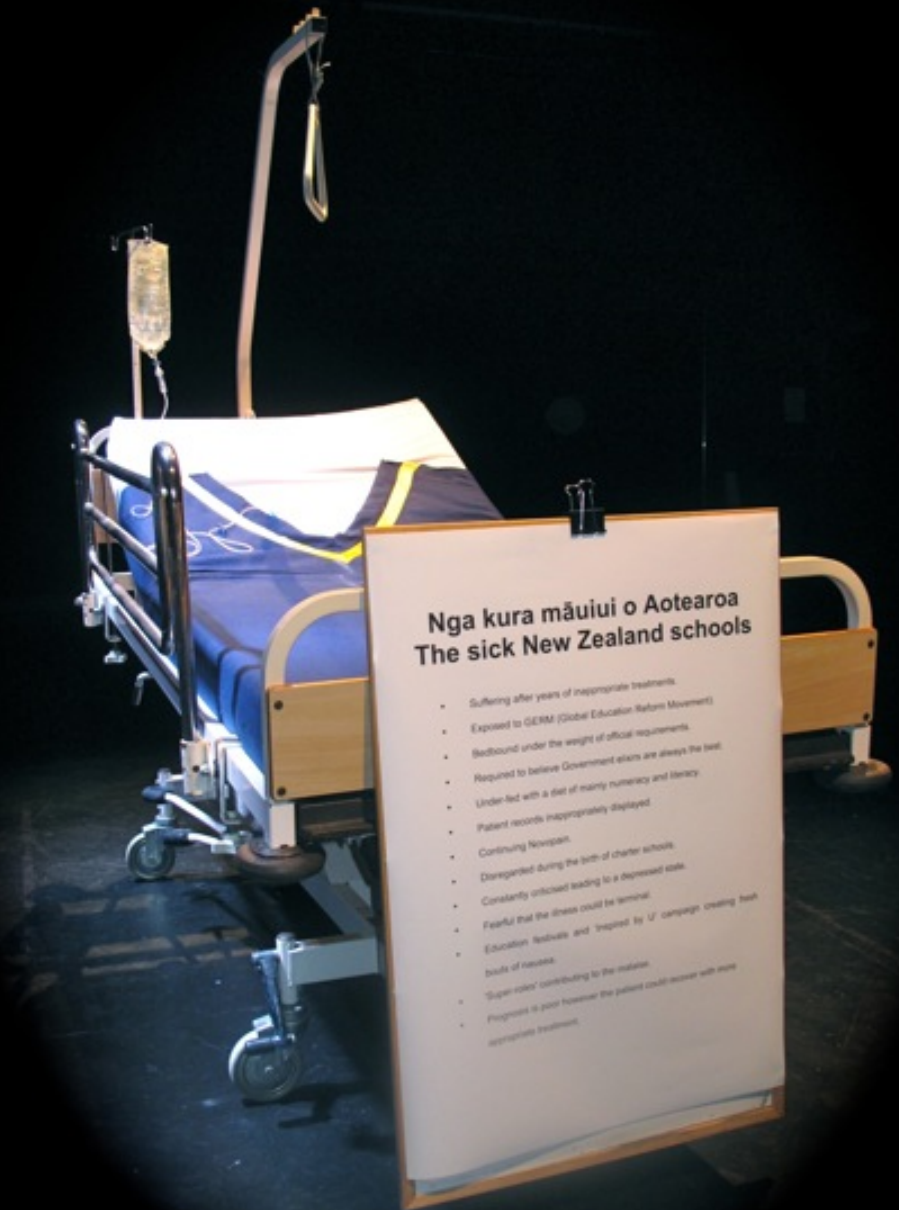


**Ngā kura māuiui o Aotearoa**

**The sick New Zealand schools**

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## Why this installation and why at this time?

This year the Key Government has become unusually upbeat about schools. 'Festivals of Education' are celebrating 'innovations, collaborations and achievements' within the sector. An 'Inspired by U' campaign has been encouraging New Zealanders to write in praise of teachers who have influenced their lives. In January, \$359 million of new funding for principal and teacher 'super-roles' was announced, the so-called 'Investing in Educational Success' policy.

This enthusiasm by the Government comes after five years of being critical of schools and teachers and applying often-damaging policies. It also comes in election year and just in advance of an 'International Summit on the Teaching Profession' where education ministers, heads of teacher unions and teacher leaders from the OECD are gathering in Wellington. New Zealand's Education Minister, Hekia Parata, has claimed it is a credit to the quality of our education system that this event is being held in New Zealand.

In these circumstances (i.e., in case anyone should get a false impression!), our installation highlights how the Key Government's education policies are creating a grave situation for the New Zealand school system. We have looked for suitable imagery to represent schools being harmed by policy but also imagery which implies that with a different approach, the plight of schools could be relieved. The chosen analogy is of New Zealand schools as a hospital patient suffering after years of bad treatment: 'Ngā kura māuiui o Aotearoa / The sick New Zealand schools'.



## Nga kura māuiui o Aotearoa The sick New Zealand schools

- Suffering after years of inappropriate treatments.
- Exposed to GERM (Global Education Reform Movement).
- Bedbound under the weight of official requirements.
- Required to believe Government elixirs are always the best.
- Under-fed with a diet of mainly numeracy and literacy.
- Patient records inappropriately displayed.
- Continuing Novopain.
- Disregarded during the birth of charter schools.
- Constantly criticised leading to a depressed state.
- Fearful that the illness could be terminal.
- Education festivals and 'Inspired by U' campaign creating fresh bouts of nausea.
- 'Super-roles' contributing to the malaise.
- Prognosis is poor however the patient could recover with more appropriate treatment.

