

## **Education Report: Consideration of the future of Redcliffs School, Christchurch**

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### **Executive Summary**

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1. This report provides you with the findings of investigations into cliff instability and potential hazard mitigation at the site of Redcliffs School. These findings are provided in summary form in this briefing, and the full reports are attached for your consideration. The report seeks your decision on the future of Redcliffs School.
2. Redcliffs School is a Year 1-8 full primary school, originally located in Redcliffs, Christchurch, in the Port Hills electorate. It had a 1 July 2014 roll of 219 students.
3. Following the Christchurch earthquakes and consequent cliff collapse debris inundation on parts of the school property, Redcliffs School was relocated from Redcliffs to Sumner School and then to the Van Asch Deaf Education Centre (VADEC) in Sumner during 2011 while rockfall hazard analysis was undertaken on the cliffs behind the school.
4. A geotechnical report prepared by MWH New Zealand Ltd (MWH) provides evidence that the majority of the Redcliffs School site could be safe for use as a school. Taking into account the findings of a wider mass movement report for Port Hills (undertaken by GNS Science International Ltd (GNS)), MWH concluded that the rockfall risk present at the Redcliffs School site could be mitigated by reducing the site area and constructing a mechanically stabilized earth bund on the boundary of the school that faces the cliffs. According to MWH modeling, these measures would reduce the risk from rockfall to the level of "background risk" that all New Zealanders are exposed to. This is also the level of risk that GNS suggests is acceptable for a school site.
5. MWH recommends that if Redcliffs School is returned to site with these mitigations in place, an operations and maintenance plan be established to define the response required after future rockfall events. Types of event that could require reassessment and/or further mitigations would be a large volume of rockfall, or a large individual boulder causing damage to the bund.
6. If there was a future event that necessitated a reassessment to determine whether the site remained within the acceptable risk level, the school would be unable to operate on the site while that assessment and any required repairs, removal of rock or other mitigations were carried out. Such an eventuality would cause further disruption to teaching and learning and may affect the ongoing viability of the site for educational purposes.
7. At this stage it is not possible to provide a timeframe as to when Redcliffs School could be returned to its site. This is because there are complex demolitions that need to take place on the cliffs above the school before the site could be reoccupied, and the timing of these demolitions has not yet been scheduled. Redcliffs School would need to remain on the VADEC site until these demolitions have taken place and the necessary property/mitigation works have been completed.

8. The Board of Trustees of Redcliffs School has engaged with its community about the possibility of returning to the Redcliffs site. This has included sharing MWH's draft findings with the school community in May 2014. The Board reports that the written and verbal feedback received from the community was positive about a return to site.
9. The Ministry recognises that the expert advice provided in the geotechnical and hazard mitigation reports supports the view that, with the recommended mitigation measures in place, the Redcliffs School site could be made safe for occupation by the school. It is noted, of course, that no absolute guarantees of safety can be given. Any engineering system recognises that failure is a factor.
10. However, the Ministry considers that the circumstances around the site create a strong risk of ongoing uncertainty for the school and its community if the school is to be returned there. This uncertainty relates in the first instance to our inability to determine a timeframe for the school's return, as described in paragraph 7. Following a return to site, the possibility of future cliff face collapse and rockfall events requiring further assessment and mitigation means that no certainty can be provided about the ongoing and uninterrupted usage of the site.
11. On the basis of the information in this briefing and the attached reports, you are asked to make a decision about whether you are satisfied that Redcliffs School should be returned to its former site.
12. If you are satisfied that the school should be returned to its site, the Ministry would commence planning for this, including developing the necessary plans for responding to future cliff face collapse and rockfall events.
13. If you are not satisfied at this stage that the school should return to this site, it is recommended that you initiate consultation with the Board of Trustees of Redcliffs School about the possible closure of the school. If the school was closed, additional property would be provided at other schools where students may next enroll. It is likely that most of the children from the Redcliffs area would attend Sumner School and Mt Pleasant School if Redcliffs School closed, though parents may of course choose to enroll their children at other schools.

## Recommendations

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We recommend that the Minister of Education:

- a. **note** the content of the reports about cliff instability and hazard mitigation at Redcliffs School and risk levels compared to other school sites;
- b. **discuss** the information in these reports with your colleagues Minister Brownlee, Minister Wagner and Minister Kaye. You may also wish to seek the advice of the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA);

**Either**

OPTION 1

- c. **agree** that Redcliffs School should be returned to its former site, with the recommended mitigations in place;

AGREE / DISAGREE

- d. **note** that the Ministry will work with appropriate expert advisers to develop an operations and maintenance plan for monitoring the site and responding to future cliff face collapse and rockfall events;

**Or**

OPTION 2

- e. **agree** to initiate consultation with the Board of Trustees of Redcliffs School about the possible closure of Redcliffs School under section 154 of the Education Act 1989;

AGREE / DISAGREE

*Either*

- f. **propose** that the closure would take place at the beginning of 2017 (27 January 2017);

AGREE / DISAGREE

*Or*

- g. **propose** that the closure would take place at the beginning of Term 3, 2016 (24 July 2016);

AGREE / DISAGREE

**And**

- h. **note** that a letter will be developed for your signature to the school Board of Trustees once your decision is known; and

- i. **agree** that a copy of this report be released to the Board of Trustees of Redcliffs School, and later released publicly.

AGREE / DISAGREE

We recommend that the Associate Minister of Education:

- j. **note** the content of the attached reports about cliff instability and hazard mitigation at Redcliffs School and risk levels compared to other school sites.



Katrina Casey  
Deputy Secretary  
Sector Enablement and Support

Encls



Hon Hekia Parata  
Minister of Education

16/3/15

I have taken some time to review the detail of this complex set of factors as they each weigh against the other. My concern is for the learning quality of the children, both now and into the future. I am also concerned to ensure that the school community has the certainty that it seeks and is entitled to.

After considering the technical and theoretical modelling, together with the views reported by the Board, and knowing that there is no one perfect solution, it is my difficult decision to initiate consultation for possible closure. A