



A school is born

Construction of Churton Park's new school is about to start. **REBECCA THOMSON** looks back at the short history of Amesbury School.

Amesbury School in Churton Park is the first school to be built in Wellington city since Newlands Intermediate in 1977.

When Amesbury School opens in 2012 it will initially cater for 240 year 1 to 6 pupils.

Ministry of Education group property manager Kim Shannon said just over \$9 million had been budgeted for the design and construction of the school.

"More teaching spaces can be added as student numbers grow," she said.

Talk about a new school in the northern suburbs began as early as 2005. Resident Roger Ellis started advocating for a second school in the suburb when Churton Park School was nearing capacity.

By 2007, Churton Park school restricted its zone and Ellis pushed harder for a second school for the area.

The northern suburbs are one of Wellington's fastest growing areas. Wellington City Council forecasts growth of 9000 to 12,000 residents in the next 20 years.

In July 2007, then-Education Minister Steve Maharey announced \$565 million had been allocated to new schools throughout New Zealand and priority funding was being given to building a school in Churton Park.

The next step was to find land. In September 2007 it was revealed the school could have a home in Amesbury Dr.

Wellington City Council owned the land and started negotiations with the education ministry over its sale.

Meanwhile, the ministry was also making decisions over the school's size, whether it would be a full primary school (up to year 8), and whether a super-sized school should be built and Churton Park school be

incorporated into that.

By 2009 there had been a change of government, but plans for the new school were in full swing and new Education Minister Anne Tolley announced the school would cater for years 1 to 6, would open for the first term of 2012 and Churton Park School would remain as it was.

Wellington City Council sold the Amesbury Dr land to the Ministry of Education for \$812,500 in June, and by November an establishment Board of Trustees was appointed.

Churton Park residents Roger Ellis, Rory O'Conner, Alison Pask, David Waters and Wendy Welsh were appointed to the board, which became responsible for appointing a principal, contributing to the design of the school, determining governance matters and ensuring the school would meet the community's needs.

At the board's inaugural meeting, on November 26, 2009, the Ministry of Education issued a brief on a range of topics, including the consent process for the school buildings.

The board has been meeting fortnightly to plan for the new school.

During the first half of 2010, board members visited several schools in Auckland to check out designs and discuss different learning environment environments. Those schools included Mission Heights Primary School, Oteha Valley School in Albany and Snells Beach School.

The board also formally chose the name Amesbury School. Up to this point the school had been known as Amesbury Drive School, named for the street it was to be built on.

The board also became aware of Wellington's links to the English town Amesbury. During World War I, the Maori Battalion and the Wellington regiment were stationed close to the town.

Mr Ellis said earlier in the year he hoped the school would forge links with the English town.

Callum McKenzie of McKenzie-Higham has been appointed as lead architect for the project. Initial design plans for the school were released in November.

The architecture firm designed Fergusson Intermediate, the Tawa College information centre and the newly-renovated library at Wellington Girls' College.

The Amesbury Dr site has been excavated to confirm the best location for the buildings, car parks and playgrounds, and construction of the school buildings will start early this year.

An administration block, school hall and 16 classrooms will be built in two stages.

In September, Lesley Murrihy was appointed principal. Dr Murrihy is a graduate of Wellington Teachers' College and the principal of Manunui School, near Taumarunui. She and the senior management team will take up their roles in April, and then the search will begin for teachers.

Pupils will walk through the school gates for the first time in February 2012.

Ms Shannon said Churton Park was one of up to 10 schools being built around the country in the next five years.

"The Ministry will continue to monitor population growth in the region to determine whether other new schools will be required," she said.

"The major growth area in New Zealand is the Auckland region, which has and will require the most new schools."

A new school is also being built in north Waikanae.

It is expected to open in 2013.



New school: How Amesbury School will look



Endorsing education:
 Peter Dunne, left, salutes Roger Ellis for his work in establishing Amesbury School.