

Future-Fit Education

Every child deserves a world-class education: safe, stable, coherent and designed to prepare them not just for work but for life.

New Zealand's education system is capable of excellence. But students, families and educators have been repeatedly subjected to political churn. Governments rewrite curricula, restructure qualifications and reorganise institutions before previous changes have been properly implemented or evaluated. School operational budgets haven't kept up with inflation, creating further strain for teachers and principals.

Education is a compounding investment in our collective future. Uncertainty and destabilisation not only increases workload, it detracts focus from what matters: excellent teaching and learning.

A plan for kids' futures, not an election cycle

New Zealand's education system has been treated as a political football for too long. Politicians are not the right people to be making operational decisions that should be left to the profession, and the three-yearly election cycle is too frequent to make sweeping changes.

A ten-year, cross-party plan for education

Opportunity will work across Parliament to secure a ten-year, cross-party plan for education that provides stable direction across early learning, primary and secondary education.

It will:

- be developed with educators, tangata whenua, learners, families and communities,
- support the rights of learners and follow the best available evidence,
- set clear national goals, an agreed programme of work, realistic implementation timeframes, workforce and funding requirements, and regular independent evaluation,
- be grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, meaning genuine partnership with iwi and Māori communities in the development of the plan with a focus on equitable access, participation and achievement, and

- align expectations with capability and support, rather than placing new obligations on educators without providing the time, resources and professional development needed to meet them.

An Independent Curriculum and Assessment Council

To support the implementation of the ten-year plan, Opportunity supports the establishment of an Independent Curriculum and Assessment Council to steward the long-term curriculum and assessment direction for early childhood, primary and secondary education. The Council will maintain consistency across electoral cycles and will be given explicit structural protections to preserve professional and technical independence.

A strong and trusted teaching profession

A supported profession is the foundation of a strong education system. Teacher shortages are not simply a recruitment problem, but a retention one due to workload pressures, under-preparation, and inadequate support. Research from NZPF, NZEI and the OECD shows that New Zealand teachers feel undervalued and politicised leading to lower job satisfaction and greater intent to leave their roles.

Opportunity will advocate for the long-term plan to:

- Allocate clear responsibility to deliver the 10 year plan in terms of workforce planning.
- Strengthen initial teacher education by setting higher entry requirements; establishing a rigorous exit practicum assessment; and funding structured, high-calibre placements in schools and early childhood centres that follow a staged progression, integrate theory and practice, and are supported by trained and paid mentors.
- Fund ongoing professional development, including in-school induction and peer-to-peer mentoring, leadership development, trauma-informed and neurodiversity-affirming practice, behaviour and complex-needs capability, cultural and reo Māori competency and Te Tiriti-informed practice, and curriculum and assessment literacy.
- Extend Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum, as a complement to the school curriculum and encourage the inclusion of early childhood-trained teachers in primary schools to ease the transition for children.
- Restore an Independent Teaching Council with democratically-elected practitioner representation.
- Strengthen regional and rural networks by tailoring support to each region's needs, including clustering where it makes sense, deploying teacher and specialist capability equitably across schools, establishing regional relief pools for rural and small schools, and providing administrative support.
- Ensure recent investments in specialist support are delivered well - including learning support co-ordinators, RTLBs, speech-language therapists, psychologists and mental health services available to every school.

Achievement for the 21st Century

Education is more than workforce preparation; it shapes the societies we build in an increasingly complex world. Achievement today requires learners to develop strong knowledge, apply it confidently and build the capability to act with agency, to think critically and creatively, to act ethically and responsibly, to navigate complexity, and to be active citizens in their community. Our schools and learners need a coherent framework that gives teachers clarity and flexibility to use effective, evidence-based practice, while creating the conditions for deep understanding, growing learner agency and achieving excellence.

Opportunity will advocate for the long-term plan to:

- Empower the Curriculum and Assessment Council to review and decide on the government's replacement of NCEA with NZCE/NZACE.
- Promote purposeful technology use in schools, providing guidance for parents and teachers for healthy screen use, online safety, critical evaluation of digital information and AI, and the ethical decision-making skills to use it responsibly, while reducing passive screen-based learning.
- Expand the availability of te reo Māori learning by rewarding and retaining specialist teachers and enabling more flexible delivery across multiple schools, within communities of learning and using distance-learning platforms.
- Build a resilient tertiary sector through a 20-year Skills and Learning Accord, seamless pathways between vocational and academic learning, restored Adult and Community Education, stable and sustainable funding, coherent national strategies, and investment in research capability for universities, wānanga, and polytechs - so institutions can plan, not just survive.
- Provide regional polytechnic stability – long-term funding and mission clarity for regional polytechnics and wānanga, ensuring learners outside major centres have access to high-quality vocational and academic pathways. See our [Breakthrough Economy](#) policy for more detail.



Early learning that prioritises children

Every child has a right to the strongest possible start in life and parents deserve early childhood education and care options they can trust to keep their children safe, happy and thriving.

New Zealand's ECCE system has drifted away from what children actually need. Teachers report high burnout and turnover, impacting their relationships with children. Ratios in many centres remain stretched. In a 2023 sector survey, close to half of the early childhood teachers who responded said ratio requirements had been breached at their centre in the past year, and one in eight said it happened often or constantly.

Opportunity will advocate for the long-term plan to:

- Lift quality and safety standards by:
 - Requiring minimum ratios of 1:3 for under-twos, 1:5 for 24-36 months and 1:8 for children aged three and over.
 - Improving space per child indoors and outdoors to match Australian standards.
 - Setting maximum indoor group sizes.
 - Requiring 80% minimum qualifications for teacher-led services.
 - Expanding the NZCER Wellbeing@School survey to ECCE teachers.
- Move away from the current licensing-only model to quality-based contracting to ensure public money delivers the best possible outcomes for children and families.
- Support community-owned early learning to provide more choice to parents, by:
 - Prioritising increased core funding for community-owned services such as Playcentre, Kōhanga Reo, Kindergartens, Pacific language nests, Playgroups and Nature Based Services.
 - Enabling more flexibility for ECCE centres to co-locate with retirement villages and support mana whenua partnerships.
 - Supporting home-based care to implement the 2:8 model (two educators, including at least one qualified teacher, for up to eight children), complementing the existing 1:4 model.

Future-Fit Education — Frequently Asked Questions

How do you make a 10-year education plan stick?

Opportunity will use our position as a party that can work across the aisle to bring other parties together. We will be open with the public about who comes to the table and who doesn't. We believe there is enough public support for this approach that parties will be incentivised to take part, and approaches like this have worked in other countries like Denmark, Estonia and Scotland.

How much will this policy cost?

A large part of this policy is governance and regulatory change that imposes no direct cost. For the elements of this policy that do require additional funding Opportunity will advocate for that within the context of the ten-year plan.

Do you support the Foundational Award, NZCE and NZACE being implemented from 2028?

That's not our call to make, and it shouldn't be any politician's. Politicians have been in the weeds of curriculum design for far too long. The decision on the new qualifications should sit with an independent Curriculum and Assessment Council.

Will you fix teacher pay?

We will advocate for including teacher workforce planning inside the ten-year plan, so training intakes, supervision, career pathways and fair remuneration are worked out as part of a ten-year pathway instead of bid for one Budget at a time.