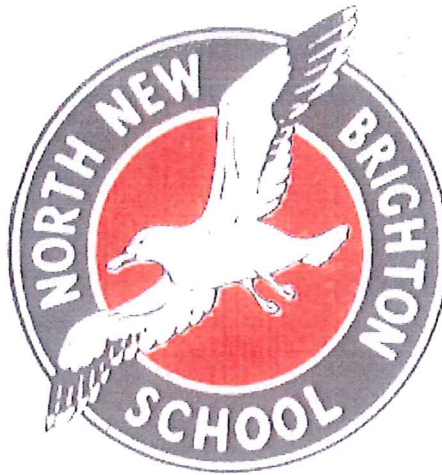


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NORTH NEW BRIGHTON SCHOOL

**Response to the Minister of Education's
interim decision to merge
Freeville School with
North New Brighton School**

March 28 2013

Proposed Merger of Freeville School (3344) and North New Brighton School (3448)

Response from the North New Brighton Board of Trustees

Background

The Ministry of Education has proposed a merger of Freeville School with North New Brighton School (18 January 2013) to the Minister of Education, the Hon. Hekia Parata. Submissions from North New Brighton School and Freeville School have been noted and acknowledged within the Ministry of Education's proposal to the Minister of Education.

In response (23 January 2013) the Minister of Education has agreed that:

- Freeville School and North New Brighton School should be merged on the North New Brighton School site and that North New Brighton be the continuing school.
- The preferred date for the merger to take effect is 27 January 2014 and that the school operate on split sites until the property is developed for the merged school on the North New Brighton School site.
- A merged school to be initially governed by an appointed Board of Trustees.
- A copy of the proposed merger of Freeville School and North New Brighton School be released to each of the respective Board of Trustees.

The North New Brighton School community, staff and Board of Trustees have given the proposal document careful and due consideration. They have also held discussions with Freeville School.

The North New Brighton School Board of Trustees wishes to avail itself of the opportunity provided by the Minister of Education to respond to the decisions she has taken on the proposed merger of Freeville School and North New Brighton School as described above.

The Decisions

1. Freeville School and North New Brighton School should be merged on the North New Brighton School site and that North New Brighton should be the continuing school.

The North New Brighton School Board of Trustees agrees with this decision. The original position of the school and the community was for North New Brighton School to remain open as an independent school that was viable and sustainable for the future. This was due to the sustained community connection with the school and the lack of support or agreement for the arguments for merger presented by the Ministry of Education. However, the school community has also listened with an open mind to the discussions for the proposed changes.

The school believes that there is a strong case to take advantage of the circumstances of the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes to create an opportunity for educational renewal with the development of modern learning environments. In the words of the Ministry of Education's document to North New Brighton School for the 'Rationale for Change': *"The earthquakes, while devastating, have provided an opportunity beyond simply replacing what was there, to restore, consolidate and rejuvenate to provide new and improved facilities that will reshape education, improve the outcomes for learners, and support greater diversity and choice."*

The North New Brighton School community fully supports this view and looks forward to the reconstruction of the school into a modern learning environment with the merged populations of Freeville and North New Brighton School students.

The strongly preferred option for the North New Brighton School Board is the building of a new school on the North New Brighton School site. The Board is also mindful that a range of innovative, cost effective, and sustainable options for organising and funding educational opportunities around the vision established by the community, in conjunction with the research on modern learning environments, must be explored, to provide for diversity and choice in an economically viable way. It is essential that the communities of both schools have the time and the opportunity to work with the Ministry of Education to establish this vision for the future of this new school.

2. The preferred date for the merger to take effect is 27 January 2014 and that the school operate on split sites until the property is developed for the merged school on the North New Brighton School site.

The North New Brighton School Board of Trustees, staff and community, with all due respect, does not agree with this decision. We believe that the Ministry of Education's original proposal for a merger in 2016 (end of 2015) was both insightful and sensible. It is this date we would like the Ministry and the Minister of Education to reconsider being mindful of the following arguments that the North New Brighton School presents.

We would propose an integrated and transitional programme of school merger completed by January 2016. It would be started by an agreed merger of the schools as from January 2014, meeting the decision of the Minister of Education, with the merger of the two school boards into one governance body and the appointment of an independent chair.

It has already been agreed by the Minister of Education that the schools would operate from split sites (Freeville and North New Brighton) and therefore it makes good sense that the Principal of

Freeville School and the Principal of North New Brighton School would continue in their roles until the end of 2015 and would both be active members of the new BOT. This would provide the MOE with one body with which to liaise, discuss and negotiate but also for the BOT to have strong links and connections to their divergent communities through the respective Principals.

The role of the BOT would be to govern the two schools but with the additional role of developing, through the Principals' into the respective communities, the vision and learning culture of the new school. The formation of a cohesive and empowered single community having strong ownership of the new school and having shared understandings and commitment to the new school vision and culture is fundamental to the success of the development of the new school. We believe with our proposed timeframe, we can do this well.

