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16 September 2009

Hon Pita Sharples  
Associate Minister of Education  
Parliament Building  
**WELLINGTON**

Dear Pita

Consultation on the future of Waikohu College

1. The viability of Waikohu College has been a concern since 1996, when there were formal discussions with the boards and community of the college and Te Karaka School concerning merger into a Y1 to Y13 area school.
2. The Association has previously sent letters to the Minister of Education, dated 20 May 2007 and 13 November 2007, concerning the future viability of Waikohu College. These letters should be referred to. The arguments stated there for the continuation of the college still hold.
3. In brief, the arguments are:
  - That Waikohu College caters for a particular clientele of students who would not do well if they were required to bus into school in Gisborne. Many of them would not get on the bus. If they did, they would get "lost". There is previous experience of students being bussed into town, which supports this conviction. Many of the current students of Waikohu College would, effectively, cease to receive a secondary education. For those in outlying areas, such as Matawai, being bussed into school in Gisborne would not be a realistic option. Students who do go into Gisborne would not be able to take part in extra-curricular activities or weekend sport, as they do now.
  - Boarding allowances are sometimes mentioned as a substitute for being able to attend the local high school. Waikohu parents cannot currently afford a voluntary donation. They are good fundraisers, though.

- The school has a whanau atmosphere. Staff-students ratios are low and the staff are able to look after the needs of every student. The students feel they belong, and one of the reasons for the failure of the previous bussing experiment was that the students felt they were spurned as “Waikohu kids”.
- Educationally, the results are good considering how far below national norms students are when they enter the college. The 2005 ERO report was positive. The 2008 ERO report focused on the fact that Y7 – 10 students score below “national expectations” in PAT and STAR tests in Mathematics. It mentions the high success rates in NCEA Levels 1 and 2 but dismisses them by saying too many of them were internally assessed.

The fact is that Waikohu College is decile 1 with [in 2009] 100% ethnic Māori composition. It outperforms most decile 1 schools in NCEA results, and does better than any other rural decile 1 Māori school in the country. The 2009 ERO report [much more positive than the 2008 one] speaks in often glowing terms of the pedagogy in the classroom. “In most classes effective teaching engages, motivates and challenges students and promotes pride in their achievements.” The report comments that level 3 NCEA standards are now being offered to students. On the whole, it is a very positive report on the quality of teaching and on the improvements the school has made in engaging with its community.

4. In October 2007 the Hon Steve Maharey, previous Minister of Education, sent a letter to the Waikohu College Board of trustees, advising that Waikohu College would remain open, under conditions. Ten targets were set. Most of them have been achieved. Some of them were unattainable; for example, a target roll in excess of 120 by 2010. The 2007 GMFS was 72 and in May 2007 the roll was 91. The 2009 roll is 88 [ERO report].
5. The roll is affected by the confidence of the community in the future of the school. In 2005 the school gymnasium burnt down, precipitating a crisis of confidence in the school’s future. Part of the Ministry’s “reprieve” of 2007 was the promise of property improvements of \$1.725 million, including the replacement of the gymnasium. The plans were drawn, all that was needed was the Ministry signoff, but it never eventuated. The funds never arrived. In an options template delivered recently to the board, the Ministry says, under “Risk areas” for the college to remain open status quo, “The college community may continue to feel at risk of impending closure”. This seems hypocritical, given that a sure signal to the community of confidence in the college’s future would have been the delivery of the promised funding for property improvements. It would seem that in a number of respects, following the reprieve of 2007, the college has been set up to fail, despite making a considerable success of meeting the targets set.
6. It cannot be said that the roll, in itself, is a reason for closure, given that the Ministry continues to give approval for the establishment of an ever burgeoning number of very small special character schools, approves maximum roll increases in others and allows primary kura to become year 1 to 13 schools with total roll numbers of less than 50. The test is; does the school have a place in the network, does it meet the needs of its community, and Waikohu College meets the test.

