Education Report: Tuturumuri School (3052) Update

To: Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education

Date: 29 October 2019

Security Level: In Confidence

Drafter: Mandy Bird

Key contact and number: Kayne Good

Messaging seen by Communications team: No

Priority: Medium

METIS No: 1209545

Purpose of Report

This report updates you on Tuturumuri School following your September 2018 decision to keep the school open after consultation was undertaken about its possible closure. When you made the decision not to progress closure, you asked for an update on the school’s viability one year on from your decision.

The report provides you with the requested update and seeks your approval on the next steps for the school.

Summary

1. In September 2018, following a formal consultation period, you decided not to close Tuturumuri School in the Wairarapa. You requested that the Ministry provide you with an update in a year on the progress of the school.

2. Since that decision, the school roll grew to seven, but this has now fallen to two pupils. We are not aware of any other prospective enrolments for next year.

3. A permanent principal was appointed for 2019. However, he has indicated that he will be looking for other employment, as the role is not a challenge due to the low roll. The release teacher has also indicated she will be looking for other employment.

4. In September the Board met with the community to discuss the future of the school. The majority of the Tuturumuri School Board of Trustees are supportive of closure. However, as this view is not unanimous, the board has decided not to formally request closure. The media has now also become interested in the future of the school.

5. The next step, if you are to consider closing the school, would be to initiate formal consultation with the board under section 154 of the Education Act 1989 (the Act). You are also required under section 157 of the Act to consult with the boards of all state schools whose rolls might, in your opinion, be affected if you were to close the school. The Ministry would carry out this consultation on your behalf.
Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

a. note this requested update on Tuturumuri School, one year on from your decision for it to remain open;

AND

b. agree to initiate consultation on the potential closure of Tuturumuri School under sections 154 and 157 of the Education Act 1989;

If you agree to initiate consultation you are asked to:

c. sign the attached letter to the chairperson of the Tuturumuri School Board of Trustees initiating consultation under section 154 of the Education Act 1989;

d. agree to the Ministry consulting on your behalf under section 157 of the Education Act 1989 with all state schools whose rolls might be affected if Tuturumuri School were to close;

e. sign the attached letters to the local Members of Parliament informing them of your decision;

f. agree that this Education Report will be proactively released after a decision is made about the school's future. Any information that might need to be withheld will be done so in line with provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

Coralanne Child
Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement & Support

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

29/10/2019
5/11/19
Background

1. In August 2017 the Tuturumuri School Board of Trustees advised the Ministry of Education that in Term 4, 2017 there would be no students enrolled at the school and the principal had accepted another position for 2018. The principal enquired about initiating the closure process. We recommended that the board undertake community consultation about potential closure. Following this, the board held three community meetings to discuss closure of the school. This consultation showed a community interest in keeping the school open but at that time, it didn’t result in any confirmed enrolments.

2. We commissioned an independent facilitator to report on the sustainability of the school. Following this report, and the lack of enrolments for the 2018 school year, we formed a view that the school’s sustainability was at risk and closure should be considered.

3. On 20 February 2018 you agreed to consultation on the possible closure of Tuturumuri School [METIS 1099172 refers]. On 22 February 2018 we appointed a Limited Statutory Manager (LSM) to support the board. An emergency principal was also appointed. By the end of Term 1, 2018 three students had enrolled at the school.

4. Consultation on possible closure ran from 28 February to 28 March 2018. In May 2018, we provided the consultation outcomes to you and you agreed that you were satisfied the school should close. You then gave the board 28 days to provide you with any final arguments in favour of the school staying open as required by section 154 of the Act. This was extended to 10 August 2018 at the board’s request.

5. At the end of the period, we received a further submission from the board.

6. On 17 September 2018, you decided that the school would remain open, and you ended the closure process. You advised at the time, that it was crucial for the long-term sustainability of the school to attract a suitable teaching principal in 2019. You also instructed the Ministry to provide you with an update later in 2019 regarding the ongoing sustainability of the school, including advice from the next Education Review Office (ERO) review.

