



NEW ZEALAND PRINCIPALS' FEDERATION

School Closures and Mergers

NZPF Position Paper

Introduction

NZPF supports the position that from time to time it is necessary to undertake a school network review due to changing demographics, natural disasters or some other legitimate purpose. The education and well-being of children would be the central consideration of any such review.

It is recognised that any school closures or mergers resulting from such a review would have a significant effect on schools and their governance boards, teachers, children and the families of the immediate communities. It is thus paramount that any review process would be managed in a way that fully engages all affected parties in a careful consultation process which places a high value on all participants' contributions. The process would be open and transparent and seek advice from the wider sector including local principals' associations, teacher unions and NZSTA.

Successful reviews would be dependent on obtaining full and accurate information on the identified schools and their communities and this information would be freely accessible to all affected parties. In this way all relevant issues would be openly and fairly debated and any decisions would be based on sound evidence.

Guiding Principles

NZPF recognises that the processes for school closures are different from school mergers. In both cases however there are certain guiding principles to be followed:

- (i) The process is transparent and open and is based on integrity and mutual respect
- (ii) Central to all decisions are the educational, health and wellbeing needs of the children
- (iii) The consultation process is democratic and promotes the two-way flow of ideas and information
- (iv) Wider participation is encouraged to gain important knowledge and understanding and contribute to informed decisions
- (v) Participants are given feedback to show how their input has shaped the final decision

Guidelines

1. Identify schools for possible merger and closure and inform them, using supporting data, of the rationale in a timely manner
2. Clarify the purpose of the consultation and the timeframe which is not unnecessarily prolonged
3. Determine the scope of the consultation process
4. Plan the consultation and identify parties to participate
5. Disclose full and accurate information at the earliest opportunity, and do not change it
6. Involve school communities from the outset
7. Invite school(s) to submit possible scenarios and solutions and share with the school network to ensure transparency
8. When the interim announcements are made, provide a reasonable consultation period **which is endorsed by boards, principals, staff and parents** to allow communities to reflect and respond with further submissions
9. MOE demonstrates their intention to genuinely listen and engage with the school communities affected
10. MOE listens to, considers, and engages with alternative solutions

11. MOE maintains an open mind and does not have predetermined processes and solutions
12. MOE maintains consistent processes across networks
13. MOE takes account of local knowledge, consults widely and does not give undertakings that can not be honoured e.g. timeframes are realistic
14. Communities choose the manner in which they want final decisions communicated and this is done contemporaneously
15. Final dates set for merger/closure are not changed
16. Once the final decision has been made the MOE fully supports the closing board and establishment board to govern the newly merged School
17. Additional resourcing is provided for school principals to support staff with job searching skills and counselling and to meet the costs of the additional work load deriving from the merger/closure process
18. In the case of closures, consult with principal, staff and the local community to establish how the closure is to be recorded and how the history of the school will be preserved

Establishment of Board of Trustees

1. Each merging school has equal representation on the merged school board, and the representatives, **including staff representatives** are determined by the merging schools with no interference from the MOE.
2. Change manager and Bot chair are experienced in the education field and well briefed. An independent, suitably qualified person is appointed to guide the board through the principal appointment for the new school.
3. The MoE supports with accurate advice and guidance to ensure that errors are not made by the establishment board e.g. industrial, appointment matters
4. NZEI/NZSTA/MOE work together when staffing is allocated. MOE rep is in attendance when staffing allocations are made.
5. NZPF recommends seeking advice from schools who have been through this process
6. Surplus staffing process needs careful management to ensure that principals and teachers are fully aware of their entitlements. Redeployment conditions are different for “closures” and “mergers”.

Note:

Schools directly affected by the review should be the only schools that benefit from JSIF – joint schools initiative fund