7. The options template developed by the Ministry contains four options. Option A is the status quo [Y7 – 13 secondary school]. The Ministry has said this is not, in fact, an option. Option B is a Y1 – 13 area school. Option C is a merger of Waikohu College and Te Karaka School into a Y1 – 10 composite school. Option D is to close Waikohu College and recapitate Te Karaka School to Y1 -8.
8. The college teaching staff strongly supports Option A [status quo], with Option B as a second preference. Following the announcement of the options the teaching staff was told by the LSM that they could not attend some consultation meetings and that they were forbidden to speak to the media. Following representations to the board these restrictions were withdrawn. The principal has been threatened with disciplinary action [for allegedly speaking to the media and encouraging politicians to come to the school]. Agendas, some of them destructive, have swirled around the college since 2007. The principal and staff have ignored them, and got on with doing a very good job for the students.
9. A significant majority of the Waikohu College and Te Karaka School communities support the establishment of an area school. The Association supports this option too. It maintains the provision of secondary education in the Te Karaka area and its hinterland beyond, and this is essential to the community. The removal of secondary education would further disadvantage a group of students who are already very disadvantaged, and who have been well served by Waikohu College. An area school would require a significant investment in infrastructure, the lack of which has undoubtedly played a major part in the college's failure to thrive since 2005. In the new school much greater use could be made of ICT technology to extend the range of educational opportunities in the senior school. The Virtual Learning Network is now used in over 200 secondary schools, and could be used with great advantage in this situation. In particular, the school should be supported financially to explore a closer relationship with Gisborne secondary schools in order to expand senior subject delivery via ICT.

Yours sincerely

**BRONWYN CROSS**  
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Attach'd



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20 May 2007

The Honourable Steve Maharey  
Minister of Education  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

Dear Minister

Re: Waikohu College

We understood that by the end of 2006 a decision on the College's future would have been made. Instead, you decided to initiate a second round of consultation, focussing on three options:

Option 1 – the retention of Waikohu College with intensive support for the board to assist it to set achievement targets for the school; or

Option 2 – the closure of Waikohu College and the establishment of a designated character Year 7-13 composite school, established under section 156 of the Education Act 1989, providing immersion education. This option would also see the ministry support the recapititation of Te Karaka School; or

Option 3 – the closure of Waikohu College under section 154 [1] of the Education Act 1989 with an understanding that the board of Te Karaka School would apply for recapititation under section 150 of the Education Act 1989.

The Waikohu College Board of Trustees supports Option 1 [although it rejects the need for “intensive support”] and totally rejects Options 2 and 3. It has surveyed the college community in early 2007. The survey had a very high response rate, which was almost unanimously in favour of Option 1 [one respondent favoured Option 2].

The Association, too, supports Option 1, and rejects Options 2 and 3.

It is difficult to see why Option 2 is included. It has no support within the college community, the Gisborne schools do not support it, and there is no evidence of support elsewhere. It is promoted by a few individuals who have managed to draw attention to it, and is best regarded as a “distractor” from the only two real options—those of continuance or closure. If the school is closed it will be closed, and there will certainly be no designated character school ready to take its place.

The immersion option would not, in any case, suit the needs of the local community. The school provides for a student roll which is stable [and has in fact risen this year] but is quite transient in nature, with students switching schools at various times in their education. Immersion education would not suit these families. The school responded to the community desire for more Maori language and immersion options by setting up a rumaki class three or four years ago, and will expand this as necessary. There is no predominant iwi amongst the student body, with Ngati Porou, Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki [Rohe] and Tuhoe being the three most prevalent. It is questionable whether a section 156 school would survive without an iwi partnership arrangement in the area, and there seems little possibility of this.

In his report, consultant Richard Thompson draws attention to the strongly held conviction amongst the school staff and community that the students would not do well if the school were closed and they had to be transported into town. There is previous experience of students being bussed into town, which supports this conviction. Many of them would get “lost” there, and many would simply not go. For those in outlying areas like Matawai, the Gisborne bus would not be a realistic option. Waikohu students are not “special”, as opposed to others, but they do have their own characteristics as a Decile 1 and often transient cohort, and there is much evidence that they need the care and attention that can be provided by a small, supportive school.

The school is of a viable size, and is doing its essential job of educating the children of the local community. The GMFS for 2007 was 72, and the roll is currently 91. The principal estimates that the July 1 return will be 88-89. For the last four years the roll has been “settled” in the band between 75 and 95, and the school is confident that a roll of between 80 and 100 will be maintained in the future.

Educationally, the school’s NCEA results speak for themselves. Senior students are achieving above the national average for Decile 1-3 schools. In 2006, all five year 13 students gained a Level 2 Certificate. In Year 12 there were eight students—four gained Level 1 certificate, two gained Level 2 Certificate. In Year 11 there were nine students—six gained Level 1 Certificate. Numeracy requirements were 100% and Literacy requirements were 89%.

