

EDUCATION OPTIONS FOR GLORIAVALE LEAVERS

SYNTHESIS OF STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Executive Summary

The Ministry of Education has commissioned this work to assess the educational needs of Gloriavale leavers considering the network capabilities of the South Canterbury region (where they tend to move to after leaving). While not intended to comment on the education of Gloriavale School or the psychological profiles of leavers, this report does use these to build context on what leavers need to access and engage with education outside of the closed community.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide context on Gloriavale leavers
- Assess the educational requirements of Gloriavale leavers within the context of their experiences
- Assess the current provisions in the South Canterbury region (where many leavers tend to initially go)
- Make recommendations to ensure better outcomes for Gloriavale leavers accessing education outside of the Gloriavale community

The Ministry has drafted network options including dual enrolment options for students at Timaru Christian School and a secular school, and support from Te Kura to enable correspondence learning.

Methodology

The primary source of feedback for this project was through semi-structured interviews. These were conducted with Gloriavale leavers (parents and children) and schools, primarily Principals. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout, and identifying words have been removed. Some school names have been retained due to specific comments being only of relevance to that school.

Interviews did not follow a strict structure, and useful feedback was gained by allowing participants to speak freely about their experiences. Interviews were primarily conducted in person with two remaining interviews conducted via Zoom. Deductive thematic analysis was used to separate main findings into broad categories and form recommendations.

Main Findings

Gloriavale Educational Background

Some participants discussed the backgrounds of their life and education at Gloriavale, providing important context for what requirements leavers might have that can be addressed through the education network. Gloriavale is the only educational experience many leavers have to compare against.

Having left Gloriavale, leavers realise some of the indoctrination they have faced. This includes not valuing diversity and expecting assimilation, for all community members to be the same ideal Gloriavale profile. Leavers often leave school early at approximately age 15 for full-time work, thus many have not learned to value their own education.

While the last ERO report for Gloriavale shows that the school has met basic requirements, this does not align with the experiences of Gloriavale leavers. Leavers report high levels of trauma and abuse. People are not taught to speak up for themselves, and where they do, this can result in ostracism and distress. This often affects how they act in mainstream schools as students have not been allowed to speak for themselves in the past and did not want to deviate from a prescribed way of behaving.

Aiding the Transition Process

The transition from Gloriavale School to mainstream education is significant for both parents and students and requires careful consideration of the problems Gloriavale leavers face, including a lack of resources, a multiplicity of academic, emotional, social, and behavioural issues, and a lack of understanding of how education and (regular life) is structured outside of Gloriavale. They leave a life that is very prescribed and everything they know to be 'right and true' for a life on the outside.

Upon leaving, families are without resources, and many have left a strong support network within the community. Families can feel overwhelmed by how much they need to organise and what they need to learn. Some describe it as feeling like they have moved to another country or feel like an alien in another world.

Recommendation 1: Gloriavale leavers require a 'resetting period', which is 3 - 6 months or longer while they adjust.

With so much to organise in the early stages of establishing themselves outside of the Gloriavale community, including housing, income, transport, clothing etc., education can be difficult to initiate while families have more urgent things to organise. A resetting period would allow time for families to establish themselves and find support without being rushed to make education decisions for their children.

Preferably, in this early stage of reintegration, Gloriavale leavers would be connected with counsellors and have initial psychosocial issues identified and assisted. They also typically build networks of support with previous Gloriavale leavers, particularly in the South Canterbury region.

Recommendation 2: Gloriavale Leavers should be connected with a dedicated Ministry of Education Liaison Person.

One of the most highly discussed 'solutions' was connecting Gloriavale leavers to a dedicated Ministry Liaison Person who would play an instrumental role in connecting families to education. While the Gloriavale Leavers Support Trust (GLST) plays an instrumental role in supporting Gloriavale leavers, feedback suggested that this would be best coming from someone from the Ministry with local, expert knowledge.

This liaison role could provide support through:

- Providing transport for families to visit potential schools (including being a driver for families in the early stages while they might not have licenses or vehicles);
- Explaining the different schooling options available to parents and aiding parent decision-making;

- Communicating how school works outside of Gloriavale, including terms, holidays, public holidays, zoning, how to apply, and how to conduct research on different schools etc.;
- Assisting families with home schooling, including providing information about applications and accessing necessary resources;
- Communicating school characters, values, curriculums etc., of the various schools in the South Canterbury region;
- Helping parents with decision-making;
- Assisting in organising transport to and from school, including public transport and school buses; and
- Helping schools who will be receiving one or more Gloriavale leavers by briefing them on their specific needs and linking them with other Ministry supports.

Gloriavale leavers are not a homogenous group and do not necessarily hold the same values and priorities. They will prioritise different things in education, with some seeking Christian values but others seeking values from school that align with their own values and are not necessarily religious. Having someone to communicate school values to parents will assist in their decisions.

A liaison person would also play an important role in assisting schools receiving Gloriavale leavers, ensuring that school governance and teaching staff know what they need to know to support the various complex needs of these students. They would meet with schools face-to-face and brief them on the families they are receiving and answer questions the school and staff may have.

Recommendation 3: A Mentor should be appointed to schools with new Gloriavale Leavers (regardless of whether the school has experience with leavers or not).

A mentor would act within schools to support Gloriavale leavers, especially with regards to academic gaps and social needs. It would be expected that there would be one mentor per school (with Gloriavale leavers), depending on the demand and needs of those schools.

A Mentor would help with the following:

- Helping students navigate the school, timetables, exams, terms/holidays etc.;
- Teach device use, e.g. Chromebooks and laptops, including digital media and social media;
- One-on-one pastoral support for behaviour and wellbeing issues;
- Connecting with school supports including school counsellors;
- Developing social skills such as appropriate languages/topics of conversation, making friends, and social norms; and
- Supporting students to engage with their education, speak up for themselves, make mistakes, talk with teachers, and communicate emotions and distress.

Device use is a particular gap present in the Gloriavale leavers as students have not had exposure to devices. As devices are commonplace in schools, students are disadvantaged as they do not know how to operate them and behave safely in online environments.

Social skills are a significant area of development for students from Gloriavale as they have little experience interacting with others and do not understand the social norms of other people. The mentor would play an important role in preparing students socially and assisting them to make friends.

Recommendation 4: Transitional periods may be adopted on a case-by-case basis to assist students to transition to a new school.

How quickly Gloriavale leavers adapt to mainstream school is often dependent on their age. Transitional periods may be beneficial for some students, but this should be assessed on a case-by-case basis as grouping Gloriavale leavers together in a classroom could create a microcosm of Gloriavale which would inhibit integration. A 'clique' of Gloriavale leavers could potentially change the culture of a school.

Students could spend 2-3 days per week at school as they adjust to mainstream school prior to being fully integrated. This may also support students moving between schools, from primary to high school, for example.

Recommendation 5: Teachers require PLD specific to the academic, pastoral, and social needs of Gloriavale leavers.

Targeted PLD could support school staff to manage the complex needs of Gloriavale leavers.

We expect that the PLD would cover the following:

- Understanding the characteristics of Gloriavale leavers
- How to communicate with leavers
- Understanding trauma
- Identifying and addressing academic gaps
- Assisting students with social difficulties
- Facilitating group activities with Gloriavale leavers

Recommendation 6: Consideration could be given to providing schools with funding support similar to refugee support (ESOL funds) to assist in transitioning Gloriavale leavers to mainstream education.

Currently, schools may access ESOL funds to support refugee students under certain conditions. These requirements do not meet Gloriavale leavers, but a similar funding strategy could be applied to schools taking Gloriavale leavers to enable them to put systems and supports in place, as the situation of Gloriavale leavers is similar to that of refugees. This should be matched to the needs of schools.

Addressing Academic Gaps

A common theme across interviews was the gaps in knowledge and competencies Gloriavale leavers have when they enter mainstream schools. An example includes female students often not knowing algebra or trigonometry. Parents tend to put a high value on education, but long-held beliefs about education from Gloriavale still act as a barrier to students accessing further education.

Recommendation 7: A standardised test/questionnaire should be created to identify knowledge and competency gaps and develop IEPs.

A test could be used to identify where these gaps exist and it could be applied across Gloriavale leavers consistently. This would help in the development of IEPs that address academic gaps across leavers in consistent ways.

