

Board Update: Future of San Antonio School

Information for our Parents, Guardians and Community

17 August 2022

The Board of San Antonio School has recommended to the Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington that the school close at the end of the 2022 school year. This information sheet explains the background to the Board's recommendation and the next steps.

We recognise that this will be sad and unexpected news for many in our community so we wanted to ensure that everyone has the same information in order to understand why the Board considers that closure is inevitable and why it is in the best interests of students for the school to close at the end of the 2022 school year.

Why has the Board recommended that the school close at the end of the year?

San Antonio School currently has 20 students and an expected roll in 2023 of 19 students, with the roll not anticipated to grow to a sustainable level in the short-to-medium term. Currently students are taught in two classrooms, one for Years 0-2 and one for Years 3-8. The school currently employs 2.6 teachers.

In 2023 the Ministry of Education staffing formulas show we will be funded for 1.3 teachers only. This means all students (from Years 0-8) will be taught in one classroom only by a sole-charge teaching principal, with some part-time teaching support to enable principal duties to be completed.

Our Operations grant from the Ministry of Education will also reduce and in 2023 is unlikely to cover all utility costs, let alone purchase curriculum resources and meet property management costs.

Additionally we are aware the Archdiocese is looking to review Catholic Schools across the Wellington region later this year, which is expected to look at the viability of schools. The Board's opinion is that an outcome will be a recommendation to the Cardinal that San Antonio should close.

For these reasons, we believe closure is inevitable and feel it is in the best interests of our students that the school closes at the end of the year. This will allow students to transition to new schools for the beginning of the 2023 school year.

The following information is intended to help further explain the background to the decision and the next steps.

How have the school's enrolments changed over the past few years?

The table below shows the school has always been a relatively small school - ranging from 21 to 35 students across the years 2008-2022. These are as at 1 July each year as provided to the Ministry of Education in our mid-year roll return.

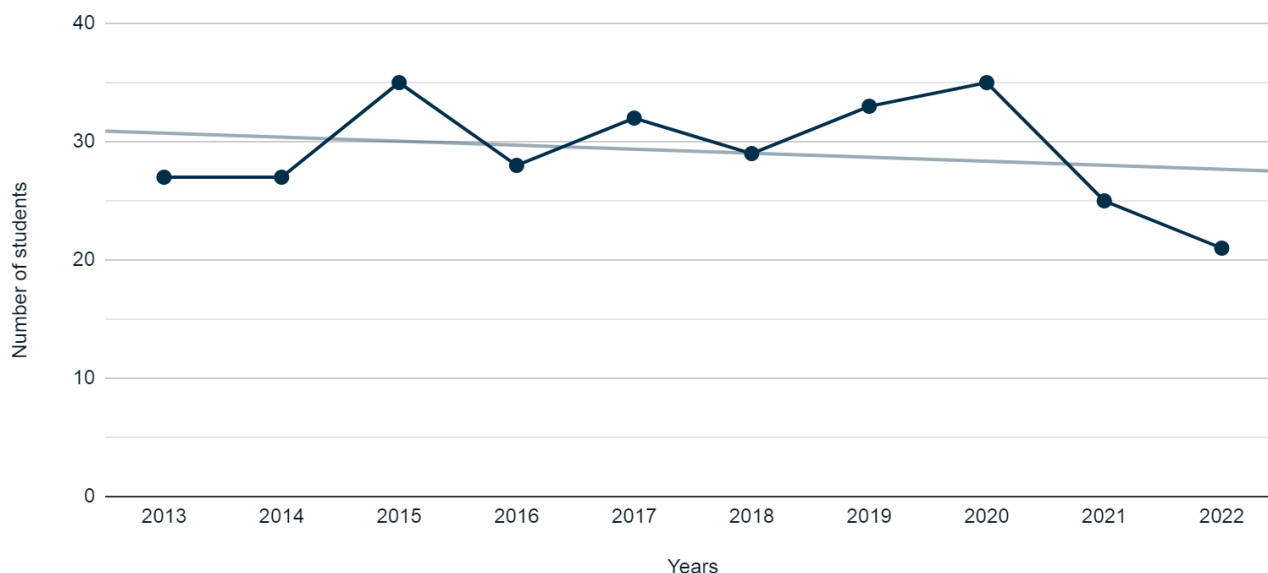
San Antonio School Roll as at 1 July: 2008-2022

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
22	25	27	33	25	27	27	35	28	32	29	33	35	25	21

The following graph shows that the number of students enrolled at San Antonio School has been trending down over the past decade. Based on the information held by the Board, and our discussions with the Ministry of Education and the Archdiocese, there is no data to indicate that this trend will reverse.

