

Tukutuku Kōrero

EDUCATION GAZETTE

The heart of wellbeing

Supporting wellbeing through aroha at Te Rōhutu Whio

Inclusion starts with connection at Kaitiaki Kindergartens

Merrin School's paws-itively wonderful wellbeing programme

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Share your practice

Every day, educators across Aotearoa are finding new ways to support learners, strengthen their communities and improve outcomes. Some of the best ideas don't come from reports, research papers or professional learning workshops. They come from your classrooms, staffrooms, playgrounds and offices.

Each issue, we're asking educators one question. We'll publish a selection of responses in a future edition and some may inspire Education Gazette stories.

What is one initiative in your school or kura that supports the wellbeing of ākonga or kaimahi?



Scan the QR code and tell us in 50–150 words.

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Editor's note



As we near the finish line of 2026, it's easy to focus on what's left to do.

But spending time with the people featured in this edition is a reminder that some of the most important work happening in our education communities isn't measured by deadlines or milestones. It's found in the relationships that help people feel safe, supported and connected.

Whether it's a school creating a role dedicated to aroha and wellbeing, a pair of four-legged friends helping children navigate big feelings, or efforts to support every learner to feel a genuine sense of belonging, these stories all point to the same idea: we thrive when we know we matter.

That sense of connection doesn't happen by accident. It grows through small, everyday acts of care, understanding and inclusion. It's built by kaiako, leaders, whānau and communities who make the effort to notice, listen and create space for others.

So, as we head into the busy final weeks of the year, I hope these stories offer a moment to pause and reflect on the people who make a difference in your school or kura, or early learning service, and on the connections that sustain us through both challenge and change.

He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.

Kia pai te rā, nā
Sarah Wilson
Ētita | Editor

On the cover
At Parakai Kindergarten, caring for the natural world is not treated as something separate from everyday life, but as part of the relationships children and whānau have with the world around them.

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Parakai Kindergarten community garden.



Inclusion starts with connection at Kaitiaki Kindergartens

Being named a finalist in three categories at the 2026 Diversity Awards gave Kaitiaki Kindergartens a chance to celebrate the inclusive culture it has built, while learning from the organisations around it.

When *Education Gazette* visited Kaitiaki Kindergartens' head office in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, the visit began with a mihi whakatau.

It was fitting for an organisation whose approach to inclusion is closely tied to connection, belonging and a strong sense of place.

Earlier this year, Kaitiaki Kindergartens was named a finalist in three categories at the 2026 Diversity Awards NZ, hosted by Te Uru Tāngata Centre for Workplace Inclusion.

The awards received a record 135 entries across eight categories, with 50 finalists selected.

Kaitiaki Kindergartens was represented in three of those categories. Chief executive Tara Solomon was a finalist for Inclusive Leader of the Year, Parakai Kindergarten was a finalist for the Cultural Competence Award, and Kaitiaki Kindergartens was one of three finalists for the Respectful Culture Award.

The group was the only education organisation among the finalists, alongside large Aotearoa New Zealand organisations including Air New Zealand, Kiwibank and New Zealand Football.

For Tara, however, putting Kaitiaki Kindergartens forward was never simply about receiving an award.

"One of the reasons that we even put ourselves forward is not really to shine light on us, but to shine a light on what education does."



Diversity Awards Night 2026.

Being recognised across three categories was particularly meaningful because, for Tara, it showed that the organisation's values were reflected throughout its mahi, rather than belonging to one particular programme or team.

"It just showed that diversity and inclusion is at every level of our organisation, which is our vision," she says.

The awards also gave Kaitiaki Kindergartens an opportunity to look beyond its own practice and learn from others.

"Another thing that we got from being there was we were learning as well," says Tara.

That learning has continued after the awards, including through the establishment of a neurodiversity group within Kaitiaki Kindergartens for staff.

But the work of creating an inclusive culture had started long before the awards.

Building belonging from the beginning

At Kaitiaki Kindergartens, belonging starts with how people are welcomed into the organisation.

New kaimahi take part in inductions and mihi whakatau, helping them understand the organisation, its values and the communities they are joining.

Professional learning is another important part of the approach. During term breaks, Kaitiaki Kindergartens holds professional development weeks covering topics including wellbeing and maramataka, alongside opportunities for kaiako to share their own ideas and innovations.

Learning also happens by visiting other kindergartens.

On one recent professional development day, staff visited two different kindergartens to see what their colleagues had been working on. At one, an art installation caught their attention, but for Tara, the real value was in understanding the process that had led to the final result.

"One had this amazing art installation, but it wasn't the installation that was amazing, it was the journey that they'd gone to get there," she says.

Seeing the mahi in another setting gave staff a chance to share ideas and recognise good practice in one another.

"And I think that that's really powerful, giving people a voice."

