

Consultation on the possible closure of Westbridge Residential School

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Frequently asked questions

Why is the Ministry consulting on the possible closure of Westbridge Residential School?

Westbridge Residential School provides education for students aged 8–15 with highly complex behavioural, social and/or learning needs. Despite ongoing intervention and support, significant concerns remain regarding the operation of the school, the ongoing health and safety of students and the quality of education provided at the school.

The Education Review Office's (ERO) latest report, whilst acknowledging improvements, highlights the concerns above and recommends closure. The Ministry agrees that these issues raise serious questions about the school's ability to meet its obligations.

What are the next steps?

The Ministry, on behalf of the Minister, is currently undertaking consultation on the possible closure of Westbridge Residential School.

All responses will be assessed and analysed by the Ministry, and will feed into the Education Report for the Minister's consideration.

The Minister considers the report and views shared during the consultation, then makes a decision on the future of the school.

If the Minister decides to close the school, a letter will be provided to the Commissioner informing them that they have 28 days to respond.

After receiving final thoughts from the Commissioner, a third and final Education Report is developed for the Minister, requesting a final decision.

Who has the authority to close a school?

Only the Minister of Education can decide if a state school should be closed.

What happens if the final decision is to close Westbridge Residential School?

- The closure process, if required is bespoke for each school.
- Current students will be provided with personalised transition plans for their move to other education settings.
- The Ministry will work with whānau and receiving schools to put appropriate supports in place.

What happens if the final decision is to keep Westbridge Residential School open?

The Ministry will continue supporting the Commissioner/School Board to improve processes to provide a safe and inclusive education environment for all students.

How can I have my say/take part in the consultation?

To take part in the consultation please visit the [Consultation Hub](#) or email your thoughts to consultation.westbridge@education.govt.nz

How long is the initial consultation period?

The consultation period opens on Monday 2 February, and closes 5:00pm Sunday 15 March 2026.

What will happen to the students currently enrolled at Westbridge Residential School if it closes?

The Ministry will consider the best possible transition pathway for the students enrolled at Westbridge Residential School.

Why are these students currently not at a 'local' school?

Students at Westbridge Residential School have complex and challenging learning support socialisation, behaviour and learning needs. Enrolment at a residential specialist school provides a short-term intervention in a residential setting to meet these needs. The goal is for students to develop skills and strategies during their time at a residential specialist school that they can use once they return to their local community.

What are residential specialist schools?

A residential specialist school is a specialised setting that provides intensive 24/7 education and support for students with complex and challenging needs, offering a tailored environment for learning, therapy, and life skills development.

What is the difference between a day specialist school and a residential specialist school?

Day specialist schools provide personalised education support for students who have high or complex learning support needs or qualify for the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS). Residential specialist schools (RSS) provide education for students with needs related to socialisation, behaviour, and learning. Students enrolled in RSS reside on-site, in specialised accommodation facilities, as part of their educational programme.

How many residential specialist schools are there in New Zealand? Where are they located?

There are three residential specialist schools in New Zealand. The schools located in Auckland and Christchurch are both co-ed, and the one based in Nelson is exclusively for girls.

There are also a number of day specialist schools across the country. See [list of specialist schools in New Zealand](#).

Who can attend a residential specialist school?

Students who are aged 8 to 15 years old, have social, behaviour and/or learning support needs that are highly complex and challenging, local learning support services have been considered or tried, and do not need an intervention in the home or community, can attend a residential specialist school. Enrolment at a residential specialist school is by agreement, as set out in section 37 the Education and Training Act 2020, between a student's legal guardian and the Secretary for Education (or their delegate).

Can students transition back into state or state-integrated schools afterwards?

Yes, students can, and do, transition back to state/state-integrated schools. The residential specialist schools work in collaboration with the Ministry, other educational professionals and with state/state-integrated schools to facilitate a carefully planned and managed transition process back into the student's local setting.