



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
Te Tahiri o te Mātauranga

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12 October 2012

Josh Martin
fyi-request-551-ea647b85@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Josh Martin

Thank you for your letter of 12 September 2012 requesting

1. *“Official advice correspondence from your department to the Minister and/or Cabinet on the current approach to addressing and hopefully preventing teenage suicide. This may be seen in official documentation or possible policy change recommendations to the Minister, or other official bodies, regarding recommended practices and processes regarding how depression, mental illness and suicide are included (or not included) in the health curriculum in New Zealand public schools.*
2. *I request briefings, email communications or official communication which addresses the effectiveness of many of the approaches to educating our youth on suicide and mental health.*
3. *I request any correspondence from schools which states their hesitation or refusal to address teenage suicide prevention in their health curriculum”*

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982. I have organised the information you have requested into three sections, according to your questions. Note that I have interpreted your reference to the ‘current approach’ to mean that you are looking for information since 2005.

Request 1

Release of Information

The documents in scope of your request are released in full and are itemised below:

- (a) Education Report, 11 November 2009. The final versions of the *Managing Emergencies and traumatic incidents* Guide and Resources are available online at:
<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/EmergencyManagement/Preparedness/EmergenciesTraumaticIncidents.aspx>
- (b) Education Report, 17 November 2010
- (c) Background to Meeting of Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention, 23 September 2011

Request 2

There have not been briefings, email communications or official communications to address educating our youth on suicide and mental health. Evidence reviews in 1998, 2003 and 2012 indicate that educating young people about mental health increases their acceptance and understanding of the mental health issues. Educating youth about these issues does not necessarily impact on their help seeking behaviour when unwell. Evidence indicates that educating young people about suicide may increase distress and is not recommended. The 1998 and 2003 evidence review can be found here:

http://www.spinz.org.nz/file/downloads/pdf/file_354.pdf

http://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/soph/centres/ipic/_docs/cr72.pdf

The 2012 evidence review will be published and made available by Te Pou before the end of the year here:

<http://www.tepou.co.nz/>

Request 3

There has not been correspondence from schools stating hesitation or refusal to address teenage suicide in their health curriculum or school.

For requests 2 and 3, I am therefore refusing your request under section 18(g) of the Act.

Under sections 19 and 28(3) of the Official Information Act 1982 you have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision.

To provide you with some context I thought you may find the following information helpful. The Government's approach to suicide prevention is set out in the New Zealand Suicide Prevention Strategy 2006–2016 (the Strategy) and the New Zealand Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2008–2012 (the Action Plan). The Action Plan brings together activity across a range of government agencies. It contains goals and actions that, together, are likely to prevent suicides. It spells out how each action will be achieved, which agency is responsible for it and when it will happen. This can be found here:

<http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/new-zealand-suicide-prevention-action-plan-2008-2012>

New Zealand Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2008–2012

Implementation of the Action Plan is led and monitored by the Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention (the Ministerial Committee), supported by the Inter-Agency Committee on Suicide Prevention (the Inter-Agency Committee) which includes the Ministry of Education and is responsible for advising the Ministerial Committee on suicide prevention activities at a government agency level. Schools are recognised in the New Zealand suicide prevention action plan as having a vital and challenging role to play in the wellbeing of young people who have mental health problems and experiences that put them at risk of suicide.

Prime Minister's Youth Mental Health Project

In August 2011, the Prime Minister directed the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) to coordinate policy work to improve prevention and treatment service for young people with, or at risk of developing, mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, conduct disorder and substance abuse. All of the above factors are known to contribute to adverse life outcomes and/or suicidal behaviours.

Schools provide an effective way to reach young people who may experience mental health problems during their adolescence. As part of the Prime Minister's Youth Mental Health Project, several initiatives will be implemented through schools. More information about these initiatives can be found here:

http://admin.beehive.govt.nz/sites/all/files/Youth_Mental_Health_project-school_Based_Initiatives.pdf

The Ministry of Education is concerned about the mental wellbeing of our young people and is investing in and implementing a range of initiatives in school to improve the mental health outcomes among our young people. The Government is committed to an evidenced based approach in all aspects of suicide prevention. It is working across agencies to help identify effective practice and direct resources to where this new investment is needed to improve the wellbeing of our young people.

