



FEEDBACK to the Office of the Children’s Commissioner on Child Poverty Solutions

Paper 062/12

Prepared on behalf of COMET Auckland, 12 October 2012

Whakatauāki

E kore e taea e te whenu kotahi
ki te raranga i te whāriki
kia mōhio tātou ki ā tātou.
Mā te mahi tahi o ngā whenu,
mā te mahi tahi o ngā kairaranga,
ka oti tēnei whāriki.
I te otinga
me titiro tātou ki ngā mea pai ka puta mai.
Ā tana wā,
me titiro hoki
ki ngā raranga i makere
nā te mea, he kōrero ano kei reira.

The tapestry of understanding
cannot be woven by one strand alone.
Only by the working together of strands
and the working together of weavers
will such a tapestry be completed.
With its completion
let us look at the good that comes from it
and, in time
we should also look
at those stitches which have been dropped,
because they also have a message.

- Kūkupa Tirikatene

About COMET Auckland

COMET Auckland, Te Hononga Akoranga (Community Education Trust Auckland) is a charitable trust and Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) of Auckland Council. COMET Auckland was formed in July 2012 from the former City of Manukau Education Trust, to enable support and coordination of education and skills across Auckland. The Trust aims to advance education for Auckland through linking knowledge, needs, advocacy and initiatives, especially in areas of high education need.

Over-arching comments

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on your excellent series of reports on Solutions to Child Poverty. We would like to congratulate the Office of the Children's Commissioner on the depth and reach of the reports, the strong use of evidence and the clear, practical recommendations.

We have largely confined our detailed comments to areas related to education, learning and skills, since this is the area in which we can offer specialist knowledge and experience.

Specifically, we endorse:

- The child-centred focus taken throughout the reports
- The recognition that the complexity of the issues requires a combination of practical, on-the-ground action and systems-level change
- The call for a clear measurement system for child poverty with targets against which progress is measured, and the recognition that specific measures and targets will need to be developed with Māori and Pasifika communities, to reflect their world views, priorities and aspirations.
- The call for high quality early learning to mitigate the effects of poverty, and to enable parents to engage in paid work while ensuring their child's development is supported
- The call to require government decision-making to first consider potential effects on children in poverty
- The suggestion to set performance targets for Work and Income and IRD, to ensure families access all the supports that are available to them. Education providers regularly see families who are struggling because they did not know about available benefits, or because they have been unable to navigate the system to access these benefits.
- The call for increased access to financial literacy services.
- The recognition that we need to support parents to build their skills so they can access stable, well-paying employment. This could include provision of earn-as-you-learn opportunities so parents can build their skills while continuing to support their family.
- The call for increased support for youth transition and employment, especially for Māori and Pasifika young people.
- The call to promote Pasifika languages as one means to lift achievement for Pasifika children in compulsory education.

- The call to increase social housing and support home ownership and to require minimum standards for rental housing, especially as stable housing reduces transience, which is a key factor in educational disengagement and underachievement.
- The suggestion of a food in schools programme to improve child nutrition and support learning.
- The plan to increase OSCAR services and homework centres, provided that these do not become compulsory.
- The plan to use schools and early childhood centres as hubs for community services.

We would like to make some comments and suggestions related to some of the recommended actions in the report:

- In order to support the goal of increasing participation in early learning, we suggest a range of interventions to increase access to quality early learning that fits the diverse needs of families who are not currently accessing early learning services.
- We have some concern about the goal for parents to start paid work when their child is 1 year old, as this risks detriment to the child if only low-quality ECE services are available. We therefore recommend changing to age 2, when ECE is more available, and there is less risk of detriment to the child.
- We are concerned about the suggested option to automatically enrol children in ECE, since early learning services are not a one-size-fits-all commodity. Parents need to be able to choose the form of early learning support that suits them and their child, and they need to be able to avoid low-quality services.
- We have some suggestions for ensuring financial literacy support suits the needs of families, especially those where parents have low literacy and numeracy levels.
- We suggest that targeted training programmes be funded for parents whose youngest child is approaching school age.
- We have some suggestions about actions required to ensure schools are able build on the language strengths of Māori and Pasifika students in order to lift their engagement and achievement.
- We would like to see the support for evidence-based targeted programmes in schools expanded from behavioural support programmes to also include programmes proven to increase student engagement and achievement.

The remainder of this feedback document provides more details on the reasoning behind each of these comments and suggestions.

