



## Education Report: Moving the October school holidays for the Auckland region

<b>To:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	14 September 2021	<b>Priority:</b>	High
<b>Security Level:</b>	In Confidence	<b>METIS No:</b>	1271539
<b>Drafter:</b>	Francesca Schiau	<b>DDI:</b>	463 0989
<b>Key contact and number:</b>	Ben O'Meara	<b>DDI:</b>	463 8704 9(2)(a)
<b>Messaging seen by Communications team:</b>	Yes	<b>Round robin:</b>	No

### Purpose of report

This report provides you with advice on whether to move forward this year's October school holidays for the Auckland region.

### Summary

1. With the Government's decision to keep Auckland at Alert Level 4 for at least another week (21 September), it is possible that the October school holidays will fall immediately after the end of a period at Alert Level 3 for the Auckland region.
2. Currently, the term three school holidays are scheduled to start on Saturday 2 October and end on Sunday 17 October. Moving the school holiday dates for the Auckland region to start from Saturday 18 September and end on Sunday 3 October could be done under the Education and Training Act 2020 (the Act), which allows the Minister to authorise boards to observe specified terms and holidays that differ from those otherwise required by the Act. However, schools are not required to follow these new term dates. To compel schools to change their term dates the Secretary for Education would need to direct schools under Schedule 25 of the Act.
3. Benefits in bringing the school holidays forward for the Auckland region include enabling more face-to-face learning (assuming Auckland is ready to move to Alert Level 2 before 4 October). This is particularly important for those groups of students that are digitally and economically disadvantaged.
4. There would also be benefits for students in years 11-13 who are currently completing their internal and portfolio assessments. Returning to school, if possible, for more face-to-face learning time would make it easier for students to prepare for mock and final NCEA exams.

5. However, changes to the school holiday dates are likely to lead to disruption for some families, schools and school holiday programme providers in the Auckland region. We know that the Auckland primary, and secondary principals' associations do not support a change in the school holidays for a range of reasons, including:
  - a. the disruption to existing planning for the remainder of term 3;
  - b. teacher workload to plan for a longer term 4;
  - c. disruption to school holiday planning by families and whānau; and
  - d. retaining the current dates will mean higher vaccination levels by the time students return to the classroom.
6. Overall, principals have advised that higher vaccination levels and continuity of current arrangements are important for maintaining student mental health and wellbeing.
7. We understand that these views from principals are generally supported by teachers.
8. The PPTA does not support a change to the school holiday dates for the Auckland region for a range of reasons, including the fact that there have been considerable changes to the school year already, and further change could exacerbate student and staff anxiety. The NZEI does not support a change either, largely in accordance with the views of the Auckland Primary Principals Association.
9. Changes will have industrial relations and payroll implications. These will be greater than those experienced in the 2020 lockdown because it will impact only one region, which creates a greater need for manual workarounds.
10. On balance, we consider that although there are both benefits and drawbacks associated with bringing the school holidays forward for the Auckland region, the current holiday dates should be retained.
11. Attached are two draft press releases at Annexes One and Two. Depending on your decision on whether to move the school holidays, one announces a change for the Auckland region and one states that the current school holiday dates will be retained.

## Recommended Actions

---

The Ministry of Education recommends that you:

- a. **note** there are some benefits associated with bringing the term three dates forward for the Auckland region, including possibly enabling more face-to-face learning for students  
**Noted**
- b. **note** that shifting the term three dates for the Auckland region will have drawbacks, including leading to disruption for some families, schools and school holiday programme providers in the Auckland region; and these changes could not be easily implemented by the payroll system  
**Noted**
- c. **agree** to retain the current term three school holiday dates of 2 October to 17 October for the Auckland region  
**Agree / Disagree**

## Proactive Release Recommendation

---

- d. **agree** that this report is released once it has been considered by you.

*bauney*

Ben O'Meara  
**Group Manager**  
**Education System Policy**

14/09/2021

Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister of Education**

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## Background

---

1. On 13 September the Government announced that Auckland will remain at COVID-19 Alert Level 4 for another week. The term three holidays are scheduled to take place between Saturday 2 October to Sunday 17 October. It is therefore possible that the October school holidays will fall immediately after the end of a period at Alert Level 3 for the Auckland region.

## Powers for changing school holiday periods

---

2. The process for specifying new school terms is set out in clause 4(2) of Schedule 21 to the Education and Training Act 2020 (the Act). This enables the Minister to authorise schools to open and close on different dates to the original term and holiday dates.
3. However, the power to authorise school boards to follow new school term dates is a permissive power i.e. State and State integrated schools will not have to implement those new term dates. That decision resides with a school's board.
4. We are aware of a small number of State and State Integrated schools that did not implement the changes to last year's term dates and continued to operate to the originally published term dates.
5. To compel schools (including private schools) to change their term dates, the Secretary for Education would need to direct schools under Schedule 25 of the Act.

