

Aranui Learning Cluster

Staff Submission on the Hon. Hekia Parata's Interim Decisions for the Aranui Learning Cluster on 22nd May 2013

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The signatories to this submission are teaching and support staff employed at Aranui High, Aranui Primary, and Wainoni Primary Schools.
- 1.2 We support Minister Parata's decision to open a new Year 1 – 13 School on the current Aranui High School site from January 2017 - Whakamihi Minita Parata.
- 1.3 In time, we hope to welcome the community, staff and students of Chisnallwood Intermediate and Avondale Primary to the new Year 1 – 13 School.

2. Reasons to support the Minister's Interim Decisions

- 2.1 The abovementioned communities in the Aranui Learning Cluster have been devastated by the on-going Canterbury earthquakes, in particular, the events of 22nd February 2011.
- 2.2 Population movement in the Aranui Area has resulted in significant flux in roll numbers and the subsequent need to re-think the local school network.
- 2.3 Aranui High, Aranui Primary and Wainoni Primary Schools serve a proportionately high number of Māori and Pasifika learners that will benefit from the seamless structure a Year 1 – 13 learning environment will provide. A Year 1 – 13 school would enable staff to develop long-term, high-trust relationships with the wider school community, in particular students and whanau.
- 2.4 The importance of relationship building is highlighted by a myriad of school-based initiatives in Aranui including the implementation of Po Whakamana, a programme where school communities and learners celebrate education success together.

3. Aranui High School – Celebrating Success leads to improved NCEA results - Po Whakamana

- 3.1 In February this year the Education Review Office ("ERO") visited Aranui High School and noted, "The school staff and community have developed a school culture that welcomes and supports students and families from all backgrounds. Students spoken with by ERO spoke very highly of their school and their teachers. They feel safe as part of a well-managed school community."

- 3.2 Student achievement in NCEA at Aranui High School has improved year on year since 2010. Students' achievement at level 1 is better than that of similar schools.
- 3.3 Importantly, Aranui High School has reversed national NCEA trends on Māori and Pasifika achievement. At the School, Māori and Pasifika students' NCEA achievement rates are higher than the whole school group.
- 4. Aranui Primary School – A haven for earthquake devastated learners and the school community**
- 4.1 80% of students who attend Aranui Primary school are classified as priority learners, including a high proportion of Māori and Pasifika students, and those from low socio-economic backgrounds. The school suffered significant damage following the September 2010 and February 2011 earthquakes. ERO visited the school in August 2012 and noted that despite high levels of frustration amongst board members, teachers and parents; students told ERO that the school was a safe place which provided good emotional support.
- 4.2 ERO also noted that, "Teachers know the children and the community well because of the shared responsibility they have for all students and their families."
- 4.3 The school has a new post-earthquake principal with high expectations for learning and behaviour.
- 5. Wainoni Primary School – Taking an holistic approach to education with a focus on te reo and tikanga**
- 5.1 Wainoni Primary School is another example of a school that takes a holistic view to the care of its students.
- 5.2 In September 2012 ERO reported that, "The board and staff know the children and their families well. They strongly focus on nurturing the whole child and the family which includes educational, emotional, social and physical well-being. The focus of the school is on the individual learner and their interests and needs."
- 5.3 Curriculum and promoting educational success for Māori are two key features of Wainoni Primary School. The 2012 ERO review noted, "Teachers continually review the curriculum to ensure that it meets the current and diverse needs of students." "Te reo and tikanga Māori is a natural part of the school day. The school has employed a kaiawhina to support teachers in the delivery and planning for the inclusion of te reo Māori in classroom programmes."

6. Proposal for Merger instead of Closure – Establishing the platform for a seamless transition from the present day and beyond 2017

- 6.1 The staff at Aranui High, Aranui Primary and Wainoni Primary Schools submit that the schools should merge, not close. Our arguments for merger over closure are advanced in paragraphs 7.2 to 7.8 below:
- 6.2 The positive learning environments and mutually beneficial community links evident in the latest ERO reports for all schools mean that it would be advantageous to continue this good work in Eastern Christchurch. Merging the schools and their ideas into one will provide continuity, closure will divide them.
- 6.3 All three schools are philosophically aligned, in that they take an holistic approach to educating children from low socio-economic backgrounds by providing students, whanau and families with care and support beyond the school grounds. Building long-term relationships is the key element in delivering and receiving this form of community-wide pedagogy.
- 6.4 Using the word “closure” has negative connotations. Many parents and caregivers we have spoken to have said they are not enrolling their children in Aranui schools because there is a widely-held view they are simply closing. Merging the schools into a brand new Year 1 – 13 campus has positive connotations in our view and would lead to increased enrolments. The Ministry of Education, schools and communities need to work together to ensure enrolment levels at all four schools are as high as possible in the build-up to 2016 and 2017.
- 6.5 As you are aware, many school staff in greater Christchurch have suffered a great deal of mental stress in the aftermath of the earthquakes which is compounded by communications insurance companies, EQC, the Council, and CERA. We then simultaneously work with the increased pastoral care needs students bring through the school gate. Removing a further stress from our lives, being the proposed closures, would be greatly appreciated and consequently improve our mental well-being and that of the students in our kura.
- 6.6 Aside from the need for change, recent educational renewal announcements made by the Minister for Christchurch has taught-us one important thing – that changes to the school network function better when schools and their communities manage change together. One positive example of this was seen when Discovery and Unlimited worked together on merging. Paradoxically, schools that fight change and each other end up worse off, as demonstrated when Branston Intermediate ceased any significant communication links with Hornby High School in the build-up to the 22 May education renewal announcements.
- 6.7 Industrially, merging the schools is much more straight-forward than closing three or four schools. Using teaching staff as example, the merger provisions that will be used are contained in a single collective employment agreement – The Area School Teachers’ Collective Agreement (“ASTCA”). Closing four schools will require the use of two different collective employment agreements – The Primary Teachers’ Collective Agreement (“PTCA”)

and The Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement ("STCA"). Once the schools are merged, then all teaching staff are employed under the ASTCA or an individual employment agreement based on Collective.

6.8 Another industrial factor for the Crown to consider is the cost of redundancy should three or four schools close instead of merge. If all four schools close, then all permanently employed teachers in the said schools are entitled to the surplus staffing provisions contained in the PTCA and STCA. Based on a GMFS of 80 FTE across all four schools, this cost would range between \$2,500,000 and \$6,000,000 (2013 salary rates used, calculation excludes Chisnallwood Intermediate given the interim decision to keep the school open). Merging the schools would avoid the majority of this unnecessary cost, as existing teaching staff would move to positions, where available, in the new Year 1 – 13 School provided they were suitably qualified and experienced (ASTCA Appendix 4 sub-section 4.5).

7. Conclusion – He toa takitini toku toa ehara I te toa takitahi

7.1 We, the staff at Aranui High, Aranui Primary and Wainoni Primary Schools cannot stress enough our desire to work together over the next three years as we prepare to merge into a new Year 1 – 13 school. In making this statement, we commit to the long-term education needs of the current and former students of Aranui, their families and whanau, and the wider community.

7.2 We must work together as one – He toa takitini toku toa ehara I te toa takitahi

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