



Briefing Note: Speech Notes for Quarterly RERG Meeting

To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	25 August 2022	Priority:	Medium
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1293687
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Messaging seen by Communications team:	Yes	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

This report provides you with background context and speech notes to support your upcoming attendance at the quarterly Rural Education Reference Group (RERG) meeting on 29 August 2022, as requested by your office.

Background

- The New Zealand Principals' Federation is hosting the quarterly Rural Education Reference Group (RERG) meeting on 29 August at 11.15am.
- New Zealand School Trustees Association (the secretary for the group) has arranged for you to attend and speak.
- The RERG meet regularly to discuss matters of concern to them regarding rural education. For example, at the last meeting, two items discussed were not having seatbelts on school busses and flooding risks due to climate change. There is usually no formal agenda.
- The meeting will be held at Level 8, the Bayleys Building, 36 Brandon Street, Wellington.
- You will be introduced and thanked by Eugene Dupu, the Chair of the RERG.
- Twelve other attendees have been invited. These are Eugene Dupu (NZSTA) (Chair), Emma Holmes (NZSTA) (Secretary), Jane Corcoran (NZEI), Kylee Houpapa (PPTA), Wayne Langford (Federated Farmers), Michael Waller (PPTA), Nicola Anderson (Te Kura), Gill Naylor (RWNZ), Kevin Shore (NZCEO/APIS), Jean McCombie (REAPANZ), Karen Brisco (NZPF) and Angela McLeod (RWNZ)
- The RERG have requested that you speak to the latest updates in your education portfolios, as they relate to rural education, and to speak from a more personal perspective.

To support the first part of this request, we have provided information about the following topics:

- The Attendance and Engagement Strategy
- Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches Programme
- Counsellors in Schools
- Boarding Allowances
- Additional Funding for Alternative Education Provision
- Planning for School Roll Declines
- Opportunities for Students in Schools with Smaller Rolls
- Improving Classrooms in Small or Remote Schools
- Climate Proofing School Properties
- Drinking Water
- The Isolation Index

Proactive Release

- a **agree** that the Ministry of Education release this briefing in full once it has been considered by you and the meeting has occurred.

☒ **Agree** / Disagree



Tipene Chrisp
Group Manager
Te Puna Kaupapahere

25/08/2022



Hon Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education

27/08/2022

Relevant work underway within your Education Portfolios

The Attendance and Engagement Strategy

- The Attendance and Engagement Strategy (the Strategy) has been developed to respond to the decade-long decline in regular attendance and engagement in schools.
- The Strategy was launched in June, and last week you joined students, teachers, parents and principals to help launch a nationwide school attendance campaign - Every School Day is a Big Day.
- A Regional Response Fund of \$40 million over four years has been established through Budget 2022 to meet local education needs, with a strong initial focus on ensuring ākonga are going to school and are engaged in their learning.
- The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) has allocated the \$10m per annum regional response fund (RRF) for 2022/23.
- Te Mahau staff are currently working with their communities and education sector to understand priorities for local investment using this fund.
- As the RRF is at the engagement stage in the regions, no institutions have yet received funding.
- The RRF will be used to fund evidence-based local solutions that are developed by those who know their school communities best and can respond to their needs.
- At a regional level, the Strategy guides the use of the RRF.

Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches Programme

- Cabinet agreed in April 2019 to pilot a phased school lunch programme for students in selected schools through Vote Education. The programme was expanded through the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund to cover 25% of students in schools and kura facing the greatest socio-economic barriers, including those in rural areas.
- As at the end of June 2022, Ka Ora, Ka Ako is reaching 950 schools and kura with over 220,000 ākonga, providing around one million lunches per week. Approximately 39% of students receiving Ka Ora, Ka Ako lunches identify as Māori and 22% identify as Pacific.
- The initiative supports child and youth wellbeing in several ways, including by:
 - reducing food insecurity among children from low-income households
 - reducing household and child material hardship and the manifestations of, and stigma associated with poverty
 - improving diet and nutrition, contributing to improved short and long-term health outcomes (for example reduced obesity, reduced micronutrient deficiency), and
 - improving education outcomes (such as improved attendance, engagement, behaviour, concentration and cognitive functioning and measured educational attainment).
- The programme is being designed to ensure increased employment opportunities and growth for local economies, particularly in regional and rural areas. As at the end of June 2022, Ka Ora, Ka Ako has created or retained over 2,300 local employment opportunities.

