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Submission on proposed changes to funding for:

Resource Teachers: Literacy

Resource Teachers: Māori

Introduction

1. NZEI Te Riu Roa is the professional organisation and union that represents the interests and issues of its nearly 50,000 members. Our members are employed as teachers and leaders in the early childhood education (ECE) and primary sectors (including Kura Kaupapa Māori and Wharekura), support staff in the early childhood, primary, intermediate, and secondary education sectors, school advisers employed by universities, and Learning Support staff employed by the Ministry of Education.
2. The main objective of NZEI Te Riu Roa is to advance the cause of quality public education generally while upholding and maintaining the just claims of its members individually and collectively. NZEI Te Riu Roa is a values-led, Te Tiriti o Waitangi-based organisation. This means that in all areas of work mokopuna Māori are considered first. We call this Mōku te Ao.
3. NZEI Te Riu Roa is one of the largest unions and professional bodies in Aotearoa and has a long history of playing a positive role in the education sector and on wider social issues affecting our members and the tamariki and whānau they serve.

4. Under Te Tiriti o Waitangi we have an obligation to operationalise a system that recognises and uplifts Māori people and their identity. We believe that a system based on rangatiratanga centres children with rights to control their own aspirations and destiny and would work for all children through values of mutual benefit to society.
5. The key issues impacting education in Aotearoa are a lack of resourcing and staffing for schools, including learning support. The 2021 independent inquiry into primary school staffing, Pūaotanga, found that current staffing levels for primary schools are not fit for purpose¹. Of the 174 positions for Resource teachers Literacy and Māori, 16 are currently vacant. These contribute to the 160 vacant learning support roles across the sector. Filling these roles should be a priority of the Ministry of Education.
6. Likewise, the Review of how Schools are Resourced for Teacher Aides, a review that resulted from the 2020 Teacher Aide Pay Equity Settlement, found that current resourcing for teacher aides does not enable the best quality learning for ākongā². The government initiated Highest Needs Review that ran from 2021 to 2024 found substantial unmet need among those ākongā within our education system with the highest levels of need³. These are just a few examples of areas where issues with resourcing and staffing in the sector have been clearly established. While the following submission is predominantly concerned with the proposal to de-fund Resources Teachers Literacy and Māori, we premise this on the assertion that a lack staffing and resourcing remain the most pressing issues in Aotearoa New Zealand’s education system.
7. NZEI Te Riu Roa stands with other national education organisations in opposing these proposed changes, namely New Zealand Pasifika Principals Association, Te Akatea, PPTA Te Wehengarua, New Zealand Principals Federation, and The Secondary Principals Council.

¹ Pūaotanga Independent Review Panel, *Pūaotanga: Realising the potential of every child: An independent review of staffing in primary schools*. Wellington: NZEI Te Riu Roa, 2021.

<https://www.nzeiteriuroa.org.nz/assets/downloads/NZEI-Pu%CC%84aotanga.pdf>

² *The review of how schools are resourced for teacher aides: Report from sector reference group to the Accord Governance Group on the preferred option*. Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2023:

<https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/News/News-2022/Final-report-The-sector-groups-preferred-option-for-how-schools-are-resourced-for-teacher-aides.pdf>

³ See: Cathy Wylie, *Highest Needs Review: What matters to stakeholders*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2022: <https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/our-work/changes-in-education/Highest-Needs-Review-What-matters-to-stakeholders-NZCER.pdf>

Resource Teachers: Literacy and Resource Teachers: Māori provide critical continuity of specialist support for the tamariki mokopuna who need it the most

