

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TOMORROW'S SCHOOLS REFORMS BY SECONDARY SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Substantial changes have recently been made in the ways schools are administered in NZ following the report of the Taskforce to Review Educational Administration (1988), known as the Picot Report and the subsequent government policy statement Tomorrow's Schools (1989). As part of the Monitoring Today's Schools Project, a nationwide survey has been undertaken, in two rounds of data collection, the first early 1991, and again in early 1992. This paper reports the views of school principals, trustees, teachers, parents and students on the impact and effectiveness of the changes on their schools, and the education system. While principals and trustees are relatively positive about the effect of the changes on their schools, teachers are strongly critical. Parents and students seem to have noted little change. The paper considers some of the evidence from the survey that gives insight into the reasons for these clearly different views. The focus is mainly on the first round of data, because analysis of second round data was not complete at the time of this paper's preparation.

THE NATURE OF THE SURVEY

The Sample

In the second week of March 1991 a random sample of 48 New Zealand secondary schools participated in a major survey involving principals, trustees, teachers, parents and students. Data were collected for each group by means of a questionnaire.

The sample was drawn up for the Monitoring Today's Schools research project by the Research and Statistics Division of the Ministry of Education and included an appropriate balance of schools by size, geographic distribution, ethnicity and gender - a balance which approximated that of all secondary schools in New Zealand. Principals were contacted early in 1991 about possible participation and asked to distribute a questionnaire to each member of their board of trustees, 20% of the teaching staff, 20 parents of Form 4 students and 20 Form 6 students. Principals were also asked to complete a questionnaire. A mailed package included suggestions for delegating the distribution and retrieval of questionnaires.

The response rate from the schools was generally high. The return from principals was 81%, teaching staff 80%, students 80% and parents 71%. Replies were received from 272 trustees, an estimated 70% return.

The Questionnaires

Apart from information outlining the characteristics of the school, and some demographic material, the questions required the participants to reflect on 1990 and the Tomorrow's Schools reforms. Although many of the questions were parallel for the respondent groups, separate questionnaires were constructed for each of the groups participating in the survey (i.e., principals, teachers, boards of trustee members, parents, and students). The length of each questionnaire varied for the different respondent groups, but all included sections covering the following areas:

- Resource availability and allocation.
 - Aspects of school programme.
 - Communication and relationships.
 - Workloads.
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- Charter and policies.
 - Trustees.
 - Perceived impact and value of reforms.

The Use of Questionnaire material in this Paper

This paper concentrates on four broad themes: communication and relationships, Maori and equity issues, school programmes and curriculum, and workloads. Material drawn from the "body" of the questionnaires is used to explore school community perceptions of the impact of the changes on schools.

The final section of the questionnaires invited each respondent to make comments on the ways in which the educational reforms had affected their school and most respondents chose to comment. As the question was an open one, a wide range of topics was covered in the responses. A small selection of comments, illustrative of some of the main views expressed, are included.

The paper then reviews the "final judgment" of the various groups within school communities and examines some of the reasons for the distinctly different views by drawing on both quantitative data and the qualitative comment sections.

THE ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TOMORROW'S SCHOOLS REFORMS BY SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

This section examines some of the major impacts of the Tomorrow's School reforms on the schools surveyed as perceived by the various school community groups. Four themes are explored.

a. Communication and Consultation

The increase in the levels of consultation involved in setting up boards of trustees and the writing of charters and policies could be expected to have resulted in schools and communities communicating more frequently and more effectively than in the past. Improved communication and the greater expectation of parent and community input into schools may also have resulted in increased parent contact with the school and involvement in school activities. The principal, teachers, and trustees could be expected to work together as well as with the community.

The survey revealed that indeed communication and the school-community partnership is considered to have improved. This is recognised to some extent by all groups, especially principals and trustees who were at the centre of the changes. Parents and students, on the other hand, were less convinced that actual improvements had occurred. All the school-based groups - principals, teachers, and trustees - noted increases in the level of communication from the school towards parents. Collectively, 11% considered that the increase was "significant", and just over half noted an "increase". Seventy percent of the principals and trustees felt there had been a growth in school and parent communication. Sixty-one percent of the parent sample had children at the school before 1989, and 29% of the parent sample were comparing different schools when they responded to this question. With this in mind, parents perceived the change differently. While about 30% noted an increase, over 60% felt there had been no change, or that communication had decreased. Clearly, there is a disparity in perception.

