



Briefing Note: Findings of the interim evaluation of the pilot of the Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunch programme

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
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Messaging seen by Communications team:	Yes	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

The interim evaluation of the pilot of the Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunch programme is complete. This paper provides a summary of its findings and includes a media statement attached as Annex 1.

Summary

1. The Ministry commissioned an evaluation of pilot of the Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunch programme and has now received the report. The Ka Ora, Ka Ako pilot started in Term 1 2020, and by end of Term 3 2020, 13,000 students were receiving lunches.
2. The evaluation was commissioned to help the Ministry assess the early impact of the Ka Ora, Ka Ako programme on food availability, consumption and satiety, as well as subsequent outcomes of attendance and wellbeing. The evaluation focused on the initial roll out of the pilot, and this included the impacts realised within primary and intermediate schools across the Hawke's Bay and Bay of Plenty regions in the first few months.
3. The evaluation examined the benefits for the children in the pilot as a whole, as well as the benefits for those most disadvantaged children, who were those children who, prior to the pilot, were repeatedly still hungry after lunch.
4. The evaluation found that the pilot resulted in the most disadvantaged students having large improvements in fullness. The children reported that after lunch, rather than feeling 'quite hungry' they now felt 'just right'.
5. The pilot resulted in a reduction in hunger levels across students in the pilot but the greater gains were for the most disadvantaged students. This is to be expected, as not all students in the schools had the same levels of need before the pilot.

6. As a result of the pilot, the most disadvantaged students also showed gains in mental wellbeing, measured as gains in positive mood (good spirits, relaxation), vitality (being active, waking up fresh and rested), and general interest (being interested in things). The evaluation also reported an increase in the availability and variety of healthy food; and that students on average were eating more vegetables and fewer sweet items.
7. The evaluation used attendance data the Ministry holds rather than itself collecting attendance data. Ministry attendance data has not enough detail to enable factors affecting attendance to be isolated from the effects on attendance of the pilot. The effect of the pilot on attendance was not seen, but it is unclear whether this is due to a lack of effect or due to the data used.

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

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| a. Note that an interim evaluation of the pilot for Ka Ora, Ka Ako Healthy School Lunch programme is complete. | Noted |
| b. Note the draft media release attached as Annex 1. Key messages and Q&A will be provided to your office in due course. | Noted |
| c. Note that the Ministry of Education is releasing this briefing and the evaluation report in full by 30 July 2021. | Noted |
| d. Note it is recommended you share this report with your colleagues Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Minister of Child Poverty Reduction and Hon Andrew Little, Minister of Health. | Noted |



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15/07/2021

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

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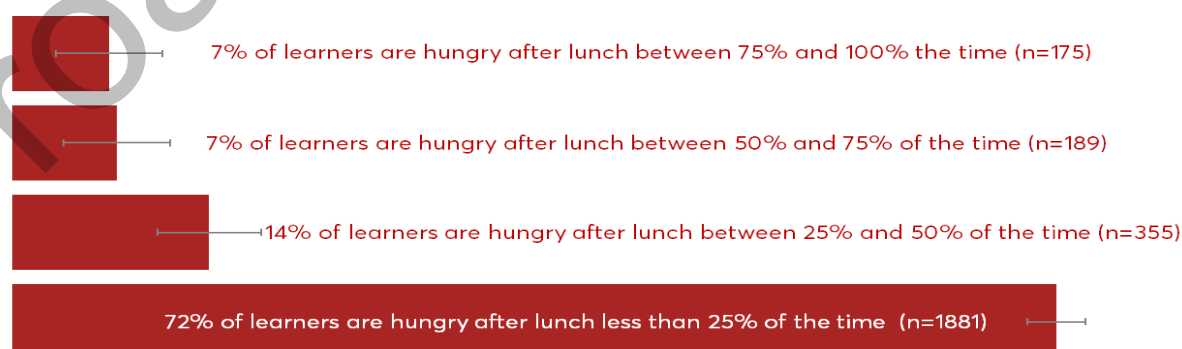
Background

8. In 2019, the Government introduced a two-year initiative to deliver a free and healthy daily school lunch to Year 1 to 8 students in selected primary, intermediate and composite schools with high concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage.
9. The pilot began with 42 schools in Term 1 2020 across Bay of Plenty/Waiariki and Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti. In terms 2 and 3 18 schools across Otago and Southland joined the pilot and another 160 schools in Bay of Plenty/Waiariki and Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti began in Terms 3 and 4 2020.
10. Standard of Proof were commissioned to evaluate the pilot. The evaluation focussed on the impacts for students in Year 1 to 8 in the participating schools.
11. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the pilot was rapidly expanded to reach approximately 960 schools and kura (around 215,000 students), including secondary schools. With the exception of some primary and intermediate schools which commenced as part of the expansion in Term 3 2020, schools included in the expansion were outside the scope of the evaluation.

Key Evaluation Findings

12. The schools in the pilot were those with the highest level of disadvantage, but students within the schools were diverse in terms of food security.
13. The evaluation gathered baseline data over a five-day period and there was a cohort of students who repeatedly reported they were 'quite hungry' after lunch. Specifically, when responding to a question about levels of satiety over a five-day period, 14 percent of children were hungry more than half of the time. These students were the most disadvantaged in the school before the pilot.
14. This distribution of need within the targeted schools is shown below.

