

How a school made its lunch programme work



Jo Lines-MacKenzie | WAIKATO TIMES

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Te Aroha College

VIDEO CREDIT: CHRISTEL YARDLEY

A Waikato school that does its own lunches says their model works so well they want the government to check it out so both taxpayers and students can benefit.

The *Waikato Times* visited Te Aroha College to check out the programme as grizzles about late and bland lunches under a centralised scheme continue to leave a sour taste for students and become a political fishbone stuck in the throat of the coalition government.

Liquidators on Wednesday revealed [defunct Hamilton-based lunch provider Libelle owes \\$14m to creditors](#), with Associate Education Minister David Seymour saying its demise had left the ministry “in the lurch”.

However, beneath Mt Te Aroha, the school did not opt in to the government programme and was going from strength to strength, said principal Neil Harray.

It takes funding that would otherwise go to the one-size fits all central programme, fattened with money from other budgets and makes its own lunches.



Te Aroha College principal Neil Harray and Ka Ora Ka Ako programme manager Karyn Galloway have seen the school lunch programme make a difference to the students.

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He would like to see the Education Review Office do an evaluation on the school's revised model.

"It would be good to get an independent evaluation of its success and to make further recommendations."

Harray said they make sure the 400 pupils get fed twice a day, despite the roll growing 25% in the last two years. For morning tea they get a yoghurt, fruit, and popcorn or grain waves or a muffin or slice.

Lunch time can vary from a chicken and coleslaw roll, Thai green chicken curry with rice, sweet and sour chicken, vermicelli noodles and vegetables, beef or chicken nachos, soup and bread or world famous Te Aroha College chicken burgers.

Harray said it was “really hard to comment” as to why other schools are having problems with their school lunches.



Woolworths supply the buns especially to make sure they meet the school's nutritional needs.

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“I have no experience with the external model. Also some of my principal colleagues said things were going pretty well (with it). That's why I think an ERO review would get a more balanced understanding of what is going on.”

Harray thinks combining elements of what schools could do themselves, with what central government provided could make the whole system work better.

“For example the fruit and snack food options at first break/interval that might help supplement the main meal. Also some of the recipes that work in the internal model might be considered for the external.”

When Harray arrived at the school the programme was funded at around \$8.50 per student per day.

“When David Seymour started the review, I emailed him straight away, I said ‘I think if you cut the funding by about a third, it's about right’.”

Harray suggested \$5.50-\$6 per student. The Ministry shoots for about \$3 and that wasn't going to work for their school so they looked for other options.

“We had a small surplus from the food program building up so we put that aside and we've also looked at additional funding, through the international student program.”

“Last year they increased the internal model to \$4 a day. To allow for logistics, hiring of staff, we think it's probably settling down now at about \$5.50.”



Te Aroha College students Phoebe Bangay, Francisca Alojado and Larissa Fernando enjoy the supplied morning tea.

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Harray doesn't like the term free lunch as someone's paying for it whether it's the school or government - but in reality ultimately the taxpayer.

He's well aware of the commentary that not every student needs it - "that's probably true".

But there's a significant portion at Te Aroha College that does, he said.

"There's quite a few kids that turn up that won't have had breakfast. This would be their main food for the day, and any leftovers we have are put at the front of the school and kids will pick up and take home for afternoon tea.

"But you see the odd occasion where they might grab four or five of the meals, and that's the dinner that night for that family."

"The kids are getting a great deal, it's really well set up, super nutritious food, cooked on site from basically as much raw ingredients as possible."

They try to eliminate as much salt, sugar and fat as possible and make sure the students are getting around 100g of protein.

Staff say kids are more settled since the lunch programme began and not wandering into town or the dairy.



Ka Ora Ka Ako Programme Assistant Samantha Tilsely making some of the 400 chicken and coleslaw rolls for Monday's lunch.

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Harray does says while no one turns away a chicken burger, not everything in their menu is a hit all the time, just like in any household.

Ka Ora Ka Ako programme manager Karyn Galloway and her full time assistant Samantha Tilsley work from 7am - 2pm to get the students fed each day.

The bubbly mother-of-four loves organising and making lunch for the students, and says it gets results.



The school brings in 65kgs of in season fruit a day for the students.

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“These kids are staying at school longer, and I do know of two boys who have told me themselves, they stayed because they were getting fed.

“One now has an apprenticeship and one has a really good job, which is going to lead to an apprenticeship. So they would have dropped out and probably gone on the dole.”

On the lunch frontline Galloway is a stickler for student manners, saying they become habitual for when they visit retailers in town.



Ka Ora Ka Ako Programme Manager Karyn Galloway enjoys being able to keep an eye on all the students when she gives out the school meals.
CHRISTEL YARDLEY / WAIKATO TIMES

Galloway said with around 30% of the school population below the poverty line, it’s good to know students are getting healthy food.

“The food they were bringing from home was chips and a cake and a muesli bar, which are not nutrient dense.”

A healthier diet means they’re not contributing to the health system.

“We all know if you've got good building blocks at the beginning, you're less likely to get sick as you get older and you're less likely to get really sick.”

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