Improving legislation to support a high performing education system for New Zealand

The Education (Update) Amendment Bill (the Bill) amends the Education Act 1989 (the Act) to make the achievement and learning of children and young people central to the early childhood education and compulsory schooling Parts of the Act.

The Bill is one aspect of the Minister of Education’s Education Work Programme.

In mid-2014 the Taskforce on Regulations Affecting School Performance (the Taskforce) recommended change to create a greater focus on student outcomes in the Act, more explicit roles and objectives, and improved usability and clarity.

In late-2015 Cabinet approved public consultation on the Update. The Ministry received over 1800 submissions. Throughout the wide range of views expressed, the common theme was the importance of education in providing better personal, economic and civic outcomes for our children and young people.

The Act has been amended piecemeal over the past 27 years and needs to better fit a 21st century education system. It is timely to consider how a legislative framework can place learners at the centre of the education system, providing an enduring vision of success for all young New Zealanders, and certainty about what the education system is expected to achieve.

The Act needs to be updated to provide a more coherent framework that meets the needs of the early childhood and schooling environments now and into the future.

The Act needs to be updated to provide

- A new framework for correspondence education (modernised to be “online learning”) to future-proof the Act, and enable students to study online as an alternative to, or alongside, face-to-face education.
- Establishing a Competence Council to speed up the competence complaint resolution process.
- Creating a refocused Careers Service within the TEC.
- Improving the way enrolment schemes are managed.
- Clarifying reasons for decision making on education provision.
- Streamlining consultation requirements on closing or merging a school.
- Creating a power for the Minister to require combined boards in certain circumstances.
- Strengthening the efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of schools and the schooling network.
- Make the achievement and learning of children and young people central to the early childhood education and compulsory schooling Parts of the Act.
- Provide for an enduring and visible strategic direction for early childhood services and schools. This will be achieved through the new objectives for education, which are part of the statement of National Education and Learning Priorities. The statement of NELP allow the government of the day to convey its priorities for education.
- Align the strategic direction-setting with strong accountability through defined roles and responsibilities for school boards of trustees, and meaningful planning and reporting. Emphasise the importance of collaboration for a sustainable, high performing education system. Put in place additional interventions to enable faster, more tailored responses when a school is struggling to ensure the achievement of all its children and young people.
- Enhance collaboration within the schooling network.
- Provide a voluntary, enabling framework for the evolution of CoL, including a statutory means of formalising agreements among members.
- Enable schools to introduce cohort entry arrangements, after consultation with their community.
- Extending compulsory attendance upon starting school to children under the age of six.
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