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BEYOND THE BALLOT BOX

12 Challenges the next government cannot ignore

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***Disclaimer**: the content of this paper represents my own thinking drawn from personal research and conversations with people from across New Zealand and internationally. Feel free to contact me with any questions or comments - derek@futuremakers.nz*

Introduction

Aotearoa New Zealand's education system is at a defining moment. There is understandable urgency around lifting achievement, strengthening foundational learning and ensuring that young people leave school with the knowledge and qualifications they need. Alongside it sit deeper questions such as what education is for, what conditions allow learning to flourish, and whether the system we are building is fit for the world our young people will inherit.

Drawing on what is happening across the sector, and on the blog posts and thought pieces I have published in recent months, I have identified twelve major issues and challenges. Some are immediate operational pressures; others are longer-term strategic challenges that will shape education in Aotearoa for a generation.

The Government's current priorities (curriculum clarity, literacy and mathematics, assessment and reporting, workforce development, learning support and the use of evidence) matter, and progress on them deserves support. The challenge is to make that progress while also addressing the broader educational, social and systemic issues that shape learning.

That is the argument at the heart of this paper. The twelve issues are not separate problems; they are interconnected parts of one system, and they cannot be resolved within a single political term, or even two. Responding to each with a short-term fix tends to compound the others. Lasting progress will require a long-term, cross-party commitment.

Each section explains why an issue matters and closes with two questions to provoke conversation in your own context: one about change at the level of the local school, the other at the level of national policy. The final section draws the threads together and makes the case for that long-term commitment.

The future of our nation and the lives of our tamariki are too important to be left to chance. My hope is that this paper will widen and deepen the conversations happening around the motu, help lift them beyond short-termism, and offer a starting point for what we need to do together after the election.



The purpose of education and the future we are preparing for

The challenge: Are we clear about what education is ultimately for?

This may be the most important question of all, because how we answer it shapes how we respond to every other challenge in this paper.

Much of the current education debate centres on achievement, attendance, qualifications, workforce preparation and economic productivity. These are legitimate concerns, and education plays an important part in preparing young people for employment and further study.

But education has always served broader purposes. It helps young people understand themselves and their world, take part in their communities, build relationships, exercise judgement and find meaning in their lives. The challenge is to hold these purposes together.

In Aotearoa, our shared view of purpose needs to be grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which influences every aspect of education: in partnership, in the standing of te reo Māori and mātauranga Māori, and in a commitment to education that works for Māori and for all learners.

Young people need foundational knowledge, qualifications and pathways into work. They need to understand their cultural identities and histories, including the place of Te Tiriti in our shared story. They need the capabilities to navigate uncertainty and respond to change in a society facing complex environmental, technological, economic and social challenges. And they need opportunities to discover what matters to them, what they can offer and how they might live fulfilling lives.

This raises a fundamental question for the sector: **Are we preparing young people to succeed in the world as it is, or equipping them to help shape the world as it might become?** It is not an either/or choice, but the balance we strike matters. It requires us to think carefully about the relationship between knowledge and capability, individual achievement and collective wellbeing, and the immediate demands of schooling and the longer-term purposes of education.

A system that prepares students only for existing structures and expectations risks leaving them poorly equipped to question and adapt when those structures change.

The challenge is to educate for both competence and contribution: enabling young people to succeed in their own lives while helping them build a better future for others, together.



In our school: If a family asked what we are ultimately educating their child for, would every member of our staff give the same answer, and would our timetable, assessment and priorities bear it out?

Government and agencies: Where is the shared, long-term statement of what education is for in Aotearoa, and how would every agency, target and funding decision be tested against it?



Student achievement and the foundations of learning

How do we ensure every learner develops strong foundations without narrowing the purpose of education to what can be measured?

Improving achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is a major priority for the Government, schools and whānau. The 2025 Curriculum Insights data show some encouraging signs, but achievement remains a significant concern.

For example, the Ministry of Education's reporting on Year 8 students shows that, in 2025:

- 45% were at or above the expected curriculum level in reading.
- 28% were at or above the expected curriculum level in writing.
- 24% were at or above the expected curriculum level in mathematics.

