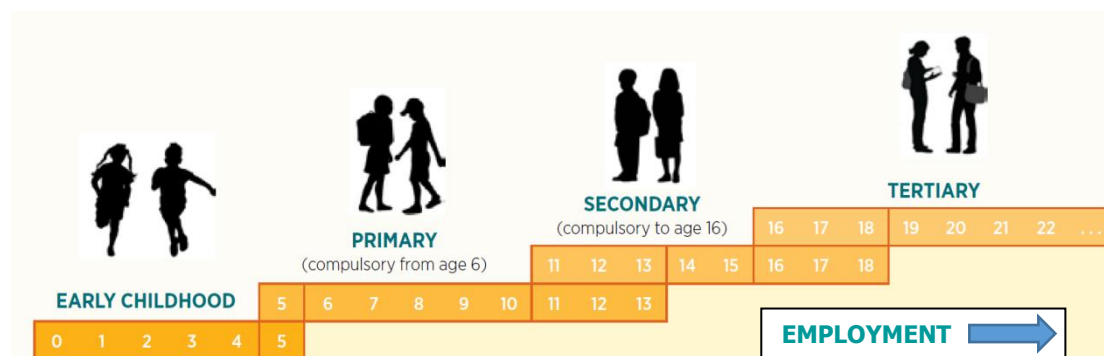


## Children and young people have good transitions and pathways through the education system

**Why does having good transitions and pathways through the education system matter?**



*Figure 1: Key periods of transition through the education system*

Children and young people make multiple transitions during their pathway through the education system. They move from home or early childhood education (ECE) to primary school, from primary to secondary school, and from secondary school into tertiary education and/or employment. These transitions involve changes in the physical and social environment as well as different responsibilities, learning structures, and pedagogies. The diagram above indicates the ages at which these transitions commonly occur, although the impacts of change may stretch beyond the immediate years indicated.

Additional or alternative transitions may take place at many stages, such as when families relocate, teachers and friendships change, children and young people return from suspension or stand-downs, or if children and young people follow alternative pathways through the education system such as periods of home education. As transitions will always occur, it is their effective support and management that is the focus of this brief rather than their elimination or reduction.

Well-managed transitions support a continuous learning experience across the education to employment pathway. Poor transitions can result in learning losses or disengagement.

Some children and young people, for example those with disabilities and learning support needs, may be particularly vulnerable during times of transition and changes need to be carefully planned so they receive the necessary support to access a meaningful learning pathway. In some cases this means the skills and knowledge of the adults supporting the children and young people with disabilities and additional learning support needs are best transitioned with them as they move across education settings. National Transition Guidelines<sup>i</sup> are available to provide schools, special education specialists and other professionals with best practice information to ensure effective transition support is put in place for children with disabilities and additional learning support needs. Best practice for the transition from school includes:

- allowing the young person to direct the process
- involving parents, families and whānau
- providing information on post-school options
- transitioning being a coordinated and recognised process with schools, parents, students and agencies working in partnership.

Some children and young people, for example those with high rates of stand downs or suspensions and those whose families are frequently mobile, have many more transition points to deal with than others.

Effective pathways can guide children and young people through a range of learning options and affirm education's value and relevance in their lives. They enable the achievement of successful transitions beyond school to further education and employment.

Poor pathways through the education system are high cost to future life outcomes.<sup>ii</sup> When young people do not gain qualifications and make informed study choices for their career pathways, they are more likely than their peers to be unemployed or on a low wage. They are less likely to report good general health and are more likely to become involved in the welfare and/or corrections systems. This has a substantial negative impact on their life outcomes and also – due to intergenerational effects – those of their children.

