



For immediate release

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Government investment in school broadband networks welcomed

A meeting held in Wellington today of representatives from five school regional broadband initiatives, from Otago, Christchurch, Nelson-Marlborough, Wellington and the North Shore, applauded the announcement by Minister Tolley of a \$34 million investment in school ICT (information and communication technology) networks.

“We met today to develop a school broadband connectivity action plan to present to the Minister. A key recommendation to Government was for an investment of \$10 million per annum for a period of 5-8 years in school network upgrades,” said Charles Newton, Principal of Nayland College in Nelson and spokesperson for the group. “We are delighted to be beaten to the draw by the Minister”, he said.

“Now we hope the Minister will extend this brave commitment by supporting the emerging trend for groups of schools to pool their resources and expertise to create local networks. Then we need to see these connected in a National Education Network that will provide teachers and learners superfast broadband access to valuable digital resources and services both nationally and from around the world.”

The upgrade of both internal and external school information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure is a critical component in achieving the learning outcomes that schools are striving to achieve. Schools are very focussed on teaching and learning but most do not have sufficient resources to bring their school networks up to scratch. A 2004 survey of school networks highlighted the urgent need to upgrade school networks; at the time 500 schools (mostly small and/or rural) did not have a network and another 1000 were identified as “poor” or “inadequate”.

“The Ministry invested \$16M over the last two years in a very successful upgrade of 450 schools and we were worried that in this climate of ‘cut-backs’ that the other 1000 would miss out”, said Mr Newton. “ICT networks are largely invisible in schools, yet they can play a significant role in improving learning outcomes in critically important areas such as numeracy and literacy. Networks bring exciting information and interactivity directly into the classroom, providing a huge variety of stimulating learning opportunities. Connectivity to the wider world can no longer be optional for today’s teachers and students; they deserve access to resources such as fast Internet in their classrooms all of the time.”

“The Government’s commitment to a widespread enhancement of broadband capacity, plus additional programmes such as the teacher laptop scheme (now with over 90% uptake) and the e-asTTle online assessment tool will be of little value to schools unless the internal and external ICT infrastructure provide an adequate level of support all the way to the individual classroom.”

The Minister’s announcement today will provide a huge boost in tackling this issue”, said Mr Newton. “Most ordinary classroom teachers do not have access to adequate ICT infrastructure in their classrooms and too often the technology is restricted to specialist computer classrooms which are typically fully booked. Teachers, most of whom now have their own laptop computer are quickly frustrated when they cannot connect to the Internet in their classroom or do not have access to a data projector to share online resources with their students. The lack of technology support in classrooms is now also recognised as a contributing factor to teacher resignations, especially those moving overseas or to schools with good ICT infrastructure.”

The group that met today included representatives from Otago, Christchurch, Nelson-Marlborough, Wellington and Auckland’s North Shore and was hosted by the Wellington Loop Trust and Wellington City Council. In each of these areas, schools are working in partnership with each other, infrastructure providers and local authorities to connect to local high speed fibre networks and to KAREN, New Zealand’s national high speed research and education network.

“We are now finalising an exciting plan to extend these groundbreaking initiatives into a National Education Network and look forward to presenting this to Minister Tolley”, said Mr

Newton. “While the Minister’s announcement about school ICT network upgrades is a significant first step, we will now be encouraging her to make similar investments in the equally critical areas of regional and national connectivity as well. This includes provision for the people needed to manage these new connected learning environments.”

Ends

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