



FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

20 May 2022

Kia ora tatou katoa

At our monthly meeting held on Wednesday evening this week, the Board considered the results of our recent surveys of parents, students and staff re the wearing of face masks indoors here at school. There was a clear signal from parent respondents (73.2%) and students (77.4%) that they believe that we are now at a point where the Board should strongly encourage mask-wearing indoors, but make this optional. However, the staff opinion was almost evenly split, with 51.7% favouring this being optional. As a good employer we are concerned that many of our staff remain anxious about the likelihood of increased transmission with fewer people wearing mask protection indoors at school.

It is clear that some parents and students believe that a large proportion of our school population has had Covid so that they have a natural immunity. In fact, this is not the case at all. Only 22 of 71 staff have had Covid (31%) and we know of 274 of 705 students (39%) who have advised the school that they have had the virus. It is likely we think that there are a small number of other students who have had Covid that we do not know about, but even if there have been 300 infected in total, that still leaves over 400 students (57%) who have not had the virus.

Of course, we also know that people can contract Covid more than once, particularly with different variants. We also know that currently there appears to be an Omicron resurgence, especially in Auckland and also in overseas countries like Australia, and with our borders now much more open to international visitors, the Board believes that a resurgence in our Waikato region and local community is inevitable.

Likewise, we know that the flu virus is now hitting our country and this often has very similar symptoms to Covid. We will continue to maintain our stance that any student or staff member who has Covid, flu, cold or tummy bug symptoms must stay away from school. If we notice such symptoms in a student at school, staff will continue to ask them questions about their health, and, if necessary, send them home. We are continuing to rely on our parents to make a decision to keep unwell students at home and to test for Covid.

This week we know of a secondary school in Hamilton which has 26 staff away with Covid, either themselves or in their household. This school is only a little bigger than our own. They have had to roster home all of their junior students because they cannot cover their classes. We know that some Auckland schools have had to return to online learning across the whole school.

We are therefore expecting that the same thing could well happen to us very quickly, worsened by a loosening of our restrictions on mask-wearing. The Board simply cannot expect staff who are well to continually provide cover for large numbers of their sick colleagues when there are very few day relievers available to us. We have done very well to be one of the few Waikato schools which have so far been able to remain open for face-to-face learning all year. This is a tribute to our teaching staff, who have often been called upon to cover their colleagues' classes. This is overloading our teachers and bringing stress, and the Board and community cannot continue to expect them to do this extra work.

This was therefore a very difficult decision for the Board to make. After much deliberation, the Board passed the following motion: **“That the wearing of masks will be strongly encouraged, but that masks will be optional indoors for students and staff effective from Monday 23 May, except in large gatherings like assemblies and on bus transport where mask-wearing will remain compulsory apart from for those few who have approved exemptions. The Board reserves the right to decide at short notice to once again mandate masks indoors, if transmission becomes such that we have to roster students home or close our school and move to online learning.”**

Ngaa mihi

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Ngaire Te Ahu'.

Ms Ngaire Te Ahu