### **What does the evidence about transitions tell us?**

The data about children being present, safe and included is covered in a separate evidence brief. However there are some key points to consider simultaneously with the data about transitions, as children who are not present, safe and included are more likely to be adversely impacted by poor transitions:

- Children who have attended four or more schools by age 10 seem to achieve less well than others on the same academic and social measures.<sup>iii</sup> In New Zealand, school age child mobility is very high by international standards with Māori being especially mobile.
- While the number of children and young people leaving early or missing school for periods of time due to formal disciplinary action is decreasing, Māori and Pacific children and young people and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds are leaving or missing school at disproportionately higher rates.<sup>iv,v</sup>
- Children and young people with additional learning support needs are facing barriers to enrolment, attendance and participation.<sup>vi</sup>
- Māori and Pacific young people are overrepresented in not being in employment, education or training statistics (NEET).<sup>vii</sup>
- Youth unemployment in New Zealand is relatively high compared with adult unemployment. New Zealand is ranked 21<sup>st</sup> out of 30 countries across the OECD in youth unemployment, leading some commentators to refer to a 'Youth penalty'.<sup>viii</sup>

### Transitions from ECE to school

Early childhood education forms a foundation for lifelong learning and has a positive impact on children's educational and life-course outcomes.<sup>ix</sup> For the year ending June 2017, 96.8% of all children starting school had attended some form of ECE, up 2.2 percentage points since June 2011.

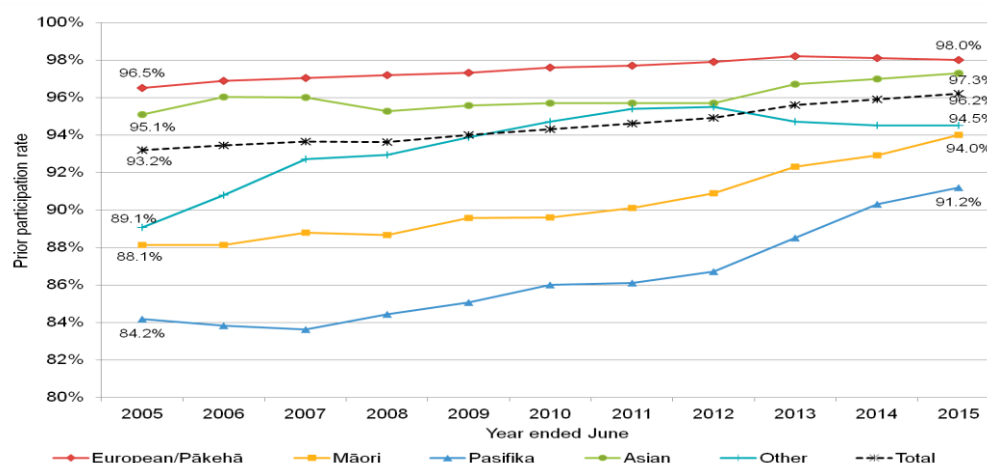


Figure 2: Percentage of children starting school who attended ECE, by ethnic group, 2005-2015

These foundations are built upon by an effective transition into schooling, where curricula, teaching and learning are substantially different. Giving children a well-supported and managed transition at this age sets them up for a continuous education pathway across schooling and beyond. Such transitions are processes, and require organisations on both sides of the transition to provide support over a period of time rather than treating them as isolated events.<sup>x</sup> Children with additional learning needs are likely to require additional support to make a strong start at school and their teachers may need additional training and support. Online guidance is available that includes stories of practice, reflective questions, implications for leadership, connections to the principles of Te Whāriki and further resources.<sup>xi</sup>

In a 2015 study, ERO<sup>xii</sup> found considerable variability in how well services supported children in the transition from ECE to school. Some services positively supported children as they approached transition to school, utilising collaborative relationships between teachers, parents and whānau to identify children's progress and plan for the continuity of their learning.

There are anecdotal incidences of ECE teachers taking children on visits to school, and providing new entrant school teachers with in-depth information on children's progress. There are also instances of new entrant teachers utilising information from ECE providers to familiarise themselves with the learning experiences and interests of their incoming cohorts.

Some ECE services and primary schools do not provide effective support for children and their families in the transition process. A number of factors may contribute to this, including differences in curricula, philosophies, and assessment approaches between individual ECE providers and the primary school system.

