



Freeville School Board of Trustees

Response to the Minister of Education's
alternative proposals to either...

...merge Freeville School with North New
Brighton and Central New Brighton Schools

or

...to merge Freeville School with North New
Brighton School and to close Central New
Brighton School

July 3rd 2013

Contents

Contents.....	2
Introduction	3
Consultation for this submission	3
Unanswered questions	4
Response to new proposals	7
Response 1	7
Response 2	8
Concerns related to the new proposals.....	9
Conclusion.....	11

Our Vision

Through our example,
efforts and encouragement
students at Freeville School
will be the best that they can be.

Introduction

As we said in our previous two submissions, the Board of Trustees, staff and community of Freeville School are committed to being the best that we can be. We continue to seek **partnership** with the Ministry of Education so that we achieve the best for the children in New Brighton. Genuine consultation and involvement will allow our community to feel a sense of **ownership** over the process and the decisions.

We understand and accept that changes in the Christchurch education network are not only necessary, but desirable. We also understand that the government has a fiscal responsibility to make best use of tax payer funding. Our role is to ensure that all relevant factors have been taken into account, that accurate information has informed decision making, that possibilities have been reasonably explored, and that the best possible decisions are made. We do not believe that they have.

We need...

Partnership and Ownership for a Win Win Outcome

Consultation for this submission

The staff and parent community were invited to submit their thoughts on the latest proposals. The Board of Trustees of Freeville School met on June 10th and considered both options put forward by the Minister.

Unanswered questions

In our March 28th submission we posed two important questions. Sadly the information we received on Wednesday 29th May did not answer those questions. We feel disappointed that our serious question about having the rationale explained to us was dismissed with the line that the “Rationale for Change” document provided the answers to our questions. This has missed the point of our question when we say that the “Rationale for Change” document does not provide a rationale that stands up to investigation.

The following paragraphs from our March submission have still not been addressed.

Q1. Why has Freeville School, with 300+ pupils (peak roll, 2011, 2012), a bilingual programme, an enrolment scheme in place, an excellent ERO review, and a brilliant 2011 Learning Studio building, been proposed for merger?

At the heart of this question sits a desire to be treated fairly. If we could have it explained in terms we understand, why Freeville School has to move, then we might quickly get past the anger and frustration that many of our community still feel. The answers we have received from the Ministry of Education so far about “Land, Buildings and People” do not stand up to logical examination. Any requests we have made for clarification have either not been answered or have been met with answers that do not provide clarity. Our land condition is similar to North New Brighton. Our building damage is significant but from the Ministry’s own figures no more expensive to fix the two schools separately than it is to build a new school. Our roll has been stable since the earthquake and would grow if we were not hampered by the enrolment zone and the uncertainty of merger proposals.

We think that many of the proposals to close or merge schools in Christchurch make sense. Almost all of those proposals would have still made sense without the earthquake as a reason for making them.

Without an earthquake as an excuse, we do not believe that Freeville School would have been targeted to close in a network review. If this is the case then we see two grounds for challenging the proposals.

A. The Minister has said in various media releases that the changes in the Christchurch network are about providing for “choice and diversity”. We do not see that the changes in the New Brighton cluster will enhance choice or diversity. Many of our families already make the choice to travel past their closest primary school to bring their children to Freeville. They value the choice and diversity that we offer and do not see any merger as increasing this. In our consultation over the proposals, families have reported they have chosen Freeville School for many different reasons.

Bilingual education

Team teaching

Restorative approach to behaviour

Respect for individual needs

Inquiry learning

Small school size

Strength of the relationships between children and staff

High ICT use

Leadership opportunities for older children

Tuakana Teina relationships across the school

There is great fear in our community that these aspects of our school culture could be lost as we merge.

- B. *The second challenge to the argument for merging Freeville School is the issue of fairness. When we look across the whole Christchurch network and examine both the original proposals and now the changes to interim decisions, we are confused about the wider rationale that has been used to justify them.*

Some small schools have been left untouched while larger schools like Freeville are proposed to merge.

Some schools physically close to others have remained open while Freeville is proposed to merge.

Some schools that have suffered significant land damage are to be moved while others nearby have been closed.

