



2006/07 Financial review of the Ministry of Education

Report of the Education and Science
Committee

Contents

Recommendation	2
Introduction	2
Communications unit	2
Teachers	2
Schools	3
Special education	4
Early childhood education	5
Tertiary education	6
School property portfolio	6
Appendix	7

Ministry of Education

Recommendation

The Education and Science Committee has conducted the financial review of the 2006/07 performance and current operations of the Ministry of Education and recommends that the House take note of its report.

Introduction

The ministry outlined some of its key achievements in 2006/07. They included the launch of the revised New Zealand curriculum and *Te Kaupapa Matauranga o Aotearoa* (the draft curriculum for Māori-medium schooling), the release of *Ka Hikitia* (the draft *Managing for Success – Māori Education Strategy 2008–2012*) for public consultation, a stocktake of the early childhood education strategy, and the implementation of the tertiary education strategy. It also acknowledged areas in need of improvement such as truancy and transience among school students, the number of them leaving school without a qualification, and the gap between under-achievers and high achievers. The ministry has established a new leadership team, with the aim of improving its working relationships with government departments, the education sector, and within the ministry itself.

Communications unit

We asked about an opinion expressed by the Group Manager Communications that the unit was in a state of “extreme volatility” and could provide continuity of service at a basic level only.¹ The ministry has conducted a review of its corporate communications function and as a result has increased the number of permanent staff employed in the unit, relying less on contract staff. The ministry believes that the revamped unit will enable it to respond to questions more quickly.

Apology

The chief executive assured us that she would tender a personal apology to Ms Madeleine Setchell for the ministry’s poor response to Ms Setchell’s inquiry regarding employment.

Teachers

Initial teacher education

We believe that the provision of teacher education in New Zealand is varied, and that in some instances the education of teachers needs to be substantially improved. We understand that the ministry and the New Zealand Teachers Council have recently conducted a review of initial teacher education and are collating the responses. The ministry is also discussing with the Tertiary Education Commission its expectations

¹ State Services Commission, *Investigation into the public service recruitment and treatment of Ms Madeleine Setchell*, 12 November 2007, p.42.

regarding the provision of teacher education. We expect the ministry and the commission to work together to improve the quality of teacher education.

Teacher shortages

We understand that a shortage of about 400 primary school teachers is predicted for 2008, and we were interested in the steps the ministry is taking to address it. The ministry acknowledged the shortage of teachers, particularly in South Auckland. However, we were advised that there is an oversupply of teachers in the South Island.

The ministry is examining ways of addressing the misdistribution of teachers, including allowances for teachers to move to areas of shortage, recruiting overseas-trained teachers and New Zealand-trained teachers living abroad, and providing scholarships to encourage workers to retrain in specific subject areas. The ministry is also working with the Tertiary Education Commission, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, and the New Zealand Teachers Council on teacher supply issues.

The ministry is planning to encourage teacher graduates from colleges of education in Dunedin and Christchurch to work in Auckland. To this end it is offering incentives such as a Priority Teachers Supply Allowance, and a National Relocation Grant to encourage teachers to teach full-time in South Auckland.

Te Kotahitanga

We asked how the ministry plans to implement the *Te Kotahitanga* professional development programme, which aims to improve the learning and achievement of Māori students in the schooling system. The ministry has yet to determine how the programme should be incorporated into teacher education and professional development for trained teachers. The ministry acknowledged that the core teaching practices promoted by the *Te Kotahitanga* programme are those of all good teachers.

Schools

New entrant class sizes

We sought a rationale for the planned introduction of the ratio of one teacher to 18 Year 1 students from the beginning of term two in 2008, rather than the beginning of a school year. The ministry explained that as children usually begin school on their fifth birthdays, these classes are relatively small at the beginning of the year. We were told that the Government is moving toward a 1:15 ratio. We were informed that approximately 970 schools will not receive additional staffing because they have very small Year 1 class sizes or because they already have additional staffing from the Maximum Average Class Size fund.

Truancy

The ministry attributed the sharp increase in the number of truants recorded in 2006 to better information collected from the ENROL system. The ministry believes nevertheless that it is making progress in reducing the number of truants. We were also informed that the ministry has reorganised the truancy service to improve its effectiveness. Additional funding has been made available to the Non-Enrolment Truancy Service to get students back into school.

The ministry is in the process of updating the attendance regulations.

Second language provision

We welcome the provision in the new curriculum for primary or intermediate students to study a second language. We sought an assurance from the ministry that there would be enough teachers equipped to implement this provision, and heard that it is still determining how to ensure that teachers would be available to provide this option. We will continue to monitor the availability of languages in schools.

Effective use of assessment data

We heard that the ministry is reviewing its National Assessment Strategy and its provision of professional development to determine areas for improvement. The initial findings of this evaluation indicated a need for targeted professional development in the use of assessment information. The ministry also plans to develop an online facility to help schools select assessment tools and use assessment information to promote learning.

