



23 March 2021

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 1 February 2021 to the Ministry of Education requesting the following information:

1. *Any advice the Ministry of Education has provided to either the Minister or Associate Ministers of Education within the last 12 months about new (and therefore not in the public domain) legislation, regulations, policies, tools or any other initiatives that are designed to increase levels of student attendance at primary and secondary schools.*

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

Regular attendance at school is vital for students to reach their full educational potential. However, irregular attendance is the symptom of a lot of issues and not a phenomenon with a consistent, simple cause. There is collective responsibility for improving attendance and this involves ākonga, whānau, schools, and the Ministry. Therefore, the Ministry and the wider education sector's efforts to boost attendance must also be wide in scope and holistic in its approach. The Ministry has already launched and/ or is upscaling a number of polices that, amongst other matters, aim to boost attendance, some of which I have outlined below.

Period products

This initiative began as a phased approach to introduce period products in schools and kura. To start, fifteen schools and kura from the Waikato region were selected to take part in a trial phase, providing free period products for up to 3,200 young people with periods. Products were provided during Term 3 and 4 2020.

On 18 February 2021, the Government announced that this initiative would be expanded to all state and state-integrated schools and kura who opted in, with the aim of reaching all students by the end of 2021.

It is expected that this initiative will:

- reduce barriers to access and improve school attendance, sports involvement and tertiary participation,
- improve child and youth wellbeing,
- reduce financial strain on families and whānau experiencing poverty/material hardship, and
- promote positive gender norms and reduce stigmatisation of menstruation.

You can find further information the free period products initiative on the Ministry's website at the following link:

<https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/wellbeing-in-education/access-to-free-period-products/>

Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy school lunches programme

In 2019, the Government announced a two-year initiative to explore delivering a free and healthy daily school lunch to Year 1–8 (primary and intermediate aged) students in schools with high levels of disadvantage.

Around 10,000 learners in 42 schools across Bay of Plenty/Waiariki and Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti were the first to get a free school lunch in Term 1 2020. Over 3,000 students in 18 schools and kura across Otago and Southland joined Ka Ora, Ka Ako in Terms 2 and 3. Another 51 schools in Bay of Plenty/Waiariki and Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti began delivering lunches in Term 4 2020.

In response to the COVID 19 pandemic, Ka Ora, Ka Ako is being expanded to reach around 200,000 students by the end of 2021, including secondary students. This first roll out of the expansion has seen around 70 schools and kura in Bay of Plenty/Waiariki and Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti join others delivering lunches in Term 4. These schools took advantage of established processes to quickly start the lunches programme. Across the rest of the country, around 640 schools and kura have been invited to take part in Ka Ora, Ka Ako. Depending on how these schools provide lunches, some will start serving lunches from Term 1 2021.

Announced as part of Budget 2020, expanding Ka Ora, Ka Ako aims to cushion the blow of COVID 19 impacts on students living in households which may now be experiencing heightened financial stress, job and income losses that can interfere with learning and wellbeing. Expanding the programme is also expected to support job creation and economic recovery from the pandemic. Based on information from the programme, it is estimated that around 2,000 jobs in local communities will be created from the expansion.

You can find further information on Ka Ora, Ka Ako, on the Ministry's website here:

<https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/wellbeing-in-education/free-and-healthy-school-lunches/>

Urgent Response Fund

The Urgent Response Fund (URF) provides \$50 million in 2020/21 to support children and young people's attendance, re engagement with learning and wellbeing after the COVID-19 lockdowns. The majority of URF funding approved to date has been for projects related to attendance.

URF applications will continue to be made until the Fund's end date on 30 June 2021.

You can find further information about the URF on the Ministry's website here:

<https://www.education.govt.nz/covid-19/urgent-response-fund/>

Pacific Education Support Fund

Many community groups and Pacific providers have been working to support Pacific learners and families to engage in education during the COVID 19 response and recovery, and to make sure Pacific learners and families have access to the services and support.

- The Pacific Education Support Fund is available for community providers, groups and organisations to help learners and their families to meet education-related and wellbeing needs arising from and/or exacerbated by COVID-19. Education-related needs are the needs and supports required to ensure Pacific learners can engage in meaningful education. This includes supporting wellbeing and growing meaningful relationships. Examples of initiatives could include:
 - Growing relationships between Pacific families and places of learning by making connections and supporting families and learners to reconnect.
 - Joining up Pacific learners and families with the right services that provide support for education-related needs, for example with on-site learning and accessing ongoing education and training pathways.
 - Supporting the return to learning at school or early learning, finding the right education and training pathways.
 - Supporting attendance and engagement for Pacific learners.

You can find further information about the Pacific Education Support fund here:

<https://education.govt.nz/news/pacific-education-support-fund-launched/>

As you can see from the above links, we have released a significant volume of information into the public domain about the work that is underway in this area. With regard to your request for any advice to Ministers *within the last 12 months about new (and therefore not in the public domain) legislation, regulations, policies, tools or any other initiatives*, we have identified one document which, at the time of receiving your request, was not already in the public domain. This document has since been uploaded to Ministry's website at the following link:

<https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/1223308-Briefing-Note.pdf>

I am therefore refusing your request under section 18(d) of the Act, as the information in scope of your request is now publicly available.

Please note, the Ministry now proactively publishes OIA responses on our website. As such, we may publish this response on our website after five working days. Your name and contact details will be removed.

Thank you again for your email. You have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision. You can do this by writing to info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Nāku noa, nā



Katrina Casey
Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement and Support