Recent ERO reports are positive, and speak positively of the leadership being provided by the principal and board. In the past there have been concerns about the quality of governance and management, but those days are behind the school now.

As the principal says, “This is no Waverly High School.”

The recent achievements of the school have been in the face of a disastrous fire which destroyed the gymnasium in 2005. The Ministry consequently froze all funding for the planned building rationalisation, tied to the 5 Year Property Plan, and decided not to upgrade the hall into a hall/gym facility [the plans for which are already drawn]. This has put tremendous stress on the school, reinforced perceptions in the community that the school does not have facilities to offer which compare with those of the Gisborne schools, and undoubtedly affected enrolment figures.

The irony is that this is a school which had been in a spiral of decline, had arrested it and commenced a recovery, and then was afflicted by an arson which resurrected the previous questioning of the College’s future and viability. The Ministry’s refusal to release funds for building improvements has just compounded the pressures the school has been under. The release of these funds once the College’s future is assured will enable it to continue to build community support for the school.

We consider that Waikohu College has a particular job to do, with a particular group of students, and is doing it well. The school’s viability may be under doubt, but there is no present evidence to suggest that it is seriously under threat, particularly once funds are released to make it a more attractive place to learn and teach in. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that, if the school is closed, most of the students who currently go there will be disadvantaged, and that some of them will have no access to education, except by correspondence. The students are already, in many cases, very disadvantaged in comparison to their peers, and we would expect you to take this into account. Waikohu College is doing a good job for its students, there is no reason why it shouldn’t

continue to do so [apart from the present freeze on building funds], and we support the retention of Waikohu College [Option 1] as the only reasonable alternative.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Bunker  
General Secretary  
New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association

John Biggs  
Chairperson  
Waikohu College PPTA Branch

13 November 2006

Hon Steve Maharey  
Minister of Education  
Parliament Building  
**WELLINGTON**

Dear Steve

**Re: consultation on future viability of Waikohu College**

1. This letter has been written in consultation with the staff at Waikohu College. It supports the unanimous wish of the staff for the present school to continue.
2. The viability of Waikohu College has been a matter of concern for a number of years. In 1996 and 1999 there were formal discussions with the boards and community of the college and Te Karaka School concerning merger into a Year 1 to Year 13 area school. In 2004 there were discussions with the boards concerning merging to create a Y1 to Y10 composite school with Y11, Y12 and Y13 students being transported to Gisborne, but neither board supported this.
3. The school roll has continued to decline, from 159 students in 1998 to 85 students in 2006.
4. Throughout the 1990s the school had critical ERO reports and management difficulties. However, a new principal was appointed in 2005, and the latest ERO report [May 2005] is very positive, saying that the principal is “successfully providing strong leadership to the board and staff” and “is committed to enhancing the school profile and raising students’ achievement levels.” The report on quality of teaching and learning is positive.
5. On quality of teaching and learning the staff say, “Many parents think that their children will get a better education in town but they don’t bother to come and have a look. Parents often don’t understand the statistics.” Past students include university graduates in a variety of professions. In the last two years students who have completed their entire schooling at Waikohu have been doing degrees in business management, teaching, Te Reo, diplomas in youth work and other subjects.
6. The school has a decile rating of 1, and many parents currently bypass the school to send their children to Gisborne schools. However, the school offers quality education to the students it has. Staff-student ratios are low and the staff are able to look after the needs of every student. The school makes a special effort to compensate for geographical isolation with numerous arts and career trips, sports camps and educational camps in other parts of the North Island. All students are given the opportunity to go, regardless of their economic circumstances. The school has no voluntary donation charge, but gets huge community support with fundraising [and staff, of course, pitch in]. Even though it is a small school, it is sometimes able to excel, e.g. it is the only school in the Gisborne and East Coast region that offers NCEA Dance at

Levels 1-3 and this year was invited to open the secondary schools' dance festival in Tauranga, which it did to very favourable comment.

