Education Report: Initiating consultation over a proposed recapitation for Meremere School (1373)

To: Hon. Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education

Date: 18 December 2018  Priority: Medium

Security Level: In Confidence  METIS No: 1170319

Drafter: Mark Atkin  DDI: $9(2)(a)

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Messaging seen by Communications team: No  Round Robin: No

Purpose of report

This report asks you to agree to the Ministry initiating consultation, under section 157 of the Education Act 1989 (the Act), over a proposal by the Meremere School Board of Trustees to recapititate the School from a Year 1 – 6 (contributing) primary school to a Year 1 – 8 (full) primary school under section 150(1) of the Act.

This has the support of the Director of Education Waikato.

Summary

1 Meremere School is a decile 1 co-educational Year 1 – 6 (contributing) primary school in Meremere, Waikato. The majority of students are of Māori heritage. The school is in a semi-rural community, with a relatively transient population. The roll has fluctuated between 42 and 20 over the last four years, due primarily to transience, with a current roll of 27. This fluctuation is reflected in the School’s variable financial performance, although the Board has utilised professional financial advice to manage this.

2 The Board considers there are educational advantages to its students in remaining at the School for Years 7 – 8 before moving to Te Kauwhata College, the only local secondary school. Mercer School is a nearby full primary school providing for Years 7 – 8 but is near capacity. No Year 7 or 8 children living in Meremere currently attend Mercer school.

3 The proposed change would result in approximately four students per year remaining at Meremere School (i.e. eight in total across the two years).
The Board has engaged with staff and parents, and the boards of the nearest schools. All staff, and all parents of current students, support the proposal. The Board of Te Kauwhata College, the school most likely to be affected by the proposal, supports the proposal, on the proviso that any students wishing to enrol at Te Kauwhata College in Year 7 or 8 can do so, and are given the choice of catching the College's free school bus. The latter is outside School Transport policy, as Te Kauwhata College will not be the closest available school for Years 7 and 8 provision. This means that students would no longer be eligible for the free service, but could still catch the bus if there were space and they paid a fare.

The current principal worked hard, with the Board of Trustees, to improve the school when she took over the position in 2013, resulting in greatly improved Education Review Office (ERO) reports in 2014 and 2016. Improvement is ongoing, and the School is now on a three year ERO review cycle. Grounds, property and resources have also been improved.

There are no property implications as the School has sufficient teaching spaces for the projected roll.

The School roll is currently on the threshold for having either one or two teachers, having had two teachers to date. The increased roll resulting from retaining Year 7 – 8 students would ensure the current, historic, staffing level could be maintained. The Board considers that greater certainty around staffing levels would aid staff retention, and it would benefit students to retain this level of staffing.

The difference of around 8 students, spread across two year levels, would have no impact on the staffing at Te Kauwhata College. The estimated cost to the Crown is $15,000 (excl GST) per year, based on Meremere School's current roll of 27 students.

Under section 157(3)(c) of the Act you must consult with the boards of schools whose rolls are likely to be affected by the proposed change.
Recommended actions

We recommend that you:

a. **agree** to the Ministry initiating consultation, under section 157 of the Education Act 1989 (the Act), on a proposal to recapitulate Meremere School, from a Year 1 – 6 contributing primary school to a Year 1 – 8 full primary school;  
   
   Agree / Disagree

b. **sign** the attached letter to the Meremere School Board of Trustees informing the Board of your decision;

c. **agree** that this Education Report be proactively released once a final decision is made. Any information that might need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

   Release / Not release

Katrina Casey  
Deputy Secretary  
Sector Enablement and Support  
18/12/2018

Hon. Chris Hipkins  
Minister of Education  
5/2/19
Background

1. Meremere School is a decile 1 co-educational Year 1 – 6 (contributing) primary school in Meremere, Waikato. The majority of students are of Māori heritage.

2. The school is in a semi-rural community, with a relatively transient population. The school roll has fluctuated between 42 and 20 over the last four years, with a current roll of 27. This fluctuation is reflected in the School's financial performance, although the Board has utilised professional financial advice to manage this.

