



## Report: Closure of Tahakopa School (3838)- Final Decision

To:	Hon Erica Stanford, Minister of Education		
Date:	8 November 2024	Deadline:	25 November 2024
Security Level:	In-Confidence	Priority:	Medium
From:	Nancy Bell	Phone:	04 463 8513
Position:	Hautū   Deputy Secretary, Te Mahau   Te Tai Runga	METIS No:	1339375

### Why are we sending this to you?

- This report seeks your decision on the proposed closure of Tahakopa School (3838) under Section 199(3) of the Education and Training Act 2020 (the Act).

### What action do we need, by when?

- We are seeking your decision on the closure of Tahakopa School, under Section 199(3) of the Act.
- Please return the signed paper by 25 November 2024.

### Key facts, issues and questions

- On 10 September 2024, you decided the school should close [METIS 1333592 refers]. The statutory 28-day period for the Board to provide any further arguments in favour of the school remaining open ended on 11 October 2024.
- The Board has written to the Ministry to advise that they have no further comments to make in favour of the school remaining open.
- The proposed closure date is 11 April 2025.

## Background

- 1 Tahakopa School (the school) is a state, co-educational, small rural, Year 1-8 full primary school located south of the Clutha District, 28kms from The Catlins Area School in Owaka and 48.8kms from Tokanui School.
- 2 The roll at the school has declined over the last five years and in March 2024, the school had only two students on its roll, who are siblings. The school has two teaching spaces which can accommodate approximately 50 students, meaning it is currently 4% utilised. The two remaining students are already attending The Catlins Area School one day each week as part of their planned transition which has capacity to accommodate primary aged students residing in the Tahakopa area.
- 3 There are no council plans or significant residential development in the Tahakopa area that could impact Tahakopa School. Statistics NZ population projections do not suggest the number of school aged students will increase in the Catlins area over the next three years.
- 4 On 29 May 2024, we agreed on your behalf to initiate consultation about possible closure of the school. In June 2024, during the consultation process there were no objections to the closure of the school.
- 5 On 10 September 2024, you decided the school should close under Section 199(1) of the Act [METIS 1333592 refers]. The Board was invited to provide any further arguments in favour of the school staying open. The statutory 28-day period for the Board to provide any further arguments ended on 11 October 2024.
- 6 Although the Board does not support closure of the school, on 15 October 2024, the Presiding Member advised it had no further comments to make in favour of the school remaining open.
- 7 Now that the 28 day notice period has expired and the Board has advised it has no further arguments to make, we are requesting you make a final decision regarding the closure.

## Ministry's view

- 8 The closure of the school would have very little impact on state schools within the network due to the small size of its current roll, and existing capacity at the other local schools that those students are likely to attend.
- 9 Since preparing the second report requesting a decision on the possible closure of the school, we have not received any further arguments in favour of the school remaining open.

## Financial Implications

- 10 The audited accounts from 2021 show that the school had good levels of working capital at \$156k or \$17,324 per student.
- 11 The audited accounts for 2022 are currently with the auditor.
- 12 If you decide to close the school, the operational savings for the Crown are estimated to be approximately \$109,188 annually.
- 13 When a school closes, permanent staff can access the surplus staffing provisions of the relevant principal and teacher collective agreements which includes up to 40 school weeks leave, plus holiday entitlements. This means that teacher's salaries savings may not be realised until up to one year following the school's closure.

- 14 Currently the school is entitled to 1.3 Full Time Teaching Equivalent (FTTE) comprised of a teaching principal, and a principal release teacher. Closing the school at the end of Term 1 will allow appropriate notice to be given for the staff of the school.

## Transport Implications

- 15 There is a bus route available from Tahakopa to Catlins Area School which could be used by students transitioning from Tahakopa School.

## Risks

- 16 There are no significant risks associated with the proposed closure of Tahakopa School.

## Conclusion

- 17 We recommend the closure of Tahakopa School as:
- It is no longer viable with only two students and no new enrolments from the area.
  - There is sufficient capacity within the existing schooling network to accommodate any future growth in the area.

