



## Briefing Note: Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunch Programme Progress Update

<b>To:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	17 September 2021	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
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### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

- Note progress made on Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches Programme.
- Suggest that you forward the review to the Minister of Child Poverty Reduction.

### Proactive Release

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

**agree** that the Ministry of Education release this briefing once it has been considered by you. Information about schools or students within the review may need to be withheld for privacy reasons.

**Agree** Disagree.



Helen Hurst  
Tumu Te Hāpai Ō Rāngai | Te Hāpai Ō Rāngai  
Deputy Secretary  
**Sector Enablement and Support**



Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister of Education**

17/09/2021

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## Background

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- 1 The Ministry of Education has provided a progress update on the implementation of Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches programme (attached as Annex 1).
- 2 It captures the programme as it stands at this point in time, and describes the successes, lessons learned, challenges, and opportunities. It brings this information together to act as a knowledge base, discuss areas for investigation or improvement, and to help with future decision making.
- 3 You may be interested in the information about the programme and insights into potential future directions.
- 4 This is separate to external evaluations of the programme (which are being undertaken by Standard of Proof), and the Independent Quality Assurance process.

## Structure of the Document

- 5 The document has the following sections:
  - a. Purpose
  - b. Introduction
  - c. The case for a healthy school lunch programme
  - d. Ka Ora, Ka Ako – pilot and expansion
  - e. Successes, lessons learned, and best practice
  - f. Ongoing challenges and opportunities
  - g. Next steps for the programme
- 6 The review contains an executive summary following the purpose section, which outlines its key messages and findings.

## Next Steps

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- 7 We understand this is an item on the Cabinet Priorities Committee tracker for September. We will work with your office to understand if anything further is needed to support you in discussing this, if required.
- 8 You may also wish to forward the update to interested colleagues. We recommend forwarding this to the Minister of Child Poverty Reduction.

## Annexes

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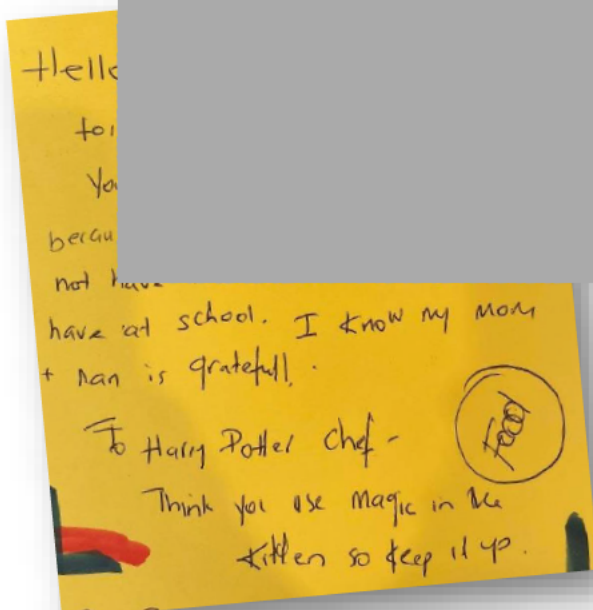
### Annex 1: Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunch Programme Progress Update



# Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches programme

## Progress update

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## Purpose

*Ka Ora, Ka Ako means in order to be in a good space to learn you need to be healthy and well. The phrase is in the form of a Māori proverb. 'Ora' can mean well or healthy, but it can also mean to be satisfied with food or replete. 'Ako' means to learn. 'Ka' indicates that an action is to follow. It is not time bound; it can mean past, present, and future.*

*The acronym of Ka Ora, Ka Ako is KŌKĀ which means aunty, mother, nurturer in East Coast dialect.*

The purpose of this review is for the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) to look back at its implementation of Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches Programme. It aims to capture the programme as it stands at this point in time, look into our processes, and reflect on our learnings and the outcomes we see.

There is a wealth of information and knowledge about the programme across the Ministry, some of which has been gathered from principals, teachers, suppliers, and students. The review intends to bring this information together to act as a knowledge base, discuss areas for investigation or improvement, and to help with future decision making.

A secondary function of this document is to provide Ministers and other interested parties information about the programme, and insights into potential future directions.

The review does not replace external evaluations of the programme (which are being undertaken by Standard of Proof), the Independent Quality Assurance process, or other fact-finding research. However, the review is intended to help illustrate how the programme operates and impacts measurable outcomes, what those outcomes look like, and how we could continue to improve our implementation and subsequent outcomes.

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"This programme ensures there is true equity in school. Attendance at school is no longer a barrier due to lack of kai at home. Coupled with the Fruit in Schools programme our kid's nutritional needs are being met five days per week during school time.

We noticed that our Year 6 kids eating at school camp changed also and ALL food was consumed whereas in the past salads may have been barely touched. We've heard from whānau that kids eating habits at home have changed also. We now have minimal waste at school too which is great for the environment."

*Jason Williams, Principal, Henry Hill School*

# Executive summary

## Introduction

Ka Ora, Ka Ako, or the Healthy School Lunches programme delivers a free and healthy daily school lunch to ākonga in schools and kura in communities with greater socio-economic barriers. The programme aimed to reduce food insecurity, improve levels of concentration and achievement, and improve learners' overall health and wellbeing.

## Reasoning behind the programme

We know that there are inequities in New Zealand's health and education systems. Nutrition has numerous impacts on health (both physical and emotional) and academic achievement, but almost one fifth of tamariki in New Zealand live in households with moderate or severe food insecurity.

Schools are an ideal setting for policy intervention, and offering a programme universally ensures that food reaches those who need it whilst removing any stigma associated with taking it up. The scientific evidence overall points to lunches in schools being an effective policy intervention to achieve broader aims for health and education; however, it can only be part of the solution to entrenched societal issues.

## Where we are now

The pilot programme was initially rolled out in three regions in 2020. It has since expanded and been implemented at a rapid pace; the programme has now delivered over 20 million lunches to students in over 850 schools across the country. The programme currently provides lunches to about 200,000 students per day.

Schools are selected to join the programme using the Ministry of Education's equity index. If they accept, they have the option of making their own lunches or using a supplier. Most schools in the programme are primary, contributing, or intermediate level, although the programme has expanded to some high schools. The most common ethnicity that students receiving lunches identify with is Māori, followed by European.

A [first evaluation of the pilot programme](#) has found some positive effects on learners from exposure to the lunches, particularly for those that were most disadvantaged. We are commissioning a follow-up evaluation now that the programme has expanded and has been embedded in schools.

## Successes and lessons learned

In terms of successes, improvements in health, behaviour, and a sense of community have been observed across students. There have also been positive effects for whānau, and over 2,000 jobs created across the country.

Implementation to date has shown us that suppliers often experience teething issues, students' tastes take time to adjust, and that school leadership is important. Schools that make their own lunches often have better outcomes than those which work with suppliers, and the programme could further incorporate te ao Māori. We are also implementing an ICT solution as there are issues with using spreadsheets to manage data at this scale.

School and supplier engagement with the programme improves outcomes. Engagement can range from integrating the programme into lessons on nutrition or horticulture, introducing incentives or competitions around meals, and running hui with whānau and communities.

## Challenges and opportunities

Complex dietary restrictions, packaging waste, school or supplier non-performance, and certainty of funding for the programme still pose a challenge for Ka Ora, Ka Ako. Suppliers are also facing cost pressures with rises in the living wage and cost of food among others. There are also trade-offs between certainty vs flexibility, and local solutions vs centralisation.

Opportunities for the programme include introducing hot lunches, common recipes, and nutrition education for the wider community. We could also look at providing greater support for smaller suppliers and schools moving to the internal model, working directly with primary industry and manufacturers, and finding ways to facilitate collaboration between schools and suppliers.