Schools with significant building damage are to be repaired while others with seemingly minor damage are to close.

Demographic shift is cited as a rationale for merger or closure when some schools have maintained or increased their rolls since the earthquake.

Unfortunately there has been little explanation from the Ministry to help our community understand the original rationale and now the rationale behind the changed position on some decisions.

For many of our families one reason for choosing Freeville is that they see us as a relatively small school compared with schools near us that have 500 – 600 pupils. They see a school of 300 being able to offer the choice and programmes they want for their children but also that the school is small enough to have a family feel. They worry that a school of 500+ pupils will lose some of this family feel.

Q2. What is the level of commitment from the Ministry of Education to facilitate partnership and ownership of the decisions that have to be made?

We can only state once again that we are desperately keen to be partners in the future of education provision in the New Brighton area. We need open and honest dialogue with the appropriate decision making staff at the Ministry of Education to help us facilitate this.

Response to new proposals

The Freeville School Community believes there are other plausible proposals that should still be under consideration by the Ministry of Education.

Response 1

Repair Freeville School on the current site.

Rationale

As we pointed out in our March submission other than the fact that we are physically close to North New Brighton we have not had a rationale explained to us that convinces us that we have to leave the Freeville site. Land and building reasons both come down to the cost of foundations. We believe it is too early for long term demographic projections to inform this decision. Given other decisions made by the Ministry we see that a school of 300+ pupils is an absolutely viable roll size for an urban primary school.

We are already meeting the educational needs of the families that choose Freeville School and we are doing it to a high standard. We are committed to improving our already successful school.

Problems this proposal solves

This proposal maintains the level of choice and diversity available to the residents of New Brighton. Parents have the choice of sending their child to a smaller school rather than only having large schools as an option in our area. This proposal is even more relevant now that the Minister has proposed to merge four Aranui schools into one. The effect of that decision is that of the seven existing schools in the New Brighton/Aranui area only three will remain. All three will have upwards of 500 pupils. **We contend that three is too few schools for this area and that the Ministry should retain Freeville School on its current site.**

Freeville School has demonstrated its commitment to bilingual education and to Māori achieving educational success as Māori. The risks for bilingual education associated with a move would be minimized with the retention of Freeville School. Specifically there is a risk of disenfranchisement of whānau who feel a sense of ownership of the bilingual programme but who feel that the three P's of the Treaty of Waitangi (Partnership, Protection and Participation) are at risk through the merger process.

This proposal preserves the characteristics of our successful school.

Response 2

In our March response we put forward an alternative proposal that included the merger of three schools on a new site. It is the possibilities that a new school site presents that we are interested in exploring. We are disappointed that the Ministry of Education dismissed this option without serious investigation or consideration.

Our purpose in putting forward a second alternative proposal in our March submission was to signal to the Ministry that we think there might be exciting opportunities to reshape schooling provision in the New Brighton area. We believe that the proposals so far miss some of the opportunities that we would like to discuss with the Ministry. Once again we can only plead for an opportunity to sit with Ministry staff and be given a genuine opportunity to advocate for an exciting future direction.

We do not see any advantage for Freeville School staff or families with an expanded merger to include Central New Brighton School and Freeville on the North New Brighton site. Including Central New Brighton in a three way merger adds a level of complication that seems to have no advantages for our community. Our Board of Trustees feel that a two school merger will better enable the important aspects of the Freeville culture, that we value so much, to be preserved. Melding of two schools will be difficult enough without adding a third. Merger Board representation will be diluted in a three school merger. The Freeville Board of Trustees also believe that a two school merger affords a somewhat greater level of job protection to Freeville staff. Closure of Central New Brighton is the preferred option of those in our community who have expressed their opinion.

Concerns related to the new proposals

The concerns we expressed in our March 28th submission still require answers. The underlying theme of these concerns is a strong belief that we would need to engage in a process of establishing a new school - not just a process of closing Freeville School and moving the children to North New Brighton.

