


## **Newtown School Board of Trustees**

### **Meeting minutes**

Tuesday 21 April 2020, 7.30 pm, via Zoom



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Present: Jess Gorman, Nick Booth, Haidee Westwater, Amelia Handscomb, Yadana Saw, Victoria Esson, Louise Conwell, Mark Brown, Nicki Read, Justine Henderson, Emma McMenamin, Michal Horton, Keith Hutton, Wanwan Liao, Hannah Gilmore, Estelle Valent and Jo Gould (minutes).

Apologies: none.

- 1. Karakia**
- 2. Planning for COVID-19 Alert Level 3**

After introductions, Jess noted that the purpose of this special Board of Trustees meeting was to discuss the school's plans to reopen under the COVID-19 Alert Level 3 restrictions. Jess invited Board members to share their initial thoughts on this issue. Items raised included:

- Staff – the importance of their wellbeing, and acknowledging different comfort levels around returning to school. Also acknowledging that while the transitional arrangements for Alert Level 3 may not be what some staff want, they will be playing a really important role in helping a lot of parents and caregivers return to work.
- Tamariki – how has the lockdown affected children emotionally and behaviourally, and extra supports students and staff may need as we transition back to the school environment? Amelia mentioned that she has done a literature review on this, which she will include in the Google Drive. Children need to know that school will be a lot different under Alert Level 3, with restrictions in place around physical distancing which mean they won't necessarily be able to hang out with their friends.
- School is currently being used as a COVID-19 testing site – how will this work with children and staff returning? Jess and Mark are discussing this with Capital Coast DHB on Thursday. It's likely that the DHB will move to a larger site at some future date, but the timing is unclear at this stage. This could delay the re-opening of the school, as the site needs to be cleared and cleaned. The Board agreed that any delay of re-opening that lasts up to a week can be accommodated,

but this possible delay needs to be signalled to the school community. Any delay of longer than a week will need to be brought back to the Board for discussion. Options could include supervising children in other venues in Newtown, or coming to some arrangement where the testing could continue while ensuring the health and safety of staff and students.

**ACTIONS: Mark to invite Yadana to the CCDHB meeting on Thursday, and to report back to the Board on the discussions/outcomes.**

- Mark had talked with Maraea about tikanga associated with the re-opening of the school following the lockdown and COVID-19 testing site moving on. As there has been no death in connection with the school there is no tapu to be lifted. A school assembly when the children return, with karakia to acknowledge what has happened, would be appropriate.

**ACTION – Jess and Mark to schedule a Board meeting before the school fully re-opens, with the school transitioning into recovery being the main agenda item.**

- What teaching and supervision will be provided for students who attend school? Some other schools have indicated that they will be continuing with remote learning programmes with staff supervising those attending. Mark observed that it is likely to be a mix of both supervision and teaching.
- Communications – the Board thanked Mark for keeping parents and caregivers well informed. The importance of keeping the messaging clear and simple and not overwhelming caregivers with lots of emails was discussed. Nicki mentioned that this was something that came up in the feedback received from parents and caregivers about the new learning environment. Suggested improvement include clearer subject lines and highlighting the key “take away” points of the emails.

Louise provided a staff perspective. She commented that staff had been enthusiastic about teaching in different ways, and using new technologies to reach out and communicate with children. Maintaining connections with students is really important, as will be communicating about what happens next, as some children are confused about when they are coming back to school and what it will be like for them. Louise noted that children and families are engaging in the online environment, with (by way of example) only a handful of students not yet connecting online in whānau Waitangi. Staff are still caring and looking out for each other, and noticing the cool things that others are doing.

Mark also acknowledged the staff, who worked hard over their holidays to get the learning from home programme up and running for when school started back. Mark also acknowledged the calm and quick thinking of the school leadership team, who problem-solved a lot of issues leading up to the start of Term 2 (and beyond). Although there are still questions and uncertainties about the move to Alert Level 3, Mark commented that there is more advice coming from the Ministry, and there is a Q+A session tomorrow where he can seek further clarification.