The figures need to be interpreted in the context of the relevant curriculum benchmarks, but they highlight the scale of the challenge. Significant disparities also remain between groups of learners.

The immediate priorities include:

- Strengthening the teaching of foundational literacy and mathematics.
- Ensuring teachers have the knowledge, resources and professional learning to teach effectively.
- Identifying learning difficulties early and responding appropriately.
- Improving the quality and consistency of assessment.
- Addressing persistent disparities in progress and achievement.

However, there is a deeper question: How do we build strong foundations while also developing the curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and adaptability that learners need to thrive?

Literacy and numeracy are essential, but they are not the whole purpose of education. The risk is that, in our determination to improve measurable outcomes, we inadvertently diminish the breadth and richness of learning.

The challenge is not to choose between foundational learning and broader capabilities. It is to design learning that develops both.



In our school: How might we lift reading, writing and mathematics while protecting the time, status and depth of curiosity, creativity and inquiry, and how would we know if we were trading one for the other?

Government and agencies: How can targets for foundational learning be set alongside meaningful measures of broader capability, so that progress on one is not achieved at the expense of the other?



Attendance, engagement and a sense of belonging

How do we get young people back into school, and ensure that being there is worth their while?

Attendance has become a major focus of education policy. The Government has set a target for 80% of students to attend at least 90% of the term by 2030, and schools have been required to implement attendance management plans since the beginning of Term 1, 2026.

But attendance is only part of the picture.

A student can be physically present without being intellectually engaged, emotionally connected or actively involved in learning.

The challenges include:

- Persistent and chronic absence.
- Disengagement during the transition to secondary school and adolescence.
- Mental health, wellbeing and family circumstances that affect participation.
- Learning experiences that some students find irrelevant, repetitive or disconnected from their lives.
- School environments in which learners do not feel known, valued or included.

This raises an important distinction between **attendance and engagement.**

Attendance policies can establish expectations and trigger appropriate support. But they cannot, on their own, create the relationships, learning experiences and sense of purpose that encourage young people to participate.

Schools need to understand why learners are disengaging, not simply how to secure their physical presence.

That requires attention to relationships, learner voice, relevance, agency and the quality of the learning experience itself.



In our school: If we asked students who are often absent why they stay away, and those who attend why they come, what would they tell us, and what are we prepared to change as a result?

Government and agencies: How can education, health, housing and social services share responsibility and information for attendance, rather than leaving schools to carry a problem that originates well beyond their gates?



Curriculum reform and the challenge of implementation

How do we translate national curriculum change into coherent, meaningful improvements in classroom learning?

New Zealand is undertaking substantial curriculum reform. The Government is seeking clearer expectations about what students should learn and when, with a strong emphasis on knowledge, progression and foundational learning. The next phase includes the implementation of refreshed secondary curricula and the development of new national secondary qualifications. Budget 2026 includes funding for curriculum resources, professional learning and the development of new assessment arrangements. For schools and kura, this creates considerable work.

Teachers and leaders must:

- Understand the new curriculum expectations.
- Review existing programmes and identify what needs to change.
- Develop appropriate teaching sequences and resources.
- Build the professional knowledge needed to teach the curriculum well.
- Adapt assessment and reporting systems.
- Ensure changes are coherent across year levels and learning areas.

Yet the challenge is bigger than implementation. Curriculum is not simply a document that tells teachers what to teach. It is the framework through which a school expresses its educational purpose.

The critical questions are:

- What knowledge and understanding matter most for young people today?
- How should knowledge connect with inquiry, creativity and real-world application?
- How do we ensure learning builds progressively rather than becoming a series of disconnected activities?
- How much room remains for local context, community knowledge and teacher judgement?
- How do we prepare learners for a future that cannot be fully anticipated?

There is a risk that curriculum reform becomes another compliance exercise, with schools concentrating on coverage and documentation rather than the quality of learning. The real test of curriculum reform is not whether schools have implemented the documents, but whether learners are experiencing better learning.



In our school: How will we judge, a year from now, whether the new curriculum has changed what learners experience in classrooms, rather than simply what appears in our planning documents?

