



# Briefing report

## Education Review Office (ERO): Learning in a Covid-19 World: What we know so far about the impact on learners

Date	3 May 2022
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ERO Priority	Medium
ERO Reference	M22-15
Date requested	ERO initiated
Date due	ERO initiated
Proactive release	Recommended

Addressee	Action sought	Deadline
<b>Minister of Education</b>	It is recommended that you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Note</b> the findings of ERO research programme <i>Learning in a Covid-19 World</i> to inform the upcoming strategy session on accelerating learning.</li> <li>b) <b>Note</b> that this briefing is recommended for proactive release.</li> </ul>	



### Attachments:

***Education Review Office (ERO):  
Learning in a Covid-19 World: What  
we know so far about the impact on  
learners***

### Minister's Office to complete

Noted	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seen	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approved	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referred to:	
Date signed by Minister:	



### Comments:



Our Ref: M22-15

3 May 2022

**Hon Jan Tinetti**  
**Associate Minister of Education**

## **Learning in a Covid-19 World: What we know so far about the impact on learners**

### **Purpose**

1. This briefing provides you with key findings of ERO's two-year work programme to understand the impact of Covid-19 on learners to inform a strategy session on accelerating learning which is to be hosted by Minister Hipkins on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May.

### **Background**

2. ERO has been investigating the impact of Covid-19 on students and schools and students since the first national lockdown in 2020. Our work shines a light on how students and schools have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, what lessons have been learnt, and the challenges going forward.
3. ERO has collected wide-ranging data including:
  - 750 interviews with principals, board chairs, and teachers
  - Surveyed 14,772 students, 1,380 teachers, and over 1,800 principals.
  - Held over 50 focus groups and hui with principals, board members, teachers and students.
  - Held talanoa with 32 leaders and teachers from schools with high Pacific rolls in November 2021 and 41 Pacific learners.
  - Held wananga, interviews and collected a range of information from across high population Māori schools, Māori medium schools and Kaupapa Māori kura, including insights from learners, whānau, hapū and iwi.

### **Overall findings**

4. Learners have been significantly impacted by the pandemic. Whilst schools, kura, families, whanau, hapū, iwi and communities have been exceptional at supporting learners based on the research to date, ERO is concerned that the disruptions from the Covid-19 pandemic will have longer-term impacts for learners, particularly for some groups of learners.

## **Wellbeing**

5. We do not have a good pre-Covid baseline of learners' wellbeing to compare to. But students have reported high levels of anxiety during the pandemic and the impact may be cumulative, for example:
  - Students remain anxious about Covid in 2021 – in the middle of last year only two thirds of secondary school students were feeling safe from Covid.
  - Students have persistently been worried about their learning progress. And this is notably worse for senior secondary students. In June/July 2021 only around a third (36%) of Year 11-13 students felt positive about their learning progress (compared to just over half of Year 9-10 students and two thirds of Year 4–8 students).

## **Achievement**

6. The picture of the impact on achievement is not yet clear due to the use of additional credits combined with reduced requirements of NCEA and University Entrance (UE), use of alternative evidence-gathering for internal assessment, and use of the Unexpected Event Grade (Auckland, Northland, parts of Waikato). The NCEA data for 2020 and 2021 shows an increase in achievement for 2020 and then a decrease in 2021.
7. However, beneath the NCEA results, teachers and principals have consistently told ERO that they are concerned about student's progress and achievement. At the end of 2020, 59% of schools reported having concerns about student progress and achievement.

## **Attendance, engagement and behaviour**

8. There are increasing concerns about the impact the pandemic has had on attendance, engagement and behaviour. It is concerning that:
  - 40% of students who had reduced attendance after the first lockdown had not had concerning attendance beforehand.
  - Student behaviour has been impacted – about a third of teachers and principals reported student behaviour was worse than expected in mid-2021.
  - Teachers also raised concerns that younger students are less "school ready", for students starting in Year 3 in 2022 their whole experience of schooling has been disrupted.

## **Māori Learners**

9. Māori learners have been significantly impacted by the pandemic. There are large Māori communities in Northland and Auckland where schools have been closed more often. Māori learners have also faced greater barriers to learning with 21 percent of Māori students saying they would not have access to a digital device or were unsure.
10. ERO's work found that Ngā Kura ā Iwi and Te Aho Matua Kura Kaupapa Māori, and English-medium schools with a high population of Māori learners from both rural and urban areas have innovated in response to the challenges of Covid. They continue to adapt to the needs of learners and their whanau including reconnecting students as a part of school communities and upholding participation to influence progress. Approaches include hybrid learning enhanced by one-to-one mentoring, trialling new

ways of working (e.g. alternative days for learning), designing learning following the maramataka, and Wananga learning to build learning for all.

