



1. City of Manukau Education Trust (COMET)

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A. Introduction

The City of Manukau Education Trust (COMET) is a Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) which provides advocacy and leadership for education outcomes in Manukau. The trust has defined a role for local government in achieving educational outcomes, and set up a model for action. The trust links schools, early childhood centres and tertiary providers to each other and to families, community organisations, education providers, the Ministry of Education, business and the community. Collaboration is at the heart of COMET's engagement with the community and its partners. Its key theme is *Working together for education*.

The trust is active across all dimensions of education: early childhood education, student achievement in school, transitions from school to work or further learning, tertiary education and adult education. It aims to bring schools and businesses together, help Māori students succeed as Māori, preserve and enhance all the languages and cultures in Manukau's citizens (particularly Pasifika), build the community's IT capacity, and develop the skills base needed for Manukau's economic future.

During its establishment period, from 1999 to 2006, COMET put several high profile initiatives into action. They covered areas as diverse as:

- intergenerational family learning partnerships;
- the 'Principal-For-A-Day' event, where business and community leaders visit the school principal for a day;
- Youth Transitions – now mainstreamed across all of Counties Manukau, and adopted nationally;
- Education for Enterprise, to incorporate enterprise development skills in the curriculum and offer teachers learning about how to connect to business;
- setting up a taskforce, and leading an action plan on early childhood education;
- promoting Information and Communications Technology (ICT) development in community organisations and early childhood centres;
- seminars and conferences on many education-related topics.

Since 2007, COMET has led the development of a new Manukau Education Strategy (the first, in 1998, had a single recommendation: to establish COMET). The recommendations for the new strategy, contained in the report *Working Together, Mahi Tahi Tatou*, were developed from nearly two years of consultations, public discussion documents, the inau-

gural Manukau Education Conference (and feedback from it), and interviews and meetings with stakeholders, including young people. The recommendations were presented to the Council in July 2008, to provide advice on how a local focus on education might fit into the LTTCP, and how effective collaboration with the education sector could create improved social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being. *Working Together: Mahi Tahī Tatou* articulates a role for local government in education in New Zealand. With the changes in local government structures and processes in Auckland the future of the strategy is, at this stage, not clear. This has not stopped COMET using the recommendations as the basis for future planning.

B. Aims and objectives

In the early 1990s, Manukau City Council developed a view that there was a proper role for Territorial Local Authorities in demonstrating leadership in social policy in the city. Groups worked on strategy in a logical order: employment (1996), economic development (1997) then education (1998) (Middleton and Vester, 2003, p 4).

Employment and economic development were the initial areas of Council interest. In 1996 the Education Review Office published a report about schooling in Māngere and Otara. It highlighted education and social systems failure in these two suburbs. The Manukau City Council was distressed by the findings, not only because of the social consequences for communities, but because of the drag effect on economic growth (Vester, 2009). An education strategy was necessary to get the economic strategy to work.

Schools are at risk for a variety of reasons that are well beyond principals' control. We needed an intermediary – we couldn't fight those battles in isolation from one another...Mayor patronage is very important....Has to be some pretty serious policy work at the local level if we are going to get traction in order to increase engagement and success of our youth, improve chances of employment, align skills required for future employment.

(Key informant)

Manukau's pockets of urban poverty are more visible than most. It has the highest concentration of low decile schools in the country; the highest birth rates in any public health board district; large numbers of young people not participating in education and training; endemic truancy issues; significant demand for public housing; and a significant migrant population (Vester, p 2).

A lengthy and consultative analysis under the leadership of the mayor and the chief executive of the Manukau Institute of Technology resulted in the establishment of the City of Manukau Education Trust (COMET) in October 1999 as a stand-alone entity (Vester, 2009, p 2). It was set up to have "a focused approach that encourages collaboration", and be a stand-alone charitable trust. It was not originally part of the council's own structures.

The education reforms of the 1980s had given school governance to local boards of trustees, and retained funding and policy settings as national, centralised, functions. Linking mechanisms between national and local educational functions were recommended in the Picot reform proposals, but these were not implemented. COMET was set up to fill this gap, which remains today. "The national education system is still driven by national approaches to policy development and resource allocation that is as unresponsive to regional and local difference as was its heavily centralised predecessor....There are similarities between the proposal (in the 1988 report on education – the Picot report) and developments such as COMET" (Middleton and Vester, 2003, 10).

While the Ministry of Education established a number of initiatives focused on student achievement in Manukau's schools, the trust independently developed a series of high-profile programmes that focused on community engagement and collaboration. The projects connected wider central government strategic priorities *and* community aspirations (Vester p 2) and made a real difference to community wellbeing. It is the collaborative projects and events that make the work of COMET visible and meaningful in the community (Vester, 2009, p 4).

