



Education Amendment Bill Education and Science Select Committee

The Salvation Army (New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory) Submission

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 We have over 90 Community Ministries centres and churches (corps) across the nation, serving local families and communities. We are passionately committed to our communities as we aim to fulfil our mission of caring for people, transforming lives and reforming society.¹
- 1.3 This submission has been prepared by the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit (SPPU) of The Salvation Army. The Unit works towards the eradication of poverty by encouraging policies and practices that strengthen the social framework of New Zealand. The Unit provides solid social research and robust policy analysis, engaging with national opinion makers in politics, government, business, media and education.
- 1.4 This submission has been approved by Commissioner Donald Bell, the Territorial Commander of The Salvation Army's New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory.

2. THE SALVATION ARMY PERSPECTIVE

- 2.1 In our opinion, the major public and policy issue in this Bill is the establishment of kura hourua or 'partnership schools' in New Zealand.

We contend that the Government **should not** pass into legislation the creation of partnership or charter schools in New Zealand with this Bill.

¹ <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/our-community/mission/>

- 2.2 The Salvation Army is choosing to comment on this Bill because we greatly value the opportunities and development that a strong and well-functioning education system can have for all New Zealanders. The SPPU also, in one of its five key work areas, focuses on the development of, and eradication of poverty for, children and young people in our nation. Therefore, this Bill is directly relevant to The Salvation Army's overall goals as well as the SPPU's work programme.
- 2.3 Our opposition to these provisions about partnership schools are based on the following reasons:

2.3.1 An ideological experiment or evidence based policy?

2.3.1.1 We highlight that the partnership schools policy is a part of the Confidence and Supply Agreement signed by the National and ACT parties after the last election. Consequently, we question whether the partnership schools policy enshrined in this Bill is actually a well thought out, evidence-based and evidence-driven policy development. Or is it in fact an ideological experiment or campaign by the Government to further reform of our education system? We are very wary of the fact that there has been precious little public input into the development of this partnership schools policy since this Confidence and Supply Agreement was signed. We submit that such a potentially dramatic reform to our national education system should have included greater public input, and even more feedback from education experts.

2.3.1.2 We applaud the stated objectives of partnership schools as attempting to address current inequalities and achievement in our education system. But we can see no real local or international evidence that partnership schools will actually address inequality and achievement issues for our children or young people. Additionally, a study by the National Centre for the Privatisation in Education in America that compared charter and publicly funded schools in the state of Michigan found that charter schools spent more per-student on administration costs and significantly less on actual classroom instruction than public schools did.² Since partnership schools will be fully funded by the State but run by private sponsors under this Bill, the sponsor can only make a profit if they run their school by spending less on the actual teaching and learning of children, and more on administration, hiring unregistered teachers who will likely be paid less than registered teachers in public schools, and also asking for more voluntary donations from their school community. We do not see how these moves can actually lead to greater achievement by our children in the lowest socio-economic areas or less inequality in our school system.

² http://ncspe.org/publications_files/OP201.pdf

2.3.1.3 In his Cabinet Paper titled *Developing and Implementing a New Zealand Model of Charter School*, the Associate Minister of Education claims that there is an emerging body of overseas longitudinal research that illustrates that well-run charter schools can successfully lift the achievement levels for minority groups and children and young people from low socio-economic backgrounds. However, at the time of writing this submission, this body of research had not been publicly presented or made available.

We should not be borrowing education policy from other nations without fully understanding our own education system's needs or even properly comprehending the local contexts from which these policies were created and implemented. We submit that this Bill should not pass because it is an ideological exercise driven out of a pre-existing Confidence and Supply Agreement and not compelled by robust research or even a real need to have this new form of school.

2.3.2 The effects on local schools and communities

2.3.2.1 We have some concerns about the potential effects of establishing partnership schools in specific communities. The Government has already announced that partnership schools will be established in South Auckland and East Christchurch by 2014 even before this Bill is passed. We are actively involved in both of these regions with our Community Ministries centres and corps, and we believe we have a very good understanding of these communities.

2.3.2.2 We are concerned that any partnership schools in these areas might grow by effectively 'creaming the best' students from other local schools. This would be damaging to both of the regions, as partnership schools that have resource-rich sponsors might entice students to leave their local schools for the new partnership school. This will adversely affect these local schools and their communities as some of their most capable students might leave for the new partnership school. Another potential effect of implementing partnership schools in these communities is that families that have children attending these schools might be placed under more financial pressure than with public schools. As mentioned above, sponsors of charter schools can be for-profit organisations and they will likely employ various methods to increase their profitability at their school. One of these methods might be asking for increased voluntary donations from families. If partnership schools are indeed located in low socio-economic areas like South Auckland, then asking for donations could place more pressure on families already struggling financially. Since we have a long history, as well as Community Ministries centres and corps

established in East Christchurch and South Auckland, we understand the financial pressures a lot of families from these areas already face. Adding more financial obligations in these tough times will likely lead to more families struggling with more financial pressures.

