



Murray's Bay Primary School Board : Consulting on a move to Cohort Entry

Introduction

Cohort Entry refers to an enrolment policy that allows new entrant children to start school in groups on predetermined dates, set by the Ministry of Education, rather than individually on their fifth birthday. Schools in New Zealand that adopt cohort entry offer two start dates per term ensuring that children begin school with their peers. This approach supports emotional, social and academic wellbeing by fostering a sense of community among students starting together.

Rational for Murray's Bay Primary School (MBPS) Adopting Cohort Entry

Murray's Bay Primary School would benefit from implementing cohort entry for several reasons:

1. **Enhanced Transitions:** Starting school as part of a group can reduce anxiety for children and foster better social connections. It gives teachers the opportunity to establish routines and set up classroom expectations for the whole group, which benefits both students and staff.
2. **Improved Learning Environment:** Teachers can plan and manage classroom learning activities more effectively when new entrants start together. This reduces interruptions to our Little Learners Love Literacy and Oxford Mathematics structured learning programmes and makes it easier to administer the Ministry of Education phonics checks which need to be carried out after 20 and 40 weeks at school.
3. **Stronger Community Connections:** By welcoming students and families in groups, MBPS would have the opportunity to build stronger connections with parents and caregivers, encouraging them to become involved in the school community. It would also give parents and whānau the opportunity to connect with each other and form relationships.

Consultation

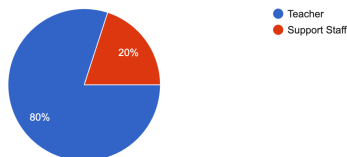
Both staff and community were surveyed via google form to find out how they felt about the proposed cohort entry (1 being strongly against, 5 being strongly in favour) and to give them an opportunity to share their views.

Staff Consultation Data

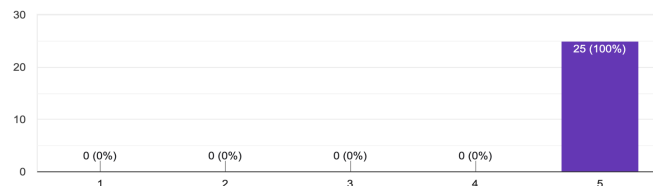
25 responded to this survey, 20 teachers and 5 support staff.

100% of staff were strongly in favour of cohort entry, rating it 5 out of 5.

Relationship to the school:
25 responses



How do you feel about Cohort Entry?
25 responses



Summary of Positive Feedback

Overall Positive Outcomes

- Continuity in teaching and learning with fewer disruptions.
- Enhanced connections and wellbeing for children, staff and families.
- Academic and social advantages for students starting their school journey together.
- More efficient use of teacher time and resources, supporting sustainable workloads and implementation of classroom routines.

Sample of Positive Feedback Statements

“Having one cohort entry benefits both children and teachers in many ways. For children, it means starting school together, which helps them form friendships, build social connections, and develop a strong sense of belonging. They all experience the classroom routines and expectations at the same time, which supports a smooth transition and ensures that no one misses out on important learning that has already been introduced. For teachers, 2 cohorts allows them to establish class routines and expectations once with the whole group, making planning and teaching more efficient. It also means they can focus their lessons on children who are at a similar stage in their school journey, rather than repeating learning for new arrivals. Overall, this process creates a settled, supportive environment where children and teachers can enjoy learning, have fun, build important relationships and have fun in the classroom.”

“At the beginning of the year, I had a small group of children, with additional enrolments joining progressively across the first two terms. While the children welcomed new peers and enjoyed making new friendships, the staggered intake was also disruptive. The existing children found it challenging to adjust, and the newcomers often felt overwhelmed entering a class with established routines and relationships. Establishing a set cohort from the outset would provide greater consistency, support smoother transitions, and foster stronger confidence and a sense of belonging for all children.”