The initiatives are the public and visible expression of the trust's work, which is driven by a strategic approach, summarised below.

The **Mission Statement** is derived from the Manukau Education Strategy adopted by Council in 1998. It was developed by the trustees, who are widely seen as credible people with trust from the education sector and the community.

To create within the diversity of Manukau City an educational environment in which there is a high level of coordination and co-operation across boundaries, effective use of resources to achieve educational goals, strong advocacy for education and the promotion of accessible high quality lifelong learning.

(SOI p 5)

The **outcomes** COMET is working towards are:

- An educated and knowledgeable people;
- A culture of collaboration among education providers;
- Families and communities engaged in learning;
- A skilled labour market;
- Realisation of Māori potential; and
- Realisation of the potential of Pacific people.

The **goals** connect COMET with the overall plan for Manukau City, and with its people (SOI p 7):

- Champion the *Tomorrow's Manukau: Manukau Apopo* vision for An Educated and Knowledgeable People
- Create a culture of collaboration among education providers
- Strengthen community connections to education
- Provide advocacy and leadership for education learning outcomes in Manukau

Twelve **strategic themes** identify the broad areas in which those goals will be put into action over the medium term:

1. Working together to support participation in early childhood education
2. Working together to enable Māori students to achieve success as Māori
3. Working together with families
4. Working together to support schools
5. Working together so that young people have effective and supported transitions from school
6. Business and schools working together
7. Working together to maintain our languages and heritage
8. Working together to ensure children are active, healthy and ready to learn
9. Working together to meet the skills needs of the future

10. Working together for adult learning
11. Working together with information and communications technologies
12. Working together for our environment and sustainability

Finally, key actions are identified for the next twelve months:

- Host forums/ conferences/ seminars or other events or publish documents that support public awareness or understanding of issues related to the key themes
- Facilitate the action project to increase participation in early childhood education as a *Tomorrow's Manukau* collaboration
- Provide Pasifika EC centres with support to build their capacity and skills in the use of ICTs for family and community engagement in learning (Pasifika SmartCentres Project)
- Continue to deliver coordination services for the Manukau Family Literacy Programme, and redevelop the model under the Families in Schools project
- Strengthen partnerships with business through the E4E, Principal-For-A-Day, and other innovative projects
- Champion local government and community involvement in education

The particular actions that are selected will to some degree depend on what resources COMET and its partners have, what central government will invest in, and what the opportunities for change are.

C. Underlying principles and approach

When future structures and processes to improve education were being considered in 1998, the core values for education initiatives in Manukau were set out clearly: quality, relevance, diversity and accessibility (Middleton and Vester, 2003, p 5).

The process of setting up and reflecting on the COMET initiatives of the first six years has led to a set of operating principles that now guide its work:

- Activities will not replicate an existing activity
- Activities will proceed on the basis of commitment from partners
- Activities will be capable of development for eventual community ownership
- Activities will be based on evidence/research on quality outcomes
- Activities will be linked to strategic priorities of the government and/or the Council

(Middleton and Vester, 2003, p 7)

The COMET model shapes the process of engagement between local government and education structures around six governance levers:

- **the vision** of the Tomorrow's Manukau strategy for "an educated and knowledgeable people";
- **distributed leadership** that includes the mayor, principals, tertiary leaders, and community elders and leaders, as well as initiative from COMET;
- **shared information** and data to underpin decision-making;
- accessing the widest possible range of **resources** available in communities;
- collaborative activities and inclusiveness in meeting shared goals;
- **public debate** and openness to community input.

COMET's success was characterised by one key informant as having "balanced pointy-headed stuff with real action on the ground.... shaped a theoretical framework for how local government can interact with education.... demonstrated a process of problem definition, generating ideas and passing onto community..."

D. What happens in COMET

COMET has a contract for service with the Council. The services are "Analysis, Advocacy and Leadership in education; Facilitation and Coordination of education projects" (Vester p 2). COMET's relationship with the Council has two primary dimensions: COMET's analysis offers an independent perspective rather than a 'council position', and COMET works with Council officers to deliver on the vision for *Tomorrow's Manukau: Manukau Apopo*.

COMET also contracts with government agencies and education providers:

- to lead pilot services to fill gaps (e.g. the development of youth transitions programmes in Manukau City);
- to research needs or evaluate services;
- to coordinate partnerships (e.g. to create collaborations around the literacy needs of families; or to coordinate achievement of the Smart Manukau early childhood goals through the Smart Centres project);
- to provide advice or consultancy services;
- to facilitate other actions that meet desired outcomes for Manukau citizens.

