

**School community meetings: Introduction talking points**

An important part of the school community meeting is introducing the background and context. For most schools the appropriate person to do this will be the principal, but schools can decide what works for them. Below is a script (or talking points) to use as the basis for this part of the meeting.

* We’re here to talk about staffing in our primary schools. First, I’d like to give you a bit of background about this.
* There have been many changes in our society and changes to our schools in the past 25 years or so. But staffing in our primary schools has not kept up with the increased need for teachers, support staff and a range of specialist staff needed to ensure all our children are able to reach their full potential.
* The way that staffing is allocated to primary schools — the number of teachers and the support principals get to manage schools — has been pretty much unchanged since it first came in in 1996. Since then, our society has dramatically changed and, along with that, expectations of the education system. But staffing of our primary schools has not changed to address the needs of children and the expectations of parents and society.
* Staffing in primary schools is up to 30% less than in secondary schools.
* Principals and teachers have tried to fix the understaffing issues in our collective agreement negotiations, but without success.
* In 2021, our union, NZEI Te Riu Roa, commissioned an independent review to look at whether current staffing in primary schools enables children to reach their potential and, if it doesn’t, what changes are needed to ensure that all children can reach their potential.
* The Pūaotanga review team was made up of education experts. They received over 2600 written submissions from teachers, principals, support staff, parents and whānau, boards of trustees, community groups and academics, and heard from a wide range of groups and individuals in hearings, hui and talanoa.
* The response from submitters was very consistent. Submitters said over and over again: classes are too large, and teachers are unable to give each child the attention they need. There is not enough learning support — teacher aides, specialist teachers and external support.
* After reading and listening to all the submissions, the conclusion of the reviewers was crystal clear: Our primary schools do not have the staffing they need for all children to achieve their potential and children are falling through the cracks.
* These issues are multiplied many times for Māori and a dramatic increase in support for tamariki Māori and te reo is needed. Pasifika children also need much more support, including support for Pasikifa language and culture.
* I know we all want the same for our children. We want them to thrive and grow and we want their learning experience to be the best it possibly can be. But too often understaffing is a barrier to this happening. Before we open up for a discussion, I’d like to ask one (or two) of our teachers to share their stories of how understaffing affects children’s learning in classrooms across Aotearoa.
* Because we care deeply about understaffing and the impact on children’s learning, teachers and principals are now campaigning to ensure our primary schools have they staffing needed to enable all tamariki to reach their potential.
* Teachers have launched the Wāwāhi Tahā campaign and principals have launched Te Ao Kei Tua. The goal of these campaigns is to win political support for a pathway to fully staff our primary schools and address the issues that currently prevent many children from thriving and reaching their potential.