Increasing access to early learning services

Data from the Competent Children study shows that children who receive quality early childhood education are more likely to succeed in schooling, and that these benefits are detectable right through into the teenage years¹. However, families in many areas of Auckland do not have access to early childhood education that fits their needs and aspirations. Across Auckland², 92.4% of children have attended some form of ECE by the time they enter school. However, ECE participation varies geographically, from 82.1% in Manurewa (an area with a very high proportion of Māori whānau) to 100% in Waiheke. What these figures do not show is the variability even within territorial local authority areas. Reports from schools in some areas indicate that there are pockets with extremely low participation – some as low as 40%.

The Manukau ECE Taskforce, which COMET Auckland coordinates, has called for national and local government to work together towards a goal of ensuring all homes in low-decile areas have access to at least one quality, affordable early learning service within a 750-metre walk – “stroller distance” - estimated to be the maximum distance a parent can walk with a toddler and baby.

At present, however, there are many areas of Auckland where there is already a shortage of early learning places, even to provide for existing demand, let alone to make it possible for families who are not currently engaging to be able to send their child to ECE.

There is a particular need for more services that build community support around families whose support networks no longer exist. Early learning programmes that encourage parents to attend with their children (e.g. playgroups, Playcentre) provide opportunities for parents to get out of the home and to build relationships with other parents, so are particularly effective in strengthening community support networks around families. Greater government support for early learning programmes that are suited to families’ needs (especially supported playgroups, kohanga reo and Pacific language nests) would help increase participation and so ensure children are supported in their development, and that families are connected and supported in their community.

If the intention is to support parental employment, ECE services will also need to be funded in a way that allows for flexibility for shift work and flexible work arrangements without requiring parents to make significant co-payment for these services.

¹ Hodgen, E. (2007). Early childhood education and young adult competencies at age 16. <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ece/2567/11776>

² ECE Participation data is for the 2010 year and is provided by the Ministry of Education. The data is taken from school enrolment surveys, which ask parents whether the child has attended any form of ECE.

Over the past four years, the Ministry of Education, Manukau (and now Auckland) Council and others have worked collaboratively to increase the supply of early learning opportunities in Manukau. This work has included changing government policy to make it possible for privately-run ECEs to be established on school sites, and for Ministry of Education-funded ECEs to be established on Council land (such as on the edges of parks). However, even with focused investment over the past several years, the increase in ECE places in Manukau has only slightly exceeded population growth.

One constraint is that a new 50-place ECE costs around \$1.2 million to build, in addition to land costs, and that the consenting and building process takes an average of two years. We also know that not all families want to send their child to a formal ECE; many prefer parent-led services such as playgroups or Parentcentre, where they can stay with their child. As was identified by the Ministry of Education in their review of early childhood participation in Auckland, there are no hard-to-reach whānau; only hard-to-reach programmes. Solutions such as those outlined above have the potential to enable early learning to be delivered “where people are at”, both geographically (close to public transport, in the marae/shopping mall/rugby club...) and emotionally (through kaupapa Māori, from “people like me”, with respect and aroha...).

If we are to ensure all families can access early learning services, we need to find less expensive and more varied ways to increase availability in high-growth areas such as Manukau. In addition to continuing to build new formal ECEs where possible, we would like to see more innovative solutions, such as:

- Prioritising the limited establishment funding to services for 3 to 5-year olds, to ensure all children can access two years of quality early learning before starting school
- Placing quality re-locatable buildings on school, church or other community sites, with provision for 20 to 40-place sessional ECEs or playgroups. Re-locatables can be obtained and fully fitted out for around \$250,000, meaning that four or five such services can be established for the cost of one major ECE build.
- Establishing supported playgroups in existing buildings with available space (such as community houses, rugby clubs, scout halls). Supported playgroups have been shown to provide high-quality early learning, and also to support positive parenting,

parent engagement in schooling, and pathways for some parents into further learning and employment³.

- Increasing support for home-based early learning programmes, especially whānau-based services, to enable family members who care for multiple children from across their extended family to be supported with training, learning resources and assistance to bring their home to the required safety standards. The Wellington Kindergarten association is trialling a service along these lines in Porirua, Etu Ao, ensuring quality learning for children in a familiar, caring setting, while often providing a pathway to employment for the trained carer.
- Increasing parenting education, especially for parents of under-three-year-olds, since the quality of learning and experience in the first three years contributes strongly to children's later development.

