

# Auckland Education summit

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WORKING TOGETHER FOR EDUCATION

## **Auckland Education Summit - Speech Angus Fletcher, Chair, The Fletcher Trust**

*What would be happening if we were serious about making a difference to education in Auckland?*

It is a quotation but now a truism that "we can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them". I think this view can be applied to education problems such as the "failure tail" of literacy and numeracy and the thinking behind education policy setting generally.

We should recognise that, within the education sector there are drivers and positions which tend to imbed the status quo. There is very little public engagement or debate around education policy. To their credit the national party elevated the issue of literacy and numeracy levels into public discussion at the last election and included National Standards in their election manifesto and enacted it via an executive order as government. This is not the forum for debating this initiative or policy and I include it here only as its topical and as an illustration, in my view, of a very poor policy development process and then appalling implementation.

These deficiencies in process and policy do not however excuse the obstructive reaction to this initiative. Schools and teachers have allowed the matter to be high jacked by unions and other parties that are, in my opinion, more interested in the politics of education than the improvement in educational standards and learning outcomes. But it is extraordinary to me and I look at this both from a private sector stand-point and from a strictly a political perspective that the minister responsible for this key educational initiative does not have the opportunity or obligation speaking within parliament to put this initiative into some form of strategic and overall policy context. It's inconceivable to me if the goal is to eliminate illiteracy and innumeracy from our young people, a laudable goal, that national standards will be the "silver bullet" to achieve this.

We are seeking a paradigm shift in educational outcomes for something like one in five of our young people - so there must be a whole series of strategies surely? Furthermore there presumably will be different initiatives for differing communities, deciles and situations. What congruence is there between the initiatives of the education ministry and programmes of other departments such as welfare and for that matter with local government? Also what role is there for the private and community sectors in bringing about change?

Educational improvement programmes initiated by central government generally do not succeed because poor education results reflect to a marked degree larger inequalities and problems in society. Consequently the structuring of government into "silos" won't result in effective strategies and proper resourcing to schools and communities to overcome all these inter-related issues.

My proposition is that if we want a paradigm shift in educational outcomes in this city not only do things need to be done differently but policy and strategy setting needs to be specific to Auckland rather than national and undertaken by those within Auckland with the expertise and with shared leadership and mutual accountability.

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My role here is to frame the discussion for this final session. I am a critic of current educational policy and the process of taxpayer resource allocation for education but I am a believer in the urgent need for change and a fervent advocate of the engagement of the private and business and the community sectors. In terms of the third sector that's not only, not for profit's but recognition of the role and the involvement of family in education in this country.

I want to try in the time I have available to provide a smorgasbord of ways and means for your involvement. The title for this section has a futuristic perspective so my views here are expressed as initiatives and developments that will happen. However you are totally at liberty either as an individual or from within an organisation to determine how, when and where you engage in adding value within the education sector. I think the previous speakers have made a very strong case for the need for change and for our individual and collective engagement.

Here are a number of possibilities and I think they group into five broad groupings. This is not anything like a definitive listing but more categories of opportunity.

## ***Firstly in the area of public - private partnership.***

There is a willingness being signalled by the current government to entertain private ownership of infrastructure in the education sector. I think this is an area of considerable opportunity not only because it recognises that central government and the taxpayer can't finance everything but once you break this monopoly of thinking and funding we could see all sorts of alternative models developing. You can get consequential impacts from this sort of systems change – for example one immediate consequential effect on schools is that it potentially removes property management as a required competence of school leadership. But more broadly what it will likely lead to is a greater emphasis on

government contracting for delivery of educational services and then potentially private management of some schools - greater equity for independent schools and greater choice for parents in terms of school choice for their kids. You don't need to start from scratch here as to anticipating opportunities - there is ample international experience you can draw from in terms of private sector engagement in the public education sector.

## ***Next there is the need and widespread opportunity to support programmes directly into the education sector.***

There is a whole proliferation now of educational programmes developed by the not for profit sector, some of which already involve the business sector not only for funding but the engagement of staff as mentors or volunteers. We will see the third sector continue to grow because these Trusts and their programmes either perform effectively or perish. Furthermore individual schools know which programmes work for them. What they need in order to incorporate effective programmes within their school curriculum is generally funding or resourcing of some form.

## ***That leads to the third area you can support education and that is with technology expertise.***

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Improving educational outcomes in schools is as much about process as it is about structure or resources. Improving school performance is about how instruction is delivered and this entails systems and systems thinking. The private sector can help here not only in relation to providing technology advice and hardware but assisting schools, particularly the school leadership group, in systems thinking and strategic planning. This is quite separate from supporting schools in terms of meeting their compliance requirements and is more about shepherding the school system and processes through a journey to higher student outcomes.

***The next and penultimate area is related to systems thinking and that is assisting in teacher development.***

Great schools are about great teachers. It's about capacity building but rather than systems or programmes or facilities it's about developing the human capital of the school. This takes time and requires organisational planning in human resources - capabilities that all successful managers and businesses have developed for their own purposes.

Again, as with the other areas of support for schools, by coming in from the outside with an independent perspective it provides the opportunity to remain objective and strategy and outcome focussed. This human resource focus can be extended to leadership development programmes for school principals. I think we will see in the future with more interaction of business and not for profits in education the break down in demarcations and greater fluidity of resourcing into the sector and the reverse with schools and teachers serving a wider role within communities.

***The final area is more of a collective response to the challenge presented at this summit and involves your engagement in the public policy area and the Auckland educational sector as a whole.***

Educational policy is largely institutionally derived in this country. It's not just politicians and bureaucrats but it is captured by existing organisations which are not incentivised to change or innovate. Auckland should have the capacity and capability to map out the major issues and develop ideas and solutions specifically appropriate to its educational facilities and requirements. Quality research can be specific, transparent and the learning shared. There is the opportunity to create an environment of working in partnership across communities, open databases on existing programmes and practices and the sharing of best practice.

I would counsel against this collective becoming political. While I despair with some educational policies the key issue often with schools is their establishing and accepting their current reality. The reality is school boards, National Standards, NCEA, and heavy compliance requirements, to name a few. Too much energy and leadership time is spent in my view disputing these realities and insufficient on developing schools pathways to improvement. The focus should be strictly on improvement at the Auckland school and community level and not at "tilting at central government policy windmills"

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I'm generally reluctant also to create more bureaucracy but I think there is an opportunity to create an action plan from this summit including an entity overseeing the overall Auckland school system charged with developing an "improvement plan". The goal could be to eliminate failure while increasing the overall quality of our educational institutions and learning experiences of all students.

This area of collective interest is quite separate to your considering on a individual case by case basis working in partnership with the sector in terms of technology and systems; supporting teacher and principal development and human resource capacity building; providing funding support and staff engagement in not for profit programmes or investment in public - private partnerships in the education sector.

All these are worthy of your consideration in what is a worthy mission. Together let us find a way of putting the education of Auckland kids first.