

Matamata Christian School Year 9 and 10 Expansion Survey Report, June 2023

Stephen Ram, PCE proprietor board member

Executive Summary

A survey was undertaken to ascertain parent and community views about expansion to years 9 and 10 at Matamata Christian School. A survey was available on the school website and in hard copy. Responses were sought on reasons for and against expansion. These were analysed with a mix of descriptive statistics and informal thematic analysis. Thirty-two responses were received, most (87.5%) from those with children currently enrolled. Most (87.5%) of responses were supportive of expansion. Themes from respondents supportive of expansion included importance of Christian worldview, “continuity and maturity”, concerns about secular education, and travel burden. The main theme from respondents against expansion was a desire to settle their children socially into a high school prior to years 11 to 13. This survey suggests a desire to consider expansion, but a need to carefully explore and consider resource implications as a next step.

Background

Requests for consideration of expansion of Matamata Christian School (MCS) to a middle school (to year 10) were brought to a member of the proprietor board. It was decided to explore this possibility. As part of preliminary informal discussions, decision was made to introduce this idea at the recent Peria Christian Education (PCE) Annual General Meeting and then seek further detail on parent and community views via a survey.

Method

Electronic survey (via school website) was available with specific email notification to PCE members inviting their participation. It should be noted that the survey link was publicly available to the wider Matamata community on the school website. In addition, paper surveys were available during the PCE Annual General Meeting.

The survey was piloted and refined with the school principal, SR, and another proprietor board member (who are also parents of children at the school).

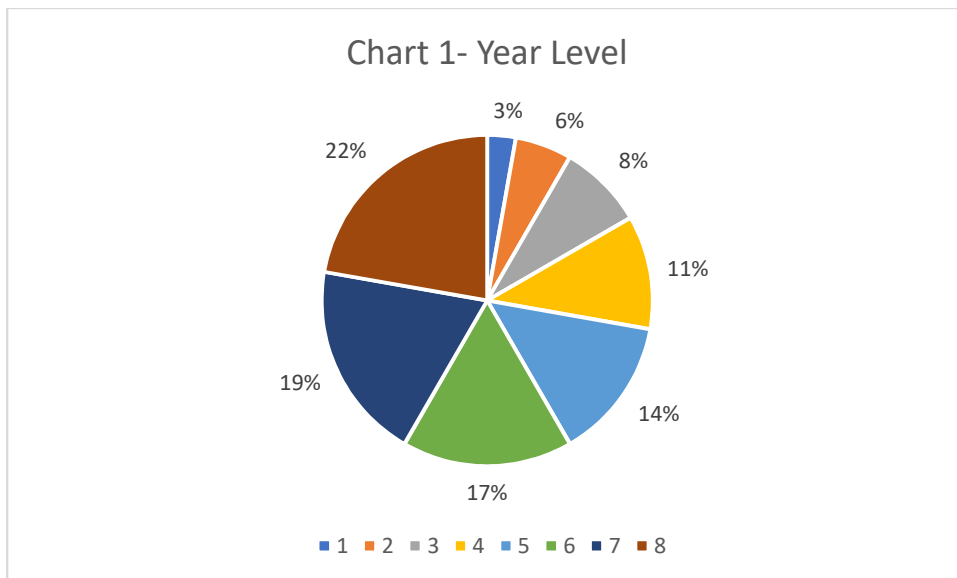
A copy of the survey can be found in appendix 1. Questions asked for name, whether the person had children enrolled, and what years, reasons for supporting or not supporting the idea of expansion, and any other comments. Duplicate responses were excluded.

Responses were sent electronically to SR using Rocketspark as a survey tool. These were then entered into a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet for a combination of descriptive statistical and informal thematic analysis by SR. Paper responses were manually entered. Where participants had submitted more than one response, it was intended to combine the responses during analysis as one single participant record. However, all participants submitted 1 response only.

The survey was open for approximately 3 weeks, with 2 reminder emails sent to PCE members.

Results

A total of 32 responses were received, with 87.5% (28/32) having a child currently enrolled at MCS. At least 3 respondents were extended family members of a child currently enrolled. Year levels are shown in chart 1 below (n=45 due to some parents having more than 1 child enrolled).



Overall, 87.5% (28/32) responses were in support of expansion, and 9.4% (3/32) against expansion (1 respondent submitted neither supportive nor unsupportive responses).

A brief informal thematic analysis of reasons for and against expansion as expressed by respondents, with example quotes is described below:

Supportive Responses – themes

Christian Environment And Worldview

Many supportive submissions described the importance and benefits of a Christian worldview as part of their child’s educational and spiritual development. This is recognised already as an important component of the special character of MCS.