3. The current principal worked hard, with the Board of Trustees, to improve the school when she took over the position in 2013, resulting in greatly improved Education Review Office (ERO) reports in 2014 and 2016. Improvement is ongoing, and the School is now on a three year ERO review cycle. Grounds, property and resources have also been improved.

4. The Board of Trustees has requested recapitation of the School, to become a Year 7 – 8 (full) primary school.

Rationale for the proposed recapitation

5. The Board considers there are educational advantages for its students in remaining at the School for Years 7 – 8 before moving to Te Kauwhata College, the only local secondary school. Meremere School students often have difficulties in adjusting to the environment of such a large school, with older students. Some students who have done very well at Meremere School have fallen significantly behind in their achievement at the College as a result.

6. The Board considers that gaining an extra two years maturity before transitioning to the College would benefit students. It considers this is particularly so because the small semi-rural nature of Meremere School and its community tends to result in children being less socially adaptable than urban counterparts.

Education in the local area

7. The only secondary school in the area is Te Kauwhata College, which caters for students from Year 7 to Year 13, and has a roll of just under 500 students.

8. Mercer School is a decile 3 co-educational Year 1 – 8 (full) primary school, located 7.6 km away from Meremere School, but is near capacity. No Year 7 or 8 children living in Meremere currently attend Mercer school.

9. Both Mercer School and Meremere School are on three year ERO review cycles.

Engagement and consultation

10. The Board has engaged with staff and parents, and the boards of the nearest schools. All staff, and all parents of current students, support the proposal.
11. The Board of Te Kauwhata College, the only school likely to be affected by the proposal, supports the proposal, on the proviso that any students wishing to enrol at Te Kauwhata College in Year 7 or 8 can do so, and are given the choice of catching the College’s free school bus. The latter is outside School Transport policy, as Te Kauwhata College will not be the closest available school for Years 7 and 8 provision. This means that students would no longer be eligible for the free service, but could still catch the bus if there were space and they paid a fare.

Staffing

12. The School roll is currently on the threshold for having either one or two teachers. There have to date been two teachers. The increased roll resulting from retaining Year 7 – 8 students would ensure the current, historic, staffing level could be maintained. The Board considers that a greater certainty of staffing levels would aid staff retention, and it would benefit students to retain this level of staffing.

13. The difference of around 8 students, spread across two year levels, would have no material impact on the staffing at Te Kauwhata College.

Financial implications

14. Operational cost modelling indicates a 0.1 FTTE entitlement increase for Meremere School, with no change in staffing entitlement for Te Kauwhata College. The primary cost increase is in operational funding for Meremere School.

15. The estimated cost of recapitation to the Crown is $15,000 (excl GST) per year, based on Meremere School’s current roll of 27 students.

Property and transport implications

16. There are no property implications as the School has sufficient teaching spaces for the projected roll.

17. At present Mercer School is the nearest provider of Year 7 and 8 tuition, so Meremere students are not currently eligible for free school transport to Te Kauwhata College, although they may catch the Te Kauwhata College bus if there are spaces available and they pay a fare.

18. If Meremere School provides Year 7 and 8 tuition there will be no transport entitlement for Year 7 and 8 students to attend another school for those years.

Next steps

19. If you agree, we will conduct consultation in Term 1, 2019 with the boards of schools whose rolls are likely to be affected by the proposal. This consultation is required under section 157(3)(c) of the Act.
Proactive release

20. It is intended that this Education Report be proactively released once you have made a final decision on the proposed change of class. 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 Board Chair
John Ngatai  
Chairperson  
Meremere School Board of Trustees  
23 Heather Green Avenue  
Meremere  
R D 2  
SOUTH AUCKLAND 2474  

Dear John  

Thank you for your Board’s application to recapitate Meremere School, to become a Year 1 – 8 full primary school.  

I note from your application that you have already engaged with students’ parents, staff, and nearby schools, with positive responses.  

Under section 157 of the Education Act 1989 I must consult with the boards of schools whose rolls might be affected and consider that feedback before I make a decision about your school becoming a full primary. I have asked the Ministry of Education to conduct this consultation on my behalf. I understand this will be done in Term 1, 2019.  

The Ministry will be in contact with you regarding the process from here. The Ministry will then prepare further advice for my final decision.  

Yours sincerely  

Chris Hipkins  
Minister of Education