## Next steps

Most supplier contracts finish at the end of term four 2021, and we are working on new contracts. We are also undertaking work on cost pressures, external evaluations, and striving for continuous improvement of the programme. The programme as a whole is budgeted until 2023. We will work on the subsequent budget bid in September 2022 with a view to continuing the programme beyond 2023.

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Aurora College



# Introduction

In 2019, the Government announced a pilot programme to deliver a free and healthy daily school lunch to primary and intermediate aged ākonga (students) in schools and kura in communities with greater socio-economic barriers. The programme, Ka Ora, Ka Ako, aimed to reduce food insecurity, improve levels of concentration and achievement, and improve learners' overall health and wellbeing.

The Government undertook a major expansion of the programme in 2020 and 2021, which was funded through the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. This was to further support families to meet their living costs by providing their children lunches as well as provide economic boosts by investing in local communities and employing local people to prepare and provide the kai.

By the end of 2021, around 960 schools and kura comprising over 215,000 (or 25 percent) of year 1-13 ākonga across New Zealand will be receiving free nutritious lunches.

This review begins with the reasoning and scientific evidence behind the healthy school lunches programme. It then provides an overview of the roll out of Ka Ora, Ka Ako, as well as facts and figures around where the programme is now.

Successes and lessons from the programme and examples of best practice are discussed, as are ongoing challenges and opportunities. The review concludes with an outline of the next steps for the programme.

*Note: tamariki is used interchangeably with children, as is ākonga with learners or students. Whānau is used to include extended family and the range of support or circumstances an individual can have. Schools includes both schools and kura unless only one type is specified.*



"We have been doing the lunches for the last five weeks and it has gone really well.

It changes student behaviour significantly, as they are calmer all afternoon and lunchtime fights/dramas almost disappeared. It will be a new challenge next year with the seniors in the mix, but also the chance to get them taking leadership to support eating together - karakia, tidying up, expectations etc.

Having food they go 'wow' over when they open their box is our key goal. We have been blown away to find them not taking the lettuce etc out, although some of them still won't have tomato. The one hot lunch we did was very popular (healthy version butter chicken)."

*Ragne Maxwell, Principal, Porirua College.*

# The case for a healthy school lunch programme

This section sets out the intention, reasoning, evidence, and principles behind the lunch programme. It aims to remind us of the wider social context (or the big picture view), provide quantitative data on inputs and outcomes, and help set expectations and aspirations for the programme.

## Striving for equity in New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand has a history of egalitarian ideals and traditions. However, there are still entrenched economic and social disparities within our country, and these are often intergenerational. Families can only improve their position by using the resources available to them.

One role of our education system is to offer tamariki opportunities to develop and support social mobility. The inequities in our health and education systems mean that tamariki Māori, Pacific children, and children from lower socio-economic backgrounds still experience barriers when it comes to educational achievement and health outcomes. This hinders their ability to fulfil their potential (such as limiting career choices or lifetime income) and can have lifelong impacts on their wellbeing and that of their whānau.

Making sure that tamariki have a great start in life helps to improve community, societal, and country-wide outcomes.

In 2015/16, a Ministry of Health survey found that almost one fifth (19 per cent) of tamariki in New Zealand, lived in households with moderate or severe food insecurity<sup>1</sup>. There are children in Aotearoa who, through no fault of their own, are going hungry. The Government has a duty of care towards these tamariki.

## The importance of nutrition

Nutrition plays a critical part in children's physical and psychosocial development. Many studies show that inadequate nutrition negatively impacts academic engagement, achievement, and overall wellbeing in school age children<sup>2</sup>.

Children in households with moderate or severe food insecurity have higher rates of being overweight or obese, asthma, and behavioural or developmental difficulties than children in food secure households<sup>3</sup>. Behavioural difficulties make it harder for both the child and their peers to learn; they require more of their teacher's time and can have a disruptive effect. Hunger and poor nutrition also affect concentration and engagement in the classroom.

Children in Aotearoa can be undernourished in terms of micronutrients while still consuming excess energy. This means that although they may have enough food to meet their energy requirements, the food is mostly unhealthy and does not provide them with other essential nutrients. A study which supplemented undernourished children's vitamins and minerals showed significant improvements in their non-verbal

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Health. 2019. Household Food Insecurity among Children: New Zealand Health Survey. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

<sup>2</sup> As reviewed in Ball, J., C. Watts, and R. Quigley. "A rapid review of the literature on the association between nutrition and school pupil performance." *Wellington: Obesity Action Coalition* (2005).

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Health. 2019. Household Food Insecurity among Children: New Zealand Health Survey. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

intelligence and behaviour<sup>4</sup>. Schools making the change from unhealthy to healthy meals had a positive impact on test scores in the UK<sup>5</sup> and California<sup>6</sup>.

A healthy diet contributes to mental wellbeing; a study of adolescents in Australia found improvements in diet quality led to improvements in mental health, while reductions in diet quality led to declines in mental health<sup>7</sup>. Another study found that adolescents with the least healthy diets were nearly 80 per cent more likely to show symptoms of depression than those with the healthiest diets, even after controlling for physical activity, socio-economic status, and family conflict<sup>8</sup>.

## Schools are an ideal setting for policy interventions

Schools are uniquely placed to provide generations of children access and exposure to nutritious food in their formative years. Tamariki attend school most days, and there is regular time set aside for eating each day.

Furthermore, school meals may be some children's first positive experience of healthy food. This can lead to changes in their food preferences and choices outside of school, and sometimes even the food choices of their whānau. Food habits learned in childhood often stay through to adulthood<sup>9</sup>.

Providing ākonga with meals during the school day is intended to get them feeling full and provides a nutritional boost where and when they need it for concentration and academic achievement.

Limited comprehensive studies exist that compare the long-term effects of healthy school lunches with food brought from home. However, a recent study showed that exposure to free school lunches in Sweden increased the population's academic achievement, lifetime income, health, and even height. These effects increased with each year students received lunches, with income and height only becoming statistically significant after some years<sup>10</sup>.

## The rationale for universality

Providing lunch on a universal basis minimises stigma associated with food insecurity or material disadvantage. Stigma and bullying can be a significant barrier to children's engagement in education and willingness to access support, such as a free lunch. A review of different school breakfast programmes found that many hungry or at-risk children did not participate in targeted programmes but did in universal ones<sup>11</sup>.

Additionally, material disadvantage is not always obvious in schools. Programmes that target based on individual need require a process to confirm eligibility which can be flawed or costly, and risks excluding those who do not appear outwardly to be in need.

<sup>4</sup> Ball, J., C. Watts, and R. Quigley. "A rapid review of the literature on the association between nutrition and school pupil performance." Wellington: Obesity Action Coalition (2005).

<sup>5</sup> Belot, Michèle, and Jonathan James. "Healthy school meals and educational outcomes." *Journal of health economics* 30.3 (2011): 489-504.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, Michael L., Justin Gallagher, and Elizabeth Ramirez Ritchie. "School meal quality and academic performance." *Journal of Public Economics* 168 (2018): 81-93.

<sup>7</sup> Jacka, Felice N., et al. "A prospective study of diet quality and mental health in adolescents." *PloS one* 6.9 (2011): e24805.

<sup>8</sup> Jacka, Felice N., et al. "Associations between diet quality and depressed mood in adolescents: results from the Australian Healthy Neighbourhoods Study." *Australian & New Zealand journal of psychiatry* 44.5 (2010): 435-442.

<sup>9</sup> Lesáková, Dagmar. "Analysis of childhood habits influence on consumption behavior in adulthood." *Scientific papers of the University of Pardubice. Series D, Faculty of Economics and Administration*. 21 (3/2011) (2011).

<sup>10</sup> Alex-Petersen, Jesper, Petter Lundborg, and Dan-Olof Rooth. "Long-term effects of childhood nutrition: evidence from a school lunch reform." (2017).

