

2026 Election Policy at a Glance

This document summarises education and AI policy announced by political parties ahead of the election.

What matters most for ISNZ

- **Subsidy and funding.** No party has announced 2026 policy on the independent school subsidy.
- **Qualifications and curriculum.** National would keep the NCEA replacement on track from 2028. Labour would keep NCEA until 2029 and pause the wider curriculum overhaul for review. Both carry planning implications for member schools offering NCEA.
- **Regulation.** Private school registration moved to ERO under the System Reform Amendment Act. Labour would repeal the Act but has not said what happens to that function.
- **Charter schools and the choice debate.** Labour would abolish charter schools; ACT would expand them. Independent schools are not directly affected, but the debate shapes how each government views non-state provision of education.
- **AI.** Labour and TOP are the only parties with schools-specific AI policy. This gives ISNZ an opening to offer practical sector experience.

National Party

- Students must stay in school until they complete Year 11, rather than leaving at 16. Exemptions remain for those moving into work or training.
- Nationally consistent school start and finish dates from 2028. It is unclear whether this would apply to independent schools.
- New Year 11 qualification from 2028, followed by Year 12 and 13 certificates in 2029 and 2030.
- Screens banned in ECE, tightly limited in Years 1–3, and the writing part of primary assessments done on paper.
- No schools-specific AI commitment; points to the Government's existing AI Strategy.

Labour Party

- Freeze the curriculum overhaul, with only the updated English and maths curriculums continuing. NCEA stays until 2029 while a new body reviews it.
- Independent Council for Curriculum and Assessment, costing about \$500,000 a year from existing funding.
- AI in Education team to support schools to use AI safely, alongside an AI office, online safety regulator and copyright rules. • Improvements at more than 2,000 state and integrated schools, with work for local firms in towns and cities across New Zealand.

Green Party

- Free ECE from 2029 and an end to public funding for private, for-profit ECE centres by 2028.
- Restore and expand the Ka Ora, Ka Ako school lunch programme; \$50M a year for te reo Māori initiatives.
- One-year moratorium on new data centre consents. No schools-specific AI policy.

ACT Party

- Protect and expand charter schools after the election.
- Legal powers for teachers to remove disruptive students from class, with protection when using reasonable force.
- No published AI or digital policy.

NZ First Party

- Opposes relationship and sexuality education, says schools should not shape children's political or ideological beliefs.
- No published policy on schooling structure, funding or AI.

Te Pāti Māori

- Māori Education Authority as the cornerstone of its education policy.
- Te reo Māori as a core subject through Year 10, expanded school lunches, free public transport for students and free school counselling.
- No stated position on independent schools; historically more open to charter schools than Labour.

The Opportunity Party

- Cross-party 10-year plans for health and education to stop policy changing with each government.
- An independent Curriculum and Assessment Council would decide whether the NCEA replacement (NZCE/NZACE) goes ahead.
- Guidance for schools on healthy screen use, online safety and responsible AI use; more flexible te reo Māori delivery; a 20-year Skills and Learning Accord for tertiary.