

SPAC Meeting Summary Report for regional distribution (AI-generated) 24 July 2026

Overview

The SPAC meeting on 24 July 2026 focused on significant professional issues affecting secondary schools, including reporting and assessment requirements, SMART assessment implementation, curriculum and qualification change, attendance policy and case management, artificial intelligence in assessment, and support for senior leaders. The meeting included updates from Ministry of Education representatives, PPTA Professional Issues, Executive, NASDAP, and field service representatives, alongside regional concerns raised by SPAC members.

Key Themes

Implementation pressure: Members reported that multiple reforms are landing at once, creating workload, timetable, staffing, communication, and change-management pressures for schools.

Need for clearer communication: SPAC repeatedly identified inconsistent or incomplete communication to schools, particularly about SMART assessment timing, curriculum expectations, attendance processes, and senior leader involvement.

Equity and workload concerns: Concerns were raised about the impact of new requirements on diverse learners, rural schools, special character schools, senior leaders, specialist teachers, and schools with limited relief or staffing capacity.

Assessment and reporting reliability: Members highlighted variability across SMS systems, uncertainty about scaled scores, concerns about AI marking accuracy, and the need for reporting systems that support rather than duplicate school processes.

Senior leader wellbeing and recognition: SPAC members expressed concern that senior leaders are carrying substantial additional work without sufficient recognition, resourcing, or backfill.

Major Discussion Areas

Reporting, SMART Assessment, and Student Progress

SPAC members raised concerns about reporting practice, including whether approaches should be mandatory or school-determined, the availability and usefulness of reporting

templates, and variability across student management systems. KAMAR reporting was noted as an issue where consolidated results may not provide scaled or percentage data. Members also raised workload concerns around triangulating evidence, interpreting progress descriptors, and responding to learner needs in classrooms.

The Ministry of Education reported strong uptake of SMART assessments for Years 3–10, with most use occurring digitally. Planned improvements include a better student experience, self-service assessment windows for schools, adaptive testing, increased item banks, and revised approaches to writing assessment. Members emphasised the need for clearer communication before future assessment windows, particularly around assessment length, accessibility, school choice, and the role of AI marking.

Curriculum, Pathways, and Qualification Change

Ministry representatives provided an update on pathways, qualification change, and Phase 5 curriculum work. SPAC members raised concerns about timelines, the manageability of new English resources, the implications of technology and arts requirements, and the impact on special character schools. The Ministry indicated that time allocations are recommendations and that further communications are expected, including Gazette information in August and September.

Members also discussed implications for specialist staffing, including technology, arts, science, and agricultural/horticultural learning. There was concern that increased use of non-specialist teachers could create significant change-management and workforce pressures. The Ministry noted possible support options, including resource development, virtual learning approaches, and retraining pathways such as sabbatical or study award options.

Attendance, ISP, and Case Management

The Ministry presented on attendance services case management and Attendance Management Plan response activities. Members raised concerns about administrative burden, duplication with student management systems, under-resourcing of In-School Provision, the impact on relationships with whānau, alternative education pressures, and how health-related absences are recorded and understood.

The Ministry acknowledged teething issues, regional variation, and the administrative burden on schools. Changes to ISP processes were signalled as forthcoming. Members asked about hardship funds, unmet need, alternative pathways, health-related coding, and the impact of surveillance approaches. Multi-agency forums were noted as having shown positive impact in locating students and increasing attendance for some of the hardest cases.

Artificial Intelligence and Assessment

The Ministry outlined current work on AI and assessment, including advice to the Minister, assessment design principles, national guidance, and the possibility of a broader policy or framework for AI use in schools. SPAC members raised questions about authenticity, software costs, critical interpretation of AI-generated work, environmental implications, and the need for education-specific guidance that balances innovation with risks such as cognitive offloading.

PPTA Professional Issues and Union Matters

PPTA Professional Issues reported on interest in extremism-related support for teachers and noted the Classification Office presentation resource. The meeting also discussed the conference paper on AI marking, with members encouraged to read and comment on Annual Conference papers.

SPAC members raised issues around subject association conferences, increasing costs, PLD funding eligibility, and the possibility of reframing professional learning to better support access.

Overall Summary

The meeting highlighted strong concern across regions about the cumulative impact of current education reforms on schools, especially senior leaders and specialist staffing. While Ministry representatives acknowledged several implementation challenges and signalled further communication or system improvements, SPAC members emphasised the need for clearer guidance, realistic timelines, resourcing, and meaningful engagement with the sector before further changes are embedded.