, (e.g. Australia, England, the USA). For example, these other countries have had national tests, often accompanied by the setting of strong achievement targets at multiple cascading levels. In contrast, New Zealand’s strongest version of this (under the National Government), involved National Standards (and only an informal target for those) and a single Better Public Service (BPS) target for NCEA: a very soft touch compared to overseas. Another example is the way that New Zealand’s charter schools (Partnership Schools) and its PPPs were kept at low numbers under the National Government compared to similar developments elsewhere. It seems that New Zealand saw an almost experimental or piloting approach that could easily be de-emphasised if there was public resistance.

Third it has often been ‘vernacular’ conditions of the New Zealand context which have mediated the way that policies circulating globally are taken up locally (Lingard, 2010). One of the main local considerations, impossible to overlook, is the importance of things Māori in New Zealand and the politics that surround that. This will have altered numerous policies over the years as Māori have strongly sought alternative Kaupapa Māori provision but also Māori representation and approaches to teaching and learning in ‘mainstream’ education. Other vernacular conditions that have been important are high levels of immigration (meaning policymakers have often been playing catchup with school provision rather than making progress) and local disasters, especially the Canterbury Earthquakes of 2010-2011.

Fourth, we recognise that education policy is not only determined by government agencies, it often shifts significantly in the process of being implemented (we prefer the term ‘enacted’ for this reason, see Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Policy gets reinterpreted as it

gets put into practice and is sometimes heavily contested as well. The campaign against the introduction and extension of National Standards was a feisty example of teachers pushing back against a policy that was widely unwanted (Thrupp, with Lingard, Maguire & Hursh, 2018). The *Investing in Educational Success* reform was particularly complicated in trying to decide the intent of the policy, and in its subsequent enactment with the primary and secondary sectors taking different stances, with academics also divided (Thrupp, 2018). More recently the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce saw considerable resistance from some school principals to its proposals for new regional hubs providing services to all schools.

Fifth, the policy issues in education have tended to revolve around predictable themes, such as NZ's education performance compared to other countries (especially in the PISA testing programme) (Stray & Wood, 2020), the extent to which education can overcome the effects of ethnic and socio-economic disparities, the role of technology in teaching and learning, and the best balance between central government and local autonomy (Sinnema, 2015). Although new emphases have emerged over the two decades covered by this chapter (such as mental health and wellbeing, and the focus on climate change), these have added to the complexity of the education sector rather than representing any resolution of earlier concerns. Instead, these return again and again, but typically given new flavour by the incumbent government at the time. We see this mix of continuity and change in the two case study areas to which we now turn: the promotion of the knowledge economy and '21st century learners', and the growth of privatisation in New Zealand education.

The Knowledge Economy, '21st Century Learners' and Education Policies

Around the turn of the century, New Zealand, along with many other nations, began to be influenced by a discourse of change associated with '21st century learners'. This term is closely associated with others such as 'new millennium learners' or 'digital natives'. Within New Zealand, ideas about the 21st century learners coincided with the new millennium and the development of the *New Zealand Curriculum* [NZC] (Ministry of Education, 2007), and

While 21st century learners is very rarely defined, it generally is associated with:

(i) a binary opposite to ‘20th century’ or ‘Industrial learners’, and therefore assumes an abrupt and rapid change in the nature of learners, the economy and education as we know it (Bolstad, Gilbert, McDowell, Bull, & Boyd, 2012);

(ii) the arrival of new forms of digital technologies which are at the fingertips of these so called ‘digital natives’ (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 6);

(iii) Globalisation and technological advancement and a ‘flattened, global economy driven by innovation, communication and collaboration’ (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 6).

the report by the 21st Century Learning Reference Group (Ministry of Education, 2014). The ideas of the 21st century learner were caught up closely with earlier discussions led by the OECD, the World Bank and other supranational organisations about the Knowledge-based

Economy (see OECD, 1996). The central argument was that economic capital was to be found in knowledge, and this was now enabled through rapid technological change and intensifying globalisation processes. Countries like New Zealand were expected to transition from “a pastoral economy into a knowledge-driven economy” (Information Technology Advisory Group, 1999, p. 1).

Proponents of these changes argued that in order to equip students for a knowledge-based economy, significant changes were required in all levels of educational systems, but especially at the level of curriculum. They argued that:

1. If ideas, creativity, and innovation were perceived to be the drivers of the economic growth, then problem-solving and critical thinking skills were likely to be more important acquiring knowledge i.e. the need for ‘learning *how*’ rather than ‘learning *what*’. The OECD’s *Definition and Selection of Key Competencies* – or DeSeCo Project – (OECD, 2005) was a crucial part of this reconceptualisation, suggesting that individuals needed key competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) to be adaptive, innovative, and self-directed global workers.
2. Subjects and disciplines were no longer needed in the ‘knowledge age’ as they reflected an earlier era of rote learning and expert information (World Bank, 2005). Instead, cross- and inter-disciplinary learning was encouraged.