8. The biggest determinant in the quality of learning for tamariki mokopuna outside of home and the socio-economic status of whānau is the quality of teaching they receive. The proposal to defund Resource Teachers: Literacy and Resource Teachers: Māori is a proposal to cut some of the most experienced and expert teachers in the education system.
9. It is right that the Minister is concerned with increasing the resourcing of Tier 1 supports and resources for all kura and schools, that is for evidence-based literacy teaching and learning delivered in the classroom. But it is not right that the Minister is proposing to drastically cut the numbers of specialist teachers who provide individualised Tier 3 learning support.
10. Tier 1 is the universal teaching that all learners experience daily, provided by their classroom teacher. This includes targeted teaching, closely monitoring learning progress, flexible groupings and differentiated learning. Tier 2 supports are supplementary to the universal provision and typically take place in targeted small groups. This can include intensive instruction, increased frequency of monitoring and 2-3 hours of extra weekly support. Resource Teachers coordinate and deliver the individualised support at Tier 3 which is tailored to specific learning needs within children's contexts. This teaching is 'personalised, multisensory, structured, and sequential'⁴.
11. Cutting the roles of Resource Teacher: Literacy from the learning support system will drastically reduce the number of specialist teachers providing literacy support directly to the tamariki mokopuna and the teaching team around them, at the right time in the right place.
12. This tiered system was established to address inequities and learning challenges faced by tamariki mokopuna in their schools and kura, which is done by providing targeted resources on top of universal provision, directly to those who need it most. This

⁴ Tiered Support Model

<https://hepikorua.education.govt.nz/how-we-work/flexible-tailored-model-of-support>

consultation suggests that the funding for these resource teachers, meant for addressing inequities, be equally spread across all schools and kura.

13. Increasing funding for supports, alluded to in this consultation (but not detailed) to be provided universally at Tier 1, should not come at the expense of funding required for Tier 3 (or Tier 2) supports and interventions. The system only works when all tiers are fully funded.
14. The work of these resource teaching specialists is effective because of the relationships they hold in the learning communities they support. These relationships of trust and care are underpinned by the specific knowledge and commitment they have to each setting they work in. These specialists are knowledgeable of each diverse setting.
15. Resource Teachers: Māori work as valued members of their kura whānau to support tamariki mokopuna to pursue the education pathways they aspire to.

This rushed, untargeted consultation process will not optimise the sectors time or specialist knowledge.

16. NZEI Te Riu Roa has decided to submit feedback via email partly because the survey questions are designed for schools and kura, and predominantly because we do not believe these questions will provide the information needed for the Government to make informed decisions regarding funding these specialist resource teacher positions.
17. The Ministry of Education's February 28 notice to schools makes clear the Ministers intentions to provide expert resources to schools and kura, for the learners with the greatest needs, to have those resources 'close to the child' and that these should be delivered efficiently and equitably. NZEI Te Riu Roa share these goals. However, discussion as to how this is done must start with the sector who have been calling for better resourcing for decades. These are the professionals who know the most about current provision and what is required to meet the Ministers stated goals.
18. It is counter-productive that these resource teachers were not engaged in good faith discussions in the first instance with the Ministry of Education regarding how their services are currently working and what could be done better.
19. NZEI Te Riu Roa supports its membership, and in particular resource Teachers: Literacy and Resource Teachers: Māori themselves to be at the forefront of any decisions made

regarding how their positions of providing expert resources to schools and kura, are best funded and utilised.

20. NZEI Te Riu Roa believes opening this consultation up to the entire sector will result in skewed and unreliable feedback as the vast majority of kura and schools do not benefit from these resource teachers because there simply aren't enough of them.
21. It is possible that mass feedback stating that schools and kura either don't use the services or are unable to access them could be understood as the services themselves being unfit for purpose, rather than years of underfunding and understaffing being scrutinised and corrected. This consultation process risks being corrupted by the tyranny of the majority.

