

## **Earthquake responses from Russley School web survey**

### Summary

The overwhelming theme of the survey responses is one of praise, gratitude and thanks from parents towards the staff of Russley School for their actions both on the day of the February 22 earthquake, during the shutdown period, and when students returned to school. Comments focus on the calm professionalism of staff and the care shown towards both students and parents. Comments show that parents felt that the emergency situation was handled extremely competently with excellent communication via the School website. The website proved to be an invaluable service for most parents. There are comments offering praise to particular staff members and some offering practical suggestions for future improvements to procedures. Improvement suggestions focus on mass communication with parents, emergency supplies and school expectations of parents' action in an emergency situation. Overall parents felt that their children were well cared for and such is their faith in Russley School and its staff that they have no doubts that they would be safe.

### Facts

- The survey was posted on the Russley School website
- Only responses submitted online through the website survey are discussed in this summary
- The survey was divided into 2 Parts with 3 questions in each part.
- Part one was focussed on comments regarding action taken on the day of the February 22 2011 earthquake.
- Part two focussed on comments regarding actions taken during the period the school was closed post the February 22 2011 earthquake.
- 26 respondents provided contact details.
- Responses were received from 23 March 2011 through to 8 April 2011, with the majority of responses being submitted during March.
- Interestingly several respondents submitted responses during early morning hours e.g.- 12:51am, 1:33am, 2:23am, 3:42am, 4:14am, 5:50am, 6:06am, 6:44am and 7:06am.
- The remainder of the responses were submitted from 8am through to 7pm with the majority of these responses being submitted during morning hours.

### Part One - Action taken on the day of the February 22 Earthquake

#### **Question 1 - What do you think worked particularly well on the afternoon of the quake?**

38 responses were received for this question.

The majority of the responses to this question mention the teachers being calm and keeping the students calm and occupied until collected by parents. The professionalism of the staff, the focus on the wellbeing of the students, following procedures and thanking the school are the main themes of the responses to this question. An example: "The ability of all the staff who were

excellent in their response and the care of the students. The school's processes in the wake of the emergency. " 3/31/11 6:04AM

Other responses include references to the presence of the property inspectors on the day which enabled the students to return to individual classrooms quickly. An example: "It was extremely fortunate that there were property inspectors already on site so that the children could return to their classrooms and did not have to stand outside in the rain or go home without their belongings. 3/25/11 7:08PM

Also, the actions of the school to keep the students at school until collected by parents or guardians is mentioned as a source of comfort to parents. An example: "I was in the city. There were things that needed my immediate attention and when I could come, getting to the school took hours. I was able to have complete trust that my child would be well looked after. I think the school was able to offer a calm, practical, confident and well drilled response to this emergency. 4/6/11 5:00PM

No negative responses.

## **Question 2 - What improvements would you suggest?**

23 responses were received for this question.

Responses vary in this question with many offering thanks to the staff for their commitment and support during the day. An example: "Every emergency situation is unique and it's the ability of the staff to adapt to those unique circumstances that matters. On witnessing the way the school handled the recent situation we don't see how this can be improved upon. We have full trust in their training and professionalism to make the correct decisions at the time." 3/23/11 5:37PM

Many responses agreed that the actions taken by the school and staff on the day were appropriate. An example: "It's hard to imagine how the school could do any more. Everyone was safe and accounted for. The environment they were in was safe. A lack of electricity and telephones meant communications were not easily available. Parents etc collected children as they could. When in doubt, stay put. Worked well." 3/24/11 11:57AM and "Given lack of power, phones, communication, I believe the actual response was best practice already." 3/25/11 2:23AM

Other responses offer practical suggestions for possible improvements to the emergency response from the school.