3. More individualised, student-centred and flexible pathways in education were required – rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach associated with the ‘Industrial Age’ to meet the needs of a rapidly changing global economy (OECD/CERI, 2000).

New Zealand was an early and rapid adopter of this ‘new’ OECD-endorsed competency-based curriculum associated with 21st century learners (Priestley & Sinnema, 2014; Wood & Sheehan, 2012). A number of direct and indirect policies heralded this adoption, with the NZC being the most significant. In the NZC, the three OECD key competencies (acting autonomously, functioning in socially heterogeneous groups and using tools interactively) were mediated by New Zealand vernacular priorities to derive five key competencies (thinking; using language, symbols and text; relating to others; managing self; participating and contributing). New Zealand’s focus on the ‘local curriculum’, encouraged by the *Tomorrow’s Schools* reforms, allowed school communities to develop their own curriculum approach. In New Zealand, this involved a “greater emphasis on the centrality of the learner; and [ostensibly] greater autonomy for teachers in developing the curriculum in school” (Priestley & Sinnema, 2014, p. 50). This approach led to much variability between how schools have understood and enacted key competencies. A recent ERO report found that, while 50% of primary schools had adopted key competencies in their programmes, there were significant differences in interpretation, with many schools using key competencies to enhance student behaviour, rather than deepen learning (ERO, 2019).

A second outcome of the 21st century learner focus was the wide-spread promotion of digital learning in schools – culminating in the 2018 launch of the *Digital Technologies Curriculum* (and the *Hangarau Matihiko* curriculum for Maori immersion schools). This curriculum received extensive input from the business sector and required students to learn to ‘code’ as well as use digital technology extensively. Many schools also adopted a Bring Your Own Device scheme, with students strongly encouraged to have a digital device for daily learning. The COVID-19 situation in 2020 also propelled schools even more rapidly into a digital environment for learning.

The ideas of the 21st century learner also impacted classroom environments and design policy in New Zealand. Following an OECD (2013) report on *Innovative Learning Environments*, MoE developed a set of guidelines for schools promoting Modern Learning Environments called *Designing quality learning spaces* (Ministry of Education, 2015). The guidelines require all new school property developments to consider aspects of lighting, acoustics, thermal comfort and flexibility in school classroom design, and greater use of

collaborative and ‘break out’ spaces. Schools must comply with these design guidelines to receive funding for new buildings. These policies were, in part, a pragmatic response to the poor quality building stock of New Zealand schools, alongside ideological notions of the collaboration and flexibility of future workplaces (OECD, 2013), yet have showed little evidence of greater inclusion or achievement of students (Bernade, 2019).

The idea of 21st century learners is an example of an enduring theme that has been perpetuated by successive governments since 1999 (Hirschman & Wood, 2018; McPhail & Rata, 2019; Barker & Wood, 2019) and continues a pattern of neoliberal policies which centre on preparing students for the global marketplace. The uncritical adoption of 21st century learning ideas has also raised concerns about how these can overstate the skills and abilities of students and understate the role of teachers and the ongoing significance of knowledge - not just competencies (Hirschman & Wood, 2018; Priestley & Sinnema, 2014).

The growing privatisation of New Zealand schooling

The New Zealand education system has long had private elements within it, not only in private or independent schools, but also within the state sector. This section discusses these, with an emphasis on the growing involvement of ‘private actors’ in state and state-integrated schooling over the last two decades.

As noted earlier, the schools of the 19th Century were largely established by churches, and most of the ‘independent’ schools today are run by church trusts. There are just a handful of for-profit independent schools, mainly those operated by ACG Schools, which is in turn part of Inspired, a global schools group. Yet independent schools remain less than 5% of overall provision in New Zealand as a result of the policy of integrating private schools into the state system. By the 1970s the Catholic school system had run into serious financial difficulties, resulting in the *Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975* which allowed private schools to become state schools, while retaining their special religious or other character (Sweetman, 2002). Under the integration agreement, the Government fully pays teachers’ and principals’ salaries on the same national scales as regular state schools. The Government does not own the school land or buildings (thus maintaining separation of church and state) so state-integrated schools charge ‘attendance dues’ to cover costs and any debts in this area. It was a tidy solution for cash-strapped special character schools in those earlier times, but from the 1990s there was a new use of the integration policy to support far more expensive and socially elite private schools, some of which had dubious claims to

special character. As a result, the integration policy has remained contentious (Fitzsimons, 2017).

