Briefing Note: Initiatives in Primary-Level Literacy

To: Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education

Date: 14 August 2019

Priority: Low

Security Level: In Confidence

METIS No: 1201789

Drafter: Cat Dempsey

DDI: s 9(2)(a)

Key Contact: Pauline Cleaver

DDI: N/A

Messaging seen by Communications team: Round Robin: No

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

Note the Ministry of Education’s approach to strengthening supports for literacy at the primary level.

Agree that this Briefing will be proactively released.

Agree / Disagree

Summary

- The Government invests significant funding in supports for primary-level literacy learning. This includes capability building, advice and resources to ensure all children receive quality literacy teaching, and there are additional supports for children that need it.

- Despite this investment, evidence shows that there are persistent inequities in literacy progress and achievement. The evidence is clear that current approaches to literacy learning are not working for all children. As New Zealand’s diversity is increasing, we are looking to ensure our supports meet the literacy learning needs of diverse learners.

- The Ministry is reviewing and enhancing literacy supports to ensure current knowledge about effective teaching and learning is reflected, that supports are responsive to the needs of today’s and tomorrow’s children, and every teacher is equipped to provide high impact teaching. This work has a particular focus on embedding practices and supports that will better meet the needs of diverse learners, drawing on a range of national and international evidence.
This work is complemented by action across the wider Education Work Programme, particularly the Early Learning Strategic Plan, Curriculum, Progress and Achievement work programme, NCEA Change Package, Learning Support Action Plan and Education Workforce Strategy. Together these actions will create coherence across the educational pathway and ensure quality in teaching and learning for every child.

Pauline Cleaver  
Associate Deputy Secretary  
Early Learning and Student Achievement Group  
14/08/2019

Hon Chris Hipkins  
Minister of Education  
20/8/19
Background

1. You have asked for a briefing note on initiatives to support primary-level literacy learning and their effectiveness. This briefing focuses on:
   a. The Ready to Read Instructional Series
   b. Pasifika Early Literacy Project
   c. Programmes for Students
   d. Reading Recovery
   e. Support for Dyslexia
   f. Resource Teachers of Literacy (RTLit)

2. The Ministry is reviewing and enhancing literacy supports to ensure current knowledge about effective teaching and learning is reflected, that supports are responsive to the needs of today’s and tomorrow’s children, and every teacher is equipped to provide high impact teaching. This work has a particular focus on embedding practices and supports that will better meet the needs of diverse learners, including English language learners and neurodiverse learners such as those with dyslexia.

3. Part of this work is to ensure we are better able to measure the long term effectiveness of the interventions, as well as understanding the comparative effectiveness across the range of initiatives.

4. A range of national and international evidence is informing this work. This includes the Massey University Early Literacy Project¹, which was a three-year (2015-2017) longitudinal research project aimed at improving the literacy outcomes of new entrant children during, and beyond, their first year at school. Teachers were provided with supplementary teaching strategies and assessments that identified the specific literacy needs of children (METIS 1200100 refers).

5. The findings from this research, along with other international evidence, have informed our approach. This includes reviewing the place of phonemic and phonological awareness within programmes, supports and resources, alongside whole language approaches.

6. Incorporating a phonetic approach with explicit teaching that uses oral language knowledge as a foundation is shown to be particularly advantageous for children who have not had a lot of exposure to print, or who live in a predominantly oral culture.

7. Work to improve literacy supports is complemented by action across the wider Education Work Programme, particularly the Early Learning Strategic Plan, Curriculum, Progress and Achievement work programme, NCEA Change Package, Learning Support Action Plan and Education Workforce Strategy. Together these actions will create coherence across the educational pathway and ensure quality in teaching and learning for every child.

