

8 May 2024

Tēnā koutou katoa,

The Secondary Principals' Council (SPC) represents secondary and area school principals who are members of PPTA. There are representatives for each region, plus for Māori, women, and Area School principals. The Council chairperson is Kate Gainsford, Kate is the current principal of Aotea College in Porirua.

We understand that you are meeting with school leaders to discuss their experiences and so this is a summary of our thoughts. We look forward to the outcomes of your review.

Summary

1. School property is a valuable public asset and should be well managed, planned for and maintained by the public service for the public good.
2. Ministry of Education property functions, as much as possible, should not impede on or detract from the planning and operations of schools. Property functions should be timely, streamlined, consistent and transparent.
3. Ministry of Education property functions should have a clear connection and integration with other ministry planning and resourcing decisions to avoid schools having to duplicate communications across MOE.
4. The current situation is characterised by delays, consequential cost overruns, sunk costs, and inefficiencies. Cases of overcrowding in current facilities compounds the situation, especially where there has been rapid roll growth due in part to government policies.
5. Navigation of the current system by schools relies heavily on the individual skill, confidence and experience of school leaders and staff with property responsibilities, and is hampered by the mixed ability of schools to pay for the extra time and expertise needed to manage major building projects.

Tomorrows' Schools Review Recommendations

After extensive consultation, the Tomorrows' Schools review¹ recommended that responsibility for five-year property agreements (5YA) and major capital works be removed from boards of state schools with an option for some schools to retain responsibility based on national criteria.

This option is likely to still be the preference of many schools, especially small schools, on the understanding that there were:

- Appropriate levels of engagement and consultation with the school's management to ensure minimum disruption and maximum meeting of need.
- Improved service delivery from the Ministry of Education.

¹ <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/tomorrows-schools-review/>

It is not clear how much, if any, work has been done by the government to implement this Tomorrow's Schools review recommendation.

Current issues with the Ministry of Education Property Function

Communication

There are mixed messages and communications occurring all the time. Schools are being told that their roll is increasing, and they are over capacity, but there is no funding for additional buildings. Or there are pauses in planning that take no account of the burgeoning school rolls during the wait period, while costs escalate.

At the same time the Ministry of Education are reminding schools of their health and safety obligations to manage overcrowding, within current over utilised spaces.

Planning and assessment

There is not a genuine assessment of the services that are available to the individual school that impact on property provision.

There is a false economy in using stopgap measures to fix and refurbish existing buildings, with flawed fundamental design and construction issues. Schools can be beset with conflicting advice from project managers and ministry about the viability of some suggested fixes.

The amount of money that is spent on the school without seeing anything positive is just incredible. All we want are classrooms that are practical and a nice environment for teachers to work in.

High turnover of staff in the Ministry of Education and the constant revision of projects create delays which cost more money and cause more interruptions to the functioning of schools and the education of young people.

It is incredibly bureaucratic and time intensive for schools who are responsible for communicating with their communities about delays and problems not of their making.

A solution may be that the Ministry increases permanent inhouse capacity in property design and planning to reduce the very significant costs of that early stage of new buildings and consider utilising some of those savings to fund additional supports for principals during the builds or renovations. It would also build expertise in the practical relationship between property design and practical function.

Staffing for School Property Projects

Schools are insufficiently staffed and resourced for their management functions overall.² The staffing entitlement for secondary schools has not significantly changed since 2012 and since then there have been significant, additional expectations and pressures on schools, in particular school leadership.

² Secondary staffing and the need for change: Report of the Secondary Principals' Council of Aotearoa: 21 September 2021

Under the current model, schools are understaffed for the property management responsibilities they hold.

Responsibilities of the principal

While school boards are nominally responsible for oversight of school property, most property management falls to the school principal. The size of this responsibility has consistently been evaluated as too large. Market rates and skills shortages create challenges for schools being able to hire appropriate support staff for major building projects.

Changes to the system are under supported and rely on principals' own initiative to get across them. Principals' Associations such as SPC are valuable advocates for principals, and for sharing knowledge.

Navigation of the current system by schools, relies heavily on the individual skill, confidence and experience of school leaders and staff with property responsibilities in schools.

Some schools have used the option of paying the principal an additional salary amount for the duration of a large building project, through a mechanism known as concurrence, which requires sign off from the Secretary for Education. Concurrence is funded by the school, from within its own baseline which is a barrier to many schools paying it. The possibility for concurrence is not communicated broadly and is not widely known about. Additional payment to a principal does not reduce the principal's workload.

Buildings in schools cover a more complex set of needs than simple, modular relocatable units can generally solve on their own. These include:

- Specialist teaching spaces.
- Safe crowd (traffic and pedestrian) management.
- Air quality.
- Sustainability of energy options that schools must continue to service.
- Professional workspaces.
- Provision for changing curriculum and assessment demands (digital assessments etc)
- Complex timetabling.
- Extra-curricular activities; and
- Community expectations around schools as a hub for their communities.

These all need careful managing by the principal.

Mechanisms to increase management staffing

To improve school capacity for better property management, schools can receive increased staffing in three ways:

- Direct funding – to the school

- Staffing entitlements that are centrally delivered, with a direct line of sight from political intent to practical application.
- Time entitlements in the collective agreements (Teacher and Principals). Time in a school is delivered by providing the staffing required to cover time away from normal responsibilities.

The Ministry of Education consistently refuses to engage with the PPTA about management staffing in negotiations. However, they also have no coherent plan or workforce strategy for management staffing for schools.

This means that staffing allocations stagnate unless unions negotiate a time allowance for specific roles or functions, which must be delivered by an increase in staffing. This is the explanation for the time allocation claim below.

Two claims to address these issues were made in the last principals' negotiations round – an overall increase in management staffing as well as the below building project claim.

Building projects allowance and staffing (claim from 2022 principals negotiations round)

An allowance of \$17 000 per annum for the period of a building project. A time allocation for the school to enable either the principal or a senior leader to be released to support the building project.

Lower the funding cap of \$3m to allow more schools to access building project support to put towards staffing to support the build. Make this support automatic and not on application.

Rationale

Building projects take a significant amount of time and engagement from the principal. Existing funding for project support is not well utilised and needs fewer barriers to access. This claim seeks to provide flexibility for schools through remuneration, time allocation and staffing for additional project support to manage the significant undertaking of a building project.

Neither of the claims for management staffing or building projects progressed and the Ministry gave no indication of how they were going to address the underlying issues that these claims sought to resolve.

Flexible learning spaces

The high quality of building specifications for school buildings provides assurance to school communities that they are being provided with appropriate, safe places for teaching and learning.

The use of flexible/open learning spaces should be carefully considered. The Ministry of Education should research the effectiveness of flexible learning spaces considering the impact on student achievement, student and teacher wellbeing, and teaching and learning in Aotearoa New Zealand. This research should inform future property investment in schools.

PPTA supports government commitments to additional funding for professional development for teachers where flexible learning spaces have been included in the design of teaching and learning spaces.

There is a growing understanding that school property should include culturally inclusive practices, learning environments and pedagogies, embedded in mātauranga taketake.

Public Private Partnerships

Any increase in the use of public private partnerships for school property should be approached with caution. There are well known challenges with the model in terms of maintenance and community access.

There has been no independent evaluation of the value of public private partnerships when measured against longer term costs and the experience of schools that have property developed through this model.

Thank you for your consideration. If you wish to contact me, you can do so on gd@aotea.school.nz or 04 237 3166.

Naku noa, nā



Kate Gainsford

SPC Chairperson