This could also aid in the detection of undiagnosed learning difficulties, such as dyslexia which appears to be prominent in the Gloriavale community.

Recommendation 8: A bridging integration course could be developed to be administered by schools to support developing academic and social capabilities.

Where gaps are commonly found, a bridging course may be structured to address these and aid in the academic transition of students to mainstream education. This could also address some social norms and behaviours that assist students to fit in with their peers.

Home Schooling Support

Many families opt for home schooling their children. There are several reasons for this, often not trusting mainstream schools will align with their values, or feeling pressure to home school as a norm of what other leavers do (and have done successfully).

Many parents, however, overestimate their capabilities to home school successfully while balancing being a full-time parent to multiple children. Balancing these roles can be overwhelming for families, indicating a need to further support those who opt for home school education.

Recommendation 9: Gloriavale leavers who opt for home schooling could receive additional financial support packages to ensure they are well-resourced for their specific needs.

While there is money available for families home schooling their children, the additional funds decrease with additional children. Gloriavale leavers have pointed out that with multiple children entering education with no resources, the funds are hard to manage. The Ministry could consider increasing the allowance for Gloriavale leavers or assessing their financial needs on a case-by-case basis, ensuring that they have the materials and resources needed to engage in home schooling successfully.

Recommendation 10: Gloriavale leavers could receive a special allowance for technology and connectivity.

Similar to the above recommendation, Gloriavale leavers may face significant financial stress in supplying their children with devices. Families could receive devices and connections or receive an allowance to purchase these.

Recommendation 11: Gloriavale leavers should be connected with an in-home mentor to provide support for parents engaging in home schooling.

A mentor was discussed earlier as a support for students in mainstream schools, but this could be extended to home schooling. This would support families juggling multiple responsibilities and assist in the delivery of the New Zealand curriculum at home. They could also provide support with the pastoral needs of students while monitoring the wellbeing of parents. The frequency of these visits would be assessed on a case-by-case basis and would not necessarily be permanent.

A mentor could also support families with learning issues at home, such as dyslexia.

School Network Options

Interviews asked participants if there could be innovative ways of structuring the education network (specifically in South Canterbury) to support Gloriavale leavers. This includes options drafted by the Ministry of Education, including dual enrolment with Christian education and Te Kura.

Gloriavale leavers are not a homogenous group, and no single network option will be beneficial for all. It is important to note that the unique situations that families face may require innovative options.

The concept of dual enrolment with Timaru Christian School and other mainstream schools was less popular. While Christian education is important to some, dual enrolment with a secular school may not be desirable, or families may not require a Christian school to deliver education congruent with their values. Moving between two schools may inhibit integration without necessarily adding a strong component of religious education.

Recommendation 12: Te Kura application could be streamlined for Gloriavale leavers, including options for dual enrolment with mainstream schools.

Dual enrolment with Te Kura may be a viable option for some as this could aid in the transition to mainstream school. This would temporarily allow students to learn at a distance some days while slowly integrating into a mainstream school other days.

The referral process could be simplified for Gloriavale leavers as the referral criteria requires a psychological/psycho-social assessment from a Ministry of Education Psychologist. The process could be simplified to allow Gloriavale leavers easier access to Te Kura.

Recommendation 13: Te Kura staff should receive targeted PLD on the needs of Gloriavale Learners.

Staff at Te Kura could receive targeted PLD to better support the unique needs of Gloriavale leavers, considering their limited exposure to distance learning and the New Zealand curriculum.

Mitigation

It was the view of GLST and some interview participants that more families are likely to leave Gloriavale in the future. Should there be an exodus of families from the closed community, the South Canterbury school network could be overwhelmed. Accommodating large numbers of Gloriavale leavers could be particularly challenging as schools have typically dealt with smaller numbers at any given time.

Recommendation 14: Roll caps in South Canterbury Schools could be assessed for potential additional Gloriavale leavers.

The South Canterbury region is where most Gloriavale leavers (initially) move to after leaving the community. Roll caps of local schools should be assessed considering the potential need to accommodate more Gloriavale leavers. Master planning may need to consider the facilities needed to accommodate this.

Recommendation 15: Gloriavale leavers support should be mobilised across the country, recognising that leavers often move beyond South Canterbury.

The recommendations and support systems for Gloriavale leavers may need to eventually be applied across the country to ensure there is a contingency for leavers who leave the South Canterbury region. This includes having the liaison and mentor roles being across the country or easily mobilised to other regions.

Scope of Problem

This work has been commissioned by the Ministry of Education to address the educational needs of families leaving the Gloriavale community as well as the school network that primarily caters to them as they seek educational provisions. The Gloriavale community is in the West Coast of the South Island in the Haupiri region. This work is specific to the educational requirements of those who leave Gloriavale considering their previous education, their experiences and traumas, social abilities, values, and biases that influence their priorities and requirements.

This work is not intended to comment on the education of Gloriavale School, other than in instances where it is relevant to the experiences of Gloriavale leavers seeking education outside of the community or the requirements of the educational networks outside of Gloriavale. It is also not intended to comment on the psychological profiles of Gloriavale inhabitants or leavers, however, aspects of developmental psychology, resilience, wellbeing, and social psychology are important to consider when assessing how Gloriavale leavers perceive, access, and engage with education.

Throughout this report, we will comment on the experiences of Gloriavale leavers including commentary unique to some people that gives insight into how educational provision can be tailored to give the best results for those experiencing trauma, particularly considering that Gloriavale leavers can be in unique situations, often having multiple children, deep religious fundamentalist upbringings, and abusive experiences that make a 'one-size-fits-all' approach unfeasible.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide context on Gloriavale leavers
- Assess the educational requirements of Gloriavale leavers within the context of their experiences
- Assess the current provisions in the South Canterbury region (where leavers tend to initially go)
- Make recommendations to ensure better outcomes for Gloriavale leavers accessing education outside of the Gloriavale community

The Ministry has drafted potential network options for Gloriavale leavers that may innovatively meet the needs of Gloriavale leavers. This includes dual-enrolment options for students at Timaru Christian School with other secular schools and support from Te Kura (for correspondence learning at home or in controlled school environments).

Methodology

Feedback for this report was gathered primarily through semi-structured interviews. These were conducted with Gloriavale leavers (parents and children) and schools. This work is sensitive in nature, and discussions often involved some discussion around personal events and histories. Because of this, anonymity and confidentiality is essential. Because of this, no people will be named and identifying words (such as school names) have been removed.

Interviews did not follow a strict structure as often the most useful feedback comes from allowing participants to speak freely with little guidance from the interviewer. The following topics were covered to varying degrees, allowing for other topics to naturally come up in conversation:

- Gloriavale leaver parents:
- Experiences accessing education
 - What parents look for in choosing a school or home school options
 - How education-related decisions are/were made
 - How education is perceived/experienced having left Gloriavale
 - What gaps exist in academic knowledge
 - What support families received (from schools or otherwise)
 - What support could have been available to help (from schools or otherwise)
 - What support could potentially help other leavers
 - What network options might assist some families
- Gloriavale leaver students:
- How school (or home schooling) compares to education in Gloriavale
 - What things surprised them or felt different
 - What they like about school, what subjects and opportunities excite them
 - What gaps exist in academic knowledge
 - What support they received
 - What support could have been available to help
 - What support could potentially help other leavers
- Schools in South Canterbury:
- How the transition worked for them receiving Gloriavale Leavers
 - What issues Gloriavale leavers present with
 - How to accommodate Gloriavale leavers in schools
 - Important lessons learned that could benefit other schools
 - What support was made available
 - What support could be offered to schools with Gloriavale leavers
 - What network options might assist some families

Interviews typically lasted 20 – 45 minutes, as children often had little to say. One group evening event was held in Timaru including multiple families. Two interviews were conducted over Zoom with the remainder occurring in person in Timaru and the wider South Canterbury area.

This report is structured to discuss the main findings from the interviews once the main themes were derived through deductive thematic analysis. These main findings are used to inform recommendations for the Ministry of Education to consider in providing education to Gloriavale leavers, sensitive to their needs and priorities.

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Main Findings and Recommendations

Gloriavale Education Background

For context, the background education of Gloriavale leavers was discussed with some interviewees. This allows us to better understand what requirements leavers might have throughout the remaining subsections, as well as some future requirements with ongoing problems present within the closed community. Again, it is not intended for this to be used as a *review* of Gloriavale school, but more as context for why it is important to consider innovative educational solutions for leavers.