Government and agencies: How can curriculum, qualifications, assessment, resourcing and professional learning be sequenced and funded as one coherent programme, so that schools are not left to stitch together changes that arrive separately?



Equity, inclusion and persistent disparities

How do we move beyond providing equal opportunities to ensuring that every learner has a genuine opportunity to flourish?

Equity remains one of the sector's most persistent challenges. Learners arrive at school with different experiences, strengths, identities, languages, resources and needs. These differences influence their opportunities to participate and succeed.

Disparities in educational outcomes remain particularly concerning for Māori and Pacific learners and students experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. The latest achievement reporting continues to identify gaps, including in mathematics.

Other important dimensions include:

- Access to appropriate learning support.
- Educational experiences for disabled and neurodivergent learners.
- Culturally responsive teaching and learning.
- The recognition of Māori and Pacific identities, languages and knowledge.
- Access to enrichment, extension and specialist opportunities.
- The influence of family circumstances, housing insecurity and poverty.

The difficulty is that equity cannot be achieved simply by applying the same programme or intervention to everyone. Nor is it enough to identify disparities and set targets for reducing them.

Schools need to understand how their own structures, expectations, teaching practices and assessment systems influence who succeeds, who struggles and whose strengths are recognised.

This requires a shift from asking, How do we help learners fit the system? to asking, *How do we design learning environments that respond to the learners we actually have*? It also requires meaningful partnerships with whānau and communities, rather than treating them simply as recipients of school decisions.

For Aotearoa, this includes taking Te Tiriti o Waitangi seriously in the way educational relationships, knowledge, authority and opportunity are understood and enacted.



In our school: Whose strengths do our structures, expectations and assessments currently recognise and whose do they overlook, and which whānau and community members could help us find out?

Government and agencies: How will policy move from reporting disparities to being jointly accountable for closing them, including the conditions beyond schools that shape opportunity and a genuine commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi?



Teacher supply, professional capability and retention

How do we build and sustain a teaching workforce capable of meeting increasingly complex educational needs?

Teachers are central to educational improvement. But their work is demanding, and the conditions in which they work strongly influence what they can achieve.

New Zealand's workforce picture is mixed. The Ministry's 2025 teacher demand and supply projections indicated a national surplus of 530 primary teachers in 2026, alongside a projected shortfall of approximately 710 secondary teachers. The projections also identify significant regional differences.

A national surplus does not necessarily mean that every school can recruit the teachers it needs, particularly in specialist subjects or hard-to-staff communities.

Beyond supply, several challenges remain:

- Recruiting and retaining teachers in particular regions and subjects.
- Ensuring beginning teachers receive effective induction and mentoring.
- Developing strong subject and pedagogical knowledge.
- Providing sustained, high-quality professional learning.
- Supporting teachers' wellbeing and manageable workloads.
- Developing future leaders and strengthening leadership succession.

There is also a question about the nature of professional learning. Too often, professional development can become a series of disconnected initiatives, workshops or mandated practices. Teachers may be asked to change what they do without sufficient time to understand why, experiment with alternatives or learn collaboratively.

The challenge is to create professional environments in which teachers are trusted as professionals, supported to develop their practice and held accountable for the quality of learning they create.

We cannot expect transformational learning for students without investing in the professional learning and working conditions of those who teach them.



In our school: What would make this a place where teachers, especially those early in their careers, choose to stay and grow, and what could we stop doing to make that possible?

Government and agencies: How can workforce planning, initial teacher education, induction, professional learning and conditions of work be designed together, so that national averages do not hide real shortages in particular regions and subjects?



Learning support and the capacity to respond to diverse needs

How do we ensure learners receive the right support, at the right time, without placing unsustainable demands on schools and teachers?

Schools are working with increasingly visible and complex learning needs. Teachers are expected to respond to a wide range of abilities, learning difficulties, disabilities, neurodivergence, behavioural needs and social and emotional challenges.

The challenge is not simply identifying those needs. It is ensuring that appropriate support is actually available.