## Potential impacts of changing the October school holiday dates

---

### Benefits

6. Bringing forward the school holidays will remove the risk that Auckland will move out of Alert Level 3 immediately prior to the beginning of the October school holidays, and enable many parents to return to work sooner.
7. Some parents that have been asking for the school holidays to be brought forward have noted that their children are struggling to engage in remote learning. Assuming Auckland is ready to move to Alert Level 2 before 4 October, shifting the school holidays would mean students could return to face-to-face learning with their teachers for a longer period. This is particularly important for students in years 11-13 who are completing their internal NCEA assessments and for those requiring materials and machines for their portfolio assessments that are on school sites (although we are aware that some schools have accommodated portfolio assessments by delivering materials to students and using online assessment).
8. Being able to return to face-to-face learning earlier may make it easier for some students to prepare for their mock and NCEA exams. We have already started to receive requests for approval from year 12 and 13 students to return to school under Alert Level 3.
9. Bringing the school holidays forward for the Auckland region may be beneficial for those groups of students that are digitally and economically disadvantaged, including Māori and Pacific students. However, it is important to note that even if Auckland is ready to move down to Alert Level 2 by 4 October, student attendance may still be impacted. Recent Ministry data shows that students are most likely to have reduced their attendance in response to Covid-19 if they attend a low decile school, are in earlier year levels, are Pacific or Māori, or participate in Māori medium education.

## Drawbacks

10. Some families and whānau will have already arranged annual leave for the October school holidays (on the assumption that Auckland will be at Alert level 2), and a change in holiday dates will remove their ability to have a rest at this time. A change in school holidays could create disruption for school holiday programme providers and lead to loss of revenue.
11. We know that the Auckland primary and secondary principals' associations do not support a change in the school holidays. At a meeting with the associations this morning they provided us with the results of a straw poll:
  - a. Of 424 primary schools asked, 93% want to keep holidays as is (323 respondents).
  - b. Only 7% of schools supported a date change – these responses came largely from high decile schools.
  - c. Secondary schools also confirm that there is virtually no support for a change to term dates.
12. Principals advised that retaining the current holiday dates would provide time for those who have recently had their first Covid-19 vaccination to get their second vaccination. This would significantly reduce anxiety about returning to school.
13. They also advised us that previous experience of managing significant upheaval in Christchurch has demonstrated that maintaining continuity and a familiar pathway is extremely important for maintaining student mental health and wellbeing. For the parents of younger children, principals have been urging parents to talk with their schools to get support for remote learning.
14. The PPTA does not support a change to the school holiday dates for the Auckland region for a range of reasons, including the fact that there have been considerable changes to the school year already, and further change would exacerbate anxiety.
15. The NZEI does not support a change, consistent with points raised by Stephen Lethbridge, of the Auckland Primary Principals Association.
16. If the October holidays are brought forward, term four will be lengthened as a result. We are aware that many teachers, principals, students and parents were fatigued last year as a result of a longer than usual term. Principals' preference is to not have a longer term four compared with other terms in the year.
17. Principals and teachers have planned for responding to students' learning needs in term four, and based on past experience there was a widespread view that this would be more effective if everyone had a proper break.
18. Changing the school dates is also likely to impact school property projects, most of which happen during the school holidays. These include the delivery of roll growth classrooms and asbestos removal.

## *Payroll and industrial relations risks*

19. Changing the school holiday dates for the Auckland region is also problematic from the perspective of payroll and collective agreements.

