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Wairoa JAB prizegiving

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Audit report passed to SFO

Concerns about Waikaremoana school's financial management

CONTINUING Ministry of Education concerns around Te Kura o Waikaremoana school's financial management led to a forensic financial auditing report being sent to the Serious Fraud Office last September.

Alarm bells sounded last May when the ministry learned of an inquiry from the board chairperson about securing a loan. The level of ministry oversight was increased.

A limited statutory manager identified that the board's financial management was poor and its funds almost depleted.

Because of the seriousness of the allegations, the board of trustees was dissolved in September.

For the ministry, deputy secretary sector enablement and support Katrina Casey said the matter was the subject of a police inquiry and could not comment on specifics of the case.

The ministry did, however, provide the following response:

"When we establish that a board of trustees is having difficulty in governing a school, we provide support.

"The Ministry of Education appointed a limited statutory manager in July 2017 following concerns over the school's financial performance. The kura has had statutory interventions in the past.

"That LSM position was later upgraded to commissioner in September 2017, following an audit of the school's finances.

"A commissioner holds all the functions, powers and duties of the board of trustees that the commissioner has replaced.

"A new principal, Te Kewena White, was appointed in May this year.

"The commissioner will begin community consultation this month for the establishment of a new board of trustees.

"The school continues to receive support from ministry staff.

"In June 2014, an Education Review Office report recommended an intervention to bring about improvements, which we took action on.

"We requested that the board develop an action plan to address particular concerns.

"It sets out under each area of concern, the actions that the board will undertake to bring about the change required.

"An action plan is requested when the ministry considers that the board is struggling to manage a situation without a higher level of intervention.

"In some cases, the board may need assistance from an external consultant. For example, where the concern is about developing and implementing teacher appraisal systems, an external expert may be required.

"At the time of the transfer of this kura from Hawke's Bay-Tairāwhiti to the Bay of Plenty-Wairariki office, a review of the intervention was undertaken.

"We decided that the action plan the board had developed was not bringing about the changes required fast enough.

"As a result of the review, in March 2016, we met with the board and asked it to re-submit the plan, which it did in June 2016.

"The original action plan was to address areas of concern identified by ERO, namely board organisation and management, financial management and student achievement.

"In January 2017, there was insufficient evidence that the risk to the school had been addressed and it was decided that the action plan intervention should continue.

"We continued to meet with the board each term and in May 2017 we became aware that the board chairperson was inquiring about securing a loan.

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Forensic audit ordered after funds 'almost depleted'

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This raised further concerns about the situation at the kura and we reviewed the intervention and escalated it with a limited statutory manager (LSM) being appointed, vested with financial management, curriculum management and to advise the board on systems and

processes.

"The LSM identified that the board's financial management was poor and its funds were almost depleted.

"In July 2017, we contracted Deloitte to undertake a forensic financial audit.

"Deloitte reported to us in September 2017 and recommended that its report be passed to the Serious Fraud Office.

"The LSM issued financial directives to the principal and board chair.

"At this time the Minister of Education agreed that due to the serious nature of the allegations made in the Deloitte report, the board of trustees should be dissolved and a commissioner be appointed.

"The limited statutory manager was subsequently appointed as the commissioner.

"The former principal resigned in January 2018, effective from end of term 1.

"During this police investigation, the

commissioner has continued to govern the school.

"The principal was permanently appointed and he and the commissioner are working to develop community interest so that a new board of trustees can be appointed.

"It is hoped that a new board can be in place later this year.

"If that were the case, we would continue to provide support and guidance to the new board at an appropriate level."

Te Kura o Waikaremoana has a roll of 29 students from years 1 to 8.