Gloriavale School is the only school offered to the community, and for many leavers, it is the only educational experience they have had, and is therefore their only reference point for what school is, or what it should be.

“I didn’t like school because of the experience I had at school in Gloriavale” [Student]

As of July 2021, Education Counts listed Gloriavale School as having 207 students, all of European/Pākehā descent.¹ This is despite leavers discussing that there are Māori families and students. Some Gloriavale leavers described the community, and as an extension, the school, as being inherently racist and misunderstanding toward Māori and other ethnic and minority groups due to valuing assimilation.

“Gloriavale is very white. At [School name], they didn’t care. It stood out to me. You were there to learn, you were there to go to school.” [Student]

“Te reo, that was a big no no in Gloriavale. My family is Māori. All the kids were taught te reo at 3 to 5, then once they got to school they were not able to teach it again.” [Student]

“They don’t teach Māori or other languages in there. You don’t know much about other countries’ cultures and stuff.” [Student]

“Anything Māori was bad, but that’s our culture in New Zealand.” [Parent]

They describe the community as not respecting individuality, viewing people as being the same and needing to fit a narrow profile of an ideal Gloriavale member. This may explain why all students are listed as European/Pākehā without an overview of the numbers of Māori and Pacific Island students and how education is catered to them.

“Individuality is looked down upon.” [Parent]

“They’ve learned everyone has to be the same, but to see people celebrating differences is really healthy for them.” [Parent]

¹ This information can be found at <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/find-school/school/profile?district=®ion=&school=1587>

Gloriavale School offers education to Years 1-13 as a composite school, however, it should be noted that students commonly leave school early. At approximately 15 years old, students leave for full-time work for the community. It is interesting to note that students don't have much of an option in this, even if they value their own education, as staying in school would not be considered "normal" and would go against the best interests of the community, which is to have people enter an area of work where they remain until they are not fit to do so anymore. Gloriavale has a strong focus on the community, and all decisions made are to benefit the wider community rather than the individual.

"At Gloriavale, everything with schooling was angled at making people a better fit for Gloriavale rather than finding what fit that person." [Parent]

The last ERO report for Gloriavale School was published in 2020.² At the time of this review, Gloriavale School was meeting requirements in terms of having suitable premises, staffing, equipment, curriculum, tuition standards, and managers who are fit and proper for a private institution. ERO did report that there were not regularly reviewed policies and procedures in areas related to the provision of a physically and emotionally safe place for students. Since the onsite review, the school provided evidence to show those aspects had been improved to meet the requirements of ERO.

While the ERO report does not show areas of great concern this is not congruent with the experiences of Gloriavale leavers. They discussed that ERO reviews were a time when the curriculum changed to suit national standards, with children participating in subjects such as art where they had not done so at any other point during the year. Given reports of both physical and mental abuse (including reports of hitting children who are misbehaving or not meeting prescribed standards), it cannot be assumed that the ERO report is an accurate reflection of the school's way of operating.

"There were subjects they would do around the ERO visits, but they were only for that small period of time. Things like art, woodwork, those subjects that weren't core curriculum subjects. They would only be for a small amount of time." [Parent]

As such, the families leaving Gloriavale report high levels of trauma and reports of abuse. In children, experiences of trauma follow them through school and require special consideration from schools and the Ministry of Education. These are ongoing issues that will affect the day-to-day functioning and engagement of students.

"By design, people leaving are subjected to the maximum amount of trauma. They're not in a good psychological space." [Parent]

"The last teacher I had in Gloriavale... he made it hell for me... For me, going to [mainstream school] because there were male teachers and the Principal was male, I just thought I don't want to do this again. I have a lot of stuff against older men because of what happened in Gloriavale." [Student]

"All the stuff, I wanted to get out at 14. Life was a living hell... All the emotional stuff affects the schooling. Everything that happens in there affects you big time emotionally." [Student]

² The ERO report can be found at <https://ero.govt.nz/institution/1587/gloriavale-christian-school>

The closed community and the education provided are fundamental in understanding the social capabilities of families leaving, and how students may react and interact within school environments. The school is described as a place for indoctrinating young people into the ways of the community, including conforming socially. Gloriavale leavers describe feeling ostracised and punished for not conforming to the social norms of the community.

There were some persistent feelings of fear that have affected students' confidence in speaking up for themselves, asking questions (as not understanding something would make them appear 'dumb' to their teacher and peers), and seeking help.

"Because they've been blamed for [everything], they'll blame themselves for everything in their life. It all builds up. It's not healthy." [Student]

"It doesn't help when you talk to these kids and they get a growling from a teacher, they will automatically feel like they're being talked down to, and that they're dumb, and they don't know anything. It hurts because then they don't know what to do anymore." [Student]

Academic gaps will be discussed later in this report. As Gloriavale School prepares students for life in the community, working for the benefit of others and the ongoing success of the community, the school leaves some gaps in knowledge that students of a similar age in mainstream schools do not have. It is important to understand that leavers will also differ academically from peers which further challenges successful transition into mainstream school.

Aiding the Transition Process

The transition from Gloriavale to mainstream education is significant for leavers, both parents and students. Several of the leavers discussed their personal experiences of leaving. The Gloriavale Leavers Trust also discussed the leaving process.

The process of leaving can be a long one and it is not a decision that is made lightly. Families leave their home, friends, extended family, and many of their possessions to seek refuge beyond the community. Beyond people and things, leavers also leave a way of life. The Gloriavale lifestyle is very prescribed with people wearing the same clothes, performing the same duties every day, and living with very strict rules and religious values.

“Some of them might feel like it’s a big scary thing for them, because it’s a whole lot of new people and when people come from out here they’re visitors, but everyone knows everyone in there.” [Student]

“You’ve left everything you know to be right and true and you’re finding your way in this unknown world.” [Parent]

“Everything is unknown, it’s a whole new world, you don’t know anybody. I was really afraid of everything.” [Parent]

Upon leaving, families quickly realise the lack of resources and support networks. They describe feeling overwhelmed and ‘daunted’ by the number of things that need to be organised and learned in life on the outside. The families tend not to have money and are not supported by the Gloriavale community, with some having academic records and work destroyed. Others maintain ties with family still inside but are ex-communicated by the wider Gloriavale community.

“The cost of setting up and transitioning is daunting.” [Parent]

“In Gloriavale you don’t consider anything costing anything, it’s just there... There’s a lot for your mind to think and cope with.” [Parent]

There have been references of feeling like they entered another country or that they feel like an alien in another world. This highlights the amount of change that leavers are experiencing at once.

“[They] come out here, they don’t know anyone. Feel like they’re aliens in the world.” [Student]

“When you leave Gloriavale, people expect you to act as a New Zealander, and you’re not. Gloriavale is like a country of its own.” [Parent]

Recommendation 1: Gloriavale leavers require a ‘resetting period’, which is 3 – 6 months or longer while they adjust.

There have been instances of Gloriavale leavers being approached by truancy officers, and some described feeling rushed by the Ministry of Education to get their children into schools (even if registering as home schooling) while they still organise housing, income, driving, clothing etc. Considering human motivation through a simple framework such as a hierarchy of needs³, families are not equipped to put their children into school or start home schooling them themselves while they do not have their basic needs (shelter and food for example, both of which require income) met.

“I did the applications as soon as I could, had people ringing up ‘why aren’t they in schools?’ There was a lot of pressure and not a lot of time to prepare.” [Parent]

“There’s so much to take on as a mum you can’t think about education. Could somebody please just tell me what to do, that would be good!” [Parent]

“First thought isn’t what school the kids are going to go to... where we’re going to base ourselves, where our home is going to be...” [Parent]

A resetting period would allow families time to get the support they need, whether it be from the GLST or others, to provide for their family and get the resources they need to enable their children to learn and/or attend mainstream school. A timeframe of up to 6 months to allow for this has been suggested, and this would need to be communicated to families after they leave.