### **Pacific learners**

11. Of all groups Pacific learners appear to have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Two thirds of Pacific learners live in Auckland where schools have been closed more than three times the number of days as for the rest of the country. Pacific communities have experienced higher levels of Covid-19, impacting on their learners. Pacific learners have also faced greater barriers to learning with one in five lacking access to a device for online learning.
12. Schools, families, and communities have been exceptional at supporting Pacific learners. Pacific learners were more likely to say they received extra support from teachers following lockdown and there has also been an increase in Pacific families' engagement with their children's learning.
13. But there is significant risk that the disruptions from the Covid-19 pandemic will have longer-term impacts for Pacific learners. Pacific learners' achievement declined in 2021 after a rise in 2020. This fall was more pronounced than that for the general population. After each Covid-19 disruption, Pacific learners have been slower to return to classrooms and at the end of November last year attendance for Pacific students was only 47 percent (compared to 68% general population). In saying this some schools have developed approaches that have powered up learning for their Pacific students and achieved year on year improvements in outcomes for their Pacific students through the last two Covid impacted years.

### **Students in low-decile schools**

14. ERO's research found that students in low-decile schools, particularly those in Auckland, have also been disproportionately impacted, for example at the end of 2020:
  - Fifty-nine percent of low decile schools (decile 1-3) were concerned about student attendance.
  - Nearly eighty percent of low decile schools were concerned about student achievement in their school (compared to half of high decile schools).
  - Only just under a third of teachers in low decile schools were confident their students would be able to catch up with their learning.

### **Teachers and Principals**

15. In addition to the impact directly on learners, the pandemic has also impacted teachers and principals. Teachers' wellbeing impacts learners and constrains the ability of schools to respond going forward. ERO found last year that teacher and principals were struggling:
  - **Teachers' and principals' enjoyment of work had declined** e.g. only half (56 percent) of teachers reported being happy at work, down from nearly two thirds (62 percent) in September 2020.
  - **Teachers and principals were feeling less supported and connected** e.g. just over a quarter of principals said they needed further support.
  - **Principals of smaller schools were less happy at work.** Only 57 percent of principals in small schools were happy at work compared to 72 percent of principals in very large schools.

- **Younger teachers were struggling more.** Teachers under 35 years old were three times as likely to say they were not happy at work, compared to those over 46 years old.

### **Actions to respond to Covid disruptions**

16. ERO's research over the last two years has also identified a wide range of innovation and positive practices that schools have put in place to support learners. We have shared these in a series of guides for principals and teachers. But sharing good practice is unlikely to be a sufficient response given the scale and duration of the disruption learners have faced and the pressures on teachers and principals.
17. ERO analysis has shown that schools need to be supported to:
  - **Prioritise student engagement and wellbeing** using evidence-based approaches, recognising that students may still be anxious and some students will need targeted support.
  - **Build on the strong whānau and parent partnerships** that have developed through Covid will be key to this. The increased investment in PB4L and Mana Ake will assist schools in responding to wellbeing and behaviour concerns.
  - **Understand student progress and accelerate student learning**, prioritise addressing lost time in learning across the curriculum, focusing on the essential areas of literacy and numeracy, particularly for younger learners (ie. years 1 to 4).
  - **Access targeted support and programmes** that can help individual learners, including evidenced small group programmes. Our work has found that some schools need help navigating the support that is available, or in brokering this support.
  - **Enable teachers and principals to thrive** through opportunities to share practice, support each other and continue to access professional support; particularly in respect of those early in their teaching or principalship. There could be potential for greater pooling of relief and reliever teachers to address staffing shortages and ongoing Covid impacts on the workforce.
  - **Have plans in place to accelerate learning that are resilient to future shocks.** Further variants/outbreaks of Covid are likely and need to be factored in. There has been a rapid acceleration in teacher's competencies in using technology through hybrid learning but further guidance could help promote effective practices and use of online delivery platforms. Ensuring all students have access to devices for online learning remains critical.
18. The most significant risk from Covid-19 is that it magnifies inequities already within education. Our research has found that groups who already are disadvantaged in the education system have been disproportionately impacted by Covid. Focusing on how to mitigate the impacts of Covid on these groups should be the overarching priority.
19. A key constraint ERO has also found is that the sector will struggle to successfully accommodate significant numbers of new initiatives and change, implementation will need to be phased out over the next one to two years and should be an important consideration for Ministers and the Ministry.

**Recommendations**

20. It is recommended that you:

- a) **Note** the findings of ERO research programme *Learning in a Covid-19 World* to inform the upcoming strategy session on accelerating learning.
- b) **Note** that this briefing is recommended for proactive release.

**Noted**

**Noted**



Nicholas Pole  
**Chief Executive**

NOTED/APPROVED



Jan Tinetti  
**Associate Minister of Education**

04 /05 /2022