Suggestions for improvements are;

- Activities about how earthquakes happen
- School expectations of parents in the event of an emergency
- Emergency shelters if evacuated into inclement weather

- Central point of collection and students brought to parents as they arrive
- Tracking system of who collected students and their intended destination
- Text communications with parents on mass
- Staff training in emergency situations
- Emergency water storage facilities
- Emergency supply of raincoats/ponchos

Full supply of bottled water  
Landline phone not reliant on electricity  
Ability to change school answer phone message to convey 'all safe'  
Person nominated by parents to collect students in times of emergency

Few negative responses. An example: "... our teacher was extremely flustered and appeared unsure as to what to do. The teacher had left the children in the room, on their own, when the quake struck. I felt this was wholly inappropriate given they are all 5 and 6 year olds." 4/1/11 6:26PM [Please note: the quake struck at lunchtime when class teachers are not in their rooms.]

### **Question 3 - Any further comments you want to make?**

23 responses were received for this question.

Majority of further comments take time to acknowledge and praise and thank the staff of the school for their efforts and caring support of students in such a trying circumstance. An example: "Congratulations to all staff for the outstanding response and putting our children's security and safety before their own." 3/25/11 2:23AM and "Thank you to all the teachers for the amazing support they have given both children and parents." 3/25/11 5:50AM

Also many comments praising the website and its useful updates and detailed information. An example: "want to thank the staff who manage the website as this was our first port of call when trying to find information on the unfolding events. This was an invaluable source of information and as I have children at other schools, it really stood out as one of the best sites..." 3/24/11 7:46AM and "I was impressed with the quality of the updates on the school website during the school closure. It was great to have lots of information and the updates were written in a caring, sensitive way." 3/23/11 1:58PM

Some comments pick up on the need for mass text communication or similar with parents in the event of an emergency and in the cancellation of events. An example: "Synd 4 were meant to be on a day trip to various places but as parents we didn't at the time of the quake know if they had gone or not.??? Not sure how this could be managed but perhaps we need to use Text tree or website at earliest convenience of event being cancelled or postponed..." 3/28/11 9:35AM

Along the same lines as these mass communication responses there was a reiteration of the need for parents to have a guide as to the school's expectations of them in emergency situations. An example: "For future emergencies, it would be helpful if there was some way that you could update the website or text all parents on a database with advice on parents actions required. Although power was out, I had no idea of the seriousness of the emergency and wasn't sure whether to collect my children. I was worried about being the only parent to turn up in a panic to collect her kids and causing more harm than good.. As it turned out, I waited 45 minutes, got myself into some semblance of calm and by the time I got to school there were only two children left in one of my classes :-). Perhaps I have blind faith in Russley School however at no point was I concerned for my children's welfare." 4/2/11 8:54AM

Several responses show confusion exists with parents as to the reentering of buildings after the earthquake, which suggests that parents may require further information that Russley School had property inspectors on site on the day and that reentry to the school buildings was not a decision made by School Staff. A comment: "Russley School was the only school that I heard of that re-entered and kept the children inside the classrooms. I completely understand the reasons as given above for gathering inside and I don't know what would have been the best scenerio as far as safety is concerned. It would be interesting to have an 'experts' view on

this for the future..." 3/25/11 9:23AM and another "...Wasn't sure how I felt about children and teachers going back inside. As a teacher, I would have definitely preferred to be in my room with things for the children to do etc, as a parent, I would like to be sure that my child was not taken back into a place that could prove a risk? This is a tricky call, esp now in the light of what has happened." 3/28/11 9:35AM

To be noted there was particular praise for a new teacher "It was lovely to see a first year teacher (Miss Gordon) totally in control in what must've been a stressful and concerning situation for herself being so composed and caring with all the children in room 15." 3/24/11 4:48PM

There was also particular comment for the staff and Principal who stayed late in the day "I was extremely grateful to the staff and principal who stayed until late afternoon, putting the children and school before their own personal situation." 4/6/11 5:00PM

