

Healthy School Lunches Programme Operational Policy

Changing Delivery Models or Suppliers for Schools/ Kura

Policy owner:	Director, Strategic Programmes
Policy is managed by:	Principal Advisor, Special Projects
Approval date:	10 November 2025
Next review:	As required

Purposes

1. This operational policy outlines the process under which a school or kura can be considered and approved to shift from their current delivery model (Delivery Model Variation (DMV)), including by changing their supplier.

Background

2. Since the introduction of school lunches from mid-2021 onwards, schools and kura have had some flexibility to change delivery model or supplier as they felt necessary. Where possible, the Ministry encouraged this to be coordinated around the end of contractual periods.
3. With the introduction of the alternative provision model in September 2024, and the transition to the new cost-efficient model in February 2025, the Ministry became increasingly responsible for a complex network of provision supporting over 1,000 schools through provider partnerships at the local, regional and national level.
4. Given the responsibility to be sure that school lunch providers remain viable (for students to be consistently fed) – the Ministry policy on considering and approving school level changes to delivery models, now has stronger implications. The loss of schools from a provider under the cost-efficient model may rapidly affect their margins and impact provider viability. Conversely too many schools/students rapidly joining a provider may also stress existing systems and result in non-delivery.
5. This policy document attempts to balance the need to be:
 - responsive to students, the requests of schools and honouring the directions agreed by boards/communities/iwi and others; and
 - recognising the implications for providers and other schools that might arise because of changes in the numbers of schools served.

Scope

6. This policy applies to the *Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches programme* decisions of all schools and kura seeking to explore different models.

Policy Statements

Changes to model and lunch providers will only be considered in exceptional circumstances

7. As a rule, schools and kura remain with their current meal provider and delivery model, to work through problems and to partner for better solutions. This helps:
- improve existing **relationships between suppliers and schools**, fostering better communication, responsiveness and service quality over time;
 - current lunch suppliers to **make necessary improvements to their service**, fostering commitment to enhance the quality of meals and delivery;
 - **avoid disruption** to lunch provision, for the school requesting a change and for other schools that may be affected due to network stability implications;
 - **sustain buying power** for external lunch suppliers by maintaining stable volumes essential for the efficiency of the programme and the viability of the supplier; and
 - Be sure that the programme is delivered within the budget constraints and support long-term sustainability and responsible use of public funding.

Circumstances for Changing Models

8. Although the list is not comprehensive, the Ministry will consider requests from schools and kura to change their supplier or delivery model under the following circumstances:
- If a meal **provider decides (or is forced to) cease provision** to a particular school, kura or collection of schools;
 - If the **internal model has become unviable**, and an alternative supplier/ provider is available, there is an option for a transition to a stable, dependable and accepting **external model provider**.
 - If there has been **continued poor performance** by an external supplier who has not met programme requirements, even after improvement processes have been communicated and undertaken. (The Special Projects Commercial Manager will manage this process).
 - If a school or kura that previously withdrew from the programme wishes to **rejoin** (refer to Withdrawing from the Programme Operational Policy).

Assessment Criteria

9. The Ministry will assess each request to change delivery model on a case-by-case basis. The main factors for consideration include (but are not limited to):

Consideration	Areas of impact
Impact on the provider and network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the potential effect on service volumes, network stability, and the provider's contractual commitments/investments (these may include leased kitchens, vehicles, staff employment under one- or two-year Services Agreement). • Note the contractual obligations in termination and notice periods with external providers.
Alignment of the reason for Change with the evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the validity of the request, and ensure any issues raised, have been tested in consultation processes with all relevant stakeholders to support the identification of possible resolutions. • Assess the feasibility of the change to give better outcomes based on the current circumstances. • Consider the impact of the change on the programme budget. • Incorporate relevant regional insights and network-wide information.

Process for Change

10. It should be noted that through the evolution of the school lunches programme, steps have been taken to provide food, and to include, a range of education sites that haven't strictly worked through the school-hierarchy.¹ In cases like delivery model changes and withdrawal discussions it will be important to ensure appropriate engagement and consultation recognises the complex formal accountabilities involved.
11. The first step in identifying any change opportunity will be through the school's Senior Advisor. Depending on the model(s) involved early discussions will also be had with the:
 - Commercial Manager will need to evaluate the contractual status and obligations²; and
 - Internal Model Lead Advisor and Iwi/hapū Service Delivery Manager, who will also have relevant perspectives on proposed changes.
12. Due to programme design changes for the budget period 2025/26, the decision to change delivery models will have a cost impact and this will depend on the models being changed between. The purpose of this prioritisation is to reduce unnecessary movement between models and ensure the viability and continuity of ongoing Ka Ora, Ka Ako programme provision.

