



## DISCUSSION DOCUMENT: Priority Learners for Partnership Schools

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<b>To:</b>	Mr David Seymour MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Education		
<b>Copy to:</b>	Hon Hekia Parata, Minister of Education,		
<b>Approved by:</b>	Karl Le Quesne, Associate Deputy Secretary, Early Learning and Student Achievement	<b>DDI:</b>	<span style="background-color: black; color: black;">[REDACTED]</span> s 9(2)(a) OIA

### Purpose

1. As set out in your work programme, this discussion document provides information on the current definition and measures in relation to priority learners as referred to in the Partnership Schools I Kura Hourua (Partnership Schools) standard form contract, and we provide possible options for refining the definition and/or measures.
2. The options discussed below only involve making changes to how the priority learner performance standard for Partnership Schools operates. The discussed options therefore have no direct impact on the state schooling system, or on other Government education initiatives.
3. The briefing note discusses three possible options:
  - a. improving the methods for identifying students of low socio-economic status (low SES)
  - b. adding to the definition of priority learners, a new category of 'at risk' students which would align with the Government's social investment approach
  - c. altering the performance management system to require that 75% of students enrolled in a Partnership School are students who have experienced educational disadvantage. This would include priority learners, but could also include students who have been subject to disciplinary proceedings, have a history of poor school attendance or have been unsuccessful in prior education.

### Background

4. In July 2012, Cabinet agreed to establish Partnership Schools as a new option for delivering education, targeted at educational underachievement in disadvantaged areas [CAB Min (12) 26/6 refers].

5. The Minister of Education agreed to a Performance Management System that included a requirement that 75 percent of enrolments be priority learners (METIS 809215 refers).<sup>1</sup> This performance standard is reflected in the Partnership School contracts, which the schools report on quarterly.
6. Section three of the Education Act 1989 provides that every person who is not an international student is entitled to enrolment at any state school or Partnership School between the person's fifth and nineteenth birthday. This means that a Partnership School must accept the enrolment of a student whether or not that student is a priority learner. The expectation is that Partnership Schools will rely on other strategies, such as marketing campaigns, to meet the priority learner performance standard (METIS 809215 refers).
7. Some sponsors have raised concerns about reconciling the legislative requirement of open enrolment with the performance standard of at least 75 percent priority learners. The Minister of Education considered this matter and informed Cabinet in 2015 that she did not intend to change the priority learners performance standard. The performance standard was seen to provide an important signal to sponsors that Partnership Schools are intended to meet the needs of priority learners. She asked the Ministry to provide more guidance around the definition of priority learners [CAB (15) 364 refers].

#### **Status quo – current definition and measures of priority learners**

8. The Ministry currently provides guidance to Partnership Schools on the definition and acceptable measures of priority learners for contract reporting purposes. Partnership Schools identify priority students through information in ENROL.<sup>2</sup> It is relatively clear how to determine three of the four priority learner groups for enrolment purposes:
  - **Māori and Pasifika**; ethnicity is captured using ENROL as students self-identify when enrolling.
  - **Learners with special education needs**; currently defined as students in the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme; the Intensive Wrap-around Service; and the High Health Needs Fund provided through Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (METIS 809215). These students are the ones in most need of intensive and/or ongoing learning support.<sup>3</sup>
9. However, determining whether a learner is from a **low SES background**, the fourth priority learner group, has been more challenging. This is a matter of concern for at least one sponsor.

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<sup>1</sup> These were defined as Māori, Pasifika, students with special education needs and students from low SES backgrounds.

<sup>2</sup> All schools, including Partnership Schools, must use ENROL - a register of student enrolments. It lets schools update enrolment information as students enrol, change schools or leave the school system.

<sup>3</sup> A Learning Support Update is currently underway. It includes a broader understanding of support through more flexible responses, rather than a system based on criteria. As the Update progresses, we may need to ensure that there is alignment between the results of that Update and definitions of learners with special education needs in the Partnership Schools context.

10. To date, guidance given to help with identifying learners from a low SES background has included the following methods:
- a. **Previous school method.** If the student has attended another state school in the previous three years, and if that school is decile 1-3, then the student can count as from a low SES background (this is restricted to three years because families may move as their circumstances change), or
  - b. **Nearest school method.** Identify the closest state school that is not a school of choice (i.e., not an integrated or section 155/156 school) to a student's address. If it is decile 1-3, the student can be counted as coming from a low SES background.
11. We understand that most schools that are identifying learners from low SES backgrounds to meet the priority learners performance standard are using the previous school method. However, this method cannot be used for students who have not previously attended school.
12. The disadvantage of the nearest school method is that living in proximity to a particular school is not a reliable indicator of the student's socio-economic status. For example, the student may be unable to enrol at the school nearest to their home because they are outside the enrolment zone for that school.