For Tara, building an inclusive culture also means making space for staff to understand the reasons behind the organisation's approach to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

"One thing we really understand is that it's often not that people don't want to embrace Te Tiriti, but sometimes they don't understand 'the why'."

Tara trained as a kaiako 11 years ago and says the emphasis on Te Tiriti in teacher education



has changed over time. At Kaitiaki Kindergartens, professional learning gives staff opportunities to build both their understanding and their confidence in putting that learning into practice.

Te ao Māori and the natural world

Enviroschools is another important part of Kaitiaki Kindergartens' kaupapa, linking sustainability with an understanding of te ao Māori and the natural world. For Tara, that relationship begins with helping tamariki understand Papatūānuku and Ranginui and develop a sense of responsibility for caring for them.

"Papatūānuku and Ranginui are not 'an other', they're family," she says.

That understanding shapes the way Kaitiaki Kindergartens talks about the environment. Caring for the natural world is not treated as something separate from everyday life, but as part of the relationships children and whānau have with the world around them.

That mahi also reaches beyond the kindergarten gates.

In the six months leading up to the awards, Kaitiaki Kindergartens planted more than 1,000 trees through around 41 partnerships with schools and other organisations. Kaiako and communities also take part in local environmental projects, including cleaning up awa and planting trees.





Kaitiaki Kindergarten's tamariki connect with their environment and each other.

Tara describes these activities as "ripples of kaitiakitanga" extending into the wider community.

The group's annual survey of parents and whānau provides another indication of how those ideas are travelling home.

Tara says one of the most encouraging parts of the feedback is hearing about children using te reo Māori at home and teaching it to their whānau, as well as sharing their learning about sustainability.

"The power of it is that they're leading, and not just with te ao Māori, but also with their sustainability practices, and the amount that they're telling their parents what to do."

She says a high percentage of parents report changing some of their own practices because of what their children bring home from kindergarten.

A place to be yourself

Alongside cultural identity and environmental responsibility, Kaitiaki Kindergartens' approach to wellbeing is about creating spaces where tamariki feel safe to be themselves.

Tara recalls one tamaiti bringing his korowai to kindergarten when he was preparing to leave. As he proudly shared it with his class, he became emotional.

For Tara, moments like this demonstrate what can happen when children have a genuine sense of safety and belonging.

"Kaitiaki Kindergartens is a genuine place where they feel safe to be able to express that," she says. "And to get that rich fulfilment."

Parakai Kindergarten, Kaitiaki Kindergartens' finalist in the Cultural Competence Award, demonstrates this approach through its everyday practice.

Te ao Māori is woven through the kindergarten, including in ordinary interactions between tamariki.

"Te reo Maori is spoken daily. When you're there, you can hear tamariki calling each other in 'haere mai ki te kai', it's so embedded."

Karakia, mihi whakatau, poroporoaki and kapa haka are also all part of the kindergarten's life, alongside a range of community-focused mahi.

Parakai has worked on zero-waste projects, supported families with food, established a community vegetable garden and run clothing swaps and giveaways.

These practical actions are another way of communicating belonging, says Tara.

"No matter who you are, you belong here, you're important, there's something here for you."







Kaitiaki Kindergarten's values seen in action.

"I always say, the value of something is if you took it away, who would miss it? Parakai Kindergarten, it would be missed. It's not just the families that are there that benefit from it, it's the external community as well."

The Diversity Awards recognised Parakai Kindergarten's work to embed bicultural capability through Te Waka Hourua, Kaitiaki Kindergartens' cultural competency framework developed by the Pou Ahurea Pandy Hawke, and have built a relationship with their mana whenua Ngāti Whātua ki Kaipara to embed their pūrakau, waiata, haka and karakia into their curriculum

For Kaitiaki Kindergartens, cultural competency is not something that sits separately from wellbeing or inclusion. It is woven through the way people learn, work and relate to each other.

"The power of it is that they're leading, not just with te ao Māori, but also with their sustainability practices."

Looking after the people doing the mahi

The same focus on connection extends to Kaitiaki Kindergartens' kaimahi.

Celebration is deliberately built into the organisation's culture, from an annual conference and Matariki Awards night to a values award recognising a kindergarten that has embodied Kaitiaki Kindergartens' values.

There is even a bell in their head office that staff ring when there is something to celebrate, with those moments shared with teams across the organisation. A regular newsletter also shares stories of celebration alongside information staff need to know.

Tara says those moments matter because wellbeing is not only about responding when people are struggling. It is also about creating opportunities for people to feel valued and connected through their everyday work.

She recalls hearing from a parent who attended an activity to support their child, despite finding it difficult to take a day off work.

"I went to support my child and I couldn't really afford to take a day off work, but I left feeling like my bucket was full, and it was so worthwhile and so valuable."

For Tara, that is the kind of impact Kaitiaki Kindergartens wants its work to have.