Suffering after years of inappropriate treatments. Such treatments include having had to put in place the National Standards with their damaging positioning of struggling learners and intensification of staff workloads; loss of professional development quality and opportunities as the work of school advisors has been contracted out and narrowed, the distraction of the (failed) attempt to increase class sizes, disproportionate funding increases for socially-exclusive private schools; integration of some socially-exclusive private schools into the state system so they get government support and can still charge large 'donations', allowing wealthy businesspeople to shape the direction of education policy (philanthrocapitalism), and the Christchurch school mergers and closures. There are lots of other problems too and more are discussed in the following slides.

Exposed to GERM (Global Education Reform Movement). This is about a business model being imposed on New Zealand schools through managerialism, market competition and privatisation. Privatisation of education comes in many forms, both obvious and hidden, including contracting out, PPPs, charter schools and additional support for private schools. It leads to schooling being regarded as a commodity rather than something done for the benefit of each child and for the common good.



Bedbound under the weight of official requirements. Managerial accountabilities have brought a huge growth of reporting for teachers, principals and Boards of Trustees. Much of this is a waste of precious time that could be better used working with and for children and young people.

Required to believe Government elixirs are always the best. There is lack of consultation with those in schools, or consultation only on the detail of policy. Government appointees are taking over from sector or elected representatives and there is the dismissal of research that doesn't fit with the Government's objectives.

In 2009 Deputy Prime Minister Bill English said in the House: 'This Government has the capacity to make its own distinctions between good advice and bad advice. Advice we disagree with is bad advice; advice we agree with is good advice'. We thought he was joking.

Under-fed with a diet of mainly numeracy and literacy. Many elements of the New Zealand Curriculum are being lost as teachers seek to boost National Standards results in numeracy and literacy. New Zealand schools were already very focused on these areas before the National Standards: now they are often over-emphasising them. The same will probably become true of the effects of Ngā Whanaketanga in Māori-medium schools with the public release of their data.

Patient records inappropriately displayed. The 2012 decision to scan National Standards data on to a Government website regardless of format or quality was disgraceful. In that year special schools for children and young people with severe special needs ended up being publicly labelled as 100% 'well below'. While the Government has taken steps to to 'fix' that problem, the wider issues of the quality of the National Standards data and of releasing raw data for each school that cannot illustrate progress have not been addressed. Meanwhile the 'Public Achievement Information (PAI) Pipeline' will continue to spew out endless misleading infographics.

At secondary level, raw NCEA data has also been publicly released for many years. As a nation we have become used to this, but it doesn't make it acceptable.

Continuing Novopain. What does the ongoing Novopay debacle say about valuing teachers and other school staff?

Disregarded during the birth of charter schools. Charter ('Partnership') schools will undermine state and integrated schools schools. Charter schools in some ways depend on the state school system but policy also provides charter schools with unfair advantages.

Constantly criticised leading to a depressed state. Until just recently the Government rarely had anything positive to say about most schools and teachers. The publication of raw achievement data and the setting of arbitrary targets by Government has opened up new opportunities for unfair criticism of schools and teachers from politicians, business leaders and other commentators.

Fearful that the illness could be terminal. The 'reorganisation' of Christchurch schools has resulted in the highly contested closure of schools in that city. It has also raised concerns that schools in other parts of the country will be deemed 'surplus to requirements' even if they are important to local communities.



Education festivals and 'Inspired by U' campaign creating fresh bouts of nausea. Recent praise and support from Government is too little, too late. It is hard to take seriously when Government has been failing to listen to those in schools.

'Super-roles' contributing to the malaise. Teachers and principals are justifiably suspicious of the 'Investing in Educational Success' proposals announced in January 2014. The training that those in the new roles will receive, the accountabilities they will have, and the extra pay they will get, could provide powerful means of taking greater control over schools to force compliance with damaging policies. This reform also seems to be only part of wider changes to the governance and leadership of schools that are currently underway. There are many more obvious problems as well, such as staff being taken out of school communities that actually require their full-time commitment.

Prognosis is poor however the patient could recover with more appropriate treatment. Careful concern for children and young people and those who teach them needs to be put at the heart of New Zealand education policy. This means policy that genuinely recognises and responds to the diverse contexts within which schools are located and the kinds of children and young people they serve. It also means better professional development for teachers and the appreciation that teachers work within highly collaborative professional cultures and genuinely want to improve their practice.

Education policy also needs to recognise that when teachers are put under the wrong pressures, their teaching becomes less authentic. New Zealand as a small nation is usually a 'borrower' rather than a 'lender' of education policy. In this situation we need to be taking seriously the extensive research critiques of the policies we are adapting from overseas. Otherwise we are doomed to become just another variant of the educational nightmares to be found in the OECD countries we tend to borrow from.

If overseas visitors attending the 'International Summit' want to admire the New Zealand school system, they should be appreciating the longstanding strengths that are holding it together, rather than the impact of the Key Government's policies.



### Nga kura māiui o Aotearoa The sick New Zealand schools

- Suffering after years of inappropriate treatments
- Exposed to GEMM (Global Education Perform Movement)
- Bedbound under the weight of official requirements
- Required to believe Government advice was always the best
- Under fed with a diet of mainly economy and history
- Patient records inappropriately displayed
- Continuing Neoliberalism
- Disregarded during the birth of charter schools
- Complicity involved leading to a depressed state
- Fearful that the dress could be torn
- Education leaders and inspired by 'U' (University) leaving their seats of honour
- 'Super hero' contributing to the problem
- Progress is slow however the patient must remain with more appropriate treatment

## Acknowledgements

The 'Ngā kura māuiui' bed was obtained through a donation to a children's charity. It was originally used in Tauranga Hospital. Yvonne sewed the 'school jersey' beautifully before Donn made it look more lived in. We thank the Save our Schools (New Zealand) website for hosting images and information about our installation.