Nicki provided an update on the curriculum delivery. She observed that while learning is being digitally delivered, there are lots of online and offline options that students and families can choose from. It's all about being realistic about what can be achieved, giving it a go, and offering reassurance so families and students don't feel too stressed about the demands of home learning.

Nicki mentioned that there had been 49 responses to the family survey about how home learning was going. The responses tended to focus on three areas – communication (covered above), content, and suggestions looking ahead. Parents were very positive about the amount of work and ongoing effort teachers had been putting in, particularly in terms of reading and commenting on what is coming in through seesaw, google docs, email and the like.

It will be important to think about the lessons learned from the home learning programme, and how teachers can continue to nurture the passion, creativity and self-directed learning many children have demonstrated.

Justine provided an update about support being provided to families and children with additional learning needs and/or behavioural issues. This is being managed primarily by the whānau teachers with support from the Ministry of Education. Teaching and Ministry staff have been making contact with families, to check in about what support they need, offer reassurance and clarify understanding. The TAs have been translating the "Can Do Sheets" so that they are more accessible for families with English as their second language. While the school won't be able to offer respite unless the families fall within the Alert Level 3 criteria (i.e. the parents need to return to work, or the children cannot learn at a distance), the support being offered is still a "work in progress" and will continue to evolve.

The Board discussed the planning for the school to reopen under Alert Level 3 restrictions. A lot of thought had already gone into a planning document, which had been circulated to Board members. Staff are meeting (virtually) on Wednesday to problem-solve some of the issues, and will also be meeting again next Tuesday.

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A form will be sent to families on Wednesday to get an indication about how many children the school can expect when it re-opens. Staff and TAs will also make contact with families who have English as a second language to help explain what is required. It is expected that the majority of students will continue to learn from home.

A form has also been sent to staff to clarify their circumstances and availability to attend school. The Board agreed to a flexible approach, allowing staff to make the best choices for their own individual circumstances. Some staff will choose to be based at school to either supervise and teach students attending, or continue delivering the home-based programme and offering other support. Other staff will choose to remain at home and support the programme from a distance.

The Board discussed a range of issues, including cleaning, ways to support physical distancing, timetabling, use of playground equipment and the library, devices available for student use, supporting shift workers and others that may only need their children to attend for a few days a week, managing new entrants that are due to arrive during Alert Level 3, PPE requirements, and supporting the wellbeing of families who have lost income or their jobs.

Mark mentioned that he was due to meet with a social worker provider but that it didn't go ahead with the lockdown. Haidee indicated that she was happy to attend any future meeting on this with Mark.

**Mark to ACTION this.**

The Board concluded by acknowledging Mark's leadership throughout the pandemic – his calm, can-do, positive attitude has landed the school in a good place to deal with the various challenges.

### **3. School pool project**

Yadana shared a proposal about the staging of the pool project, which has been prepared at the request of the Wellington City Council. WCC needs confirmation that the school will follow through with all stages of the project, and details about how these stages will be funded and managed, as the Council will be re-visiting their annual plans. The Council's grant would cover the costs of the first stage (essential structural, electrical and plumbing work), at which point the pool would be operational. The school would need to find around \$250,000 to complete the remaining two stages (interior fit-out, and accessibility, heating and ventilation improvements). Recommendations about how to fund stages 2 and 3 are set out in Yadana's proposal, including committing funds from the Saturday market to the project, applying for grants, and seeking community and corporate sponsorship. The Board can revisit the plan as

the project progresses. Victoria commented that the funds raised from the Saturday market are currently allocated to cover some of the school's operational costs.

**ACTION: Board members were invited to reply to the emailed proposal with their views on the recommendations.**

Next meeting: TBC (possibly a Zoom meeting before the school reopens).