### *Transitions between primary and secondary school*

Intermediate schools for children in years 7 and 8 are a feature of the New Zealand school system. 54.7%<sup>xiii</sup> of New Zealand primary schools are Full Primary schools meaning they also offer schooling at the intermediate level. For children in the remainder of primary schools in New Zealand, they need to transition to an intermediate school, followed by a transition to secondary schooling two years later.

A child's transition into primary school is followed by a transition into secondary schooling. This is often a significant environmental shift: secondary school presents new methods of teaching, longer school days, different rules and wider groups of peers. The shift usually occurs at an age of adolescent development, a period of significant social, emotional and physiological change.

The transition from primary to secondary school is also a time where young people often disengage, resulting in significant barriers to learning.<sup>xiv</sup> Data indicates that disengagement escalates over this transition point: the number of stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions and non-enrolments escalates at age 12 and peaks at age 14, with a similar pattern seen for truancy. This difficulty following transition is also related to a higher likelihood of dropping out of education.<sup>xv</sup>

Chronic truancy is also a strong predictor of negative outcomes in later life. Some children and young people miss significant periods of school due to non-enrolment. Rates of non-enrolment in compulsory schooling are falling for all ethnicities. In 2012 Māori young people were non-enrolled at the rate of 14.3 per 1,000, Pacific young people at the rate of 8.8 per 1,000, compared with Pākehā young people at the rate of 2.1 per 1,000. In the same year, there were 934 cases of non-enrolment for more than 60 days.<sup>xvi</sup>

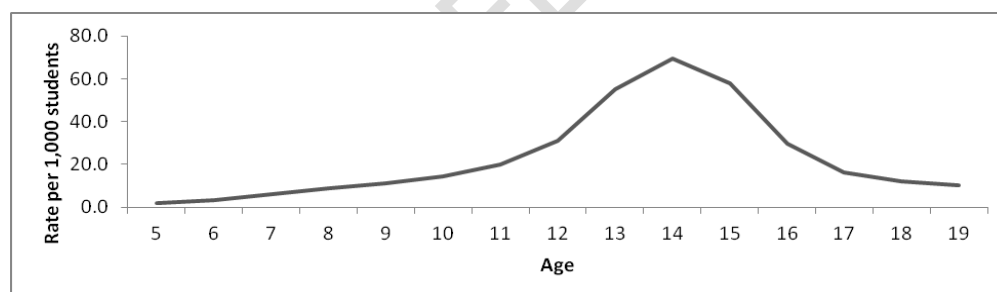


Figure 3: The number of stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions in 2015 escalated sharply from age 12/13 at the point of transition into secondary school.

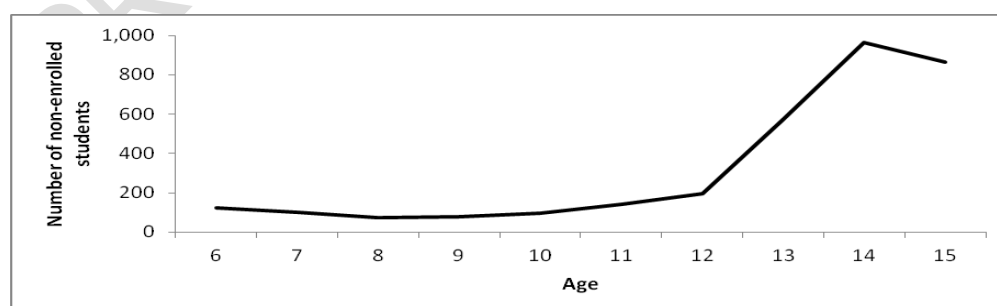


Figure 4: The number of non-enrolled young people in 2012 also rose sharply at transition.