Updates

Permanent Principal and Staff

7. On 12 December 2018, Alastair Morrison was appointed as the permanent principal of Tuturumuri School. He is a first time principal and has a Leadership Advisor to support him in this role. Alastair has been teaching for six years and was the head of e-learning at his previous school.

8. The principal has signalled to us and the community that he intends to look for other employment during Term 4 2019. He has indicated that this is because the role does not provide enough of a professional challenge for him. This is the same reason that the previous permanent principal left at the end of 2017.

9. The release teacher has also indicated she is seeking employment elsewhere. Both the principal and release teacher have signalled their intentions to the board and the community.
Student Numbers

10. The school opened in Term 1, 2019 with a roll of seven students. Since then six
students have left and another one has enrolled meaning the school has a current roll
of two students – one student in Year 7 and one Year 1 new enrolment, both from the
same family.

11. In week 4 of Term 2, 2019 the principal, concerned about the long term viability of the
school, met with the Steering Committee (the Committee), made up of local community
members who previously campaigned to keep the school open. During the possible
closure consultation in 2018, this Committee supported the school remaining open,
and was actively trying to raise enrolments at the school. The Committee led the
community in advocating to retain the school. The members are aware of the roll
decline and that there are no enrolments pending.

12. The parent of the most recent student who left the school has enrolled her daughter at
a larger school § 9(2)(a) OIA. The principal has informed us the parents of the remaining siblings enrolled might also enrol their
children elsewhere as they do not want their children to be the only students at the
school and only socialise with each other.

13. South Wairarapa District Council has not changed its population projections for
Tuturumuri. The population forecasts for the next 25 years indicate no expected
population growth. There are no known consented residential developments. Plans for
a small development settlement in Tuturumuri have not materialised.

Other Education uses of the School Facilities

14. There are four children enrolled at a playgroup operated on the school premises. All
children are under two years of age and there is no indication whether any of these
children would be future Tuturumuri School students.

Board of Trustees

15. In Term 1 2019 the board Chairperson resigned and moved out of the area. The new
board Chair was mentored by the outgoing Chair.

16. The composition of the current board is three elected parent representatives, the
principal and the staff representative.

17. During 2018-19, an LSM was in place to support the board. Following a review of the
ongoing need for an LSM this intervention was revoked on 24 July 2019.

18. The board is working with NZSTA for ongoing training and support.

ERO Report

19. On 10 June 2019, ERO conducted a review of the school. On the basis of the findings
of the review, ERO’s overall judgement of the school’s performance in achieving
valued outcomes for its students is ‘Developing’.
20. The report found:
   a. Due to the low fluctuating roll, it is difficult to identify how well the school is achieving and sustaining equitable and excellent outcomes for students over time. No reliable achievement data was made available for ERO or the new principal for the period prior to mid 2018.
   b. Individualised teaching in 2019 has successfully promoted equitable and improved outcomes for each student in literacy and mathematics.
   c. The school has been successful in accelerating students' learning.
   d. A well-considered approach is in place for managing school development and operation. Trustees have shown significant commitment, securing community support and achieving the permanent appointment of a teaching principal. Together the principal and trustees have identified priorities for development.
   e. New operational guidelines have been put in place. External support has been accessed to support the revision and documentation of the school’s long-term planning and localised curriculum. These actions are likely to support improvement over time and a sustainable approach to managing the school.
   f. There is an appropriate focus on building leadership and teacher capability.
   g. Student wellbeing is prioritised.
   h. Specialised help is in place for any child who needs additional support.
   i. The board and principal have identified, and ERO’s evaluation confirms, that the key priorities for the school include:
      i. continuing to secure community/iwi relationships and networks
      ii. working with community to revise school direction and inform decisions about curriculum development
      iii. strengthening stewardship through training, succession planning and the development of guidelines, expectations and work plans
      iv. an enduring focus on leadership and teacher development to promote ongoing improvement to student outcomes
      v. ensuring guidelines for all aspects of practice are kept current and support shared understanding of good practice and accountabilities
      vi. the implementation of a suitable internal evaluation process should enable trustees and teachers to better measure and report progress in developing school conditions and meeting goals, and inform decisions about further development steps.

