

Education Report: Following up on the Authorisation Board's concerns in relation to the Partnership Schools evaluation

Executive summary

1. On 5 November 2014 Catherine Isaac, Chair of the Authorisation Board (the Board), wrote to you expressing the Board's concerns about the external evaluation of Partnership Schools | Kura Hourua (Partnership Schools).
2. The Board's letter recommends that:
 - the Martin Jenkins review be re-scoped to better reflect Cabinet's intent
 - the current phase be deferred until that re-scoping is complete
 - the Board be consulted to ensure there is alignment between the scope of the review and the approach the Ministry of Education and the Board are taking in executing the Partnership Schools initiative.
3. The Ministry considers that the evaluation is well aligned with the broad parameters for its timing, direction and purpose approved by Cabinet. Phase 1 of the evaluation is nearly complete.
4. The Ministry recognises the value that the Board's expertise can bring to the evaluation. The Board will receive a draft of the first evaluation report in May 2015, and we will work with the Board on the focus and methodology for phase 2 of the evaluation prior to its commencement in July 2015.
5. If the scope or timing of the evaluation was to be significantly changed, some stakeholders would be concerned that Partnership Schools' implementation was not being closely monitored or evaluated in a timely manner. The Ministry would also be likely to incur additional evaluation costs.

Recommendations

We recommend that you

- a. **note** that the Ministry does not recommend re-scoping phase 1 of the Partnership Schools evaluation in response to the Authorisation Board's feedback
- b. **note** that the scope and timing of the evaluation closely reflects Cabinet's intent
- c. **note** that the Ministry will share a draft of the phase 1 evaluation report with the Board in May 2015
- d. **note** that the evaluation does not include a requirement for comparisons between the achievement of students in Partnership Schools with a matched group of students in state schools, because this is not practical in the early years of the Partnership School initiative

- do not agree*
- e. **note** that the Ministry intends, however, to carry out such an analysis to supplement the evaluation; is working through the methodological issues involved; and will consult with the Board on this work
 - f. **note** that we will consult with the Board on the focus and methodology for phase 2 of the evaluation prior to its commencement in July 2015
 - g. **note** that a draft response to the Board on behalf of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Education is attached for your consideration
 - h. **note** that we have an Official Information Act request from the PPTA for the evaluation plan
 - i. **agree** to the Ministry proactively releasing the evaluation plan on its website, with appropriate redactions
 - j. **discuss** this paper with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Education to inform his response to the Board

DL
 AGREE / DISAGREE

DL
 YES / NO

LHG

Lesley Hoskin
 Acting Deputy Secretary, Student Achievement

NOTED / DISCUSSED / AGREED

NOTED

Hekia Parata

Hon Hekia Parata
 Minister of Education

18, 3, 15

David Seymour MP
 Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the
 Minister of Education

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Purpose of report

6. This report recommends a response to concerns raised by the Authorisation Board (the Board) in its 5 November 2014 letter to you regarding the Partnership Schools evaluation.
7. A draft response to the Board on behalf of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Education is attached as Appendix A for your consideration.

Background

8. Broad parameters for the timing, direction and purpose of the evaluation of Partnership Schools have been approved by Cabinet.
9. The Cabinet paper "Developing and Implementing a New Zealand Model of Charter School" indicated Government's intention to commence evaluating Partnership Schools from their establishment:

"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].
10. The Cabinet paper "Further Application Rounds for Establishing New Partnership Schools" states that the focus of the external evaluation will be on:

"... the implementation and outcomes of the model rather than an assessment of the individual schools. ...matters such as how Partnership Schools are using the new model to set up institutions that are different from state schools; how they interact with parents, family, and whānau; and what factors have helped or hindered implementation" [CAB Min (13) 39/5 refers].
11. This Cabinet paper also noted that:

"An external evaluation will add to the credibility of the assessment from these sources and be able to provide a cumulative overview of how the model is developing and what outcomes it is achieving." [CAB Min (13) 39/5 refers]
12. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Education has been developing a work programme in relation to Partnership Schools. In due course, the evaluation will form a part of the work programme.

