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Ministry of Education
Wellington

To whom it may concern,

SUBMISSION ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO ENROLMENT SCHEMES

1. Thank you for the opportunity to submit on this very important issue. I am writing a separate submission, rather than using the provided form, because the provided form provided me with insufficient flexibility.
2. I am a recent old boy of Auckland Grammar School and was, from 2018-2019, the student representative on the school's Board of Trustees. I attended the school as an out-of-zone student without a family connection on a partial boarding scholarship. I have based much of my submission on my experiences at Auckland Grammar, but I believe my arguments apply more broadly.
3. I am currently reading for a degree in economics at Yale-NUS College in Singapore and previously worked for the Parliamentary Service in New Zealand. I have worked on education policy in both capacities. Despite these interests, I write in a personal capacity.
4. It has been my long-standing position that enrolment schemes at state schools are fundamentally unfair. By restricting enrolment at in-demand schools to certain geographies, school zones enrich landowners and entrench inequality. They also protect school monopolies and prevent parents from choosing the school which is best for their children.
5. However, far from mitigating these inherent inequalities, the Ministry's proposals will exacerbate them and undermine the strong communities which many of New Zealand's great state schools have created over decades and, in some cases, for more than a century. If New Zealand is to continue to allocate scarce state school spaces through enrolment schemes, alumni preferences must be maintained.

6. In this submission, I will focus on the Ministry's proposal to remove preferences for the children of alumni from enrolment schemes. I suggest three major problems with this proposal:
 - 6.1. It will weaken non-geographic school communities, undermining school culture and traditions;
 - 6.2. It will weaken schools' ability to raise funds and find volunteers, undermining the quality of state education; and,
 - 6.3. It will entrench geographic zones even further, undermining equity and making any attempt at increasing access to in-demand state schools more difficult.

The Impact on School Traditions and Culture

7. A number of New Zealand state schools have multi-generational traditions, which create deep connections between families and the schools they have attended.
8. Such connections may have emerged simply by chance – for instance, because a boy's grandfather happened to live in Mt Eden and Auckland Grammar was the closest school to his family home – but they are maintained by choice. Families value the way in which attending the same school creates commonalities between generations which have little else in common. Furthermore, previous generations may value the ethos of the schools they attended and wish to pass those values on. It is not unlike a family's connection to a particular church in that respect. Just as one might wish to be married at the same church as one's parents, one might wish to study at the same high school as one's father.
9. I saw these connections every day while attending Auckland Grammar. Boys would point out with pride their grandfather on one of the honours' boards which surround the Hall. They would relay scandalous stories from their father's days at the school and we would find the scars from those escapades left on some unseen corner of a heritage building. Even personally, I took great pride in showing my younger cousin around the school which he would soon attend, pointing out my own name engraved on an honours' board and carved into a century-old desk. Even in Singapore, I come across old boys whose sons I went to Grammar with. These connections create a sense of community which spans not just class, race, and religion, but also time.
10. The feeling of belonging to such a community is a powerful motivator. It creates a sense of camaraderie and pride which is difficult to emulate in organisations bereft of culture and heritage. This pride doesn't just motivate commitment to school while students attend, but it also motivates commitment far beyond the school gates.
11. Multigenerational traditions cannot survive without multiple generations. Though official histories can tell the stories of certain school buildings over the ages, only actual personal stories will give life to those stories and those traditions for the current generation of students. Those personal stories can only come if people connected with

the school's past – i.e., the children of alumni – continue to attend it. Reducing those children's access to their parents' schools will slowly undermine these communities and the commitment and camaraderie which come with them.

12. That doesn't just harm those whose parents attending the school. It also harms the other members of the school community. I, for instance, did not have a family connection to Auckland Grammar before attending. I still gained from institutional knowledge created by those who did.