<sup>11</sup> Ball, J., C. Watts, and R. Quigley. "A rapid review of the literature on the association between nutrition and school pupil performance." *Wellington: Obesity Action Coalition* (2005).



## Final thoughts

There are many reasons why providing food in schools appears to be an effective intervention. It can improve students' physical and mental wellbeing, and academic achievement. It can also alleviate hunger, mitigate disparities, and enhance long-term outcomes. It is also a challenging and costly undertaking, and good implementation is key to realising many of these benefits.

Food in schools will not solve all of Aotearoa's issues in health and education; there are some entrenched problems in these areas that require tackling on many fronts. However, evidence points to it being a useful policy tool and part of the solution.



Nutritious lunches at Ōtorohanga College

# Ka Ora, Ka Ako – pilot and expansion

## Overview of the roll out

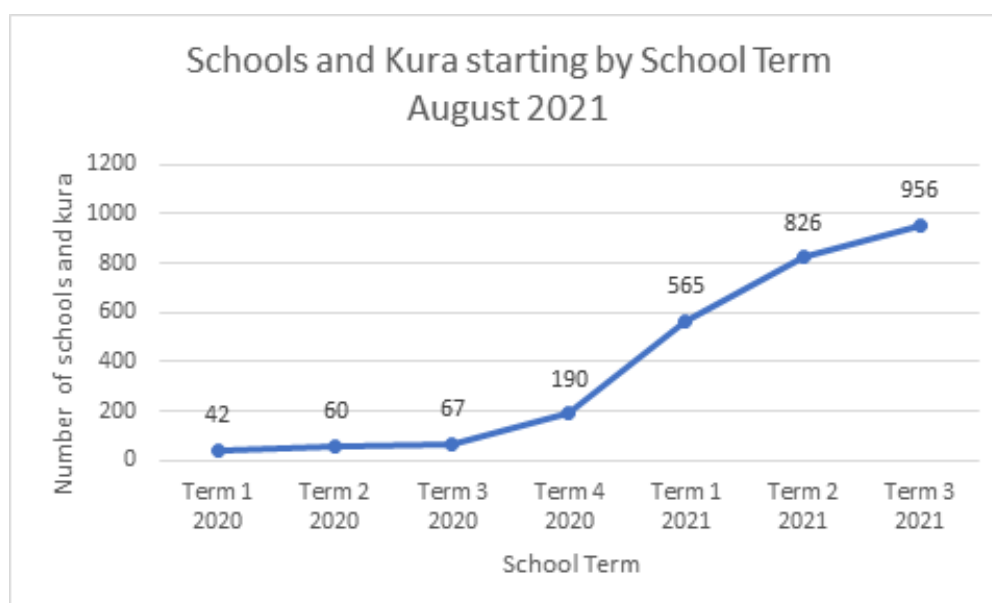
In 2019, the Government announced a pilot initiative to prototype a free and healthy daily school lunch programme for ākonga in selected schools and kura in three regions. As well as addressing food insecurity in schools, the pilot was designed to gather evidence to support future policy and investment decisions and help develop a robust implementation design.

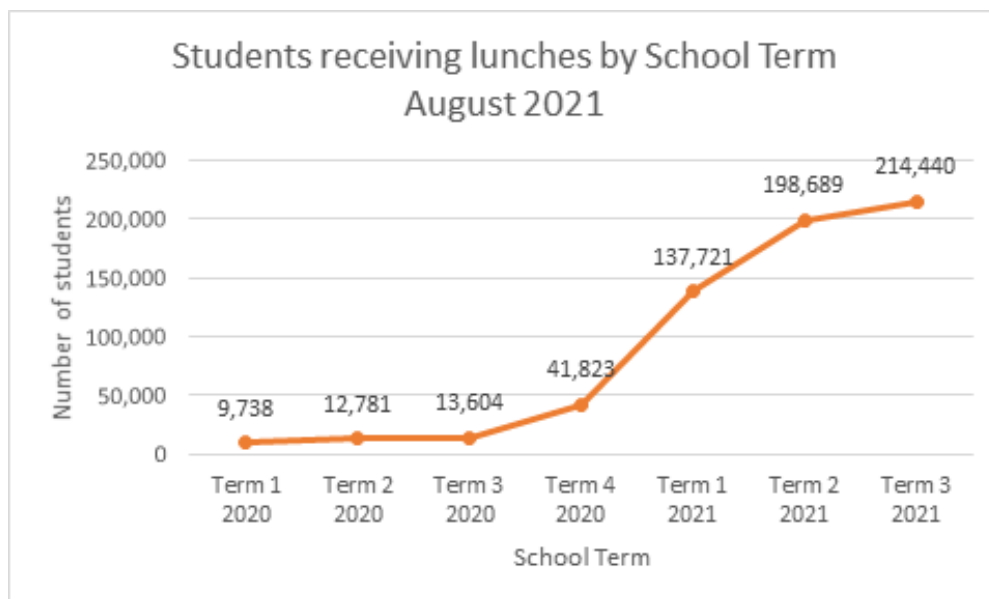
Around 10,000 learners in 42 schools across Bay of Plenty/Waiariki and Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti were the first to get school lunches in term one 2020. Over 3,000 students in 18 schools and kura across Otago and Southland joined Ka Ora, Ka Ako in terms two and three.

In 2020 and 2021, the Government undertook a major expansion of the programme, which was funded through the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. This was to further support families meet their living costs as well as provide economic boosts by investing in local communities and employing local people. The expansion also allowed for the programme to reach secondary schools.

The expansion began with another 70 schools and kura in Bay of Plenty/Waiariki and Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti in terms three and four of 2020. Schools across the rest of the country soon joined the programme, with an additional 322 providing lunches to around 88,000 learners from the start of term one, 2021. By the end of 2021, around 960 schools and kura comprising over 215,000 (or 25 percent) of year 1-13 ākonga across New Zealand will be receiving free nutritious lunches.

This amounted to an exponential implementation against a backdrop of a rapidly evolving COVID-19 environment. As it expanded the programme, we were simultaneously building our team (recruiting 50 staff), making policy decisions and business rules, and building interim capability to handle the programme's growth. The graphs below show the scale and speed of the expansion.





## How the lunches reach ākonga

Ka Ora, Ka Ako is offered to schools and kura with students that fall within the highest 25 percent of socio-economic disadvantage nationally and where students face the greatest barriers that can affect access to education, wellbeing, and achievement. This is calculated using the Ministry of Education's [equity index](#).

Schools can accept or decline the invitation. If a school accepts, they need to decide whether they will prepare their own lunches, use one or multiple suppliers, or make their own lunches some days and use a supplier on other days (known as the *mixed model*).

Schools making their own lunches is known as the *internal model*. They have operational responsibilities for the lunch process, including health and nutrition, dietary and religious requirements, food safety and waste management. They will need access to a kitchen and [a Food Control Plan](#) which have both been approved by the Ministry for Primary Industries, have enough capacity to make lunches for all students, and appropriate preparation and storage facilities.

Most schools opt to use a supplier to deliver lunches. Suppliers are identified through an open tender process. Schools or kura that outsource lunches can select from a panel of approved suppliers. If a school wants to work with a local supplier they are already familiar with, they can encourage them to register with the [Government Electronic Tendering System \(GETS\)](#). This is known as the *panel model*.

The *group model* involved a banding together a group of schools and kura within an area and having a single supplier providing lunches to all of them. This approach enabled the programme to roll out to many schools in a short timeframe, and in this sense it was a success.

However, the group model locked schools into their provider. Some schools struggled with their supplier, and there was limited recourse to move.

The group contracts will expire in December 2021. The group suppliers will all join the Ka Ora, Ka Ako panel of approved suppliers, and all schools using the external model will select their supplier for 2022/23 school years from the panel. Making the panel model the default option for external suppliers will offer more flexibility for schools and the programme overall.

