



16 October 2020

Kia ora koutou from the Board of Trustees

Community and a sense of belonging has always been a focus and strength of Somerville Te Kura Wairepo.

Our tamariki experience this as they become part of a new whānau within their class, their ropu and a wider network of ākonga (students). We also know that school, particularly primary schools, are an important point of connection for parents as we navigate what can sometimes be the challenging business of raising our kids. For these reasons – and many more – the issue of school zoning is a difficult one for schools and for whānau.

You may be aware that the Board of Somerville Te Kura Wairepo was given a directive to reduce our enrolment zone by the Ministry of Education. They identified our school as becoming at risk of overcrowding. What this means is that there are significantly more primary school aged children currently in our zone, than our school can accommodate.

If we do nothing this would mean:

- Large class sizes (even in our junior school where we try to keep class sizes small);
- Splitting cohorts of children into different areas of the school in spaces not designed for teaching;
- Shifting children into new classes and year groups, possibly part way through a school year, to accommodate extra children.

We don't believe these options are acceptable for the wellbeing of our tamariki or our teachers.

So, if the demand for our school is high, then why do we simply not build more classrooms to meet demand? When we commenced our rebuild project, the Ministry of Education required our school to deliver capacity and space for no more than 475 children. It was not open to the Board to build the school to accommodate a greater number of children, even if that was possible on the existing small site.

This means:

- We have a target roll of 475 that the Board must, according to the direction from the Ministry, work towards achieving;
- The current roll is 494 and by the end of the year with additional new entrants will be 502;
- Staffing for next year is being planned based on a predicted roll of 512;
- The number of Year 1 to 6 children living in the current zone is 570 – this is the total possible demand on our school, if all children entitled to enrol did so.

The current process is Ministry-led and Ministry-initiated. The Ministry formally required the Board to consult on an adjustment to the zone to reduce the risk of overcrowding: creating a legal obligation for the Board to commence the process. In addition, the Board's recommendation will be

just that, a recommendation. It is the Ministry that will make the final decision on Somerfield's zone.

South west Christchurch is unique in having overlaps between school enrolment zones, giving families in these overlap areas the choice of two or sometimes three schools. Some elements of government funding for schools are based on the in-zone population (rather than the roll). This means the same government funding may be provided two or sometimes three times for the same child, but to different schools. In south west Christchurch, there are up to 1,200 children in this situation, representing significant additional funding requirements for the Ministry. The Board and the Ministry are required to act as good stewards of the existing assets within the education sector, by ensuring that the network of school zones enables the best use of existing school assets across south west Christchurch, and avoiding the existing duplication of funding for children.

The issue is a network wide one. For this reason, Thorrington, Beckenham and St Martins schools have each recently revised their zones, effective 2021. Further schools in the south west area will be entering into this process shortly.

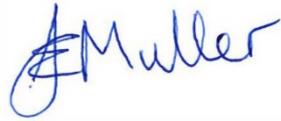
In reaching a decision, the Board has carefully considered the area for which Somerfield is a reasonably convenient school, but has also balanced whether there are areas for which another school is reasonably convenient and whether there are areas that should be excluded to allow the Ministry to make the best use of existing capacity within the wider network of schools. The issue is not a simple one of distance, otherwise all schools would have a simple circular zone, with the school at its centre. Instead, there are several competing factors that the Board has considered. These include location and numbers of children, neighbouring school zones, capacity at our own and other schools, feeder and contributing schools, distance, travel routes, and geographical boundaries such as the river and main roads.

We have also carefully considered all the feedback received, both in writing and at the Board meeting yesterday evening. The Board acknowledges this is an emotional and contentious issue for families. We as a Board have appreciated the high quality of submissions and the opportunity to engage with the community. While there is always room for improvement, the Board has been genuine in its desire to actively consider all feedback received. The decision has been a particularly difficult one, and it was evident last night that Board members could see arguments both for and against the proposed change.

At last night's meeting, the Board decided to recommend to the Ministry that the zone consulted on by the Board be approved without modification. This reflects a need to balance the desire of some families to have greater choice in their children's schooling, against the need for the school to provide an educational setting where children at the school can learn and grow in smaller classes, within collaborations and teams that are physically together in a purpose built space, and without the disruption of shuffling children between class rooms part way through a year.

To give families and the community time to prepare for the change, the Board will recommend to the Ministry that the change does not take effect until Term 1 2022. I acknowledge the proposal has been particularly stressful for families with children due to start at Somerfield in 2021. This was one aspect of our consultation process which could have been stronger and I as Board chair accept responsibility for that. The additional lead in time will allow the families affected to continue to plan to attend Somerfield next year, and we look forward to welcoming them then.

The Board will request that the Ministry considers the Board's recommendation by 29 October, in advance of our next Board meeting on 30 October, and I will provide a further update at that time.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "S Muller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Stephanie Muller, Chairperson, Board of Trustees