There needs to be time to win the hearts and minds of the community while at the same time giving continuity to effective, on-going educational provision to students within both schools. The active role of both Principals would be pivotal to achieving this goal.

Currently the broader community lacks cohesion due to the commitment of the respective parent groups to their individual schools. As would be expected, parents are passionate and proud of their children's schools and have every right to feel this way. To establish a new school will require shifting parents' energy and passion away from one of loss, frustration and disempowerment due to the proposed merger, to one of optimism and excitement for the future and what would be, and can be, possible for education provision in the new school. This will require the time and commitment of the schools, through the interim board, to develop and action a strategic approach for this constructive change. We believe this will be best achieved by the Ministry's original merger date of the end of 2015.

The issue for the community is compounded by the physical and emotional circumstances they have experienced and continue to endure. The Freeville and North New Brighton School communities sit at the centre of some of the worst earthquake devastation in Christchurch city and our families continue to live on a daily basis in broken homes and broken infrastructure. The stress on these communities is intense and extremely high. It is of fundamental importance that the merger of the two schools does not become another 'blow' to the morale and wellbeing of a very fragile community. Rather, we would like the merger to be a celebration of hope and aspiration for the parents and young people of these communities achieved by a positive, sensitive, well timed and cohesive strategic process.

We are suggesting a process of a transitional merger to provide effective time for empowerment, partnership and collaboration to enable the schools to build layers of trust and co-operation

between themselves and between community groups and to encourage the insights for the potential opportunities that they can own and be part of. We would like to talk to these communities about exciting possibilities for modern learning environments. While the physical environment plays an important role there is also the need to explore a rethink not just in pedagogy, but in every aspect of the way a school is organised: its structure, culture, and the use of space, place and time. We are being guided by a range of research such as the work of the 'Learning Futures' programme within the UK which has brought new and exciting opportunities, stimulated new thinking, and has been the catalyst for several new and very productive partnerships. It has continued to enhance the culture of professional learning and has given schools increased confidence in their own ability. Most importantly it is making a real difference to the experience engagement and learning outcomes of students.

We want time and the existing professional leadership to use a range of research and successful practice to build this new vision with our schools and our communities.

3. A merged school to be initially governed by an appointed Board of Trustees

The North New Brighton School Board of Trustees supports the concept of a single Board of Trustees but does not support:

- the concept of the continuing school Board (North New Brighton School) staying in office while the Board of the other school (Freeville School) is dissolved on the day the merger takes effect. This is significantly disempowering to all the participants of the Freeville School community. This community needs to have an active and strong voice on an equal basis to the North New Brighton School community. We would regard this as a divisive action and against our values of wanting to work collaboratively and cooperatively with the Freeville community.
- The Minister of Education appointing a new Board of Trustees for the continuing school. This has the potential to disenfranchise both communities despite the best intentions from the Ministry of Education. The ownership would be with the Ministry of Education and not the schools' communities.

We would like to respectfully suggest a compromise that fits within the terms of the Education Act Sections 156A and 157. When two schools merge neither is legally closed, therefore we would like the elected representatives of both Boards to be merged together to form an interim BOT being mindful that equal numbers of BOT members from both communities is important. The Minister could appoint any shortfall to representation in this area. However, we would like the Minister of Education to appoint an independent chairperson for the merged school BOT. As the two schools

are not legally closed we would recommend that the two Principals are active members of the merged BOT until such time as the building of a shared vision and culture for the new school is established with the community and the school is ready for the final stages of merger (physical merger) in 2016. New BOT elections would be held in 2016 with a full BOT being appointed within the normal requirements of the Education Act.

4. A copy of the proposed merger of Freeville School and North New Brighton School be released to each of the respective Board of Trustees.

The North New Brighton School Board of Trustees wishes to thank the Minister of Education for approving the release of the Education Report: Proposed Merger of Freeville School (3344) and North New Brighton School (3448). The document has been extremely helpful and informative. While views expressed are not always in accordance with our own we do value and appreciate the time that has been spent in this latter consultation period, the visit and interest shown from the Minister of Education and the desire that is being expressed from the Ministry of Education to create new modern learning environments to support the children in our community.

We would like to think that you will listen to us one more time. Our request is to create a win / win scenario for both of our communities through the work being undertaken by the Ministry of Education. We want the opportunity to build a cohesive, energised and excited community around the possibilities of what is possible with their children's education. To do this will require a high level of dedication from the Interim BOT, the Principals and staff of both schools to win hearts and minds of our community. We are committed to, and confident of, achieving this outcome. However we need time to build this community spirit and understanding so that all of us can celebrate the opening of the new merged school, as a modern learning environment, at the beginning of 2016. We don't believe we can achieve this by 2014 to the standard our community would expect of us, or be happy with.

We thank you for the opportunity to present our views and have high expectations that you will give them your full and thoughtful consideration.

Linda Boyce
Chairperson BOT

Brian Walkinshaw
Principal

28 March 2013

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