The communication of parents towards the school shows some increase since Tomorrow's Schools was introduced, but much less than the level of school-toward-parent communication. Again, the school groups perceived greater increases than the parents, with around 40% of the principals, teachers, and trustees seeing increases in this area. Between 55% and 65%, however, saw no change. Many parents saw no change (more than 75%), or a decrease (5%) and only 15% considered that their level of communication toward the school had increased.

A further element in the improved communication, as perceived by some groups, can be seen in the opinion that the "full" school community is better represented in the affairs of the school. The staff and student representation on the boards of trustees is generally seen as a success, particularly the former.

One of the goals of the charter writing process was that schools would carry out consultation with their community before the charter was finalised. Presumably it was expected that consultation would become an ongoing part of the relationship between principals, trustees and a school's community. Consultation is also considered to have been an area where there had been a discernible change by a substantial majority of all groups surveyed. Most groups considered that there had been significant

change in consultation and 90% of trustees and principals rated it by responding that change had occurred. Many teachers, parents and students also recorded change, although 30% said "there had been no change.

The greater community consultation and improved communication was seen as a gain by some parents, as illustrated in the following comments:

Obviously there is far more parent consultation. It seems the parents are much more welcome and listened to now.

It has tried to cater for all children's needs and choice of subjects. It's made teachers more approachable. There is more explanation of the school's direction, activities and hopes, and much more communication to parents through more newsletters.

The educational reforms have let students, parents, and teachers have a say in how the school should be run. The school has become more socially aware of its citizens and their needs. It is definitely a step in the right direction. (student)

Other parents saw the idea of better communications as desirable, but viewed the reality as different from the hoped-for changes:

I think the idea of the community having a say in the way schools are run is a good one. Unfortunately, our school doesn't seem to have any lines to actually communicate our ideas to the Board. I personally would prefer to have more say.

Although overall consultation between teachers and the school was seen in a positive light, some teachers commented that the consultation process added an extra burden to their workload:

We have endless committees and meeting with parents. Apart from staff meetings, I attend at least two meetings a week and at least three meetings a term with parents. Although they are a good idea it is quite stressful on top of other» extra curricula activities.

I believe there has been a great demand on middle management and senior administrators to work long hours consulting with boards of trustees and parents' associations.

b. Maori Issues

A second area that was perceived to have undergone considerable change was that of Māori issues. Māori people had been widely and frequently consulted. The number of Māori programmes had increased (see next section) , and Māori have been co-opted onto boards in significant numbers.

Māori issues are now more directly addressed through charter and policy procedures. The Treaty of Waitangi and bicultural areas were seen as moderately important areas of change. (see discussion below) Further when the Māori respondents to the survey were looked at separately, the degree of change noted was considerably higher than for survey respondents as a whole. Māori people, it would seem, consider that the reform process has encouraged significant change in areas of Māori concern. The impacts noted in this area are reported below.

Treaty of Waitangi

Through compulsory sections in the charter framework, schools were required to acknowledge and consider the implications of the Treaty in the life of the school. About 50% to 60% of the principals, trustees and teachers felt there had been noticeable changes in this area. However, only 30% of the students and parents agreed. On the other hand, 45% of Māori parents reported that there had been change. Similarly, 71% of Māori teachers noted change.

Biculturalism

Over half of the trustees (52%) and Nearly half of the principals (45%) and teachers (43%) saw change in the area of biculturalism, although the proportion is lower than those in the area of the Treaty of Waitangi

(around 40-50%). About half of the students and about 30% of the parents also noted change in biculturalism. As with the Treaty, Māori parents and teachers were more positive about the degree of change than the full sample, with changes in biculturalism noted by 51% of Māori parents and 76% of Māori teachers.

