Education Report: Proposed Closure of Riverslea School (2668)

**To:** Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education

**Date:** 5 December 2018  
**Priority:** High

**Security Level:** In Confidence  
**METIS No:** 1167025  
**DDI:** s 9(2)(a)

**Draker:** Natasha Kiwara  
**Key Contact:** Katrina Casey

**Messaging seen by Communications team:** No  
**Round robin:** No

**Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to provide you with information to support your consideration of whether to close Riverslea School.

**Summary**

1. Riverslea School is a contributing primary school in the suburb of Mayfair, in Hastings. It is in close proximity to other primary schools. The roll at Riverslea School has steadily declined from 62 students in 2012, to 19 students as at 18 October 2018.

2. The Education Review Office (ERO) August 2018 review stated that, although some progress had been made in key areas since its 2017 review “The school is not well placed to continue to improve and to sustain improvement”.

3. The Riverslea School Commissioner believes the long-term viability of the school is poor, with most parents of current students indicating they will be sending their children to Mayfair School, which is 1.3 kilometres from Riverslea School.

4. The Commissioner wrote to the Ministry in May 2018 asking for the voluntary closure of the School at the end of 2018, at which time the school would stop being operational, and would officially close on 27 January 2019.

5. On 13 October 2018 you agreed to initiate consultation on the possible closure of the School [METIS 1149572 refers].

6. Consultation under section 157 of the Education Act 1989 (the Act) was initiated with schools whose rolls might be affected, and no concerns were received. Local iwi were also approached as part of the consultation and did not have any comment.

7. If approved, closure of the school, would be under section 154 of the Act.
If you decide to close Riverslea School, in the first year it is estimated that there would be operational savings to the Crown of $25,000. Each year after this would see estimated operational savings of $121,000, with $918,000 being saved over a 10 year period.

Education Development Initiative (EDI) enhancements of $196,000 would apply if the closure proceeds, based on the 1 March 2018 roll of 22 students. This is allowed for in the figures above. This funding is primarily to help students transition to their next school and to raise achievement.

Recommended Actions

We recommend that you:

a. **agree** to close Riverslea School under section 154 of the Education Act 1989, with effect from 27 January 2019;

b. **sign** the attached *New Zealand Gazette* notice gazetting the closure;

c. **sign** the attached letters to the Commissioner and the local Members of Parliament informing them of your decision; and

d. **agree** that this Education Report be proactively released as per your expectation that information be released proactively. Any information that might need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

Katrina Casey  
Deputy Secretary  
Sector Enablement and Support  
5/10/2018

Hon Chris Hipkins  
Minister of Education  
19/12/18
Background

1. Riverslea School is a decile 1, contributing primary school located in the Mayfair suburb of Hastings. The School is located 1.3 kilometres from Mayfair School, 1.4 kilometres from Parkvale School and 1.5 kilometres from Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Wananga Whare Tapere o Takitimu.

2. The Principal of Riverslea School resigned in December 2017 and an Emergency Staffing Scheme (ESS) Principal is currently in place. Attempts to appoint a permanent Principal have not attracted a suitable applicant.

3. The School is currently engaged in a longitudinal one-to-two year Education Review Office (ERO) process. Education provision at the School has been variable. Although the 2016 National Standards data showed between 67% and 74% of students achieved at or above in reading, writing and mathematics, the ESS Principal has identified issues with the validity and reliability of student achievement data at all levels in the school.

4. The ERO August 2018 review stated that, although some progress had been made in key areas since its 2017 review “The school is not well placed to continue to improve and to sustain improvement”.

5. Riverslea School has been governed by a Commissioner since 28 November 2017, after the resignation of the Board of Trustees. There have been no expressions of interest from the community to form a new Board of Trustees should the school remain open.

6. Student numbers at Riverslea School have steadily declined from 62 students in 2012 to its current roll of 19. The Commissioner has been advised that many of the current students are likely to enrol in Mayfair School from the beginning of 2019. Mayfair School has capacity to accommodate these students.

7. The Commissioner wrote to the Ministry on 11 May 2018 asking for voluntary closure of the School [METIS 1149572 refers].

8. We met with the Commissioner and ESS Principal on 18 October 2018. Information was discussed about the closure process, asset distribution and the Education Development Initiative (EDI) policy.

Consultation under Sections 154 and 157 of the Education Act 1989

9. Before making a decision about closing a school, you must consult with the Board (or in this case, the Commissioner) of the school concerned and with the Boards of state schools whose rolls might be affected. In October you agreed to initiate this consultation, and we undertook it on your behalf.

10. We consulted with the Boards of Mayfair School, Parkvale School, Mangateretere School, Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Wananga Whare Tapere o Takitimu, the Lead Principal for the Whirinaki Kāhui Ako (of which Riverslea School is a member) and Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Incorporated.

11. Although schools expressed sadness with the possible closure of Riverslea School, no formal responses opposing the closure were received. No comment was received from the Iwi.
Assessment

12. The Ministry considers that Riverslea School is no longer viable and is being considered for closure for the following reasons:
   - There are currently only 19 students enrolled at Riverslea School. All students have new schooling options arranged for Term 1, 2019.
   - A significant range of formal and informal support has been provided to improve the quality of education provision at Riverslea School over a sustained period of time. This includes programmes and intervention from NZSTA, ERO, RTLB Service, Ministry of Education, the Principal Leadership Advisor and statutory appointees. Despite this support, there has not been sustained change. This view is supported by the latest ERO review.
   - Evidence shows engagement from the community is poor.