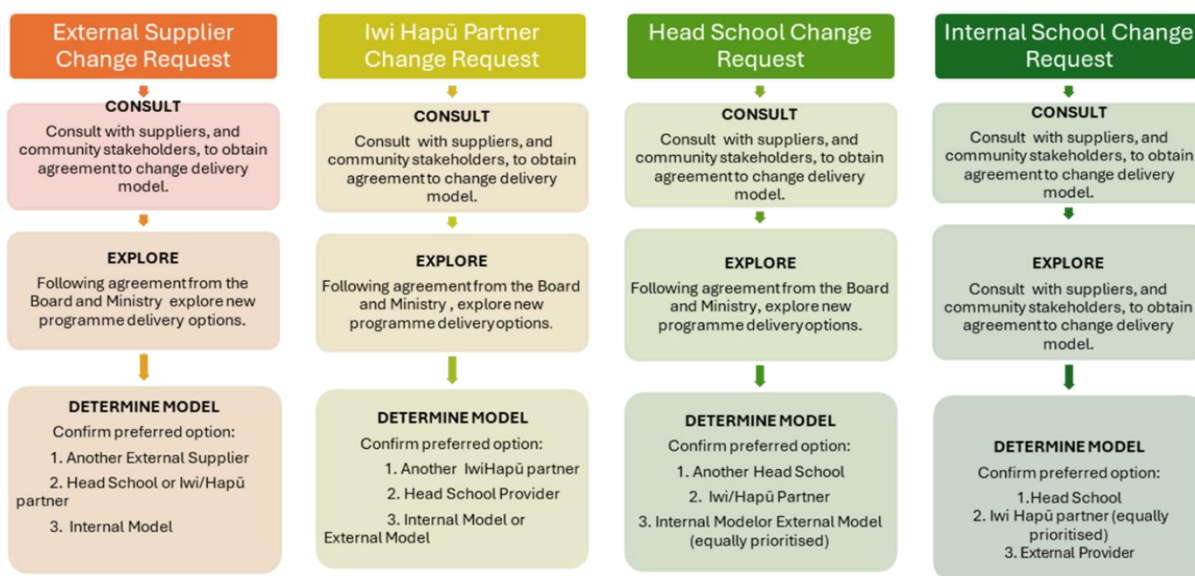
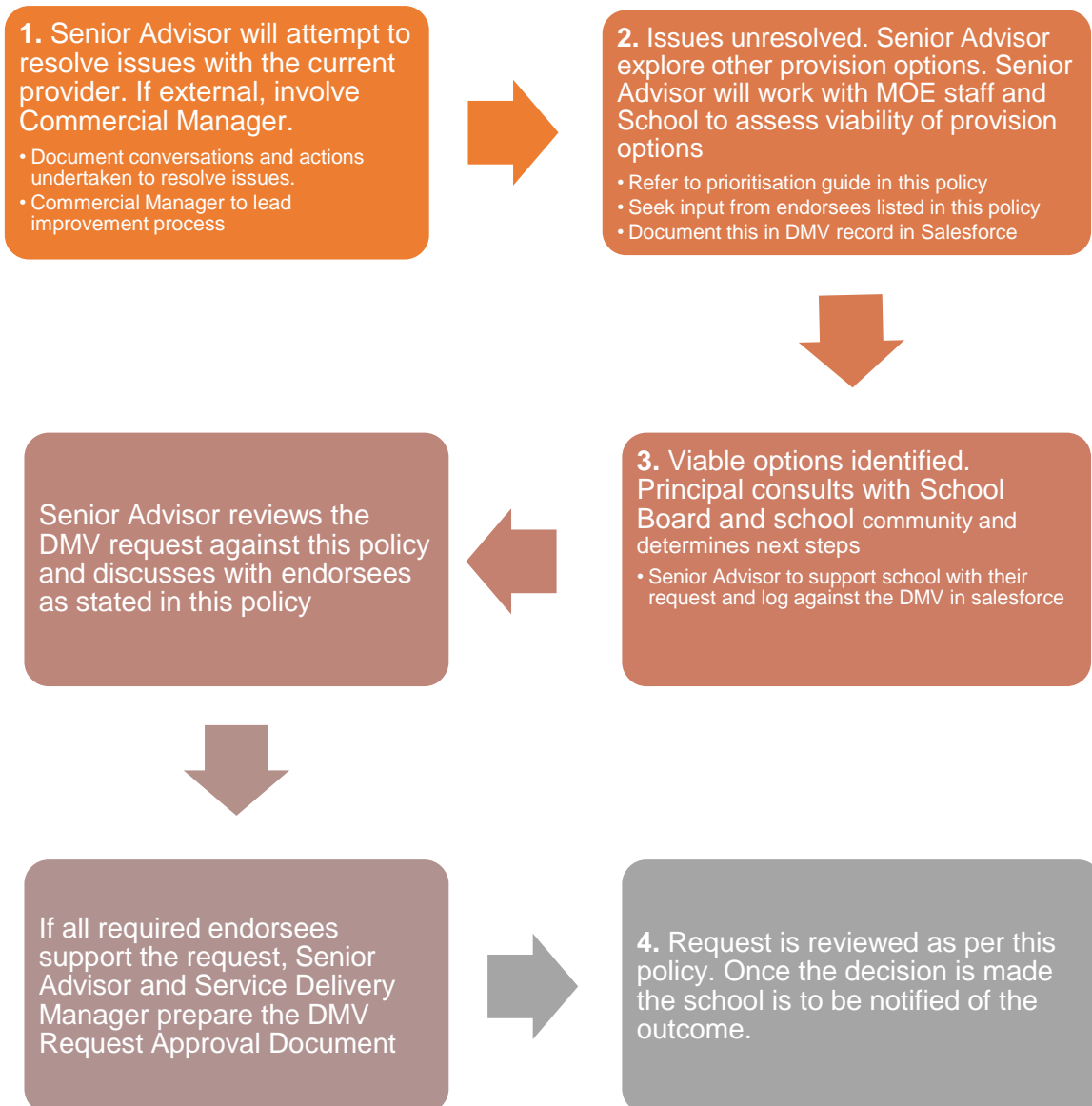