This consultation process is not Te Tiriti o Waitangi consistent

22. It is imperative that only Kura Kaupapa Māori and Māori medium education settings provide consultation feedback on Resource Teachers: Māori. That this consultation has stepped over Resource Teachers: Māori and gone straight out to wider consultation is Te Tiriti o Waitangi inconsistent.
23. Resource Teachers: Māori were established due to the inequities Māori were facing in the education system. Many of these inequities persist today and discussions about how to continue addressing them should always start with Māori.
24. The proposal to de-fund Resource Teachers: Māori, the second proposal of its kind, must be seen in the context of de-funding of te reo Māori initiatives by the National led-coalition government and the de-prioritisation of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the New Zealand Curriculum and the Education and Training Act 2020.
25. The consultation does not include any proposal as to how to better support Māori learners who experience inequities in the education system. Resources Teachers: Māori are currently the only service whose primary purpose is to uphold the revitalisation and preservation of te reo Māori in kura.

This consultation relies on outdated reports and does not propose how funding could be best spent for consideration.

26. The Minister of Education is using reports from 2008, 2012, and 2014 as evidence of the need for change which sits in contravention to her commitment to using good evidence to guide the provision of learning and assessment supports for the most vulnerable children.
27. Beyond these outdated reports and therefore the unreliable picture they present of the system as it currently is, there is no transparency about what considerations led to this proposal.
28. This consultation, and so-called proposal, fails to address the real problem in the system, which is chronic under-investment in education, and most acutely, learning support for children.
29. Since the 2008 ERO report on Resource Teachers: Māori, little action has been taken by the Government on the report findings. NZEI Te Riu Roa shares the frustrations and disappointments held by these specialists that these long-standing issues of underinvestment and inaction are now weaponised in this consultation document as reasons to defund the service. Furthermore, the 2008 report was the result of these resource teachers lobbying the government to better support the service.
30. There is a real risk that this consultation will take advantage of the lack of consistent knowledge in the sector of these resource teachers and of exasperated professionals' desperation for more support in their kura and schools.
31. This consultation posits that defunding Resources Teachers: Literacy and Māori will enable all schools to have more in-school learning support. It does not make clear how current funding that does not provide one resource teacher per school will be able to provide better per-student, in-person coverage in all schools.
32. The consultation document does mention the newly created roles of structured literacy approach staffing for years 0-2, along with other initiatives such as Programmes for Students for years 3-8. The consultation frames these supports and the resource teachers as potential doubled ups. However, the structured literacy approach staffing have not yet accessed their specialist PLD, available from term 2. This new role needs

time and a review to determine its effectiveness. In the meantime, it is dangerous to remove any other resourcing and supports while there is such a lack of them.

33. Furthermore, Resource Teachers: Literacy and Resources: Māori provide wide ranging expert knowledge and support, beyond structured literacy. Their removal would be the loss of specialists who provide ongoing support and development for schools. De-funding these roles risks over-reliance on short-term, one off, expensive PLD.
34. These resource teachers are highly regarded by their professional peers for their breadth and depth of knowledge and their skills at knowing which approaches to try with ākonga.
35. NZEI Te Riu Roa Resource Teachers: Literacy members have asked the Ministry of Education to collect data that reflects their students' actual start and finish achievement levels, to capture their accelerated learning progress. Assigning them strictly to bands of 6 months, 1 year and 2 years below, does not capture the progress of those students who start at 3 years+ below, and therefore remain 'below' after intervention despite accelerated progress of several curriculum years.
36. Beyond accelerating ākonga learning, Resource Teachers: Literacy and Māori up-skill their teachers and kaiako over the same period and work alongside school management to improve school-wide systems and practices and often provide wider PLD to teams of teachers and kaiako none of which is measured at all.

Recommendations

1. NZEI Te Riu Roa implores the Ministry to abandon this proposal and retain the resource teachers in 2026 and beyond.
2. NZEI Te Riu Roa also encourages the Ministry to establish an expert advisory group. A good faith exploration of learning support resourcing issues, including addressing the longstanding under funding of resource teachers, should be informed by an expert advisory group consisting of these resource teachers and the kura and schools leaders who use them.
3. NZEI Te Riu Roa also encourages the Ministry to establish avenues to hear from the whānau of the tamariki mokopuna who benefit directly from Resource Teachers' expert knowledge.