Yours sincerely



Jill Bond
Group Manger Service Delivery
Special Education

Encl

2

11 November 2009

397354

Education Report: Managing emergencies and traumatic incidents – a guide for schools and ECE services

Recommended Actions

We recommend that you:

- a. **note** the Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention held on the 6 August 2009 requested copies of the draft *Managing emergencies and traumatic incidents guide* for the next committee meeting to be held on the 19th of November 2009. Copies are supplied for your information.
- b. **note** the guide *Managing Emergencies and Traumatic Incidents* is a web based resource for schools and Early Childhood Education (ECE) services to plan for and respond to a range of emergency situations. This includes suicides of staff, children or young people.
- c. **note** hard copies of the guide are to be made available to members of the Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention prior to the committee meeting on the 19th of November.
- d. **note** the guide and it's resources will be made available on the Ministry of Education website in late November.
- e. **note** the guide also a training tool for schools and ECE services to develop their response plans to emergencies that affect the health and safety of their communities.
- f. **note** training in responding to emergencies and traumatic incidents will be offered to schools and ECE services in special education districts from 2010 onwards.

Jill Bond
Principal Advisor
Regional Operations

NOTED / APPROVED

[Signature]

Hon Anne Tolley
Minister of Education

Education Report: Managing emergencies and traumatic incidents – a guide for schools and ECE services

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides a brief context and background to the development of the guide *Managing emergencies and traumatic incidents* web based resource.

Background

2. Supporting early childhood education (ECE) services and schools to cope with the impact of a traumatic event has been an important part of special education service provision since the mid 1990's.
3. The Ministry of Education, Special Education assists ECE services and schools to prepare plans and form teams to respond to emergencies and traumatic incidents, including suicides of students or staff.
4. Ministry staff also work alongside ECE services and school traumatic incident response teams at the time of an incident, to enable them to implement their plan and support the wellbeing of those affected.
5. This handbook has arisen from two extensive reviews of the Ministry of Education's traumatic incident service carried out in 2001 by the Injury Prevention Research Centre (Te Pūru Taki Aukaiti Whara, University of Auckland, New Zealand and in 2006 by the Professional Practice Unit in the Ministry of Education, Special Education.
6. The reviews indicated that schools spoke highly of the service but identified the need for:
 - Written information for ECE services/schools and references to where to go to for more information on traumatic incidents (eg, publications/websites)
 - Plans to support an ECE service/school function during a traumatic incident
 - Local training opportunities for ECE services/schools to develop traumatic incident plans

In 2007, a project plan to address the issues raised by the reviews devised a number of key areas for development. For example, a telephone service has been established for schools to request support from Ministry of Education staff and an evidence-informed guide supports the service. This current resource is a companion guide for the sector with resources to support recovery and wellbeing in schools and early childhood education services.

Responding to suicide

8. People who are bereaved by suicide are at significantly increased risk of suicide themselves. The Ministry of Education traumatic incident service supports schools and ECE settings affected by suicide.
9. Communicating a suspected suicide has been a particular problem for schools as this may breach the Coroners Act. Judge Maclean and the Ministries of Health and Education have worked together to provide a solution to this difficulty that works within the current legislation.
10. Guidance and resources about responding to and communicating about suicide is included in the guide for schools and ECE services.
11. This guide will be available to schools and ECE services in late November 2009 via the Ministry of Education website.
12. Training for schools and ECE services to develop plans to respond to emergencies and traumatic incidents, such as suicide will occur from 2010.
13. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health are also working together to review and update existing suicide prevention guidelines for schools.
14. The review will seek appropriate Māori and Pacific input to ensure all resources are culturally appropriate.
15. The updated guideline and a document outlining the evidence that the guideline is based on, will also be made available on the Ministry of Education website.

Conclusion

16. The area of emergency/crisis preparedness and intervention has emerged in international literature as an important domain in preventing numerous adverse outcomes (including an increase risk of suicide) associated with the experience of an emergency/crisis event. Advanced planning and preparation has been found to be invaluable to responding to crisis events impacting on schools and communities.

17. These resources also emphasize the importance of cultural considerations when engaging in crisis preparedness and the influence and support these beliefs and traditions provide in understanding and resolving the often tragic nature of emergencies and traumatic incidents.

b.

15 November 2010

Education Report: Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention


Recommended Actions

We recommend that you:

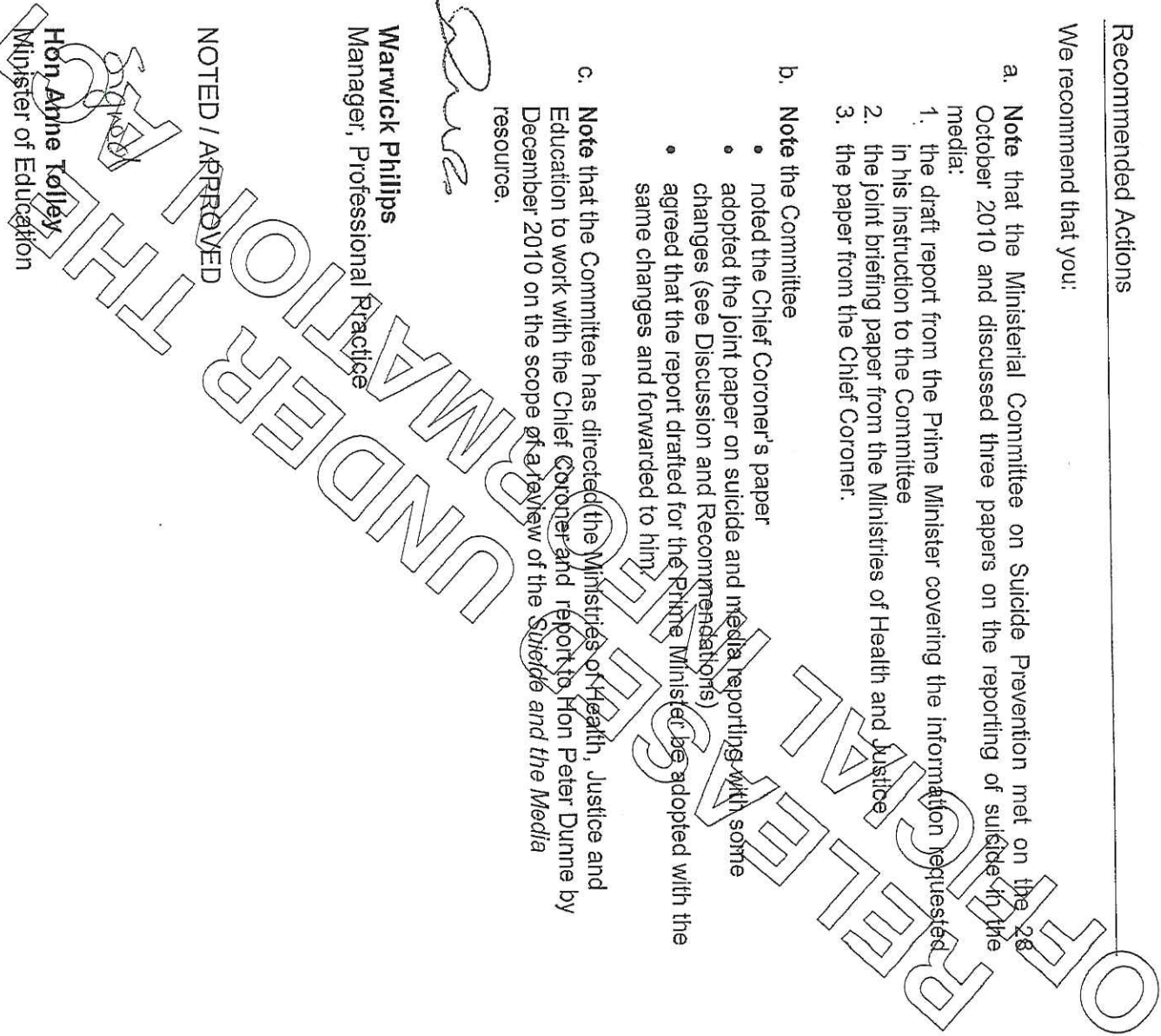
- a. Note that the Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention met on the 28 October 2010 and discussed three papers on the reporting of suicide in the media:
 1. the draft report from the Prime Minister covering the information requested in his instruction to the Committee
 2. the joint briefing paper from the Ministries of Health and Justice
 3. the paper from the Chief Coroner.
- b. Note the Committee
 - noted the Chief Coroner's paper
 - adopted the joint paper on suicide and media reporting with some changes (see Discussion and Recommendations)
 - agreed that the report drafted for the Prime Minister be adopted with the same changes and forwarded to him
- c. Note that the Committee has directed the Ministries of Health, Justice and Education to work with the Chief Coroner and report to Hon Peter Dunne by December 2010 on the scope of a review of the Suicide and the Media resource.

Warwick Phillips
Manager, Professional Practice

NOTED / APPROVED


Hon Anne Tolley
Minister of Education

18 / 11 / 10



Education Report: Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides a brief context and background to the Ministerial Committee on Suicide.

Background

2. In August 2010 the Chief Coroner was approached by media seeking information for a story about a 'suicide toll' in New Zealand.
3. The media requested the last three years coronial suicide statistics. The figures were released with the disclaimer that they were provisional, self-inflicted deaths. The Chief Coroner also ensured that the information released was the same level of detail that is published by the Ministry of Health's Suicide Facts.
4. The provisional coronial statistics showed a high plateau of suicides over the past three financial years with about 540 likely suicides occurring annually.
5. Following comments made by the Chief Coroner to encourage more openness, public debate and media coverage of the suicide rate the Prime Minister instructed the Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention to undertake a review of this issue and report back by 4 November 2010.

