

Kia ora e te whanau,

I hope you are all well and find ways to fill the days and enjoy family time.

During times of challenge, the inequities in society are even more visible. I am writing today to urge you all to be part of the solution and to use this lockdown time to take a stand against unfair policies that create barriers to education.

You may have heard the Ministry of Education talking about digital devices and hard copies of learning materials. Those resources that are needed by all students are NOT available to us. At least not at the moment. Priority has been given to decile 1-3 schools followed by those doing NCEA.

The Labour government promised to remove the outdated decile system but that has not yet happened and during this time of challenge, that system is being used to decide who gets prioritised assistance and who misses out.

The decile system is particularly unfair to Intermediate Schools and Colleges. As there are fewer Intermediates and Colleges, we take our students from a wider geographical area and this means that we also take from a wide socio-economic area. The system looks at the socio-economic status of all students and works out the average. Our students come to us from primary schools that range from decile 3 to decile 10. As a result, we are a decile 6. However, the socio-economic status for students has not changed based on the school they attend.

Being a North Shore school also has some stereo types attached to it meaning that we are often unable to access services and resources that are available to students living in other parts of Auckland.

As a principal of a decile 6 Intermediate on the North Shore, I feel overwhelmed with the amount of inequities in education. Our students deserve to be treated fairly and with dignity. They need an education system that meets their needs and is accessible to all. As a community, we need to insist that our local politicians, the MOE and the current government prioritise barrier free education for all.

Please take some time during lockdown to write to our local MP, our Minister of Education and the Opposition telling them that Birkdale matters and we need to be seen. Our students need resources and services, and these should be available regardless of the decile rating of a school. Remind them that our school staff do an amazing job but they are stretched and need Ministry support. We need equality for all and this starts by recognising the needs of individuals and meeting these needs. Ask our politicians to stop using an outdated formula that disadvantages students and reduces access to education.

We want access to resources, access to well being and counselling services, free transportation for students living 3kms away from school, access to school lunches, increased funding to meet learning needs, additional staffing for all, subsidised uniforms and equipment for all students and digital accessibility for all students at home and at school. At the current time, we want all students to be able to access home learning without barriers. We want the government to see all learners as the valuable tamariki that we know they are and not a decile number.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I really hope that you will consider adding your voice to our call for equality in education. The role of teachers is to teach and I know that some of you will feel that a political email is not appropriate. I am unapologetic about being passionate about wanting barrier



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free education for all and I am hopeful, that as a community, we all feel that this is a message that needs to be shouted loudly from the heart of Birkdale / BeachHaven to the hearts of our policy makers.

Please take care of your whanau, stay well and reach out if you need support.

Ngā mihi nui,

JoAnne Sutton
Tumuaki / Principal