

IEAG Submission on the Education Amendment Bill (no 4)

Submission to the Education and Science Select Committee

24 January 2013

About the Inclusive Education Action Group

The Inclusive Education Action Group (IEAG) is a group of parents, teachers, disabled people, principals, teacher educators and researchers who are committed to ensuring that all disabled children, young people and adults ***participate fully in their local, regular educational setting.***

We do this by promoting knowledge, attitudes, policies and practices that facilitate inclusive education. IEAG is a national organisation with 250 members throughout New Zealand. Our membership includes:

- Parents of disabled children or people with disabilities (37%);
- Education sector workers (24%) comprising of school principals, special education staff, therapists, and educational psychologists;
- Disability sector workers (20%),
- Researchers and academics (11%)
- And others (6%).

Introduction

The Education Amendment Bill will allow Partnership Schools/Kura Hourua (a.k.a charter schools) to be established in New Zealand.

IEAG opposes the intent of this bill for the following reasons:

The bill will infringe on children's rights

- All children have a right to attend their local, regular school and Government priority should be to improve public schools so that they meet the needs of all children. By diverting funds to charter schools, the Government is neglecting its duty to provide a quality, free education for *all children* at their local school.

- New Zealand’s obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) Article 24, requires the Government to build a well-resourced, inclusive public education system at all levels that meets the needs of all students.
- Charter schools directly contravene Objective 3 of The NZ Disability Strategy (Ministry of Health, 2001):
 - 3.1 “No child is denied access to their local school because of their impairment” (ibid, 2001, p.16).

Studies from the UK and USA provide evidence showing many charter schools excluding and discouraging disabled students. Reasons given for excluding or suspending disabled students include additional costs, lack of qualified and experienced teaching staff and fear of lowered test scores (Dudley-Marling & Baker, 2012; Ravitch, 2010)
 - 3.3 “Teachers and other educators understand the learning needs of disabled people” (ibid, 2001, p.16).

Qualified and registered teachers understand and can respond positively to the learning needs of diverse students, including students with disabilities (Carrington & MacArthur, 2012). Unregistered and unqualified teachers are unlikely to have the knowledge, skills and professional judgement required to teach and include disabled students.
 - 3.6 “Improve schools...accountability for the needs of disabled students” (ibid, 2001, p.16).

Charter schools will not be required to have a transparent governance structure, follow the New Zealand Curriculum, be overseen by the Ministry of Education, the Auditor General, Ombudsman or be subject to the Official Information Act.

Disabled Students in Charter Schools

- Evidence from countries where charter schools have been implemented shows that charter schools have a poor record of including disabled students (Academies Commission, 2013; Dudley-Marling & Baker, 2012)
- Charter schools tend to cherry-pick high-achieving students, leaving other students, including those with disabilities, to be catered for by an increasingly stretched public education system.
- Where charter schools do accept disabled students, students with less significant impairments are more likely to be accepted than students with more significant disabilities. Disabled students are generally segregated from other students in special schools or special classes. This approach goes against the Ministry of Education’s (2010)

own “Success For All” policy target of all schools demonstrating inclusive practices by 2014.

- Quality, inclusive teaching is essential for high quality outcomes for diverse students (MacArthur Kelly & Higgins, 2005). Charter schools with high numbers of unregistered and unqualified teachers are unlikely to have the skills to successfully teach and include disabled and other diverse learners.
- Achievement outcomes for students identified as having special educational needs were significantly worse in charter schools as compared to regular schools in several States in the USA. In two States a third of disabled children were suspended from school at any one time (Dudley-Marling & Baker, 2012).

Charter Schools & New Zealand’s Public School system

- IEAG has been unable to locate any research or evidence to show that charter schools provide superior social and educational outcomes for disabled students than public schools. However, there is a wealth of information indicating that most charter schools tend to exclude disabled students. Coupled with the fact that New Zealand has one of the highest performing education systems in the OECD, it is illogical to introduce charter schools to New Zealand on the premise that it will improve student achievement.
- Charter schools will receive public funding to deliver education yet will not be accountable to the NZ Curriculum, the parent community, the Minister of Education, Auditor General, Ombudsman or be subject to the Official Information Act.
- Charter schools will receive public funding yet there will be no transparency as to how this money is spent.
- Charter schools can be for-profit enterprises. The primary motivator becomes profit, not student participation, learning and achievement as it should be.
- Parents and whanau influence their child’s educational and social outcomes, yet research has shown that in many charter schools parents’ voices are not heard. Many charter schools are also not close to their communities or directly accountable to them.

Conclusion

“Although data on charter schools and students with disabilities is limited, the available statistical evidence supports the conclusion that students with disabilities, especially students with more severe disabilities, are significantly underserved by charter schools.” (Dudley-Marling & Baker, 2012, p.16).

There is a tendency toward standardized approaches to students and the curriculum in charter schools. Standardising teaching and assessment helps to achieve economies of scale and efficiency, this leads to maximised profitability. Standardising education will never serve the needs of students who, by definition, do not fit the "standard."

Schools working within the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) teachers are expected to acknowledge and incorporate student diversity into their teaching. Values and practices that support social justice, equity, citizenship and inclusion are central to the NZC. What are we saying about our national curriculum if it can be ignored and overridden by other approaches to teaching, learning and 'success'?

The best prospect for an inclusive education system in Aotearoa/New Zealand is a strong, well-resourced public education system and a clear policy direction and leadership for inclusion within the government and its key agencies (Higgins, MacArthur and Morton, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2010).

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