2.3.3.3 We also want more clarification as to whether the State funding of any new partnership school might take away funding from local schools already in those areas. The Government's education budget is limited. If more partnership schools are opened, particularly in areas with high deprivation, does this mean local schools will receive even less funding from the State? We sincerely hope this is not the case.

2.3.3.4 We also want to highlight that there is no explicit requirement in the Bill to have parental or community representation at any new partnership school. This is in stark contrast to the Board of Trustees model employed in public schools. We are in favour of more community and parental input and representation into local schools. We believe this is essential so that schools remain accountable to their local community. If partnership schools are legislated for, then how are parents and the local community involved in their local schools at decision-making levels? This lack of accountability is compounded by provisions in the Bill that make partnership schools exempt from public accountability under the Official Information Act. We believe wholeheartedly that if this Bill passes, then partnership schools must become officially accountable to their local communities and wider New Zealand society, just like state and state-integrated schools.

2.3.3 The quality of learning and teaching

2.3.3.1 We are also concerned with provisions within this Bill that permit partnership schools to hire unregistered teachers and have principals who do not have a teaching background. Both the Treasury and the Ministry of Education have already voiced their concerns around teacher registration and staffing of partnership schools. We contend that all schools in New Zealand should have registered teachers. If teaching quality is an issue for some people, then we believe more attention is needed around the average class sizes and regular teaching hours that our teachers have. For instance, New Zealand teachers have on average 20-plus contact or teaching hours per week. This is in comparison to China (15-17 hours per week) and Finland (about 16 hours per week), two countries that New Zealand often compares itself with regarding national education systems.

2.3.3.2 Unregistered teachers, despite their own skills and passions, might negatively affect these partnership schools

that will be focused in lower socio-economic areas even more. This is not what students in these regions need. We also believe that a principal needs the business and managerial skills needed to lead a school *and* a solid teaching and education background so they can understand all of the complex aspects of a school.

2.3.4 Addressing inequalities

2.3.4.1 We submit that this Bill, particularly the partnership school provisions, is not the most ideal way to address inequalities in education or raise achievement levels. East Christchurch and South Auckland have been selected as sites for the first partnership schools. In South Auckland, the Achievement in Multicultural High Schools Consortium (AIMHI) has been working with nine decile one high schools since 1995 to raise achievement levels with schools that have large Maori and Pacific student populations.³ Moreover, the NCEA achievement levels of the majority of these schools has been steadily improving with initiatives such as AIMHI working between schools, students and their local communities.

2.3.4.2 Additionally, schools in South Auckland generally have long-standing and strong relationships with their communities. This is exhibited by initiatives like the Gateway programme delivering structured work-place learning for senior students at local South Auckland businesses and organisations,⁴ or the three Health Science Academies that have been set up at Otahuhu College, Tangaroa College and James Cook High to facilitate more local students into health-related careers, study and employment within the South Auckland region.

2.3.4.3 We submit that opening a new partnership school in South Auckland will not actually reduce inequality and raise educational achievement in these communities. We believe that greater investment and support of these existing public schools, and the innovative and effective initiatives already attached to them, are tried and proven methods that are helping to reduce the social, economic and educational inequalities in these communities.

2.3.4.4 We also submit that addressing inequality issues in our education system is a very complex issue that involves looking at other inequalities and social issues prevalent in our society. Although this is not the forum for this type of discussion, we want to highlight that child poverty, housing affordability and shortages, and other socio-economic forces are major contributing factors to inequalities and low achievement levels in our education system. We reiterate our

³ <http://www.aimhi.ac.nz/default.asp>

⁴ <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Funding/Fund-finder/Gateway/>

support for the Children's Commissioner's recent Solutions to Child Poverty report as a logical plan to help address some of these matters.

3. RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC AMENDMENTS TO LEGISLATION

3.1 Search and seizure

We support in general the search and seizure amendments, particularly the prohibition of random searches and the use of drug dogs.

3.2 National student number

We support the assigning of a national student number to children under 6 found in Clauses 35 to 39 of this Bill. However, we want assurance that the families of these children are not stigmatised by authorities as their children are encouraged into early childhood education (ECE). There are numerous reasons as to why children are not attending an ECE service, including accessibility, childcare at home, and cost. We encourage any authorities using these new national student numbers to work with and consult other people or organisations who are working alongside that family to ensure there are comprehensive assessments of the child's situation.

4. CONCLUSION

Core neoliberal concepts such as public-private partnerships, privatisation and competition are now commonplace in our society. These concepts are dominant in our national thinking, especially as they become increasingly enshrined in our national plans, strategies and policies. For example, in recent times our corrections and prisons system has been reformed by the Government, culminating in our brand new privately-run Wiri prison, being built alongside two other prisons right in the middle of South Auckland.

Now, it is seemingly our education system's turn. Neoliberalism in itself is not the issue here. The crucial point is whether or not our education system needs these types of partnership school reforms. We submit that our education system does not need this type of reform and we urge the Government to increase support for our existing public schools, and to continue to address child poverty and other relevant issues that have a direct correlation to inequalities and achievement in our schools.

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