

21 November 2025

Hon Erica Stanford

Minister of Education

Parliament Buildings

Wellington

Cc Ellen MacGregor-Reid, Secretary for Education

Tēnā koe e te Minita,

Funding for removal and remediation of asbestos in coloured sand

I write on behalf of members in schools and ECE centres who are facing disruption to learning and potentially significant exposure of children in their care to dangerous materials - and are now facing large and unforeseen costs as the result of the failure of Government's regulatory systems.

The entry and distribution of asbestos-containing products into New Zealand constitutes a clear and alarming failure against the importation ban on asbestos and the statutory duties imposed by the Health and Safety at Work Act.

Children have potentially been exposed to a known carcinogen that is strictly prohibited under New Zealand law. We need to find out how this was allowed to happen and agree a plan to help prevent this in the future, but in the meantime, through these failures and through no fault of their own, schools and centres now face costs that could cripple them.

Not only is this a question of budget deficits, more importantly it may divert funding away from essential supports to learning. Any reserves that schools and centres have are used to support additional staffing and resourcing for children that need extra help, as central staffing and operational grant funding is inadequate.

The sector is entitled to full transparency, accountability, and corrective action funded by government. We urge you to demand swift and decisive intervention at a ministerial and system-wide level from your Cabinet colleagues. This must include a broad formal investigation into how fibre boards and asbestos-containing sand entered New Zealand, looking at border testing, import controls, supplier assurance, and whether government oversight systems are fit for purpose.

We believe it is critical that all relevant stakeholders are included in this review, ensuring the voice of schools and ECE services as well as occupational health professionals, workers, business, and other impacted communities is heard. Asbestos is the most well-known occupational health hazard, and yet asbestos exposure is still killing up to 220 people in New Zealand every year. It is unacceptable.

Ngā mihi



Ripeka Lessels

Te Manukura | President