



Report: Update on engagement with state schools considering converting to charter schools

To:	Hon David Seymour, Associate Minister of Education		
Date:	11/12/2024	Deadline:	None
Security Level:	In-Confidence	Priority:	Low
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Purpose of the report

1. This paper provides an update on the Charter School Agency (the Agency)'s recent engagement around potential converting schools and outlines the perceived barriers for state schools to convert to being a charter school based on those conversations.
2. The information gathered will help the Agency develop information and processes specifically for state schools considering converting, it may also inform future consideration of policy settings where necessary.

Background

3. In the first round of charter school applications there were very few from current state schools. Of those that did apply, four potential converting schools were approved to go to consultation by the Authorisation Board. Each of the schools that applied were looking to expand their offering or open a new school, rather than simply converting.
4. To better understand the challenges and opportunities for state schools considering conversion the Charter School Agency (the Agency) has undertaken a series of meetings with selected stakeholders over the past few weeks. These stakeholders have included:
 - current state school principals in Wellington, Auckland and Northland;
 - representatives of the Association of Integrated Schools
 - a number of proprietors of state-integrated schools
 - Ministry of Education regional directors
 - potential converting schools who applied to be charter schools.

Feedback from engagement with state schools and key stakeholders

5. Through these conversations the Agency has identified the following perceived barriers for state schools considering converting.

Perceived limited benefits of charter school model

6. One principal noted that he didn't think there was anything that the charter school model allowed him to do that he wasn't able to do within the standard state system. Some principals spoken to felt that any benefits there might be in converting were outweighed by the potential issues it would create within their communities and with their teaching staff.

The property model

7. Most concerns centre around the standard in which a Ministry-owned property will be provided to a converted school, and how repairs to known issues may be funded. If properties are provided in a poor state, schools are concerned that they would not be able to meet the costs of maintenance, repair, or upgrades.
8. A perception of a lack of transparency around arrangements and funding for Ministry-owned property as these will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
9. Integrated schools expressed concerns around the level of funding that would be provided for property maintenance compared with the current state-integrated model.

The perceived complexity of converting

10. Questions were raised around how to find potential appropriate sponsors who would be capable of taking on a converting school without alienating the staff.
11. Schools were seeking more information on how to engage with their teaching staff on workforce arrangements in a charter school. The highly unionised nature of most state school workforces posed a significant barrier to conversion for most stakeholders the Agency spoke to.
12. Concerns around the likely disruption to students, staff and communities should there be a change of government and the charter school model abandoned.
13. Stakeholders also raised that application process itself was a deterrent as it seemed overly arduous and could require a considerable amount of time and money to be invested without a guaranteed outcome.

Effects on the network

14. Concerns were raised around effects on the wider network, particularly the effect on feeder schools if the sole secondary school in an area were to convert. There is a feeling that this could leave parents with little choice with regards to their children's education should they not agree with the charter school model.

Next steps

15. This information will be used to develop the Agency's approach to state schools interested in converting to the charter school model.
16. Steps have already been made to address some of these concerns:
 - I. The application process for 2025 is being re-developed to separate the processes for new vs converting schools, and to make it less onerous for schools interested in converting. We are planning on a termly expression of interest process which will be launched in February 2025. There will then be support available to help schools consult their communities and complete their applications.
 - II. The agency is developing collateral (information sheets, updates to the website etc.) to be available to potential schools and sponsors.
 - III. A principals' advisory group is being established to provide free and frank feedback on the charter school model as it is further developed.
 - IV. We continue to work closely with the Ministry of Education as they develop their draft lease agreement and their operating model in their role as lease holder.
17. The Agency will also use the information it has gathered to develop a full outreach plan in early 2025 to connect with state and state-integrated schools that may be interested in converting to the charter school model. This plan will also address how to build a pipeline of suitable sponsors to link with potential converting schools.

Recommended Actions

The Charter School Agency recommends you:

- a. **note** the information provided on perceived barriers for state schools considering conversion
- b. **note** that the Charter School Agency is working to address barriers and provide information to schools that are interested in conversion.


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Charter School Agency

11/12/2024


Hon David Seymour
Associate Minister of Education

15/12/24