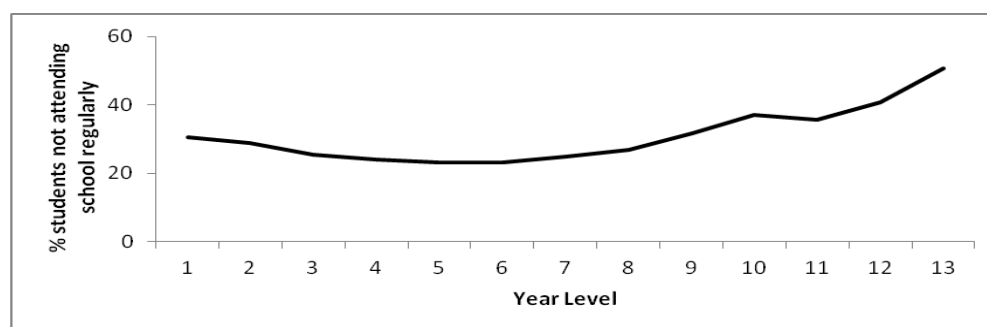


Figure 5: Truancy rates in 2015 began rising from year 7 to year 10.

Certain groups of children and young people are more likely to experience stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions than others. In 2016, the age-standardised stand-down rate for Māori students (37.2 stand-downs per 1,000) was 1.5 times higher than for Pacific students (24.8 stand-downs per 1,000), and 2.4 times as high as for European/Pākehā students (15.7 stand-downs per 1,000). Schools also suspended and excluded Māori children and young people more than any other ethnic group. Socio-economic status further impacts stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions; children and young people in decile 1 and 2 schools are more likely to experience these disciplinary actions.<sup>xvii</sup> For these children and young people the risk of transition points impacting negatively is significant.

Some children and young people require support to re-enter the education system once they have disengaged. Young people aged 13-15 who are no longer able to engage with mainstream schooling may enrol in Alternative Education. This aims to provide a meaningful learning programme targeted to individual needs which supports transitions back to mainstream school, further education, training or employment. While children and young people in Alternative Education report feeling safe and included<sup>xviii</sup>, there is a relative lack of evidence concerning the success of Alternative Education at supporting transitions back into mainstream school.

Young people in secondary school progress through different stages of awareness in their decision-making about possible future pathways. They start to see and think about pathways, including further education and/or employment, and may be starting to connect and question the relevance of their learning to their future. Early and regular opportunities to make the link between their interests, their subject choices and career options will enable them to continue to learn effectively in the face of these transitions.

### *Transitions in the Māori medium pathway*

Just under 12% of all Māori students are in Māori medium early learning, primary and secondary. Although the overall proportion of Māori students in Māori medium has steadily declined since 2010, the actual student numbers have increased each year since 2010. The proportional decrease in Māori medium is driven by a continuing decrease in student participation in ngā kōhanga reo over years, with participation in primary level remaining steady and a slight increase in proportional participation at secondary level. Key points to note are:

- proportional participation in Māori medium decreases significantly at transition points between early learning (22%), primary school settings (12%), and secondary school settings (5%)

- Māori medium is concentrated in particular regions. It operates over capacity in some regions, whereas others have no access to Māori medium
- data analysis shows that being in Māori medium at year 8 and staying in Māori medium until leaving school in year 12 or 13 has a strong relationship with achievement of NCEA level 2
- the data suggests that when students transition from Māori medium, their year level at the time of transition potentially has an impact on their achievement.<sup>xix</sup>

### *Transitions between secondary, tertiary education and employment*

The transition at the end of secondary school differs from earlier transitions, for the majority of young people, as there are different pathways that young people might choose to take. Young people can transition to study options at degree, diploma or certificate level at tertiary providers across New Zealand. They can also move into employment, including employment that combines further study through industry training.

The world of work is in a period of rapid change and young people are making decisions about transitions in this context. A 2015 Foundation for Young Australians report on “How are young people faring in transition to work?” found that, in Australia:<sup>xx</sup>

- young people are staying longer in education but 75% of future jobs will involve STEM subjects and proficiency is not growing accordingly in these subjects;
- 90% of future jobs will involve digital literacy and 35% of 15 year olds are not digitally literate; and
- young people will have 17 jobs over 5 careers throughout their lifetime.

Young people's transition pathways into employment and/or further study are strongly influenced by a range of factors. Their educational performance and achievement at school impacts their employability and skills. The state of the economy and labour market are also highly influential, as is their previous work experience. Those who are supported to think about tertiary education and employment options from a young age, including with high quality careers information, are more likely to make well-informed decisions with positive outcomes.