Equity

Half of the principals and a similar ratio of trustees thought that change in equity had been noticeable, and just under half of the teachers concurred with this view. Students, however, saw less change with half stating no change and 40% acknowledging some changes. Interestingly, there was a similarity in the student responses and those of the teachers, 46% of the latter perceiving that changes had occurred. Parents once again saw little change, with only 25% registering perceived change. However, when the Māori and Pacific Island parents are considered separately, the views on change are somewhat more positive. Just under half of Māori parents (46%) and Pacific Island parents (44%) said that change had occurred.

c. School programmes and curriculum

Māori Programmes

One of the thrusts of the reform programme was to give more emphasis to Māori education. Charters required schools to consider Treaty of Waitangi obligations and the emphasis on equity could be seen to provide an impetus

for new developments in this area. It was also anticipated that the greater effort to consult and involve the local community, including the Māori community, and the provision of special tagged funding for Māori students would result in significant developments in Māori programmes. Initiatives in this area, however, are not new. There has been concern about the educational provisions for Māori students for many years. Prior to 1989 there were already programmes in place in many schools to assist Māori students. Therefore, principals were asked to identify when such programmes had been instituted. Most schools (89%) already had special Māori programmes. Over three quarters of the schools already had Māori culture groups prior to Tomorrow's Schools and had used outside resource people for some time. However, a further 20% of the schools had instituted programmes using Māori resource persons since October, 1989. There also appears to have been relatively strong developments in the use of extra teacher aide time, and in immersion and bilingual classes in some schools.

All schools had received equity funding and most schools received Māori language funding. Programmes that include some aspects of taha Māori (a Māori dimension) in the school life of all students, Māori or otherwise, have also been given priority in education for some years. Again, most of the schools (84%) had such programmes. While it can be argued that the charter framework and greater community involvement provided an impetus to initiate these programmes, many schools (59%) already had programmes before October, 1989 and only 13% of the schools had instituted new programmes since the introduction of the reforms.

Other Special Programmes

Concerns for equity and the greater emphasis on community input could also be seen as encouraging the introduction of special programmes for students on the grounds of their special education needs and/or their ethnic background. Once again, considerable change had already occurred before the Tomorrow's Schools reforms, so questions in this area asked for the pre and post October, 1989 situation to be declared. Many schools had special programmes prior to the changes in October, 1989. For example, 82% had mainstreaming (inclusion) programmes, 74% had gifted student programmes, and 51% had programmes for different ethnic groups.

Notwithstanding the number of special programmes already in place prior to the reforms, there have also been considerable developments in other

special programmes since October, 1989. The growth in mainstreaming programmes (22% of schools had developed new programmes post-October, 89) and in programmes for gifted students (20% of schools had new programmes), was particularly strong.

The "General" Curriculum

The programmes and curricula items discussed so far can be viewed as

“fringe” or “extras”. When respondents were asked to indicate the degree of change in the wider school curriculum the picture that emerged from the survey was much less focused. Only one in three of the principals (31%) considered that any change to curriculum had occurred, while 59% said they considered there had been no change. However, about half of the trustee, teacher and student respondents considered there had been change. In 1992 there was an increase to 66% in the teacher and principal groups. Parents were evenly divided, with one-third (30%) reporting they had noticed changes, one-third (35%) feeling that nothing had changed, and the remainder (34%) not responding.

The impact of curriculum discussion related to the initiatives of the present Minister may be one reason for this rise. However, most teachers in the survey (75%) considered there had been no change in what they taught and the way they taught (66% in 1992). However, about half of the Principals felt there had been a “slight” change in teaching methods. Questions relating to charter and policies indicated that two thirds of principals and teachers considered that their charter had not had an effect on classroom teaching whereas about 30% felt there had been a positive effect. A very large proportion of teachers and principals (around 80% in both cases) reported changes in assessment and reporting practices. Again, in both groups about 30% of respondents felt the change was marked. This may, though, reflect developments in achievement-based assessment and school leaver documentation independent of the Tomorrow’s Schools reforms.

Many teachers considered that curriculum support was less than it had been prior to 1989. The reforms transferred most of the resources for teacher in service training to school boards. Nearly half of the teachers felt in-service training had decreased, in both the 1991 and 1992 surveys. A large body of teachers (43%) also said senior administration staff spent less time with teaching staff. A number of teacher comments showed concern about what they saw as a reduction in support agencies.

The back up resources and curriculum development have disappeared.

