



Briefing Note: Update on delivery of Better Start Literacy Approach


To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

- **Note** recent progress on the delivery of the Better Start Literacy Approach (BSLA) professional support.
- **Agree** that Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga | The Ministry of Education release this briefing in full once it has been considered by you.

☒ **Agree** ☐ **Disagree**


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Hon Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education

17/02/2022

18/02/2022

Summary

- You have asked for an update on the delivery of BSLA, including its reach and early evidence of results.
- BSLA professional support is an integrated approach delivered to literacy specialists and teachers, with a focus on supporting children's literacy development in the first year of schooling. It is being introduced in a phased way through five application rounds from January 2021 to June 2023. Early findings are positive, showing statistically significant gains in learner achievement after ten weeks of BSLA teaching, and a decrease in the achievement gap.
- Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga | The Ministry of Education (Te Tāhuhu) is working to promote BSLA in regions with a high percentage of ākonga Māori and Pacific learners. If you like, we can arrange an opportunity to visit a school that has benefited from BSLA and discuss its impact with a leader, teacher, and/or parent and child.

Background

1. BSLA is an integrated approach to developing vocabulary, oral listening, spelling, writing and reading skills for English language in the first year of learning, utilising the Ready to Read Phonics Plus texts. Funded by Te Tāhuhu, it is delivered to across-school literacy specialists and teachers by Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha | The University of Canterbury. BSLA focuses on the link between spoken and written language, systematically supporting children's phonological and phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge and oral language.
2. BSLA professional support was developed in an Aotearoa New Zealand context by the University of Canterbury over a ten-year period and draws on international research. It was selected to trial with a diverse range of learners in 2019/20, through a contestable procurement process seeking innovative foundational learning approaches. It was subsequently selected for broader implementation in 2021 through a second public procurement process, following review of the impact of trials. All schools with new entrant and Year 1 learners will have the opportunity to take part in BSLA between 2021–2023.
3. BSLA is designed to complement existing approaches to teaching early literacy and build on current school and teaching practices. It leverages the expertise of across-school literacy specialists to support teachers to notice and respond to the literacy needs of each ākonga from the day they start school, and it includes resources for whānau to understand and support their children's literacy learning.
4. BSLA employs a two-tier delivery system, providing professional support for both literacy specialists employed in the sector and new entrant and Year 1 teachers. Literacy specialists provide in-class coaching to teachers while teachers undertake online learning with the University of Canterbury. This delivery model is designed to:
 - a. Offer explicit training in BSLA directly to teachers from the designers of BSLA, to increase learner achievement through fidelity to a structured approach to literacy;
 - b. Develop a cumulative impact as literacy specialists trained as BSLA facilitators provide in-class support to growing numbers of teachers, embedding changes to their teaching practice;
 - c. Provide support for the effective use of new Ready to Read Phonics Plus texts;

- d. Create a layer of expertise in a structured approach to literacy across the sector, to serve as a resource for teachers and schools and reduce reliance on a limited number of external experts; and
 - e. Use modern online learning to increase access and efficiency.
5. Online delivery allows many teachers to receive professional support at the same time creating momentum for change, especially when schools from the same Kāhui Ako, clusters and communities are participating.
 6. The online assessments that form part of BSLA identify learners who need additional support after only ten weeks of teaching. Appropriate Tier 2 BSLA approaches are identified for each learner and provided at this early stage of children's learning.
 7. BSLA is supported by ongoing research and evaluation by the University of Canterbury and an external evaluation commissioned by Te Tāhuhu. This research contributes to the knowledge base of literacy in Aotearoa New Zealand, informing our responsiveness to the country's changing literacy needs and demography.