Taking the learning forward

The experience of the Diversity Awards also prompted Kaitiaki Kindergartens to ask what else it could be doing.

Since the awards, the organisation has established a neurodiversity group, creating space for kaimahi to share experiences and helping Kaitiaki Kindergartens think about how it can support neurodivergent whānau as well.

Tara says that work recognises that neurodiversity can be relevant to adults as well as children.

"A lot of us are realising as adults that we are probably neurodivergent in some sort of way."

She says creating a dedicated space can support staff while also helping the organisation better understand the experiences of families.

"More and more families, not just their children, but their parents as well are looking for support in this area. Because often you're transitioning parents as well as children."

This is part of what Tara means when she talks about the ripples of kaitiakitanga.

For Tara, the most immediate impact of the awards, though, was seeing kaiako from Parakai experience the occasion and have their work recognised.

"When you're in the weeds, you can feel that 'this is a lot'."

She says seeing the team at the awards gave them a sense that their mahi was being noticed and valued.

"They love what they do and they're passionate about it, but it's just that real affirmation of their mahi."

Kaitiaki Kindergartens did not leave the Diversity Awards with a trophy, but Tara says the recognition was still valuable.

For an organisation focused on building belonging, they are proud of their efforts. The value of the mahi is not only found in formal recognition, but in the people who experience it every day.



Wellbeing kaiako Siobhan van der Werk and principal Lisa Dillon-Roberts, with Finn.

Merrin School's paws-itively wonderful wellbeing programme

When its community said some tamariki were struggling, Merrin School Ngā Whetū Kohara listened. It introduced a wellbeing programme to build resilience and confidence and offer practical strategies. At the heart of the programme are two gentle dogs offering tamariki a peaceful place to pause and restore.

"We want our students to have the self-belief, skills and competencies to believe that anything and everything is possible," says Merrin School tumuaki Lisa Dillon-Roberts.

"More than our name, our vision is 'whētū kohara' – shining stars," she explains.

"All stars are different from one another, but all are unique and treasured. Some stars are brighter than others at different times, some are larger, some are smaller, but all are very important to the combined strength of the night sky.

"And sometimes stars flicker and need extra support to shine."

The last part, she says, is important. After hearing concerns raised by whānau and teachers – and children themselves – about struggles that were impacting tamariki academically, emotionally and socially, the school decided to create a programme to help tamariki build resilience, confidence and practical strategies they would be able to use when "something felt too hard or tricky".

"Supporting our children means nurturing not just their academic progress, but their individual strengths, confidence and emotional wellbeing," explains Lisa. "So we created a wellbeing programme that gives children a peaceful place to pause and restore."

Honed over the last 18 months, the resulting programme comprises 30-minute mindfulness sessions supported by 'wellbeing' dogs.

Gentle companions

Finn and George are the beloved pets of wellbeing kaiako Siobhan van der Werk.

"Finn is a five-year-old golden retriever crossed with a labrador," describes Siobhan. "He was originally training to be a guide dog, but because public transport made him a bit too anxious, he didn't finish the programme."

Instead, he has found his true calling as a gentle companion for the children at Merrin School.

"George," she continues, "is a Bernese mountain dog, crossed with a golden retriever/poodle cross. He is one year old and still learning the ropes from Finn. The children get to help with his training as they work with him each week."

Dogs are amazing at supporting wellbeing, says Siobhan.

"Within a pack, dogs naturally co-regulate as an innate behaviour – they work together to keep their families safe and grounded.

"Finn especially has a naturally calm manner, so if a child is anxious or upset, Finn stays relaxed and quiet, sharing his steady energy with them. We often see children who are feeling overwhelmed begin to mirror Finn's calmness, which helps them settle quite quickly.

"The children love to talk to the dogs while they brush or cuddle them – dogs are great non-judgemental listeners who never interrupt," she says with a smile. "Meanwhile, little George watches Finn closely, learning from each quiet interaction."



George and Finn are the beloved pets of wellbeing kaiako Siobhan van der Werk.

"The children love to talk to the dogs while they brush or cuddle them – dogs are great non-judgemental listeners who never interrupt".


Thirty minute mindfulness sessions.

"We have seen wonderful shifts in our students," says Lisa, highlighting the changes the school has seen since introducing the programme.

"Children who were very anxious to begin with are now smiling, laughing and eager to share in class. They're signing up for school activities that they wouldn't have felt confident to try before."

Walking taller and smiling wider

Each 30-minute session takes place in a quiet room with soft lavender oils, gentle music, a snack and a few simple activity choices for the children.

"When students arrive, they check in using colours to show how they are feeling: red if they feel upset or frustrated, green if they feel calm," says Lisa.

"They then spend four or five minutes practising 'pause, breathe, smile' mindfulness. Children can pat George and Finn, draw or try a quiet activity while they talk about their week."

"It's my job to listen closely and follow their lead, letting them share as much or as little as they want," adds Siobhan.