“I am High school teacher myself and believe that the ability to have students continue through until junior high years will give the community another place for education for those who wish to continue their education that maintain their core values and morals. These junior high years are crucial in teaching values, and curriculum”

Continuity and Maturity

Another strong theme in supportive submissions was the opportunity to continue Christian education during what was perceived to be formative years.

“We would love to further our childrens education in a Christian environment locally This provides more time close to home for our kids during quite formative years. They can then transition to high school with more maturity”

Concerns about Secular Education

There was significant concern about the conflict between Biblical Christian values and those that children may be exposed to in a secular education setting, particularly current societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality.

“From what we have heard from other parents with children in public secular schools and have read in the news it appears that these schools (not surprisingly) are moving in the direction of the world and away from Christian beliefs and principles.”

“The option of Christian based high school education is not available in our area. This level of education in main stream schooling comes with a raft of social issues and challenges that could be avoided or at lest soften at a faith based school.”

Travel and Cost

Matamata is a rural community some distance from other Christian schooling options. Due to current enrolment policies, Bethlehem College Tauranga has traditionally been the high school of preference where continuing a Christian education in the state integrated system has been desired. The only other local (secular) option is to enrol at Matamata College. The burden of travel and cost was mentioned in supportive submissions.

“We are wanting our children to attend a christian high school but we don't feel great about sending our children all the way over to Tauranga when they are year 9. Its a really long day for them with the long trip there and back. If anything goes wrong we haven't got family over there to help our children. It seems quite far away. We are also not that excited about the size of Bethlehem or the fees.”

Notably, there was one submission that was overall supportive but highlighted the challenges of resourcing, managing the wide age range, and possible need to develop relationships with Matatamata College to provide ample extracurricular activities.

Reponses for submissions against expansion.

All respondents against expansion expressed a preference to settle their children into high school (routines and culture) in year 9 and 10. Their rationale was the need to settle their social circle prior to the “higher stakes” years 11 to 13.

“I do not support. I want to move my children for the social connection. I would like them to find their social circle rather earlier and be more focused on academics in the last year. I would like my children to settle in a bigger school as early as possible”

One respondent against expansion also expressed concerns about limited resources and the unique developmental needs and issues of this age group, and the potential for expansion to divert attention from the needs of existing year 1-8 students.

Other comments

Submissions highlighted the need to consider qualified teachers, classroom space and building upgrades, use of the ACE curriculum, and potential concerns around Modern Learning Environments. A request was also made that any expansion not compromise existing preference arrangements with Bethlehem if the expansion went ahead.

Discussion and Conclusion

Responses were generally supportive of expansion. The opportunity for a longer period of education in a Christian environment appears to be particularly valued among those who support expansion, as well as the reduction in travel and associated costs that are experienced by parents who chose to continue Christian education at high school and therefore must send their children away from this rural community to a main centre. Those that didn't support had a preference for settling their children into the routines of high school.

While this survey suggests high levels of support for expansion, there is a need to carefully consider the resource implications of proceeding, in particular staffing and infrastructure.

Recommendation

- 1) That PCE proprietor board note the high levels of support for school expansion, but seek further expert advice, and carefully consider the resource implications.
- 2) That PCE proprietor board notes the high value that respondents placed on the Christian environment and worldview, and that steps are taken to safeguard this aspect should the development of a middle school proceed.

APPENDIX 1 – Survey Tool



Scan the QR code with your mobile camera for a link to the online survey form



School Expansion to Years 9 and 10 Survey

A long time dream of many who have been involved with the growth of Matamata Christian School has been the **addition of a middle school to accommodate years 9 and 10 students**. There has been a recent increase in interest in the matter and so the Proprietor Board has decided to investigate this possibility.

The Board is seeking feedback from the school and broader community. You are invited to give us your thoughts **using the online form (scan the QR code above for the link)**, or through the feedback form below. **Please note that you are not making any commitments with your responses.**

The online form will be available for the next two weeks until 8pm on the 13th June 2023 when submissions, including written submissions, close. **Please feel free to make multiple submissions during this time.**

First name	Last name
Email (Voluntary for possible updates)	
Mobile number (Voluntary)	
<u>If you have children at MCS please advise what year level they are. Example for 3 children attending. (Y1, Y3 and Y6) or 0 for none</u>	
<u>I support the provision of a middle school at MCS for the following reasons</u>	
<u>I DO NOT support the provision of a middle school at MCS for the following reasons</u>	
<u>Any additional details and other thoughts would be most welcome.</u>	

Feedback on this form should be directed to the Matamata Christian School office before 13th June 2023