



28 November 2023

Hon Erica Stanford  
Minister of Education  
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Tēnā koe e te rangatira

### **Netsafe briefing to incoming Minister of Education - online harm and education**

Congratulations on your election and appointment to the Education portfolio. You're likely to be scanning briefings from officials to inform your thinking on priorities. As you do, please consider our briefing on online harm, crucial for students navigating education, alongside briefings from your department. As Minister of Education you have levers at your disposal to ensure young people are much better prepared to navigate a very rewarding but complex and harmful online world.

The attached briefing to incoming ministers tells you about Netsafe, the work we do with government and community, and rising levels of online harm in Aotearoa New Zealand. In this letter we focus on issues for the Education portfolio, the work we do in schools, our relationship with the Ministry of Education, and the areas where we think you can make a difference.

#### ***Netsafe work in schools and with young people and their families in a public/private partnership model***

Netsafe provides support and resources for schools, kura and parents dealing with young people and online harm. This includes:

- An online learning management system (and content) for schools and kura, presentations by Netsafe staff, and classroom resources.
- Resources on our website for parents and youth, for helping young people with online bullying, safe online relationships, security, and 'sexting'.
- Support and advice to schools and kura from Netsafe when dealing with online incidents.
- Calls by parents and teachers to our seven day a week helpline.
- The Youth Action Squad, a programme that supports students to enact positive changes around the online safety issues that affect them most.

We regularly ask schools and kura to evaluate the services we provide, through a satisfaction survey. Ninety-three percent of respondents, from the last quarter, rated their experience of our face to face and webinar services as 8/10 or higher.

#### ***Key issues for your portfolio***

Young people are particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying and online abuse. We are seeing a dramatic increase in sextortion, and a number of issues made worse through online platforms, such

as youth suicide, body image issues, posting and boasting about criminal activities, and the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

More services are required to educate and support young people and their digital lives. As Minister of Education you have two levers to do this: through the curriculum, and through Vote Education funding for programmes and resources.

Netsafe recommends that you:

- Update and improve online safety and (social) media literacy as part of the curriculum for schools and kura. We also suggest you re-examine the decision to remove media literacy from Curriculum Level One, because the age of criminality under the Harmful Digital Communications Act applies from the age of 10.
- Invest in anti-cyberbullying programmes in schools. For example the localisation of Ireland's *Fuse* program to counter cyberbullying <https://antibullyingcentre.ie/fuse> and make Netsafe the New Zealand home of this global programme.
- Improve reporting pathways to Netsafe regarding online harm incidents in schools and kura.
- Fund more Netsafe bite sized micro-learning moments ( less than 20 minutes each) to teach young people about responsible technology use. Six have already been launched successfully funded by the Ministry of Education (MOE) with three more under development to roll out in Term 1 in 2024.
- Fund research to address content that sexualises children or depicts self-harm and suicide violence against children.

We think the proposed ban on phone use during school term could complement the suggested update to the curriculum, to educate students about social media use, technology, and screen time.

***Netsafe's funding contract with the Ministry of Education (and decision of former government to transfer contract to DIA)***

Netsafe is currently funded by MOE to do much of our work with schools and kura. This includes a 24 month baseline contract, and additional 12 month 'top up' funding from time to time for projects that are part of the Ministry's overall Cyber Security and Digital Support for Kura and Schools programme. Examples include our recent work on micro learning moments and the Youth Action Squad programme.

We very much value our contract and relationship with the Ministry Education which we have held for 25 years. It is critical to understanding the needs of schools and kura, designing content that meets those needs, understanding the curriculum and getting vital support and resources to teachers via the Ministry's networks and platforms.

At the end of the last parliamentary term, the previous Government made a knee jerk decision to transfer Netsafe's funding contracts to the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) and for this to take effect in July 2024. We understand this decision was collateral damage resulting from a broader piece of work to align cybersecurity work across government, and a throwaway comment related to cyber safety, without any benefits analysis or consultation with MOE, Netsafe or school

communities. We wrote to the previous Minister in August 2023 notifying her of the opaqueness of the process and risks posed to online safety education. A copy of that letter is attached.

We ask that the new Government reverse the decision, so that Netsafe continues to contract directly with the Ministry of Education for our education mahi. Bringing the DIA into Netsafe and the Ministry of Education's contractual relationship increases bureaucracy, adds complexity and will drive up contract administration fees paid by the public sector that otherwise do not exist under current arrangements. It also creates a burden on Netsafe of collecting, researching and reporting on outcomes to serve both DIA and Education portfolio's needs.