"Sometimes if a child is facing a tricky challenge, together we might create a small, practical plan to help them tackle it, so the child knows they can take supportive action whenever it is needed."

Before tamariki head back to class, Siobhan will take a moment to reflect with them, thank them for being brave, and "remind them how much we value who they are".

For both Lisa and Siobhan, just one of the highlights is seeing children who were initially frightened of animals, or who had never petted a dog before, grow close to them. Often, Lisa says, these become the children most eager to help with training George.

"We see children who have been quiet for weeks suddenly open up and share everything all at once. After some gentle processing, they literally walk taller and smile wider," she says.

"Children who used to feel confused by big emotions, are now able to name what they are feeling and know some strategies to use when those feelings arise," adds Siobhan.

Measuring success

Lisa tells the story of refugee siblings, starting school and a life in New Zealand with severe trauma.

"They arrived from a war-torn country, spoke no English, and exhibited behaviours ranging from extreme dysregulation to complete withdrawal.

"The sessions gave them a sanctuary. They slowly opened up, began sharing and started to trust and smile. They still experience hypervigilance to loud noises and have heightened anxiety, but today they are happy, thriving children who love coming to school and actively laugh and play alongside their peers."

She explains how they measure the programme's success.

"Weekly, we review session notes, the children's collaborative action plans, their pastoral care notes and feedback from classroom teachers. We work closely with their classroom teachers, our school learning support coordinator and senior management.

"The patterns that emerge from all of these sources help guide and inform the best next steps for each child.

"At the end of eight to 10 sessions, Siobhan and the LSC reflect on whether the child is showing improvements and in which specific ways."

Pausing to reflect, Lisa says they've learned "a great deal" since launching the programme.

"Keeping sessions to 30 minutes works well," she explains. "It's long enough to connect but keeps children fresh and doesn't take them away from class for too long. Meeting once a week also feels right; it gives children enough time between sessions to try out the strategies they've learned but also keeps the experience exciting and something they can look forward to.

"We allow the sessions to be student-led and at the child's own pace – it's so essential for real sharing to happen. We also quickly discovered that a small snack goes a long way in helping children settle. It's hard to stay anxious or closed off when enjoying something nice to eat!"

Looking ahead to the future, Lisa says they'd love to offer wellbeing sessions to teachers, too.

"It'd be great to give them dedicated time to enjoy quiet reflection, practice mindfulness, and reflect on their week with a supportive colleague."

Ngā kōrero a ngā tauira | What students say

"I like working with Finn. He lies on my lap and goes to sleep. He makes me feel calm." Oliver, Year 4

"Finn is really nice. He puts his chin on my lap and it feels heavy." Amélie, Year 4

"Finn walks with me and then I can talk to him. I like cuddling him and he makes me happy." Coen, Year 1

"I like Finn and George. They give me company and I like taking them for walks. Sometimes Finn is lazy and wants to sleep, so George keeps me company." Ana, Year 2



Kaitiaki o Aroha Lexi Manera.

Supporting wellbeing through aroha at Te Rōhutu Whio

A year after establishing the unique Kaitiaki o Aroha role, Te Rōhutu Whio is seeing the difference that dedicated relationship-building, practical support and a focus on belonging can make for tamariki, whānau and staff.

When Te Rōhutu Whio opened the permanent Kaitiaki o Aroha position last year, it was looking for someone to "sprinkle aroha, care and connection throughout the kura".

A year on, principal Katarina Morgan says the role has become an integral part of the growing Rolleston kura, helping strengthen connections and wellbeing across a school community of more than 40 kaimahi, and 370 Year 1–8 students and their whānau.

"We recognise that some tamariki and whānau need more than traditional school-based support," says Katarina.

"Barriers to learning and attendance are not always academic. They can be connected to trauma, anxiety, family circumstances, being unable to navigate the New Zealand social system, a lack of belonging, difficult past experiences with education, or simply needing someone trusted to walk alongside them."

The school created the role to provide a dedicated person whose purpose is to notice people, build relationships and offer practical support before challenges become significant barriers.

Now held by registered social worker Lexi Manera, the position sits alongside tamariki, whānau and staff, acting as both a connector and advocate within the school community.

The role can include accompanying whānau to appointments, helping families navigate support services, running friendship groups, supporting attendance, and checking in with staff wellbeing.

Bringing school values to life

Katarina says the Kaitiaki o Aroha role reflects the values that underpin Te Rōhutu Whio.

The school's commitment to manaakitanga is demonstrated through practical care, whether that means delivering food and clothing parcels, supporting families to access services, or accompanying whānau to appointments.

Whanaungatanga is strengthened through trusted relationships, while kotahitanga is reflected in the way the role works alongside agencies and wider support networks around a child or family.

