

# Ka Ora, Ka Ako | healthy school lunches programme

Ka Ora, Ka Ako | the healthy school lunches programme aims to reduce food insecurity by providing access to a nutritious lunch in school every day. By the end of 2020, over three million lunches have been served in 182 schools to over 39,000 students.



*Flaxmere Primary School students enjoy their lunch.*

Regular nutritious food is vital for children's physical, mental and educational development. It affects their ability to focus, concentrate and learn.

Around one in five children in New Zealand live in households that struggle to put enough good-quality food on the table. In communities facing greater socio-economic barriers, 40% of parents run out of food sometimes or often.

Ka Ora, Ka Ako aims to reduce food insecurity by providing access to a nutritious lunch every day. Research indicates that reducing food insecurity for children and young people:

- improves wellbeing
- supports child development and learning
- improves learners' levels of concentration, behaviour and school achievement
- reduces financial hardship amongst families and whānau
- addresses barriers to children's participation in education and promotes attendance at school
- boosts learners' overall health.

## About Ka Ora, Ka Ako

In 2019, the Government announced a two-year initiative to explore delivering a free and healthy daily school lunch to Year 1–8 (primary and intermediate aged) students in schools with high levels of disadvantage.

Around 10,000 learners in 42 schools across Bay of Plenty/Waiariki and Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti were the first to get a free school lunch in Term 1 2020. Over 3,000 students in 18 schools and kura across Otago and Southland joined Ka Ora, Ka Ako in Terms 2 and 3. Another 51 schools in Bay of Plenty/Waiariki and Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti began delivering lunches in Term 4 2020.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ka Ora, Ka Ako is being expanded to reach around 200,000 students by the end of 2021, including secondary students. This first roll-out of the expansion has seen around 70 schools and kura in Bay of Plenty/Waiariki and Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti join others delivering lunches in Term 4. These schools took advantage of established processes to quickly start the lunches programme. Across the rest of the country, around 640 schools and kura have been invited to take part in Ka Ora, Ka Ako. Depending on how these schools provide lunches, some will start serving lunches from Term 1 2021.

Announced as part of Budget 2020, expanding Ka Ora, Ka Ako aims to cushion the blow of COVID-19 impacts on students living in households which may now be experiencing heightened financial stress, job and income losses that can interfere with learning and wellbeing. Expanding the programme is also expected to support job creation and economic recovery from the pandemic. Based on information from the programme, it is estimated that around 2,000 jobs in local communities will be created from the expansion.

Providing a lunch to all students in participating schools will make sure that everyone who needs a free lunch gets one and will minimise any stigma that sometimes comes with receiving free meals. Targeting programmes on the basis of need also requires a process to confirm eligibility. This can add to cost and complexity and discourage eligible families from taking part, meaning some children needing lunch miss out.

Schools can decide whether to deliver lunches themselves or outsource to an external supplier. Schools and communities are best placed to understand what their children need.

The Ministry is supporting schools with contractual documentation and providing guidance and advice to schools if required.

## Nutrition and safety

It is important that lunches are healthy and nutritious. This includes offering foods from the four main food groups - vegetables and fruit, breads and cereals, milk and milk products, and lean meat, chicken, seafood, eggs, legumes, nuts and seeds.

There is no set lunch menu for the programme. Schools and suppliers decide what works best for them. What is included in lunches will depend on a number of factors such as the chosen supplier, available catering facilities, the number of students, and a school's distance from the chosen supplier. A typical weekly menu includes a variety of lunches such as wraps, vegetable sticks, dips, salads, soups, and hot lunches. Menus may also change from term to term to reflect available fresh produce and the season, and any feedback from schools and students.

We know that children's tastes vary. It can be challenging to provide healthy food that children want to eat and getting children to enjoy new foods can take time. We have worked closely with the Ministry of Health, nutrition, and health experts to establish guidelines, based on the [Ministry of Health's nutrition guidelines](#) for schools and work with schools and suppliers on how they can gradually introduce new foods and make lunches healthier.

Staff preparing food must comply with Food Act 2014 and be aware of allergies and allergens. We have worked with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) to provide a food safety plan and can help organise training to assist schools providing their own lunches. Contracts with external suppliers include requirements to meet nutritional guidelines and health and safety standards.

Schools are also encouraged to move towards a zero-waste policy, reduce food wastage, and minimise the use of plastic single-use items.

## Evaluation

We are working with selected schools and suppliers to explore different ways of delivering nutritious lunches and adapt and refine as we go.

Evaluation of the programme began in Term 1 2020. There are two phases of evaluation: evaluating implementation and testing the best way to deliver lunches and gathering evidence of the impact for learners and their achievement and engagement at school.

Evaluation will include gathering feedback from schools and suppliers, including asking:

- if nutritious food is available every day of sufficient quality, quantity and variety, and is appealing to learners
- if different implementation models provide better value for money for our schools
- if local capacity can sustain delivery of the pilot programme
- if the Ministry of Education can expand the pilot and scale up the model.

## **Child Youth and Wellbeing Strategy**

The programme is part of the Government's Child Youth and Wellbeing Strategy. Children and Young People have what they need is one of the key outcomes. Providing food to children at school is one-way government can directly address poverty and food insecurity, and positively impact children's wellbeing.