



Briefing report

Education Review Office (ERO): Long Covid: Ongoing impacts of Covid-19 on schools and learning

Date	24 May 2023
Security Level	N/A
ERO Priority	Medium
ERO Reference	M23-24
Date requested	ERO initiated
Date due	ERO initiated
Proactive release	Recommended

Addressee	Action sought	Deadline
Associate Minister of Education	<p>It is recommended that you:</p> <p>a) Note that ERO intends to release the attached report (Long Covid: Ongoing impacts of Covid-19 on schools and learning) on Tuesday 20 June 2023.</p> <p>b) Agree to forward this briefing and the attached report to the Minister of Education, Hon Jan Tinetti, and Associate Minister for Education, Hon Kelvin Davis.</p> <p>c) Note this briefing is recommended for proactive release at the time of publication of this report.</p> <p>d) Agree to discuss the findings reported in this publication with ERO officials prior to 20 June.</p>	



Attachments:

**Education Review Office (ERO):
Long Covid: Ongoing impacts of
Covid-19 on schools and learning**



Comments:

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



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Our Ref: M23-24

24 May 2023

Hon Jo Luxton
Associate Minister of Education

Long Covid: Ongoing impacts of Covid-19 on schools and learning

Purpose

1. This briefing provides you with our most recent research on how learners, teachers and principals have been impacted by Covid-19 - three years on from the start of the pandemic. The near-final report and summary, *Long Covid: Ongoing impacts of Covid-19 on schools* is attached as Appendix A, and ERO's draft media release is attached as Appendix B.
2. ERO's *Learning in a Covid World-19* research programme has been gathering information on the impacts of the pandemic on learners, teachers and principals throughout the pandemic (from the very first lockdown) to provide real time insights that can inform how education agencies support learners, principals and teachers.
3. We are able to track trends in learners' wellbeing and achievement and teacher and principal wellbeing. This report shows how these have changed over the last three years as we move through the pandemic.

Background

4. ERO has published several reports and guides in its *Learning in a Covid-19 World* series. A list of main reports is included as Appendix C.
5. For this report we conducted surveys with learners, principals, and teachers. We received responses from:
 - i. 3,052 learners in Years 4 to 13, from 98 schools.
 - ii. 1,209 principals.
 - iii. 349 teachers, from 64 schools.

Overall findings

6. Learners reported that their wellbeing has improved, but teachers and principals have serious concerns about learning progress. Attendance has been seriously impacted and inequities in achievement have widened.
7. The sector needs to respond intensively to lift learner progress and achievement, but teachers and principals continue to experience the cumulative impacts of the

pandemic (on wellbeing and workload). They will, themselves, need ongoing support to be able to then support learners.

Impact of Covid-19 on learners

8. Our key findings for learners are that:

- i. Learner wellbeing has improved.
- ii. Learner attendance and behaviour are concerning.
- iii. Learner progress and achievement are increasingly impacted.
- iv. Learners in poorer communities have been more impacted.
- v. Māori learners' progress has been more impacted.
- vi. Pacific learners feel more positive, but their learning has been more impacted.
- vii. Learners from ethnic communities face greater wellbeing challenges.

9. These findings are set out in more detail below.

i. **Learner wellbeing has improved.**

- Learners are happier. Sixty-eight percent of learners report feeling happy most or all of the time, an increase from 61 percent in 2021, and 62 percent in 2020.
- We found the most important reported driver of happiness at school is being connected to friends. Other drivers of learners' happiness are feeling safe from Covid-19 and having an adult who cares for them at school.
- Learners are feeling more connected to their friends. Three quarters of learners (76 percent) report feeling connected to their friends, compared with just under two thirds (64 percent) in 2021, and two thirds (66 percent) in 2020.
- Learners are less worried about Covid-19. Three quarters of learners now feeling safe from Covid-19, which is up from just over half (58 percent) after lockdown in 2020.

ii. **Learner attendance and behaviour are concerning.**

- Covid-19 has had a serious impact on attendance. By the end of 2022, regular attendance had only recovered to 51 percent, suggesting Covid-19 disruptions have led to longer term impacts on attendance.
- Challenging behaviour is a significant issue. Four in 10 (41 percent) principals report that learner behaviour is worse or much worse than they would expect at this time of year, which is not significantly different from 2021 (39 percent).

iii. **Learner progress and achievement are increasingly impacted.**

- Principals are increasingly concerned about learning, with 43 percent of principals saying that learning is worse than they would expect at this time of year, a substantial increase from 27 percent in 2021.
- A quarter (26 percent) of principals say their struggling learners are two or more curriculum levels behind.
- Teachers and principals are most concerned about learner progress in writing.
- Attainment rates for NCEA Level 2 are below where they were in 2019, before the pandemic. From 2020 to 2022, modifications were made to award additional Learning Recognition Credits. If these were not in place, attainment in 2022 would have been even lower.

