Education Report: Redesigning and improving alternative education provision – Summary of youth feedback

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<tr>
<th>To:</th>
<th>Hon Tracey Martin, Associate Minister of Education</th>
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<td>Date:</td>
<td>6 June 2019</td>
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<td>Security Level:</td>
<td>In Confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drafter:</td>
<td>Jessie Smart</td>
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<td>Key Contact:</td>
<td>Ben O'Meara</td>
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<td>Messaging seen by Communications team:</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Purpose of report

This paper provides you with a summary of the feedback from the engagements we have held with young people in alternative settings. These engagements have been completed as a part of the work programme to redesign and improve alternative education provision.

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

a. **note** that the summary of feedback from the young people we spoke to is in Annex 1

   - **Noted**

b. **agree** to release the summary of feedback to the attendees of the Alternative Education Hui

   - **Agree / Disagree**
Proactive Release Recommendation

c. agree that this Education Report is proactively released once the summary of feedback has been sent to attendees.

Dr Andrea Schöllmann  
Deputy Secretary  
Education System Policy  
06/06/2019

Hon Tracey Martin  
Associate Minister of Education  
16/6/19
Background

1. Following the Alternative Education Hui on 22 February 2019, you agreed to us engaging with young people about their experiences in alternative settings.

2. This paper is the next deliverable in the agreed work programme outlined in the table below (Melis 1174533 refers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key milestone</th>
<th>Due</th>
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<tr>
<td>Overview of Hui feedback provided to Hui attendees</td>
<td>22 March</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth engagement underway</td>
<td>Late March</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion document: Current state, gaps and best practice</td>
<td>16 April</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engagement with the Ministerial Youth Advisory Group</td>
<td>May</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education Report: Summary of youth feedback</td>
<td>Late May</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overview of youth feedback provided to participants</td>
<td>Early June</td>
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Summary of feedback received

3. We heard from around 60 young people in nine alternative settings throughout New Zealand. These settings include:

4. We also spoke with the Minister of Education’s Ministerial Youth Advisory Group (YAG). In addition to this, we have drawn on feedback that has been collected as part of other engagements with young people in alternative settings, including for the development of National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP).

5. Overall, we heard a lot about the positive experiences of akoanga in alternative settings, particularly compared to their experiences of school. While young people experienced barriers and challenges in alternative settings, there is a sense that these spaces are doing a number of things well for them. While provision varies considerably between individual sites, there are some key themes around why and how alternative settings are ‘different’ to school.

6. The feedback from young people about what works best for them is consistent with the research. It also aligns with what we heard from providers of alternative education during the Alternative Education Hui held on 22 February 2019.

7. Annex 1 provides a more detailed summary of the feedback from these engagements.
Next steps

8. Once you have agreed to the release of Annex 1 we will send this out to the alternative settings that participated in the engagement. We will also circulate it to the participants who attended the Hui in February.

9. S 9(2)(f)(iv)

Annexes

Annex 1: Redesigning and improving alternative education provision – Summary of youth feedback
Annex 1: Redesigning and improving alternative education provision – Summary of youth feedback

Introduction

This document summarises the feedback received through targeted engagements with young people | rangatahi who are in alternative education settings. It has been completed as part of the work to redesign and improve alternative education provision.

We heard from around 60 rangatahi in nine alternative settings throughout New Zealand. We also spoke with the Minister of Education’s Ministerial Youth Advisory Group (YAG). In addition to this, we have drawn on feedback that has been collected as part of other engagements with young people in alternative settings, including the National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP).

We heard a great deal from young people about their positive experiences in alternative settings, particularly compared to their experiences of school. While rangatahi experienced barriers and challenges in alternative settings, there is a sense that these spaces are doing a number of things well for them. Young people told us that if these settings and supports had been in place for them earlier, it would have been easier for them to stay engaged in education. The experiences rangatahi are having in alternative education provision are outlined in the following sections of this document.