“A lot of families that come out need a resetting year. They’ve got a lot of guilt that they left their family. They’re going to hell, now their kids are going to hell because they left. But it’s okay because you made a decision to keep your family safe no matter the cost. About half a year to one year to adjust.” [Student]

Preferably, early in their transition out of Gloriavale, they will be connected with counselling support to help them cope with the early trauma they are likely experiencing. Counselling should be ongoing, but establishing this early will allow for the best results. Providing counselling is not the core business of the Ministry of Education, but it makes intuitive sense to collaborate with the GLST to ensure that early psychosocial needs are being met to allow them to more easily transition to school in the near future.

During their transition, Gloriavale leavers will also typically find or be connected with other leavers who may have been living outside of the community for a longer period. This is particularly true for those going to South Canterbury (either permanently or temporarily) but some leavers choosing to live in other regions may have smaller networks of support.

³ Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is the most basic understanding of this concept. Read more at <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1943-03751-001>

Recommendation 2: Gloriavale Leavers should be connected with a dedicated Ministry of Education Liaison Person.

This is one of the most referenced practical solutions discussed in the interviews. Preferably, this would be someone not from the GLST but the Ministry of Education, or a government agency with deep insider knowledge of the New Zealand Education system. This is because GLST play a strong advisory and advocacy role in helping Gloriavale leavers adjust to life outside of the community, but leavers have acknowledged a need for education-specific information from a local expert to guide them through the entire process while they work with the GLST on lifestyle changes.

“Being able to have a conversation with someone from the Ministry about the options available for my children, especially high school. What I’ve learned I’ve just had to pick up.”
[Parent]

“I think it would be better if it wasn’t someone from the Trust, and it was coming from the Ministry. More ‘we’re going to help you help your children’” [Parent]

“You need contact with someone who can support you around education.” [Parent]

“Doing research on schools is so difficult. Having a liaison is really important.” [Parent]

This liaison role could provide support through:

- Providing transport for families to visit potential schools (including being a driver for families in the early stages while they might not have licenses or vehicles);
- Explaining the different schooling options available to parents and aiding parent decision-making;
- Communicating how school works outside of Gloriavale, including terms, holidays, public holidays, zoning, how to apply, and how to conduct research on different schools etc.;
- Assisting families with home schooling, including providing information about applications and accessing necessary resources;
- Communicating school characters, values, curriculums etc., of the various schools in the South Canterbury region;
- Helping parents with decision-making;
- Assisting in organising transport to and from school, including public transport and school buses; and
- Helping schools who will be receiving one or more Gloriavale leavers by briefing them on their specific needs and linking them with other Ministry supports.

Transport is a common issue for leavers who likely won’t have a New Zealand driver’s license upon leaving and won’t have a vehicle of their own to travel between home and school. This not only creates a barrier for sending children to school but creates a barrier for families who want to visit schools, understand their values and character, speak with the Principals and teachers etc. Parents can feel isolated and less likely to access mainstream education where they feel that they can’t adequately gauge the safety of the school in line with their strongly held values.

“Everything like that, you feel very handicapped as a parent. You can’t go and meet the teachers. Then they don’t know anything about you and where you come from... That was a really big thing.” [Parent]

Parents would benefit from having a local expert provide information on the local schooling options available to them, detailing the associated costs, transport, and other aspects that might influence their decision. This would save them from doing extensive research themselves, allowing them to make an informed decision.

“Maybe even some information sheets, different avenues and possibilities, what they might need, rough idea of what it might cost. We’re weighing all of that up.” [Parent]

“Having all the facts displayed in front of you. The fees, uniform, travel etc. for each option. Someone analytical can just look at the facts.” [Parent]

“I think having the options laid out to you. This is what’s available, if there’s grants or things they can apply for... what is financially viable for you? Even things like buses, sporting opportunities, how to get involved in a sport, how to get involved in those clubs.” [Parent]

School can be a difficult system to understand. The proscribed lifestyle in Gloriavale has most days looking the same, with students attending school and parents having little to no involvement in their education. As leavers are navigating their way through lifestyle adjustments, understanding the school system can be extremely difficult, and many parents not from Gloriavale have had years to understand how the system works, have time to adjust, and strong support networks to understand how school works.

It would be advisable to have a prescribed list of things that Gloriavale leavers should know about. This could include the four-term system, term dates, public holidays/teacher-only days, uniforms, school zoning, out-of-zone enrolments, school applications, school materials, stationery etc. Having this information could help Gloriavale leavers navigate uncharted territory. This could be included as a handout as well as information that a liaison person discusses with leavers face to face, answering questions as they go.

“Didn’t know about terms... Public holidays, teacher-only days, I didn’t know about any of that. There aren’t those holidays in Gloriavale, every day is the same.” [Parent]

It is important to note that several families opt for home schooling their children, particularly as they navigate the space of understanding mainstream schools. This includes challenging some long held beliefs about schooling outside of Gloriavale, especially secular mainstream education. As parents may be very nervous about what schools offer and how this may impact their children, it is important that they know the options available to them, including if they want to home school, and how much work this will require. Some leavers discussed the difficulty of home schooling and potentially not anticipating how much work it would be to full-time teach while being a full-time parent to multiple children. Parents need to have a full understanding of the logistics of home schooling as well as how to establish this practice. The liaison person could provide assistance in enrolments and applications for home schooling, checking in to see how home schooling is going for them.

“In the process of sorting out life, groceries, all that stuff. It took months to get exemptions away. We hadn’t done home schooling, I had to do my research.” [Parent]

“Probably being a parent [is the biggest challenge]. They have to parent by themselves. Usually, they’re working all day.” [Principal]

“...Someone who can answer those questions. Accessing Te Kura was actually quite difficult.” [Parent]

Messaging in Gloriavale also tells parents that schools outside of the community are not adequate, evil, or don't have Christian values that will protect their children. This can create an additional barrier to families, making it more important for them to be able to access the schools to make these assessments for themselves. The liaison person would play an important part in communicating the character and values of schools for parents to understand how they align with their own values.

“When we first shifted I was terrified to put kids into a school.” [Parent]

“The way we were raised, we thought Gloriavale was the only place that had values.” [Parent]

“We’re a bit concerned about sending our kids to high school based on what we were told.” [Parent]

Evidence from the interviews suggests that values are particularly important to Gloriavale leavers. **It is important to note that leavers are not a homogenous group and do not necessarily hold the same values and priorities.** While some seek Christian values, others do not place such high importance on this, realising that many mainstream schools tend to have values that align with typical Christian values, such as respect, responsibility, and resilience etc. Some also stated that they value high-quality education and that this takes precedence as they feel they did not have access to this within Gloriavale. Ultimately, choosing schools based on values is an individual decision and it can be difficult to determine what schools Gloriavale leavers will prioritise.

“For us, basically, we came to the fact that the teachers don’t save our kids, there’s sort of no such thing as a Christian school, the teachers could be Christians but that doesn’t make your kids Christian, and it’s still up to families to teach their own philosophy.” [Parent]

“It would be misguided to think that the Ministry can force them to enrol somewhere else. It’s about their beliefs, they’re not going to lose those.” [Principal]

“I want my kids to have a good education. I felt like my education at Gloriavale was pathetic.” [Parent]

“To build a family structure where everyone felt they belonged and valued and they could contribute to other people’s lives in a willing way that they felt was something they wanted to do, and not forced.” [Parent]

“I know some of them with their faith and belief think the best way forward is a Christian education, which is fine, but if you live in Geraldine it’s a long drive to receive education when you can receive a perfectly good education at your local school.” [Principal]

Parents discussed having trouble making decisions. This is because of their upbringing in Gloriavale, feeling that all decisions are final and the consequences for making a wrong decision can be final. Being incorrect can result in punishment which can ostracise members. The liaison person should help leavers make decisions, including telling them that it is okay to change their minds later (e.g. change schools or home school) and that it is okay to make mistakes. While there can be associated costs with changing these decisions, parents should be reassured that if a school is not working for their child(ren) or their family, parents have the freedom to explore other options. Parents do not have experience speaking up for their child(ren)'s education or advocating on their behalf. A liaison person could play an important role in communicating to parents their rights and freedoms in making decisions, changing their minds, and speaking up for what they (and their children) need.