State and state integrated schooling has also had various kinds of privatisation occurring within it. Under the National-led Government (2008-17), a small number of ‘Partnership’ charter schools (state-funded schools run by private sponsors, none of them for-profit in New Zealand’s case) were set up, as well as the PPPs to build schools already mentioned. Yet such developments are just the most obvious face of privatisation that has been occurring in the state system since the 1980s. The use of managerialist thinking in and around schools can itself be seen as form of privatisation, what Ball and Youdell (2007) call ‘endogenous privatisation’, that softens the sector up to private involvement. Then there has been a great deal of contracting out to various private actors including businesses, consultants, social enterprises, charities, and philanthropic organisations operating in and around the state schooling system. Ball and Youdell (2007) refer to this as ‘exogenous privatisation’, while Hogan and Thompson (2017) would describe much of it as commercialisation.

As with independent schools, the involvement of private actors in state schooling has deep historical roots in New Zealand, for instance, publishing companies had a strong foothold in schools by the 1960s. But it was the *Tomorrow’s Schools* reforms in the 1980s that led to a remarkable array of goods and services becoming provided to the state school system by private actors (Thrupp, O’Neill, Powell and Butler, 2020). These included construction and related services for new buildings, renovations, maintenance and cleaning, and the supply of furniture and fittings, information technology and student management systems. Professional Learning and Development from private providers was contracted into schools and some teaching, such as privately-provided outdoor education, physical education, arts and drama activities, were contracted out. Schools also began participating in an increasing range of curricula and programmes provided by multinational corporations (e.g. McDonald’s, Honda, Macleans) and industry groups (e.g. fruit and vegetable industry, gambling industry), as well as charities and other not-for-profit organisations (‘pokie’ trusts, KidsCan, Duffy Books in Homes,). Private actors were also involved in schools marketing to international students and providing for them. As well as the increasing direct involvement of private actors with schools over the 1990s and 2000s, private actors also gradually became more involved in the wider activities supporting schools over these decades. Schooling-related MoE processes of many kinds also became contracted out,

including curriculum and policy development, websites and communications, and research and evaluation.

Private actor involvement in schooling has continued to intensify over the last two decades. Despite the Labour-led Government, elected in October 2017, having a platform of repudiating many of the business-led approaches of previous governments, this Government has retained a private supplier of teacher education, Teach First New Zealand. Neoliberal policies have hollowed out state provision to the extent that the system now relies heavily on private actors, even if issues of quality, cost and relevance to context are often raised by their services. This reliance on private actors is even more obvious in the early childhood and tertiary sectors of the New Zealand education system.

A key policy challenge in the circumstances is to genuinely consider the costs and benefits of using private actors. There are cases where governments have decided pragmatically to bring some activity back in-house – for instance, a failed contracting-out of the teacher payroll system was brought back into MoE. Albeit this was done through a government-owned company, Education Payroll Ltd., but government now assumes full responsibility for the education payroll service. School transport has been another area brought back in-house as MoE decided it could manage this area better than external contractors. It may be that more such decisions are taken in the recessionary climate following the COVID-19 pandemic. Another challenge in this area is for school staff to become more discerning consumers of private goods and services by becoming more knowledgeable about the organisations they are dealing with. However, teaching is an intensive activity and the arrangements around private provision are often complicated. As a result, the background research needed for educators to ask critical questions of private actors may often be a bridge too far (O’Neill and Powell, 2020).

Conclusion

By 2020 many of the limitations of the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s have been exposed. With a Government that often publicly recognises the same problems, it would be tempting to think that transformative new policy directions are now feasible. Yet the ideologies of previous decades continue in numerous respects, as illustrated by the previous case studies. It remains to be seen whether the many advisory groups and reviews of education of the last few years will be able to translate into systemic changes. Meanwhile COVID-19 has further exposed numerous problems in education such as the digital divide, the safety of homes, mental health, teacher supply, and the rise of edu-businesses. At the same time, this pandemic

and its aftermath may provide new impetus for improvements towards more equitable and genuine educational provision: there are many new possibilities as well as constraints.

One thing that is abundantly clear is that academic research and scholarship needs to be available to inform education policy debates in the years to come. Yet coverage of Aotearoa New Zealand education policy matters is becoming patchy. For instance, we know of only one academic article concerned with Partnership Schools (Courtney 2017), even though this charter school development was a major education policy focus for the National-led Government of 2008-17. The general paucity of education policy research and scholarship reflects a decline in national capacity for reasons that have included frequent restructuring of university education faculties and changes to educational research funding. Our concern is that without renewed investment, education policy articles like this will become a thing of the past because the necessary academic sources will no longer be available.

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