It has proven not economically viable to deliver a fresh, daily lunch to some rural schools due to their remote location and the small size of their roll. In these instances, we have trialled a *stable shelf-life delivery model*. Schools have generally been supported with crockpots for heating food and refrigerators for safe storage of excess meals. Some schools have been very pleased, but others have reported issues with a lack of variation or appeal of the meals. While not perfect, the stable shelf-life delivery option has allowed rural schools to be a part of the programme.

## Where we are now – facts and figures<sup>12</sup>

As at the end of term two 2021, Ka Ora, Ka Ako had:

» delivered **19,812,141** lunches



» to **197,029** students



» across **814** schools and kura.



The **20 millionth lunch** was delivered on the first day of term three.

**92 per cent** of schools reported being satisfied with the programme.

As of August 2021, **2,006** jobs had been directly created by Ka Ora, Ka Ako<sup>13</sup>.

» 1,109 of these are full time

» 897 are part-time.

The total operating budget for the full financial year 2022/23 is **\$263 million**.

## Who is receiving the lunches?

The following table shows the breakdown of school types receiving the lunches. There are significantly more contributing and primary schools than most other school types.

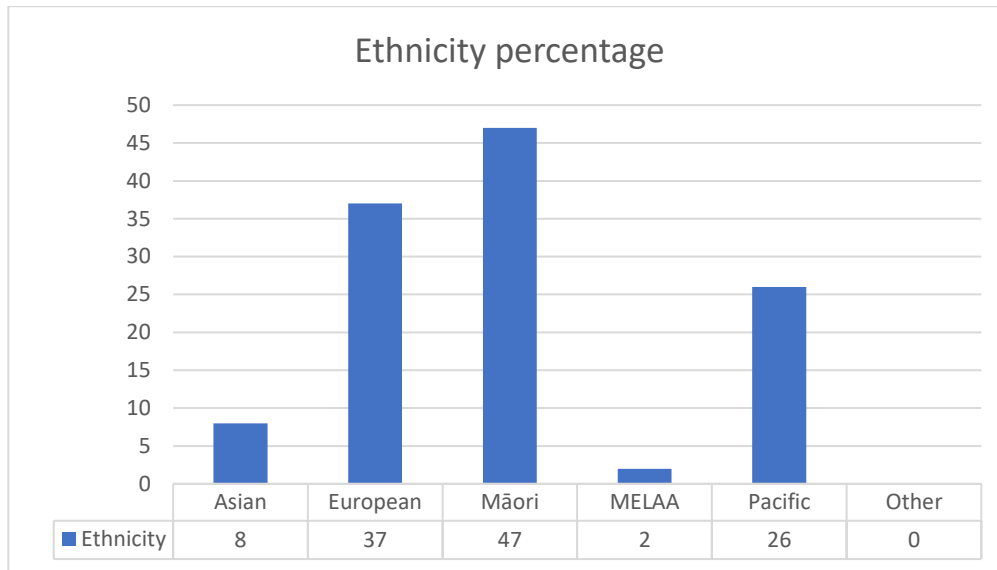
School type	# schools	# students
Activity Centre	4	80
Composite	78	13902
Composite (Year 1-10)	1	135
Contributing	239	59863
Full Primary	321	47392
Intermediate	51	20417
Restricted Composite (Year 7-10)	2	271
Secondary (Year 7-15)	29	11490
Secondary (Year 9-15)	78	42577
Special School	7	834
Teen Parent Unit	4	68
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>814</b>	<b>197029</b>

<sup>12</sup> Unless specified, the statistics in this section were taken on 5 August 2021.

<sup>13</sup> This data is a combination from the term one supplier survey and term two school survey. Not all responses have been received, so this figure includes partial data.

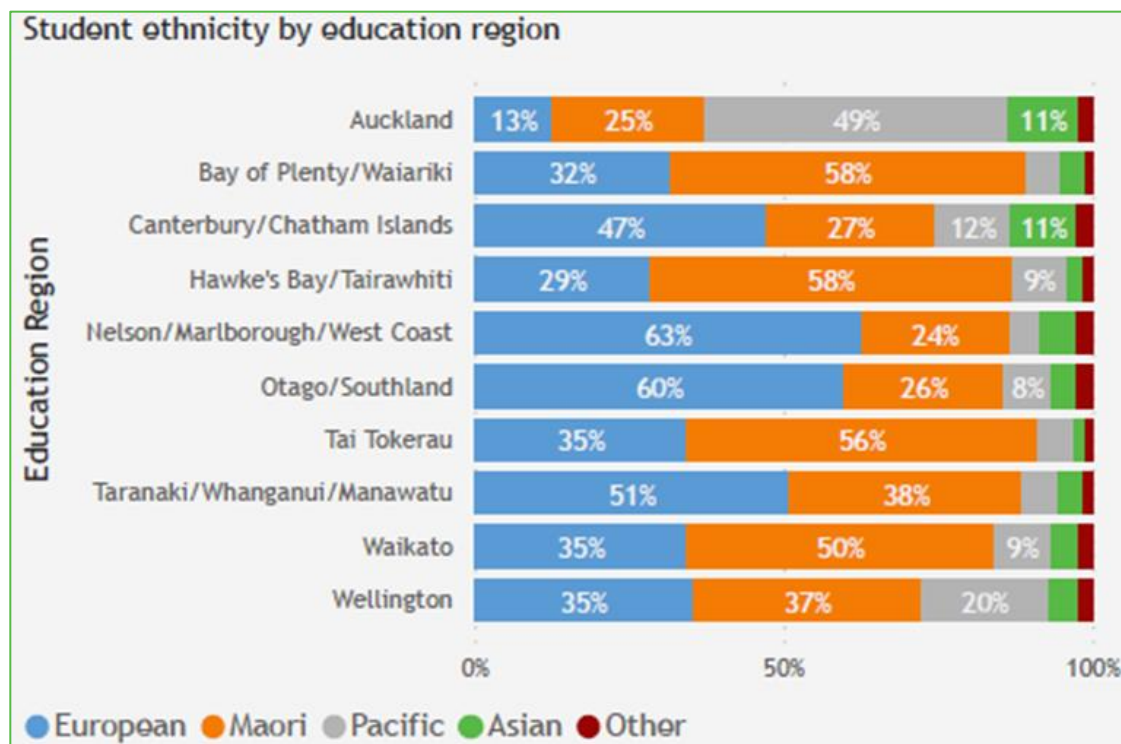


The table below breaks down the students who are receiving lunches by ethnicity. More students identifying as Māori are receiving the lunches than any other ethnicity, followed by European, then Pacific, Asian and MELAA.



MELAA stands for Middle Eastern, Latin American, or African. Note that some students identify with more than one ethnicity, meaning that the percentages add to more than 100.

The ethnicity data can be broken down further by education region.





## How students are receiving the lunches

The table below shows the how many schools and kura are using each delivery model.

Delivery Model	# Schools	Roll Total (as at Jul 2020)
<b>Panel</b> <i>Schools supplied by an approved panel supplier on a one-on-one basis</i>	485	104,964
<b>Group*</b> <i>Schools banded together in groups provided lunches by a single supplier</i>	270	77,758
<b>Internal</b> <i>Schools making their own lunches</i>	163	26,194
<b>To be confirmed</b>	15	3,118
<b>Mixed</b> <i>Schools that make their own lunches some days of the week and use a supplier on others</i>	15	2,254
<b>Stable Shelf-life</b> <i>Rural schools that are provided stable shelf-life lunches which they prepare and serve</i>	8	152
<b>Total</b>	<b>956</b>	<b>214,440</b>
<b>Declined</b> <i>Schools that have declined to take part in the programme</i>	40	7,098
<b>Declined but reconsidering</b>	2	213
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>998</b>	<b>221,751</b>

\*Note that all group model contracts will expire at the end of 2021, and group suppliers will move onto the panel.