Literacy progress and achievement in New Zealand

8. New Zealand’s school system is characterised by persistent inequities in progress and achievement in literacy. New Zealand has wider variance in achievement than most other OECD countries (PISA, 2015), and our international standing relative to other countries has been dropping in recent years.² National and international evidence³

¹ https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/early-literacy-research-project
² Chamberlain, M., with Forkert, J. (In press). Reading literacy instruction in English-language countries: similarities and differences. Wellington, Ministry of Education. Australia, England, Ireland and Singapore, whose scores were statistically significantly higher than the average reading score for New Zealand make explicit mention of teaching phonics (2016 PIRLS). In 2016 PIRLS the average reading score for Singapore was 576, Ireland was 567, England was 599 and Australia 544.
³ (PISA 2015 (reading), PIRLS 2012 (writing) and 2015 (reading); NIMSA 2012 (writing) and 2014 (reading))
shows that New Zealand can no longer say that we have a good-sized group of high performers in literacy. The evidence is clear that current approaches to literacy learning are not working for all learners. New Zealand’s diversity is increasing, so failing to evolve our supports to meet the literacy learning needs of diverse learner’s risks inequities increasing.

Primary-Level Literacy Initiatives

9. The Government invests significant funding in supports for primary-level literacy learning. The foundation to improving literacy learning is ensuring all children receive quality teaching, supported by quality advice, tools and resources. When this is not enough, we need to ensure that there is a range of additional supports available that are effective in improving literacy progress and achievement, and that good decisions are made about which additional supports are appropriate for each individual child’s needs.

10. Expectations for literacy progress are clarified through the Literacy Learning Progressions and the Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT), and teachers can use this to track children’s progress, evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching practice, and identify when additional support is needed. This will be complemented by the development of dyslexia screening tools, as part of the Learning Support Action Plan.

11. A range of materials and supports for literacy learning in the classroom are currently invested in. This includes the Ready to Read Instructional Series and Pasifika Early Literacy Project, both described below. We are also trialling innovative foundational learning approaches that better support rich curriculum learning opportunities and a focus on integrating the key competencies and oral literacy.

12. Significant investment is also made to ensure there are supports available where a particular child needs more support to progress and achieve in literacy. This includes Programmes for Students, Reading Recovery, Dyslexia resources, and Resource Teachers of Literacy (RTLit).

Ready to Read Instructional Series

13. The Ministry has reviewed the Ready to Read Instructional Series and identified ways it can be strengthened. This has informed the requirements for the current tender round. In particular, incorporating teacher support material for the teaching of phonemic and phonological awareness in book covers to save teachers needing to search for this advice from other sources.

14. The changes to the Ready to Read series respond to feedback from teachers about their usability with different groups of students and the desire for revised and more easily accessed support material. The support materials are based on the evidence that shows learners with diverse needs had more success when teachers had access to decodable texts,4 a scope and sequence framework,5 and a pathway to teach the code of written language explicitly through the development of quality resources for teaching and learning.

4 Despite the importance of learning to decode and encode written forms of language for literacy acquisition being signalled in the Ministry’s key teacher resource (Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1-4), the Ready to Read Instructional Series texts and teacher resources do not provide explicit guidance about this.

5 (METIS 120010 refers)
Pasifika Early Literacy Project

15. The Pasifika Early Literacy Project (PELP) is a two year project (2018-2019) to support the early language and literacy learning of Pacific students from new entrant to Year 2 in English-medium classrooms. PELP focuses on the utilisation of Pacific Dual Language books at school and at home. The project helps teachers work in partnership with families and Pacific communities to build Pacific learners’ English language and literacy, utilising the strengths they bring from their first language, ensuring that students are supported in their learning pathway from early childhood education into the early years at school.

16. PELP is part of the recent Pacific education budget initiatives that will ensure Pacific learners and their families have their identities, languages and cultures valued and respected, and have the skills, knowledge and equitable opportunities to pursue any educational pathway. The programme has places available for up to 10 primary schools in Auckland. The package includes the extension of PELP to 10 early learning services and 10 English-medium primary schools and will extend to include some regions beyond Auckland. There is no cost for the participating schools and early learning services.

17. PELP includes:
   a. provision of facilitators fluent in Pacific languages for the Pacific parent and family fono
   b. two one-day professional development workshops for new entrant, Year 1 and Year 2 teachers (up to three teachers per school)
   c. overview meetings to share outcomes of the teacher workshops with parent and family fono.

Programmes for Students

18. Some students need extra support to meet curriculum expectations at different times along their pathway. Current contracts for Programmes for Students (PfS) end in 2019. While PfS has worked for some, a high level evaluation has confirmed that sustained impact across the system or systemic shifts in teacher/leader practice is not visible.

