

STOP GUESSING, START KNOWING

# Using evidence to keep young people in school

## Cook Islands child benefit expansion

### The issue

Parents told us that support ended while some young people were still at school. Welfare consultants also saw students weighing school against the need to find work.

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# Child Benefit history

Confirmed changes to eligible age and monthly payment

| Year     | Eligible age       | Monthly amount    | Confirmed change                    |
|----------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1979     | Under 6            | Rate set by Order | Child Benefit programme began       |
| 1984     | Under 10           | Rate set by Order | Age limit increased                 |
| 1995     | Not stated         | \$60              | Payment rate confirmed              |
| 2010     | Under 12           | \$60              | Position recorded in welfare review |
| Oct 2018 | Under 14           | \$100             | First stage of age expansion        |
| Jul 2019 | Under 16           | \$100             | Second stage of age expansion       |
| Jul 2026 | Under 17 in school | \$125             | Current expansion                   |
| Jul 2027 | Under 18 in school | \$150             | Planned expansion                   |
| Jul 2028 | Under 18 in school | \$175             | Planned payment increase            |
| Jul 2029 | Under 18 in school | \$200             | Planned payment increase            |

**CRC Article 1 defines a child as a person under 18 unless national law sets an earlier age of majority. Earlier Child Benefit ages were programme eligibility rules.**

# Evidence behind the policy change



## Community evidence

Parents explained why support still mattered for students in the older age group.

## Administrative evidence

Benefit records, welfare consultants and school confirmation helped identify who remained in education.

## Budget evidence

Cost modelling with MFEM supported a phased expansion that government could fund alongside other priorities.

**Qualitative evidence identified the problem. Administrative and budget data shaped the response.**

# The SPICES review strengthened the evidence for reform

ADB-supported assessment of Cook Islands social protection using 2024 data



ADB

## Social Protection in Cook Islands

### Social Protection Indicators of Coverage and Effectiveness, 2024

Technical Assistant Consultant Report  
Project No. TA-10119  
June 2026

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## What the review added

The assessment brought programme, expenditure and coverage data into one national evidence base. It compared the 2024 position with the earlier 2018 assessment and identified remaining gaps.

## How it supported the reforms

Alongside community consultation and fiscal analysis, the findings strengthened the case for higher Child Benefit support and provided a baseline for the wider parental leave scheme, including migrant workers and fathers.

## The next evidence need

A follow-up review should measure reach, adequacy, results and cost after the reforms have operated, and update the SPICES indicators for the next policy decisions.

Request to ADB: technical expertise and funding support for the next Cook Islands SPICES review

# Phased expansion and early monitoring

A staged approach manages cost while giving each expansion time to be checked.

## AGE 16

### First stage

Support extended for students who remained at school.

## AGE 17

### From July 2026

Reapplication confirms that the young person remains enrolled.

## AGE 18

### Next stage

Current monitoring will inform the next expansion.

## Child Benefit payment results, July to September 2026

| Month7    | Total paid   | Children at month end | 14-16-year-olds returning |
|-----------|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| July      | \$496,250.00 | 3,989                 |                           |
| August    | \$504,750.00 | 4,037                 | 48                        |
| September | \$510,812.50 | 4,104                 | 67                        |

From July to September, the month-end caseload increased by 115 children and monthly payments increased by \$14,562.50.

Monthly amount totals both payment runs. Children are counted from the 16th payment run to avoid double-counting.