While provision varies considerably between individual sites, there are some key themes around why and how alternative settings are ‘different’ to school. These include:

- success should be measured in relation to the needs, goals and aspirations of individual students, as decided by the young person and their whānau (for example, social or emotional needs, NCEA achievement and post school goals);
- staff in alternative settings are building strong, positive relationships with their students, and this is helping young people to experience a sense of belonging. Many young people did not experience this when they were at school;
- teaching and learning appears to be working better for young people in alternative settings because of the one-to-one support, they can go at their own pace and teachers try to personalise learning programmes to their interests;
- young people in alternative settings are having variable experiences with transitions between school and alternative settings; and
- accessing additional supports, such as transport and healthcare helps young people to attend alternative settings.

The feedback from rangatahi about what works best for them is consistent with the research. It also aligns with what we heard from providers of alternative education during the Alternative Education Hui held on 22 February 2019. A summary of the feedback we received on the day can be found here.
Hon Minister Tracey Martin’s vision for the future of alternative education

Hon Tracey Martin, Associate Minister of Education has presented her vision for the future of alternative education. A recording of the Minister’s speech can be found here, and a copy of her vision for alternative education can be found here. In response to the Minister’s vision, one young person in an alternative setting commented that it was good to see recognition that they were not “bad kids”, but had experienced things that had resulted in “bad behaviour”. This was echoed in feedback from other young people about experiences of stigma, discussed in the section below on transitioning between settings. The YAG told us that they can clearly see in the Minister’s vision, why there is a need for change in the alternative education space and that they are interested in seeing how we will achieve this. They said that they are concerned with some of the language in the section that explains why young people end up in alternative education, and would like to see this more positively framed.

“Everyone is different”: Recognising diverse markers of individual success

When asked about what they thought personal success looks like, rangatahi highlighted the importance of setting, making progress towards, and achieving their goals and aspirations. They frequently discussed goals such as securing employment and achieving NCEA. Some young people also spoke about their hopes to transition back to school. Young people said that they saw success as participating in sports, learning and other activities. Other young people aspired to be leaders, to mentor younger students and to give back to their community.

Personal growth through social and emotional development is a key theme in the feedback from these young people. Many young people spoke about success through improving their wellbeing, health and happiness, improving their attitude and “getting the most out of what is offered [at Alternative Education]”. We heard that making friends, building self-confidence, self-motivation, overcoming fears and “not being afraid to try new things” are important. Some rangatahi said that success to them would be improving their behaviour and staying out of trouble.

Many young people spoke about the importance of the steps they needed to take towards accomplishing their goals, such as completing the work set in class, achieving credits towards NCEA and improving their attendance. They told us that they wanted to get work experience because that would help them know what they wanted to do.

“It feels like home”: Creating safe spaces where young people feel a sense of belonging

Rangatahi told us that the alternative settings they are in are welcoming and make them feel safe and comfortable. They said that these spaces feel more “like another home” than a school. This is linked to physical aspects of the space, such as the presence of couches and having areas to relax, take a quiet moment, or to play pool. A significant number of young people talked about the availability of kai and said that they felt like they are part of a whānau at their alternative setting.

We heard a great deal about how the staff in alternative settings create a sense of belonging through their behaviour, actions and attitudes towards the young people in these settings.
In particular, feeling cared for and building relationships based on mutual trust and respect has had a significant impact on the rangatahi we spoke to. Young people told us that they notice that their tutors, teachers and youth workers take time out of their personal lives “to do the best [they] can for [us]”.

Rangatahi told us that the staff in alternative settings take an interest in their lives and make them feel like they matter. Emphasising the importance of these relationships, young people said that “when [teachers] don’t care, you don’t try”. We heard that it is important to these young people that the adults working with them in alternative settings spend time to get to know them as individuals, and understand their history and circumstances. As one young person put it:

Youth prefer not to get told what to do, you do this and they disappear. If you actually befriend that young person, you get more of a sense of how they learn and stuff. Everyone is different. If they [the adults] actually know you, they notice when something happens. They will sit and talk with you to see what is wrong.

Young people said that staff in alternative settings are encouraging and inspire them to improve. They demonstrate how much they want their students to achieve through their actions and they are supportive, approachable and always ready to offer help. Staff in alternative settings help students by sharing their personal experiences and how they have overcome challenges in their own lives. Rangatahi said that the adults that work in alternative settings also relate well to them. They said they can “banter with tutors” and also talk to them about personal things that they needed help with.