- iv. **Learners in poorer communities have been more impacted.**
- Principals of schools in poorer communities are much more concerned about their learners' progress. Over half (53 percent) of principals from schools serving poorer communities say that student learning is worse than expected, compared to a third (31 percent) of principals serving schools in better-off communities.
 - Learners in poorer communities are further behind. Principals in schools in poorer communities are more than three times as likely as those serving better-off communities to say that their struggling learners are behind by two curriculum levels or more (46 percent to 14 percent).
 - NCEA Level 2 attainment has fallen for learners in poorer communities. The gap between schools in poorer and better-off communities has widened from 14.5 percentage points in 2019 to 17.8 percentage points in 2022.
- v. **Māori learners' progress has been more impacted.**
- Fifty-seven percent of Māori learners say their learning progress has been good this term compared to 61 percent of non-Māori learners.
 - Māori learners' NCEA Level 2 attainment has fallen to 64.1 percent, which is the lowest it has been since 2014. The gap between Māori and non-Māori learners' NCEA Level 2 attainment has increased from 10.4 percentage points in 2019 to 13 percentage points in 2022.
- vi. **Pacific learners feel more positive, but their learning has been more impacted.**
- Positively, the proportion of Pacific learners enjoying their learning is greater (63 percent) than for non-Pacific learners (52 percent).
 - However, Pacific learners' NCEA Level 2 attainment has fallen to 67.3 percent (down from 71.3 percent in 2019) and the gap between Pacific learners and non-Pacific learners has increased from 6.7 percentage points in 2019 to 8.1 percentage points in 2022).
- vii. **Learners from ethnic communities face greater wellbeing challenges.**
- Only 37 percent of Middle Eastern, Latin American and African (MELAA) learners and 43 percent of Asian learners report they have an adult at their school who really cares about them, compared to 51 percent of all learners. This matters, as we have found that it is a key driver of happiness at school.
 - Additionally, our data suggest that MELAA learners are less likely than all learners to feel happy most or all of the time. This is consistent with the finding in ERO's report *Education for All Our Children* that MELAA learners report lower wellbeing than others.

Impact of Covid-19 on principals and teachers

10. Our key findings for principals and teachers are:
- i. Covid-19 impacts on schools have accumulated. Only a fifth (19 percent) of principals believe their school has recovered from disruptions caused by Covid-19. This compares to 37 percent in 2021.
 - ii. There are some indications that teacher wellbeing has improved but increasing numbers of principals need support for their wellbeing. Four in 10 (41 percent)

principals report needing more support for their wellbeing, which is up from 26 percent in 2021. Nearly a third (30 percent) of principals say they had accessed support for their wellbeing in the past year.

- iii. Workload manageability remains challenging, which is consistent with the teaching workforce in other countries. As the impact of Covid-19 continues, only a quarter (26 percent) of teachers report their workload as being manageable (down from 42 percent in 2020) and only 16 percent of principals say their workload is manageable (down from 26 percent in 2020).
- iv. Principals of small schools and female principals are struggling more. We continue to find that the smaller the school, the more principals struggled with their workload. Principals of very small schools (58 percent) were much more likely to find their workload unmanageable compared to principals of very large schools (28 percent). We have also found that female principals (45 percent) are more likely to find their workload is unmanageable compared to male principals (38 percent).
- v. Filling vacancies is a concern. Nearly a quarter of principals (23 percent) say they are struggling to fill vacancies in 2023. Principals of schools in poorer communities are finding it particularly difficult (31 percent) compared with those in better-off communities (18 percent).

Looking forward

11. Overall, education in Aotearoa New Zealand is suffering from the longer-term effects of Covid-19 pandemic with:
 - i. Learning gaps for all learners.
 - ii. Increasing inequities in outcomes.
 - iii. Principals and teachers who are struggling.
12. There is already a range of work underway by the Ministry of Education to address these three issues, which is highlighted in the report. ERO recommends in the report that, in 2023, we continue to:
 - i. Focus on making up for lost learning opportunities.
 - ii. Target learning support for those who have been most impacted.
 - iii. Support principals and teachers.
13. In addition, looking forward, ERO notes that schools in poorer communities are facing the biggest challenges from the combined impact of their learners' progress having been more impacted by Covid-19, their principals' wellbeing being more impacted and finding it hardest to recruit new teachers. This means that these schools will need to be a priority for focused support.

Publication

14. ERO intends to publish this report on Tuesday 20 June 2023 and speaking notes are attached at Appendix D. We will share the report through:
 - i. An ERO media release on the morning of publication (Appendix B).
 - ii. Publication of the reports on the ERO's website and social media platforms.
 - iii. Providing a short guide for principals on how this can inform their planning.

Recommendations

15. It is recommended that you:

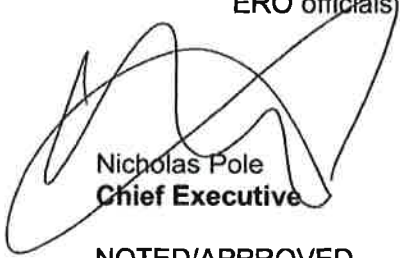
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Noted

Agreed/Disagreed

Noted

Agreed/Disagreed



Nicholas Pole
Chief Executive

NOTED/APPROVED



Jo Luxton
Associate Minister of Education
7/7/23