(SOI p 17)

COMET also functions as a visible expression of partnership between the major tertiary education provider in the city (MIT) and the Council. The MIT provides the trust with office accommodation and computing and support services (Vester p 3).

Across all of its functions, however, COMET's core role is leadership and advocacy around current education issues facing Manukau (see Figure 1). A significant element in this work is around 'policy analysis' – that is, identifying what the (local) problem is, gathering information, consulting with others to test ideas and preparing discussion papers - to support Council and community understanding of issues related to education. The diagram below sums up the five key dimensions of COMET's role.

The model is inclusive of other approaches, and open to change over time. For example, COMET does not have the internal capacity to shape a Māori education strategy for Manukau. This work has become owned by the runanga for the Manukau Institute of Technology, and a 'Māori Outcomes' working group of the *Tomorrow's Manukau* Strategic Steering Group, which is chaired by the Council Chief Executive. It supports *Ka Hikitia*, the national strategy of the Ministry of Education, but has a particular local dimension and ownership over the action framework (Vester p 5).

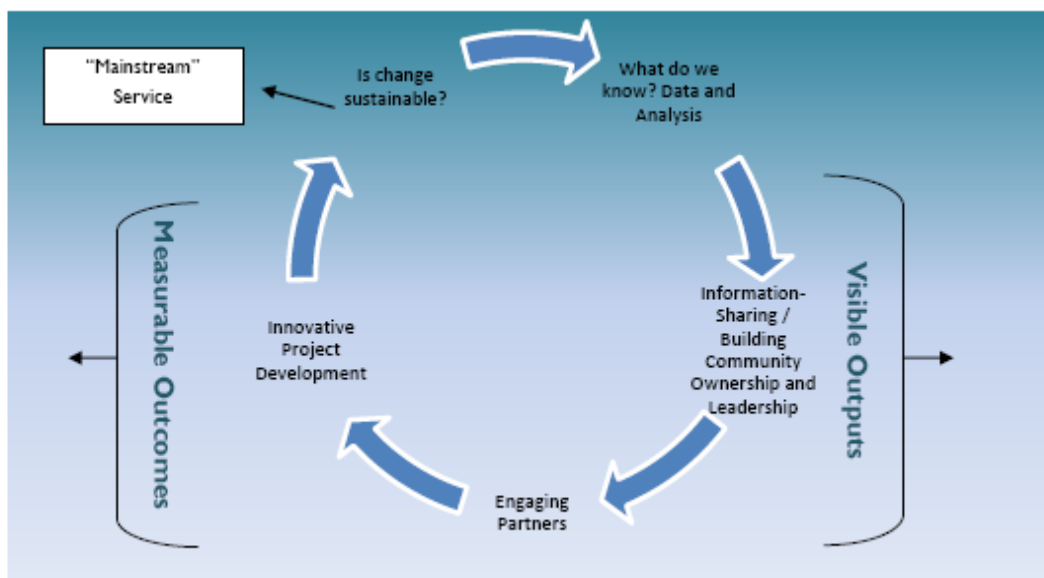


Figure 1: Key dimensions of COMET's role

In practice, COMET's work has included the following activities or outputs:

1. In 2005 COMET researched the ICT capacities of early childhood centres, and subsequently developed a project to address gaps, now called the Pasifika Smart Centres project:
 - over 30 Kidsmart computer desks were donated by IBM over a three-year period;
 - thirty Pasifika early childhood centres have received ICT support visits and technical advice accompanying the IBM donations;
 - a series of teacher workshops and family workshops were held to build connections between family learning and child learning.
2. From 2004-2008 COMET led the development of youth transitions programmes in Manukau City, and later passed this project on to a provider, who tendered for the service through the Ministry of Social Development.
3. As the result of a summit co-hosted by COMET and Workbase Aotearoa, COMET developed the Manukau Family Literacy Programme and created subsequent collaborations around the literacy needs of families (see page 10). COMET's work in the area of family literacy has gained international attention.

