

**Education (Update) Amendment Bill**

**Education and Science Select Committee**

**The Salvation Army New Zealand Fiji and Tonga Territory Submission**

**BACKGROUND**

1. The Salvation Army is an international Christian and social services organisation that has worked in New Zealand for over one hundred and thirty years. The Army provides a wide-range of practical social, community and faith-based services, particularly for those who are suffering, facing injustice or those who have been forgotten and marginalised by mainstream society.
2. The Army offers early childhood education services at four locations and vocational educational services at 18 locations across New Zealand. Our interest in education however goes beyond this relatively limited involvement in education provision. We have an on-going interest and concern for the interests of children and their right to be protected, cared for and educated and this interest has motivated this submission.
3. This submission has been prepared by the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit of The Salvation Army. This Unit works towards the eradication of poverty by encouraging policies and practices that strengthen the social framework of New Zealand.
4. This submission has been approved by Colonel Willis Howe Chief Secretary of The Salvation Army’s New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory.

**THE SALVATION ARMY’S OVERALL RESPONSE TO THE BILL**

1. The Salvation Army generally supports the Education Amendment Bill and in particular its focus on greater direction to our early childhood and compulsory education systems. The Army notes however, that much of the Bill specifies new or extended duties and responsibilities of students, teachers and schools to the state but provides few guarantees or expectations of what we can expect from our publicly funded education system. This is in our view is the major shortcoming both in the present legislation and the Bill.

**A MORE FOCUSED AND DIRECTED EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

1. The Salvation Army supports clause 4 of the Bill which proposes to include a new Part 1AA into the parent Act and which relates to the expected objectives and priorities of the early childhood and compulsory education systems. The Army believes that it is important our primary education statute not only specifies various obligations and broad administrative procedures (as it does presently) but also serves as a legislative statement of what New Zealanders should expect from our education system. The scope of ideas offered in clause 4 and specifically in the proposed section 1A(3), in the Army’s opinion is fine overall and we certainly support the retention on the focus of such things as children’s appreciation of diversity, identity and the Treaty of Waitangi.
2. Some educational theorists including the great John Dewey have identified the hidden curriculum and its effect of instilling and transferring social norms, values and beliefs. More radical theorists, such as Pierre Bourdieu, have suggested that this hidden curriculum is one source of enduring inequality as it privileges one set of values and understandings over others and so advantages those groups who share these values and understandings. This cultural bias has been identified in New Zealand and in relation to Maori students by educational academics such as Russell Bishop[[1]](#footnote-1).
3. Any proposal to make the intentions and ambitions of our education system more explicit risks either, ignoring the hidden curriculum and so glossing over it pervasive effects, or giving explicit preference to the values and understandings of the hidden curriculum - so that it is no longer as hidden. The second course of action is of course more open and transparent. In The Salvation Army’s opinion there is a danger that any attempt to make the intentions and objectives of our education system more explicit risks being seen as a form of social engineering where dominant social values or political ideas are enshrined in law and so applied universally. Public policy more broadly risks such dominance as it of course always necessary to have a set of values or understandings driving policy as well as the legislation which underpins it and the programmes which deliver it. One imperative here is to be aware of the presumptions being made and of the bias behind these presumptions. We ask that Committee Members cast their minds to such questions as you consider the final content of clause 4 of the Bill.
4. In our opinion the proposals offered in clause 4 in new section 1A(3) are a mixed bag. On one hand this provision promotes that value of teaching our children to be creative critical thinkers which are of course essential attributes for us all. One the other hand this provision makes it clear that the purpose of our education system is to make our children compliant and singularly focused on work (see sub-clauses (3)(b)(iii) and (iv)). It seems unusual to have such a narrow instrumental focus for our education system. Such a narrow focus is consistent with a common criticism of the hidden curriculum that the main purpose of the education system is to produce compliant workers in the next generation. We believe that our collective aspirations for our education system can be much wider and more imaginative than this.
5. Specifically The Salvation Army believes that our early childhood and compulsory education systems should look to prepare our children for all aspects of adult life – not just work, and that these systems should aim to produce good citizens and not simply individuals who are trained to fulfill their *‘civic and social responsibilities’*. We ask that Committee Members consider a substantial re-write of proposed section 1A(3) to embrace the idea of preparing our children for adult life and of educating them to become good productive citizens.

**A BROADER RIGHTS FRAMEWORK**

1. Part 1 of the Education Act 1989 and specifically sections 3, 8 and 9 are the only parts of the Act which discuss the educational rights of New Zealand children. These particular rights are fairly shallow and are simply the right to enroll in and attend a state school or partnership school free of charge between the ages of five and 19 years of age. Somewhat ironically a large portion of Part 1 of the Act which ostensibly is about the *‘Rights to primary and secondary education’*, deals with the administration of the admission and education of international student rather than New Zealand children.
2. Nothing in the Bill extends or amplifies the rights of children with respect to the education system and in the opinion of The Salvation Army this is a lost opportunity. This is so especially when we consider that in 2015 almost one in five students leaving a decile 1 2 or 3 secondary school did so with virtually no formal qualification[[2]](#footnote-2). As well, and is well known, Maori students are less likely to succeed at school and this has been a multi-generational feature of New Zealand’s education system. The Bill makes reference to the objective of the education system *‘to focus on helping each child and young person to attain educational achievement to the best of his or her potential’*. The systematic failure of our education system to ensure that Maori children and poor children are able to achieve to the same level as middle-class Pakeha children is apparent in any indicator of educational inequality. It seems quite unlikely that much if anything will change in these outcomes just with that vague objectives offered in proposed section 1A(3).
3. Ideally the Education Act should include a statement of principles which outline what it is that New Zealanders can expect from their publicly funded education system. In The Salvation Army’s opinion such principles should go beyond the loosely defined idea of free access to a public school to include ideas such an equality of opportunity and reasonable equality of outcomes.
4. Equality of opportunity and outcomes can be seen as broadly defined rights and these in our opinion should be framed as such. This means of course that it is incumbent on Government to deliver on these rights. There is, in The Salvation Army’s view, nothing unreasonable about such an expectation given the public resources applied into our education system and the coercive powers available to the state to operate it. The Bill as it stands presently, offers the Minister wider powers over schools and teachers to demand accountability but is not required to offer any accountability back to the citizens who pay the bills and accept controls around their lives. In The Salvation Army’s opinion this imbalance in accountability should be changed as part of this Bill

**CONCLUSION**

The Salvation Army supports the overall idea offered in the Education Amendment Act that our education system should be more purposeful and directed. The Army supports the idea of greater accountability of schools for meeting expected educational outcomes for our all our children. In our opinion the Bill is somewhat one-sided in terms of this accountability –it places additional Ministerial expectations on schools but ignores the expectations which citizens and especially children might responsibly have of the education system overall. The enduring inequality which is a feature of our education system is in our view unlikely to be addressed as long as this broader idea of accountability is included in relevant education legislation.

The Salvation Army would like an opportunity to present a verbal submission in support of this written submission if the Committee has time for this within its deliberations. To arrange such an opportunity or for further information on this submission please contact:

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1. See for example Bishop, R, Berryman, M. Cavanagh, T and Teddy, L. (2009) *Te Kotahitanga: Addressing educational disadvantages facing Maori students in New Zealand.* Teaching and Teacher Education 25 pp734-742. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a discussion on this and other aspects of educational inequality see our recent publication *What Next? Addressing New Zealand’s youth unemployment.* Available at http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/research-media/social-policy-and-parliamentary-unit/latest-report/what-next [↑](#footnote-ref-2)