19. We are seeking proposals for a new package of support called Supports for Students (SFS), designed for years 5-10, and focused on both literacy and numeracy. SFS will be tailored to the local context, and focus on accelerating the progress for learners both during the intervention, as well as supporting schools to sustain this over time.

20. School leadership will be critical to the success and sustainability of changed and improved literacy approaches. Providers will work in partnership with school leaders and teachers to:
   a. Tailor interventions to respond to the needs of students within their local context. Success here will involve delivering supports that reflect students’ unique identities, languages and cultures.

---

6 The project works with Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, Samoan, Tokelauan and Tongan students.
7 There has been a focus on improving outcomes for learners in Years 1-4 and many foundational learning supports cater to this age group. There are fewer supports available for learners in Years 5-13. We need to fill the gap in cross-curriculum literacy and numeracy support for learners in Years 6-10, given that Year 11-13 learners are expected to have the foundational literacy and numeracy skills needed to support their discipline specialisation and future pathway. Our focus on Years 5-10 will also address the reported decline in learning progress more generally across the curriculum that occurs after Year 4.

8 NZCER’s 2019 report Exploring Literacy identified that coherence of purpose, where the school community works collaboratively as a team towards a commonly understood goal, is key to good literacy outcomes for learners (De Wall, E., & Eyre, J. (2019). Exploring Literacy: How six schools lifted achievement, NZCER, Wellington)
b. Deliver their supports in ways that develop reflective practice for themselves and the teachers/leaders they work with, so evidence is used to evaluate and improve the support while it is being delivered.9

Reading Recovery

21. Reading Recovery (RR) is an early literacy intervention designed to:
   - accelerate students’ reading and writing achievement to the average level of their peers so that they can learn effectively in the classroom without further additional literacy support
   - identify the small proportion of students that need ongoing, long-term specialist literacy support.

22. Learners are identified for RR at six years old. It has been implemented in New Zealand for over 40 years. The current service contracts have recently been extended until January 2021.

23. RR was not specifically set up to support English language learners or neurodiverse learners, such as those with dyslexia, nor to recover comprehension skills, although we know it can make a difference in these areas. We therefore need to know the impact of RR of diverse learners’ literacy and education achievement, as well as its impact on school culture and capacity to sustain a focus on literacy development.

24. 8 9(2)(i)(iv)

Dyslexia Package

25. In response to the 2016 Education and Science Select Committee’s Inquiry into the identification and support for students with the challenges of dyslexia, dyspraxia and autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in primary and secondary schools10, the Ministry’s Early Learning and Student Achievement Group (ELSA) has updated a 2008 teaching resource (formerly known as About Dyslexia11), and developed further materials to support learners with dyslexia, designed for Year 1 through to secondary school.

26. The updated teaching resource exemplifies specific approaches that are effective, and the stocktake will support all educators working with children exemplifying a range of approaches known to be effective for learners with dyslexia12. The resource for parents gives clear information about how to talk with teachers and access further help and support.

---

9 The expectation is that once the support is embedded into a school that the provider will move on to support another school to maximize the impact of the supports across our schooling system. We will expect providers to maintain contact with leaders from all schools that have worked with so they can report on the sustainability of results in the school over the duration of our three-year contracts.


11 The About Dyslexia booklet was printed in December 2008. While much of the information in the booklet remained relevant, some revision to content and links to other Ministry dyslexia resources was required.

12 The resource provider has referenced an extensive range of current research from both New Zealand and other jurisdictions to reflect current research, evidence and best practice when designing this set of resources.
Resource Teachers of Literacy (RTLit)

27. Resource Teachers of Literacy (RTLit) provide specialised literacy assistance to learners in Years 1 to 8 who are experiencing difficulties with literacy learning. RTLit support learners referred from Reading Recovery, as well as those that have the highest literacy needs in the school.

28. The Learning Support Action Plan 2019 – 2025, Priority 4, is focused on flexible supports for neurodiverse children and young people, and states that subject to funding, improvements will be designed with the RTLit service between June 2020 and June 2022. Consideration also needs to be given to how the RTLits complement and work with the new Learning Support Coordinators and other resource teachers to coherently support children’s learning needs.

29. s 9(2)(f)(iv)

Proactive Release

30. We recommend that this Briefing is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

---

14 There will be specific work streams to provide for particular needs, e.g., dyslexia and autism spectrum disorder.