



TUAKAU COLLEGE

Pai rawa atu i nga mea katoa • The very best in all things

Jan Tinetti
Minister of Education

17 October 2023

Dear Ms Tinetti

The Tuakau College Board would like the Minister to reverse the decision made by the Ministry of Education to **not fund** or assist the secondary students from Pōkeno to get to their nearest school, Tuakau College

Tuakau College belong to the Franklin Transport Network Group(FTNG). The group is made up of six schools and they are Tuakau College(Fundholding School), Pokeno Primary, Te Kohanga Primary, Onewhero Area School, Pukekawa Primary, and Mangatawhiri Primary. The network group have just completed a bus network funding review. This network is directly-resourced. The Ministry of Education (MOE) determines the money the network receives using the number of eligible students, a daily kilometer rate and a daily base rate. The Ministry of Education then informs the network how much money it has to run the buses on an annual basis. The network then uses the funding to run an appropriate set of network routes which assists getting the students to and from school and which fits the requirements of all the network schools.

Over the years the FTNG have done this very successfully but in the last couple of years the number of students coming to and from Pōkeno has increased. This has impacted the bottom line in the budget because the funding has not changed for near 10 years. The network cannot run at a loss so therefore it requested a funding review by the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education have now completed their funding review and they have informed the network of two significant changes:

1. The funding for the network will be **decreased by 17%** because of a decrease in eligible students across the network routes. For Tuakau College it was two significant areas where the students are ineligible because they do not attend their nearest school. Students coming in from Pukekawa South(south of Pukekawa school) and Port Waikato (south of Te Awamarahi Marae) are now deemed ineligible because they should all be going to Onewhero Area School. There are other areas too for other schools but not the impact this has on the students in these areas. This is a significant decrease in funding for the network.

All correspondence to the **Principal • Mr C Betty** MEdAdmin (Hons), BSc, Dip Tchg

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2. The second change that the Ministry of Education has deemed is that all the students living in Pōkeno are **ineligible to be funded** to get them to and from Tuakau College. They are ineligible because the Waikato District Council have a public bus service running between Pōkeno and Pukekohe stopping in Tuakau on the way.

Over the past 20 plus years students have been travelling to Tuakau College using the network buses. The township of Pōkeno has grown significantly over the past three years, increasing the numbers of students having to get to Tuakau College for their secondary education. Tuakau College is the only designated enrolment zone secondary school for the township of Pōkeno, according to the Ministry of Education enrolment team. This town is growing fast so the Waikato District Council decided to put on a bus service (BUSIT) from Pōkeno to the Pukekohe train station (which is not functional at present because of electrification). This has subsequently, in the guidelines (not legislation) of the Ministry of Education, made all the students that live in Pōkeno ineligible for funding.

The Board totally rejects that the students are ineligible, because the Board believes the service that the Waikato District Council has put on is totally inadequate and unsuitable in its present state to get all the students to and from Tuakau College appropriately. The Board through the Principal has discussed this with the Ministry and it has fallen on deaf ears. We are not talking about a small number of students. If every student from Pōkeno uses the bus service which we presently run we are taking close to 200+ students, with another 400 younger students at Pōkeno Primary which will enrol with us over the next five years who will also need to be transported, increasing the numbers again.

The Ministry of Education uses the clauses in its School Transport Assistance pamphlet, that all parents have access to. Looking at the criteria Tuakau College's Pōkeno students meet all the criteria except Criteria 3, according to the MOE.

Criteria 1:

“The school MUST be the closest state or state-integrated school where the student can enrol.”

Tuakau College is the designated College for the Pōkeno area so we are the closest school.

Criteria 2:

Students MUST live more than a certain distance from the school depending on their year levels.”

Tuakau College is 10km from the township of Pōkeno. All the students are eligible under this criteria.

Criteria 3:

“There MUST be no suitable public transport options.”

(Waka Kotahi guidelines for regional public transport plans page 37)

The Board believes there is no suitable transport option to get all the students to and from Tuakau College according to the criteria because:

- In its present form the bus will not be able to pick up and drop off all the Tuakau College students in a timely fashion. There are two possible slots on the BUSIT timetable otherwise the students will either get to the College too early or too late.
- The bus does not have the capacity to fit all the students on and will need an increased capacity for the future. The Ministry of Education has informed us that capacity is not a consideration in their decision.
- The Waikato District Council have informed Tuakau College that in its present state their bus service **is not suitable** for getting the students to and from Pōkeno to Tuakau College and that they will need time and a change in funding to determine a better option, which is unavailable to them presently. They have informed the Board and the Ministry of Education delegate that this service is only temporary and could be pulled at any time. Their funding has already been set and to make changes is going to take time.
- We have been informed that if this bus service stopped tomorrow that the Ministry of Education would have to fund a suitable service to and from the College for the Pōkeno students.

If the Ministry of Education forges ahead and does not fund to assist the Bus Network to get the students from Pōkeno to Tuakau College then there is likely to be these outcomes:

- If BUSIT do not assist in changing their schedule then students will be left on the side of the road, they will arrive too early to school and not have supervision and or arrive too late for a 9:00am start.
- Attendance from students in this area will decrease because of an increased truancy. The Ministry of Education is placing barriers in front of our families when they should be knocking them down especially when there is presently a huge focus on getting students to school. Truancy will increase because:
 - There is an inappropriate timetable, at present run by BUSIT (as explained above)
 - Whānau and families are struggling already under the cost of living crisis and now the Ministry of Education want to increase their pain by making them use an unsuitable bus service which they have to pay for. Parents/caregivers will have to make decisions around getting their kids to school or putting the money aside for food, etc. These are the decisions our families make every day and even though they can get them to school for free now, after the 1st April 2024 parents are going to have to pay. The Board feels the MOE have put their hands in the air and are telling the Tuakau College Board that it is not their problem.

The Ministry of Education use the word ‘assist’ and in this instance they are not assisting the students to get to school they are placing a barrier in front of students and their families because

there is an inadequate bus service already here. The Ministry of Education needs to have equity and flexibility in this guideline about another bus service until the BUSIT service is adequate. The flexibility is to ensure the students are getting to school with a funded bus network and assist in getting the BUSIT service appropriate.

The Board feels the Ministry of Education has a moral obligation, in this case, to the families in Pōkeno to find a solution moving forward and to not leave it to Tuakau College to fund these students under the present circumstances.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nicky Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nicky" written in a more stylized, looped manner.

Nicky Moore
Board Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Betty". The signature is very stylized and abstract, with many loops and a long, sweeping line extending upwards and to the right.

Chris Betty
Principal