“Agree with all the benefits”

Summary of Neutral or Negative Feedback

N/A

Community Consultation Data

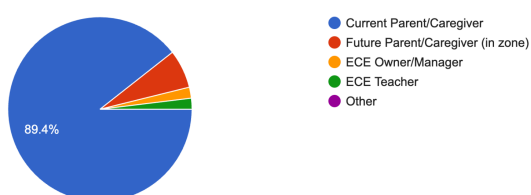
104 community members (labelled in the key below) responded to this survey.

81% (n=84) of respondents were in favour, or strongly in favour (4 or 5 out of 5).

12% (n=12) of respondents were neutral or unsure about the change (3 out of 5)

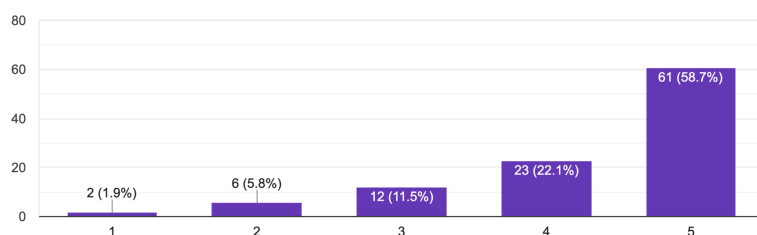
8% (n=8) of respondents were against or strongly against (1 or 2 out of 5).

Relationship to the school:
104 responses



How do you feel about Cohort Entry?

104 responses



Summary of All Feedback

- Positive feedback clearly outweighs the negative.
- Concerns are mostly logistical and financial, not opposing the concept itself.
- Neutral responses either seek clarification or express no strong view.

Current Parents/Caregivers Consultation Data

82% (n=75) of respondents were in favour, or strongly in favour (4 or 5 out of 5).

11% (n=10) of respondents were neutral or unsure about the change (3 out of 5)

8% (n=7) of respondents were against or strongly against (1 or 2 out of 5).

Overall Positive Outcomes

- Children benefit as building friendships and belonging in a group lessens the feeling of anxiety or isolation.
- Teachers can manage and plan classroom routines more easily with less disruption.
- Parents feel more supported entering as part of a group, families can build stronger connections with each other and certainty around start dates makes it easier to plan childcare.
- School benefits as it simplifies administration, reduces disruption to already started classes, aligns with the system in other countries and helps with a smoother ECE to school transition.

Sample of Positive Feedback Statements

"I can see the benefits to the school and families alike, my only reason for putting a 4 instead of a 5 would be because of the history of going to school on your 5th birthday. I did it, my children have done it, so that's been an important part of our educational lives."

"I like the idea of kids starting at the same time, in groups, for ease of transition for kids and also teachers. Two dates per term also means that you'd not have to wait long after your child turns 5, or that you have options for entry if starting later between 5th and 6th birthdays".

"One of ours did cohort entry simply due to Covid and her starting in term 1, and one started at 5. The cohort definitely settled into school faster and we felt more supported as parents. Because there was a group of us who all met on the first day of school, we felt we had more of a connection with what was going on."

"Best way to make connections with other families - really enjoyed our child starting with 8 others - felt sorry for students who joined later. They didn't get to meet the other parents and our kids had already made bonds. Highly support cohort entry from a teacher perspective too - makes their lives simpler with everyone starting off at same point."

"It's wild we don't already do this. The current system must be a nightmare to manage from your end and is really tricky from our end too."

Overall Negative Outcomes

- Concern about loss of motivation, missed opportunities and fairness if a child turns 5 just after an intake date.
- Extra childcare fees whilst waiting for the intake date add to financial pressure.
- Teachers may struggle to identify learning difficulties quickly in larger groups.
- End of a tradition (starting on 5th birthday)

Sample of Negative Feedback Statements

"My son will have to wait 4 weeks to start school."

"The only thing I'm not sure about cohort entry is if a child turns 5 but misses the first day of the term entry point. Does the child need to wait until Week 6? Where is the child supposed to stay while parents are working? Childcare centre? Parents will need to pay more fees."