In 2008, 54 adults completed the programme, 47 graduating with the AUT Certificate in Introduction to Early Childhood education at six sites. Since 2003 there have been 28 programmes serving 322 adults with impacts on over 1,000 family members.
4. A stocktake of early childhood issues in Manukau in August 2007 resulted in the development of a *Tomorrow's Manukau* strategic priority project, "Increasing Participation in Early Childhood Education". A summit in 2008 was instrumental in obtaining a commitment from central government to action (see page 43).
5. As part of a portfolio of programmes that support relationships between business and schools, COMET hosts the Principal-For-A-Day event, and manages a collaborative contract through New Zealand Trade and Enterprise on curriculum connections between schools and business/ community.
 - In 2008, 66 school principals and 66 businesses and community leaders matched for the Principal-For-A-Day event;

- Most of these principals and senior school managers will complete return visits to businesses as part of the programme.
6. Completing the framework for the Manukau Education Strategy (see above) – the key strategic goal for the 2007/2008 year.
 7. Advocacy activities, which include meetings with elected representatives and government officials on matters related to education in Manukau; the hosting of international guests; participation in workshops, conferences and seminars on relevant matters; and the provision of advice to council committees – for example, the Pacific Islands Advisory Committee (PIAC) – and other organisations. To illustrate, in 2007/2008 COMET completed:
 - A submission to the stocktake on school governance (*Governance and Complex Urban Campus Schools*) - October 2007. The submission called for legislative amendments to meet the needs of the 21st Century at Manukau's urban campus schools.
 - A submission to the Manukau City Council on the establishment of a CCO to manage a tertiary education campus - January 2008. The submission evaluated the proposal and contained advice on the establishment of an education hub, including a tertiary education campus within the city centre revitalisation area.
 - A series of three reports about early childhood education and family services: a stocktake on early childhood education in Manukau City - October 2007; a discussion paper on quality in early childhood education - March 2008; a discussion paper on family service centres - March 2008 and a report on the proceedings of the Manukau Early Childhood Education Summit - June 2008.
 - *Response to Schools Plus* - April 2008. A paper responding to the government initiative that establishes a new goal for schooling: that all young people are in education, skills, or structured learning, relevant to their needs and abilities, until the age of 18.
 - A submission to the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance - May 2008. The submission called for the Royal Commission to consider the role of education and skills growth in the future of the Auckland region.
 - Participation in the Ministry of Education's Flat Bush Area Advisory Group, and preparation of a report on the development of schooling in the Flat Bush area for the Botany Community Board and Manukau City Council - April 2008. Follow-up advice was provided to the Botany Community Board on matters of process.
 - A submission to the Ministry of Education on matters related to bilingual education provision in Otara - June 2008.

(Vester 2009 and 2007/2008 Annual report)

E. Who's involved with COMET

Most funding for COMET comes from the Manukau City Council, who provided \$268,089 in 2008/2009. Grants income totalled \$152,700, including an in-house contribution of \$32,700 from MIT. Total income in 2008/2009 was \$845,475 (annual report, p 19). There is an expectation that the base funding from council is 'leveraged' to obtain funding from other sources. In the 2007-2008 financial year the trust leveraged \$4 from other sources for every dollar of council contribution (Vester, 2009, p 3), but because of the handover of the youth transitions programme to a 'mainstream' provider, this shifted to leverage of \$2.1 for every \$1 in the latest financial year.

The stakeholders COMET works with are:

- Schools - teachers, principals, parents and trustees;
- Early childhood centres and tertiary providers;

- Business – including business associations and industry organisations (the future labour force is in our early childhood centres and schools today);
- Community leaders – from marae, church, sport and leisure organisations, ethnic networks, and local government community boards and Council;
- Central government agencies and organisations who shape policy and programmes in education

(SOI 09/10 p 6):

Organisations like COMET are important. Schools need better links with their communities....They need to be independent from us. Government couldn't do this as well – they need to reserve the right to be an educational irritant!...

(Key informant, Ministry of Education)

Some sense of the size of education sector in Manukau is given in the appendix of the report, *Working Together: Mahi Tahī Tatou*. 139 schools are listed, along with 197 mainstream early childhood education centres, 37 Māori ECE centres, 33 Pasifika ECE centres, three universities/technical institutes, 46 training establishments, seven other education services and four government agencies.

F. Decision-making and reporting processes

The trust, as a Council Controlled Organisation, is required to issue an annual Statement of Intent (SOI) approved by the Council and to present annual accounts and annual reports.

The strategic initiatives set up by COMET emerge from processes which have common elements:

- Forum activity to identify issues based on evidence
- Stakeholder group/s set up to identify key actors and generate ideas
- Needs exploration
- Project development, based on partnership development activities

(Middleton and Vester, 2003, 7)

The analysis can be triggered by council priorities, or by trustee or community priorities. In addition, the networks that have been built over the last decade now function as a continuous informal conduit for new issues and ideas that can be fed into the more formal processes.

G. Innovative features

COMET's innovation has been in linking Manukau's education sector, local government, families and communities, and the business community, and in creating a model for local government engagement in education, which combines hard data and analysis with community engagement. It is important that this work continues to thrive in the new environment.

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