Board Actions

21. In Term 3, 2019 the board held a meeting with the community to discuss the future of the school. At this meeting the community presented no new ideas that were not discussed in 2018 when the school was faced with potential closure.
22. The board then met to discuss their next steps. The majority of the board agreed with seeking voluntary closure.

23. The board subsequently engaged a facilitator to run a second meeting on Monday 23 September 2019 where they informed the community that the majority of the board supported closure. We attended this meeting to advise the board on the technical closure process and answered questions from the community on process. The principal, release teacher (and staff representative on the board) and board chair all believe the education needs of students will be better met at larger schools. The community remained divided on closure of the school, with people speaking both for closure and retention.

24. The board met again on Sunday 29 September to formally vote on whether to request closure. At this meeting, despite a majority of the board agreeing with the decision to request closure, the board resolved that as it was not a unanimous decision they would not request voluntary closure.

25. The principal has indicated to us that if a directed closure process is progressed, the board will accept this.

Closure Process for State Schools

26. Sections 154 and 157 of the Education Act 1989 require the Minister to undertake consultation about possible school closures.

27. If you agree to initiate this consultation process, the Ministry would formally consult with the Tuturumuri School Board and the boards of all other state schools whose rolls might be affected should the closure go ahead.

28. We would then report back to you with the feedback. If, having considered this feedback, you are satisfied the school should close, the Act requires you to give the board 28 days to provide any arguments in favour of the school staying open. Once this feedback has been received it would be provided to you for your final decision about whether to close the school.

Ministry Comment

29. Our concerns about the long term viability of the school remain. The current roll is two students, and potentially none in 2020. We are not aware of any other planned enrolments and neither is the board. There is still no projected population growth in the area.

30. During consultation on the potential closure of the school in 2018, a number of future enrolments were mooted. Unfortunately these enrolments have not occurred at the projected rates and the school's roll remains low. At the same time, a number of plans to increase the school-aged population were discussed, including building new houses, and attracting families to work on farms. These have not materialised.

31. There are a number of children in the wider Tuturumuri catchment. These children choose not to attend the school.

32. There are three state primary schools within 55km of Tuturumuri School. The nearest is Martinborough School located approximately 31km away. In some cases, families are already choosing to travel up to an hour to get to these larger schools (by-passing
Tuturumuri School). There is also capacity within the existing network of schools for any future students from the Tuturumuri area.

33. The ongoing stability of leadership in the school remains an issue. The current teaching principal is looking for employment elsewhere after only two terms in the school. Without an increased roll, it is likely the board will continue to struggle to find a suitable, long term principal. Attracting emergency principals to the role has been challenging in the past and may continue to be so.

34. With the release teacher confirming she is also seeking employment elsewhere there is potential that in 2020, there will be no teaching staff at the school. Recruiting to the teacher release position may also be difficult.

35. Although the board and staff have worked hard to further develop the school, there is an ongoing risk to its viability and the school largely finds itself in the same situation it was in when you agreed to initiate consultation on the potential closure in 2018.

36. We have not seen any evidence that in the last two years there have been any changes in the school’s circumstances. We believe there is perhaps a stronger voice for closure in the community following unsuccessful attempts to grow the roll over the past two years.

37. We expect significant media interest should you decide to progress formal consultation on the closure of Tuturumuri School, as there was last year.

38. The Tuturumuri Steering Committee is likely to lead a campaign to keep the school open. The group has consistently raised that it believes the dip in the school roll is intergenerational and would like to explore the possibility of holding onto the school site for future provision. This is not current policy, and would mean the school would still have to be maintained, until such time that it may be required to be operational again. This idea was raised during the consultation in 2018 and we advised at that time that this is not Ministry policy.