Concerns about young children in ECE

We would not support any requirement for parents to return to even part-time work when their child reaches 1 year of age, because if such a policy were enacted in the current environment, the risk of harm to children is too great. The recent review by your office⁴ indicated that out-of-home care for children under 2 years old can be detrimental unless the service is of high quality. Given the shortage of places in early learning services in many low-decile areas (see above), and the variable quality of available services, there is a high chance that families in poverty, if forced to work, would have no choice but to place their under-2-year-old in low-quality services where they would be at risk of long-term detriment. We therefore suggest that if there is a need to set a deadline by which parents on a benefit must enter the workforce, this deadline should be no earlier than the second birthday of the youngest child.

Concerns about automatic ECE enrolment

We would not support automatic enrolment in ECE services for sole parents because such a system would not enable parents to choose a service to fit their needs. Participation in early learning is more than enrolment. Parents will only take their child regularly, and engage with the service themselves, if they feel comfortable, and see the value of the service for their child and themselves. This is unlikely to happen if they are simply placed into whatever

³ Widdowson, D. and Dixon, R. (2010). Final report for the evaluation of the Parent Mentoring project in Manukau. Uniservices: Auckland.

⁴ Carroll-Lind, J. and Angus, J. (2011). *Through their lens: An inquiry into non-parental education and care of infants and toddlers*. Office of the Children's Commissioner: Wellington.

service is closest or has available spaces. Indeed, in such a situation, families who are automatically enrolled will inevitably be placed in the services that are least-desirable to community members, because only least-desirable services will have spaces available. Thus such a policy would only increase the disparity between rich and poor.

Financial Literacy Provision

We strongly support the expansion of financial literacy programmes and initiatives, especially those that are tailored to families' needs and actively build knowledge and skills. Our experience of local research around financial literacy⁵ tells us that there is a shortage of financial literacy provision and that many of the programmes that exist do not fit the needs of local families. Many assume that participants will have much higher literacy and numeracy levels than is realistic. There is also often a lack of cultural fit with the clients, and the programmes are too short to provide families with the chance to bed in long term change. Successful programmes use adult learning techniques that take account of learners with low literacy and numeracy; are delivered by community members; and include longer-term mentoring and coaching.

Financial literacy programmes with an explicit home ownership focus require long term funding so families can be supported over the time it takes to reduce their debt and establish a positive credit rating, necessary pre-requisites before they can start to think about buying a house.

Targeted training programmes for parents

One of the most effective ways to support children and young people is to provide families with the skills and resources (social and economic) that help them succeed in their role of supporting their children. This means "thinking family" in planning and decisions. By providing and supporting programmes that support parents as first educators and simultaneously provide pathways to stable employment, government can help break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

Family learning programmes can provide this type of support for vulnerable families, by delivering low-level tertiary learning that combines parenting education with career-focused upskilling in a community context. Such programmes need to last long enough to enable families to make long-term change.

Thinking "family" in any intervention can help bring more sustained change because adult and family learning empowers families to work more effectively with their community, and

⁵ Reed, C. and Sutton, A. (2012). *Financial Literacy in Tamaki: A slice of understanding*. COMET: Auckland.

builds their skills and capacity to look beyond the immediate and to become more self-sufficient as a family in the longer term.⁶ Parents are motivated to make changes that improve the lives of their children, and children benefit from both short-term changes in the family's situation and from longer-term role modelling from their parents and extended family. Early learning settings and schools are an ideal place to provide family learning opportunities, since they can link the learning of the adults with that of their children.

It is not enough just to communicate positive parenting messages, because people do not learn effectively through words alone. Without very intensive ongoing learning opportunities, people parent as they were parented. For those parents who may not have experienced supportive, positive parenting themselves, change can happen through such interventions as formal family learning and teen parent programmes that run over an extended period and provide non-judgemental information, discussion and feedback; regular in-home support such as the HIPPY programme (or indeed the old in-home Plunket service); parent-led ECEs (such as Playcentre or supported playgroups) where there is a trained person on hand to model positive relationships; or live-in family support centres where families can go for short-term caring support when needed.

The silos within and between government departments create barriers to effective support for tamariki and whānau, because they make it almost impossible to fund and monitor holistic, preventive support for whānau. Programmes that support families in multiple ways across generations and areas of need can protect vulnerable children in both the short and long term, in a very cost-effective way. However at present, no one agency funds and monitors both short and long term outcomes for children, adults and families; in health, violence-prevention, housing, education, and employment. Whānau Ora is a step in the right direction but the systems for funding and monitoring across departmental areas are still very under-developed and take far too much effort for most community organisations to work around.

