

1. Summary

The Save the Children New Zealand Child and Youth Council (CYC) is a national organisation led by regional Ambassadors with representation on the Save the Children New Zealand Board. The CYC was launched in November 2011 to advocate for children's rights, promote child participation and ensure that children's voices are heard in decision making processes in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In its Concluding Observations the Committee on the Rights of Child (2011) urged New Zealand to increase awareness of the Convention and to promote greater child participation. The government has called for public input on many policy issues. Our CYC has taken the opportunity to contribute children and young people's opinions to key discussions such as the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children which developed into the Children's Action Plan and the report by Experts Advisory Group on Child Poverty.

This submission focuses on how children see the New Zealand government delivering on the Convention in areas of protection, provision and participation. The submission reflects the perspectives of children that took part in the surveys conducted by the CYC on their online platform called *Hear Our Voices: Values Exchange*.

The Values Exchange is used regularly by Save the Children to give young people a voice, and the results below form part of broader patterns. Generally speaking young people are future-focused and see education as their pathway to a better life. They live in increasingly multi-cultural environments. They have a strong sense of social justice and consistently report their desire to eradicate poverty and to offer every New Zealand child a level playing field as they start their lives. Children repeatedly report that this level playing field does not yet exist.

It should be noted that our samples are relatively small and may not reflect the opinions of NZ children as a whole.

2. Introduction

The Save the Children Child and Youth Council conducted a survey of 255 young people throughout New Zealand using its *Hear Our Voices Values Exchange* website. In this survey, it was clear that the issues young New Zealanders are most concerned about are education, poverty, child abuse and racism. The main result of this survey is shown in Figure 1 below.

If you could change one thing today what would it be?

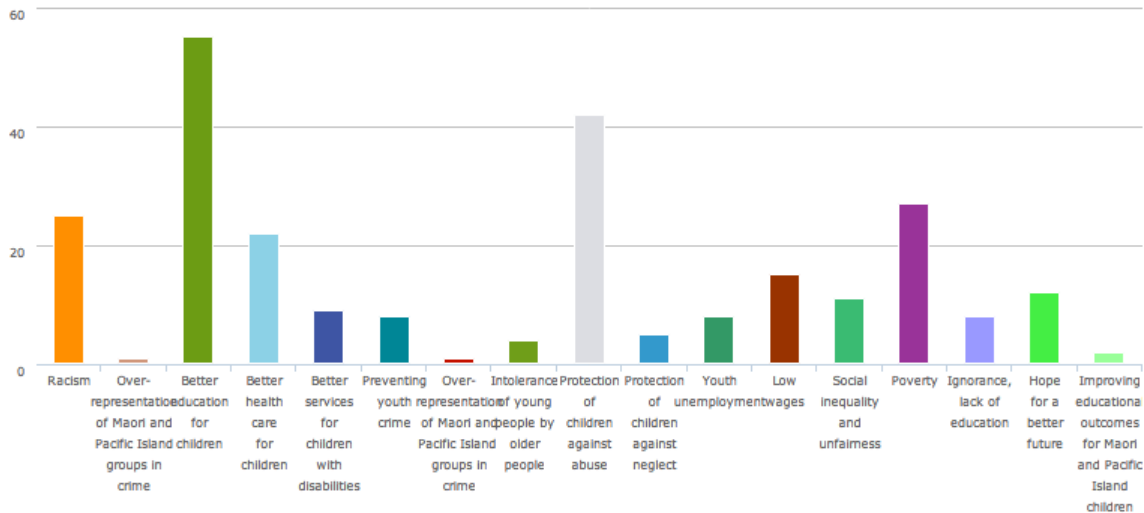


Figure 1: Initial Survey Results of Main Issues of Concern

3. Right to education

We conducted a follow-up survey of 127 young New Zealanders to further determine how the system can be improved. This survey focused on class sizes, school resources, attitudes towards schooling, and the curriculum.