#### **Possible additional measures for identifying learners from a low SES background**

13. To address the shortcomings of the two existing measures of low SES identified above, the Ministry could add one or more of the options below to the list of acceptable measures that can be used to meet the priority learner performance standard. This information could be collected from parents/caregivers when enrolling their child.
14. The options we have identified are:
- a. **Eligibility for community services card.** This is an established indicator of whether a family is low to middle-income. To get a community services card an individual must be aged 18 years or over (some 16 to 17 year olds may also get it) and on a low to middle-income.<sup>4</sup> When enrolling their child in a Partnership School, parents/caregivers could be asked whether they hold a community services card. They could be informed that providing the information to the school was entirely voluntary.
  - b. **Address matching.** For the purposes of defining learners from a low SES background it may be possible to assign a deprivation index meshblock<sup>5</sup> to an individual learner. The measure for low SES background would be those learners residing at locations classified as 8-10<sup>6</sup>. The school could, by using publicly available information, match the student's address with the relevant meshblock.

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<sup>4</sup> Currently, for a family of three, the income limit is \$59,743.

<sup>5</sup> Note: Statistics New Zealand gives us confidential access to Census data, and which is currently used to calculate decile ratings. The Ministry cannot identify individuals from Census data relating to decile calculations. We extract information from each meshblock, but only from households with school-aged children.

<sup>6</sup> Note: This is the reverse of the decile rating system where a rating of 1 is the most deprived.

15. The advantage of the eligibility for community services card measure over address matching is that it would involve very little extra cost for a school to implement. The disadvantage of this mechanism is that parents might consider the school's request for card holding information an infringement of their privacy. Furthermore, it may be the case that some parents that are eligible for a community services card have not applied for and do not hold one.
16. Address matching would not infringe parents' privacy in the same way (addresses are provided to schools routinely in a way income information is not). However, the matching would constitute an extra administrative hurdle for schools.

### **Adding a risk-based group**

17. Since the model was first established there has been a shift in emphasis, as part of the Government's social investment approach, from those students who are not well-served by the current education system to students who are *at risk* of educational underachievement.
18. The Review of Funding Systems currently underway has identified that the decile mechanism used for funding state schools does not accurately target resources to those children and young people who are most at risk of educational under-achievement. The outcomes of that review could provide further guidance on how to best target those at risk of educational under-achievement.
19. A risk-based mechanism is being used in the Budget 2016 initiative to direct an extra \$43.2 million, in the form of an operational grant increase, to schools with students at risk of not achieving. These students will be identified as those students whose parents have been on benefits for 75 percent of the first five years, or 75 percent of the most recent five years of the students' lives. Partnership Schools could have been considered for that initiative, had the contracts not specified another annual process for adjusting the operational funding (teaching and operating rate only).
20. It would be possible to extend the definition of priority learners to include a risk-based group similar to the one used for the operational grant increase, for enrolment at Partnership Schools. This group would be a fifth group of priority learners.
21. The annual data-matching with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) that will be undertaken for the operational grant increase could be used by the Ministry of Education to determine this group of priority learners at Partnership Schools. Any students from this group who are enrolled at a Partnership School could then be counted alongside the current priority learner groups for determining whether or not a school had met the performance standard for priority learners.
22. Data matching for the purposes of the targeted operational grant increase for state schools has now been completed, so it might be possible to provide information on numbers of students enrolled in Partnership Schools who have been matched by MSD to long term benefit receipt data.

**Altering the performance standard so that 75 per cent of students enrolled must be students who have previously experienced educational disadvantage**

23. It would be possible to alter the Performance Management System for Partnership Schools to extend the priority learner criteria to recognise other groups of students who have experienced disadvantage. These learner groups could include:
- students with a high rate of unjustified absences at school
  - students who have been subject to stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions
  - students who have been unsuccessful in prior education.
24. These potential changes would only benefit Partnership Schools that were enrolling disadvantaged students who had already attended school. Extending the focus in the performance management system may lead to criticism from the state schooling sector that performance criteria for Partnership Schools were being watered down.
25. However, our advice is that broadening the current performance management system to include some or all of the above measures would be consistent with the original methodology used when we designed the current performance management system. Therefore these additions would be indicative of continual improvement and refinement as new or better measures can be identified.

