

SO 1/22/2; ER 6/1

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26 November 2013

Hon. Hekia Parata  
Minister of Education  
Freepost Parliament  
Private Bag 18 888  
Parliament Buildings  
**WELLINGTON 6160**

Dear Minister

## CHARTER SCHOOLS IN WHANGAREI

I am writing to you to express my grave concern about the situation that is developing in Whangarei as a result of your decision to approve the establishment of two charter schools in a community that already has so many social and educational challenges.

From the outset, the Ministry warned that these schools were at some risk because of their reliance on local schools to deliver the curriculum and because of the time frame. It is clear that this advice was ignored by the authorisation board and subsequently ignored by you when you endorsed the authorisation board's decision.

Whangarei now has two additional schools which have been set up in direct competition with local public schools in an area that already has falling rolls. The same teachers whose schools are under threat from the charter schools and who were unfairly criticised in the charter school applications are now being asked to teach the charter school students. They were never consulted at any point about their willingness to be involved in this political experiment. It was simply assumed that local teachers would make up the curriculum shortfall for charter schools that are actually too small to survive alone.

PPTA members do not want to be part of the charter school experiment. Even if they could overcome the distaste they feel for what amounts to an attack on public education and the credibility and competence of their chosen profession, they have their own professional reasons for not being involved.

They want all their professional experience, expertise and goodwill to go into looking after the needs of the students that they are employed to teach and who remain their prime responsibility. It is not in their interests, or their students' interests, to allow themselves to be co-opted into this ill-thought out scheme.

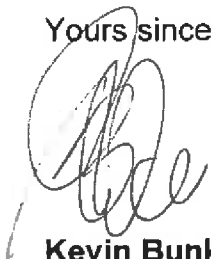
Competition with public schools is part of the rationale for charter schools wherever they are introduced, competition which is supposed to drive innovation and raise standards in both models of schooling. Despite the evidence for this being non-existent, this is the expectation. Establishing a competing model and then expecting the public system to support it is nonsensical. When PPTA first met with the New Zealand Model of Charter Schools Working Group we suggested a model whereby partnership schools could have worked in genuine collaboration with public schools to target at risk and under-achieving students. This suggestion was ignored.

The charter school issue is now creating bitter conflict and division in Whangarei. It is as if the politicians have pushed through an ideological initiative designed to privatise education and to open the door to American corporate interests with no thought of how this might rip apart New Zealand communities.

You have the power to end this bitterness by placing a moratorium on the establishment of these schools and I urge you to do so. Once that is in place the whole community can commence a discussion about how to harness collaboration to help all learners in Whangarei, not just those who get into a charter school. This would need to include consideration of social, health and welfare needs. The money set aside for charter schools will go much further and be used more effectively in this way.

The one positive in the short-sighted and divisive charter school policy is that the debate has clearly shown that everyone in Whangarei - teachers, parents, boards and the community wants to be involved in initiatives that lift achievement for priority learners. You have an opportunity to end the hostilities and to lead constructive, creative and collaborative educational change in Whangarei. I fervently hope that you will step up to the challenge.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Bunker', written in a cursive style.

**Kevin Bunker**  
**GENERAL SECRETARY**