

New Zealand Teachers Council

Response to the Green Paper titled “*Every Child Thrives, Belongs, Achieves*”

Introduction

This submission outlines the work of The New Zealand Teachers Council (‘the Council’), sets out the Council’s key responses to the Green Paper, and outlines strategies for supporting New Zealand’s teachers and children as the proposals discussed in the Green Paper are implemented.

The New Zealand Teachers Council

1. The Council is the national professional and regulatory body for promoting and assuring the quality of the teaching workforce in New Zealand schools and early childhood education settings. Our entire operation is focused on levers and processes to support effective teachers and teaching, driven by our vision statement *Ū ki te ako tū tangata ai āpōpō - Excel in teaching so our learners will excel in the future.*
2. The Council
 - a. registers teachers
 - b. approves and monitors programmes for Initial Teacher Education
 - c. engages in research and other professional projects to support the teaching profession
 - d. supports the maintenance of professional standards through competence and discipline processes and judicial bodies.
3. The core values underpinning the Council are:
 - āwhinatanga
 - respect
 - manaakitanga
 - fairness
 - integrity
 - honesty
 - transparency

The principles and values embodied in the *Code of Ethics for Registered Teachers* govern the work of the Council and its teachers.

The Teaching Profession in New Zealand

4. The teaching profession i.e. the body of 98,000 registered teachers includes teachers in the schooling sectors, in the early childhood education sector and in Māori medium early childhood and school settings.
5. Teachers, who make up a significant part of the workforce for children, come into contact daily with children and their families who are in vulnerable circumstances. To improve outcomes for all children, it is vital that teachers have the training and support necessary to assist all children, especially those in vulnerable situations.

Key Messages from the New Zealand Teachers Council

6. The Council supports the principles the Government is committed to under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC). UNCROC focuses on all children, creating universal rights such as education and freedom from abuse and exploitation.
7. The Council supports the creation of one child-centred action plan, with a focus on all children and their families. This action plan must be embedded into legislation so that its application is confirmed both long term and cross party. This approach will ensure that the action plan continues despite changes in government. Rather than being one-size-fits all, sufficient flexibility must be built into the action plan so that it is relevant and adaptable for all of New Zealand's diverse communities and cultures.
8. The focus of the action plan must be on ensuring that every child thrives, belongs and achieves. This approach means that strategies would be developed that have a universal application and capacity should be built-in for targeted interventions for those children who are most at risk.
9. The Council notes that many attempts have already been made to improve the situation of New Zealand's children. These have largely been unsuccessful. The Council considers that government should look at the implementation of a completely new framework to support children and should not shy away from disestablishing those programmes or agencies that cannot demonstrate how they are improving outcomes for children. Government's interventions must make an impact and strong, evidence-based programmes, with effective monitoring will ensure that, this time, we actually improve the situation of all children in New Zealand.

Overarching strategies to make the action plan work

10. The Council considers that the action plan must include strategies to enable government to work better across agencies. Systems must be developed that support information sharing with protocols that apply across all government departments. Ideally, a holistic approach should be developed, with one set of child-centred principles shared and understood by all relevant agencies and all people working with children. Teachers play an integral role in the workforce for children and when they recognise that a child is particularly vulnerable they need to have:
 - a. an agreed set of clear protocols that apply throughout New Zealand,
 - b. shared understanding (across the workforce for children) of those protocols,
 - c. a thorough understanding and respect for the roles and competencies of other professionals working in the workforce for children, so the best people to assist each at-risk child can be contacted,
 - d. a strong sense of a teacher's place within the workforce for children, with an understanding of the extent to which a teacher should help and when other professionals in the workforce for children should get involved.
11. The Council emphasises the importance of creating the action plan on evidence-based research. Funding should only be provided to those programmes and systems that have been proven to work, ideally in New Zealand or a similar context.

12. It is important that robust processes for monitoring and evaluating the action plan are established once it is in place. The Council considers that there is a risk the action plan would be too fragmented if it is implemented by different government agencies without an umbrella organisation bringing the work together. An independent body or office such as the Office of the Children's Commissioner could work with agencies to rationalise the work streams and evaluate programmes.
13. The Council supports acting early to assist children. This means ensuring that the action plan applies to all children from birth through to adolescence. Frameworks must encompass the very youngest children to avoid preventable developmental set-backs even before a child enters into the compulsory schooling system. Early childhood education (ECE) with well trained teachers can provide support for both children and families. ECE represents excellent value for money with studies showing that \$1 spent represents \$16 of value.¹
14. The Council agrees with the common features of successful programmes outlined by the Children's Commissioner in his position paper on the Green Paper. Many of the features identified, such as training staff with the relevant skills for identifying children who are vulnerable, incorporate areas where the Council can have a direct impact.

Improving the workforce for children

15. Ensuring that teachers are appropriately qualified and registered should always be an underlying principle of making sure that our children have the best chance to avoid situations of vulnerability. Currently those working with children in their most vulnerable stages of development are not all required to be qualified and registered which means the public has no assurance that children are safe or that their needs can be identified and responded to appropriately. The regulated requirement of qualified teachers in ECE services is 50% of the ratio of adults. There is no requirement to ensure that the teachers allocated to work with children under two years of age and their families in the centre are any of the qualified and registered teachers. Instead they may be rostered with the older children.
16. Concern is also expressed that learners in the prison system and in the health camp schools are not being taught by qualified and registered teachers. This means that the quality of their learning cannot be guaranteed.
17. Policies that will enable teachers to better support vulnerable children should be developed with a focus on two periods: pre-service and in-service.
18. Pre-service:
 - a. The Teachers Council is mindful of the Office of the Children's Commissioner report: *Through their lens* (2011) and the recommendation that teacher education providers review programmes to ensure provision of adequate content specific to infants and toddlers. As the body that oversees the approvals and reviews of initial teacher education

¹ HighScope Perry Preschool Study

programmes, the Council can ensure that more of this type of content is indeed included in relevant programmes.

- b. Ongoing education is needed around the Privacy Act 1993 and its application. At present there are agencies that hide behind the Privacy Act. There is the ability to share information so long as the intention is to do good/not harm. The expectation is that teachers will have a clear understanding of the Act through their pre-service programmes.
- c. While all approved initial teacher education programmes are required to be aligned to the Graduating Teacher Standards which have requirements that graduates are committed to promoting and nurturing the physical and emotional safety of their learners and their families/whānau, there is room to strengthen components in programmes to ensure teachers have the skills to identify and respond to at-risk children.

19. In-service:

- a. Ongoing professional training and support for practising teachers to ensure skills in identifying at-risk/vulnerable children that are appropriate to the context they work in, are needed.
- b. Aspiring and new professional leaders need to have appropriate professional development to ensure they have the knowledge and skills for identifying vulnerable children to ensure they can provide leadership on responding to the needs of these children and their families in their learning setting.
- c. Professional leaders need access to a database that is easily accessible and functional to determine whether a child is involved with other agencies.