## Ka Ora, Ka Ako team

The team consists of around 28 regionally based staff who act as a point of contact for schools and kura, with a support team of 22 people that include programme coordinators, senior advisors, procurement specialists, a business analyst, communications support, and our own nutritionists.

The team takes a regionally led, nationally supported approach to implementing Ka Ora, Ka Ako. The strengths of this approach are emphasising local relationships, working flexibly, and offering tailored and relevant solutions to any issues that arise.

## The Programme's governance

The Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches Governance Board ultimately governs all work items relating to the Healthy School Lunches Programme. Their responsibilities include:

- » approving the programme scope and key programme deliverables
- » monitoring and reviewing performance including key work-stream progress to time and budget
- » making key strategic programme decisions
- » providing subject matter expertise and guidance
- » advising and supporting the management of significant risks, issues and concerns; removing roadblocks
- » resolving operational escalations.

The Board is made up of subject matter experts from within the Ministry (i.e., representatives from Procurement, Policy, IT, Regions, and Evidence, Data and Knowledge), Business Owners and Programme Sponsors, and external members from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry for Primary Industries.

## Standard of Proof evaluations

Standard of Proof are a team of independent evaluators that have been commissioned to undertake evaluations on Ka Ora, Ka Ako. They have completed an interim evaluation of the pilot, which has been [publicly released on the Ministry of Education website](#). We are commissioning the second evaluation, which will cover the expanded programme.

The data used in the interim evaluation report comes from the first selected primary and intermediate schools in Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti, Bay of Plenty/Waiariki, and Otago/Southland regions, and can cover up to forty-three or as little as four weeks after implementation, depending on when the programme arrived at the school. Some data collection was unfortunately hampered by COVID-19 alert level four (the national lockdown).

Researchers gathered information through individual food diaries ākonga would complete. Older learners also responded to questions about their wellbeing, these being the Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory (PedsQL) and the World Health Organisation- Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5). The researchers also conducted some focus group interviews with school staff.

The evaluators found:

- » 'large benefits' for all primary and intermediate learners in respect of the types of food available and consumed
- » 'large gains' in fullness for learners who previously had insufficient food, with these learners, on average, feeling an 20% fuller after lunch than before the programme
- » 'large gains' in mental wellbeing by the most disadvantaged learners
- » a statistically significant reduction in the proportion of learners with low health quality of life
- » 'small but significant' improvements for learners, on average, in terms of their overall health quality of life, as well as in their physical and emotional functioning.

They also found that there was a small increase in satiety (the feeling of being full) across all learners, but this was lower than we would have expected. We have since undertaken work on students' differing energy needs, which is discussed further in the 'Lessons Learned' section below.

The report did not find statistically significant evidence of the lunches affecting attendance either positively or negatively. This is in contrast with some anecdotal feedback from schools that attribute higher attendance to lunches.

The overall picture is one with good initial signs from the programme. We consider that there would be greater value still in a second evaluation with a longer data collection period after more time has passed since the programme's implementation. This is because some schools will have still been experiencing teething issues and some benefits take time to realise. We would therefore expect to see positive effects become more pronounced over time.

The second evaluation is currently being commissioned. It will cover some of the same ground as the first (albeit for a longer time period and with the programme now well-established in these schools), while also looking at a greater variety of schools and regions. There may be a greater focus on health outcomes and positive effects on whānau and the wider community. We are particularly interested in the impacts on students in secondary schools as they were not part of the pilot.

## Quality assurance

We have commissioned IQANZ to undertake an independent quality assurance review of the programme commencing in September 2021, with specific focus on ensuring the programme governance and management environment is robust and that appropriate management controls and benefits tracking processes are in place. This review is likely to be completed this year.

# Successes, lessons learned, and best practice

## Successes

This section details successes that Ka Ora, Ka Ako has had to date over and above what is reported in the Standard of Proof evaluation. Some of the successes discussed are still predominantly known from qualitative evidence. Gathering this information enables us to consider which successes are worth exploring further, and how we can investigate and report on them in a systematic way.

### Improvement in children's health

There has been positive feedback about children's health attributed to the programme. Tranche one schools, which started the programme in the beginning of 2020, have seen the following:

- » Improved skin integrity.
- » Improved immunity (children are not staying home sick as long).
- » Improved energy levels.
- » Improved oral health care.

The New Zealand Health Survey 2019/20 found that 9.4 per cent of children aged 2–14 years were obese, and this was higher in socioeconomically deprived areas. Regional staff have heard that some children are losing weight due to the lunches and have adopted better food habits that have extended beyond the school gate.

One mobile dental therapist anticipated needing a month to treat all students at a school in the programme. Because of the improved oral health, the therapist only needed one week to treat all the students.

While positive on multiple fronts, this information is predominantly anecdotal. We are looking for ways we can explore and report back on these impacts in a robust way.

### Improved focus and behaviour

Schools are reporting that students have better concentration and engagement after lunch than they had before the programme. They are also finding fewer behavioural issues after lunch. We have also received anecdotal evidence from some schools that attendance is improving; however, this was not shown in the Standard of Proof evaluation of the pilot.

"Our Healthy lunches have been great. There are lots that we have changed and adapted along the way as we learn what works best but sitting down together as a class at 1:15pm each day for 10 minutes to eat has been really well received by everyone.

We have already started to notice that there are fewer incidences of misbehavior after lunch, and there is hardly any rubbish around the school."

*Edith Painting-Davis, Principal, Bay of Islands College*

## Sense of community and tikanga

Students sitting down to eat together is helping to foster a sense of community and build social cohesion between classes or year groups. Learners are happy to see their friends all receiving the same food and enjoying lunch.

9(2)(a)



Tikanga is the Māori concept of correct procedures, manners, or protocol. Teachers have reported that ākonga are learning appropriate behaviour around food and mealtimes. For example, ākonga are taking their hats off, washing their hands, learning to sit while they eat and not talk with their mouth full, and saying a karakia before eating. Staff can use this opportunity to sit with students, encourage healthy eating, and model table manners.

### Café a la Waihi Central

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## Positive effects on whānau

Whānau have been grateful for the extra time they have in the mornings and with their tamariki. They have fewer expenses because of the programme (especially in houses with many children), with some better able to pay bills or groceries.

Some are finding it easier to feed their picky eaters at home, with tamariki willing to eat or even asking for novel foods like salads. The programme has provided peace of mind for many whānau and removed stigma from those who may have been reluctant to take it up.

A family has been able to get internet connection in their home from the money they are saving on lunches. This means they can have access for their child's education."

*Principal, Newfield Park School*

"I wanted to express my gratitude for the free school lunches. As a single parent who works, with a giant 13-year-old, it is a huge amount of pressure off me knowing he is being fed healthy food. It also allows me the freedom to buy a little extra at the supermarket to keep him fed with healthy snacks during the weekend (not just noodle cups). Thank you for implementing this."

*Feedback from a parent of Waiopehu College*

## Jobs created

The programme has directly created 2,006 jobs, many of them within the communities the programme serves. All staff have been paid the living wage, and this will update in line with Government policy.

We have heard anecdotes of people volunteering in informal lunch programmes or previously unemployed family members of students now working due to the programme.

"We have 24 staff in total at Puku Ora and about 18 that are employed through the lunches programme, we love our team! Its been so awesome to employ mums with babies at the schools, the hours are great for them. We have also organised some in house training to help upskill them too, 95% are Maori and local. We have te reo classes every fortnight too"

*Puku Ora, Hawkes Bay Supplier*

The programme has also indirectly created jobs in supply chains. For example, the programme has increased demand for wholemeal bread, pasta, and sustainable packaging, and we have seen new jobs developed in these areas.