Transitions from secondary to the world of work are challenging for students with additional needs and they face further attitudinal, access and support barriers even before they begin to seek employment. The Employers and Manufacturers Association reported that 41% of members were dissatisfied with the readiness of school leavers for work.<sup>xxi</sup> There are well developed principles for the provision of effective work experience and the need for ongoing support in the work place.<sup>xxii</sup>

At this transition point the influence of peers as well as teachers, parents and whānau and other significant influencers such as mentors, buddies, and employers help ensure that young people have the right level of support and advice to make confident decisions that are right for them.<sup>xxiii</sup> Young people need the competencies necessary to make informed choices about their future. Relevant and well-developed

competencies such as self-knowledge and resilience can support making well-informed transitions and achieving successful outcomes.

A 2011 survey by the Education and Employers Taskforce and YouGov showed evidence of a positive correlation between employer engagement while in education and perceptions of successful and confident labour market progression, status in the labour market and earnings. Participation in four or more employer engagement activities while in school made young adults (19-24 years) five times less likely to be NEET, as well as earning on average 16% more. These results were independent of qualification level.<sup>xxiv</sup>

### *Achievement at NCEA Level 2 and above*

An increasing number of young people are leaving school with the necessary foundation qualifications that support them to move on to work or further study. As more young people are achieving foundation qualifications at school, participation by those under 20 years in tertiary-based foundation courses has decreased. Māori and Pacific school leavers remain the most likely to be enrolled in such courses.

In 2016, 80.3% of all school leavers attained the equivalent of NCEA Level 2 or above, up 0.7 percentage points from 2015 (79.6%). While Māori school leavers experienced a lower achievement rate (66.5%), they saw the highest increase of the illustrated groups over the 2015-16 period (up 3.3 percentage points).

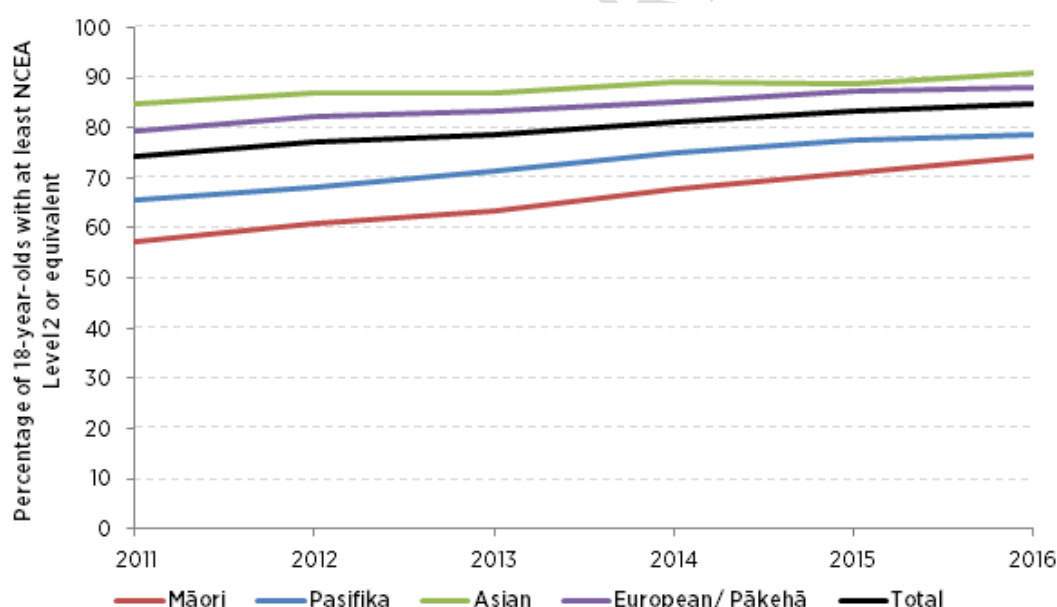


Figure 6: Percentage of 18-year-olds with at least NCEA level 2 or equivalent, by total response ethnic group (2011-2016)