Another significant barrier to effective support for whānau is the lack of funding for coordination, to make it possible for several organisations that deliver different services to work together to provide more holistic, seamless services to families. Holistic services are more effective because they address several of the causes of vulnerability at once. However it is almost impossible to deliver services in a seamless way across organisations without an explicitly funded coordination function. At present, apart from Whānau Ora, it is extremely difficult to find such funding.

⁶ Lochrie, M. (2004). *Family learning: building all our futures*. Leicester: NIACE.

Thomas, M. (2009). *Think Community. An exploration of the links between intergenerational practice and informal adult learning*. Leicester: NIACE.

COMET Auckland has had ten years of experience leading intergenerational family learning programmes and that experience illustrates how much more flexible funding agencies need to be to scale up that type of programme. Our family learning and literacy programme, Whānau Ara Mua, combines in one foundation tertiary programme many of the key aspects being described by the EAG – improved literacy and numeracy, budgeting, ICT and financial literacy skills; enhanced parenting and an improved understanding of the education system; enhanced parenting, nutrition and family well-being. However, because it provides outcomes against several different Ministries’ targets (education, health, social development, economic development), it has been almost impossible to fund and sustain.

Building on language strengths for school achievement

Māori and Pasifika children come to their learning with cultural and often language skills that could be strengthened and built on as a platform for success. One key reason for the under-achievement of so many Māori and Pasifika learners is the fact that our education system largely ignores the potential of students’ heritage language to support identity and cultural wellbeing, and to provide a platform for learning within their own language and in English.

Evidence shows that early bilingualism brings significant gains in cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, meta-linguistic skills and flexibility of thinking⁷. It also shows that quality bilingual or immersion instruction in children’s first or heritage language brings measurable gains in literacy achievement in the target language and also in English⁸. Clearly there is potential to capitalise on these benefits at all levels of the education system in order to redress the widespread underachievement of Māori and Pacific students, and to maximise Māori and Pacific success.

At present, Kohanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Māori and Wharekura are under-resourced compared to other state-funded schools, and teachers only have limited access to training and resources to support full-immersion or bilingual teaching in Te Reo. For this and other reasons, the supply of teachers who are fully fluent in Te Reo and who are qualified to teach in immersion or bilingual settings is extremely limited, which sometimes leads to schools having to close their bilingual classes.

We recommend that funding (including establishment funding) for all forms of pre-compulsory and compulsory education in Te Reo Māori be set at a level that is at least

⁷ Skerrett, M. & Gunn, A., 2011. *Quality in Immersion-bilingual Early Years Education for Language Acquisition*. Canterbury University: Christchurch

⁸ Ministry of Education (2008). *Teaching and learning for bilingual Pasifika students in New Zealand*.

equivalent to the funding for fully state-funded English immersion education, with an additional provision to recognise the extra training and resources required.

The situation for Pasifika communities wanting their children to grow up bilingual is even more difficult than for Māori, since there is very little support for learning in and through Pasifika languages. In making decisions about the level of resourcing that can be provided for bilingual and immersion learning in Pacific languages, government needs to weigh the minimal costs against the potential gain. The potential benefits of more widespread Pasifika success are significant – it is estimated that if by 2021 the average wage for Pasifika people were to rise to the level of the national median wage, the NZ economy would increase by \$4 billion. Getting education right for Pasifika people in New Zealand is therefore an economic as well as a social imperative.

A major barrier to more effectively building on Pasifika children's language strengths is the policy that only official languages of New Zealand (English, Te Reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language) can be supported by the Ministry of Education as languages of instruction. The result is that educators who want to support children's first language and capitalise on the proven benefits of bilingual instruction⁹ are forced to create their own learning resources, assessments and professional development. This can lead to difficulty in attracting and retaining high-quality teachers to bilingual classes because of the additional burden it places on teachers. It can also lead to less-effective education for Pasifika children due to lower access to learning resources and other support.

More coherent policy would enable more Pasifika language speakers to be actively attracted into teaching, and would enable learning resources, assessments and targeted professional development to be provided so that educators can make the most of the potential of bilingual learning to support Pasifika success. This does not need to be a major investment; rather, it is a re-targeting of existing resources (eg professional development funding) to support the specific skills needed to teach effectively in a bilingual setting.

