

13 March 2019

Hon Chris Hipkins  
Ministry of Education

Dear Minister

We the parents of Rise Up Academy would like to make a formal response in regards to the relocation of our school to a commercial building on Atkinson Avenue in Otahuhu. This is now a matter of urgency as the time lines proposed are fast approaching and we have yet to see any progress to reassure us of this plan.

Please note that we have written this letter with the intention of sharing with the media, other Members of Parliament, Local Board Leaders, Opposition Party Leaders, the Prime Minister Hon Jacinda Arden, and the wider community. We are now taking our own action as we feel the Ministry of Education (MOE) has not listened to any of our concerns and you have not engaged with us adequately or been transparent with information. We feel the process undertaken by the MOE has purposely not allowed us to have any say and to therefore force us into accepting Atkinson Avenue or face having no school.

We have written letters to you in December 2018 of our concerns after meeting with Rob Giller, Acting Head of Education Infrastructure Service in November 2018. This was the first and only time the MOE has engaged with us as parents in regards to the relocation. Atkinson Avenue did not meet our expectations of what would be acceptable conditions for our children. Rob Giller responded on your behalf that *"we carried out an exhaustive search to find a suitable alternative. The Atkinson Avenue property was the only option that met the requirements agreed with Rise Up Trust."* However, he has failed to show us evidence of this *"exhaustive search"* and what this entailed to then come to the conclusion that Atkinson Avenue is *"the only option"*. This process was undertaken behind closed doors.

The MOE have not provided us with any examples of a primary school model operating in a commercial building in New Zealand. There are no proven effective management strategies to help moderate risk factors such as a shared driveway that is also utilized by delivery vehicles, shared carpark spaces of which part will be the playground for children as young as 5 years old, shared stairwells with other tenants that are essentially unvetted adults. We have therefore come to the conclusion that the relocation of Rise Up Academy into a commercial building is a political experiment and we are the guinea pig.

Rob Giller reassured us that Atkinson Avenue will be ready and safety aspects will be addressed. He has given our Elected Board of Trustees (BOT) proposed plans for this location only in February 2019 to be signed off. Our EBOT's duty as officers of a PCBU is to exercise the primary duty of care to ensure that MOE complies with its duties or obligations under the HSWA. To which they have employed a health and safety auditor to review the plans and are using this information to provide assurance of authentic

engagement from the Ministry. However the proposed plans did not rectify many safety concerns that we had already expressed to you on our letters.

The completed proposed plans for Atkinson Avenue does not provide much natural light for our children, classroom sizes are small and cramped and two of the classrooms are still only separated by partitions. We have children with hearing problems and children who are kinesthetic learners. The open plan concept is not appropriate for these children. The playground will be incomplete but more importantly our children will access this via the shared driveway and there are no toilets or drinking facilities for our children in the playground. Our children will have to go back into the building (top floor) for these facilities. You can imagine the logistics of safely escorting our children in and out of the building by the staff and the risk of our 5-year old's soiling themselves due to access issues. There is no security for our children from the general public who will still have access to the building, as we are sharing with a restaurant and a church who are the other existing tenants.

Hon Minister Chris Hipkins this is unacceptable to us and we will not be putting our children into Atkinson Avenue. This will impede our children's learning and is a huge step backwards for Rise Up Academy. This school is founded by children that the state sector schools have already failed, and continue to fail in providing an education model that delivers for Maori and Pasifika. We proudly stand with the Rise Up Academy BOT and teachers as the first Pasifika Charter School in New Zealand that opened in 2014. We are now the first Pasifika Special Character State School that caters for Year 1-8. Our children are performing well above the national average for Maori and Pasifika. In 2016 our achievement data for reading writing and mathematics was 86%, 85%, and 85% respectively. This is a successful school that is achieving well above national standards and we deserve the right to be given better than what you have offered us. The Ministry should be looking very closely at what is making Rise Up more successful and looking into how this can be intergrated into other state schools.

The school was established from humble beginnings in the garage of Sita Selupe who is our Principal and CEO. She was awarded the Next Magazines Woman of the Year Award in 2014 and the Sir Peter Blake Leadership award in 2015. Her vision and passion to improve education for Maori and Pasifika, the learning model that allows our children to learn according to their learning style, and parent engagement programs are reasons we chose to put our children into Rise Up Academy. Our children are proof that it is working.

Our community continues to fight adversities and inequality. From the Charter schools being abolished, to our Rosella Road property being sold, the possibility of not having a school, and now the MOE giving us a second-rate deal. The name "RISE UP" was born through adversities that gives hope for the future of our children. We will not allow you to take us back down.

We would like to ask you Minister and those that work in the MOE - would you put your children into that environment? We invite you to come and inspect the building and imagine your own children attending school in a commercial building that is unsafe, has limited natural light, no structural walls, has open access for the general public and no grass to play on. Because this is what you are telling us to accept for our children as it is *"the only option"* that meets our *"requirements"*. Are you asking us to accept this because we are a low decile school and no one would care? Because we are a small school and insignificant? Because we should be grateful for your hand out? Because we should lower our expectations of ourselves? Because our *"requirements"* is less than those in other areas?

Our parents, teachers and BOT were looking for alternative school sites before the Coalition Government decided to close charter schools. We stopped looking because you promised to help do this for us. We offered you these alternative locations to look at. Rob Giller was not transparent about these alternative sites, if they were even considered by the MOE.

We urge our Pasifika Members of Parliament to stand with us and voice our concerns as our Pasifika communities voted for you to be our voice. You have been silent and chosen not to engage with us. We urge those in opposition to question the Minister on his motives for placing our children into an unsafe environment that is not conducive to their learning. We urge the Prime Minister Hon Jacinda Arden to review the process carried out by the Ministry of Education, who are experimenting on our children without proper evidence and strategies to moderate the risk factors. We urge our communities near and far to stand with us and raise our voices for better educational structures that will increase Maori and Pacific achievement. The MOE have told us that this is the only option. What does that say about the MOE and their mandate for Maori and Pacific?

We would like MOE to support our Principal and our BOT and enter into negotiations with our landlord to remain at Rosella Road until you together with us, find a more suitable and acceptable location for our children. We do not believe Atkinson Avenue is the only option and it does not fit our requirements. We do not believe that the Ministry looked at any other alternatives. You have given us a second-rate deal and we do not accept it. We ask that you give us the respect of a fair and equitable process as it is our children who will ultimately be affected.

Signed by  
Parents of Rise Up Academy School