Delivery of BSLA to date

8. BSLA is being introduced in a phased way through five application rounds from January 2021 to June 2023. While priority is given to decile 1-5 schools, to date Te Tāhuhu has been able to fund all of the applications that meet the criteria of new entrant and Year 1 teachers. Applications have been evenly spread across schools of all deciles. After three rounds of delivery, 674 state-funded schools, or 33% of eligible schools, will have received BSLA professional support.
9. Two rounds were delivered in 2021 and the third is currently underway in Terms 1 and 2, 2022. The cumulative total of these first three rounds is 1,573 teachers and 341 literacy specialists. We have funding for 5,400 teachers which means all schools who wish to access Te Tāhuhu support will be able to. Uptake of the BSLA training is steady, with similar numbers across each round.
10. The regional breakdown of participating schools, inclusive of rounds 1–3, is outlined in the table below:

Region	Number of schools
Tai Tokerau	45
Auckland	107
Waikato	100
Bay of Plenty / Wairāiki	105
Hawke's Bay / Tairāwhiti	42
Taranaki / Whanganui / Manawatū	46
Wellington	64
Nelson / Marlborough / West Coast	58
Canterbury / Chatham Islands	100
Otago / Southland	61
Total	728

11. Evidence has indicated some of the regions with the highest proportion of ākonga Māori and Pacific learners are not applying for training in the numbers anticipated. As

a result, we will provide targeted promotion for school leaders in Auckland, Bay of Plenty/Wairarapa, Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatu, Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti and Wellington through in-person group presentations to school leaders and literacy specialists by the University of Canterbury, hosted by our regional offices. This will also include the opportunity for school leaders and teachers who have been using BSLA to share their experiences and the results from their schools. We have seen this work well in Tai Tokerau, which went from 2 applications in round 1 to 34 in rounds 2 and 3 combined. This approach will be guided by what is appropriate in the context of COVID-19.

Early findings

12. Learners completed both Baseline Assessments (at school entry or pre-BSLA teaching) and Ten Week Assessments (following ten weeks of BSLA Tier 1 teaching to all learners). The early findings from these assessments for approximately 3,800 children from round 1 are positive and replicate the trial results. This indicates the delivery model is supporting changes to teacher practice.
13. The data from 157 schools shows that, after ten weeks of BSLA teaching, the majority of five-year-old learners are able to transfer their emerging phoneme awareness and phonic knowledge to the reading and spelling words that they haven't seen before.
14. The data also revealed that phoneme identity, phoneme blending and letter sound knowledge showed significantly greater growth over the first 10 weeks of BSLA instruction for children in the bottom 20th percentile of the Baseline Test than children starting above the bottom 20th percentile, indicating the gap in achievement is decreasing.
15. The majority of teachers have not experienced professional support in a structured approach to literacy before. The early literacy approach evaluation, feedback to Te Tāhuhu and evaluations from facilitator workshops showed that schools, teachers and literacy specialists were very positive about BSLA and would recommend it to their peers.

Impact of COVID-19

16. Applications for round 3 rose sharply from Auckland and remained steady for Waikato and Tai Tokerau during COVID level 4 restrictions. In-person workshops for literacy specialists in January 2022 were attended by all but one of the enrolled participants.
17. Most literacy specialists and teachers continued their professional development in Terms 3 and 4 2021, however, 165 have deferred training to 2022 due to COVID restrictions.

Risks and mitigations

18. There may be an expectation Te Tāhuhu will continue to pay for BSLA beyond the current contract. Any such decision will be based on ongoing learner achievement data, the early literacy support evaluation and the Literacy/Communications and Maths Strategy. BSLA is reasonably priced and within the means of many schools should they elect to pay for it themselves through operational funding. Te Tāhuhu is providing the Ready to Read Phonics Plus books free to schools.
19. Other providers have suggested it is unfair that Te Tāhuhu is funding only one approach to structured literacy. However, the current provision was competitively tendered, as per government procurement requirements, and the proposals received underwent rigorous evaluation. Te Tāhuhu recognises that there are other providers

in the market, and we do not discourage schools from using them. Any future procurement in this space will also adhere to government procurement guidelines.

Next Steps

20. We are working actively to target regions with higher numbers of ākonga Māori and Pacific learners, and where a lower uptake has been recorded. As part of this, we will be promoting the early reported impact of BSLA on teaching and learner achievement through Te Tāhuhu channels, including sharing learners results via Education Gazette articles, social media, and targeted and sector-wide 'zui'.
21. If you like, we can provide you with talking points on BSLA and work with your office to set up an opportunity, at an appropriate school, to discuss experiences of the professional support with a leader, teacher, and/or parent and child.