



# Ka Ora Ka Ako - Healthy Lunches in Schools for **Every Child**

Save the Children NZ calls for further commitment to the healthy lunches in schools programme.

To achieve this, we can for a continued commitment  
to:

- 1** Continued and sustained funding to embed this programme as part of education delivery in New Zealand, and,
- 2** For this programme to be extended to more schools and to early childhood education centres.

Every child has the **right** to  
good **nutrition**.



Save the Children

Ka Ora, Ka Ako provides free healthy lunches to 220,000 children in eligible schools and kura. Budget 2023 has allocated \$323.4 million (total operating) to continue delivering these free lunches in schools.<sup>1</sup>

It is our very strong view that **Ka Ora Ka Ako** is an important **investment** in the **well-being and education** of our children, and directly contributes to **healthy** food systems in our **communities**.

**Investing in regular access to nutritious food to promote food security for our children.**

Every child has the right to a decent standard of living to ensure their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, this includes regular access to good nutrition, Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Improving the standard of living for New Zealand children is a priority area recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in New Zealand's 6th Periodic Review.

**For children to learn and to grow healthy bodies and smart brains they need regular access to good nutrition.**

However, too many of our children are going without the food they need. The Growing Up in New Zealand study, Now We are Twelve<sup>2</sup> has found that nearly one in five New Zealand children are experiencing food insecurity and are going to school or ECE hungry.



### **The cost of living crisis has seen extreme rises in healthy food prices.<sup>3</sup>**

This is having a dire impact on families already struggling to get by on too low incomes. When families are in financial distress their ability to buy healthy food is seriously limited, and this can translate to children going to school without food.

New Zealand has made a positive commitment to tackling food insecurity through Ka Ora Ka Ako – Healthy School Lunches Programme. New Zealand has invested in building the systems and infrastructure to deliver equitable access to a healthy lunch. There are positive social impacts from eating together, along with support for local food systems, local jobs, and a significant reduction on the reliance on cheap, packaged unhealthy food that is bad for bodies, learning, and the environment.

Providing healthy food in schools is a targeted way the Government can directly address poverty and food insecurity and consequently improving child wellbeing. Despite this promising start and significant investment to set up systems to deliver the Healthy School Lunch programme, Budget 2023 only allowed funding to deliver the programme to 2024. Future funding past 2024 has not been guaranteed.

Save the Children calls for a long-term funding guarantee; a sustained investment in this programme that would see it become embedded in the culture of attending school in Aotearoa and be extended to include early childhood education centres.

### **Evidence supports the continuation and growth of Ka Ako Ka Ora.**

Researchers from the University of Auckland, Te Kura I Awarua Research Centre at Te Pūkenga Hawke's Bay and consultancy Synergia reviewed data from the Ka Ora, Ka Ako Healthy School Lunch programme, along with international literature.<sup>11</sup> The study found that the programme is having positive effects on children's wellbeing and educational outcomes and additionally enriches school environments, boosts local economies, enhances availability and affordability of healthy foods and encourages innovations, such as sustainable packaging.<sup>12</sup>

Taking a universal approach where all students in eligible schools are provided with lunch removes the stigma associated with singling out children that are coming to school without food largely due to socioeconomic reasons. There are many benefits for children including health, nutrition and social benefits gained from eating together.

## **Why New Zealand tamariki need this programme.**

Food insecurity is related to low disposable household income and material deprivation. It is currently used as an indicator to monitor progress in line with the Child Poverty Reduction Act.<sup>4</sup>

The Growing up in New Zealand study Now we are Eight,<sup>5</sup> revealed that children living in households with moderate to severe food insecurity are less likely to receive the nutrition they need for healthy development. Compared to children in food secure households, children with food insecurity have lower fruit and vegetable intake, are less likely to eat breakfast at home before school and have more fast food and more fizzy drinks because these are cheap, filling alternatives. Research indicates that reducing food insecurity for children and young people through a school lunch programme improves diet quality and academic achievement.<sup>6</sup>

Due to structural and systemic problems such as poverty and inequality, Māori and Pasifika children and those living in socioeconomically deprived neighbourhoods are disproportionately affected by food insecurity.<sup>7</sup>

For more than a decade children's advocates<sup>8</sup> have been calling for government to provide food in schools to support equitable attendance, wellbeing and learning outcomes. Ka Ora Ka Ako is a long awaited and valuable response.

## **Schools are reporting the value of the scheme.**

Principals from a number of schools have spoken up in support of the programme and benefits they are seeing for the students. Examples include Bishop Viard College Porirua,<sup>9</sup> Flaxmere College Hawkes Bay, Bankwood School Hamilton and Huntly West Primary Huntly.<sup>10</sup>

Every child has the **right** to a decent standard of living, to promote their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

This includes regular access to **good nutrition**.

## Sources

1. <https://budget.govt.nz/budget/2023/wellbeing/investments/household-budgets.htm>
2. <https://www.growingup.co.nz/growing-up-report/food-insecurity#Introduction>
3. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/topics/food-price-index/>
4. Retrieved from <https://www.growingup.co.nz/growing-up-report/food-insecurity#Introduction>
5. Ibid.
6. Gerritsen S, D'Souza A, Goodsell-Matthews T, Pillai A, Swinburn B, Wall C. 2020. Food hardship and early childhood nutrition: Findings from Growing Up in New Zealand with a focus on food hardships among tamariki Māori and Pacific children. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development.
7. Vermillion Peirce, P., E. Blackie, M. Morris, B Jarvis-Child and S. Engelbertz (2021). New Zealand Healthy School Lunch pilot Ka Ora, Ka Ako Interim Evaluation. Ministry of Education.
8. Wakim, J., & Johnson, A. (2011). Hunger fo learning. Nutritional barriers to children's education. Online: [www.cpag.org.nz](http://www.cpag.org.nz)
9. <https://www.ppta.org.nz/news-and-media/healthy-school-lunch-programme-pays-off/>
10. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/checkpoint/audio/2018902763/free-lunches-seen-as-essential-despite-uncertain-future>
11. <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2023/06/13/study-finds-unexpected-benefits-from-free-school-lunches.html>
12. Ibid.



**Save the Children**