Young people said that staff in alternative settings treat them fairly. They do not “play favourites” and are careful to make sure young people feel like equals within the classroom. In contrast, one young person said that at school they had seen “some teachers treat some students with high respect and [treat others] like dirt.”

“Want to learn”: Ensuring access to quality teaching and well-designed, individualised learning programmes

Young people told us that they want learning opportunities focused around their interests, to have variation and flexibility in their learning programmes, and to have opportunities for training and further education. They value the ability of the adults that work in alternative settings to link them up with initiatives and practical learning opportunities that relate to their interests. Young people said it is good when staff get them "back in to the community so [they] can give back".

Rangatahi said they want to learn life skills, relationship skills and “important stuff like getting a license”. We heard that they want opportunities to learn about culture, to do sports and extra-curricular activities, and to have access to technology and resources (including online education). They said that they enjoy learning while on field trips, through outdoor education and through hands on activities.

Many young people said that they found learning easier in alternative settings because of the availability of one-to-one support and small class sizes. These settings make it easier to concentrate and allow for more time with teachers or tutors. We heard it was also helpful when teachers recognise when students need a break. Young people said that rules and
consequences can work well when they are easy to understand and connected to incentives and rewards.

A number of akonga mentioned the importance of having good teachers. The people teaching in alternative settings are seen as ‘different’ to teachers in school. Like other staff working in alternative settings, young people said that the teachers “take the time” to get to know them. Rangatahi said that this helps because learning works best when teachers personalise their teaching styles and methods so they work for each individual student.

Rangatahi told us that the teachers and tutors in alternative settings are patient, allow students to work at their own pace, and make sure students understand the material before moving on to the next lesson. One young person said “we don’t get told off for making mistakes, we work together to find out what went wrong and how to fix it”.

"It’s hard not seeing friends": Transitioning between alternative settings and school

Some rangatahi told us that they had experienced positive transitions into alternative education. These young people spoke about how they are still able to attend some classes in their school, or are active participants in school sports teams. They spoke about how maintaining these connections helps to motivate them to go back to school.

For other young people, being in an alternative setting means missing out, experiencing stigma and losing personal connections. They said that they felt ‘cut off’ from their school when they started alternative education and that “there is stigma and perception that Alternative Education is for dumb people”. We heard that rangatahi particularly missed being able to participate in sports and classes that required extra tools and materials such as art, hospitality, technology and science.

Young people told us that it was difficult to leave friends behind and that teachers and staff from school did not reach out to see how they are getting on. Some of the rangatahi we spoke to had been in and out of school and alternative settings, and they said losing contact with staff and peers in alternative settings when they went back to school had also been hard for them. These young people spoke about enjoying being back in alternative settings because they are back with staff that care about them.

"It can be scary meeting new people": Experiencing barriers to attending Alternative Education

Difficulties with getting to alternative settings is a common barrier to attending for rangatahi. This ranged from problems with transport, such as no public transport available in their area, not having money for the bus, not liking taking the bus, the bus stop and provider being inconveniently located, not liking walking and living too far away. Many rangatahi spoke about how much they appreciate being picked up and dropped off by staff, telling us that this has a significant impact on their attendance.

Young people also said that being sick, having poor health, “being stoned”, and finding it hard to get out of bed can sometimes make it hard to attend their alternative setting. In relation to this, young people valued access to medical treatment and visits from the local nurse. They also spoke positively about the different people who come in to teach about things like sex education or drugs and alcohol, "in a non-judgemental way".
While alternative settings are recognised as doing well at cultivating a sense of belonging for young people and supporting them to develop social skills, the young people who are in these settings are diverse, and can have complex and challenging behaviours. In connection to this, young people raised issues around peer-to-peer relationships in alternative settings, such as bullying, fitting in, getting along with others, and teasing.

Other rangatahi said that things like not wanting to do school work all day, feeling scared or anxious about meeting new people, personal issues or experiencing problems at home can sometimes make it hard for them to attend their alternative setting.