

MEDIA RELEASE

From Classroom to Global Conversation: 50,000 Rally to Save Outdoor Education

For immediate release: Friday 10th October 2025

An education campaign that began with a handful of frustrated teachers has become one of the largest education related petitions in New Zealand's recent history and it's now attracting international attention.

More than 50,000 people have signed Education Outdoors New Zealand's petition calling on the Government to keep Outdoor Education on the senior curriculum subject list. What started as sector concern has become a grassroots movement of parents, teachers, students, and community leaders who see Outdoor Education as vital to wellbeing, resilience, and belonging.

"This campaign has struck a nerve," says Fiona McDonald, Chief Executive of Education Outdoors NZ (EONZ). "We've had schools, outdoor providers, and parents from every corner of the country sharing stories, signing, and spreading the word. It's been an amazing groundswell; people are tired of decisions being made behind closed doors."

A Groundswell Too Big to Ignore

The petition's reach has surprised even its organisers. Stories about the campaign have been shared across the globe, from outdoor-learning networks in Australia and the UK to education leaders in Canada and the US who have expressed concern that New Zealand, long seen as a leader in experiential outdoor education, might be walking away from its strengths.

"Outdoor Education is part of Aotearoa's identity," says McDonald. "It connects learning with place, people, and purpose. To see it become vocational only without any proper consultation has left people shocked, it makes a mockery of what public consultation should look like."

No Experts, No Transparency

Written Parliamentary answers now confirm that no outdoor-education experts, academics, teachers or the industry itself were consulted before the subject was reclassified as vocational.

“There was no open consultation on the Phase | Tūārerere 5 curriculum subjects,” Education Minister Erica Stanford admitted in her response to official questions.

McDonald says that revelation has fueled the public response:

“People expect honesty and accountability from decision-makers. When 50,000 New Zealanders have to step in to support a subject that teaches resilience and leadership, it raises serious questions about the integrity of the process. The Minister and ministry clearly don’t understand the consequences of this change because they haven’t listened to the sector.”

Media Opportunity

EONZ will present the petition to Parliament at 1:00 pm, Tuesday 21 October, alongside students, teachers, and principals.

Fiona McDonald is available for interviews this week to discuss:

- How the campaign mobilised tens of thousands in weeks
- Why Outdoor Education matters for wellbeing, learning, and youth engagement
- The lack of consultation and what it signals about wider NCEA reform
- The international response and what’s at stake for New Zealand’s reputation

To arrange interviews:

Fiona McDonald, Chief Executive, Education Outdoors New Zealand

fiona@eonz.org.nz 027 7331100

www.eonz.org.nz/Home/NCEA-Outdoor-Education-Proposed-Changes

Images available on request