There is a huge gap left by the disappearance of the inspectorate and curriculum development. We are in a vacuum when seeking discussion and advice on curriculum matters.

d. Workloads

Over the last few years, there has been considerable media comment about the increased workloads of secondary principals as a result of the Tomorrow’s Schools changes, a trend confirmed in this survey. Most principals (84%) reported “significant increases” in their overall workload. No principals reported a decrease in workload, nor did any consider their workload unchanged. Over half (59%) reported a significant increase in their stress level, while a further 30% said that stress had increased. High hours of work were also reported, with most principals (79%) working between 51 and 70 hours per week. One in five (18%) of the

principals noted that they worked more than 71 hours per week .

Teachers' workloads were also perceived to have increased by both principals and the teachers themselves. Over 80% of both teachers and principals considered that teachers' workloads had increased or increased significantly . Stress levels of teachers were also considered to have increased or increased significantly by over 80% of the teachers and principals . Teachers' hours of work were estimated at 40 to 50 hours per

week by 40% of the teachers, with another 38% reporting 50 to 60 hours per week.

It should be noted that the survey did not examine specifically why workloads had increased. There is reason to believe that some of the increase in workload for teachers is related to curriculum and assessment developments not directly related to the Tomorrow's Schools reforms to do with the administration of schools. Never-the-less comments from all groups indicated that the Tomorrow's Schools changes were perceived to be a significant factor in increased stress and workload for principals and teachers

Some parent comments to this effect were:

I do not feel there has been any change where my daughter has been concerned, but do feel it has put a lot more pressure on the staff, e.g., teachers and headmaster. It has meant more work for them and, even though school staff seem to be coping at the moment in time, I think the extra work will take its toll and the school will probably suffer, which will gradually affect the children.

I have found reports late and leaving certificates late because the teachers have so much to do other than teaching. The office staff seem to not be up to date with work as there seems too much to do.

The changes have created far more work for all staff, but particularly senior staff. Staff are uncertain over contracts, bulk funding for salaries, and the 'paper war'. Expensive reports and money is being spent on these rather than directly benefiting students. One existing top heavy system has been replaced by another. Principals now spend increasing time on administration and not enough on the professional development of staff.

Teachers made frequent comments on their increased workload, for example:
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The main problem is that everyone is a lot busier (and tired), having to run and budget on all areas and be accountable individually rather than through a central system. There are lots more meetings to review and

rewrite programmes, policies etc.. It all takes time during lunch or after school and you still have to teach, prepare work and take sports' practices.

Paperwork with no direct value in the classroom occupies 2-3 times as much as before. The administration area of the school has more than doubled in personnel and resources at the expense of the teaching area.

Some students also noted increases in teacher workloads:

It hasn't made much difference

e. An overall judgment of the reforms.

The first section of the paper reviewed the impact on schools of four aspects of the recent reforms. There has been observable gains in the area of communication and consultation. There have also been some reported gains in the area of Maori issues and in mainstreaming and gifted student programmes. On the other hand, very little impact has as yet been noted in classroom programmes across most curriculum areas. Further, the cost of increased consultation, charter and policy writing and greater accountability appears to have been high workloads and stress levels for senior teachers, in particular as well as the teaching force as a whole. What conclusions, then, do the school communities draw about the overall value of the reforms?

The final question in the survey asked all respondents to give their perception of the quality of the New Zealand education system after the Tomorrow's Schools reforms, compared with the way it was before the reforms. There were strong and clear differences between the opinions of principals and trustees compared with the other groups. Perhaps because these two groups had the most "creative" role in the writing of charters and policies and in utilising the greater administrative initiative involved in the "new" environment, they were fairly positive with 40% and 50%, respectively, rating the system as better or much better. This had risen to 60% in the latest round of data collected in 1992. Fewer than a quarter rated it as worse or much worse. The teachers, however, were more negative, with nearly half rating the system as worse or much worse and this pattern remained the same in 1992. There were also relatively few parents and students who saw improvements in the system, with only 20% of

the parents and 30% of the students giving positive ratings. About 40% of these two groups saw no change and about 30% thought the system was worse.

We have, then, two groups (principles and trustees) evaluating the reforms much more positively. than teachers who are quite negative in their judgments. Parents and students were relatively neutral in their assessment and they believed that little had changed. Some of the reasons for these

clear differences are discussed in the next section of the paper.