*Students with a high rate of unjustified absence at school*

26. Attendance is an important factor influencing student achievement in school. A New Zealand study (Hughes, 1999) found student attendance during Year 11 to be one of the most significant variables influencing student achievement in senior secondary school. Furthermore, longitudinal studies of Christchurch and Dunedin children have found non-attendance at school to be a strong predictor of other negative social outcomes including violence later in life, crime, substance abuse, suicidal risk and unemployment.
27. Given the positive correlation between regular attendance at school and student achievement, a case could be made that students with a high rate of unjustified absence have experienced educational disadvantage.
28. This option would create practical difficulties. In particular, it would be difficult for a Partnership School to acquire student attendance information from previous schools. One possible approach for acquiring this information would be for the Ministry, with permission from parents, to provide it to the Partnership School. However, because the Ministry does not hold individual level data on student attendance over multiple years, the Ministry would probably need to exercise its information request powers under s144A of the Education Act 1989. This would mean that the Ministry would become involved in collecting data towards a Partnership School's performance standard.
29. Another possibility would be for the Partnership School, on enrolment, to ask permission of parents/caregivers to request this information from their previous school. Parents/caregivers would be informed that providing this information to the Partnership School is voluntary and would not be used for any other purpose than assessing whether the school is meeting its contractual obligations; it

would not be a relevant consideration in determining whether or not a student would be enrolled in the school. Under this option, the onus for collecting the data would rest with the Sponsor of a Partnership School. It is difficult to recommend this option as it would have to be effected by varying Sponsors' agreements. However, because the change would allow sponsors to enrol a broader population of students it would have benefits for those who agreed to take it up.

*Students that have been subject to stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions*

30. Stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions provide indications of where students are not engaged in learning. These are the students that may benefit most from the innovative approaches offered by Partnership Schools.
31. As with information on unjustified absences, it might be difficult for a Partnership School to acquire this information about a new student. Currently, schools are only required to report on the exclusions and expulsions of individual students to the Ministry.
32. However, as with unjustified absences, it would be possible for the Partnership School to ask parents/caregivers of prospective students for permission to get information from the student's prior school about how often that student had been subject to one of these mechanisms.

*Students unsuccessful in prior education*

33. Students who have been unsuccessful in prior education might also benefit from attending a Partnership School. This might be measured by assessing how well an individual student has achieved against National Standards or in National Certificate of Educational Achievement.
34. The Ministry does not hold this information on individual students. Again, it would be possible for Partnership Schools, with permission from parents/caregivers, to ask this information of the student's prior school. This option would also require that a certain level of achievement against some standard count as 'successful' and a certain level of achievement count as 'unsuccessful'. This criterion would be difficult to establish.
35. In the three options above relating to educational disadvantage, it is possible that the state schools may choose not to provide the requested information to a Partnership School.

## Conclusion

36. There are several ways that the performance management system for could be refined to better reflect the full range of students who might benefit from Partnership Schools.
37. One way of doing this would be to add to the accepted measures used to determine whether or not a student is from a low SES background. We would welcome your feedback on the two options in this note: asking parents/caregivers upon enrolment if they have a community services card, and/or undertaking address matching to the housing deprivation index.
38. Another group of learners that could be included as a population focus for Partnership Schools is an 'at risk' group, similar to the criterion that is to be used for the state school targeted operational grant increase for 2017. This group would capture some of the same students as the other priority groups, such as low SES. However, the groups would not be identical.
39. Another option would be to extend the performance standard for Partnership Schools to allow inclusion within the 75 per cent priority student obligation those students who have experienced prior educational disadvantage. This could include:
  - students with a high rate of unjustified absences at school
  - students who have been subject to stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions
  - students who have been unsuccessful in prior education.
40. Changing the population focus or how we measure priority learners to include students who are 'at risk', or students who experience educational disadvantage more generally would not require changing the current performance standard of 75 per cent. Such a change can be made through variations to Partnership Schools' contracts. As discussed, because the change would allow sponsors to enrol a broader population of students it would have benefit to those sponsors who agreed to take it up.
41. Altering the performance standard for enrolment in Partnership Schools would not have any immediate impact on funding for Partnership Schools. However, if the change results in increased enrolments in Partnership Schools, the fiscal risk is manageable in the medium term because Partnership Schools can only grow to their maximum roll.

## Next steps

42. We would like to discuss the information and options in this paper with you to gain your feedback and determine next steps.