Contract and methodology for the evaluation

13. Martin Jenkins was selected through a competitive tender process to undertake the independent evaluation of the implementation and outcomes of the Partnership Schools model. Martin Jenkins prepared a draft evaluation plan with input from the Ministry of Education and the first five Partnership Schools.
14. Because the Partnership Schools are newly established, a formative evaluation is being undertaken to guide ongoing development of the model. The focus is on the Partnership Schools model rather than the performance of individual schools or students.
15. The evaluation will take place over four years, and comprises three phases:
 - Phase 1 focuses on how the schools are using the new model; how they interact with parents, family and whānau, and what factors have helped or hindered implementation
 - Phase 2, commencing mid-2015, focuses on how schools are developing conditions to achieve their outcomes
 - Phase 3, commencing mid-2016, will have two years of outcomes data and will begin to draw conclusions about how well the model is achieving the educational achievement outcomes sought.
16. The contract with Martin Jenkins provides for the evaluation's focus and methodology to be fine-tuned prior to the commencement of each phase of the evaluation.
17. A formal evaluation report will be provided at the end of each phase.

The Board's concerns and the Ministry's response

The Board's concerns

18. On 5 November 2014 Catherine Isaac, Chair of the Authorisation Board (the Board), wrote to you expressing the Board's concerns about the external evaluation of Partnership Schools.
19. The Board's key concerns are that:
 - there was a lack of timely consultation with the Board by Martin Jenkins in the development of the draft evaluation plan
 - the evaluation duplicates the activity to be undertaken by the Board, Education Review Office (ERO) and Ministry, raising issues of efficiency and compliance costs
 - the evaluation plan goes beyond the scope of the Cabinet paper, and as currently framed will seek to evaluate outcomes that are not essential to the success of the Partnership Schools initiative, but be unable in the short term to evaluate those that are essential, ie educational performance results

- the evaluation plan does not focus on the changes to the processes and institutional supports around the Partnership Schools initiative
- review of the RFP process, including the Ministry and Board evaluations, the interview and selection process, contract negotiation and execution, and the important issue of the time between Ministerial approval and the opening of the schools should be added to the scope of the evaluation.

Ministry response to the Board's concerns

Lack of timely consultation with the Board

20. The Board was consulted on a draft evaluation plan in October 2014. We appreciate that the timeframe meant that the Board had limited opportunity to comment on the evaluation methodology.
21. The Ministry recognises the value that the Board's expertise can bring to the evaluation. We will engage with the Board in a more timely manner over the next steps in the process.
22. The Ministry will share a draft of the first evaluation report with the Board in May 2015. The Ministry will also provide the Board and other stakeholders with an opportunity to contribute to the fine-tuning of the focus and methodology for phase two of the evaluation, which is scheduled to commence in July 2015.

Duplication of activity being undertaken by the Board, ERO and the Ministry

23. The external evaluation is one component of a range of monitoring and evaluation activities that is in place for Partnership Schools, and is scoped to be complementary.
24. The other components of the overall Partnership Schools monitoring and evaluation framework, which are focussed more closely on the effectiveness of individual Partnership Schools rather than the model itself, include:
 - data that is provided to the Ministry, especially through contract monitoring
 - review by ERO
 - monitoring of the schools' educational performance by the Board.
25. Martin Jenkins is aware of the need to work efficiently, and to minimise intrusion and compliance costs for the Partnership Schools. They will work with the Board, ERO and the Ministry to achieve this.

Alignment of the evaluation approach with Cabinet intent

26. The Ministry considers that the timing, direction and purpose of the evaluation are well aligned with the broad parameters approved by Cabinet, as set out above.
27. The formative evaluation design is appropriate, because the Partnership Schools model is in the early stages of implementation. It is designed to provide an early indication of the impact of the Partnership Schools model and to identify potential improvements to the model in a timely manner.

