



Briefing Note: Planning for school roll declines

To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education (School Operations)		
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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is to respond to your request for information on how the Ministry anticipates, forecasts, and plans for when school rolls decline; and how schools are supported to minimise the impacts of declining rolls on staff and students.

Summary

1. The Ministry plans not just for new capacity in areas of growth, but also for supporting equity and appropriate provision in areas where we know there is population decline. Our 119 Education Network Plans that make up the National Education Network Plan (NENP) provide for catchment planning and provision across the motu.
2. Nine catchments in the NENP have school aged populations that are expected to decline over the next 10 years (Annex 1). They also identify potential responses to ensure local students have access to inclusive, quality education.
3. In addition to these 9 catchments, there are also areas where population is not in decline, but where individual school rolls may be declining for a variety of reasons.
4. We know that we have around 80 state schools with rolls of 20 or less (July 2021). However, not all of these are declining – many are small rural schools with stable rolls. However, thirteen state and state integrated schools have closed in the past 5 years due to declining rolls. Closing a school is always the last option, and only done after consultation with the board and its community. The power to close a school has not been delegated to the Ministry.
5. We do not have a particular roll number that triggers the school closure process. We consider such things as:
 - the availability of other schools in the network, or other means of accessing education.
 - the level of community support for the school

- the ability to maintain an effective Board
 - educational outcomes, current and historic
 - the school's rurality, isolation, numbers of children within the school catchment, and possible ongoing viability.
6. Should a school be approved for closure, specific funding is generated and allocated for schools receiving students from the closed school to support projects that will aid these students to transition and to support their learning.
 7. We regularly monitor school rolls across the country and support individual schools with declining rolls to remain viable.
 8. Schools with declining rolls can have a range of challenges, for example with governance (attracting enough people to form a board), finances, attracting and retaining suitable staff, and offering a varied curriculum for their students. Sometimes the community lose confidence in the school and by-pass it to attend another school, which leads to lower support for the small school.
 9. We have helped schools in the past by supplying emergency staffing (including principals), governance support, and financial advice. We are also able to share our roll data and projections for the area and have discussions with the board about what they see as the future of the school. We support boards to have these conversations with their community.

Proactive Release

- a **agree** that the Ministry of Education release this briefing in full once it has been considered by you.

Agree / Disagree



Sean Teddy
Hautū | Deputy Secretary
Te Pae Aronui



Hon Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education
(School Operations)

25/08/2022

27/08/2022

Background

1. As communities change, so too do the schooling needs of their children and young people. We work hard to ensure there is an effective and sustainable school network across New Zealand, and we regularly monitor the capacity and projected growth and decline of the school network and work closely with schools, local communities and other agencies across the school network.
2. Monitoring school rolls is a key part of the network planning and monitoring function in the Ministry. This includes both areas of growth and population decline.

Strategic approach to declining population

3. In March of this year, Minister Hipkins approved the release of 80 Education Network Plans that complete the catchment planning picture across New Zealand that began with the National Education Growth Plan (NEGP) in 2019. The combined number of education network plans, including the 39 NEGP high growth plans, is 119 across all regions. Based on regional analysis, these 119 plans identify catchments that are experiencing high growth, steady growth, are relatively stable, or are trending down.
4. The development of the Education Network Plans has been a significant piece of work that completes the national picture of network planning for schooling. Each education network plan looks at a catchment or group of schools in a specific area, and identifies factors influencing population change and education outcomes, impacts on the current network; and potential responses for shaping the future of education provision and school networks.
5. Nine of these catchment plans were identified as having populations that are trending down: Hokianga Kaikohe, Taumarunui, North Taranaki, Coastal Taranaki, Ruapehu, Rangitikei, Tairāwhiti East Coast, Wairoa and Buller. Details of these catchments are attached in Annex 1.
6. If a catchment is 'trending down', it means that school age population in the area is projected to decline. In reality the decline may not happen (there may be factors that impact on the projections), but the Ministry will support the catchment and region with these forecasts in mind.
7. We use our education network plans as a foundation for engaging with the sector and communities around the future of education provision across and within catchments. The Ministry's focus is on delivering equitable outcomes for all learners, and these plans support better, longer-term conversations with communities, the sector and stakeholders.
8. To support schools with declining rolls or facing population decline in a catchment or area we may examine the need for major schooling change such as mergers, closures and regeneration opportunities.
9. We also monitor and plan for the impact that new schooling may have on other school rolls. No schooling decision is made in isolation, without considering the impact on the network of schools. We have a number of tools to balance rolls across a network, including enrolment schemes, change of school structure, and supporting schools to improve their profile in the community.