As the school will need to move to a single classroom environment next year, our roll may decrease even further if some parents feel this is not the best learning environment for their child/ren.

2013-2022 Rolls as at 1 July (with trendline)



Why do roll numbers matter?

Funding provided to the school by the Ministry of Education for staffing and operations is calculated on the number of students enrolled in the school - the fewer students, the less staff and the less money we receive to pay all of our expenses. There is typically more scope for a small school to remain open in rural areas where there are few convenient alternatives, which is not the case for San Antonio.

What has the Board done to increase enrolments?

For the past three years the Board has worked extremely hard to lift student numbers, including:

- Running open days
- Advertising in local newspapers around the benefits of our school
- Building the school's Facebook presence
- Paying for billboards
- Engaging with local ECE providers
- Running Facebook ads in some of our adjacent communities.

Unfortunately these efforts have not resulted in an increased roll.

What alternatives did the Board consider instead of closure?

The Board had intensive discussions internally, and with the Archdiocese and Ministry of Education, to consider alternative options to closing. Ultimately based on all the data and factors at play here, even if we did not recommend closure, we believe it would be an outcome of the Archdiocese's upcoming review of Wellington Catholic schools.

When considering the review, coupled with the significant structural change of having just one classroom in 2023, we felt the energy and resource required to attempt to keep the school open was not in the best interests of the students and their learning. We felt that making the decision now would give families and staff certainty and time to make alternative arrangements for next year.

As Board members with children at the school, we are acutely aware of the impact of this decision on students, families, staff and the parish but we feel it is the right decision in the circumstances.

What happens next?

The Archdiocese will now move forward to work with the Ministry of Education to undertake the formal statutory processes required before closing a school, including consultation processes with local schools and staff and parents/guardians of this school.

We will share more information about these processes with parents as they come to hand, but we think it is important to reiterate that we see closure as an inevitability based on the school's current situation.

What are the next steps for parents and guardians?

We recognise that San Antonio closing at the end of the year adds additional pressures and challenges for parents/caregivers that they did not anticipate, but it is now important for parents/guardians to consider what is the best schooling option for their child/ren for 2023.

The Board has asked the Archdiocese to work with the school so that preference students who wish to continue with a Catholic education can be placed in other local Catholic schools. We will contact parents of preference students to discuss this further over the coming days.

The principal will be informing other local schools of our expected closure and will work closely with them to support the transition of students to their new school at the start of 2023, or earlier if that is a parent's preference.

Our Board and Principal are available by appointment to meet with each whānau to discuss options and how we can help ensure the transition is as smooth and positive as possible for each child. Parents and guardians, please make contact with Annemarie if you would like to schedule a meeting with us.

What happens to the school's assets and buildings after a closure?

There are a number of steps and actions that will be required during the next few months to properly wind up all of the school's activities. For instance, the PTA will need to formally cease and make decisions on what happens to its funds. We will be in touch with any current users of our facilities to discuss the future, but can confirm they will have continued access at least until the end of 2022. We will endeavour to provide any support or information needed.

The Archdiocese and Ministry of Education have procedures for determining what happens to school assets and property after a closure. Once further information is available, we will share this with our community..

What is planned to mark the school's closure?

We know the closure of the school will be sad for everyone with a connection to the school, particularly current and former students, staff, families and the parish. We intend to put in place a programme of events to celebrate and honour the school's proud 86-year history as we move towards closure at the end of the year. We will keep everyone informed about this.

Where can I get more information?

The Board's immediate priority is to support whānau and staff as they work through their own next steps. We will continue to share information with parents/guardians, Father Marlon and other relevant people/organisations. If our community has any specific questions, please email office@sanantonio.school.nz or leave a message for the Board via the school office.