#### SOME REASONS FOR THE RELATIVELY POSITIVE PRINCIPAL AND TRUSTEE VIEWS

The final open-ended question was particularly helpful in providing an insight to the reasons why the various groups concluded as they did. Principals were, it would seem, able to see the "gain beyond the pain" (while at the same time acknowledging difficulties).

~√The principals had a number of concerns. They considered that there had been a large increase in workload, especially for senior staff and Trustees, for little real gain in the classroom; and that too much time, money, and resources had been spent on administration at the expense of pupils' education. The increased time spent on administration was often considered to have been at the expense of principals and senior staff providing professional leadership and working on improving the educational experiences of pupils in the classroom.

These reforms have taken senior staff away from the instructional leadership and involved us in more administration, especially budgeting and financial management and reporting. Much more time is spent on explaining school policy and practice to the Board (often in writing). Instructional improvement has taken a subordinate position to administrative efficiency. The school is therefore doing less well by its students.

Other negative comments related to a fear that the real agenda behind the reforms was to cut education funds. Many wrote negatively about bulk funding possibilities. There were also concerns that schools were subjected to too many changes in the 1989-1991 period.

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On the positive side, comments were made by principals about new opportunities were under the new system. The greater flexibility and opportunities to make local decisions was appreciated and seen as very beneficial by many principals. Some principals felt there was now a clearer focus to the school because Tomorrow's Schools had provided a tool for examining the aims and objectives of the school more closely. The greater consultation and community awareness and involvement was mentioned positively by some principals, as was the view that the school was now seen to be more accountable.

~%Trustees mentioned similar concerns and benefits to those expressed by the principals. On balance, most trustees also considered that the improvements outweighed the costs, as reflected in the following responses:

Our secondary school has coped very well with the extra demands made by Tomorrow's Schools. The administration workload has been much heavier. As chair of the Works Committee, I have found contact with Ministry of Education frustrating - when one can get hold of anyone. Deferred maintenance is particularly frustrating and still not resolved. Parents

and the public have plenty of opportunities to attend meetings, but very few do. An insufficient grant has meant overall maintenance has been cut to a minimum. However, all these negative niggles are outweighed by being forced to focus on the college and the future which has had a positive effect. There is more co-operation now.

As with any new system there are numerous teething troubles and we have suffered, endured and survived the lot. The positive effects of the

reforms have been to allow us to make decisions, make changes, appoint our own staff and make our mistakes that we have to fix up. The less desirable effects have been the massive input necessary by a few to collate the paperwork and try to interpret it for our school community. Costs and workload are massive. Training and assistance for the managers are very poor. Government has not kept pace with the grassroots.

Thus most principals and trustees reported some positive gains from the reforms, while also pointing to the problems, pain and disruption that have accompanied them. They have been closest to the changes because of their leadership responsibilities. They have borne the brunt of the changes. However, because they have also been the main decision makers at the school level they were more likely to feel some ownership of the changes. Principals in particular, have been in a position where positive system changes may be more "visible" than they have been to teachers, parents and students. The beneficial aspects of the changes for them outweigh the disruption, hard work, "hiccups" and problems.

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#### REASONS FOR THE NEGATIVITY OF TEACHERS

As a group, teachers were far more negative about the Administrative changes than were principals and trustees. Fewer than 20% of the teachers noted an improvement, although they did make some positive comments.

There is greater independence in budget and spending.

Awareness in areas like equity, etc., has been raised.

Increased consultation a good thing.

However, nearly 50% of teachers considered the education system to be worse or much worse as a result of the reforms.

They were, of course, somewhat further removed from the decision-making during the early period of change. In part, their negative reactions may be because they had no feeling of "owning" the changes in the way principals and trustees had. They seemed to feel they were having to work a lot harder to make the system work on behalf of others, and that they are being placed under additional stress. They revealed perceptions that their classroom teaching was not getting enough attention and was suffering. It

is possible that these reactions are to be expected in a phase of fairly rapid change, especially when preoccupied principals could not be expected to find time to bolster staff morale and involvement.