## Fed thousands of hungry tamariki

The programme has resulted in over one million lunches being served to over 200,000 students across the country each week. In the absence of these lunches, some of these children would have gone hungry, and others would have eaten unhealthy products like packets of chips. The programme has been implemented at a huge scale and – while, as expected, there have been teething issues – what we have managed to deliver to the children is a success in itself.

Dear lunch providers

I am very grateful for the yummy food you provide for the classes and school. Heaps of people don't starve or try to scab off their friend's food anymore because they are getting fed. Everyone is not as hungry as they used to be anymore and the food you make for us makes a HUGE impact on so many students life. We are all very thankful for you cooking and your service to Maeroa.

*Student feedback to Montana BiteLab*

## Lessons learned

This section aims to collate and provide of an overview of what we have learned through implementing the programme.

### Children's tastes take time to adjust to healthy food

While some hesitation was expected, staff were still surprised by the lack of uptake and enjoyment of some healthy food. We introduced a [Pathway to Nutrition](#), which meant that schools could operate at a midpoint in the nutritional guidelines for up to two terms in order to build familiarity with healthy food (such as vegetables and wholegrain breads) to increase uptake.

Tastes change over time, adapting to the food one consumes (in fact, tastebuds regenerate every few weeks). Suppliers have seen success with this approach; there has been a reduction in food waste and increased enjoyment of the meals.

"Huge success with the programme going from having a large surplus with many students not eating their lunches to having no surplus and every child engaged with the programme."

*Ngata College*

### Children have different energy needs

Some suppliers initially provided portions that were too small for many ākonga, and schools were relying on there being surplus lunches to meet the needs of their students. We have since refined minimum serving sizes and set three standard portions, these being for years 1-3, years 4-8, and years 9-13. These will be introduced from term one, 2022.

However, there are still differences in energy needs within these groups. Some suppliers are adding optional sides to their main meal, so that children who need more can take more, without generating food waste by providing it to those who don't.

9(2)(a)



**Te Wharekura o Arowhenua, Southland**



## Suppliers (or schools) often experience teething issues

It can take time for suppliers (or schools that have opted for the internal model) to successfully deliver lunches to a new school, particularly if this is their first term with the programme. There are many reasons for this. For instance, they may not have realised the scale of the programme or ironed out how they manage their distribution. It can take time for them to understand the nutrition guidelines and unique dietary requirements of the school. Finally, it takes time for them to learn and adapt to learners' tastes (and for the learners' tastes to adapt in turn).

We can help overcome these issues through clear communication, setting expectations, and facilitating dialogue between schools and suppliers.

## Care needs to be taken to manage surplus lunches

Schools are able to order lunches up to their full roll numbers but, due to absences and sometimes only partial uptake, doing so means they can be left with surplus lunches. Schools that regularly have surplus lunches are encouraged to work with their supplier to adjust their order. Schools should also have systems in place to manage surplus lunches. Senior Advisors have seen schools giving surplus lunches to whānau who need support, sharing them with local community groups, food redistribution organisations or food banks, or using them for morning and afternoon tea and after school snacks.

We have created and distributed [guidance on the safe redistribution of surplus lunches](#).

## School leadership is crucial

Schools and teachers can be hugely influential on how the children think about the programme and their uptake of lunches. Sometimes schools haven't realised the effort that will be involved (in logistics, discussions with suppliers and so on), which can be a barrier to realising good outcomes. This can be hard work, needing patience with children trying things and engagement with whānau. We have adapted our communications to schools to highlight their importance in delivering the programme.

The more engaged a school is in a programme the more successful it is. The next section contains several examples of initiatives schools have implemented to increase engagement or derive other benefits from the programme.

## Internal models tend to have better outcomes

We have seen that schools that prepare their own food often have better outcomes than those working with suppliers. They are committed and engaged in the lunches process by default and have close ties to their students and community. Being present means that they are in tune with what their learners want and are able to give encouragement and collect real-time feedback. These schools usually have better uptake, less waste (as they know their attendance on the day) and are happier with the programme overall.

Internal model schools are also able to make the lunch budget for each child go further than suppliers (who have more overheads, delivery costs, and need to maintain an operating margin). There are also more opportunities to integrate the programme into students' education or involve them in the lunch making and distribution process.

Taking ownership of lunches is a serious undertaking and does not suit all schools' circumstances. For example, schools must meet the obligations of the [Food Control Plan for Ka Ora, Ka Ako | healthy school lunches programme](#). However, we are seeing interest from schools, and are encouraging those that are willing and able to take it on.

## Manual IT systems are not sufficient for the programme's scale

Operational processes, including managing a central database, invoicing, complaints and incidents, monitoring, surveys, and customer relationship management have been done manually since the start of the programme, often on spreadsheets. With the rapid expansion and sheer number of interactions, there are capacity issues and a growing risk of human error, which may lead to delivery delays or suboptimal customer service. We are working on implementing an ICT solution (SalesForce) which will centralise these processes and provide a single point of truth. Phase one of SalesForce is planned to be implemented in October 2021<sup>14</sup>.

## Integrating te ao Māori

Ka Ora, Ka Ako has provided an opportunity for many schools to embrace and embed Māori values as part of their school culture. The use of karakia, eating kai together, sustainable practices, learning about where the food comes from are examples of manaakitanga, kaitiakitanga, whakawhanaungatanga, tikanga and use of te reo in action.

Some Māori medium schools have taken the opportunity to unveil the four cornerstones of Māori health and well-being through Te Whare Tapa Whā practices (taha tinana, taha wairua, taha whānau, taha hinengaro). Schools are also building on maara (garden) to kīhini (kitchen) and enriching the vision of the curriculum in developing confident, connected lifelong learners, and using Ka Ora, Ka Ako as the contextual vehicle.

There were areas in which we could have engaged Māori earlier, such as asking iwi leaders if they were interested in being providers. The programme is building a te ao Māori workstream, which will increase engagement with local iwi, hapū and marae, and help facilitate co-design of future decisions. It will also aim to integrate te ao Māori values into the programme, apply a cultural lens to issues, and translate key documents and messages into te reo.

