

10 June 2011

Dear Parents/Caregivers

During April the Board sought the views of the parent community on a number of issues affecting Meadowbank School. This letter addresses some of the points raised during the consultation, and also provides an update on some the issues that the Board has recently been addressing. The actual responses received through the consultation are available on the school's website.

Communication

There is diversity in the views about how people want to receive communications. That range of views indicates that many people do not know that you can already receive email versions of the school newsletter. If you want to use this service, please contact the school office.

There are no plans to drop paper communications altogether. That has been tried unsuccessfully in the past – the messages did not get through to people anywhere near as well as paper notices.

Website

The school website was also a topic that received comment. An upgrade to the site is being addressed. This upgrade could not occur until the school solved significant shortcomings with the school's IT system that saw complete system outages on a fairly regular basis.

The Board considers a well functioning, reliable, IT system as essential – both in terms of providing the teachers with a teaching tool, and also providing the students with exposure and experience with IT. Over \$200,000 has been spent in the last year in an effort to upgrade the IT system to an acceptable level.

Enrolment issues

The Board has resolved to maintain our enrolment scheme, subject to the one required amendment because of a change in the law.

Our enrolment scheme as is restrictive as it can be. We have a zone within which every child is entitled to enrol at Meadowbank School. We only take students from outside the zone in years where the Board resolves to hold a ballot for places. That ballot has to follow a particular priority order set by the Education Act.

For the first time in many years, the Board did hold a ballot last year for students enrolling in 2011. The reason for holding that ballot was to address another issue of concern to the parent community – staff turnover. In order to retain staff who had children that would be attending school the Board held a ballot so that those children could attend, and we retained the staff. That ballot resulted in a total of 5 out of zone students attending the school.

An enrolment issue sometimes raised with board members is that of people who move out of zone after enrolment at the school. The short answer is that provided a pupil was

legitimately living in the zone on a permanent basis when they enrolled in the school we are not able to annul a student's enrolment if their family subsequently moves out of zone.

Another common point raised is the issue of our school zone. That is not an easy thing to adjust. It requires the agreement of a neighbouring school to take up the zone we lose. All of the schools around us face similarly expanding roles and so this is highly unlikely to occur. We do not border Stonefields School's zone, so that is not an option.

Overcrowding

Some of the concerns around enrolment often stem from notions that the school is overcrowded and/or that an enlarging roll is a bad thing. Neither of those perceptions is necessarily correct. Local newspapers contained articles about the overcrowding in our local schools as far back as 1993. At that time the rolls in the schools were considerably lower than they are now. The simple fact is that in the central and eastern bays areas there have been increasing roles for at least the last 20 years. But we still have space for the children to play at lunch time (although we would like more if it was available), and our teacher-child ratios have dropped.

The advantages of a large roll are often overlooked. Having a greater number of students means we receive more funding (both from the Ministry and the community), and creates economies of scale. If we had a smaller roll number we would be unlikely to be able to sustain a PE teacher, the SENCO role for special needs children, the music programme, or activities such as Garden to Table. The Board has a strong desire to continue the enriched education experience with these extra programmes that we would not be able to deliver with a smaller roll.

The Board will of course continue to look at ways of addressing any adverse effects of larger roll numbers and welcome your ideas.

Teachers

The Board is proud of the quality of the teaching staff at Meadowbank. We monitor the level of turnover in the staff. But it is important to look at the reasons staff leave Meadowbank School. In 2010 we had 37 teachers: 13 left during the year for the following reasons:

- 4 took maternity leave (and will hopefully return)
- 2 took refreshment leave (and will hopefully return)
- 2 followed their partners away from Meadowbank/Auckland
- 1 is doing her big OE
- 1 left for health reasons
- 3 moved to other schools

The matter of staff turnover was discussed with the Education Review Office last year and they had no concern. The focus of the Board is to maintain an environment to attract, develop and retain the best available teachers. Unfortunately we are not immune to teacher shortages in New Zealand, but fare better than most schools.

The building projects

We are anxiously waiting for completion of the building project on the junior side, scheduled to be in late June. The disruption it has caused has been unwelcome, but once completed the five new classrooms, (much needed) upgraded toilets, and an artificial turf field that can actually be used during winter will be fantastic. Thank you all for your patience.

To date the project is on budget of \$1.6 million, of which the Ministry funds approximately \$1.4 million.

Expressions of interest are about to be sought for a contractor to undertake the senior side demolition and construction. The project will involve the demolition of the far end of the Theo Lynds block and construction of a new two story block of classrooms and a music room. This block will link with the existing two story block and also the hall. The total cost is expected to be \$2.8 – 3.0 million. The Ministry is again providing the bulk of the funding, with the remainder coming from school reserves.

Plans will be available to view as soon as the Ministry has approved them and tenders are completed.

Throughout these projects the Board has endeavoured to preserve as much of the school's field space as possible. This is why a double story block is being constructed. However, there will need to be one additional class room placed temporarily on the field. Four temporary classrooms will be placed in the senior car park.

Construction (or more rightly demolition) is expected to commence at the end of this year. We look forward to the day some time in 2012 when classroom construction is finished and the temporary classrooms are removed from the field.

Board elections

Three of our Board members will complete their three year term in October and elections for replacement parent representatives will occur. I encourage you to put your name forward for election for one of those places. If you want more information on the election process, or what being on the Board involves, please contact me or any of the other Board members.

Yours sincerely

Paul White
Chairman, Meadowbank School Board of Trustees