

Monday October 18 - Welcome to term 4 2021

Principal's Comments :

Dear Parents and Caregivers, It has been a challenging year with lockdowns and COVID responses. The school is doing it's very best to manage change with your children at the centre of all decisions. With that in mind the Board of Trustees has included an update for you all in this newsletter.

We have a very busy 9 weeks and communication is vital especially when things change so rapidly. The Ministry of Education is putting our daily bulletins to schools to keep us up to date with Education and Health issues, as well as recommendations.

We also have school events to manage and these may look very different to what they have before. Considerations will always aim to keep the bubble at Rakaia School safe and secure.

Events affected this term :

- Athletics - decision already made that this is an "in school" event with no spectators and no other schools taking part.
- County Athletics - No decision made yet
- Year 5-8 Camp - note home this week to gauge the feeling of community
- Swimming tuition - going ahead at this moment in time with Whanau swimming next week
- School Concert - will be made into a movie for your viewing pleasure.
- Prize Giving - To be advised
- Picnic - To be advised

Please read all communications on Hero, Facebook, School app and the School website. Thank you.

Rakaia School Board Update

Hello School Community,

There are a couple of items that the Board are working on at the moment that may affect the school community in future. It is important to be open and try to explain in 'plain english' what is happening.

Surplus Staffing Notification

The harsh reality is that schools are funded for 'bums on seats'. When the school roll drops below a predetermined level, we are obligated to inform the ministry of our numbers which in turn triggers the appropriate number of teachers. Remember we do not pay teachers directly – this is centralised - and only have control of the quality of the staff that we have on board, not the quantity. However if schools generate more of their own funds, they could employ teachers directly.

Our roll has dropped to the level where we need to act in respect to reducing our staffing level. It is very important to note this is done with care, respect and consideration to the whole school family. This is a ministry directive that the Board must carry out and the least we can do is to uphold our fantastic staff. It is only natural as human beings to feel upset when something we have worked hard to obtain is taken away.

To put this process in perspective, there are 1057 (44%) schools having to decrease staff in NZ next year. Where will they go? They will go to the 1023 (42%) schools that have to increase staff. You can see that

this is a realignment of student numbers based on where the population has moved to – it's the same staffing pool, just at different schools.

What does this mean for Rakaia School?

The Board are working through having to reduce staffing and will be able to advise the community by the end of the year what the teaching teams look like. The process is fair and transparent, and the Board has indicated that there are core areas that cannot be understaffed. We look to the future and see that with every challenge lies opportunity, even if it isn't apparent yet.

- **COVID Vaccinations**

You may be aware that the government has mandated vaccinations of people in the education sector. It has even suggested that 'No jab – No job'. This has caused a lot of emotion and confusion.

It is important to note that as the national COVID situation escalates, this is only the beginning of the journey and such mandates issued today, may be irrelevant next week as the situation changes. This is new territory and must be navigated with caution.

For now, it is our children at school that are important. We have been entrusted with their care while they are here and to this end **the school will be requiring people that who are not on staff who enter the school to work with groups of children or will have free access to classrooms / grounds have at least a first vaccination dose. The wearing of masks and physical distancing still applies regardless of vaccination status.**

The School reserves the right to request full vaccination for certain events should the event pose an increased risk.

- The drop off / collection of children that occurs outside does still require the wearing of face masks and distancing regardless of vaccination status.
- Visiting a teacher is also ok as long as you observe the usual precautions such as 2m distance and wearing a mask.
- This includes external services and support to the school.

The community that supports us also poses the greatest COVID risk, and we ask that you understand this. You must trust us to assure you that we will work through the vaccination status of staff in line with advice from the Ministry. If you have any questions around the government mandate, your local MP may provide more assistance.

We are on the edge of pandemic panic (again) and schools and health appear to be the battleground. Rakaia School is being proactive, but balanced in its approach for the current situation.

If the situation changes, then we'll update you as we go.

Take good care,

Rakaia School Board