Counsellors in Schools

- Counselling in Schools (CiS) is in an implementation phase in 8 regions and at 164 selected schools. This includes support to rural schools. This has provided the Ministry with the opportunity to provide community-based counselling services at selected primary, intermediate and some smaller secondary school who previously did not have this service available to them.
- Implementation of CiS has been affected by several factors including the limited number of counsellors available, Covid lockdowns and the returning to school post these lockdowns.
- To support an increased number of counselling providers in harder to reach regions the Ministry has introduced a direct sourcing model to enable smaller, local, and culturally appropriate counselling providers to offer their services in these harder to reach areas.
- Examples:
 - 22 Te Tai Tokerau schools currently receiving service under CiS are designated as rural schools. The ākonga in these schools have received a total of 1,344.5 hours counselling in 2022 so far. Work is being done to expand counselling delivery through a direct sourcing approach to enable a broader reach than the schools and service that were initially selected for support.
 - The Hawkes Bay/Tairāwhiti education region has engaged small, local community based providers who can offer a wide range of therapeutic approaches. This is enabling service to be delivered in more rural parts of the region. Developing relationships has been key to the service building within schools. Anecdotally we have received positive feedback on the support provided.
 - Despite delays in service to rural schools in in Taranaki, Whanganui, Manawatu region, the Ministry is close to finalising contracts with local providers to support the Ōpunake school community.

Boarding Allowances

- The Access Barrier Boarding Allowance supports geographically remote ākonga, such as those living rurally or on offshore islands, where there is no local secondary school. 2097 ākonga currently receive the Access Barrier Boarding Allowance.
- Boarding Allowance funding rates are currently \$3,200 for Access and \$7,500 (including a \$500 extra assistance payment) for Multiple Barrier Boarding Allowances which supports ākonga with multiple barriers to attending their local school.
- Budget 22 increased both allowances by 8%. From 2023, rates will increase to \$3,560 for Access and \$8,100 (\$540 for extra assistance) for Multiple Barriers Allowances.
- Federated Farmers have often promoted an increase in the access allowance, concerned that it has not kept up with rising costs. A petition was also put through from a student on Great Barrier Island, advocating for an increase in the access barrier amount.

Additional Funding for Alternative Education Provision

- Additional funding of over \$2.2million was sourced through Budget 2022 to fund a 2.75% increase to the per place cost of Alternative Education provision, for 1,888 places, effective from 1 January 2023. New Alternative Education contracts with revised delivery

requirements will also come into effect from January 2023, to coincide with the new funding.

- Funding can be used flexibly by providers to help to meet the costs of essential resources and supports, such as access to quality teaching and learning experiences; learning resources; access to health, mental health and broader social services; enrichment activities; transport costs; and other basic wellbeing needs.

Planning for School Roll Declines

- The Ministry plans not just for new capacity in areas of growth, but also for supporting equity and appropriate provision in areas where we know there is population decline. Our 119 Education Network Plans that make up the National Education Network Plan (NENP) provide for catchment planning and provision across the motu.
- Nine catchments in the NENP have school aged populations that are expected to decline over the next 10 years (Hokianga Kaikohe, Taumarunui, North Taranaki, Coastal Taranaki, Ruapehu, Rangitikei, Tairāwhiti East Coast, Wairoa and Buller). They also identify potential responses to ensure local students have access to inclusive, quality education.
- In addition to these 9 catchments, there are also areas where population is not in decline, but where individual school rolls may be declining for a variety of reasons.
- We know that we have around 80 state schools with rolls of 20 or less (July 2021). However, not all of these are declining – many are small rural schools with stable rolls.
- Schools with declining rolls can have a range of challenges, for example with governance (attracting enough people to form a board), finances, attracting and retaining suitable staff, and offering a varied curriculum for their students. Sometimes the community lose confidence in the school and by-pass it to attend another school, which leads to lower support for the small school.
- The Ministry has helped schools in the past by supplying emergency staffing (including principals), governance support, and financial advice. We are also able to share our roll data and projections for the area and have discussions with the board about what they see as the future of the school. We support boards to have these conversations with their community.