The role also supports rangatiratanga by helping people regain confidence and agency, and kaitiakitanga through a focus on protecting and nurturing the wellbeing of the school community.

"The Kaitiaki o Aroha helps ensure our values are not simply words displayed around the school," says Katarina.

"They are felt in the way staff and whānau are welcomed, supported and cared for."

Walking alongside whānau

For Lexi, the role is less about solving problems and more about building relationships.

"I would describe my role as being someone who sprinkles aroha and care throughout the school," she says.

"I am here to notice people, listen and help tamariki, whānau and staff feel that they belong."



No two weeks are the same. A day might begin by greeting tamariki and whānau at the school gate before checking in with students who are finding school attendance difficult.

Other days involve helping families access support services, attending meetings, supporting friendship groups, checking in with staff, or spending time with a child who needs a trusted adult.

"It is important that tamariki, whānau and staff know where to find me and feel comfortable approaching me," says Lexi.

"I begin by listening and taking time to understand whānau. I try not to make assumptions or approach the relationship with a predetermined solution.

"My role is not to tell people what they have done wrong. It is to work alongside them and ask what might make things easier."

Strengthening belonging

Belonging is a key focus of the role, and in turn, the school hopes this will lift attendance. Katarina says improving attendance starts with understanding why a child is absent in the first place.

"We need to understand what sits underneath a child's absence," she says.

That might include anxiety, health concerns, transport difficulties, difficult experiences, family stress or a child who no longer feels connected to school.

"The Kaitiaki o Aroha begins by building trust and listening," says Katarina.

"When whānau know there is someone at school who cares about them, will welcome their child without judgement and help find practical solutions, it becomes easier to reconnect."



For Lexi, the role is less about solving problems and more about building relationships.

Lexi recalls supporting a child who was struggling with friendships, unstructured break times and a challenging situation at home.

The support began with regular check-ins and conversations with the whānau. Lexi helped establish a friendship group, identified trusted adults and safe spaces within the school, and worked with the family to develop a consistent morning routine.

She also connected the family with practical supports, including budgeting assistance and clothing.

"Over time, the child became more confident with the morning routine, developed stronger connections and began looking forward to coming to school again," she says.

For Katarina, the outcome reflects a series of small, consistent acts of care.



Caring for those who care for others

The role also extends beyond tamariki and whānau to include staff hauora.

"Schools are caring environments, but they can also be emotionally demanding places to work," says Katarina

"We cannot expect staff to continually pour care into others without also ensuring that they feel cared for themselves."

In many cases, Katarina says staff opt to connect with the Kaitiaki o Aroha as their first port of call.

Whether that involves a conversation, practical support, encouragement or simply sharing a cup of tea, Katarina says these gestures can have a significant impact.

"It has contributed to a culture where care, kindness and checking in with one another are seen as important parts of our work, rather than optional extras."

Relationships first

Reflecting on the first year of the role, Katarina says one of the biggest lessons has been the importance of taking time to build trust.

"Relationships cannot be rushed," she says.

"We have also learned that the most valuable support is not always a large programme or formal intervention. Sometimes it is greeting a child at the gate, contacting a whānau to see how they are, helping someone access support, or sitting beside a staff member who is having a hard day."

For schools considering a similar approach, Katarina believes it is important to protect the relational nature of the role.

"It should not become overloaded with administration or become another layer of compliance ... Allow the role to be flexible, because people's needs do not always fit neatly into a timetable or job description."

Katarina says it is also important that the person is well connected with school leadership, teachers and support services, while still being seen as approachable by whānau.

Lexi agrees, saying it is important to choose someone who genuinely loves people and can build relationships without judgement.

"Most importantly, keep aroha at the centre. The role works because people feel that the care is genuine."

The ripple starts with kaiako: The joy of moving and learning together

Meg Fisher, curriculum and capability consultant at Sport NZ, and Taylah-Jade McIntyre of Toi Tangata discuss how professional learning opportunities through Healthy Active Learning and Mātaiao are strengthening kaiako wellbeing, confidence and practice. By reconnecting kaiako with the joy of learning and movement, these initiatives create positive ripple effects for ākonga, schools and kura.



Kaiako exploring te taiao at Mātaiao wananga.

Many people can still name kaiako who had a lasting, positive impact on their lives – long after their journey through education.

What made them special? Perhaps they really knew you, cared about something you cared about, made you laugh or took the time to learn alongside you. Often, what stays is how they made you feel.

Just like ākonga, kaiako have needs and aspirations for their own ongoing learning, helping them connect to their joy and enthusiasm for teaching. That's where Mātaiao and Healthy Active Learning responds.

Each initiative supports kaiako to learn in ways that reflect who they are as people, their strengths, interests and aspirations, as well as the contexts they work in.

Mātaiao works mainly with kura kaupapa, using mātauranga Māori and connection with whenua and te taiao to guide learning. Healthy Active Learning provides locally led learning that supports kaiako to work in the context of their schools, kura and communities.