Figure 1: Ka Ora, Ka Ako Delivery Change Model Prioritisation.

13. The Ministry will prioritise minimising disruption to schools and students | ākonga when a change in lunch supplier occurs. As part of this, the Ministry will aim for complete transparency by providing consistent information and guidance for all stakeholders throughout the decision-making process.
14. The following flow diagram outlines a simplified four-stage process steps: 1. attempting to resolve, 2. exploring alternatives, 3. gain agreement and 4. plan for transition.

¹ Activity Centres, Alternative Education, Teen Parent Units and some Specialist Schools are supported through managing-schools who have formal responsibilities and accountabilities in the decision-making process. This also applies for satellite sites that are managed from a central school.

² Schools and suppliers must meet their obligations under the Employment Act, regarding vulnerable workers. Guidance for lunch providers is available [here](#).



15. The considerations and transition arrangements differ slightly for each model.

Internal and Iwi/Hapū Model Transition Considerations

- 16. These models offer significant benefits, including fostering local relationships, supporting the cultural identity of schools and students, providing hands-on learning about food and nutrition, and promoting the language and culture of ākonga Māori in the case of the iwi/hapū model. It is important to maintain and strengthen these models within the programme.
- 17. To retain the added benefits of each model, school requests to transition between models for improved outcomes will be prioritised where feasible, in line with the preferences outlined in this policy.
- 18. Transitioning between delivery models has a neutral impact on the programme budget. Changes between delivery models must consider the capacity and capability of the school or the iwi/hapū to meet programme expectations within budget.

Iwi Hapū Process and Considerations

19. Proposed model changes involving the iwi/hapū model, such as establishing a new partner, expanding provision of an existing partnership, or transitioning away from an iwi/hapū partner must be managed by the Iwi and Hapū Service Delivery Manager.
20. The Service Delivery Managers role is to review requests and to help resolve issues. The healthy school lunch programme has significant logistics to consider and this is particularly important when it involves small providers and local relationships.
21. Considerations may include:
 - 21.1. existing relationships with local iwi or hapū interested in the programme;
 - 21.2. The reasons behind the school or kura request to change their Iwi/Hapū provider.