1. The original timeline proposed for the merger was 2016. Given that timeframe we could see that it would be possible to do a good job of merging two schools. We would have time to bring the staff together, to plan events that bring the community together, to meet and form new vision, values and goals. We would be able to form that strategic direction that is so vital to a successful school. The Minister has said that the reason for bringing the merger forward to 2014 is to provide certainty for staff and families. This does not make any sense to us. A definite date provides certainty but the 2014 date has only increased uncertainty. We see many reasons for going back to the originally proposed date of 2016, we see that it might be possible to successfully merge by 2015 but we do not see any good reasons for accepting the 2014 date as being beneficial.

The new date of May 5th 2014 adds another layer of complexity into staffing decisions that will add a significant level of stress on an already stressed staff and community. We see no advantages in an earlier merge and would urge the Minister to reconsider her interim decision. The fact that we are to remain on two sites until 2016 lends strength to our argument that there is no need or indeed no benefit to be gained from an earlier merge.

If the Minister does not accept this argument we ask her to make the merger effective at the beginning of the school year.

The increased uncertainty and complexity of a mid-year merger is completely unacceptable.

2. When a new school is established the Principal, in co-operation with the establishment board, performs the critical role of creating a vision for the school, establishing a leadership team, and defining foundation policies and procedures. When a new school is built and established in New Zealand, the Ministry of Education allows at least a 12 month lead in for this process to occur before children arrive on the new site. We ask the Minister to consider the level of staffing entitlement support available to the new school to enable release of key staff to begin the establishment process. The only Ministry document we have seen addressing this issue suggests the Ministry will allow 1FTE for one term for the new Principal and 1FTE for 5 weeks for leadership release. This seems to be less than adequate and we would ask the Minister to allow some discussion on the level of staffing allocation to enable us to do the best job that we can.

3. We are concerned that a shortened construction period will shut us out of involvement in the design phase of both the school site and the learning spaces. We are passionate about our Learning Studio and will be deeply disappointed if we have a design solution imposed on us. We need spaces that

are designed around our teaching and learning pedagogy. We need time to join together as a staff and community to discuss teaching and learning in a new school. The Ministry of Education commitment to “Modern Learning Environments” is not a bare minimum standard that we find acceptable. We want spaces of the size and quality of our Freeville Learning Studio.

4. We need the Ministry of Education to commit to adequate financial support for all the appropriate facilities required for a new school. New Hall, playgrounds, sports facilities, library, hard surfaces, carparking and landscaping. By abandoning the Freeville site we are being asked to walk away from excellent facilities and we need a concrete vision of the future. In both her meetings with us at Freeville School the Minister has talked about better facilities being provided. We have good facilities at Freeville at the moment, so a commitment to something better requires the Ministry of Education to communicate clearly to us what that will look like.

5. We have been given different messages regarding the formation of the merger Board. We ask the Minister to clarify the structure and representation of the merger Board and the timeline for implementation.

6. If the merger must happen in 2014 we need a commitment from the Ministry of Education to fund the costs of running two sites adequately. Given the very few cases of site sharing that exist in New Zealand, we do not believe that a funding formula for site sharing is appropriate. We ask the Minister to look at the actual costs of operating two sites. This funding must include sufficient staffing component to fully release a staff member on both sites.

7. We need clear guidelines and job descriptions for the Merger Board, Change Manager, New Principal, Existing Principals and Ministry of Education in this process. It is our desire to work in partnership with the Ministry of Education through the process but we are concerned that if roles and responsibilities are not clear early in the process this will lead to frustration and confusion.

8. We need the support of the Ministry of Education to protect our bilingual programme through the merger process. This will require sufficient staffing allocation, professional development support, resourcing for teaching spaces and other resources and facilities appropriate to a bilingual setting.

9. We need the Minister to understand that this process is being forced on a community that is also under a great deal of personal stress. Our staff and families are dealing with their own health, stress, housing, business and community damage issues post earthquake. The feeling of once again being disempowered is high in our community. It does not have to be this way. We need the Ministry of Education to commit to partnership with us, to sit with us and listen to what that means for our community.

Conclusion

We ask the Minister to retain Freeville School on its current site.

If the Minister persists with the decision to merge Freeville School with North New Brighton we ask her to close Central New Brighton School.

We ask the Minister to make the merger date the beginning of the school year.