New Zealand needs teachers at all levels of the education system who are capable of building on learners' language strengths, rather than treating speakers of languages other than English as a problem. All new teachers should be assessed as to their competence in supporting children's first and heritage languages, and all teachers wanting to teach in a bilingual or immersion classroom should be assessed as to their language competence and understanding of bilingual pedagogy. Teachers already in the system should be supported with on-going professional development.

⁹ Ministry of Education (2008). *Teaching and learning for bilingual Pasifika students in New Zealand*.

How to enable quality bilingual instruction: Early years

The recent review by Skerrett and Gunn¹⁰ states that “The optimum percentage for quality early years immersion/bilingual education in the New Zealand context being between 90 to 100 percent in the target language”. This should be the level of heritage language required for early learning services to be seen as fully supporting bilingualism.

For this to happen, early learning services need clear guidelines about effective practice, access to initial training and ongoing professional development that includes effective pedagogy in bilingual settings, reliable ways to track children’s language learning in both their heritage language and in English, learning resources (books, posters, songs, videos, computer programmes etc) in Te Reo and in Pacific languages, and information to help parents understand and support their child’s language development.

At present, early learning services that support Pacific languages are variable in both availability and quality of language support. Many families who would like to send their child to a Pacific language and culture-based service do not have that choice, because there is no service in their language close to their home. Even when services exist, families do not have access to reliable, family-friendly information to help them evaluate the quality of the service, both generally and in terms of language support.

This is important because a national evaluation report by the Education Review Office¹¹ found that only 14 of the 49 Pasifika services evaluated provided high-quality support for language, while in 10 of the services, adults “did not use the Pacific language often or well enough for children to develop fluency” (p5). At present there are few incentives for services to increase the level of language support, because there is no funding attached, very low awareness among parents of the value of high levels of heritage language, and no way for parents to judge the quality of language support.

This variability should not be surprising. Many Pacific centres are running on a shoe-string, governed and managed by caring people who are passionate about supporting families and children, but who may not have the training or expertise to ensure the service provides a quality bilingual experience. Without focused support and clear information about what is needed for effective support of Pacific language development, community-run services cannot be expected to consistently provide the high-quality immersion learning that is needed if Pacific children are to gain the potential benefits of growing up bilingual.

¹⁰ Skerrett, M. & Gunn, A., 2011. *Quality in Immersion-bilingual Early Years Education for Language Acquisition*. Canterbury University: Christchurch.

¹¹ Education Review Office (2007): *The Quality of Education and Care in Pacific Early Childhood Services*

One impact of the lack of focused support is that few organisations are prepared to establish new centres, and existing Pacific services are sometimes forced to close. This leaves fewer choices for families who want their child to learn through their heritage language and world view. Indeed one of the reasons given by families whose children do not attend an early learning service is that they do not have access to a service that meets their cultural needs. The wider implication of this is that in order to address the low ECE participation rates of Pasifika children, government needs to encourage and support Pasifika centres.

We recommend that:

- Specific guidelines be established to help early learning services identify how to deliver quality early learning for children who speak a language other than English. This should include guidelines on the level and type of language support needed in order to build fluent bilingualism, and on how to track children's language progress in their heritage language and in English.
- These guidelines be used to provide the basis for initial teacher education, and also for in-service professional development for all early learning teachers.
- A voluntary registration category be developed, enabling early learning services that meet these guidelines to be registered as bilingual services. This would give parents a means of identifying services that provide quality support for bilingualism. Additional funding and/or targeted professional development support should be available to services that meet the requirements for this category, as an incentive for quality delivery.
- Resources (books, computer programmes etc) be made available to support early learning in all major Pacific languages. These should include resources designed for parents to use with their children at home.
- Guidelines also be developed for effective support of Pacific-language bilingualism through informal and home-based early learning provision.

How to enable quality bilingual instruction: Compulsory education

Evidence¹² shows that in order to gain the full benefits of bilingualism, children need at least six years' instruction in and through the target language, including learning across the curriculum, in order to build both communicative and academic vocabulary. Children who attend heritage language early learning programmes and then transition into English immersion school settings do not have the opportunity to build the required level of fluency and depth of thinking in their heritage language before they transition into English. Indeed,

¹² For example: May, S., Hill, R., & Tiakiwai, S. (2004). *Bilingual/immersion education: indicators of good practice*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.

there is evidence that children actually lose fluency in their heritage language when they transition into an English-medium school¹³. They will still be gaining cultural and identify benefits from the heritage language ECE, but may not gain the academic benefits that would be expected from bilingual instruction to the end of primary school.