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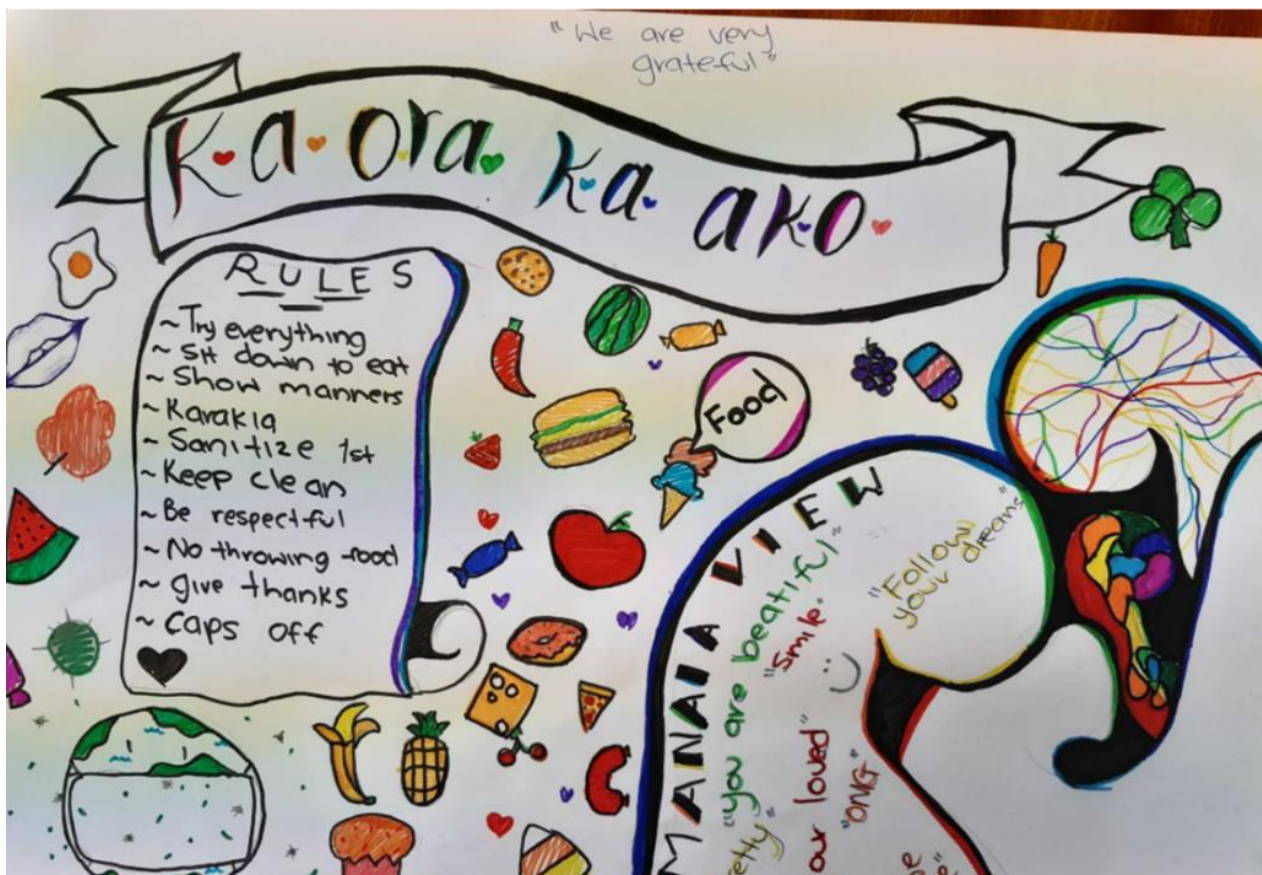
<sup>14</sup> Phase two is for the access to period products initiative.



## Making the most of the programme – school level

There are many ways that schools can make the most of Ka Ora, Ka Ako. Below is a selection of initiatives from schools in the programme. Not every initiative will be appropriate for every school – what works for a school with a roll of over 1,000 may not for a small rural primary or special school and vice versa. The key takeaway is that the programme can be more than just a lunch – it can be what the community makes of it.

- » Building shared values, including tikanga around students eating lunch together. This can change the culture of a school, help build social cohesion and a sense of community.
- » Gathering student feedback in a way ākonga are comfortable with (which can be student-led) and passing this information on to suppliers.
- » Teachers can encourage ākonga to try the items in the lunch they are not familiar with. If there are surplus lunches, they can model positive behaviour by eating the food with the children.
- » Integrating the programme into the curriculum. The programme provides real and relevant examples for teaching nutrition, health, food tech, horticulture, waste management, or even supply chains.
- » Setting up worm farms, vegetable gardens, and composting on school grounds.
- » Introducing incentives such as golden tickets, lunch badges, and stickers to increase uptake in the early days of the lunches.



Manaia View School

## Making the most of the programme – supplier level

Similarly, there are ways that suppliers can aim to get the best outcomes out of the programme.

- » Making time on a regular basis to see how the meals are provided to learners at schools and being present to receive feedback in person.
- » Leveraging the supply chain. This can mean increasing buying power (the ability to put more food on the plate for less), driving product development, and reducing inwards goods packaging (to reduce waste going to landfill).
- » Running workshops or hui with students and whānau.
- » Inviting food-tech students to design meals within the nutritional guidelines.
- » Providing options or sides.
- » Making lunches at schools to take away transit time and ensure kai retains its freshness.
- » Inviting students to tour their facilities and see the end-to-end lunch service process.

9(2)(a)



Michael from Libelle running an interactive workshop at St Joseph's School, Dannevirke

# Ongoing challenges and opportunities

## Challenges

This section sets out the ongoing and emerging challenges we have come across in implementing Ka Ora, Ka Ako. It also describes two trade-offs which we need to balance.

### Complex dietary restrictions

Suppliers are able to manage many of the more typical dietary restrictions (e.g., vegetarian, halal, dairy free) as business as usual. However, a small proportion of the population have multiple or complex dietary restrictions (e.g., allergies and coeliac disease or dysphagia), and not all suppliers are able to cater to these needs. These are more labour-intensive, sometimes having to be prepared or delivered separately. As a result, these lunches are more expensive to produce, and are not always catered for at present.

Many of these learners are a target population (as they are more likely to be undernourished, and there is high overlap with disabilities). While adapting the programme to them poses a challenge, they are an important part of keeping the programme universal, and they and their whānau will be positively impacted.

### Sustainability/packaging waste

Contracts require internal model schools or suppliers to have environmentally friendly practices and to minimise waste. However, the programme still has the potential to create large amounts of packaging waste. If every lunch each student had over the course of one day had just one non-recyclable product (e.g., a yogurt pottle), this would mean 200,000 non-recyclable products going to landfill. Inwards goods packaging (i.e., the packaging on goods that suppliers purchase) is less visible at school level but is also a significant source of waste.

Many suppliers are using recyclable or compostable containers and utensils. However, not all areas have adequate end-of-life processing facilities in place to deal with the sheer number the programme creates. This means that some packaging is still going to landfill.

Internal schools can purchase reusable items. However, it can still be more expensive for suppliers, or present a logistical challenge to wash reusable items in some schools.

We have developed guidelines in partnership with the packaging forum to help suppliers make informed packaging decisions. We have also updated our contracts to provide greater clarity and accountability. Work to make the programme more sustainable is ongoing.

Students' lunches brought from home were also a source of waste before the programme. Successfully tackling this issue will result in less individually packaged goods being purchased and going to landfill across the country.

### School or supplier non-performance or communication breakdowns

The examples in this document have primarily drawn from schools operating a successful programme. As at the end of term two 2021, 92 per cent of schools reported being happy with the programme. However, it should be acknowledged that this is not occurring across the board.

There are still issues with uptake and popularity of the meals at some schools. 9(2)(ba)(i)

9(2)(g)(i)

## Staffing levels

The number of staff members hasn't matched expansion of programme. This makes it harder to maintain and facilitate good relations with schools and suppliers, monitor performance, and share knowledge. We are reviewing the structure that we will need from next year.

## Cost pressures

An increase in the living wage and the rising cost of fruit and vegetables (over and above what is expected with the change in season), utilities, and fuel is causing the lunches to be more expensive to make. The price is currently fixed (i.e., not indexed to any measure of inflation). Suppliers are advising us that if the price per lunch isn't increased, they may need to reduce the amount of food they provide to learners.

We are considering how to meet these cost pressures, while also working with suppliers to understand their models, viability, and exploring opportunities to find efficiencies.

## Tender price is publicly available

The price per lunch that the Government pays is publicly available. This is a maximum price; 9(2)(j)

Suppliers therefore compete only on meal quality, and not price.

Given the cost pressures suppliers are facing, this may not be a significant issue at the moment. However, it may have an effect on competition and incentives (and therefore budgets) in the future.

## Certainty of funding

There is not currently any certainty of funding beyond 2023. Some schools and suppliers are hesitant to make significant investments (for example, in kitchens) for this reason. Extending or rolling over contracts creates extra transitional work. It also affects how we recruit, retain, and support staff.

## Trade-offs

### School flexibility vs supplier certainty and contract duration

There is a trade-off between allowing schools to have flexibility over who supplies them (or which model they use) and giving certainty to suppliers. Greater flexibility means that schools have more sway with suppliers and can take decisive action in response to poor performance. However, giving suppliers greater certainty about their continuing involvement means they are more able to invest in the programme (e.g., purchasing reusable containers, leasing kitchens, or training staff). 9(2)(g)(i)

We encourage schools and suppliers to commit to working together as success is made through ongoing communication, honest feedback, and collaboration.