Key issues include:

- Timely access to specialist assessment and intervention.
- Availability of learning support staff and specialist services.
- Teachers' confidence in adapting learning and teaching.
- Effective collaboration between schools, families and external agencies.
- The balance between inclusive classroom practice and more specialised provision.
- Funding and staffing arrangements that allow support to be sustained.

The difficulty is particularly acute when schools are expected to provide highly responsive learning environments but lack the specialist expertise, time or resources to do so consistently.

This is both an educational and a system-design issue.

Schools cannot reasonably be expected to solve every social, health and learning challenge independently. Effective responses require coordinated support across education, health, disability services and social services.

The ultimate test is whether learners and their families experience a system that responds to their needs, rather than one that repeatedly requires them to navigate its boundaries.



In our school: Where do learners and their families currently reach the edge of the support we can offer, and what could we do with local agencies to make the pathway easier to find and follow?

Government and agencies: What would it take for education, health, disability and social services to plan, fund and be held accountable for shared outcomes for each child, so that families no longer have to navigate the boundaries between them?



Assesment, accountability and the meaning of success

How do we know whether learning is improving without allowing measurement to define what we value?

Assessment is essential. Teachers need to know what learners understand, where they are making progress and what support they require. Parents and whānau deserve clear information about learning. Schools and the wider system need evidence to guide decisions.

The current policy direction places considerable emphasis on more consistent assessment, reporting and monitoring. The challenge lies in ensuring that the information collected is useful, valid and interpreted appropriately.

Several tensions need to be managed:

- Measuring progress against common expectations while recognising individual starting points.
- Using assessment to improve teaching rather than simply report results.
- Ensuring that standardised measures do not crowd out professional judgement.
- Making achievement information meaningful to learners and whānau.
- Distinguishing between what is easy to measure and what is educationally important.

A narrow conception of success can lead schools to concentrate on the outcomes that are easiest to quantify.

Yet many of the qualities that matter for lifelong learning and human flourishing develop over time and are not easily captured in a test: curiosity, confidence, empathy, resilience, ethical judgement, creativity and the capacity to work with others. This does not mean abandoning measurement. It means broadening the evidence we use.

One useful approach is to think in terms of a **split-screen view of learning**:

- **Foundational learning**: What knowledge, skills and understandings are learners acquiring?
- **Broader development**: How are learners developing the capabilities, dispositions and agency to use that learning meaningfully?

Both matter. Neither tells the whole story on its own. The challenge for the system is to develop an accountability approach that supports improvement without reducing educational success to a collection of scores.



In our school: What evidence of learning beyond test results, such as curiosity, confidence and collaboration, are we already gathering, and how could we use it alongside achievement data to tell a fuller story to learners and whānau?

Government and agencies: How can accountability settings be designed to value a broader view of success, so that what is measured does not quietly become all that is taught?



Student agency, motivation and the relevance of learning

How do we develop learners who are not simply successful at school, but capable of directing and sustaining their own learning?

This is one of the deeper challenges facing education, although it receives less attention in policy discussions dominated by achievement, attendance and qualifications. Students need more than the ability to follow instructions, complete tasks and meet externally determined expectations.

They also need to develop the capacity to:

- Understand themselves as learners.
- Recognise their strengths, interests and learning needs.
- Make informed choices and act on them.
- Set goals and manage their learning.
- Ask questions, investigate problems and create solutions.
- Reflect on feedback and adapt their approaches.
- Contribute to the learning of others.

This is what I would describe as learner agency: the capacity to make meaningful choices and to act on those choices. Agency should not be confused with leaving learners to work everything out for themselves. It requires strong relationships, carefully designed learning experiences, explicit teaching and appropriate guidance.

Nor does it mean that every learning experience must be driven by individual interests. Learners also need access to knowledge, perspectives and experiences they would not necessarily choose for themselves.

The challenge is to find the right relationship between structure and agency. A system that concentrates exclusively on prescribed content and external measures risks producing compliant learners who struggle to take responsibility for their learning when the structure disappears. Conversely, a system that emphasises choice without providing the necessary knowledge and support risks leaving learners behind. The goal should be to develop learners who can engage confidently with both: knowing what they need to learn, why it matters and how to use it.