7. The staff say, "We have a good relationship with the kids. We know them and their whanau. Often kids who have gone into town will come here or phone up for help—even if they don't go to this school! They feel comfortable about coming here and asking for general help or for career direction. Lots of former students come back to see and thank us. Some kids have huge problems. They can come and see a staff member and have a heart-to-heart. Some call staff members "Mum" and they trust staff members. An example of the whanau atmosphere is lunchtime volleyball games where teachers, students, teacher aides, etc, all join in.
8. "Students like coming to school—so much so that it is hard to get them to stay home when they are sick. They tend to **dislike** holidays because there is nothing to do. They will sometimes accost staff in the holidays and ask if they can have a lesson or if they can come to school to help. We have always thought about our kids. They come first. Why can't we continue to do this?"
9. The staff fear that if the college is closed their students will "fall through the cracks". Many of those from more remote areas will simply not get on a bus and travel for more than an hour to Gisborne. The express bus suggested by the MoE will not be viable. Some of these students already have to walk to get to the bus [sometimes for kilometres]. It would be dark when they leave and dark when they get back.
10. Even if these students did get on the bus, many of them would be 'lost' once they got into town. For example, in the mid 1990s, for one year, seniors were bussed into town. About half didn't attend school and the truancy service couldn't cope. The students went to games parlours and went shopping. The school cites examples of students who have found attending school in town difficult, e.g. a year 13 girl who went to Lytton High School. She found the crowded bus trip stressful. Sometimes she had to sit over the motor. Because she spent so much time travelling she had less time for homework and other activities. Another student who went to Lytton experienced the same difficulties, and said that it seemed as if the school didn't really care for him. Recently, some students who were attending Gisborne Girls' High School were truanting, so their parents switched them back to Waikohu. Since then their attendance has been excellent.
11. Those students who do go into Gisborne will not be able to take part in extra-curricular activities or weekend sport, as they do now. Because of a lack of transport into Gisborne on Saturdays, the college minibus has been doing a two and a half hour round trip from Matawai and back, leaving at 7.30am. This is free for the students and voluntary for the staff member, who then has an extra hour's driving to do. This indicates the level of commitment to students from the staff at Waikohu College. The school provides breakfasts each morning, buys shoes and assists with uniforms. Recently a staff member took six students into town to purchase shoes for them. There are other students who need this as well.

12. It is sometimes forgotten that, although the college is only 30 minutes drive from Gisborne, some students come from as far away as Matawai [40 minutes to the west of Te Karaka] and beyond.
13. Transport is the key issue. The proposed solutions for getting students to Gisborne would not work. On the other hand, there are families in Motu who have children on correspondence because of transport difficulties. A Ministry minibus from Motu to Matawai [10 minutes] would solve this. It is easy to say that the solution to providing secondary education in the Te Karaka area is to put the children on buses and send them into Gisborne, but local knowledge and experience contradict this. On the other hand, some creative thinking could be done around local transport options.
14. Boarding allowances are mentioned as a substitute for being able to attend the local high school. The fact is that Waikohu parents cannot afford a voluntary donation. Boarding allowances do not, by any means, cover all costs, and Waikohu parents would not be able to cover them.
15. A closure would have a severe economic impact on the Te Karaka community, which is already struggling. Shops, garages, carriers, etc, would all suffer. It would be the final nail in the coffin.
16. There are two other issues we wish to raise. The first is about consultation. Richard Thompson carried out a large number of consultation meetings with the local communities, but PPTA was advised of only one of them—the one with Waikohu College staff. We expected to be advised, in advance, of all meetings. We were also assured that his report would be sent to us once it was completed. This has not happened.

Secondly, the memorandum signed by Trevor Mallard restricted school closures to those initiated by the community or by ERO review. Neither applies in this case. On what basis, therefore, is the current consultation being carried out?

17. In summary: it is our view that the continued provision of secondary education in the Te Karaka area is essential. We believe that equal access to education is an entitlement of all, regardless of economic circumstance, or of whether an individual lives in a wealthy urban precinct or in a remote rural location. We know that this government shares that belief. We say that closure of Waikohu College would not preserve equal access to education for the students of that college. The proposal that students could be bussed into Gisborne schools is not adequate, and means that some students would be left without a secondary education at all when, in fact, they are now receiving a very good education at Waikohu College in an environment of whanau support. We, and the school community, are opposed to the idea of a Year 1-10 composite school, which has been tried before and found wanting. The staff of the school are unanimously in favour of the present school continuing, although they are also prepared to consider the idea of a merger to form an area school. We suggest, also, that there is merit in exploring the possibility of Waikohu College joining an ICT cluster, in order to strengthen the senior curriculum, as is currently done with great success at Tolaga Bay Area School.

Yours sincerely

**Kevin Bunker  
General Secretary**

**Dave Coldham  
Principal  
Waikohu College**

**Roger Lynch  
Chairperson  
Board of Trustees  
Waikohu College**