

## **Kia Mau Te Ha – “A breath of fresh air” Tomorrow’s Schools**

I also would like to thank the Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators Association (WAESPAA) for their subsidy which enabled me to attend the third combined conference of the Australian Special Educators Principals Association (ASEPA) and the New Zealand Association of Special education Principals (NZASSP). I would also like to thank Wendy Strang for providing an excellent overview of the conference and its lead speakers presentations and messages and to this end I would like to concentrate on some impressions I gleaned on how progress had been made since the introduction of Tomorrow’s Schools in New Zealand which has parallels with our current Independent Public Schools movement.

### **Tomorrow’s Schools**

Changes introduced in the administration of New Zealand education in 1989 were intended to ensure that schools would become more responsive to their communities. Many aspects of school governance were devolved from a central government bureaucracy to Boards of Trustees at each school and greater choice of school was given to parents.

These changes shift responsibility for spending and school policies, within guidelines, from a government department working through ten Education boards as well as its own local units, to individual schools. They envisage a deeper partnership between school staff and parents of children at the school through its governing body, the Board of Trustees. Each board has five parents, elected by other parents, the principal, a staff representative, and can co-opt up to four other members. The board of trustees are to focus on steps to improve student achievement and the school runs in the best interests of its students and community..

The Board is responsible for drawing up the school charter (Business Plan?), which sets out the school programme and policies in relation to a description of the community served by the school. Each charter communicates the schools vision and direction, its gals for the long and short term and plans to meet its legal obligations. The charter is in essence a three-way form of contract between a school’s board of trustees, its parents, and the Ministry of Education, which provides funding for the school. Consultation with parents on the content of the charter is one of the major responsibilities of trustees.

Accountability, in the form of goals or outputs, and information about outputs and operations, is a major theme in the changes. For trustees, it comes in the form of their election by parents, the Ministry of Education’s agreement with their school charter which secures funding, and the review of the school every three years by the Educational Review Office (ERO). The charter document forms the basis of the review, by setting out policy goals and targets against which the school’s performance can be judged.

Students with special education needs can attend a special school, a special school satellite class (there has been a proliferation of these) or their local school. Some regular schools have set up their own units. Schools having

students with learning or behaviour difficulties for which the school is not managing well can request support from a visiting teaching service in the form of a Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour (RTLB).

It is acknowledged that the changes arose from **a review of educational administration** rather than a review of the quality of New Zealand schooling. A prime rationale for *Tomorrow's Schools* was that by shifting decision making to the school level removing several bureaucratic layers, and introducing at school level the accountability mechanisms being introduced elsewhere in the public service, the public money available for education would be spent more effectively. However, the *Tomorrow's Schools* provisions carried an underlying theme that they would also change the quality of New Zealand education.

Initial major criticisms of the changes were that school-based funding would make it harder to put into practice national policies designed to improve the learning outcomes of disadvantaged groups or introduce changes to curriculum; and that in trimming the bureaucracy, layers of vital support and advice for schools would also go, leaving schools isolated or stagnant. Additional concerns about the adequacy of school budgets were also raised.

There have been three main waves for improvement since the inception of Tomorrow's Schools in 1989: Firstly it was about improving business practices although it was implied that this would have a flow on effect to improving student achievement: Then the focus switched to engaging low socioeconomic communities in schooling: Currently the focus is on raising student achievement across the spectrum.

Some of the major outcomes of Tomorrows Schools program from Principals perspectives are:

- Educational leadership is now the most important part of their job. This involves less direct teaching or working with teachers than it used to, and more planning, facilitation, motivation and resource provision. Educational leadership now includes assisting the schools board as well as the teachers.
- Management of the schools roll, its reputation, and its buildings and grounds are more important issues now.
- Administrative work has increased substantially.
- Principals' workloads have increased.
- Teaching principals are particularly hard-pressed to balance the different aspects of their role.
- Principals have less time for their own professional development.

So all those Principals who want to jump in, join me, and become an Independent Public School beware!!!  
John Exeter Principal Carson Street School