In our school: In a typical week, where do students make real decisions about their own learning, and what would we need to change to give them more, with the right support around them?

Government and agencies: How can curriculum, assessment and qualification settings deliberately create space for learner agency, rather than rewarding compliance alone?



Digital transformation, artificial intelligence and the future of learning

How do we prepare young people to live, learn and contribute in a world being reshaped by technology?

Artificial intelligence is accelerating changes in how people access information, create content, solve problems and undertake work.

For education, the implications reach well beyond the introduction of new tools.

AI raises fundamental questions about:

- What knowledge learners need to acquire and retain.
- How students demonstrate their own understanding.
- The future of assessment and qualifications.
- The development of critical thinking and information literacy.
- Privacy, data sovereignty, bias and algorithmic decision-making.
- The role of teachers when information and personalised assistance are increasingly available through technology.
- The changing relationship between human judgement and automated systems.

There are immediate practical challenges, including academic integrity, equitable access, teacher capability and appropriate school policies.

But the deeper question is what education should be preparing young people to do in an AI-rich world. It would be a mistake to treat AI primarily as a threat to be contained or as a tool that automatically makes learning better. Students need opportunities to understand how these systems work, recognise their limitations, evaluate their outputs and use them responsibly. They also need to develop qualities that cannot be reduced to efficient information processing: ethical judgement, empathy, creativity, discernment and the capacity to work constructively with other people.

The challenge is to move from asking, *How do we stop students misusing AI?* to asking*, How do we develop the wisdom and capability to use powerful technologies well?*

This also means rethinking what happens in classrooms, how learning is assessed and what constitutes valuable human contribution.



In our school: What do we want our students to be able to know, do and decide for themselves in an AI-rich world, and how should that reshape what we teach, assess and ask of them this year?

Government and agencies: Who holds responsibility for a coherent national approach to AI in education, covering equity of access, data sovereignty, teacher capability and assessment, so that each school is not left to work it out alone?



Educational leadership and the capacity for meaningful change

How do we enable schools to respond to changing expectations while maintaining a clear sense of purpose?

School leaders are navigating multiple demands: curriculum reform, achievement targets, attendance, workforce pressures, learning support, financial constraints and community expectations.

These demands compete for time and attention. A common problem is the accumulation of initiatives. New priorities are introduced, new requirements are added and new practices are expected, but relatively little is removed. The result can be a crowded agenda in which staff struggle to distinguish what is essential from what is merely urgent.

The challenges include:

- Maintaining a coherent strategic direction.
- Translating system priorities into meaningful local action.
- Building trust and professional ownership.
- Developing leadership capability throughout the school.
- Creating time for collaborative inquiry and experimentation.
- Sustaining improvement beyond the enthusiasm of individual leaders.
- Knowing when to stop doing things that no longer serve learners.

This is not an argument against national priorities or system-wide improvement. There is real value in shared direction, common expectations and access to effective practice.

The challenge is to avoid confusing consistency with uniformity. Schools need sufficient coherence to work towards shared educational goals, alongside the professional discretion to respond to their learners and communities.

Leaders must also create the conditions for change: helping people understand the purpose, test new approaches, learn from evidence and embed what works.

The key leadership question is not simply how to implement more change, but how to build the collective capacity to change well.



In our school: If we could stop doing three things so that we could do the rest well, what would they be, and who needs to be part of that decision?

Government and agencies: How can system priorities be introduced with discipline about what is removed, sequenced and funded, so that coherence at the national level does not become overload at the school level?



Funding, infrastructure and the sustainability of the system

How do we ensure that educational ambitions are matched by the resources and conditions needed to realise them?

Educational improvement depends on more than curriculum documents and teaching methods. It also depends on the material and organisational conditions in which learning takes place.

Schools face pressures relating to:

- Operational funding and rising costs.
- Building maintenance, classroom capacity and learning environments.
- Access to digital infrastructure and reliable connectivity.
- Learning support and specialist staffing.
- The time and resources required to implement curriculum and assessment changes.
- Unequal access to enrichment and learning opportunities.

Budget 2026 includes investment in school operating grants, property, curriculum implementation, foundational learning and vocational pathways. These commitments recognise the scale of the work ahead, although the existence of new investment does not, by itself, establish whether resources will be sufficient or well targeted.