"You never had to choose anything. You never had to help kids decide what they want to learn." [Parent]

"Like you can move schools, it isn't the final decision. They haven't learned to make decisions. It was more 'how do we make this decision'. In Gloriavale, making the wrong decision means you get it tough and that's traumatic. It's empowering to know it's not final to make a decision. The school isn't going to be angry with you or whatever." [Parent]

"Coming out of Gloriavale, you don't know that you can speak up for your children." [Parent]

A barrier for some mainstream school access is transport for children. Parents may not have a license or vehicle to enable them to send their children to schools at a distance. This is particularly true for those living rurally, schools may be too far and families are limited in travel options. A liaison person may assist the family in setting up transport looking at the options available, working directly with the school to set get the school bus to pick up the children, for example.

"The school helped organise a bus for us into town... but I still couldn't get in because I didn't have a driver's license yet. I felt like I couldn't support them because I couldn't go in." [Parent]

The liaison person may also play an important role in assisting schools that are receiving Gloriavale leavers. This means prepping the school governance and teaching staff with what they need to know to support the academic, behavioural, emotional, and social needs that are unique to Gloriavale leavers. The GLST provides some of this information which may easily be repurposed for schools as a handout. The liaison person may engage in face-to-face meetings with the principal and teaching staff to answer their questions and help them best support the students once they arrive. It would also be beneficial to have a liaison person connect schools to other Ministry supports that may assist the school in providing support to Gloriavale leavers.

"These are parents and students coming into your environment, these are the types of things they will need. This is the support network, this is the person you can phone and ask those silly questions. Making sure there's a good connect around that." [Principal]

"I wish they knew the kids coming into their school, a lot of them are traumatised, they've been hurt, they don't know how to open up." [Student]

“Some of the teachers knew [the GLST], that helps because they had an understanding of what Gloriavale was and stuff about it.” [Student]

To achieve all of this, the liaison person will need to have an unambiguous role description and concise materials to aid in the dissemination of information. While we currently recommend a single person, contingencies should be in place in the event that several families leave Gloriavale at the same time and potentially two or more liaisons may be required to act across the country. Having the description and resources in place beforehand will help should additional staff be required.

Recommendation 3: A Mentor should be appointed to schools with new Gloriavale Leavers (regardless of whether the school has experience with leavers or not).

While we do not anticipate that a mentor would be permanently with students, they would act as an advisor and support person for students who left Gloriavale. They would help students adjust to school and support them pastorally, acting similar to a Teacher Aide temporarily. We expect that there would be one mentor per school with Gloriavale leavers, however, this should be adjusted depending on the demand and needs of those schools.

It would be expected that a Mentor would help with the following:

- Helping students navigate the school, timetables, exams, terms/holidays etc.;
- Teach device use, e.g. Chromebooks and laptops, including digital media and social media;
- One-on-one pastoral support for behaviour and wellbeing issues;
- Connecting with school supports including school counsellors;
- Developing social skills such as appropriate languages/topics of conversation, making friends, and social norms; and
- Supporting students to engage with their education, speak up for themselves, make mistakes, talk with teachers and communicate emotions and distress.

When asked how mainstream school was different to Gloriavale School, some students quoted feeling lost and confused navigating a new system. A Mentor may provide support in helping students adjust to how school works and how to navigate the physical grounds and educational systems such as examinations.

“Schools give you tours like where your class is going to be and all that. If they didn’t do that it would be freak, especially if you don’t have people you know. Someone to help you for the first week or first days.” [Student]

“Maybe if there was a support person in the school for them. Just to help them settle in or that sort of thing... Even finding my way around the school was stressful, and reading the timetable, that sort of thing. It was all new to me.” [Student]

“Having a person there to help them through it. Changing school is big, and it’s wave after wave of ‘new new new’.” [Student]

“They told me who my teachers were, they told me where my classroom was. It was a big help.” [Student]

Device use and digital fluency were also determined to be significant gaps in the knowledge of Gloriavale leavers who have not had much experience engaging with technology. Both students and parents voiced embarrassment at not knowing how to use a device and needing to ask for help. A mentor would assist not only in the physical operation of devices but in safety and security, ensuring that students understand how to use them safely.

“Simple things like using a laptop. They had Chromebooks at school, I had never seen one before. I had to ask someone how to use one. Little things like that were hard to adjust to.”
[Student]

“Probably learning how to use a device. That would have been a big help.” [Student]

“I was thinking that the schools use a lot of Chromebooks and online work. My kids hadn’t had any experience. A teacher asked if we have a laptop at home and we said no, and they could tell. They’re behind from that point of view.” [Parent]

As Gloriavale leavers often have associated wellbeing, behavioural, emotional, and social needs from their experienced trauma, the Mentor would play an important role in helping them cope in these areas. This is not to take the place of counselling or therapy, but more to support students entering learning environments to develop self-efficacy and a locus of control. The Mentor should play a role in connecting students to any wellbeing services at the school, including school counsellors to help them process their trauma. They would work *with* families, considerate of the trauma associated with authoritative figures they have had in their life and their reluctance of being told what to do.

“Someone that can link and work alongside all of them is really important. That pastoral care role. People to work alongside. To do it with them, not at them. It’s going to be an important role.” [Principal]

“At [the high school] they had a school counsellor. I was seeing a counsellor [elsewhere] but since COVID hit we had a big dip. A year and a half I went without and it was not good.”
[Student]

“In Gloriavale you can’t tell them how you feel, the more you say, they more they use that against you.” [Student]

“For leavers who have been in school... they need a personal counsellor. Possibly put some really well-educated people in there for them, people who know what kids coming out of Gloriavale will be like. Someone who can listen and help them.” [Student]

“Trauma isn’t necessarily left behind after a year or two. Trauma can go years back. They’re still dealing with stuff. Still dealing with losing people from the community.” [Parent]

Social skills are a significant area of development for Gloriavale leavers. Students struggle to interact with peers at mainstream schools due to what appears to be a combination of struggling with unfamiliar people (after having spent their lives with the same people) and not understanding the social norms of other people, such as how to act appropriately and what words and topics of conversation are considered appropriate. A particular difficulty is the expectations placed on young people in Gloriavale to marry and have a family quite young. This can result in problems of age and situationally inappropriate conversations, and difficulty interacting appropriately with members of the opposite sex. The mentor could play an instrumental role in supporting students socially.

“Main things we talked about was, social skills, what does that look like? How does that integrate back into a normal school? What’s the pastoral care look like?... Having an ability or funds that sits outside of our normal realm is what we’d need. Going through the RTLB service and SWIS, you’d already have a backlog.” [Principal]

“It was quite hard for me to settle in and make new friends because I’ve never had to do that. Meet new people, so that was quite scary.” [Student]

“They can be very shy, not very interactive. Shut down a lot of emotions, control your emotions, a lot of the time they’ll be very quiet and won’t ask for teachers’ help often.” [Student]

“They also need to learn a big thing on social words you can use. We had no idea of appropriate words you can speak about in public.” [Student]

Students also need support to speak up for themselves. Students and parents discussed the difficulty of advocating for their own education in Gloriavale. They felt discouraged to ask questions, appear unintelligent to their peers, and face consequences from the teacher(s) as this could result in punishment (including physical punishment or ostracism). The Mentor could offer support in helping students speak up for themselves, ask questions, and engage meaningfully with their learning. This would include communicating their emotions and distress to adults who may assist them, particularly in cases of bullying or similar.

“You could talk to teachers. You could do and say what you felt, and they respected you. Coming out of Gloriavale you don’t get that, teachers are harsh, they make you feel stupid, dumb, like you’re nothing.” [Student]

Recommendation 4: Transitional periods may be adopted on a case-by-case basis to assist students to transition to a new school.

Much of the conversations with parents and staff indicated that younger leavers tend to be more adaptable and adjusted to mainstream education more easily than older leavers. A ballpark number was ages 5-10 adjusting more easily, and 11 years and above facing more issues in adjusting, facing greater emotional distress.

“Ages 5 to 10 should just be integrated, they adapt very quickly. 11 to 14 may have more social issues to be sorted. The core curriculum at school, and afternoon could look at social training, relationships, teaching the value of higher education.” [Principal]

Transitional periods may be necessary for some (but not necessary all) Gloriavale leavers, but it is important that this is considered on a case-by-case, or school-by-school basis. The aforementioned liaison role may help inform this decision by working with the families and schools in tandem to determine whether a dedicated transition may be necessary. This is to help the students adjust to a new environment and new way of learning slowly, considering anxieties they might have at integrating quickly. The transitional period could be set up in a number of different ways such as:

1. Students spend 2-3 days per week in a separate classroom (with other Gloriavale leavers) before being slowly integrated into mainstream classes 5 days per week.
2. Students spend 2-3 days per week in a mainstream classroom before being slowly integrated into mainstream classes 5 days per week.