There was one comment which also offered thanks for the welcome that students received when they finally returned to school "...It was also great the way that the school welcomed the students back to school with balloons etc and the welcome received from staff even though many are under stress." 4/7/11 8:02AM

### Part Two - Action taken post February 22 Earthquake

#### **Question 1 - What do you think worked particularly well in the days between the quake and the reopening of school?**

35 responses were received for this question

All responses to this question praise the website and the constant flow of information which kept them informed. An example : "Communication via the website was excellent. And in looking at websites of other schools there was simply no comparison. Erica's messages on the Russley School website were informative, regular (even if there was nothing new to report) and came across as being very reassuring and compassionate." 3/23/11 5:44PM and " Being able to gain information from the website daily was invaluable." 3/27/11 1:48PM

One response also mentions the online resources for students to work on while at home during the shut down period. An example: "... the fact that students could continue school work from on-line sites staff had already set up worked really well." 4/7/11 8:04AM

Another response comments "Not a lot for the kids to be perfectly honest." 4/2/11 8:58AM

#### **Question 2 - What improvements would you suggest?**

17 responses were received for this question.

Responses about improvements focus again on mass text communications with parents acknowledging network and power issues would also need to be addressed to achieve this. An example: "Maybe a text tree arrangement for communication that would enable people to get the most up to date info immediately and no matter where they were. Obviously this is only relevant once power is up and running again." 3/28/11 9:38AM and " This type of communication worked because our power wasn't disrupted on this side of the city and that threat should be taken into consideration for future planning." 4/6/11 5:03PM

Other comments ask for some home schooling ideas for students while they were away from education facilities during the shutdown period. These include:

Curricula or activity suggestion via the website

Gathering of school families  
Teachers willing to make house calls

Some responses also question the speed of reopening the school “ I would like to say opening the school earlier but its all about balance, timing and resources.” 4/5/11 4:13AM

### **Question 3 - Any other comments you would like to make?**

17 responses were received for the question.

A majority of comments in this section again take the opportunity to thank the staff of Russley School for their efforts and Erika in particular for her hard work. An example:” The Principal worked really hard to ensure that the parent's knew exactly what was happening regarding Russley School and to that end she must be congratulated.” 3/27/11 1:48PM and “Only comment is Thank you. Under very trying circumstance both personal and professional for you all, you have all done a fabulous job in returning school life to normal. For that, I thank you all so much” 3/23/11 9:25AM

Responses show that parents appreciated the way the return to school was handled and the gentle way school routine was re established. An example: “...The morning tea in the staffroom with Erica on the first day back was much appreciated, as was knowing that the staffroom was available for the first couple of weeks if a cuppa and chat was needed after dropping off children.. We also appreciate the way the children were warmly and gently welcomed back to school, the support available and the focus on "feel-good" subjects such as art, PE and music. The singing assembly on the Friday afternoon was hugely therapeutic, both for the students and for those of us parents who were able to make it along.” 3/23/11 5:44PM

Further responses comment on the communication with parents that had already been covered, and one comment questions the possibility of compensation or refund for International student fees because of time missed from school. Specific concerns were addressed by the school.

Some comments indicate disappointment in the delays re opening the school and the lack of provision from MOE for bottled water in school. An example: “I was disapointed with the MOE and there delays in reopening the school.” 3/31/11 6:05AM and “surprised the Ministry of Education could not provide bottled water for the staff and students.” 3/24/11 8:36AM

One response questions the safety of families entering the school grounds during the shutdown period. An example: “I know of a family who visited the school grounds during these days, obviously unaware that no-one was allowed on site. Were there any cordon tapes at the gates?...” 3/25/11 7:08PM

One response comments on upcoming teacher only days which the school responded to by clarifying that the school is open two extra days at the end of the year to make up this time.

A final comment that sums up the overwhelming theme of the parental responses to the questions in this survey; “I think the school was wonderful in this emergency and I thank each and every one of you for caring for my children.” 4/7/11 3:42AM