"What I've seen during my time as both a kaiako and someone who has delivered professional learning and development (PLD) to schools and kura is that quality PLD gives kaiako fresh ideas, and the confidence to try them," says Meg Fisher.

"It can be the 'aha moment' that leads to quality ākonga experiences and the courage to weave movement through other areas of learning."

Over time, those everyday movement moments can create a ripple effect, making movement part of the culture of a school or kura.

"When ākonga know that movement is a classroom norm, not a one-off or a reward at the end of the day, it becomes embedded in the rhythm of learning," says Meg.

"It creates opportunities for ākonga to connect with their kaiako and each other and it becomes a natural part of the learning journey."

Sport New Zealand's most recent *Voice of Kaiako* survey shows 89.5 percent of school leaders see ākonga wellbeing and hauora as a core component of all our teaching and learning, and 87 percent see physical activity as a key part of ākonga wellbeing.

"School leaders and kaiako know how important it is for ākonga to be active every day and understand the contribution movement makes to their hauora, engagement and achievement. When kaiako are able to move and learn alongside their ākonga, they get to enjoy the benefits too," says Meg.

Quality PLD broadens kaiako thinking about how ākonga can learn in, through and about movement. It can inspire new ways to build physical activity into learning across the school day.

"It could be in dedicated health and physical education (HPE) sessions, integrating movement into different learning areas, through waiata and kapa haka, through playing in or exploring their local taiao. Every opportunity to move benefits the wellbeing of both kaiako and ākonga," says Meg.

"When kaiako are given space to learn, connect and grow in confidence, they can create rich learning experiences that support ākonga to do the same."



Healthy Active Learning kaiako during PLD in Pāpāmoa.

Pathways to wellbeing, confidence and practice

Sport Bay of Plenty Healthy Active Learning team members, Sandy Sheterline and Natalie Field, are supporting a group of Tauranga kaiako to include as much movement as possible across their numeracy programmes.

While insights are still being gathered, kaiako have reported stronger ākonga hauora scores and learner engagement, more positive connection from moving alongside ākonga, and growing confidence to integrate movement in ways that benefit everyone.

"Quality PLD provides double benefits; kaiako wellbeing is boosted through having the opportunity to connect, learn and move with their peers," says Sandy.

"When that enjoyment and learning is translated into classroom practice, ākonga and kaiako wellbeing continues to grow as they move and learn alongside each other.

"The tamariki just think this is what maths looks like, and now I'm seeing other kaiako start to move more too."

Filling the kete of kaiako

Tangi Haere Hou-pere is a kaiako at Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hoani Waititi Marae in Tāmaki Makaurau. Starting in 2024, he attended a series of Mātaiao wānanga to explore different taiao environments and consider how that learning could be applied in his kura and context.

Reflecting on his first wānanga, Tangi Haere shared, "He rawe hoki ngā wheako hou ki au i te mea he tapiritanga tera ki tō kete hei koha atu ki ngā tamariki i roto i te akomanga.

"The new experiences were wonderful because they added to my kete, something I could pass on to the children in the classroom."

His reflection captures the value of Mātaiao as a kaupapa that supports kaiako wellbeing through learning, connection and inspiration.

Kaiako have space to ask questions, share whakaaro and explore mātauranga Māori together, gathering new perspectives to carry into their teaching.

For Tangi Haere, one of the most rewarding aspects of Mātaiao is seeing learning come alive for tamariki.

After taking his class into the māra, he used harakeke as a starting point for exploring its characteristics, traditional uses and associated pūrākau. A simple observation from an ākonga opened the door to deeper learning about the knowledge held within the taiao.

He describes seeing the "WOW" in the eyes of his tamariki as a reminder of why he became a kaiako.

These moments demonstrate how renewed inspiration can influence teaching practice. Kaiako who return from wānanga with fresh ideas and a deeper connection to their surroundings can create engaging experiences that connect tamariki with their whakapapa, whenua and mātauranga tuku iho.

Mātaiao also encourages kaiako to recognise the meaningful learning available within their own kura and communities. As Tangi Haere reflects, "Whakaūngia te kaupapa ki te aheinga o tō kura.

"Embed the kaupapa within the capacity and context of your kura."



Tangi Haere Hou-pere at Mātaiao wananga.

Working together

Kaiako do not need access to every kind of environment to make Mātaiao meaningful. A māra, a local green space or the taiao surrounding a kura can all provide opportunities to explore mātauranga Māori.
Tangi Haere emphasises that this learning should not rest with one kaiako alone. He encourages kaiako within a kura to attend the Mātaiao wānanga, experience the kaupapa and fill their kete together.

