

National Report Summary

ERO publishes evaluation reports on education issues of national importance. This handout is a summary of a recent national report – it captures the key points and highlights findings that you may find useful. The full report is available on our website – www.ero.govt.nz

Food, nutrition and physical activity in New Zealand schools and early learning services: effective practice

In late 2015, the Cabinet Social Policy Committee asked ERO to assess ‘the current status of food, nutrition and physical activity in schools and early childhood services’ and to report on Health Promoting Schools that were included in the sample.

We visited 202 early learning services, 46 primary schools and 29 secondary schools in the first half of 2016.

We asked:

How well does the service/school promote positive attitudes to physical activity, and food and nutrition to benefit children?

ERO found that most schools and services were doing a good job of equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to make healthy choices around food, nutrition and physical activity.

Young people told us that even though they knew what to do, they were not always able to make these healthy choices. Environmental and financial constraints limited their ability to participate in physical activity.

They were restricted in their ability to make healthy nutritional choices by the food that was available to them, either as a result of what was affordable, or what their parents chose to provide.

The availability of cheap, unhealthy foods from local dairies, fast food outlets and petrol stations near to schools also tempted students to make poor choices, despite what they knew to be healthy.

To effectively change behaviour, parents, whānau, local government and the wider community need to work together to support children and young people with opportunities to make the best choices for their health and wellbeing.

The report has three main sections. Each section begins with the questions we asked and the effective practice statements used for making a decision about how well each school or service was doing, followed by what we found in schools and services that were doing very well.

The sections include quotes, challenges and examples of good practice. Each section includes a story of what effective practice looked like in an early learning service, a primary school and a secondary school.

A principal told ERO about how their school valued children’s wellbeing:

The skills, understanding and motivation required to live a healthy lifestyle are inherent in the school culture from staff through to parents and students. We build on the attitudes and beliefs that children have about their health and then use these to develop further skills and understandings which the children can practise.

Another talked about the impact they could have:

I can't help what a parent puts in the lunchbox but I can educate the student about what is good to eat.

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For more ideas and information, you can read the full report online at www.ero.govt.nz/publications

Early learning services

Nearly nine out of ten services were doing well or very well at promoting children's positive attitudes to food, nutrition and physical activity. Leaders and teachers in these services recognised and valued the importance of food, nutrition and physical activity for children's wellbeing and learning.

Teachers modelled healthy choices and ensured that the messages children received were consistent across adults, and across children's age groups in the service. Teachers worked well with children's parents and the community to support children's learning. Children developed leadership skills, and had opportunities to make decisions about physical health in their learning programme.

Primary schools

Primary schools that were doing well were thorough in their planning and implementation. Nearly three-quarters of the primary schools in this evaluation were doing well or very well at promoting positive attitudes to food, nutrition and physical activity.

These schools were guided by sound policies and procedures, founded on a clear vision for students' success. There was a focus on holistic wellbeing, and students' enjoyment of activity was valued. This meant there was a high level of consistency across the school in the messages students were receiving about food, nutrition and physical activity. Teachers modelled healthy choices, and showed their enjoyment in being active.

Secondary schools

Just under two-thirds of secondary schools in this evaluation were doing well or very well at promoting positive attitudes to food, nutrition and physical activity.

Passionate leadership and a clear vision for student wellbeing drove coherent and well-planned programmes across the schools that were doing well. Decisions around what was done, and how it was done were guided by achievement, participation and survey data.

These schools actively involved students in decision making, and expected that parents and the school would work together to promote students' wellbeing.

Health Promoting Schools

ERO visited 16 primary schools and seven secondary schools that were registered as Health Promoting Schools (HPS).

HPS is a school community-led development. HPS facilitators help schools work with their communities to use their strengths to find ways to improve health, wellbeing and educational outcomes for their students and whānau.

ERO found that HPS had helped some schools take a more focused approach to promoting student wellbeing. Primary schools that were part of HPS were more likely to be doing a good job promoting positive attitudes to food, nutrition and physical activity than primary schools that were not part of HPS.

HPS did not support secondary schools as well as it supported primary schools. This might be because HPS is targeted at primary schools.

When schools that were HPS were not doing so well, it was usually because there had been changes in staff or leadership and the information and prioritising of HPS was lost.

The report has several stories of how schools that were HPS supported their students to learn about and value food, nutrition and physical activity.

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For more information about HPS, you can access their website at hps.tki.org.nz

Young people knew the importance of looking after their health:

We know it's important to keep healthy, so our teeth are strong, and we don't get fat or get diabetes.

It [exercise] helps you get into the learning stage a little bit. It helps you relax.

There are competitive and non-competitive events - you don't have to be competitive to be healthy.

You need to put the effort in to get something out - keep trying to get fitter.

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