

Hon Erica Stanford, Minister of Education Parliament Buildings, Wellington

Cc: Rt Hon Christopher Luxon, Prime Minister; Hon Simon Watts, Minister of Climate Change

Re: The Years 0–10 curriculum review of climate change content

31 August 2026

Dear Minister,

We welcome your decision to direct the Ministry of Education to reinstate the words “climate change,” alongside related terms such as “greenhouse gases” and “fossil fuels,” into the Years 0–10 Science and Social Sciences curriculums. Their removal from the final documents, despite being present in the earlier drafts, was a serious misstep, and we are glad to see it being corrected. We are writing now because how this review is carried out matters just as much as the decision to undertake it.

Putting the words back in is a necessary first step, but it is not, on its own, enough. If the review amounts to finding a handful of places to reinsert the term “climate change” without connecting it coherently to its causes, its human origins and its consequences, it will not have fixed the underlying problem. Professor Chris Eames of the University of Waikato has already noted that while aspects touching on climate change remain present in the curriculum, they are not connected in a coherent way, nor attributed to human activity. We would ask that the review go further than a find-and-replace exercise, and instead ensure climate change is taught in a way that reflects the scale of the problem today’s children will spend their whole lives dealing with.

Introduction to Kiwis in Climate

Kiwis in Climate (“KiC”) is a global professional network of over 400 New Zealanders working in climate and sustainability. Our members include executive leaders and experts from a range of fields including business, non-profit, science, law, engineering, and policy, and are spread across the world from Auckland and Wellington to London and Singapore. As a network of climate and sustainability professionals, we work daily with New Zealand businesses and see, first-hand, how prepared or unprepared their people are for a warming world and a changing economy. That vantage point is why we feel compelled to write to you now.

The case for teaching it meaningfully

Today’s children will live with the effects of climate change more than any generation before them. They are the ones who will experience the floods, droughts, sea level rise and disrupted

seasons that are already reshaping life in Aotearoa, and they will do so for longer and more intensely than we have. To meet that future well, they need two things from their education: an understanding of why it is happening and what can be done about it, and the practical resilience and problem-solving skills to live with its impacts as they unfold around them. A curriculum that mentions climate change without building that understanding progressively across ten years of schooling denies most children that grounding during the years when curiosity, values and ways of thinking about the world are still forming.

This is not only a matter of individual preparedness. It is a matter of economic preparedness. Employers increasingly need staff who understand climate risk, carbon and resource management, and how to adapt operations and decision-making accordingly, whether that is in agriculture, finance, construction, tourism, or manufacturing. The evidence on this is now well established internationally. LinkedIn's Global Green Skills Report has found that the number of jobs requiring green skills is growing markedly faster than the pool of workers who hold them, and that workers with green skills already see meaningfully higher hiring rates than the workforce as a whole.¹ Closer to home, Deloitte's research into the green skills gap among Australian businesses found that 43 percent of surveyed businesses lacked the skills and expertise needed to prepare for the climate crisis, with the sharpest gaps in engineering, science and technical roles, as well as climate and sustainability-related soft skills.² There is no reason to expect New Zealand businesses are travelling any better on this front, and every reason to think the same shortage will land on our economy as global demand for these skills accelerates.

As sustainability and climate professionals working inside New Zealand businesses, we see the current shortfall in climate literacy among managers and employees regularly, even as the exposure of businesses, politics and economies to climate impacts continues to grow globally. A curriculum that treats climate change as a term to be slotted in, rather than a lens that runs through how children learn, does not close that gap. It leaves it for a generation who will need to close it faster than we have. A workforce that does not understand climate change, and is not equipped to cope with or adapt to its impacts, is a workforce that will hold the New Zealand economy back at precisely the point other economies are moving to get ahead.

There is also a teaching practice point worth making directly to you, Minister. Some of the best teachers we come across are already using climate and nature as the way into teaching the basics, rather than as a topic that follows once the basics are covered. Getting children outside, watching how a local stream, coastline or bush block changes, is proving to be a genuinely effective way to teach reading, writing, maths and science, not a distraction from it. A systematic review of nature-based outdoor learning found measurable gains in engagement, academic performance, social skills and wellbeing, with particular benefit for children who find a traditional classroom setting difficult.³ For those children especially, being outside and making sense of a changing natural world can be the way in, not an add-on once the "real" learning is done. We would encourage the review to consider how this kind of teaching practice, not just curriculum wording, can be supported and encouraged.

This review also represents a genuine opportunity, Minister. You are in a position to set New Zealand's children on a path where a strong, early understanding of climate change and how to live with it becomes a foundation of their education, not an afterthought. Done well, that knowledge and those skills would leave them future ready, equipped to build a New Zealand society and economy that is prepared for the impacts of climate change we already know are coming, and relevant in a world that will look very different by the time they enter the workforce.

Our ask

We request the Government:

1. Ensure the review goes beyond reinserting the words “climate change” in a handful of places, and instead builds a coherent, progressive understanding of its causes, human origins, and consequences across Years 0–10.
2. Ensure climate change is taught as a cross-curricular topic from primary school, reflecting its relevance across Science, Social Sciences, Geography and beyond, rather than being confined to a single learning area.
3. Include the development of resilience, adaptability and problem-solving skills related to climate impacts as an explicit learning outcome within the Years 0–10 curriculum, alongside the scientific content.
4. Support and encourage outdoor, nature-based teaching approaches as a foundation for delivering core literacy, numeracy and science skills, particularly given the evidenced benefits for children who struggle in traditional classroom settings.
5. Consult with businesses, employers and industry bodies, alongside educators and climate professionals, on the climate and sustainability literacy the future workforce will need, before the review concludes.
6. Publish the outcome of the review, including how climate change concepts have been woven through the curriculum, with input from climate science and education experts, including KiC’s members.

Our offer

As a broad collective of climate and sustainability professionals working across New Zealand business, we bring practical, on-the-ground insight into the skills gap this review is an opportunity to close. We would welcome the chance to meet with you and officials as the review progresses, to help ensure the outcome matches the scale of what today’s children are facing.

Yours sincerely,

Kiwis in Climate

A global network of New Zealand climate and sustainability professionals

www.kiwisinclimate.org

¹ LinkedIn Global Green Skills Report, cited in “A four-step plan to closing the global green skills gap,” World Economic Forum: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/12/green-skills-gap-four-step-plan/>

² Deloitte Australia, “Towards a green skilled workforce”: <https://www.deloitte.com/au/en/services/economics/blogs/towards-green-skilled-workforce.html>

³ “Getting Out of the Classroom and Into Nature: A Systematic Review of Nature-Specific Outdoor Learning on School Children’s Learning and Development,” PMC: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9149177/>

Underlying news sources: “Minister confirms climate change will be in junior curriculums,” Stuff (19 August 2026): <https://www.stuff.co.nz/politics/361022210/minister-confirms-climate-change-will-be-junior-curriculums>;
“Govt to reinstate climate change in curriculum u-turn,” Newsroom:
<https://newsroom.co.nz/2026/08/19/govt-to-reinstate-climate-change-in-curriculum-u-turn/>