13. We therefore consider that in the best interests of the children, Riverslea School should now close.

Staffing

14. The 2018 school staffing allocation is 1.3 Full Time Teacher Equivalents (FTTE).

15. There is a permanent office person, who is also a teacher aide, a fixed-term cleaner and a fixed-term part-time caretaker.

16. The Commissioner understands her responsibility to meet the employment contract requirements of staff and will work with the New Zealand School Trustees Association and relevant unions to ensure that obligations are met.

17. Riverslea School currently has an ESS Principal. This contract has been extended to the end of Term 1, 2019.

Financial Implications

18. Riverslea School has a total accumulated surplus since 1995 of $38,937. It operated in deficit of ($18,545) in 2017 and a surplus of $12,359 in 2016. The declining roll has affected its operational grant. The working capital position remains positive at $27,521 as at 31 December 2017. The School's equity has begun to improve slightly over the last 4 years moving from 65% to 72%.

19. If you decide to close Riverslea School, the estimated operational savings to the Crown in the first year is $25,000. Each year after this would see estimated operational savings of $121,000 with an estimated saving of $918,000 over a 10 year period.

20. Education Development Initiative (EDI) enhancements of $196,000 would apply if the closure proceeds, based on the 1 March 2018 roll of 22 students. This cost is allowed for in the figures above. This funding is primarily to help students transition to their next school and to raise achievement.

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1 We note that as at March 2018, there were 179 Year 1-6 students living in close proximity to Riverslea School. Of these, only 19 currently choose to attend Riverslea School.
Property and Transport Implications

21. The property at Riverslea School is Crown-owned. Should Riverslea School close, it would be beneficial for the site to be retained and used for educational purposes. The two main school buildings (six teaching spaces) are in an average to good condition.

Early Childhood Education
22. The Te Atawhai Early Childhood Centre (Te Atawhai) currently occupies two surplus classrooms on the site under a five year lease. The lease is from 1 February 2014 to 31 January 2019, with a right of renewal for a further five year term. There is provision for early termination, with no entitlement to any form of compensation.

23. Te Atawhai is licensed for 40 children and has a current roll of 26. It is highly responsive to the target communities, is fees-free and provides transport. Leaders and staff have worked hard to provide a quality service. ERO reviewed the Centre in November 2018, giving it a very positive report, and will conduct its next review in three years. We will therefore either retain the ECE on the site or relocate it to another suitable location.

24. There are two schools in the area that could be relocated onto the Riverslea site, either permanently or as a temporary move. Should one of these options be adopted we would assist Te Atawhai in relocating to another suitable site.

School Transport
25. Should you decide to close the school, there would be no transport implications. Riverslea School is an urban school and no current students have Ministry-funded transport.

Risks

26. We consider this to be a low risk decision. The Commissioner has initiated a number of opportunities to support engagement, however its support for the school has not been strong. The parents of the current students have indicated that they will be sending their children to other schools in 2019.

Next Steps

27. Under section 154(2A) of the Education Act 1989, if the Commissioner advises or indicates in writing that she agrees with or does not oppose the closure of the school, you have the discretion to close the school immediately without completing any consultation process underway. Typically at this point in the process, if you were satisfied the school should be closed you would then give the Commissioner 28 days to provide any arguments in favour of the school remaining open.

28. In this case, as the Commissioner has requested closure in writing, community support for Riverslea School remaining open is very poor, and no objection to closure has been raised through consultation. We consider that a further 28 day period for provision of further arguments in favour of keeping the school open is not necessary and we recommend that you progress directly to gazetting closure, if that is your decision.

29. If, after considering the information in this report, you decide you are satisfied the school should close, a draft letter (Annex 1) and NZ Gazette Notice (Annex 3) are attached for you to inform the board and gazette the closure.
30. If you agree to this request for closure, a Memorandum of Agreement itemising the EDI funds and the process for accessing them, as well as details of the distribution of assets from Riverslea School, will be negotiated with the Commissioner and other relevant boards.

31. We will appoint a Change Manager and Residual Agent to complete the closure process. This would be expected to be completed approximately three months after the closure is gazetted.

32. If you decide to leave the school open we will work with the Commissioner to determine further plans for the future of the school.

Conclusion

33. We consider that Riverslea School is no longer viable, and closure is appropriate for the following reasons:
   - The Commissioner has considered the future of the school and the ongoing issues related to governance, leadership, staffing and community support, and has requested closure.
   - The Commissioner has initiated a number of opportunities to support engagement of the community, however, community support for the school has not been strong. The parents of the current students have indicated that they will be sending their children to other schools.
   - As at March 2018, there were 179 Year 1-6 students living in close proximity to Riverslea School. Of these, only 19 currently choose to attend Riverslea School. These 19 students have arranged to attend another school in 2019.

Proactive Release

34. It is intended that this Education Report be proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information that might need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

Annexes

Annex 1: Letter to Commissioner
Annex 2: Letter to MPs
Annex 3: New Zealand Gazette Notice