28. While acknowledging that raised achievement will not be evident immediately, the Board would like to see a stronger focus on educational achievement in the evaluation. Martin Jenkins understands that raising student achievement is central to the Partnership Schools model. Student achievement data will be collected throughout the evaluation, with increased emphasis placed on student achievement over time as sufficient data becomes available from which to make robust inferences.
29. The evaluation does not include a requirement for comparisons between the achievement of students in Partnership Schools with a matched group of students in state schools. Such comparisons have been done in other countries.
30. Because the schools are still building up their student numbers in these first years of establishment, the small sample size could mean that the characteristics of a few students could skew the findings.
31. The Ministry intends, however, to carry out such an analysis to supplement the evaluation, and is working through the methodological issues involved. For example, the criteria for selecting "twins" will need to be robust for the findings to be valid. There are also issues of parental consent for all students in the sample that would need to be worked through. We will consult with the Board as we undertake this work.
32. The Board does not consider that parent, family and whānau engagement is a critical indicator of the success of the Partnership Schools model. There is a strong evidence base to support parent, family and whānau engagement as a key element in student achievement. Enhanced engagement with families and whānau is likely to be a critical indicator of the success of the Partnership Schools model, and may yield new approaches that can be adopted more widely by state schools.
33. The Board considers that the evaluation places too much emphasis on the extent to which Partnership Schools have taken advantage of the model's flexibility to do things differently. Operational flexibility is one of the distinguishing features of the Partnership Schools model, and therefore is a critical component of any attempt to evaluate the model. Martin Jenkins recognises that innovation may initially be modest. Martin Jenkins is developing a tool to identify any form of innovation, and will evaluate the extent to which innovative practices contribute to the outcomes achieved.

Changes to the processes and institutional supports around the Partnership Schools initiative

34. The Board recommends that the external evaluation be re-scoped to include review of the RFP process, including the Ministry and Board evaluations, the interview and selection process, contract negotiation and execution, and the time between Ministerial approval and the opening of the schools.
35. These matters lie outside the scope of the evaluation, except to the extent that the schools may identify something within those processes that they believe has helped or hindered them in implementing the model.

Proposed proactive release of the evaluation plan

36. There is high stakeholder and public interest in the Partnership Schools model. The PPTA, for example, has requested the Partnership Schools evaluation plan on a number of occasions, and has now submitted an Official Information Act request for the plan.
37. In response, we propose to proactively release the Partnership Schools evaluation plan on the Ministry's website. Commercially sensitive financial information and the names of officials and individuals working at Martin Jenkins will be redacted.
38. Proactive release of the report will reduce speculation about the evaluation, and enable interested parties to engage with the Ministry on the detail of the evaluation plan. We will respond to specific issues and questions as they arise.

Conclusion

39. The Board's letter recommends that:
 - "the Martin Jenkins review be re-scoped to better reflect Cabinet's intent
 - the current phase be deferred until that re-scoping is complete
 - the Board be consulted to ensure there is alignment between the scope of the review and the approach the Ministry of Education and the Board are taking in executing the Partnership Schools initiative."
40. The Ministry does not consider that re-scoping phase 1 of the evaluation is warranted. If the evaluation was to be significantly re-scoped or the timing substantively altered some stakeholders would be concerned that Partnership Schools' implementation was not being closely monitored or evaluated in a timely manner. The Ministry would also be likely to incur additional evaluation costs.
41. Phase 1 of the evaluation is nearly complete. The Board will receive a draft copy of the first evaluation report in May 2015. The Ministry will consult with the Board to fine-tune the focus and methodology of phase 2 of the evaluation prior to its commencement in July 2015.

Appendix A: Draft response to the Board's letter

Catherine Isaac
Chairperson
Partnership Schools | Kura Hourua Authorisation Board
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Dear Catherine

The Minister of Education, Hon Hekia Parata, has asked me to follow up on the Authorisation Board's (the Board's) concerns about the external evaluation of the Partnership Schools | Kura Hourua model, as outlined in your letter to her dated 5th November 2014.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for sharing the Board's concerns and advice. I am committed to having a world-class evaluation programme for the model and recognise and appreciate the value that the Board's expertise can bring to this.

As phase one is nearly complete, I do not consider it workable to re-scope this phase of the evaluation. However, I have asked the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) to work with the Board to fine-tune the focus and methodology for phase two of the evaluation, prior to its commencement in July 2015. I understand that the Ministry will share a draft of the phase one evaluation report with the Board in May 2015.

Kind regards,

David Seymour
Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Education

cc Hon Hekia Parata **Minister of Education**