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New Plymouth Boys High School bans speech competition entry

Good morning,

1. The Free Speech Union is a registered trade union with a mission to fight for, protect, and expand New Zealanders' rights to freedom of speech, conscience, and intellectual inquiry. We believe that freedom of speech is not only a legal principle, but a social good that allows for people in modern liberal democracies to peacefully, freely advocate for the causes they care about without risking unjust retribution.
2. We write following New Plymouth Boys High School's ("the school") conduct with respect to its annual speech competition held in July this year. A year 11 student, Oliver Jull, was withdrawn from the speech competition because the vice-principal and other staff felt the speech was controversial, expressed "*right-wing views*" and may offend some people in the audience. For your reference, a copy of the speech titled 'The Decline of Western Civilisation' is **attached**.
3. Oliver attempted to engage the school on his concerns, namely, that he was being penalised because some staff did not agree with some of the views expressed and the school's stance was somewhat hypocritical considering one of the participants in the finals last year expressed a particular view on co-governance, a highly contested political issue that would have polarised the audience.
4. After no success with the school, Oliver sought the help of the Free Speech Union who wrote the **attached** letter to the principal and Board of Trustees. The response (from the principal) was brief and asserted Oliver was "*not selected at any point to participate in the finals of the speech competition*" and "*not barred from the competition without warning (or otherwise) for the content of his speech.*" Oliver has provided evidence to us of the contrary.
5. After much difficulty, Oliver and his parents were able to meet with some members of the Board to discuss their concerns. The Board did not appear interested in resolving the issue noting they would hear the Jull's point of view from a governance perspective, not management. It is important to note

here that the school does not appear to have a clear policy relating to complaints procedure. This was apparent in the meeting minutes. Notwithstanding potential misconduct of the staff involved, we are concerned that the Board have not taken their statutory obligations seriously. Specifically, their obligations under section 127(1) of the Education and Training Act to ensure the school gives effect to the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, the Human Rights Act and takes all reasonable steps to eliminate discrimination within the school.

6. Our concern is that Oliver suffered detriment and was discriminated against because of the views expressed in his speech. This is not only a breach of his right to freedom of expression but signals a growing censorial culture in secondary education. Students should be learning to think critically and learning that society expands its knowledge and understanding through the expression and debate of different ideas and opinions. What the school has done in banning Oliver's speech under the guise of it not being "*good enough*" is teaching its students and staff that some views should be silenced. This is the antithesis of education and our democracy.
7. We invite your individual comments on the following:
 - a. Whether the school's conduct here is consistent with its statutory obligations and your expectations of a secondary school in conducting speech competitions.
 - b. Whether free speech, as a foundational principle of democratic societies, should be upheld by secondary school staff and governing boards.
8. We look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,

Free Speech Union (New Zealand) Inc.



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