The challenge is to align funding with educational priorities and the realities facing schools.

For example, introducing new curriculum expectations requires more than publishing materials. It requires planning time, professional learning, appropriate resources and opportunities to collaborate.

Similarly, expectations for inclusive and personalised learning need to be matched by the capacity to provide meaningful support.

A further challenge is ensuring that resources are distributed in ways that address differences in need, rather than assuming that every school begins from the same position.

The central question is whether investment translates into better conditions for teaching and learning, particularly for those learners and communities facing the greatest barriers.



In our school: How do we know whether our time, staffing, space and money are aligned with what we say matters most, and what would we do differently if we started from our priorities?

Government and agencies: How can decisions on property, staffing, curriculum, learning support and digital infrastructure be weighed as a single package against agreed outcomes, with greater weight given to the learners and communities facing the greatest barriers?

Concluding Thought

Joined-up thinking and the case for a long-term commitment

Each of these twelve challenges is demanding in its own right. Together, they reveal something more important, that none can be solved in isolation. Attendance depends on engagement, which depends on relevance, relationships and agency. Curriculum reform depends on teacher capability, which depends on workforce conditions and funding. Equity runs through every section, while learning support, assessment and AI each place new demands on a system already stretched. Pull on one thread and the others move.

Yet our current policy settings rarely reflect this. Priorities shift with the electoral cycle, and each term brings new targets, reforms and reporting requirements, often before the last have been embedded or evaluated. Schools experience this as the accumulation of initiatives; learners experience it as a system that is constantly changing but not always improving. The outcomes that matter most take a decade or more to emerge, and they are the least likely to survive a change of direction.

It does not have to be this way. Finland's comprehensive school reforms of the 1970s rested on a broad political consensus about the purpose and principles of education that has held across many governments and ministers. We cannot simply copy Finland, but we can learn from what that continuity made possible: stability in which teachers and schools could build capability over time. New Zealand has also shown that cross-party agreement is possible when the stakes are recognised. A 30-year infrastructure plan has attracted support across parties, and health sector leaders are now calling for a ten-year cross-party health agreement. Education, whose results play out over a generation, has at least as strong a case.

A long-term commitment would not mean agreeing on every policy detail. Debate about method should continue. It would mean a ten- to twenty-year cross-party accord on four things:

1. **Purpose**: a shared statement of what education is for, and what success looks like.
2. **Outcomes**: a small number of long-term goals for learners, covering foundational learning and broader capability, equity and belonging.
3. **Conditions**: stable commitments to the teaching workforce, learning support, leadership capacity, funding and infrastructure.
4. **Accountability**: joint responsibility across education, health and social agencies, with regular public review, and with the voices of learners, whānau and communities, and our obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, built in.

The twelve challenges in this paper are not twelve separate problems for twelve separate work programmes. They are different views of one question: "*what kind of education do we want for the young people of Aotearoa, and are we willing to stay the course long enough to deliver it?*"

A world class education system will not be built in a single term, but it will not be built at all unless we agree to start together and to continue together.

Further Reading

Listed below are other thought pieces or blog posts I've written that relate to the issues raised in this paper.

Thought Pieces

Education Environment Scan 2026 – designed to help educational leaders, policymakers, and communities make sense of the forces shaping education in Aotearoa New Zealand – and to think more clearly about what an effective, equitable, and future-focused response might look like. (https://futuremakers.nz/thought-pieces/environment-scan-2026-2/)

Report from the inaugural EdRising Convening, 2025 – provides a full overview of all of the convening sessions, and concludes with a list of the ideas, actions and recommendations that were generated from the table sessions during the convening. (https://edrising.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/edrising-convening-report-final-compressed.pdf)

Five pou of future-ready education – this thought piece explores five foundational pou that can help guide the design and development of education in Aotearoa New Zealand for the years ahead. (https://futuremakers.nz/thought-pieces/five-pou-future-education/)

