

Chief Ombudsman launches investigation into school closure consultation

Date: 26 March 2013

The Chief Ombudsman, Dame Beverley Wakem, has today commenced an investigation into the way in which the Ministry of Education conducts consultation on school closures and mergers.

The investigation arose out of an Ombudsman's inquiry last year into how the Ministry handled information requests about proposed closures and mergers in Christchurch, during which a number of parties voiced dissatisfaction about the consultation process as a whole.

The Education Act requires the Minister of Education to consult prior to closing or merging schools and the Ministry plays a key part in assisting the Minister with those consultations. The investigation will focus on the actions of the Ministry of Education only and not the Minister herself as the actions of the Minister are not subject to oversight under the Ombudsmen Act.

Dame Beverley will be looking in some detail at a number of closure and merger consultations carried out in recent years, including the process that is currently underway in Christchurch.

“I will assess whether the consultation processes operate in a manner that adequately ensures fair and meaningful participation by affected parties and, if they do not, how they could be improved”, says Dame Beverley.

Dame Beverley is asking anyone who has information relevant to the investigation to contact her office by calling 0800 802 602, by filing an online complaint at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz, or by e-mailing info@ombudsman.parliament.nz (and entering “school closure consultations” in the subject line).

It is expected that the investigation will be completed in the second half of this year.

For further information, please contact Leo Donnelly, Deputy Ombudsman, on (027) 441 7357 or Andrew McCaw, Senior Advisor, on (04) 462 7852.

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