

07 August 2018

Dear Parents/Caregivers of West Harbour School

At its meeting last night, the West Harbour School Board of Trustees made the decision to have a full closure of the school on Wednesday 15 August due to the strike action being undertaken by the teachers. Their main concern is the health & safety issues that could arise around having children in the school while there are insufficient staff to supervise them.

This means that the school will be CLOSED on Wednesday 15 August

OPEN LETTER TO ALL PARENTS

On 15 August, West Harbour School teachers will be involved in a one day strike. **The last time we went on strike as a profession was in 1994. We do not like causing disruption to our students and their families, but things must change.** This letter is to help shed some light on why the teaching profession is moved to action and why they need your help and support.

Firstly, this is not about pay but about the quality of the education your child receives. **There is a serious crisis occurring in education. We have teachers leaving the profession in droves. A large percentage of our workforce will reach retirement age within the next 10 years (the average age of teachers in New Zealand is 57.4 years old), although some are postponing retirements. We have fewer numbers of people entering training and growing numbers of graduates leaving the profession in their first 5 years of teaching.**

What exactly is this 'crisis' the profession is so concerned about?

1. There are fewer and fewer people applying for jobs. In many cases in Auckland, schools are getting NO applicants.
2. Finding a classroom teacher is hard, but finding a reliever is even harder – those wonderful and essential beings who come into your school to teach a class when the day-to-day teacher is sick or attending professional development.
3. The problem is not just a Primary school issue. Our Secondary schools are struggling to find staff (in many cases specialists), as is the Early Childhood sector.

SO, why is this 'crisis' such a big deal ?

A number of reasons and unintended consequences arise because of the teacher shortage and you as parents should be concerned:

1. There is a whole generation of students who are getting short-changed in their education. They are facing an inconsistent education because, in some cases, they are having a series of part-time teachers or their classes are split because no reliever can be found.

Ask yourself this: *if a student has spent a significant amount of their education with a series of inexperienced teachers, year after year, or a new teacher each week/term because a school cannot replace the teacher, what happens to their education? What happens to the relationships they need? What happens if the only teacher they have is one who would not perhaps make it under ideal circumstances, but because a school is desperate to have a live, breathing human in front of student that is what they get?*

2. How many times have parents gone to drop their child off in the morning, only to hear their child's class is split between other classrooms due to not being able to find someone to teach the class.
3. Where schools can, they use senior leaders to take classes or be the 'reliever'. However, this 'solution' is not sustainable and adds to the workload of these employees who still have to take care of the rest of their usual job.

The flow-on effects from this crisis are huge:

- **Teachers are coming in to work when they are sick** because they are trying to save their colleagues the stress of a split class or their students not having a teacher.
- Some schools are having to double classes – this is not sustainable.

Teachers who live in Auckland – and other expensive places such as Queenstown – are leaving the city/town in droves, looking for a chance to buy a house and make their wage go further. When they leave, they are not being replaced by the 'next wave of teachers'. ***There is no 'next wave' of teachers.***

Most importantly, it is our students, the next generation, who are being impacted on right now by this crisis. It is only because schools are being creative that things are 'sort of' ticking along. ***It is a band aid at best and that band aid has run out of stickiness.***

Teachers and leaders have had enough. Every time one of our profession leaves, the rest of the teachers have to pick up the slack but this is becoming more and more difficult and most of the goodwill that was in the profession has gone.

Please understand that this is not just about pay and it is not just about Auckland – it's much deeper than that. This teacher shortage is serious unless we do something about making it affordable to teach in our cities; attractive to want to be a teacher; and do something about ensuring our teachers and leaders have the time to manage the workload **then your child, your neighbour's child, the child you see walking into your local school or the child about to leave school that you employ to work in your business or alongside you, they are the ones who are going to be short-changed.**

Please show your support for our teachers.

We really appreciate your support with this issue and would love to have your feedback if you wish to give any. Please fill in the slip below and return it to the office if you have any feedback to give.

Thank you again –

Teachers, Staff & School Leaders

Feedback on Teachers' Industrial Action
