

## Briefing Note: Release of UNICEF Innocenti Report on Child Wellbeing

<b>To:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	01/09/2020	<b>Priority:</b>	High
<b>Security Level:</b>	In Confidence	<b>METIS No:</b>	1239792
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### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

**Note** that on Friday 4 September 2020, UNICEF's Office of Research – Innocenti is releasing the *Innocenti Report Card 16: Worlds of Influence - Understanding What Shapes Child Wellbeing in Rich Countries*

**Note** that the report includes a league table ranking OECD nations for certain child wellbeing outcomes, with New Zealand ranked 35 of 38 countries overall

**Note** that the Ministry of Education provided input into the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's aide-mémoire about the report (Annex 1).

### Proactive release

**Agree** that this briefing will be proactively released

☒ **Agree** ☐ **Disagree**



Damian Edwards  
**Deputy Secretary  
Evidence, Data and Knowledge**

01/09/2020



Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister of Education**

12/ 9 /2020

## Background

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1. UNICEF Innocenti releases a new report card annually, each with a different focus. This year's report provides an overview of child wellbeing, similar to reports released in 2007 and 2013. Previous reports have resulted in media attention and concern from advocacy groups about how New Zealand's level of child wellbeing compares internationally, and also about the gaps in data for indicators included in the reports.
2. The Ministries of Education and Health have responded to a media request from Newsroom on 1 September 2020 about the findings in the report [METIS 1239872 refers].
3. In anticipation of the report's release, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet coordinated feedback from across children's agencies to inform an aide-mémoire for the Prime Minister. We understand this aide-mémoire will be forwarded to your office in the coming days. We also understand that the Prime Minister's Office considering releasing a media release to respond to the UNICEF report. We can confirm this with your office tomorrow.
4. We have attached the aide-mémoire (Annex 1) for your reference, as it provides a cross-agency perspective and significant detail on the report's findings.
5. Key points from the aide-mémoire include:
  - a. The report includes a league table that rates New Zealand poorly (35<sup>th</sup> out of 38 high-income countries) for child wellbeing outcomes
  - b. This league table is based on only six indicators which are unlikely to represent the overall state of child wellbeing. Furthermore, only five of the indicators include New Zealand data and the data itself ranges from 2012 to 2018.
  - c. Across all the indicators in the report, New Zealand ranks poorly for youth suicide, child obesity, child poverty, and paid parental leave. These rankings are generally consistent with those in earlier international reports and league tables.
  - d. New Zealand's below average ranking on child poverty is consistent with previous reporting by Ministry of Social Development and others. The rankings are based on figures for 2017/18, before the period covered by the Government's Child Poverty Targets.
  - e. Past reports have resulted in concern and debate both about children's outcomes in New Zealand and about the level of comparable data collected on children. New Zealand is again missing from many of the key indicators, but this is partly due to the report's use of measures based on European surveys.
  - f. New Zealand's approach to improving child wellbeing aligns very well with the recommendations of the report, which are to consult children, have an integrated approach to child wellbeing, and plan for the future.

## Implications for education

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6. The UNICEF report and the aide-mémoire highlight that New Zealand did not include the question regarding life satisfaction in the Programme of International Assessment (PISA) surveys in 2015 and 2018. This question will be administered in the next cycle of PISA in 2021.
7. The report uses a number of measures from European surveys that New Zealand is not included in, as well as the aforementioned PISA item. For example, the measure of mental wellbeing (which New Zealand ranks 38 of 38), is based solely on New Zealand's youth suicide rate in 2012/13 as no data was collected for the second indicator, life satisfaction. Further, a number indicators for the 'relationships' and 'networks' domains, which we know to be critical to the wellbeing of children and young people, are based mostly on the Children's Worlds and European Quality of Life Surveys, which New Zealand does not participate in.
8. Given the over-reliance on PISA data for New Zealand's measures, the known limitations of standardised testing, and the culturally diverse make-up of our schooling population, we consider this new report has significant limitations and does not present a fulsome picture of child wellbeing in New Zealand.
9. However, we do acknowledge that there is a long way to go to realising wellbeing for children, young people and whānau, and that education has a key role to play in this. The Ministry is implementing numerous strategies and initiatives designed to improve wellbeing, from operational responses through to system transformation.
10. For example, as part of the Government's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Package, \$200 million was allocated to support the wellbeing of children and young people across early learning, schools and tertiary education. This includes:
  - a. \$50m Urgent Response Fund, which is currently supporting the immediate wellbeing needs of children and young people in early learning and school.
  - b. \$75.8m investment to increase access to counselling services in schools for children and young people
  - c. \$25m to strengthen mental health support services for tertiary students
  - d. \$32.8m million for frontline curriculum support, to assist early learning services, schools and kura to deliver high quality curriculum programmes, with a focus on wellbeing, mental health and healthy relationships; and
  - e. \$16m to support educator wellbeing for the employees of publicly funded early learning services, kōhanga reo, schools and kura and their families.
11. The Ministry of Education has a work programme that is seeking to understand and fill the gaps in our data about the wellbeing of children and young people in education.  
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