Patterns of reform failure - This paper explores some of the key reasons behind our failure to introduce the change we set out to achieve, and includes a call to action that identifies a number of things that could become actions for anyone in the education system, including teachers, school leaders, and system leaders. (https://futuremakers.nz/thought-pieces/patterns_of_reform_failure-2/)

Why schools lose the capacity to learn – in this thought piece I explore the idea of organisational atrophy, applicable as much to schools as it is to our system (https://futuremakers.nz/thought-pieces/why-schools-lose-the-capacity-to-learn/)

Future-ready capabilities - presents a fresh, NZ-based framework of the capabilities and dispositions our rangatahi will require in order to thrive and live successfully into the future (https://futuremakers.nz/thought-pieces/future-ready-capabilities/)

Lead like a wayfinder – a governance resource addressing the challenge of leading through a period of profound change with the emergence of AI (https://futuremakers.nz/thought-pieces/leading-like-a-wayfinder/)

Being resilient: Characteristics of resilient schools – This paper provides guidance for school leaders as they seek to work with their staff and communities to design the systems, structures and processes required to ensure they are able to continue providing high quality learning experiences for their students in the wake of any disruption they experience, be that short or long-term, impacting all or some of their staff and/or students. (https://futuremakers.nz/thought-pieces/being-resilient-characteristics-of-resilient-schools/)

Future of the VLN – This paper presents a case for bringing initiatives such as the VLN into the 'mainstream' of our education system in New Zealand. (https://futuremakers.nz/thought-pieces/vln-in-nz-2/)

Taking the Pulse of Distance Education in NZ - Provides an annual report that examines the nature, regulation/governance, and scope of activity of distance learning providers in the New Zealand school sector. (https://flanz.org.nz/dl-pulse/)

(read more of my thought pieces here: https://futuremakers.nz/thought-pieces/)

Blog Posts

Purpose before Policy - What we need is a shared vision, agreed by teachers, school leaders, whānau, employers, tertiary providers and policymakers, that sets out the outcomes we expect of the system with real aspiration. (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/10/28/purpose-before-policy/)

Know where the levers are – explores three perspectives on change – the micro, meso and macro (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/10/19/know-where-the-levers-are/)

Who gets to say in the AI conversation? – arguing the case for involving our rangatahi in the conversations that will shape their future – (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/10/14/who-gets-a-say-in-the-ai-conversation/)

The Future of distance education – from competition to collaboration – argues for the establishment of a network of provision to ensure equity of access to quality educational opportunities for all NZers (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/10/22/the-future-of-distance-education-from-competition-to-collaboration/)

Foundations to Futures: Rethinking literacy for tomorrow's learners – why we must build on foundational skills in order to develop the capabilities our young people will require to flourish and be active contributors in the world of the future. (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/09/30/foundations-to-futures-rethinking-literacy-for-tomorrows-learners/)

Reclaiming education as a common good – If education simply mirrors the dominant values of society, it will reproduce them. If education is to help create a different future, schools must become places where young people experience and practise a different way of living together (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/09/15/reclaiming-education-as-a-common-good/)

Signals, noise and the children in our classrooms pt2 Watch what governments do – part of a three part series exploring where the decision-making lies in relation to AI (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/09/22/signal-noise-and-the-children-in-our-classrooms-part-2-watch-what-governments-do/)

Designing a bolder future for education – interview with Jeff Wetzler outlining a global project designed to reveal what works (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/09/24/designing-a-bolder-future-for-education/)

A vision for education in NZ – my reflections after reading the report from Dr Claire Coleman on behalf of the Aotearoa Educator's Collective (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/08/20/the-conversation-yet-to-come/)

Why child-centred learning isn't the soft option – my interview with Dr Sarah Aiano (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/07/08/why-child-centred-learning-isnt-the-soft-option/)

When the urgent drowns out the important – reflections on the findings from NZCER's 2025 National Survey of Secondary Schools (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/06/30/when-the-urgent-drowns-out-the-important/)

Why good ideas don't stick - why is it that new assessment initiatives that have been introduced into schools in recent years don't 'stick'? (https://futuremakers.nz/2026/06/04/why-good-ideas-dont-stick/)

(read more of my blog posts here: https://futuremakers.nz/blog/)