20. We know from last year, that changing the school holiday dates had a significant impact on payroll, with some of the issues taking months to resolve. Education Payroll Limited (EPL) is unable to change term dates in the payroll system. They configure the payroll system for the coming year once the term dates are known, taking into account public holidays. This configuration then determines a number of things including the amount of holiday pay a person receives when they leave the service, and their service that has accumulated. As the change would only be applied to Auckland, the majority of adjustments would have to be done manually for the 569 schools in the Auckland cohort.
21. The timing of any change to term three holiday dates could have a significant impact on the payroll end of year/start of year process, a major payroll process, for the reasons outlined above.
22. Employees who work during the term time only, such as teacher aides, can either be paid during the term only, or they can choose to be 'annualised' and have their pay spread across the full year. Last year's change to the school holiday dates meant that:
- a. Employees who were paid during the term time only received salary during the 'new' school holidays because the payroll system considered that time to be term time, and were also entitled to be paid when the new school term started (during what had previously been school holidays). This created significant overpayments of approximately \$14 million for term time only employees which couldn't be recovered. This is an unavoidable consequence of moving the school holidays.
  - b. Employees who chose to be annualised did not receive that extra payment. A change in school holidays can also change the annualisation calculation, causing under/overpayments. The annualisation agreements are calculated and started in January every year and changing these calculations would be a complicated and time-consuming task for EPL.
  - c. NZEI was not supportive of the action and pushed unsuccessfully for all support staff to be paid the "extra fortnight".
23. Some teachers were also impacted by last year's school holidays changes. Teachers who had long periods of leave without pay had their holiday pay reduced in the next set of school holidays. The shift in school holidays caused an overcalculation in the holiday pay reductions, and saw the holiday pay reductions being loaded in the 'old' school holidays. This meant that teachers were having their salary deducted on days that they were working. Due to how these reductions are loaded, they had to be resolved manually from February this year.
24. Shifting the school holiday dates may have other flow on impacts:
- a. Employees with fixed term agreements cannot change the dates of their employment without their employer's agreement. Many have specified dates in their agreements, and these will not change if the term dates are changed.
  - b. Employees with fixed hours of work on a term by term basis will face similar challenges in their abilities to change previously agreed days and hours of work.
  - c. EPL resources committed to other processes and projects would need to be diverted or stopped. This could have implications for necessary technology upgrades, implementation of any Pay Equity claims and collective agreements should they settle.

## Way forward

---

25. While one of the key benefits of bringing the school holidays forward is that students would be able to return to face-to-face learning earlier, this is not a certainty since we cannot be sure when Auckland will be ready to move down to Alert Level 2. On balance, we consider that although there are both benefits and drawbacks associated with bringing the school holidays forward for the Auckland region, the current school holiday dates should be retained.
26. If you decide to bring the school holidays forward for the Auckland region, we could consider whether bringing the Christmas holidays forward would be beneficial for students and schools.
27. During last year's April lockdown, we issued exemptions to some schools. If you decide to bring the school holidays forward, we do not recommend issuing exemptions as the timeframes this year are too tight.
28. We've also considered an option to bring the school holidays for Auckland forward by one week, so that term four would start one week earlier in Auckland. We don't recommend this option for the same reasons as the *bringing forward two weeks option* as it would have a similar level of disruption while only gaining one week of additional face to face learning time.

## Annexes

---

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| Annex 1: | Draft press release: School holidays brought forward in the Auckland region so that students can return earlier |
| Annex 2: | Draft press release: School holidays remain unchanged for Auckland region                                       |

Annex 1: DRAFT press release: School holidays brought forward in the Auckland region so that students can return earlier

---

**School holidays brought forward in the Auckland region so that students can return to school earlier**

School holidays are being brought forward in the Auckland region to start from this Saturday - so students spend as few weeks as possible having to learn from home, Education Minister Chris Hipkins announced today.

“We’re pulling the school holidays forward a fortnight in Auckland while the region is at these higher Delta Alert levels – so kids can get back to learning in person with their teachers and friends sooner.”

The term holidays will now start in Auckland from Saturday 18 September to Sunday 3 October, instead of starting on Saturday, 2 October, like the rest of the country.

“We know Auckland is likely to continue at Level 4 or Level 3 for the coming weeks, so it makes sense that the holidays are held over this period.

“This change is designed to pave the way for students to return to school and learning on site as early as practicable, and it will also help parents return to work sooner.

“I thank all the education leaders, teachers and many others, who are showing great resilience and flexibility to put this into action, as we continue to manage this Delta outbreak and return Auckland to lower alert levels.”

## Annex 2: DRAFT press release: School holidays remain unchanged for Auckland region

---

### **School holidays remain unchanged for Auckland region**

School holidays in Auckland will continue to be held at the same time as the rest of the country, starting from Saturday, 2 October.

Education Minister Chris Hipkins says the date of the term holidays will remain the same so as not to disrupt the plans already in place for students, families, educators, and many others.

“We’re also aware that if the holidays moved forward then term four would end up being longer – which can cause problems such as fatigue among staff and students.

“Other factors in the decision include that school property projects would be disrupted, including the delivery of roll growth classrooms and asbestos removal.”

Chris Hipkins says he thanks all the teachers and students who have shown great resilience and flexibility to continue learning from home this term, as the county to continues to manage the Delta outbreak and return Auckland to lower alert levels.