

## **School lunches – Q&A**

### **Which early learning services will be eligible for the programme?**

We are introducing a targeted Early Childhood Food Programme for up to 10,000 two-to-five-year-olds. The programme will target students who attend low equity, not for profit, community-based early learning services. Work is underway to determine which specific early learning services will be eligible.

### **How is the Ka Ora, Ka Ako healthy school lunch programme delivered now?**

Approximately 235,000 students in more than 1,000 schools are currently supplied with a lunch, across primary and secondary schools. This equates to approximately 40 per cent of all schools, and approximately 27 per cent of all students.

The programme is delivered by a mix of models, depending on different school needs. Some schools receive lunches from suppliers on contract to the Ministry of Education (the “external model”) and others are funded to prepare the food in-house or source directly from local suppliers (the “internal model”).

The programme does not formally require schools to provide an opt out option for parents, nor is the programme flexible enough to cater to school attendance, nor was it set up and implemented with the requirement for schools to regularly measure or report on wasted food or surplus food. We do not officially know how much wasted or surplus food there is – but we know anecdotally there is a lot.

### **What is the new alternative provision model that will be in place from beginning of next year?**

Currently the Government contracts with 156 suppliers to provide lunches to schools on the external model. Each school on the internal model purchases the goods locally.

The alternative provision model will use commercial acumen and government’s considerable buyer power to procure a range of goods nationally and distribute these to schools with students year 7 and over.

Schools will order food from a central source to store, prepare and distribute to students. This provides more flexibility to the school to adjust to the roll and attendance and allows intermediate and secondary school students more choice.

The details will be determined in 2024 by the Ministry of Education with the assistance of an expert advisory group that consists of commercial and not for profit experts in procurement, logistics and contracting, plus child welfare and nutrition. The expert group and the Ministry will engage with representatives from affected schools.

## Why are you moving to the alternative provision model?

**Surplus food:** Surplus food is untouched lunches. In term 4, 2023, 407 of the approximately 1,000 schools receiving Ka Ora, Ka Ako self-reported that 9 per cent of lunches were surplus. The other schools did not respond to the survey. This equates to an estimated \$30 million worth of surplus food per annum.

**Wasted food:** Waste is lunches that are started but not finished by students. We do not have data on how much waste is in the programme. Anecdotally, we know waste is significant – in one area of one city alone, a ten cubic metre bin full of food waste alone (not including packaging or utensils) is collected fortnightly.

**Ordering to attendance:** Only around twenty per cent of schools receiving the programme align their ordering with attendance. In many schools, taxpayers are catering and paying for lunches for students who do not appear to be there to eat them. It is estimated that this cost approximately \$15 million in the first three terms of 2023.

**Flexibility:** Secondary school-aged students have greater flexibility across their schedule, which can impact on when and where they eat food during the school day.

**Opt-out:** Parents and students should be able to make their own lunches if they want to, without contributing to wasted and surplus food in the school lunch programme. It is important that parents understand that it is the parent's responsibility, not the state's, to provide lunches if they are able to.

**Best pricing available:** The current policy settings have the Ministry contracting with 156 suppliers to deliver Ka Ora, Ka Ako, and each of those suppliers has their own set of suppliers. This means economies of scale are being missed and the government is not getting a commercially sensible deal.

## Who receives food under the changes to the programme?

All students currently eligible for Ka Ora, Ka Ako lunches will continue to receive food at school.

Students in Years 0-6 will continue to receive the status quo lunches, whether through the external model or the internal model.

Students in Years 7 and older receiving lunches will receive food using the alternative provision model.

Many students will also be receiving the Kickstart Breakfast programme, KidsCan food support, and for students who attend composite primary and intermediate schools, the Fruit in Schools programme.

We are also introducing food provision for up to 10,000 two-to-five-year-olds who attend low equity, not for profit, community-based early learning services.

## How do you know this will work?

The Government approached the registered charity KidsCan for their well-grounded expertise. KidsCan has been operating a food in schools programme for the past 18 years. Their commercial expertise and knowledge of school operations and student behaviour, combined with advice from the Ministry, has informed the proposed shape of school food provision and the consequential two-year budget allocation. KidsCan

provides food to up to thirty per cent of students in 780 schools. We have also received commercially sensitive insights from commercial operators that serve food in different sectors for less. We know we can do better.

### **How much money will be saved through the changes?**

There will be approximately \$107 million savings per year from Food in Schools and \$4 million of that saving will be used for the Early Childhood Food Programme.

### **How will an effective programme be delivered with a smaller budget?**

The programme will use the Government's significant buying power much more effectively, giving students more agency around what they eat, and schools more flexibility. This will significantly reduce wasted food, surplus food, and cost.

The Ministry of Education, with assistance from an expert advisory group that consists of commercial and not for profit experts in procurement, logistics and contacting, plus child welfare and nutrition, will work on the details of how the programme will be delivered effectively. The expert group and the Ministry will engage with representatives from affected schools.

### **How long will the interim model be in place?**

The interim model is funded until the end of 2026 during which time we will be working on a full redesign of the programme based on commercial experience, data and evidence. A wider review of all the suite of programmes providing food in schools will also be conducted over this time to ensure taxpayers are getting value for money, with effective programmes that are targeted to need, and that take account of matters such as the ease of ordering and management for schools.

### **When will the changes take effect?**

For the remainder of 2024 the programme will remain as is with all current contracts and commitments in place. The interim model will come into effect in 2025.

### **Will dietary needs still be catered for under the alternative provision model?**

The Ministry intends to continue providing options for students with standard dietary requirements (i.e., vegetarian, vegan, gluten free and dairy free). They will work through an open tender process to source a supplier for the alternative provision model.

Options for providing for students with complex special diets will also be considered as part of the procurement process.

### **Will meals be nutritious?**

The Ministry, with advice from the expert advisory group, will work through an open tender process to source supplier(s) for the alternative provision model. The range of food on offer will depend on the supplier(s) selected, and nutritional value of the food

will be a consideration of this process. Schools will be able to select foods based on their preference, as well as facilities and capacity.

**Who will the tender process be open to?**

The Ministry will work through an open tender process to source supplier(s) for the alternative provision model through the Government Electronic Tendering Service (GETS). This process is open for any business to engage in.

**Will the food provided/format for providing food in the alternative model be the same in all schools?**

The type of food and contracting details will be determined through a procurement process in 2024, and may vary for different schools depending what works best for their roll size and composition, and the facilities they have available.

The details will be determined by the Ministry and the expert advisory group of commercial and not-for-profit experts in procurement, logistics and contracting, plus child welfare and nutrition, in 2024. The Ministry and the expert group will engage with representatives from affected schools. They will work through how the alternative provision model will work.

The Government will use its considerable buying power to bulk purchase goods, and schools will choose what food they order from this government-procured selection and decide how much they need.