

Office of Hon Erica Stanford

Minister of Education
Minister of Immigration
Lead Coordination Minister for the Government's Response
to the Royal Commission's Report into Historical Abuse in
State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions



Gary Kelliher, Matt Hollyer, Michael Laws and Neil Gillespie
Councillors of the Dunstan Ward
Otago Regional Council

Ref: GEMS-46435

By email to andrea.howard@orc.govt.nz

Tēnā koutou

Thank you for your letter of 15 December 2025 about the Ministry of Education's review of school bus services in the Queenstown area. I appreciate you taking the time to raise these concerns on behalf of your community.

Since receiving your letter, I have asked the Ministry for further information. I understand that many students in the Queenstown Lakes area are ineligible for school transport assistance because they either do not attend their closest school or have access to public transport. The eligibility criteria can be found under the school transport assistance section at education.govt.nz/parents-and-caregivers/schools-year-0-13/available-assistance.

I also understand that the Ministry completed its review of its school bus services in the Queenstown Lakes area at the end of last year and provided Otago Regional Council with the final outcome on 10 December 2025. Changes will come into effect at the start of Term 2, 2026 (20 April 2026).

I am advised that, as part of these changes, the Ministry will introduce interim bus services to support a smooth transition for students who are not eligible for a Ministry-funded school bus service because public transport is available. These services will operate while the Ministry works with your Council to develop a longer-term, sustainable solution.

The Ministry has been working closely with your Council since 2021 to ensure changes align with the Council's own planning processes. While the Ministry can only provide services to students who meet its eligibility criteria, regional councils have greater flexibility to provide services that meet the transport needs of their communities.

Although public transport and Ministry-funded school bus services have different funding models and policy settings, both receive significant central government funding. It is important to avoid duplication and ensure taxpayer money is used efficiently and effectively.

Public transport is widely used by people of all ages and mobility levels, including students, across the country. Caregivers play an important role in choosing safe travel options for their children, whether that involves getting to bus stops, using public transport or travelling to school. The Ministry supports families in making decisions that best suit their circumstances.

Schools are responsible for the safe supervision of students during bus loading and unloading, managing behaviour on bus services in collaboration with bus operators, and communicating safety expectations to parents and caregivers.

Responsibility for road networks and infrastructure, including signage, speed limit and bus shelters, rests with local councils, police and the New Zealand Transport Agency. Any concerns in these areas should be directed to the appropriate authorities.

Thank you again for writing, and for your advocacy on behalf of your community.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Erica Stanford', written in a cursive style.

Hon Erica Stanford
Minister of Education

cc Joseph Mooney, MP for Southland
By email to: joseph.mooneymp@parliament.govt.nz