



## Briefing Note: Release of He Whakaaro 'Student learning during COVID-19'

To:	Hon. Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education Hon Kelvin Davis, Associate Minister of Education Hon Aupito William Sio, Associate Minister of Education		
Date:	14 June 2021	Priority:	Medium
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Messaging seen by Communications team:	Yes	Round robin:	No

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

**Note** that we have produced the attached *He Whakaaro* research report (and related technical appendix) on the estimated impacts of COVID-19 on student learning in reading, maths and writing.

**Note** that we are planning to publish this report on the Education Counts website on Friday 25 June.


**Agree** that this Briefing will be proactively released.

☒ Agree ☐ Disagree



Alexander Brunt  
Deputy Secretary  
Evidence, Data & Knowledge

14 / 6 / 2021



Hon Chris Hipkins  
Minister of Education

23 / 06 / 2021

## Background

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1. The *He Whakaaro* | Education Insights series on the Education Counts website aims to provide relevant and insightful evidence and to provoke further thought and discussion on key education issues. The series is for policy analysts, people working in the programme and intervention area, educators interested in knowing more about education evidence and data, as well as the general public.
2. This *He Whakaaro* report is the last in a series of research studies on the impacts of COVID-19 on various aspects of the education system. Similar reports examining impacts on student retention/school leavers, school attendance, and participation in early childhood education were published in December 2020 (METIS 1244449 refers).
3. We will continue to monitor impacts of COVID-19 on the education system using the data we have access to (including flow-on impacts from the lockdowns in early 2021). We will feed those insights through to relevant areas of the Ministry, and keep your office updated with any issues that emerge.

The research found that student learning has not been meaningfully impacted by COVID-19 so far

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4. This *He Whakaaro* report uses data from the English-medium e-asTTle student assessment tool to examine students' progress in reading, mathematics and writing. We examined progress of students from 2019 to 2020, and compared this to progress in prior calendar years. We analysed the data through a number of different methods, which produced generally consistent results.
5. The report finds that:
  - According to data on end-of-year progress, there have not been moderate or large decreases in learning in reading or mathematics.
  - In reading and maths, the estimates for many student groups in 2020 are essentially unchanged or even positive compared to 2019. Where there have been decreases in 2020, the differences are small (the equivalent of perhaps two to three weeks of learning), and are within the range of regular year-to-year fluctuation in progress scores.
  - There has essentially been no change in equity of learning along decile or ethnicity (in any learning area) during 2020.
  - There is no strong evidence that learning has reduced substantially more for students in Auckland, who have been affected by multiple lockdowns.
  - There is more cause for concern about slower than usual progress in writing, where the data is consistent with moderate impacts that are more educationally meaningful, representing perhaps five weeks of learning.
  - Teachers almost entirely ceased assessment of students using e-asTTle during periods of lockdown, but the numbers of assessments and students assessed at the end of the year was essentially unchanged between 2019 and 2020.



We view this research as a strong endorsement of the positive work undertaken by schools throughout 2020

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6. UNESCO research estimates that globally, schools have been closed for an average of two-thirds of a year, and OECD research estimates that learning progress of students might have been impacted by about one-third of a year. Evidence is still emerging from most countries, but validates that students in many educational systems (especially in countries such as the US and the UK) face impacts of at least this magnitude. Even in educational systems that have been less impacted by COVID-19, studies have found meaningful barriers to learning. A recent study in New South Wales found no impact on learning progress on average, but a reduction of about two months of progress for schools with lower socio-economic status, which has further reduced equity.
7. That we see no evidence of impacts on excellence or equity with respect to learning anywhere close to this magnitude in New Zealand is strongly positive, given the large disruption to the education system and to students' lives. Where there are estimates of reduced progress in 2020 (including in writing), changes from 2019 are in line with historical fluctuations – in the data, progress in 2020 appears almost indistinguishable from any other year.
8. The results in this report are largely consistent with the findings of NZQA analysis of provisional NCEA data from 2020 (NZQA education report CR 21879 refers). That data indicates that provisional NCEA attainment rates for Level 2 and 3 would have fallen about 4-5 percentage points on 2019 attainment if not for the COVID-19 mitigations, with little difference between Māori, Pacific and Pākehā students. (Provisional figures show attainment rates actually rose relative to 2019 after COVID-19 mitigations – including the introduction of learning recognition credits – were applied.) Given that attainment rates tend to increase by 1-2% by the time the data is finalised, this might indicate that 2020 attainment calculated without the COVID-19 mitigations might have been just below 2019 levels. This is consistent with a low overall impact. There has been no meaningful change in equity.

The research was not able to adequately examine impacts for students in every educational setting

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9. While e-asTTle contains Māori medium assessments, these are not widely used, and there is not currently enough data to meaningfully examine progress of ākonga in Māori medium education. We plan to explore whether there is sufficient data in other Māori medium aromatawai tools such as Te Waharoa Ararau to analyse the learning progress of Māori medium ākonga, and potentially examine impacts of COVID-19.
10. Previous reports in this COVID-19 series found that COVID-19 caused school leaving rates for ākonga in Māori medium to decrease by less than ākonga Māori in English medium education, but MME ākonga had much lower leaving rates prior to COVID-19. MME ākonga experienced higher barriers to attendance than ākonga Māori in English medium following the 2020 lockdowns, particularly after the Auckland lockdown in Term 3.

11. E-asTTle is also not widely used in settings such as specialist schools, alternative education providers, teen parent units, or activity centres. Students from these settings have been included in the data in the report where they did participate in assessments, but there is not enough data for these students to meaningfully separately analyse their progress.
12. E-asTTle has been designed for students at Curriculum Levels 2-6, and so is not often used to assess students below Year 4. This means that we could not meaningfully assess impacts on learning for students in lower primary years. Our previous report looking at attendance found that while the attendance of most students was unaffected or increased after the two 2020 lockdowns, the students who experienced additional barriers were disproportionately primary school students.

## Communications

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13. We are preparing reactive messages, which will be provided to your office. Additional communications materials can be prepared if required.

## Proactive Release

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14. We recommend that this Briefing is proactively released as per your expectation that information will be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

## Annexes

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Annex 1: *He Whakaaro* | Education Insights 'Student learning during COVID-19'

Annex 2: Using e-asTTle to model short-term learning