Overall Neutral Outcomes

- Requests for clarity around intake timings and what happens to children while they are waiting (e.g. need to stay at childcare/ECE longer)
- Recognition of pros and cons

Sample of Neutral Feedback Statements

"I understand the benefits, and support this. It really depends on when it would be implemented and if upcoming parents have enough notice to arrange for this."

"Children can get more advantage of being in a peer group, equality, but teachers may can not catch or to be late to catch the small difficulties of children who need special attention."

Future Parents/Caregivers Consultation Data

86% (n=6) of respondents wherein favour, or strongly in favour (4 or 5 out of 5).

0% (n=0) of respondents were neutral or unsure about the change (3 out of 5)

14% (n=1) of respondents were against or strongly against 1 or 2 out of 5).

Summary of All Feedback

- Strong positive feedback stating benefits for school, teachers, students and families.
- Negative feedback shows concern about unfair delays for some students.

Overall Positive Outcomes

- Easier organisation and clear intake times.
- More supportive of students, teachers and families for smoother transition with less disruption.

Sample of Positive Feedback Statements

"Seems supportive of students, faculty and families. I'm glad to see even ECE were considered in the report."

"It will help each individual adjust to the school."

"Good prediction of intake times."

Overall Neutral Outcomes

N/A

Overall Negative Outcomes

- Unfair starting delays for some students
- Lost learning opportunities for students having to wait longer

Sample of Negative Feedback Statements

"We can see the benefits for some kids but we don't think it would benefit some children like ours - she's our third child and already she's very excited about starting school when she turns 5 and joining her older brother. But if this went ahead she would miss out on the first entry point by 4 days and then have to wait 6 weeks before she gets to start school."

ECE Owners/Managers & ECE Teacher COnsultation Data

75% (n=3) of respondents were in favour, or strongly in favour (4 or 5 out of 5).

25% (n=0) of respondents were neutral or unsure about the change (3 out of 5)

0% (n=0) of respondents were against or strongly against 1 or 2 out of 5).

Summary of All Feedback

- Positives emphasised the benefits to children, teachers and families
- Concern around children leaving ECE at the same time leaving ECE spaces to be filled.
- Acknowledgement that there are pros and cons depending on child's individual circumstances.

Overall Positive Outcomes

- Smooth transitions for teachers, children and families.
- Stronger sense of belonging and support for children.
- Consistent and predictable start dates.
- Reducing pressure to start at exactly 5 years old.

Sample of Positive Feedback Statements

"I think that it is a great idea. The children will have support as you shared and it will help the teachers as well making the transition smoother for all involved. Robust systems can be in place ensuring consistency and predictability for the children as this is important at this age."

"As a teacher, I feel it would be much more settling for a classroom environment and the teacher to have a group starting at once, rather than sporadically through the term. Also, research shows (and from what we observe) for many children staying in ECE for a little longer is beneficial for their social and emotional wellbeing so this may give children an opportunity for them to stay a few more weeks after their fifth birthday without the pressure parents feel to start them immediately at the age of five. I feel for all parties involved, this will be much easier."

Overall Neutral Outcomes

N/A

Conclusion

The survey responses indicate strong support for adopting cohort entry at Murrays Bay Primary School from all community groups. Research suggests this policy would improve the learning environment by reducing classroom disruptions, supporting smoother transitions for new students and fostering stronger community engagement with parents and caregivers. While some current parents remain neutral or uncertain, many recognise the social and emotional benefits cohort entry provides for their children.

Recommendation

Based on the results of the community consultation, it is recommended that Murrays Bay Primary School implement a cohort entry system from the beginning of Term 1, 2026.

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Outcome: Approved by the Board 29.08.2025

Resources for Reference

Board Members can find out more about Cohort Entry from the Ministry of Education [HERE](#). The Education Review Office report on Cohort Entry can be viewed [HERE](#).