Māori-medium delivers educational achievement and qualification outcomes that are not delivered for many Māori young people in English medium. In 2015, 78% of school leavers from Māori medium left with NCEA level 2 or above. This is on par with all young people in the school population, unlike Māori in English medium.<sup>xxv</sup>

While achievement at Level 2 is significant, it is not the sole determinant of transitions into tertiary study or employment. Māori and Pacific school leavers are less likely than any other ethnic groups in New Zealand

to begin degree-level studies, to succeed in their first year, and to continue with their studies.<sup>xxvi</sup> In 2015 there were approximately 60,600 domestic school leavers. When analysing the destinations of these leavers a year later, the following can be observed:

- 60.3% (36,500 young people) had enrolled in tertiary education at all levels.
- Tertiary enrolment rates for Pacific (54.4%) and Māori (50.5%) school leavers were lower than the national average.
- Of the cohort enrolled in tertiary education at different levels the proportion who enrolled in Level 4 or higher programmes remained at around 45%, but the proportion in degree-level programmes increased from 30% in 2012 to 33%. This reflects a shift in student demand towards study at higher levels.

The correlation between higher achievement at Level 2 and stable enrolments at Level 4 partly reflects labour market trends. Student enrolment patterns in tertiary education at sub-degree levels are highly linked to the strength of the labour market. In periods of low unemployment, overall demand for provider-based tertiary education tends to fall. More young people enter employment and may take up industry training and apprenticeships. Some young people may go into employment, and then go into tertiary education in subsequent years. This shows that young people take a broad variety of different pathways after school, and many move between further education and employment.

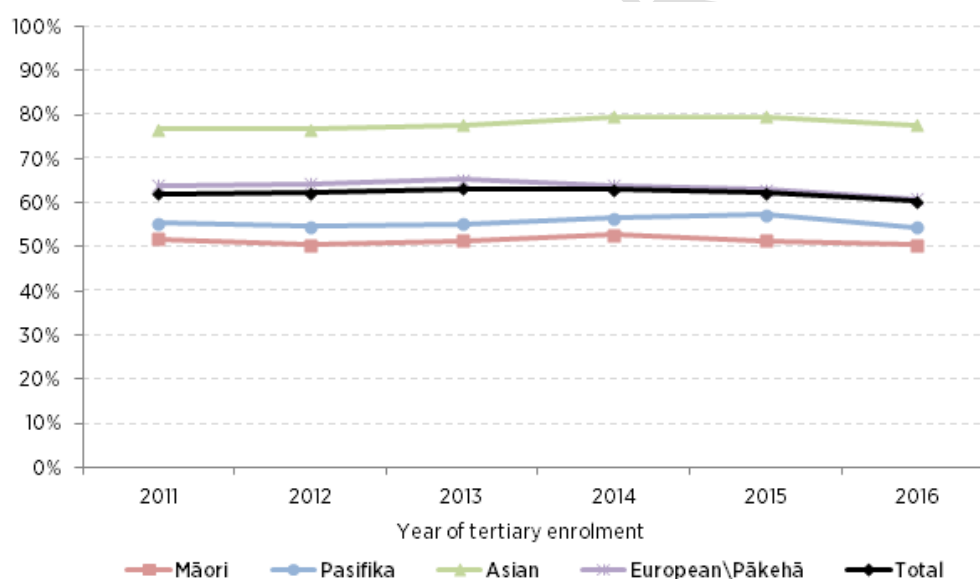


Figure 7: Proportion of young people in tertiary education one year after leaving school by year, and ethnicity (2011-2016)

As has been illustrated, many young people transition directly into further education or employment. However, some are not engaged in employment, education or training (NEET). Young people who are NEET may be looking after children or volunteering. However, others may be in their position due to a lack of jobs, disability, long-term sickness, poor qualifications, substance abuse, or criminal offences.<sup>xxvii</sup>

NEET rates vary with the economic cycle. In June 2017 the total NEET rate for 15-24 year olds was 12.2%. This is relatively low when compared with other OECD countries, indicating that many young people are making successful post-school transitions.



However Māori and Pacific young people are more likely to be NEET than the population average, with rates of 20.1% and 17.8% respectively.