Internal Model Process and Considerations

22. The Internal Model includes three levels of involvement: Head Schools (preparing and producing food onsite for themselves and other schools); Receiving Schools (receiving food from a Head school); and standalone Internal Model Schools (only preparing food for themselves).
23. When a DMV request affects any of these, the Ministry will assess options based on the 'Ka Ora, Ka Ako Delivery Prioritisation Model' Figure 1.
24. As Internal Model schools receive funding in advance for the full term, arrangements will need to identify/ recover unused funds (based on time-elapsed). If a school transitions to an external supplier mid-term, the Ministry will recover/reprioritise unused funds (in accordance with the Funding Agreement) to apply these to the new supplier or change-related costs.
25. Internal Model Schools and Head Schools must provide written notice, as outlined in their Funding Agreements, before terminating their Funding Agreement with the Ministry or Deliverables Agreements with Receiving schools.
26. Internal Model Schools may be supported to expand their provision and become a Head School on a case-by-case basis. This may occur when another school requests or is required to move to the Internal Receiving Model, due to circumstances beyond their control. This could arise, if collaboration between two or more Internal Model Schools make the model more feasible for continued delivery.
27. If a school is granted a Delivery Model Variation to Internal Receiving, their supplying school will automatically be classified as a Head School upon approval, if it is not already recognised as a Head School.

External Model Process and Considerations

28. A school or kura will be considered to transition out of an External Model in exceptional circumstances and must adhere to the approval process outlined in this policy.
29. These requests to change may stem from network constraints, changes in school or kura needs, or if the Ministry determines that the current meal provider is consistently not meeting expectations of the programme or underperforming.
30. If a new meal provider is required, alternative options will be developed and evaluated based on the principles in this policy, cabinet decisions and budget considerations.

Specialist Schools and Teen Parent Units Process and Considerations

31. Specialist Schools and Teen Parent Units receive targeted funding to address the complex dietary needs of their student | ākonga. This includes specialised nutritional

support for teenage parents, mothers or fathers, as well as their babies or children, and for expectant parents.

32. If a supplier chooses to exit the programme, an alternative supplier will be sought, either from existing programme suppliers or from external providers.
33. There is no funding impact related to a change in model for Specialist Schools and Teen Parent Units.
34. Requests to change model for these schools will follow the process for change and be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
35. Ultimate approval for change rests with the Director regardless of model type. There may be room for reconsideration of decisions only if key information changes.

Approval Process

36. For eligible applications fitting the circumstances and criteria, the application will progress through confirming School Board approval, Service Delivery Manager approval, Commercial Manager approval and Director approval.
37. To ensure the change direction is supported, any proposed changes to a school or kura supplier or delivery model must be submitted in writing by the Board of Trustees (potentially with evidence of community support) and endorsed by the Service Delivery Manager and Commercial Manager, prior to going to the Director of Strategic Programmes for final approval.
38. Transitioning out of an External Model will only occur in exceptional circumstances, requires approval from the **General Manager (Delegation Level 3 – Direct report to Deputy Secretary)**
39. All approvals for change must be documented in writing and recorded in the Ka Ora, Ka Ako programme Decision Log.
40. An overview of the required approvals is listed in the table below.

Type of Delivery Model Variation	Level of Approval	Endorsement Required
External to Internal	General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial Manager • Lead Advisor - Internal Schools • Director
External to Iwi Hapū	General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial Manager • Service Delivery Manager – Iwi Hapū • Director
Internal to External	Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial Manager • Service Delivery Manager
Internal to Iwi Hapū	Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Delivery Manager – Iwi Hapū • Lead Advisor - Internal Schools
Internal to Internal Head	Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead Advisor - Internal Schools • Service Delivery Manager

Iwi Hapū to Internal	Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Delivery Manager – Iwi Hapū • Lead Advisor Internal Schools
Iwi Hapū to External	Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Delivery Manager – Iwi Hapū • Commercial Manager

Ownership and Responsibilities

41. The below table outlines the roles that are required to apply this policy.

Role	Responsibilities
General Manager	Informed of changes and in instances where the decision is not to approve the change. Considers any schools wanting to move away from the external model supplier.
Director of Special Projects	Final sign out of change recommendation under all circumstances. Making decisions on MCIs when an internal model school moves to a supplier.
Service Delivery Manager	Supporting Ka Ora, Ka Ako Senior Advisors
Commercial Manager	Assessing the impact of any change on suppliers. Setting transition timeframes for schools and kura.
Iwi and Hapū Lead	Point of contact for schools and kura seeking to move to the iwi and hapū model. Reviewing alongside kura and possibly iwi whether the iwi and hapū model is appropriate.
Lead Advisor Internal Model	Point of contact for schools and kura seeking to move to the internal model and to assess capability and suitability of the school to operate internal model lunches.
Ka Ora, Ka Ako Senior Advisors	Point of contact with schools and kura. Working with Procurement to make change recommendations to the Director of Special Projects. Communicate the result of change request to schools/ kura Supporting schools and kura through any approved change.
Programme Co-ordinator	Record any changes in the programmes Decision Log