



Ministry of Education Drinking Water Policy

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Contents

Part A: Policy	1
Context	1
Purpose	1
Scope and application	1
Policy statement.....	2
Part B: Requirements	2
Definitions.....	2
The Ministry.....	3
All schools	3
Specific requirements for self-supplying schools.....	4
Specific requirements for schools connected to a community or rural water supply.....	5
Key legislation and reference documents	5
Policy review	6

Part A: Policy

Context

Schools and kura must ensure students, staff, and visitors have access to clean and safe drinking water. Properly maintained and managed water supplies are essential to prevent health hazards and ensure school operations are not disrupted. Given that any drinking water system is vulnerable to contamination, schools have a responsibility to provide water that meets drinking water quality standards¹.

Some schools do not have access to a public drinking water supply. These schools either rely on a community water supply or are self-supplying. Self-supplying schools' source their water from roof water, groundwater, spring water or surface water. Regardless of the source, all schools must ensure that water remains safe until the point of use.

Current challenges to drinking water compliance in self-supplying schools include increased compliance requirements, remote locations which make it difficult to access service providers (e.g. plumbers), water services that were often designed and built with no minimum agreed performance standards, upgrades that were tailored to local priorities rather than optimum asset management, inadequate source capacity to meet current or projected growth, excessive operational and maintenance costs, and a lack of consideration of alternative sources.

Taumata Arowai, the water services regulator, oversees implementation of water services legislation and regulations, and undertakes enforcement action if required. While the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) provides funding and resources to schools, achieving safe, compliant, and sufficient water services for all schools will take time due to resource and funding limitations.

Purpose

The purpose of this Drinking Water Policy is to:

- (i) set out the obligations of the Ministry and schools to manage drinking water supplies in line with legislative and regulatory requirements.
- (ii) support schools in supplying safe, sufficient, compliant, and cost-effective drinking water services for their kaimahi, ākonga, and manuhiri (staff, students, and visitors).

This policy aims to increase schools' compliance with the relevant drinking water legislation and regulations, PCBU obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, and Ministry requirements.

Scope and application

This policy applies to all Ministry-owned school facilities (including schools on leased land), and where the Ministry or school is the landlord (e.g. school houses).

This policy does not replace any statutory requirements, including those of the Water Services Act 2021 and the Water Services (Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand) Regulations 2022 (DWSNZ).

Policy statement

Through clear policy guidance, the Ministry aims to support schools in delivering safe, sufficient, compliant, and cost-effective water services. To achieve this, the Ministry will act to help schools incorporate the six principles of drinking water safety in their drinking water quality management.

¹ [Water Services \(Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand\) Regulations 2022](#)

These principles² are:

- Principle 1: A high standard of care should be embraced
- Principle 2: Protection of source water is of paramount importance
- Principle 3: Maintain multiple barriers to contamination
- Principle 4: Change precedes contamination
- Principle 5: Suppliers must own the safety of drinking water
- Principle 6: Apply a preventative, proportionate, risk management approach

Part B: Requirements

Definitions

Term	Definition
Community supply	A water supply that is not a municipal supply.
Meter	A device to measure the volume of water supplied.
Ministry	The Ministry of Education
Municipal supply	A reticulated potable water scheme owned by a council or public water services entity (e.g., Watercare).
Rural water supply	Water supplies that primarily provide stock water in rural areas but also provide water to households and other users (may be owned by a council).
Self-supply schools	Self-supplying schools source their drinking water from rainwater, surface water, spring water and/or groundwater and operate their own water supply.
Third parties	Users of the drinking water supply on separate land parcels beyond the school boundary.
Water supply system	<p>For self-supplies: all those components of the water supply network between the point of abstraction from the natural environment to the tap.</p> <p>For schools connected to a municipal, community or rural supply: all those components of the water supply network between the point of supply (typically at or near the boundary) to the tap.</p>

² From [Guidance on Drinking Water Safety Planning | Taumata Arowai](#)

The Ministry

The Ministry as asset owner and funder, will ensure schools as the supply operator, have a clear understanding of the funding sources available to them to operate and maintain their water supplies. The Ministry will make capital funding available to upgrade school water supplies to achieve full regulatory compliance as funding allows.

The Ministry and schools will prioritise investment in water supplies based on the following priority order:

1. Public health and safety (e.g. where people could become ill due to a lack of water treatment)
2. Sufficiency (e.g. where there is insufficient drinking water)
3. Addressing a formal non-compliance for which a notice or written warning has been issued
4. Achieving and maintaining statutory compliance
5. Reliability and redundancy (e.g. additional water storage tanks)
6. Reducing operating and maintenance costs or improving water efficiency
7. Divesting schools of water supply responsibilities and associated assets.