"Ko aku kupu mō tēnei kaupapa, hei kai mā a koutou wā ako, hei kai mā a koutou whakaaro, hei kai mā o koutou taringa. Kia kaha rā tātou te hunga kaiako ki te toro atu ki tēnei kaupapa, te whakakī ai i tō mātou kete o te mātauranga, rau atu ki roto, a, whāngai ki ngā tamariki.

"Mātaiao and Healthy Active Learning create ongoing learning pathways for kaiako. What connects them is not a shared model, but a shared recognition that when kaiako are given space to learn, connect and grow in confidence, they can create rich learning experiences that support ākonga to do the same. That is how one kaiako and a single learning experience can begin a wider ripple across a whole school or kura."





Top and bottom: Tangi Haere Hou-pere enjoying his experience with Mātaiao participants.

Tips for kaiako exploring professional learning and development opportunities:

- Check out what support is available for your school or kura, including Mātaiao and Healthy Active Learning at Physical activity in schools and kura | Sport New Zealand - Ihi Aotearoa.
- Read case studies about Mātaiao by Toi Tangata, including the full profile on Tangi Haere.
- Find details of upcoming Mātaiao wānanga delivered by Toi Tangata.
- Explore what PLD opportunities subject associations are offering in your area – Physical Education New Zealand and Education Outdoors New Zealand.
- Explore the curriculum documents with your teams to identify areas for team learning.
- Continue to look out for PLD updates from the Ministry of Education.



In a Sport Waikato's youth survey, 18 Afghan, nine Somali and seven Colombian young people talked about their culture, movement and physical activity.

How migrant-background rangatahi experience physical activity

A new study from Sport Waikato explores how migrant-background young people experience movement, physical activity, identity and belonging, and how family, faith, culture, language, gender and everyday circumstances shape their participation.

"What are we missing when we don't hear their voices?"

That's the question Hamilton Boys' High School asked when it noticed that young people from migrant backgrounds were under-represented in Sport Waikato's biennial youth survey.

This year's survey – which is used to understand how young people experience movement, physical activity and the environments around them – had about six percent of Hamilton Boys' responses come from rangatahi with migrant backgrounds. However, the total percentage of students with migrant backgrounds at the school actually sits closer to 25 percent.

Intrigued by the gap between who responded and who didn't, Sport Waikato decided to research this. Working with Hamilton Boys' High School, Hillcrest High School and the Refugee Orientation Centre, strategic insights and data manager Lot Hawkins and her team asked 18 Afghan, nine Somali and seven Colombian young people about their culture, movement and physical activity.

"What they told us went well beyond sport," says Lot. "They spoke about family, faith, culture, language, food, friendship, safety, gender, home and belonging."

Surprising findings

"It's really quiet here. In Colombia, they blast music, but here it's really quiet. Too quiet," says a Colombian student.

Across the three ethnic groups, rangatahi all described growing up through family, faith, language, food, hospitality and social practices.

Colombian ākonga talked about music, dance, clothing and shared lunches; Somali ākonga described Islamic greetings and removing shoes at the door, dance, prayer and modesty; Afghan ākonga spoke about Persian rugs, sitting on the floor for meals, family gatherings, large households, faith and respect for parents and elders.

Their accounts all shared a common theme: that cultural identity is carried into everyday life through ordinary practices and relationships.

For many Afghan and Somali, Islam is part of everyday life. While not a barrier to participating in physical activity, the report found that it impacted whether participating felt appropriate – faith choices come through in clothing, mixed-gender participation, food, privacy, prayer and the cultural and religious comfort of an environment.

Food is a small aspect with bigger implications – for example, Muslim students describe how they need to check whether half-time lollies contain gelatin.

Similarly, students need to consider whether they can wear warmer or hijab-compatible clothing, or whether there are private changing areas, prayer-aware facilities, language support and halal food.

"[It's about] getting people to realise there's other things going on outside of what's happening on the field to impact what's going on," says a Somali student, describing the complexity of navigating school workload, tiredness, transport, language, prayer, family responsibilities, parental permission, clothing, food, friendship and concern about being judged or misunderstood – all before reaching a field, court or gym.



Refugee Orientation Centre strategic insights and data manager Lot Hawkins.

The role of family

One of the key factors that emerged in the research was the influence of family on participating.

"In New Zealand, kids have the final say. Yet in our culture our parents have the final say," explains an Afghan student, highlighting the contrast between individualised decision-making in New Zealand and family-led decision-making within migrant communities.

The research shows parents influence whether students participate in physical activity through concerns about safety, injury, gender expectations, time, study priorities, transport and cultural values – dynamics that particularly impact female students.

Gender also came through in discussion about the opportunities for girls and women in Aotearoa.

"Women can work, study ... basically, they can do everything they want," says an Afghan student.

Implications for schools, clubs and activity providers

One of the most significant themes that came through in the findings, Lot says, is that play is undervalued in New Zealand culture.

For example, one Afghan boy commented, "in Afghanistan, people spend time playing with each other. In New Zealand people spend time on their phone."