"It's interesting watching from this perspective... the ones who are newer and go straight into secular state schools, how they integrate is very different to the ones who take a year or two to get sorted." [Principal]

"For the first time, it would be easier going like three times a week, getting used to everything. The whole surrounding place, the school." [Student]

"Some ideas floated with a separate place for kids to go where assessments were done, then within 2 or 3 months they integrate into a school, but there's still a hub where they offer counselling, parenting things " [Parent]

"If someone came here [from Gloriavale], I would probably spend a few days until they got used to the school." [Student]

Transitional periods may also support students moving between schools, for example, having them prepare for secondary education by allowing for a transition period at the secondary school and linking them with mentor. This extra time to adjust will help ensure they are prepared academically and socially for the secondary learning environments. Some respondents recommended aiding the transition through spending additional time at primary school, however, this should be assessed on a case-by-case basis

"Transitioning to year 11 to 13 classwork rather than going straight to TBHS or TGHS, working at [primary] initially then the high schools over time. After one year move on." [Principal]

"If you put them in the Christian School, then in year 11 for example, you took them into year 9 and 10 classroom at the Christian school, and did some classes at the high school. So an allowance for dual-enrolment idea without it being so big. Going straight to a secular high school might be too much." [Parent]

This is not a one-size-fits-all approach. In many cases, grouping Gloriavale leavers in one class may further inhibit integration and is not viewed very positively by some leavers or some schools. There are concerns they may only be friends with other Gloriavale leavers and people familiar to them which may create a microcosm of Gloriavale.

"As a community, you're going to gravitate to people who are like-minded." [Principal]

“If they all stay in one classroom it will make them more Gloriavale-ish because they’ll gravitate toward people they know. We need families to integrate.” [Principal]

“If one family comes out, would you make a whole class for one family? How is that going to be beneficial? They’re still going to continue with that mentality? What about two or three families? We could easily integrate two or three families at once.” [Principal]

Having Gloriavale leavers create a clique or small community within the school could also change the character or culture of the host school. This is more of a hypothetical outcome as interview feedback did not indicate that school character or culture had changed as a result of having multiple Gloriavale leavers, but it was a concern of some should the leavers be encouraged to socialise with one another.

“There were a number of other families from Gloriavale and that almost had its own set of problems because you’ve got all these traumatised kids in one place. It’s like it’s starting its own Gloriavale culture, there’s so many of them they keep reverting back to what they know.” [Parent]

“I appreciate the Ministry doesn’t want the culture of our school to change, I feel at the moment it’s strong enough to handle that, but perhaps having options, you can enrol here but if it’s getting too difficult let’s look into some other options.” [Principal]

Across the board, it seems important that students are encouraged and able to socialise and make friends with other students in mainstream schools or outside of the Gloriavale culture. Parents would like opportunities for students to integrate with school culture and life outside of Gloriavale through interacting with new peers and making new friends.

“I think it helps them make better and lasting friendships too. They’re friends with Gloriavale people because that’s all they’ve got, but we need to go on to find other friends. We’re not forced into one group. We need to go out of our comfort zone to make proper friends, it’s the same for the kids.” [Parent]

“The school said ‘you’re too cliquey with Gloriavale, we want you to split up and be friends with other kids’ and that was really hard for them.” [Parent]

It is important that the transition to mainstream schools is handled carefully, considering the unique needs of students and families given their social abilities, goals, and priorities. A transitional period should be arranged between the family and the school, and a liaison person may play an important role in negotiating how this will work. This is also reliant on available space in schools to accommodate a group of students multiple times per week and the class sizes.

Recommendation 5: School teachers require PLD specific to the academic, pastoral, and social needs of Gloriavale leavers.

Feedback from the interviews suggests that teachers have mostly done well to support Gloriavale leavers as they address unique needs in their learning environments, rather than assigning students to homogenous groups and expecting assimilation.

“Our teacher had some Gloriavale students at his last school, so he knew what it was like and made it easier. He knew all of the stuff, knew we were behind.” [Student]

“PD with staff. There’s those key things to understand, a) they’re not all the same, and b) they don’t necessarily want to change. If they’re viewed as extreme, you’ve got a danger of them becoming isolated or judged.” [Principal]

Despite this, there have been problems with students integrating into mainstream school and feeling that they aren’t being adequately supported by teaching staff. This includes reported incidents of teachers engaging in bullying behaviour, and singling Gloriavale leavers out without considering the trauma they have experienced with authority figures in the past.

“It didn’t work out, he was having troubles with teachers bullying him because he wasn’t vaccinated.” [Parent]

Staff would benefit from having targeted PLD to understand the unique needs of Gloriavale leavers, understand their trauma, and understand the pedagogies and practices that will best support their learning in an unfamiliar environment. This could be provided to teaching staff who will be receiving Gloriavale leavers in their learning environments and should be tailored to the needs of Gloriavale leavers. We expect that the PLD would cover the following:

- Understanding the characteristics of Gloriavale leavers
- How to communicate with leavers
- Understanding trauma
- Identifying and addressing academic gaps
- Assisting students with social difficulties
- Facilitating group activities with Gloriavale leavers

Recommendation 6: Consideration could be given to providing schools with funding support similar to refugee support (ESOL funds) to assist in transitioning Gloriavale leavers to mainstream education.

As discussed earlier, transitioning to life outside of Gloriavale can make Gloriavale leavers feel like they are from another country or aliens in another world. Leaving Gloriavale often means leaving friends and loved ones behind in an escape from abusive and authoritative community norms. Leavers are similar to refugees in the sense that they have made a difficult escape from a community to seek a better life for their family, and as such, consideration could be given to schools receiving funding support to assist in the transition to mainstream education. This could be similar to the ESOL funding made available for former refugees who do not speak English or te reo Māori as their first language and could be used by schools to fund their pastoral and academic supports.

“...They’re essentially refugees in our own country. We need to have that specific setup. Once they’re realigned in a normal society, it’s quite different for them.” [Principal]

“If you have one or two coming in, you treat that like refugees, put things in place. If you’ve got a bigger number, then trying to organise money and support, you’re going to be chasing your tail on it. Need a separate Gloriavale leavers pot.” [Principal]

One school discussed the support they have received for refugees, including assistance in the enrolment process, volunteers who help them find what they need, making sure the school is accessible, assisting in dental care, and helping connect them to support in the community.

It is important that funding levels are matched to the needs of the schools. For example, the number of leavers, the space available, the supports required etc.

“If they put the same level of support as everyone else gets, literacy support and social workers are really going to be at a pressure point... How do we address that with the most amount of clarity?”

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Addressing Academic Gaps

A common theme throughout the interviews was the gaps in knowledge and competencies of Gloriavale leavers. Students tend to have good rote learning abilities in formative education years such as simple spelling and arithmetic, placing some younger students ahead of their peers in mainstream education. However, as students near adolescence, gaps in knowledge become more salient. Examples include female students not advancing in mathematics (including there being significant gaps in algebra and trigonometry) and science. In Gloriavale, females focus more on home economics subjects before leaving school and there is a lack of advanced mathematics and science.

“They are educated, but is it New Zealand curriculum? Where do they align so we can support them the best we can?” [Principal]

“Yeah, there were massive gaps. I was shocked at how many gaps Gloriavale leaves out, because, you know, you’re going to grow up and stay there the rest of your life. But when you come to school here, there are massive gaps. You’ve never heard of that, done that before. I’ve done NCEA, but I was like ‘am I dumb?’” [Student]

“Academically they come in very varied. They are confident in that they know more than they need to, but then they find big gaps.” [Principal]

Parents tend to put a high value on quality education. This includes the availability of further education as this is not an option in Gloriavale. Within the closed community, students tend to do NCEA early without achieving much beyond NCEA level 1 or 2 and leave school early to work within the community.

“I was redoing years. Mum wanted to make sure I didn’t fall behind.” [Student]

There is still, however, a barrier to further education, largely related to the values that have been placed on education in Gloriavale and long-held beliefs about entering the workforce early.

“The expectations are no higher than what they had. They’ve got more opportunity to be able to further themselves, but it’s almost like they’ve got a ceiling. There’s no pushing beyond what they’ve already done.”