Opportunities for Students in Schools with Smaller Rolls

- Smaller rolls result in limited operational funding. This may result in fewer curriculum and extra-curricular options being provided compared to bigger schools. Where schools have financial concerns they can contact their Ministry Financial Adviser, who will help support with budgeting, prioritising and expenditure.
- Parents with children at schools with low rolls often raise concerns that their children are not getting the same socialising opportunities as children in larger schools. Socialising with peers is a key part of the schooling experience. Anecdotally this reason has been given by some parents when choosing to bypass a smaller local school and send their children to a larger school.
- The Ministry has worked with boards to suggest working with other schools to share extra-curricular activities. This is often supported where schools are part of Kāhui Ako and support each other in a range of areas. Virtual classroom options may also be a solution, particularly for some senior subjects.

Relevant Work happening outside of your Portfolios

Improving Classrooms in Small or Remote Schools

- The Ngā Iti Kahurangi project focuses on ensuring that small and remote schools have quality learning environments.
- The programme acknowledges that these schools have unique challenges engaging contractors and having facilities maintained and upgraded.
- Through the programme we are improving lighting, acoustics, insulation and electrical safety at these schools. The project managers work with the schools to review their existing learning environments and undertake upgrade works in response. New carpet for primary schools is also being provided to learning spaces as part of this programme from 2023.
- The project includes 589 state schools and 44 state integrated schools and is expected to be completed by September 2024.

Climate-proofing School Properties

- New Zealand's coastline is a highly dynamic and unique environment, continuously evolving as it is subject to the forces of the sea and climate. Infrastructure situated in coastal areas is vulnerable to disruption and damage from these coastal threats. The Ministry oversees approximately 2,100 state schools across the country, many of which are located in coastal zones.
- The Ministry has completed an initial study to understand the extent of the risk and is developing a Coastal Management Plan. This work included the screening of the Ministry's schools to identify a list of schools that were 'likely' (103 schools) or 'unlikely' (2024 schools) to be exposed to coastal flood hazard now or in future.
- The subsequent activity gained a site-specific understanding of the nature of the hazard at a prioritised sample group of 10 schools 'likely' to be exposed to coastal hazards. That has enabled a range of coastal hazard management options to be considered and preliminary adaptive pathway for the 10 schools to be developed. The adaptive pathways are currently being costed and extrapolated to provide a programme high level costing.
- Programme scope currently exclusively relates to the hazard of coastal flooding. It is evident that a number of our schools are also susceptible to other sources of inundation due to their proximity to harbours and rivers. The next phase of this programme will see the scope extended to include other potential sources of inundation.

Drinking Water

- As part of the 3 Waters Review, new water supply regulatory standards and rules come into effect in mid-November 2022. These are in addition to new legislative requirements under the Water Services Act and revised National Policy Statements all aimed to protect human health and environmental standards. The Ministry and schools will need to comply with these, and we are working with the new water regulator, Taumata Arowai, on how we can transition to the new requirements.

- The Ministry currently has approximately 450 schools self-supplying water through either bore water, surface water, rainwater capture or a combination of these. There are also a small number of schools receiving water which does not meet the drinking water standards and so must treat and monitor their water supply. Based on a detailed assessment of 44 schools, the current physical infrastructure at the self-supplying schools will not meet the minimum standards under legislation to guarantee safe drinking water, and so upgrades will be required at impacted self-supply schools.
- The Ministry is currently developing a business case for the upgrade of high priority drinking water systems at these schools. The Ministry will keep schools informed through the usual channels as this work progresses.

The Isolation Index

- The Isolation Index, which was used to determine the relative isolation of schools and early learning services and provide extra support, is being updated to reflect changes in New Zealand over the last 20 years.
- New Zealand's geography means that schools and early learning services are widely dispersed, and some are long distances from towns. Isolation can mean that there are additional costs that schools face, e.g., it can be further for staff and students to travel, or additional costs for accessing trades and services. To recognise these additional costs, the Ministry provides additional funding to isolated schools so that they can operate and deliver the curriculum.

Annex 1: Speech notes for the quarterly RERG meeting