The Impact on Fundraising and Volunteering

13. In a more concrete sense, however, removing preferences for the children of alumni will also undermine the ability of these schools to fundraise and find volunteers and provide the same standards of education.
14. Alumni naturally drift away from their *alma mater* as they age. Many head overseas for their OEs, others move to other parts of the country or the city. Their memories of their time at school naturally fade.
15. For many, the moment that they reengage with their old school is when they are choosing where to send their own offspring. If it becomes harder for them to send their children to their *alma mater*, those reengagements will happen less often.
16. When they reengage with their alma mater, they are reminded of their own schooldays and, for some, perhaps the moral and financial obligations they owe to their old school. That might make them more likely to donate money to their school or to volunteer to help it.
17. These moral and financial obligations are much stronger for parents who owe both their own and their children's educations to one school. Transferring the children of these alumni to other state schools will not result in those alumni contributing what they would have contributed to their own *alma mater* to the substitute school. They simply will not feel so attached or indebted to that second school.
18. Thus, this is a positive-sum game. Increasing the attachment of alumni to their previous schools does not impoverish other state schools. Rather, it encourages additional investment in the state school system overall, benefiting not just the children of these alumni, but also every other student at these schools, who benefit equally from these raised funds or volunteered labour.
19. To see an example of this phenomenon in action, consider the Auckland Grammar Board. While I was a student representative, most of my fellow trustees were both parents of students at the school and alumni. This extended even to those who were appointed as representatives of the Old Boys' Association. Their own children attending the school was the catalyst for them to reengage and to provide significant value to the school community. Their alumni status gave them an extra impetus to contribute – had

their children attended an alternative school where they were not alumni, the incentive to contribute would have significantly weaker and the alternative state school might not have received the benefit of their services.

20. The Ministry, were it to sever this important tie between some parents and the schools of the children, would significantly reduce the investment in the state school sector at large.
21. Some might suggest that schools with prosperous alumni networks already have significant advantages and therefore the benefits to them should not be considered. That is dreadful analysis for two reasons:
 - 21.1. It is simply based on envy. As I already noted, this is a positive-sum game – no other school is deprived by these schools receiving extra benefits. These contributions cannot be redistributed if the children of alumni attend other schools and the spaces which would have been taken are filled at random.
 - 21.2. Increasing alumni contributions to schools which are lucky enough to have strong alumni networks frees up Ministry resources to support other schools without such networks. In essence, it creates free additional money in Vote Education for the Ministry to allocate however they like.

The Impact on the Political Economy of School Zoning

22. Our supposedly free state education system is far from it. Access to the most in-demand schools is rationed by one's ability to pay. Analysis from the Chief Economist at Auckland Council suggests that being within the Double-Grammar Zone can increase the value of a property by more than \$100,000. That provides a significant monetary incentive for incumbents within that zone to maintain the existing restrictions on enrolment into Auckland Grammar and Epsom Girls' Grammar. The same story, but perhaps with less money at stake, plays out across the country.
23. The preference for alumni children helps to prevent this situation from becoming even more regressive.
24. As discussed above, alumni value sending their children to their old school. If the preference was removed, those alumni would then be required to enter into the bidding war to access property within the zone. That would drive the marginal value of being within the zone to equal not just the additional value any parent would see from their children going to these in-demand schools, but to the higher valuation which nostalgic alumni parents would put on sending their children to such schools.
25. That would result in an even higher premium being required to send children to these in-demand schools. Not only is that a more regressive outcome, it is also one which makes it significantly harder to increase access to these schools in the future, because the property right of access to these schools would become even more valuable. Thus,

the incentive to protect this property right by limiting access to in-demand schools would be even stronger.

Conclusion

26. New Zealand's state education system has many flaws. However, the achievement of the top schools within it is unquestionable. Our best state schools are the equals of our best independent schools. Few other countries can say that.
27. Much of the reason for this out-performance of some state schools is because of the commitment of their alumni to their old school. We cannot redistribute that commitment. Weakening the commitment, by removing alumni preferences, will only weaken those schools. It does nothing to strengthen underperformance elsewhere in the system and it does nothing to increase access to these schools.
28. If the Ministry wishes to increase access to in-demand schools, it should do so by funding their expansion. Simply reshuffling the deck of who gets into them will make them all worse off.
29. I hope the Ministry will choose to maintain the status quo. I would be most willing to providing any additional information or testimony that the Ministry would find helpful. Please contact me if I can be of assistance.

Kind regards,

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