Next Steps

39. If you agree that we should undertake formal consultation on the closure of Tuturumuri School on your behalf, please sign the letter to the board chair and MPs attached as Annex 1.

40. This Education Report will be proactively released after a decision is made about the school’s future. Any information that might need to be withheld will be done so in line with provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

Annexes

Annex 1: Letter to board chair and MPs if initiating consultation
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Hon Meka Whaitiri
MP for Ikaroa Rawhiti
Parliament Buildings

Dear Meka,

I am writing to you about Tuturumuri School near Martinborough in the Wairarapa.

As you may recall, last year, following a formal consultation process, I ultimately decided I would not close the school. At the time I asked that the Ministry of Education update me in a year’s time on the progress of the school, which it has now done.

After considering the update, I have decided to begin a formal consultation process about the possible closure of Tuturumuri School. I have written to the board informing them of this. I am aware that the Board has already talked with its community about the possible closure of the school so it will now have the opportunity to provide me with formal feedback. The Ministry will also undertake consultation with the boards of other local schools in the network. These comprise Martinborough School, Kahutara School and Pinnoa School.

Once this process has been completed I will consider all this information before making a decision as to whether I am satisfied the school should close. If I am, then the board will have 28 days to provide any further arguments in favour of the school remaining open which I will consider before making a final decision.

I can assure you that I have not yet made any decision about whether the school should close. I am aware that closing any school is a significant decision for any rural community and it therefore needs careful consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education
Mr Alistair Scott  
MP for Wairarapa  
Parliament Buildings

Dear Mr Scott

I am writing to you about Tuturumuri School near Martinborough in the Wairarapa.

As you may recall, last year, following a formal consultation process, I ultimately decided I would not close the school. At the time I asked that the Ministry of Education update me in a year’s time on the progress of the school, which it has now done.

After considering the update, I have decided to begin a formal consultation process about the possible closure of Tuturumuri School. I have written to the board informing them of this. I am aware that the Board has already talked with its community about the possible closure of the school so it will now have the opportunity to provide me with formal feedback. The Ministry will also undertake consultation with the boards of other local schools in the network. These comprise Martinborough School, Kahutara School and Pirinoa School.

Once this process has been completed I will consider all this information before making a decision as to whether I am satisfied the school should close. If I am, then the board will have 28 days to provide any further arguments in favour of the school remaining open which I will consider before making a final decision.

I can assure you that I have not yet made any decision about whether the school should close. I am aware that closing any school is a significant decision for any rural community and it therefore needs careful consideration.

Yours sincerely

Chris Hipkins  
Minister of Education
Louise Roseman  
Chairperson Board of Trustees  
Tuturumuri School  
White Rock Road  
RD 2  
Martinborough 5782

Dear Louise

I am writing to you and your Board to let you know that the Ministry has updated me on the situation at Tuturumuri School, following my decision in September 2018 to keep the school operational.

While I am informed that there are many good things that have taken place at the school this year, including a positive ERO review process, I understand that the roll is still very low and likely to decrease further. As you will be aware this poses risks to the school’s viability.

Before a decision is made as to whether or not a school should close under section 154 of the Education Act 1989, I must consult with your board, and with the boards of all state schools whose rolls might (in my opinion) be affected if the school were to close. The Ministry of Education undertake this consultation on my behalf. I have directed the Ministry to begin this consultation process on the potential closure of Tuturumuri School.

As your school has now formally entered this process the board should be aware that it should:

- not make permanent appointments (teaching or non-teaching)
- discuss the appointment of fixed term employees with Ministry staff before any such positions are advertised
- not undertake property projects except for those concerning health and safety
- be particularly prudent with expenditure of operational / school funding.

I understand that this will be a difficult process for the community. The Ministry will continue to support your Board and community. Please contact Alana McCorry, Lead Advisor Network in the Wellington’s regional office on 04 463 4606, or email Alana.mccorry@education.govt.nz to discuss anything in this letter.

Yours sincerely

Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education