We will continue to monitor teachers' ability to use assessment information effectively to improve the educational achievement of their students, particularly Māori students.

Curriculum professional development

We understand that professional development programmes have been developed to help teachers to implement the revised curriculum. The ministry's school support services and other providers are working with principals and school leaders to familiarise them with the curriculum, which is to be implemented over the next two years. The ministry has also trained 100 "sector leaders" to lead school clusters in implementing the curriculum.

Special education

We are concerned that children with special needs are not having their needs met by the range of services available. There are not enough places in some special schools, nor are there enough specialists available to support these children in mainstream schools.

The ministry is working with special schools and regular schools to create a continuum of provision, and exploring options for enabling students to attend a school that best meets their needs. It is also considering the provision of satellite classes in mainstream schools. The ministry told us that it is not considering expanding the provision of special schools.

We will continue to monitor how adequately these children's needs are being met within the current provision.

Educational achievement of students with special needs

We were disappointed that the ministry does not collect data on the educational achievement of students with special needs. The ministry informed us that it plans to collect such data. We believe that this information should improve the ministry's planning for and delivery of services to students with special needs.

We asked about progress in raising the educational achievement of students with special needs, such as autism, and in improving services for them. The ministry has released

recently an Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline, which sets a framework for the provision of support for students with these disorders. We understand that the ministry is applying this framework in the schooling sector. It is also implementing an *Early Bird Programme*, to provide parents and whānau with information on autism spectrum disorders, to enable families to help their children to learn before they start school.

The ministry is providing a professional development programme (*Tips for Autism*) to inform teachers, teacher aides, parents, and specialist service providers about autism spectrum disorders so they can support individual children. We were told that this programme will be widely available in 2008. We understand that ministry is expanding the *Incredible Years* programme in the early childhood sector, which aims to generally improve challenging behaviour in children in the long term.

Resource teacher: learning and behaviour service

We recognised that the effectiveness of delivery and management of resource teacher: learning and behaviour services vary from region to region. We will continue to monitor the effectiveness and structure of this service.

Early childhood education

We heard that at 31 October 2007 there were 76,924 three-to-four-year-olds enrolled in the free 20 hours early childhood education scheme; there are approximately 107,000 children in this age group in New Zealand. We were disappointed that the ministry could not tell us how many children had transferred from parent-led early childhood services to others in order to benefit from the free 20 hours scheme. The ministry collects data on the participation rate in early childhood education, but does not collect data on particular children.

We were told that approximately 44 kōhanga reo are offering the free 20 hours of early childhood education. However, as kōhanga reo are funded retrospectively, this figure could be higher. The ministry plans to conduct a census of children participating in early childhood education in June-July 2008.

Promoting Early Childhood Education Participation Project

The Promoting Early Childhood Education Participation Project targets communities with low early childhood education participation rates and facilitates access to high-quality early childhood education services. To date 1,792 children have been enrolled in this programme. The children are required to regularly attend a minimum of nine hours per week over three months.

Teacher-led early childhood education

We note that early childhood services were required to be 50 percent teacher-led by the end of 2007 and we were interested in the options available to those early childhood services that did not meet this requirement. The ministry said that it might be able to issue a provisional licence for a limited period to enable the service to meet the licensing requirements. If a service does not meet the licensing requirements, it may apply for funding as a different class of provider.

Tertiary education

We are aware that tertiary education is provided at a number of levels, and are disappointed that the ministry has reported only the number of students graduating with an undergraduate or a graduate degree.² The ministry explained that the annual report covers only a slice of activity in the tertiary education area, and that data on industry training programmes is collected by the Tertiary Education Commission.

The ministry is required to monitor the progress of the tertiary education system against the goals of the Tertiary Education Strategy, which includes modern apprenticeships, targeted programmes, and provider-based programmes. The ministry is working closely with the commission to develop industry training indicators, which should make such reporting feasible.

School property portfolio

We are concerned at the escalating building costs faced by some schools, which have a grant based on the valuation of the project at the time it was allocated, not at the time of construction. We were told that the costs of building on which funding is based are reviewed annually and that generally schools can build within their budgets.

² Ministry of Education, *Annual Report – 2007*, p. 40.

Appendix

Approach to this financial review

We met on 21 November 2007 and 13 February 2008 to consider the financial review of the Ministry of Education. Evidence was heard from the Ministry of Education and advice was received from the Office of the Auditor-General.

Committee members

Hon Brian Donnelly (Chairperson)
Hon Marian Hobbs (Deputy Chairperson)
Paula Bennett
Hon Mark Burton
Dr Ashraf Choudhary
Te Ururoa Flavell
Colin King
Allan Peachey
Katherine Rich
Dianne Yates

Evidence and advice received

Ministry of Education, *Annual Report for the year ending 30 June 2007*.

Ministry of Education, *Statement of Intent 2007–2012*.

Office of the Auditor-General, Briefing on the Ministry of Education, 21 November 2007.

Response to written questions, 14 November 2007.

Response to supplementary questions, 7 December 2007.