All schools

The requirements for all schools are:

1. Wherever and whenever practicable and appropriate, the option of connection to a reticulated municipal water supply is to be chosen ahead of self-supply.
2. Where schools supply their own water, school principals are responsible, and Boards of Trustees are accountable for providing kaimahi, ākonga, and manuhiri with sufficient and safe drinking water.
3. Confirming that self-supply water quality meets drinking water quality standards.
4. Preparing for and responding to any incident that puts the safety or adequacy of the drinking water supply at risk. Schools must capture these incident management procedures in a Drinking Water Safety Plan, for self-supplied schools, or a Risk Management Plan for schools on reticulated services.
5. Conserving and promoting the efficient use of water as far as practicable. To achieve this, schools are urged to install smart water metering systems, use low-flow technologies (e.g. low-flow taps, dual flush toilets, sensor urinals) and promptly identify and fix leaks.
6. Meeting Ministry requirements for drinking water systems.
7. Ensuring that any part of the water supply no longer required (e.g. due to demolition, removal, or abandonment of school buildings) is removed or left in a condition that will not be detrimental to drinking water quality.
8. No person/s other than the school and its authorised agents/contractors, may undertake the following activities without the following approval of the school:
 - o Enter any building, or facility set aside by the school for the protection of source water or as a water supply facility
 - o Access any part of the water supply system

- o Enter, make any connection with, discharge into, tamper or otherwise interfere with any part of the water supply system
- o Install devices which would compromise the ability of the school to maintain its levels of service
- o Allow third-party connections.

Specific requirements for self-supplying schools

Self-supplying schools are also required to comply with Table A.

Table A: Self-supplying school requirements

Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have a drinking water treatment system so that safe water is provided to users.
Quality and level service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embrace a high standard of care to manage water quality at all points of the supply process. • Ensure that water is protected from contamination during collection, treatment, and distribution to the point of use. • Must identify and document all components of the water supply system to be maintained. Inspection activities, regular maintenance, and cost requirements should be identified and planned in a way that are proportionate to the scale and complexity of the drinking water supply. • Must implement a preventive risk management approach to prioritise proactive management to minimise incidents as far as practicable.
Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure those involved in the supply of drinking water are aware of their responsibilities to understand, implement, maintain, and improve the school drinking-water quality management system. • Schools are encouraged to enter into maintenance contracts with suitably qualified and experienced external parties to achieve a high standard of care.
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must prepare a drinking water safety plan
Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be registered as a water supplier with the water supply regulator, Taumata Arowai, in its Hinekōrako web portal. • Must keep registration information up to date and as a minimum, reviewed and updated annually.
Monitoring and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must keep records of its drinking water supply, its operation, results of any monitoring and any of their actions undertaken to meet compliance and or legislative requirements under the Water Services Act 2021. • For schools using the Drinking Water Quality Assurance Rules, report water quality monitoring results to Taumata Arowai at the frequency specified in the Rules.
Notification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify Taumata Arowai if:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The drinking water supply doesn't comply with the drinking water standards • the drinking water is, or may be unsafe • the ability to maintain a sufficient supply of water is at imminent risk • there is a planned restriction or supply interruption longer than 8 hours • there is an unplanned restriction or supply interruption longer than 8 hours.
Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must commit to improving the drinking water quality management system on a yearly basis by reviewing (and updating if necessary) the Drinking Water Safety Plan.
Providing drinking water to third parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing drinking water to third parties should be avoided. Any requests for the provision of drinking water to third parties must be referred to the Ministry's Water Services team. • Where drinking water is already provided to a third party, the school should explore discontinuing this service.

Specific requirements for schools connected to a community or rural water supply

Schools connected to a community or rural water supply are also required to comply with Table B.

Table B: Requirements for schools connected to a community or rural water supply

Quality and level service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the supplied water does not meet the drinking water standards, install, operate, and maintain a drinking water treatment plant so that safe water is provided. • If the supplied water is unreliable, install sufficient water storage tanks to maintain a reliable supply for the school.
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Key legislation and reference documents

Water Services Act

The Water Services Act 2021³ provides the regulatory approach for drinking water. Water suppliers are required to ensure their drinking water is safe and sufficient.

Drinking Water Standards

All self-supplying schools must ensure their drinking water supply meets the Drinking Water Quality Assurance Rules⁴ or a Drinking Water Acceptable Solution⁵.

The Drinking Water Standards⁶ set out Maximum Acceptable Values (MAVs) for a range of determinands which can affect the safety of drinking water. Water suppliers are required to comply with the MAVs.

The Aesthetic Values⁷ (AVs) are the limits for determinands that can affect the taste, odour, and appearance of the water. Where these are present at levels which exceed the Aesthetic Values⁸, self-supplying schools must take reasonable steps to treat for these.

Health and Safety at Work Act

Providing clean, safe water at school is part of the overall health and safety responsibilities of the school under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.

Building Act

Under the Building Act 2004, buildings must be safe and sanitary (which includes adequate drinking water and wastewater systems).

Policy review

The policy will be reviewed on an as required basis when Ministry or legislative changes require.

³ Water Services Act 2021: <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2021/0036/latest/LMS374564.html>

⁴ Taumata Arowai: [Standards, Rules, and Aesthetic Values | Taumata Arowai](#)

⁵ Taumata Arowai: Acceptable Solutions <https://www.taumataarowai.govt.nz/for-water-suppliers/acceptable-solutions/>

⁶ Water Services (Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand) Regulations 2022:

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2022/0168/latest/whole.html>

⁷ Taumata Arowai: Aesthetic Values for Drinking Water Notice 2022 <https://www.taumataarowai.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Rules-and-standards/Taumata-Arowai-Aesthetic-Values-for-Drinking-Water-2022.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.



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