Challenges and support for boards

10. A declining roll can lead to a number of challenges for boards and schools.

Staffing and Governance

11. Principal U-grades are based on roll numbers, and if a roll slips below a certain number, the principal's salary is affected. A decline in roll will also affect the number of full-time teacher equivalent (FTTEs) a school is funded for. The lowest staffing allocation that a school can get is 1.3 FTTEs (primary schools that teach in English and have a roll under 25 students).
12. Where a suitable principal cannot be found we work with NZSTA to provide emergency staffing. This is usually a short-term solution while a longer-term outcome is organised.
13. Schools with smaller rolls can also find it difficult to attract suitably qualified and experienced staff. The fewer pupils at a school, the harder it can be to attract skilled members for the school board, as there are fewer families involved with the school. It may also be that everyone in the school community has already had a turn on the board.
14. Where appointing a principal or forming a board is challenging for a number of small schools in an area school may decide to apply to form a combined board, which allows them to have one principal for more than one school. This works well for three state integrated schools in Southland (St Patrick's Nightcaps, St Teresa's Bluff and St Joseph's Invercargill), which have one board and one principal across the three schools. Similarly in the Far North, Ngataki and Te Hāpua Schools have a combined board (which is currently a commissioner) and one principal for both schools.
15. If there are not enough parent representatives to legislatively form a board, a commissioner is appointed. The commissioner will help determine options for governing the school going forward, such as an alternative constitution which may for example include fewer parent representatives on the board.

Opportunities for students

16. Smaller rolls result in limited operational funding. This may result in fewer curriculum and extra-curricular options being provided compared to bigger schools. Where schools have financial concerns they can contact their Ministry Financial Adviser, who will help support with budgeting, prioritising and expenditure.
17. Parents with children at schools with low rolls often raise concerns that their children are not getting the same socialising opportunities as children in larger schools. Socialising with peers is a key part of the schooling experience. Anecdotally this reason has been given by some parents when choosing to bypass a smaller local school and send their children to a larger school.
18. We have worked with boards to suggest working with other schools to share extra-curricular activities. This is often supported where schools are part of Kāhui Ako and support each other in a range of areas. Virtual classroom options may also be a solution, particularly for some senior subjects.

Support for a school that is closing

19. If a school is considered for closure, or a change of some other type to its structure, such as from a full primary (Y1-8) to a contributing primary (Y1-6), the Ministry will always engage with the board to work through options, signal any potential change to the Minister responsible for the decision and request permission to consult on the change. Formal consultation with the board, the community, and neighbouring schools will take place before the Minister makes a final decision.
20. Teacher unions are always involved in change or closure discussions, to support their staff members who may be affected.
21. When a school closes or merges, funding is provided to support the affected students. The Education Development Initiative (EDI) and Joint School Initiative Funding (JSIF) money is generated from the savings created by the reorganisation. EDI and JSIF funding must be used for projects that support students with their transition or strengthen their education.
22. The EDI cash grant supports the ongoing education of the students whose schools are closing or merging. It is calculated based on the number of students at the closing/merging school. JSIF is generated when more than two schools are involved in the process of a review or reorganisation (e.g. an area review) that results in a closure or merger with two or more schools remaining at the end.

Annex

Annex 1: Nine Education Network Plans for areas that are trending down