*A meeting to discuss*

Netsafe would very much appreciate a meeting with you to introduce ourselves and discuss online harm and education and contracting arrangements. Barb Wright, our Executive Assistant can be contacted at [barbw@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:barbw@netsafe.org.nz) and by phone on +64 21 925 910 and can make meeting arrangements.

Congratulations again and I look forward to working with you and the incoming Government.

Ngā manaakitanga



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Brent Carey  
Chief Executive Officer



25 August 2023

Dear Minister Tinetti

**Re: Cabinet Update Paper - consideration on Monday 28 August 2023**

I refer to my previous correspondence about Cabinet's decision of 3 July to transfer Netsafe's baseline education contract to the Department of Internal Affairs, copied to a number of Ministers.

Netsafe received a reply to that correspondence from Minister Edmonds stating that this was a minor administrative matter and therefore any consultation with Netsafe or Justice and Education was deemed unnecessary. Unfortunately, Netsafe's meeting with Minister Edmonds of 23 August to discuss matters arising from this decision and our election advice was cancelled.

We felt it important ahead of Cabinet's consideration of the update paper to provide further context to you as the Minister of Education about the following matters:

- Netsafe has had no contact from DIA officials since 4 August nor seen the Cabinet update paper. Netsafe is not involved in any interagency discussions about the implementation effects of the decision because as an NGO we sit outside of Government.
- Netsafe's baseline education contract (which we have had with the Ministry for much of Netsafe's 25-year existence) will end on 30 June 2024.
- We have had no assurances from any government official that the education contract of \$816,000 per annum will be renewed beyond 1 July 2024.
- Ordinarily we would have already started discussions about the renewal of that contract with Education officials by now. However, we understand Education no longer sees itself as the lead agency for online safety education as a result of the 3 July decision, and DIA has no online safety education appropriation.
- Come 1 July 2024 there is more than a real prospect that Netsafe will lose 20 percent of its overall budget and that New Zealand schools and kura will be without free online safety education support and online safety incident response from Netsafe.
- The 3 Netsafe FTE roles that provide online safety education services marketed to all 2,400 plus New Zealand schools and kura are under threat of being disestablished. Netsafe is unable to make any plans beyond the next 10 months about any online safety education function.
- New Zealand schools and kura that previously received free online safety services from Netsafe may face a user pays and subscription service scenario if Netsafe is to continue to operate in this area - this will necessitate a call to action to all schools and kura for support to have Netsafe services remain in schools and kura so that no-one is left behind or left out from online safety education.
- The prospect of winding down online safety education services and product development is real and seems counter intuitive when there is record demand for help from schools and kura

and research released this week shows 10 percent of young people in schools are being cyber bullied and in need of NetSafe's services.

This re-arrangement of Netsafe's working relationships is also happening at a time when the Digital Education strategy is being launched [Connected Ako: Digital and Data for Learning – Education in New Zealand](#) and new health and technology curriculum to be rolled out.

This Digital Education strategy is all about agencies working together, a commitment to engagement between government and community agencies like Netsafe and a focus on safety and well-being for New Zealand rangatahi. Severing our contractual and funding ties to Education does nothing to strengthen our working relationships with the Ministry, schools, ākonga and the public.

There is an apparent rush to give effect to this decision of 3 July. Rushing such a significant contractual reorganisation could lead to unintended consequences and undermine the very objectives it seeks to achieve. It is an understatement to say we are dismayed by the lack of consultation on this proposal. More concerning, however, is the lack of any proper analysis by government officials and the lack of appropriate advice to Ministers on the real world effects of this change before the decision was taken.

The online safety system design, retention of staff, delivery of schools' online safety programs, and other important areas will be adversely affected by this decision which creates uncertainty, budget risks, reduced effectiveness, and the risk of a loss of valuable online safety education expertise.

Netsafe has valued its close working relationship with the Ministry of Education which it has held for many years. In the last year alone together with the Ministry we have launched a number of innovative online safety education services and products that are making a real difference to the lives of our young people and classrooms around New Zealand.

We urge you to reconsider this move, to undertake a proper analysis of the real world effects of consolidating both education and justice functions in a government department that is responsible for neither, and allow your officials to continue to negotiate directly with Netsafe on the delivery of future online safety education products and services to New Zealand schools and kura.

Our working relationship with Stuart Wakefield at the Ministry and his team is constructive, effective and productive and has been going from strength to strength.

Should you or any of your Advisors have any questions please feel free to ring me on 021 925140.

Yours sincerely



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Brent Carey  
Chief Executive Officer  
Netsafe