

QPEC Release

Unanswered Questions about Charter Schools

11 September 2014

QPEC Chairperson, Bill Courtney, participated in two interviews broadcast on Radio New Zealand on Wednesday 10 September 2014 on the subject of the first five charter, or Partnership, schools.

QPEC is concerned by several comments made during these segments by both Minister of Education, Hekia Parata and Catherine Isaac, the Chairperson of the Partnership Schools / Kura Hourua Authorisation Board.



The following release sets out several of the issues that QPEC believes require clarification or rebuttal.

1. Where is the Isaac Report? The arguments behind the establishment of NZ charter schools have always been weak and the original Working Group led by former ACT Party President, Catherine Isaac, never produced a written report. This is in contrast to former ACT MP John Banks's claim in parliament that we could learn from the successes and failures of charter schools overseas. But with no written report from his former party president, we simply don't know how the NZ model supposedly does this and how it should therefore be resourced, funded and evaluated.
 - a. "The Partnership Schools / Kura Hourua Working Group (formerly known as the New Zealand Model of Charter School Working Group) has not produced any document that sets out the evidential base behind charter schools."
Ministry of Education letter dated 4 October 2012.
 - b. "The Working Group did not produce any reports, recommendations or advice to the aforementioned Ministers. However, their views were captured in four documents that were produced by the Ministry of Education:
 - i. Developing and Implementing a New Zealand Model of Charter School;
 - ii. Regulatory Impact Statement
 - iii. Authorising and Monitoring Report back
 - iv. Resourcing Partnership Schools**OIA Ministry of Education letter dated 8 August 2013.**
2. Why is there so little transparency around the charter school authorisation process and how the schools operate? There have been serious concerns from the outset about the deliberate moves to reduce transparency and remove the schools from the scope of normal public sector accountability.

- a. “I do not accept the Ministry’s position that later disclosure of the [application] information at issue will satisfy the public interest. Disclosure after the Minister has taken decisions on the applications may serve the public interest in accountability, but it would not satisfy the public interest in the public being informed, and being able to participate in the debate, about the creation of partnership schools prior to those decisions being taken. The partnership schools policy involves substantial public funds and significant changes to the way in which publicly funded education provision is controlled, managed and delivered. I consider a more informed public discourse about the creation of such schools is in the public interest.”

Ombudsman Report, dated July 2013.

3. Why does Hekia Parata state incorrectly that the funding figures per student are a “gross misuse” of the data? The Operational Funding calculations have not included the one-off Establishment Payments, as Hekia Parata states. In the story reported on Radio NZ on Tuesday 9 September, the Whangaruru funding was stated as “nearly \$27,000 a pupil,” which is based on Operational Funding of \$1,508,561 divided by 56 students, giving \$26,939 per student. This excludes the Establishment Payment of \$1,379,150.
4. Why does Catherine Isaac, as the Chairperson of the Authorisation Board, not know what the charter school rolls are, if her group is also responsible for monitoring their progress? Why have the Minister and Catherine Isaac both made statements about the schools’ rolls that are simply not correct?
- a. Isaac: Radio NZ 10 September: “It is simply not correct [that 3 out of the 5 schools have not reached their guaranteed minimum roll]. Many are at their maximum roll and have waiting lists.”
- b. Parata: “All five are near or above enrolment.” Parliament, Questions for Oral Answer, no. 7, 11 February 2014

School	“Guaranteed Minimum Roll”	Maximum Roll	Actual Roll @ 1 March	Actual Roll @ 1 July
South Auckland Middle School	90	120	108	110
Te Kura Hourua ki Whangaruru	71	128	63	56
Te Kura Hourua O Whangarei Terenga Paraoa	50	300	50	53
Rise Up Academy	50	100	42	46
Vanguard Military School	108	192	104	93
Total	369	840	367	358

5. Although rolls may well fluctuate at any school during the course of the year, the fact remains that two of the schools have experienced falling rolls during the year.

6. The absence of any substantive case for “What” and “Why” leads to another problem: How is the charter school initiative going to be evaluated? This point is vitally important if the public is to gain confidence that the initiative is to be objectively and independently evaluated, as the Cabinet Paper tabled by the Minister of Education, in October 2013, promises:
 - a. **“The Cabinet paper “Developing and Implementing a New Zealand Model of Charter School” states:
“A strong evaluation programme will be put in place that thoroughly examines the impact and effectiveness of the first such schools. This will enable us to make informed decisions about whether or not to open further such schools in the future” [CAB Min (12) 26/6 refers.]”**
 - b. The October 2013 cabinet paper was prepared after a briefing paper from the Ministry of Education, dated 6 September 2013, contained the following warning:
“...risks in moving from what was described as a pilot to an on-going roll-out before evaluating the model. Committing to on-going annual rounds now will reduce the potential for evaluation of the early schools to be taken into account before a long term roll-out.”
7. In many ways, the most important comments made during the day, were the disparaging comments made by the one person who is ultimately responsible for New Zealand’s public education system: the Hon Hekia Parata, Minister of Education:
“But what's the alternative? To have these kids become another statistic in the justice system, or in the social welfare system”
8. No, Hekia. The alternative is to stop talking in clichés and to start dealing head on with the real challenge of properly resourcing public schools. Let’s give all our children the greatest possible opportunity to succeed.

Issued by

Bill Courtney

Chairperson

Quality Public Education Coalition