Recommendation 7: A standardised test/questionnaire should be created to identify knowledge and competency gaps and develop IEPs.

As such when Gloriavale leavers enter mainstream schools, there can be significant gaps in their knowledge and competency that can inhibit their learning, including engaging in NCEA with their peers. Students then struggle to find their place, needing to be in classes above and below their peers in various areas. Schools work hard to identify these academic gaps and address curriculum areas that require development; however, this process can be streamlined.

“With maths, I hated it except algebra. I was good at that... at [secondary school] I was very lost. The maths teacher had favourites. I started to not pay attention and fell behind... Science was very good as well. At [secondary school] he knew about Gloriavale, he decided to give me an easier level of science than what they were doing. That really helped.” [Student]

“A lot don’t understand the lack of education you get in there. So I think having an understanding of that. It’s huge, it’s a huge jump. A whole new world you’ve come into... Things like algebra, trig, I don’t know if the boys got taught that, it was all new to me.”
[Student]

This could be in the form of a standardised test or list of competencies that would allow schools to assess Gloriavale leavers upon entering the school and quickly identify gaps in knowledge. This would greatly assist schools in developing Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) to address needs and catch students up academically. A liaison staff member would help to administer tests/questionnaires and report back to schools and families.

“Probably having alone time with the teacher to teach them and see where they are at”
[Student]

There may also be cases of undiagnosed dyslexia and other learning difficulties due to a lack of acknowledgement of this in Gloriavale. Having left the community, students may be better supported once these difficulties are identified and acknowledged.

Recommendation 8: A bridging integration course could be developed to be administered by schools to support developing academic and social capabilities.

A bridging transitional course would enable Gloriavale leavers to catch up in areas they have not adequately developed at Gloriavale School. This could focus on core curriculum gaps common across Gloriavale leavers as well as social skills that are underdeveloped in most Gloriavale leavers. This would act as a bridge between Gloriavale School and mainstream school, considering what Gloriavale leavers need to know to fit in and learn with similar-aged peers. This could consider a component of parent education, including them in learning about social norms and behaviours appropriate for life outside of Gloriavale and supporting their children’s education.

“The Social skills side is the biggest challenge.”

“3 months, 6 months, whatever is needed. A teaching programme for the culture of the school, what different words mean, something that could be half a day session and parents could go and learn as well. You’re all on the same learning level. The programme would be focused on social behaviour a lot.” [Parent]

Home Schooling Support

Home schooling is common among Gloriavale leavers. There are several reasons for this. This includes parents not feeling comfortable sending their children to mainstream schools, not trusting that their values will align with their own or that they don't trust their child being in a mainstream school environment (such as with much older students or with the opposite sex).

"Coming out of Gloriavale you're fearful, so that's your only option." [Parent]

*"Worried about the influences in other schools. That's all you've heard your entire life."
[Parent]*

"We didn't want a co-ed school. It was personal preference for us, boy-girl relationship thing. It has been a very strong point with our family, we don't actually want our boys and girls mixing in high school." [Parent]

Some leavers also described feeling pressure to home school because other leavers had done it, or were doing it successfully.

*"I was surrounded by all these awesome home schoolers... so I thought I should be home schooling. I failed miserably at it. I tried home schooling for 8 or 9 months, I thought that I should be doing it. My kids ended up hating school and I ended up hating every single day."
[Parent]*

They may, however, be overconfident in their ability to deliver effective home schooling, balancing being a full-time parent as well as a full-time teacher to (often) multiple children. In Gloriavale, parents have little engagement with education, and parenting is largely a collective responsibility in the community. Balancing these two roles with less experience can be very overwhelming for leavers. Parents raised in Gloriavale themselves will also have limited educational experience and thus may not feel equipped to teach material they did not learn themselves (e.g. algebra or trigonometry).

"Coming from Gloriavale there's a challenge. I'm teaching kids things I didn't know from own schooling." [Parent]

Recommendation 9: Gloriavale leavers who opt for home schooling could receive additional financial support packages to ensure they are well-resourced for their specific needs

Gloriavale leavers who opt for home schooling are eligible for the home education supervision allowance. While extra money is available for additional children, this number decreases with each additional child.

The annual total paid per child is as follows:⁴

- first child \$743.00
- second child \$632.00
- third child \$521.00
- subsequent children \$372.00

⁴ This information is available at <https://parents.education.govt.nz/primary-school/schooling-in-nz/home-education/>

Families from Gloriavale tend to have large families, thus 4 or more school-aged would be common. Each child needs expensive resources and devices. A child new to education will need a device to learn on and access materials, books, and stationery, which can cost a significant amount of money, particularly as families establish themselves in home schooling. Financial stress can be significant and this means can some children may go without.

“The costs can add up quickly. The home school allowance is quite minimal especially because it’s a certain amount for first, second, and third child, and subsequent children are a certain amount. If you started home schooling right from your first child you wouldn’t feel the pinch so much, but when you’re jumping in with 6 or 7 children... it’s actually quite hard.”

[Parent]

Recommendation 10: Gloriavale leavers could receive a special allowance for technology and connectivity.

A significant amount of financial stress may be alleviated by ensuring that Gloriavale leavers are equipped with Chromebooks or similar for each school-aged child, and potentially assisted in paying for an internet connection to ensure that they are equipped for education early.

The above home education supervision allowance could also be adjusted to help Gloriavale leavers with immediate costs of obtaining learning devices. This may be assessed on a case-by-case basis considering the needs of families. This could either be supplying devices and connections or providing the money for families to do this themselves.

Recommendation 11: Gloriavale leavers should be connected with an in-home mentor to provide support for parents engaging in home schooling.

As earlier discussed, a mentor in schools can help students in the school setting adjust to mainstream education, focusing more on the social and pastoral needs of students. A mentor could also work within the home to support parents with home-schooling, providing support and guidance to families new to home schooling and who might be juggling multiple responsibilities as well as an adjustment to life outside of Gloriavale.

The mentor would be instrumental in supporting parents to deliver the New Zealand curriculum at home while also supporting the pastoral needs of students and caring for the wellbeing of the parents in an educational setting. Parents describe feeling overwhelmed and feeling that someone to provide some support in home schooling environments, even if just to help relieve stress.

Support would cater to the unique needs of families so could be once per week or fortnight, or multiple times per week for families that are struggling. A mentor could also help in the detection of learning difficulties such as dyslexia and provide support to those families.

School Network Options

Interview participants were asked about potential ways that education could be innovatively structured to support Gloriavale leavers, including the potential of dual enrolments with students at Timaru Christian School and other mainstream education, or with Te Kura for a portion of distance learning on top of mainstream education.

While these options are viable, it's important to note that Gloriavale leavers are not a homogenous group. They have different priorities for education, different experiences, varying levels of trauma, different values, and different family situations. While one option will not fit all, having options available may allow for some unique situations to be better catered for by existing schools while allowing for flexibility in delivery.

Largely, across the interviews, participants did not offer a lot in terms of innovative new ways of structuring schools, but this will largely be from a lack of information on how this would operate and how it could benefit some situations. With mainstream school being a difficult space to navigate as a Gloriavale leaver, the concept of dual enrolments can seem daunting and add an extra element of confusion to decision-making. While more opportunities may be afforded, parents may experience decision fatigue if too many educational options are available, all requiring research into cost and logistics etc.

The concept of dual enrolment with Timaru Christian School and other mainstream school(s) was less popular. While Christian education is important to some, knowing that secular school values often align with Christian values can be enough for some families with strong Christian values. For those who believe a Christian school is essential, dual enrolment may not be a desirable outcome as this could involve travel between two schools that could inhibit integration without necessarily adding a strong component of religious education.

"We found problems with that. If they go into a classroom of their own, do they integrate? They don't really, they fall back on the friendships they already have. With Christian School, once other Gloriavale came they congregated together and stopped assimilating with the group." [Parent]

"I don't know how that would work. Best way to be integrated is to be immersed. Without that, integration would be harder." [Principal]

"Christian vs non Christian one day a week is not going to do anything for relationships. What is the purpose of that transition?" [Principal]

Recommendation 12: Te Kura application could be streamlined for Gloriavale leavers, including options for dual enrolment with mainstream schools.