Teachers also reported increased workloads. The considerable workload associated with consulting communities, writing charters and policies, and developing financial accountability has been very difficult for many principals and other senior and middle management staff. They seem to have been diverted from many of their professional and curriculum leadership duties to take administrative duties associated with the reforms. Less support was available for "rank and file" staff. Similarly, the greater consultation, charter and policy development and financial accountability has, it seems, increased the administrative workload of teachers. These factors appear to have put many teachers under pressure and they felt classroom input was being effected. Concerns about these issues were raised by some school staff, parents and students in their responses, adding verification to the view that generally school administration has taken more staff time.

The teacher comments reflected considerable concern that the support systems of education are worse as a result of the reforms. The new agencies were poorly understood and, where they were known, were often poorly regarded. They were often regarded as dithering, confused and of little help to schools. The abolition of subject inspectors and the lack of effective support from advisors or curriculum support staff who used to be available were seen as serious losses by some teachers.

The teacher comments below sum up teacher feeling.

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ew words don't mean change. What I see happening in classrooms before and after is the same. All that has happened is a group of administrators have been working hard writing charters etc., which has increased awareness of those involved but done little for the people at the chalkface not involved.

The reforms have taken immense time but have not produced effective (or any change really) in fundamental areas (the classroom practice). What we teach and how we teach it - that have received little attention. More attention is being paid to appearances e.g. having (literally!) hundreds of 'policies' written for ERO visit. And, of course, the actual practice can differ from what is written down as official 'policy'!

#### REASONS FOR THE AMBIVALENCE OF PARENTS AND STUDENTS

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Parents and students, by and large, did not have such strong positive or

negative views as the other groups. They seemed to think that little had changed. Just over 40% of parents and just under 40% of students said there was no change in the quality of education. They did, though, note the financial stresses and the high workloads of staff and school managers. To a lesser extent, they saw some of the same gains noted by principals and trustees. Parents and students seemed to be aware of greater communication and involvement opportunities. It can be speculated that because most parents and students were not closely involved in the changes, such as charter writing and policy development, nor their implementation, their estimations of the extent of change were less than those of principals, trustees and teachers.

Parents, on the whole, believed that the greater autonomy was good but they were concerned that it could lead to competition and contrasts between rich and poor communities. Comments which reinforced the predominant view of parents that children's education had not changed included:

I have not noticed any difference in effect on our children at school.

I have not noticed any change at all. We had another child at the school during 1984-1987. There seems to be no apparent change.

It has made very little difference to the child's education. But being involved in our primary school's BOT has certainly increased the principal's workload and administration load. But this hasn't improved the system in my view. Actual teaching has been little changed.

Students, similarly, saw both positive and negative outcomes, but on balance felt there had been little real change.

Having a Board of Trustees rather than an education board has meant that finances are not so available; however, it does mean that students have more of a say in the running of the school, which is good.

Very little has changed. There is a slight improvement in communication between students and the Board - for example a referendum on cycle helmets or the student representative applying for drinking taps. In regards to social issues, nothing has changed. However, I feel nothing needs to be changed here. The quality of education has not differed, however, there is notable pressure on finances and class sizes are still too large.

As far as I can see, no changes (relevant) have been made to anything, which I find quite surprising due to the big lead up (media-wise) prior to Tomorrow's Schools .

Educational reforms have not really affected our school in any way. Parents have always had a say about anything concerning school, and students have always shared ideas with teachers - teachers then pass ideas to the principal. So there has been no major change.

Educational reforms haven't changed the way my schooling is at all, except for the fact that no-one has anything positive to say about it.

#### CHANGES NOTED IN THE SECOND SURVEY

The second survey report was not complete at the time writing but much of the analysis has been completed. It appears that surprisingly little has changed 12 months later. Similar perceived gains and costs have been reported. There was little evidence of a slow down or settle down. Workloads are still considered to be growing and the pace of change too fast. Further change in prospect ( such as bulk funding) was continuing to fuel apprehension of further increases in workload for administrators, and further funding problems for schools.

There are some indications of on-going changes in some school practices. Although some of these may be linked to schools' responses to a perception of greater community expectations flowing from Tomorrow's Schools, some may be also be attributable to other developments in curriculum and assessment unrelated to Tomorrow's Schools.

Similar views on the overall value of the changes have come through in the 1992 survey. Principals were slightly more optimistic than in 1991, trustees about the same. Teachers continued to be strongly negative and parents and students by and large still thought little had changed as far as they could see.

#### REFERENCE

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