Class Sizes

In general, class sizes are apparently not a big problem, with only 29% of respondents feeling that their classes are too big, and an average class size of 22.2 students.

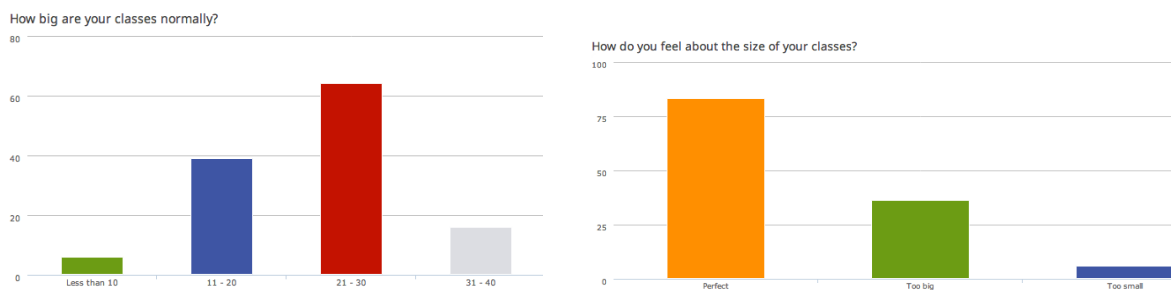


Figure 2: Class Sizes

However there is a significant difference in enthusiasm for going to school between those who are happy with class sizes and those who are not.

Students who prefer smaller classes focus on time the teacher is available to them and the disruptiveness of larger groups:

- “Although current sizes (21-30) are reasonable, I definitely feel that in my smaller classes (smaller 20) I learn a lot more, and overall the learning environment is better.” – Bokyong
- “Smaller class sizes are definitely better as there is more teacher-student time and better quality teaching can occur.” – James
- “There are a lot of people in my class, and it’s hard to concentrate on the lesson because of the noise” – Sau

- “Too many people and if one person talks then the others will and in a minute the whole class is talking” - Nathaniel

It is important to note that public school students had more students in each of their classes than their private school counterparts; with the average of public school classes being at least 25 students, while private schools had the average of sixteen.

School Resources

In general, schools are well resourced, with only 11% of respondents saying that their school does not have adequate resources. The most lacking resources are water fountains (47% of respondents reporting that these are lacking at their school), followed by special needs learning support (44% lacking), disabled access (42%), and heating (38%).

Attitudes Towards Schooling

Attitudes towards schooling are positive overall, with 53% of respondents reporting that they are enthusiastic or very enthusiastic about going to school, and 41% feeling neutral about going to school. In general, the core subjects are well liked. Exams are the least liked part of schooling, with 47% of respondents saying that they like exams “a little” or “not at all”.

The Curriculum

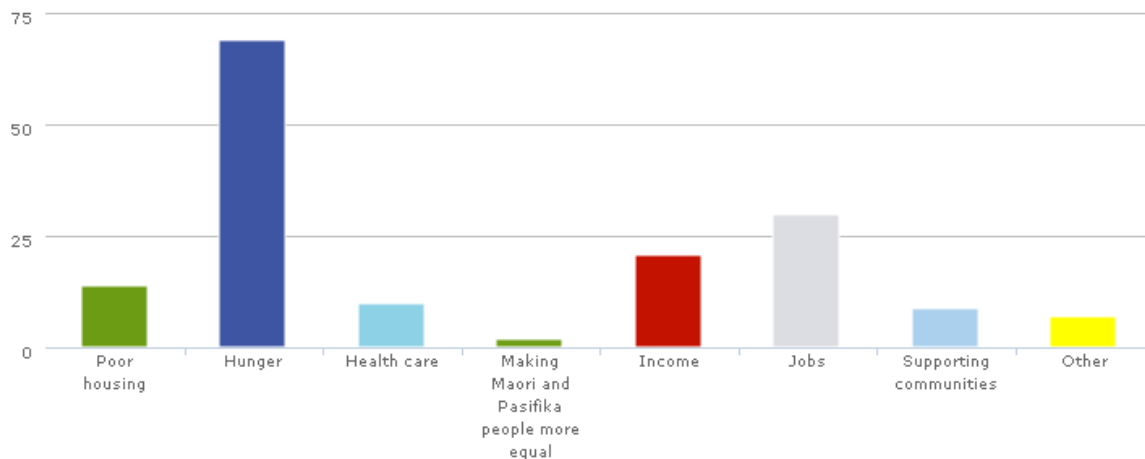
While students feel that they are being adequately prepared for the future, with 65% of respondents reporting that they are “mostly” or “totally” being well prepared, many respondents brought complaints about the way that students are assessed in the national curriculum, NCEA:

- “Make it less punitive, and have clearer marking schedules and criteria for higher grades.” – Kate
- “I would create more than the four grades than the current *Not Achieved, Achieved, Merit, and Excellence*, to add more distinction.” – Emilie
- “The marking should be more holistic! There’s no room for creativity, and if your brain is wired differently it’s very hard to succeed. Life does not conform to a checklist!” – Caitlin
- “I would make it GCSE. We aren't given a range of criteria. And in creative subjects (art, music, English) we are given restrictions which box your creativity and pass judgement on your creativity. It's no longer about expression and human awareness, but about getting the highest mark and ticking all the boxes” - John

4. Right to adequate standard of living

Poverty in New Zealand has recently gained significant domestic media attention, with many projects being set to raise awareness and tackle this issue. Many survey respondents believe one of the main poverty-related problems in New Zealand is children going to school hungry, a pattern we have seen strongly in previous Values Exchange surveys.

What is the most pressing poverty issue in New Zealand?



Values Exchange Hear our Voices, Sept – Nov 2012

This mentality was reflected in the responses, with people giving suggestions such as “I think the government should invest more in school lunches ensuring every child is not hungry e.g. breakfast clubs, free lunch, provided fruit”. Many of the comments suggested that the government should donate food and/or money to schools with hungry children.

The government has recently implemented a food-in-schools policy for the most needy. We applaud this action, and encourage the government to expand this programme to all New Zealand children.

Some respondents also want the government to create more jobs and to ensure equal pay for equal work regardless of age.

5. Equality and non-discrimination

While a large number of respondents said that racism was an important issue facing New Zealand, few elaborated on these views. Of those who did, the main focus was on institutionalised positive-discrimination, which some viewed as unfair:

- “The government should be race-blind to all New Zealanders, as most problems are not caused by race, but by other factors. To respond to such problems with racially-based solutions is ignoring much of the problem itself. The best way to stop racism is to stop discriminating based on race.” – Sebastian

While ‘racism’ was the fourth most important issue, there were very few explicit comments about this, so it is not possible to say why ‘racism’ was a choice. In discussions children acknowledged disadvantage experienced by Maori and Pacifica children and also said that racism against Asians is cause for concern. They called for anti-bullying programmes in all schools and a review of the effectiveness of current bullying programmes.

6. Right to protection

While child abuse was a significant choice in our survey we had no specific examples of what respondents meant by the term.

7. Conclusion

The trends revealed by our surveys and discussions are:

- 1) Education is largely seen as a positive factor in young people's lives. Most children enjoy or feel neutral about school. However, there is a strong correlation between class sizes and enjoyment of education – roughly speaking, the larger the classes the less enthusiastic children are about school and this effect kicks in quickly in classes of 25 and over.

Improved access to education and support for children with disabilities needs to be looked into.

- 2) Poverty is a major concern for children who are very aware of the wealth inequalities in New Zealand and the consequent differences in life opportunities. New Zealand must provide more job opportunities for adults and youths and remove age based wage discrimination.
- 3) The trends in our survey seem to suggest that racism is less of a concern for children. However in group discussions children registered concern with racial discrimination.

The major human rights issue for young people seems to be inequality. Young people would like to see every child in New Zealand have the right to the same opportunities in life.

The Save the Children Child and Youth Council.