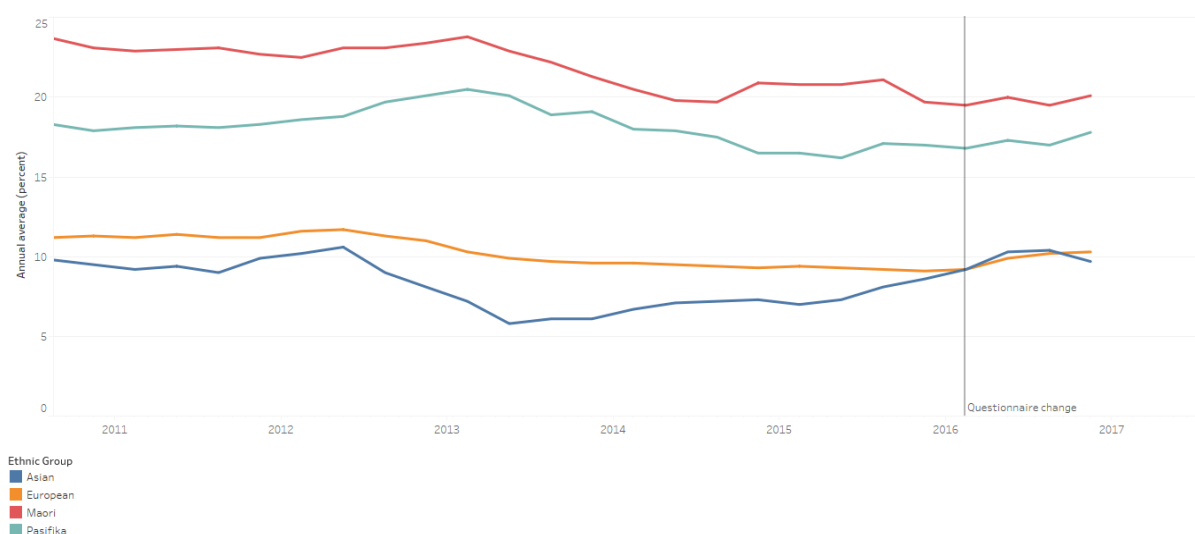


Figure 8: Youth NEET rates by year, and ethnicity (2011-2016)

'The Attitude Gap', a multi-agency study into the lack of connection between local employers and young people in South Auckland, has found that youth unemployment is driven by a mismatch of norms and expectations between young people and employers.<sup>xxviii</sup> Conflicting communication styles, cultural misunderstanding and a lack of responsibility, accountability and coordination can perpetuate this divide.

### *What are children and young people telling us?*

A report recently commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner engaged with a diverse group of 1,678 children and young people in order to better understand their thoughts and feelings about schooling and education.<sup>xxix</sup> These tamariki and rangatahi describe a number of issues relating to educational transitions and how they could be improved. Some key points and themes emerge.

Relationships are highly important to young people, particularly with a good teacher, their family, and friends. Respondents expressed a desire for their teachers to understand their home life and how it influences their school experience and learning. Young people who have changed schools frequently (especially those in alternative education) talk about how much they miss their friends when they are excluded from mainstream school.

Children and young people want their perspective to be understood. They value being comfortable, being listened to, and having a say in their educational pathways. They report that their comfort could be improved by greater teacher support in times of change or difficulty, and by good inductions to new environments. This includes building relationships as well as understanding physical and structural changes.

The transition to secondary school was considered the hardest transition — harder than getting a new teacher, or starting primary or intermediate school.

In the eyes of the children and young people, transitions would be improved by:

- teachers' knowledge and appreciation of the children they care for, including of the child's perspective;
- comprehensive inductions, both in terms of understanding a physical environment and in building relationships;
- respect for existing relationships and cultures; and
- involvement and support from teaching staff, especially at times of difficulty and change.

The children sampled made corresponding suggestions. In response to the question "What do you think could make these changes better for young people?" the most identified solutions were teachers, introductions and induction, and relationships and peer support.<sup>xxx</sup>

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