Figure 1: The proportion of children according to how frequently they felt hungry after lunch over a five-day assessment period (before the pilot was introduced).



15. The most disadvantaged students had large improvements in fullness. It was reported that the average response on satiety over a five day period had moved from “I am quite hungry and my belly feels a little empty” to “I feel just right, not too hungry and not too full”. The report commented:

Among the most disadvantaged children, we found that those with insufficient food prior to the pilot achieved a statistically significant average increase in fullness... beyond those that had sufficient food at the outset ($+20\% \pm 3.3\%$).¹ The result is noteworthy and represents a large improvement in feelings of fullness for those with insufficient food prior to the pilot.

16. The pilot also benefited the mental wellbeing of the most disadvantaged students. This was measured using the World Health Organisation Five Wellbeing Index, which is based on five individual items measuring positive mood (good spirits, relaxation), vitality (being active, waking up fresh and rested), and general interest (being interested in things). The evaluation reported that:

Notably, there was a statistically significant increase in mental wellbeing... for those children with previously insufficient quantities of food over and above that for children with sufficient quantities of food.²

17. The evaluation also looked at the kinds of lunches students were eating before the pilot, and almost three quarters of student lunches had no vegetables. The pilot resulted in an increase in the availability and variety of healthy food and resulted in children, on average, eating more vegetables and fewer sweet items. The evaluation reported:

Those children with fewer snacks and sweets items available to them in September also showed an increase from 0.64 vegetables consumed in a lunch in September to 1.48 vegetables consumed in a lunch in November... This means children that had more snack and sweet items available to them prior to the pilot had a statistically significant net gain of 0.18 (± 0.15) vegetables over those with sufficiently healthy options.

18. The pilot provided food to all students in schools irrespective of need, to avoid the stigma of singling out those whose circumstances meant their lunches regularly left them hungry. It is expected that not all students would experience the same level of changes to their hunger levels as a result of the pilot. The evaluation found the pilot resulted in the average student making small gains in terms of feelings of fullness, and small gains in emotional and physical functioning and overall health quality of life.

¹ The net gain in fullness for learners with insufficient quantities of food before the pilot over those with sufficient food was $20\% \pm 3.3\%$ ($\beta = 20\%$, $p = 0.003$, $n=1487$).

² The net gain in mental wellbeing for learners with **insufficient quantities of food** at the outset over those with sufficient food was $6.2\% \pm 3.7\%$ ($\beta = 6.2\%$, $p = 0.001$, $n=946$).

Attendance

19. As noted above the evaluation focussed initially on the impact of providing food to students and improvements to their wellbeing. The evaluation also investigated whether providing lunches would have a positive flow-on for attendance. The initial assumption was that there would be a positive impact on attendance at the population level, however, this wasn't the case.
20. We have heard anecdotally from Principals that attendance improved for a number of their students once lunches were provided. As the evaluation was designed to look for change at the population level it did not track the attendance of students who were found to have insufficient food in their lunches before the pilot, and we assume this is the group whose attendance improved.
21. Therefore, for these most disadvantaged students, the evaluation was unable to establish a link between their participation in the pilot or changes in hunger levels after lunch, and attendance at school. The next evaluation, which is currently being designed, will focus on more specific groups using a basket of different variables known to indicate disadvantage, such as the equity index and parental income. The exact methodology is still to be determined but will allow us to examine any links between the provision of lunches and attendance for the identified target group.
22. As Ka Ora, Ka Ako is now providing lunches to 200,000 students, alongside the focus on specific groups of students, we can now track a larger volume of students. This could enable the testing of whether the programme does have a population level impact on attendance.

Ministry comment: The interim evaluation was early in the life of the pilot

23. It has taken about six months for the pilot to be implemented successfully within a school. Students in the pilot are not always familiar with the food being introduced and their taste buds take time to adjust. Palates change as students continue to be exposed to new foods, see their friends eating the lunches, and gain confidence to try new foods through positive encouragement and role modelling.
24. Many schools and suppliers experience a teething period when first starting the pilot. This is to be expected when engaging in a novel or complex logistical task or adapting to the unique requirements of students in an area. However, it does mean that the data collected was primarily during this transition period.
25. The Ministry has formalised a "pathway to nutrition" to ensure that the first focus is on getting students engaged in the pilot and then healthier options are introduced slowly to transition them into a healthy way of eating. Suppliers have made many changes to their menus and processes to refine and improve their processes as they have learnt over time.
26. The Ministry's monitoring approach has been developed to focus on quality outcomes and building strong relationships that enable open communication between the Ministry, suppliers, schools and their communities. The Ministry is currently developing tools that will help capture student and whānau voice through the pilot.

27. The other benefits which the Ministry has observed over time but were not considered by the evaluation include such things as eating etiquette, local employment, and whānau engagement.

Next steps

28. As agreed [CAB-21-MIN-0079] the Ministry are in the process of procuring the next evaluation. This will draw upon baseline data from the pilot and include secondary schools to inform future budget bids.
29. The Ministry will work closely with the evaluator to develop a methodology which enables us to understand the effects on attendance for disadvantaged children and other cohorts of interest. Officials anticipate the evaluation will be complete end 2022.
30. The Ministry will proactively release this briefing and the evaluation report in full by 31 July 2021.

Annex 1 – Media Statement, School lunches benefit disadvantaged students

Proactively Released