



**Te Tāhuhu o  
te Mātauranga**  
Ministry of Education

Daniel Mokoena

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14 April 2026

Tēnā koe Daniel

### **OIA: GEMS-47278 – School Lunches guidance**

Thank you for your email of 17 March 2026 to the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) requesting the following information:

1. *Any guidance or recommendations provided by the Ministry to schools or school boards regarding:
  - a. *the amount of time students should have to eat food during lunch or break periods*
  - b. *the relationship between eating time and student health, wellbeing, or nutrition.**
2. *Any advice, briefings, or internal discussions held by the Ministry regarding whether schools should ensure students have sufficient seated time to eat their lunch.*
3. *Any documents held by the Ministry discussing best practice for structuring lunch breaks, including eating time versus play time.*
4. *Any research, reports, or external advice (for example from the Ministry of Health or other agencies) held by the Ministry concerning the impact of lunch break duration or eating time on children's nutrition, wellbeing, behaviour, or learning.*
5. *Any guidance issued in connection with the Ka Ora Ka Ako Healthy School Lunches programme relating to time required for students to eat the meals provided.*

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

Regarding **parts one, two, three and four** of your request, the Ministry does not advise schools on timeframes for eating. It is up to the school to determine what works best for students, staffing and the daily curriculum needs. Therefore these parts of your request are refused under section 18(e) of the Act, as the information requested does not exist.

The Healthy School Lunches programme provides nutritious food to support student learning and their ability to thrive at school. Eating a nutritious lunch helps with student growth, development and can improve mental health, enhance cognitive

skills like concentration and memory to support wellbeing and academic performance. Lunch eating times vary, with some schools offering 20-30 minutes, though studies show longer is better for consumption. I am providing this advice as **Appendix A**.

For planning purposes, schools have advice regarding serving lunch earlier in the day/morning tea, as that can help increase uptake and give hungry students two opportunities to enjoy a lunch. Schools have reported that less lunch waste is generated when students sit down and eat lunch together.

For schools who also have Kickstart breakfast it is suggested lunch time is later to ensure they are hungry at lunch time.

Regarding **part five** of your request, the advice is given to schools on food safety guidance. Eating times are not specified. Instead, we have provided guidance on the timeframes within which food must be consumed to remain safe, per the attached.

Please note, we may publish this response on our website after five working days. Your name and contact details will be removed.

Thank you again for your email. You have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review my decision on your request, in accordance with section 28 of the Act. You can do this by writing to [info@ombudsman.parliament.nz](mailto:info@ombudsman.parliament.nz) or to Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Gibson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andrew Gibson  
General Manager, Strategic Programmes  
**Te Mahau | Education Services**