Even when children do attend quality language-based early learning services, and develop strong language foundations, in the current policy environment Pasifika children rarely have the opportunity to develop those skills beyond age 5. This is the single biggest issue that limits long-term outcomes from Pacific language early learning. If government wants to see long-term outcomes from early learning for Pasifika children, it needs to enable and support language pathways, with quality, high-level bilingual instruction that starts in the early years and continues at least throughout primary school. Without this, many of the potential academic benefits of Pacific-language ECE will continue to be lost.

There therefore needs to be greater coordination between the language supports available to children at different stages of the education system, in order to create a coherent language highway. Such a highway would include coherent provision, and information for parents about the provision available in their area. This would ensure that children who attend a bilingual or immersion early childhood centre are able to continue learning in and through their home language at primary and intermediate school in the same local area, and that they can go on to gain recognition for their language skills by studying their language at a high level at secondary school and university.

For those children who do not have the benefit of a heritage language other than English, early childhood services and primary schools need to be able to support children to learn at least one additional language, so that they grow up with more than one language, and so are more able to learn other languages as they progress through education. It would make sense for this additional language to be Te Reo Māori, given that it is an official national language. At present language teaching is only supported from Year 7, but this is too late to benefit from the ease of language learning in the early years.

We recommend that:

- Second language learning (in at least Te Reo Māori, and possibly also a second additional language) be made a compulsory part of the curriculum from age 5.

¹³ Tagoilelagi-Leota, F., McNaughton, S., MacDonald, S. & Farry, S. (2005). Bilingual and biliteracy development over the transition to school. *International journal of bilingual education and bilingualism*, 8(5), 455-478.

- Government actively support high-quality Pacific bilingual education at early childhood and primary levels (i.e. to Year 8), as a means of achieving its goal of increasing Pasifika student achievement.
- Secondary schools continue to offer a range of languages, including Te Reo Māori and Pasifika languages, so that young people can continue to maintain and develop language fluency.

Evidence-based schooling improvement

In addition to the Positive Behaviour for Learning Programme described in the report, there are a number of other interventions that have been proven to increase achievement and engagement for Māori and Pasifika learners, and for those from low socio-economic groups. These include:

- Providing clear guidance to schools to help them to more effectively engage with Māori and Pasifika families and communities. Schools and families both want the best for children, and genuinely want to engage with each other to support their learning. However, many schools and most Māori and Pasifika families struggle to achieve the level of partnership they know is needed. This is about more than merely providing information about children's progress, or giving parents strategies to read with their children at home. It is about a two-way partnership of trust where schools and families recognise the strengths each brings, and work to support each other's role.
- Providing training and materials to support teachers to effectively use student achievement data to reflect on and improve their teaching; and to understand and build on students' cultural and language strengths. This should include effective bilingual pedagogy, and how teachers in English-medium classes can support children from immersion or bilingual settings to maintain and build their skills in their heritage language, while also transferring those skills to their learning in English.
- Ensure that all low-decile students and their families have support throughout schooling, and especially in the middle years to identify their strengths, goals, interests and career directions, as a basis for increased motivation for learning and more informed subject choice. As part of this, we suggest that literacy and numeracy standards be compulsory for NCEA level 2, to ensure that all students leave school with the literacy and numeracy skills they need to go on to further education and to obtain stable, satisfying employment.

- Supporting schools in focus, low-decile areas to work together to increase effectiveness. Ideally these groups would include contributing ECEs and receiving organisations (intermediate, secondary and tertiary). The key support needed for the groups is access to research expertise to help them use achievement and observational data to improve pedagogy and to tailor teaching to learners' needs.
- Increasing education participation and uptake of services for children with special needs, especially in low-decile areas (since Māori and Pasifika children with special needs are often under-identified). Teachers need training to be able to recognise if a child may have developmental delay e.g. communication skills or social interaction, and adequate support needs to be available where needs are identified.
- Explicitly focusing on and measuring the development of self-management, relationship and self-directed learning skills, so young people leave school with the skills they need for the workplace and for lifelong learning. The NZ Curriculum has potential to deliver young people with all these skills, but feedback from employers implies that many school leavers do not have them to the degree required to cope in 21st century workplaces.

This submission has been assembled by COMET Auckland based on our own knowledge and experience, and on extensive discussions with education stakeholders.

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