To whom it may concern,

I am writing to ask the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the New Zealand government to take action on managing screen use in schools. The students of our school are spending a significant amount of their day on screens, and they will have a greater chance of doing better both academically and emotionally if guidelines are set.

The digital curriculum launched by former Education Minister, Nikki Kaye, has been designed to ensure students learn computer science principles, and to use digital technology to create digital content, including learning about electronic components and techniques to design digital devices.

The MOE were very clear that the curriculum means learning about devices, not on devices, and that meeting the curriculum does not mean more device time, particularly in primary schools.
https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/digital-curriculum-changes-connect-young-people-future

"The goal of this change is to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to become digitally capable individuals. This change signals the need for greater focus on our students building their skills so they can be innovative creators of digital solutions, moving beyond solely being users and consumers of digital technologies."
https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum/Technology

Below is a video link to the workshops the MOE ran in 2017 about implementing the digital curriculum for schools:
https://education.govt.nz/our-work/consultations/recent-consultations/digital-technology-consultation/

Digital technology can offer new ways of learning, and opens up many opportunities for our children. The 2015 OECD report on the use of digital technologies in school, 'Students, computers and learning,' agrees that digital fluency is important for equal opportunities for employment and study on leaving school. However, they found that there is a limit to the amount of technology use that can achieve this.

The report analysed data from 64 countries when reviewing this topic.
They found that students who used computers moderately, defined as 1 to 2 times per week, have some improvements in educational outcomes compared to students who rarely use computers. They noted improvements only occurred in certain areas, and there were no significant improvements in reading, science or mathematics.

Students who frequently used computers had significantly lower educational outcomes.

Testing was done both on paper, and digitally. This is highly relevant, as 'needing to be prepared for digital assessment in high school and university' is one of the reasons given to parents for Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies for young

children. Singapore, with only moderate use of technology, came out top for digital skills.

A recent report by the Reboot Foundation (2019) has also analysed the connection between educational technology and learning, using PISA and the 2017 NAEP (National Assessment of educational Progress) data, and their results have replicated the 2015 OECD results. They noted that "the results regarding tablet use in fourth-grade classes (equivalent of NZ Year 5) were particularly worrisome, and the data showed a clear negative relationship with testing outcomes. Fourth-grade students who reported using tablets in 'all or almost all' classes scored 14 points lower on the reading exam than students who reported 'never' using classroom tablets. This difference in scores is the equivalent of a full grade level, or a year's worth of learning."

In addition, some children are more at risk of problematic internet use, and BYOD policies in schools are causing wider issues in the community for many families with managing screen time. I question whether BYOD is necessary to achieve the goals of the digital curriculum, particularly at primary and intermediate school level.

Smartphone use in school has also been highlighted by educational expert Dr Pasi Sahlberg, as the main reason that New Zealand is slipping down the PISA ratings. Evidence seems to back this up, with research showing that removing smartphones from school increases performance by 6.4%, or by 14% in more disadvantaged students, (Beland & Murphy, 2015). While an outright ban may be difficult to police, some teachers believe this action, combined with education about responsible use, would set a tone and an expectation for students.

In summary, while research has shown that there is potential for moderate, purposeful use of digital technology to enhance learning and digital skills, the digital curriculum for many schools has become about screen learning, which is neither moderate nor evidence-based. Even primary age children can be clocking up more than half of their working school day on devices. Not only has international evidence found this to be associated with reduced learning outcomes, but an increasing number of studies are linking high levels of screen use in children and adolescents, with negative impacts on health and well-being. While more objective and scientific research is desirable, action is required now about managing screen use in schools by children and adolescents. Please follow this link for more information www.sensiblescreenuse.org.

I am asking the Ministry of Education to take the following steps:

1) To create an independent Digital Health Advisory Board for Schools, to advise the MOE on guidelines to limit harm from the use of digital technology in schools.

2) Provide best-practise guidelines for schools.

3) Take meaningful steps to educate the public about the risk of screen over-use in young people and about the guidelines that have been set.

   Thank you.