## Centralisation vs school choice and local solutions

When an organisation produces more goods, they are able to reduce cost per item (e.g., from buying ingredients in bulk or investing in equipment). The cost of the programme could therefore be reduced by centralising suppliers. This would also ensure consistent quality of food. However, this would likely mean reducing or eliminating local suppliers (including whānau initiatives) and the local employment and economic boosts they provide. Schools would also miss out on tailored solutions to local needs.

The programme is moving towards school choice rather than centralisation, phasing out the group model and focussing on outcomes rather than cost for the time being. There may be options to centralise discrete parts of the programme while maintaining individual choice, such as helping smaller suppliers bulk purchase or offering a standard recipe book.

## Opportunities

This section sets out potential opportunities to improve and derive more benefit from the programme. Some of these can be progressed with the Ministry's current resource, whereas others fall outside of the programmes existing budget or remit and may require external skills and inter-agency collaboration.

9

### Nutrition education

There are gaps in the nutritional knowledge of schools, suppliers, whānau, and students. We find that all parties are more receptive to the idea of nutritious lunches if they understand their physical and mental benefits. We could create a communications package for schools and whānau to help address this gap. We could also collaborate with or learn from organisations with experience in this area, like the Ministry of Health's Healthy Active Learning programme and the Heart Foundation.

There is also an opportunity to inform higher level suppliers (e.g., Gilmours) of items that meet the nutritional guidelines, which would have a flow on effect for direct suppliers.

### Facilitate collaboration between schools and suppliers

There are opportunities to help show schools and suppliers what each other are doing, and foster collaboration and healthy competition. We have started an education workstream which will create a newsletter to show examples of positive initiatives from schools and suppliers.

### Hot lunches

We are finding that hot lunches increase uptake and engagement with the programme. It is also easier to include more vegetables or mask their taste in a hot lunch (for example, including mushrooms or carrots in lasagne). Some suppliers are trialling hot lunches, while other schools have already taken to heating up some meals for students. Countries with successful lunch programmes, such as Sweden and Finland, serve hot lunches.

There is an opportunity to transition to providing one or more hot lunches per week. There will need to be a transition period, as the capability to safely serve a hot lunch requires training and investment over and above what is required for a cold lunch. There are also issues to be worked through regarding redistribution of surplus lunches.

### Common recipes

Some schools and suppliers have floated the idea of a Ministry-led common recipe book. This would be particularly useful for those with dietary restrictions. More public knowledge in this area may mean more suppliers will be willing and able make meals for those with difficult diets, and potentially reduce their cost.

### Gather feedback on Ministry performance

There are further opportunities to assess our Ministry's performance in implementing the programme, for instance surveying schools or suppliers on how they find working with us or looking into metrics of success (e.g., percentage of lunches meeting the highest nutritional standard).

## Invest in the internal model

Internal models (school led) have often been able to provide higher quality food in greater quantities, and result in better outcomes for ākonga at a reduced cost. While it won't be suitable in every instance, there is an opportunity to promote the internal model to more schools. As there are high standards and requirements for a school to make their own lunches, an increase in capital investment offered to schools may help encourage uptake and enable those who would not have been previously able to take it on.

## Support for smaller suppliers (including bulk purchasing)

Smaller suppliers are important to the programme for their contribution to local economies and employment. However, they face some disadvantages relative to larger suppliers. We could explore group buying or other ways to increase smaller suppliers' purchasing power. We could also provide general information on business management to smaller suppliers, whānau or community initiatives.

## Work directly with the primary industry and manufacturers

The school lunch programme in its entirety is a huge consumer of fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as wholegrain goods like breads and pasta. There is an opportunity to open dialogue with primary industry and manufacturers, and plan for a year's worth of goods to be prepared, bought, and distributed – particularly for popular fruit like apples, which are eaten regularly across the country. This may help to reduce the cost of fresh fruit, vegetables, and wholegrain goods, which are key components of healthy lunches.

9(2)(a)



Eltham School



## Next steps for the programme

Ka Ora, Ka Ako is a massive and expensive Government programme. It has twice the annual budget of the Ministry of Education's next largest project, this being the longstanding school bus contract.

Twenty five percent of students in Aotearoa are now receiving a daily nutritious lunch through Ka Ora, Ka Ako, many of whom previously had unhealthy or irregular lunches, others who would have had no lunch at all.

It has positively impacted students, whānau, schools, communities, and regional economies across the country, and has the potential to deliver greater benefits still. The programme provides more than just a daily lunch; positive externalities can include improved health (both mental and physical), social cohesion, and local employment.

Most schools' contracts finish at the end of term four, 2021. We will take on a significant amount of work to transition all schools onto new supplier contracts for the next two years of the programme. We expect that some schools will seek to change suppliers, and others will move to an internal delivery model.

Suppliers are expressing concern about cost pressures and their ability to deliver sufficient nutritious food. We anticipate that these pressures can be absorbed within this year's budget, but that this will need to be evaluated for next year.

The pilot evaluation by Standard of Proof did not find all the successes that this report discusses. This is likely in part due to the short data collection period and time the programme had been in the schools. We have commissioned a second evaluation now that the programme is well embedded in many schools, which will be useful for assessment and future decision making.

There is a wealth of insightful, qualitative information about the programme. By its nature, it is unlikely to be captured in a quantitative evaluation. However, it is useful to see how we are going, find areas to investigate, and help make decisions. Some, but not all of this, is being recorded (for example, in surveys or board reports).

The programme is budgeted to continue until 2023. While there are no plans to expand the programme, there may still be further growth in the next two years due to annual changes to the equity index and the possibility of schools that had declined to be in the programme reconsidering.

9(2)(f)(iv) Staff are beginning to consider what a longer-term vision for the programme looks like.

In the meantime, the Ministry, schools, and suppliers are striving to continuously improve how they deliver the programme, and to make it a success for every student.



## Afterword

### Craig McFadyen, principal of Ngongotaha School, discusses the programme in response to a survey.

Yes, it's been quite a bit of work but the rewards are huge!

...I had several key factors each supplier had to meet:

- I wanted people working in our kitchen who had a connection to our school. 9(2)(ba)(i), 9(2)(a) This has made a huge difference as they know our children and are related to many of them.
- I wanted a menu that was healthy, nutritious and would allow the children the opportunity to try new flavours. This isn't just about a lunch, however for some of our children it's the most nutritious meal they have each day, it's actually about education too. Trying different types of food has been a fun part of this process.
- I wanted the lunches to be made on site. This way if there is an issue, we can rectify it and the children still enjoy lunch every day. We don't have a kitchen big enough to cater for 400 children. Libelle brought in food caravans for the kitchen team to work in each day.
- I didn't want it to be more work for classroom teachers. Teaching is a busy job. Heating or serving meals is not something I expect my teaching staff to do. All lunches are delivered straight to the classroom door and then taken away again for recycling.
- Recycling is important. Creating 400 lunches each day generates a fair bit of mess. Libelle uses recyclable products to serve their food in each day. Food scraps are sent home with one of our Teacher Aides for her pigs.

I've had several principals come and visit to see our programme in action and have told each of them, the thing that I think has caused the most success is the four community members who work in our kitchen. Whichever supplier or system they end up running, having people who genuinely care for the tamariki makes a huge difference.

We have been feeding our children lunch each day since the beginning of the year and we have seen some real positive changes. Nothing that we can link directly back to the lunch in schools programme but I guarantee that it has something to do with improved attendance, improved behaviour, sustained concentration, and happy children.

This has been a fantastic initiative for the children and the wider community. 400 students are provided with a nutritious healthy meal every single day at my school alone, parents get to keep money they would have spent on lunches to cover other expenses and locals have job opportunities - a win win in my mind. To me it's well worth any 'hoops' we would have to jump through.

9(2)(a)

Natone Park School