Summary of Review Findings

6. There is no constraint on the media or anyone else, discussing suicide as a public health issue, including discussion of the wider issues of mental health. The restrictions in the Coroners Act 2006 are on publicising the details of an individual death.
7. Media organisations consider that the restrictions unreasonably limit their ability to report on suicide and that more open reporting would enable better discussion and result in a reduction in the number of suicides. Evidence does not support that stance in relation to the reporting of individual deaths.
8. The weight of evidence is that irresponsible reporting, especially on the details of a particular suicide, can influence suicide behaviour and normalise suicide as an appropriate response to a life stress.
9. The available evidence on the benefits or harm of communicating about suicide on social networking sites indicates that it can support isolated people; however, it may incite some people to suicide. Social networking is only different in degree from people talking on the phone or directly to each other.
10. The Ministry of Health's *Suicide and the Media* resource is out-dated but still provides valuable information in line with the World Health Organisations guidelines on suicide reporting.

Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention discussion and recommendations

11. The Committee discussed three papers on the reporting of suicide in the media; the draft report from the Prime Minister covering the information requested in his instruction to the Committee, the joint briefing paper from the Ministries of Health and Justice, and the paper from the Chief Coroner.
12. Hon Peter Dunne summed up the discussion and noted that while there is some agreement on what is not wanted, there is still lack of clarity on what is acceptable. He acknowledged that for change to occur there needs to be some common understanding between the Ministry of Health, the Chief Coroner and the Media
13. Hon Peter Dunne proposed that the recommendations in the joint Ministries of Justice and Health briefing paper on suicide and the media be changed to read:
It is recommended that the Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention:
 - a. direct the Ministry of Health to work with the Chief Coroner and the Ministries of Justice and Education and report to Hon Peter Dunne by December 2010 on the scope of a review and update of the *Suicide and the Media* resource. The scope of the review is to include the involvement of media organisations, mental health professionals and other interested parties.
 - b. agree that the scoping report will be circulated to other members of the Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention for approval.
 - c. direct the Ministry of Health to report to the next meeting of the Ministerial Committee in February/March 2011, on the progress of the review.
 - d. agree to send the attached report to the Prime Minister in response to his instruction to the Committee.
14. Hon Peter Dunne also proposed that the recommendations in the report to the Prime Minister be changed to read:
The Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention recommends that you:
 - a. note: that the Committee has considered the policy settings in the Coroners Act 2006.
 - b. note: that while the weight of research evidence shows a clear link between the reporting of suicide, copycat suicides and suicide ideation in some cohorts there remains some debate about this evidence, particularly by the media
 - c. note: that while most media organisations report responsibly some journalists ignore Coroners Act requirements and report or act inappropriately when a suicide occurs
15. The Committee directed the Ministry of Health to work with the Chief Coroner and the Ministries of Justice and Education, to report to Hon Peter Dunne by December 2010 on the scope of a review and update of the *Suicide and the Media* resource; and to report on progress to the next meeting of the Ministerial Committee in February/March 2011.

OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT
RELEASED UNDER THE
OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT

BACKGROUND TO MEETING OF MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON SUICIDE PREVENTION

Drafter: Sally Jackson
Mets Number:
File number:
Date: 23 September 2011

Background

You have been invited to a meeting of the Ministerial Committee on Suicide Prevention from 9.00 – 10.00a.m, 27 September 2011, Room 1908, Level 19, Bowen House.

Brian Coffey, Group Manager and Shelley Dean, Practice Advisor from the Ministry of Education will be in attendance. Agenda, minutes and meeting papers are attached.

Content of Meeting

The committee will discuss

- Reporting suicide - A resource for the media
- The progress reports against the New Zealand Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2008-2012
- Responding to suicide clusters and
- information on the suicide research fund and national suicide data.

Note that traumatic incident practitioners have responded to a number of suicides in schools including responses to recent suicides clusters involving youth in Auckland, Kawerau, and Masterton this year.

Note that the Ministry of Education has a number of ongoing and completed actions in the New Zealand Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2008-2012

- Promoting mental health and wellbeing through the Positive Behaviour for Learning Action Plan (2010 -2014)
- Promoting mental health in Canterbury – the psychosocial welfare response
- Improving the care of people experiencing suicidal behaviour by updating the evidence behind and revising guidelines 'Young People at Risk Of Suicide (1998) for schools
- Provision of support by the Traumatic Incidents Response Service. This service has been reviewed with guidelines, resources and service improvements implemented