In examining some of the feedback from parents, it would appear that a hybrid model of combining Te Kura distance learning with mainstream education may benefit as a temporary option for some families who are transitioning into mainstream education and needing some support around this transition period. As previously discussed, a transition period into schools was viewed positively by some as it would allow students to slowly be integrated into schools under controlled environments a few times a week. Through being assisted with dual enrolment in Te Kura and mainstream education, families may experience both at-home distance learning and integration into mainstream school that suits the family's needs.

"I have friends and family who do Te Kura. They're fine with that. You get your assignments and you deliver in your own time. They're lucky. I didn't get that, I didn't know about it until [high school]." [Student]

Gloriavale leavers may be able to access Te Kura under a couple of different conditions. They may live remotely (3.0km walking distance from a year 1-8 school, or 4.8km walking distance from a secondary school) or may gain entry under psychological or psycho-social grounds. Typically, this requires a referral from a Ministry of Education Psychologist and the referral would detail the supervision arrangements for study under Te Kura and detail how psychological and/or psycho-social needs will be addressed. Psychological and psycho-social grounds should be of a sufficient severity to prevent the student from attending an otherwise reasonably convenient school. There may also be referrals from Oranga Tamariki or Corrections, but this has not yet been applicable to Gloriavale leavers.

The referral process could be simplified for Gloriavale leavers to ensure that Te Kura is a viable option for families seeking distance learning or dual enrolment options for their children and that Te Kura is responsive to the unique needs of these families. The psycho-social option for enrolment in Te Kura is appropriate for Gloriavale families, but waiting to be connected to a Ministry Psychologist could make the enrolment process too slow or unresponsive and be damaging to families who need immediate educational support or not coping in full time mainstream education.

Recommendation 13: Te Kura staff should receive targeted PLD on the needs of Gloriavale Learners.

Te Kura may not be aware of the unique needs of Gloriavale leavers. This includes the needs for structured environments as distance learning may be an entirely new experience for students. Targeted PLD would ensure that staff responsible for Gloriavale leavers are aware of their presenting needs and allow them to provide education that keeps them engaged.

Mitigation

It is the view of the GLST as well as some Gloriavale leavers that more families are likely to leave the closed community at a rate higher than previously observed. Should the community experience an exodus of families in the coming years, the South Canterbury educational network may not be equipped to cope with the number of students and families requiring support. As such, accommodating large numbers of Gloriavale leavers could be particularly challenging for schools and communities that typically have dealt with smaller numbers at any given time.

“People could leave in droves at some point. Having some contingency plans in place for if this happens, how are we going to support these people?”

“It goes from 1’s or 2’s to 50’s or 100’s, it’s very different... It would take a while for us to get our heads around it.” [Principal]

“Supporting the potential size of what could happen. It’s easy to deal with one or two, but what about 50?” [Parent]

Recommendation 14: Roll caps in South Canterbury Schools could be assessed for potential additional Gloriavale leavers.

While Gloriavale leavers may go to schools outside of South Canterbury, this area is where most are concentrated upon leaving the community. Should large groups leave at once or within a short timeframe, they could exhaust school roll caps or property provision. These should be assessed given the current population of Gloriavale and the potential for 50% or more of the community to leave. Where the network is not able to accommodate more Gloriavale leavers, school master planning should address increased numbers of families entering the area and space available at these schools.

“We’re doing a roll return now... If we have [a certain number] displaced out of Gloriavale, that’s a different level of support that’s needed.” [Principal]

“If I have 30 people turn up on my door and they’re all in zone, I can’t say no. Then all of the sudden, what does that actually look like? What does that look like for the classroom teacher and their knowledge and experience?”

Recommendation 15: Gloriavale leavers support should be mobilised across the country, recognising that leavers often move beyond South Canterbury.

South Canterbury is a common place of interest for families leaving Gloriavale as there is a support network present in Timaru from past leavers and the Gloriavale Leavers Support Trust. This region is also known for farming, which is viable work for experienced Gloriavale leavers. While this report has focused on the educational network in South Canterbury, leavers do extend to other regions, some going to Christchurch or other areas.

“A bulk of leavers might not stay in Timaru. More are moving to Christchurch and other places.” [Principal]

The recommendations in this report could also be applied on a national level, including having liaison people and educational mentors who work in other regions or can be readily mobilised to these other areas.

Conclusion

Gloriavale leavers experience a high degree of trauma and present with significant academic, emotional, psychological, social, and behavioural issues that can significantly affect their educational experience. The South Canterbury region is the most common place for leavers to move to after leaving the closed community, but this is not where they necessarily permanently reside after leaving and many treat this as a stepping stone before moving elsewhere.

This report has summarised some of the main findings from interviews with Gloriavale leavers, including parents and children, and Principals of schools in the South Canterbury region who have/had Gloriavale leavers (or could have them in the future). The educational needs of leavers were assessed, with less focus on the psychological aspects and greater attention paid to how education can be more accessible and have better outcomes for students who had left Gloriavale.

In particular, the transition process from Gloriavale to mainstream school or home schooling is particularly challenging for Gloriavale leavers considering the urgency placed on them getting children into education and other challenges they face with housing and transport. Gloriavale leavers had complex social backgrounds that make fitting in and integrating especially challenging. This creates a strong case for the Ministry to support families to integrate through aiding the transition process in ways that cater to the unique needs of leavers. While there are commonalities among Gloriavale leavers, they are not a homogenous group, and educational supports need to consider how best to support them without applying a one-size-fits-all approach. We recommend specific roles and supports that may benefit families transition to mainstream school over an extended time frame, assisting not only in physical access and enrolment, but in addressing academic, social, emotional, and behavioural needs.

Gloriavale leavers also present several academic gaps, and when entering mainstream schools, children and parents quickly realise that their education at Gloriavale School has excluded many fundamental areas. This includes digital technologies that children are not exposed to. Additional support is required to assist students to address these gaps, including those being home schooled by parents from Gloriavale.

The Ministry offered network options such as dual enrolments to support families with strongly held values and beliefs that might not be congruent with schools available to them. While dual enrolment with Timaru Christian School and other secular schools might not adequately address the needs of Gloriavale leavers, dual enrolment with Te Kura may offer some reprise for those slowly transitioning into mainstream school, balancing distance learning with mainstream schools.

The recommendations in this report address the needs identified by the people interviewed, largely in the South Canterbury region. Consideration needs to be given to how other regions may be supported to host Gloriavale leavers. It is also important that the Ministry considers mitigating an exodus of Gloriavale families. Should this occur, schools in South Canterbury may be overwhelmed and a greater network of support will be necessary.

Compiled Recommendations

- Recommendation 1: Gloriavale leavers require a 'resetting period', which is 3 - 6 months or longer while they adjust.
- Recommendation 2: Gloriavale Leavers should be connected with a dedicated Ministry of Education Liaison Person.
- Recommendation 3: A Mentor should be appointed to schools with new Gloriavale Leavers (regardless of whether the school has experience with leavers or not).
- Recommendation 4: Transitional periods may be adopted on a case-by-case basis to assist students to transition to a new school.
- Recommendation 5: School teachers require PLD specific to the academic, pastoral, and social needs of Gloriavale leavers.
- Recommendation 6: Consideration could be given to providing schools with funding support similar to refugee support (ESOL funds) to assist in transitioning Gloriavale leavers to mainstream education.
- Recommendation 7: A standardised test/questionnaire should be created to identify knowledge and competency gaps and develop IEPs.
- Recommendation 8: A bridging integration course should be developed to be administered by schools to support developing academic and social capabilities.
- Recommendation 9: Gloriavale leavers who opt for home schooling could receive additional financial support packages to ensure they are well-resourced for their specific needs.
- Recommendation 10: Gloriavale leavers could receive a special allowance for technology and connectivity.
- Recommendation 11: Gloriavale leavers should be connected with an in-home mentor to provide support for parents engaging in home schooling.
- Recommendation 12: Te Kura application could be streamlined for Gloriavale leavers, including options for dual enrolment with mainstream schools.
- Recommendation 13: Te Kura staff should receive targeted PLD on the needs of Gloriavale Learners.
- Recommendation 14: Roll caps in South Canterbury Schools should be assessed for potential additional Gloriavale leavers.
- Recommendation 15: Gloriavale leavers support should be mobilised across the country, recognising that leavers often move beyond South Canterbury.