



18 August 2021



Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your email of 15 July 2021 to the Ministry of Education requesting the following information:

- *How many schools have buildings with mould that have been assessed as unsafe for people to be in?*
- *How many schools from this total of 110, have been assessed as having black mould?*
- *Can the Ministry of Education please provide data on the total number of school buildings that may have mould from 2019, 2017, 2015 and 2013 if this data is held for any of these years?*
- *How many of the 110 buildings are not in use?*

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

***How many schools have buildings with mould that have been assessed as unsafe for people to be in?***

As at 16 August 2021, we are aware of 25 schools which have buildings which have been isolated or closed due to the possible or actual presence of mould. Closure of a space does not necessarily mean the buildings are unsafe for occupancy. Health officials advise there are no national or international standards to measure exposure to mould for determining health effects. The negative health effects of moulds and fungi can vary depending on the individual, so minimising exposure is recommended where possible.

Where mould is considered to present a potential health and safety risk, and schools bring it to the Ministry's attention, the Ministry always acts with urgency to support them to address the issue, taking a cautious, safety-first approach to ensure students and staff are safe.

***How many schools from this total of 110, have been assessed as having black mould?***

We do not systematically record the type of mould found or suspected. Testing usually occurs where there is an assessment that mould, of whatever suspected type, may present a potential health and safety risk.

A number of the buildings currently closed have been mothballed or are surplus to requirements. In these circumstances it would not be of value to spend money on testing buildings to find this information out when, because they are closed and unoccupied, they are not a risk.

Accordingly, as the Ministry does not systematically collect the information requested, I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(g) of the Act as the information you have requested is not held by the Ministry.

***Can the Ministry of Education please provide data on the total number of school buildings that may have mould from 2019, 2017, 2015 and 2013 if this data is held for any of these years.***

The Ministry does not hold a centrally collated dataset on school buildings that may have mould as at the dates you have requested. In May 2021 we undertook a point-in-time check of known and potential mould issues in schools which revealed 110 schools where mould is known to be or may be present. As outlined above, 25 of these schools currently have buildings closed due to the possible or actual presence of mould.

Mould and other building maintenance issues are dealt with as part of schools and Ministry's day-to-day operations and information of this nature is not specifically recorded in the Ministry's asset management system. While that information may be held by the Ministry at the level of individual schools, to collate this information as at the dates you have requested would require an extensive search through our correspondence and files on every school throughout the country to identify where mould-related issues have been identified. As this would place an unreasonable administrative burden on the Ministry, I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(f) of the Act.

***Also can I please find out how many of the 110 buildings are not in use.***

As stated above, 25 schools have buildings that have been isolated or closed due to the possible or actual presence of mould. The impacted buildings at the other schools remain in use subject to a variety of measures that includes monitoring, ventilation, cleaning and maintenance while permanent solutions are progressed, where required, to address the cause of the issue.

While we do not specifically record this, the reasons a building may be closed include:

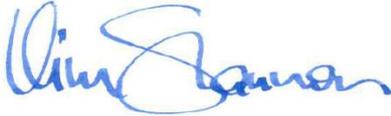
- that the classroom or building is surplus to requirements, mothballed or demolition is pending;
- the building has remediation work pending or currently underway; and
- air testing results are being awaited and they have been vacated as a precaution; or the mould has been deemed to pose a potential health and safety risk.

More information, including the general advice we provide to schools, is available at [Moulds and fungi – Education in New Zealand](#).

Please note, the Ministry now proactively publishes OIA responses on our website. As such, we may publish this response on our website after five working days. Your name and contact details will be removed.

Thank you again for your email. If you have further questions please feel free to contact our media team in the first instance at [media.team@education.govt.nz](mailto:media.team@education.govt.nz). If you are unsatisfied with my response, you have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review it. You can do this by writing to [info@ombudsman.parliament.nz](mailto:info@ombudsman.parliament.nz) or Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Nāku noa, nā



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