## Next Steps

- 18 If, after considering the information in this report, you remain satisfied that the school should close, draft letters to the Presiding Member of the Board, local members of Parliament and a *New Zealand Gazette* notice are attached for you to give effect to the closure.
- 19 We recommend closure takes effect on 11 April 2025 (end of Term 1). This will give the Board time to fulfil obligations under various employment agreements, including notice periods.
- 20 If you remain satisfied the school should close, a Memoranda of Agreement that itemises the Educational Development Initiative (EDI) funds and the process for accessing them, as well as details of the distribution of assets from the school, will be negotiated with the relevant boards.
- 21 If the school is closed, the disposal of the school site and buildings will take place in accordance with Section 40 of the Public Works Act 1981, related local authority legislation and the protection mechanisms in respect of a Treaty of Waitangi claim.

## Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

a. **note that**

- i. in May 2024 we agreed on your behalf to initiate consultation on the possible closure of Tahakopa School, and no objections to closure were received;
- ii. in September 2024 you decided that the school should close, and invited the Board to provide any further arguments in favour of the school remaining open;
- iii. on 15 October 2024, the Board advised that it had no further arguments to make and sought a decision as soon as possible.;

Noted

b. **agree** to close Tahakopa School under Section 199(3) of the Education Act and Training Act 2020; and

Agree / Disagree

c. **agree** that Tahakopa School will close on 11 April 2024.

2025

Agree / Disagree

If you agree, you are asked to:

- d. **sign** the attached letters to the Presiding Member of the Board and local Members of Parliament (Annex 1) informing them of your decision; and;
- e. **sign** the attached *New Zealand Gazette* notice (Annex 2) to give effect to the closure.

If you decide you are no longer satisfied that the school should close, you are asked to:

- f. **note** that we will develop alternative letters for your signature.

**Proactive Release:**

- g. **agree** that this report will be proactively released. Any information that might need to be withheld would be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

Agree / Disagree



Nancy Bell  
Hautū | Deputy Secretary  
Te Mahau | Te Tai Runga



Hon Erica Stanford  
Minister of Education

11/11/2024

14/11/24

## **Annexes**

The following are annexed to this paper:

Annex 1: Letters to the Presiding Member of the Board and local Members of Parliament

Annex 2: *New Zealand Gazette Notice*

**Annex 1: Letter to the Presiding Member of the Board and  
local Members of Parliament**

Proactively Released

# Hon Erica Stanford

Minister of Education  
Minister of Immigration



Tania Stapleforth-Hill  
Presiding Member  
Tahakopa School Board  
921 Tahakopa Valley Road

Tēnā koe Tania

## Decision to close Tahakopa School

Thank you for your communication of 15 October 2024, confirming that there are no further arguments you wish to make in favour of Tahakopa School remaining open.

After considering all the information provided to me, I am still satisfied that Tahakopa School should close and have made the decision that the school will close on 11 April 2025.

Please ensure you follow the surplus staffing processes regarding school closure that are outlined in the relevant collective agreements. The school's employment relations advisor organisation will be able to assist you with these matters.

Please contact Judith Forbes, Manager Integrated Services at [Judith.forbes@education.govt.nz](mailto:Judith.forbes@education.govt.nz) if you have any questions about the closure process.

I realise that it is not an easy matter for a Board and a school community to be involved in the closure of their school. I would like to take this opportunity to convey my appreciation of the service that the Board, its previous members and the school staff have given to Tahakopa School and its community. The time, expertise, and support that has been provided over the years to the school community has been greatly appreciated.

Nāku noa, nā

Hon Erica Stanford  
**Minister of Education**

CC: Nancy Bell, Hautū Te Mahau, Te Tai Runga | Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Education  
Julie Anderson, Director of Education, Otago Southland

**Annex 2: Draft New Zealand Gazette Notice**

Proactively Released

**New Zealand Gazette notice**

**Tahakopa School Closure Notice**

Under Section 199(3) of the Education and Training Act 2020, I hereby declare that Tahakopa School (3838), Tahakopa will close on 11 April 2025 and will cease to be established on that day.

Dated at Wellington this 14 day of November 2024.



Hon Erica Stanford  
**Minister of Education**