"These kids are crying out for play," explains Lot. "They remember play as an everyday activity done with friends and family. They miss the spontaneity; the freedom to just be. We can learn from this and find ways to bring it back to society."

The report lists practical things for schools, clubs, activity providers and other organisations to think about when creating opportunities for migrant-background young people.

- Create recurring opportunities that allow social connection, informal play and structured activity to coexist.
- Provide low-barrier opportunities for free play, including open courts, schoolyard access, cultural games and informal tournaments.



Hamilton Boys' High School Brotherhood match commemorating World Refugee Day.

- Build family trust through clear information about supervision, safety, gender mix, clothing, transport, cost, timing and the value of participation.
- Use trusted community connections and, where possible, home-language communication rather than relying only on translated written material.
- Design first experiences so young people know where to go, who will greet them, what will happen, what they can wear, whether they may bring a friend or sibling and what participation will cost.
- Make practical cultural considerations operational, including modest clothing, gender and privacy needs, prayer space, food requirements, transport, cost, photography, racism response, language and family communication.
- Support coaches, teachers, volunteers and facility staff to respond practically to cultural and participation issues rather than relying on general cultural awareness alone.
- Measure more than attendance by considering repeat participation, felt belonging, parent trust, whether cultural needs were met, whether informal play increased and whether providers changed their practice in response to community input.

Summing up, Lot says the aim of the study is to "build bridges between people and their cultures".

She encourages kaiako to be curious when it comes to migrant students and physical activity.

"Don't be afraid to ask questions and get to know what a student's culture means to them. Asking is a way of building bridges; it is about learning – knowing more and better."

Read the full report on the Sport Waikato website. sportwaikato.org.nz



Leading with culture and learning for life

Tarei Patuwairua's pathway into teaching was anything but conventional. From working in prisons to teaching mathematics in bilingual and immersion schools, his journey has been guided by a belief in the power of identity, relationships and education. Now, as he embarks on a PhD, he is continuing his own learning journey with the same curiosity he seeks to inspire in his students.



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For Tarei Patuwairua (Waka of Tainui, Te Arawa and Aotea), teaching is about the people – who they are and where they come from. Drawing on his experience before education, he says it is what's at the very heart of people that matters most.

Teaching across three bilingual and total immersion schools in Te Tai Tokerau – Te Kura o Te Kao, Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Rangi Āniwaniwa and Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Pukemiro – Tarei has grown his practice around whakapapa and culture, and a belief in the strengths of every young person.

But his journey was not a straight path to the teaching roles he is in now. Instead, he started with an entirely different area of studies and an entirely different career.

"I started off studying management. I thought at the time it could be all about management, managing iwi and other Māori organisations," says Tarei.

Following this, he spent some time working with Māori in prisons around Whanganui, running courses and interventions, using a Māori practice model. It was here that Tarei developed his understanding of the incredible ways culture can expand both his students' knowledge and motivation to learn.

"I think for me it's more about celebrating being Māori – it's cool. It's a cool thing to be, and I want to show them that."

> *"Once that relationship has developed, their attitude towards learning often changes as well. They are prepared to take risks, ask questions and make mistakes because there is trust."*



Relationships impact the outcome

A maths teacher of almost 20 years, Tarei started out in a support role in Whangārei. There, he saw first-hand how a trusting relationship built on the pillars of a shared culture could elevate his students' education to another level.

"The relationships you build have a massive impact on the outcome. Forming relationships with those kids, and even with their parents, can be the point of difference as a teacher."

Tarei always begins by trying to relate to Māori students on a personable level in his teaching. Some students told him that he was the first teacher to greet them by name if he saw them around the school. It's the little things that matter when it comes to success, he shares.

After building a trusting relationship, Tarei found that students started to view learning as something they could enjoy – and the classroom as somewhere they could thrive.

"Every kid just wants to be acknowledged and spoken to in a way where they are respected."

The teacher becomes the student

After more than a decade, Tarei recently returned to the classroom as a student.

"I've been wanting to do a doctorate for years; I've found I'm able to grow beyond just maths, and really by some pure luck and a sabbatical I'm able to do it."

Last year, with the support of a study award granted by the Ministry of Education, he completed a Master of Hōaka Pounamu degree at the University of Canterbury, which centred on Māori bilingual and immersion teaching and learning. Next, he will begin a PhD with further aspirations to increase his ability to teach culturally.

"My journey through my Master's was about much more than gaining another qualification," he explains. "It challenged me to think more deeply about who I am as a Māori educator and why I teach the way I do."

Tarei's PhD research will explore the ways artificial intelligence can integrate Māori values, tikanga and mana motuhake (identity). He wants to understand how to evolve and adapt to changes in technology, while holding on to authority over Māori language, knowledge and identity.

"Central to my new work is the question of how we uphold rangatiratanga, protect mātauranga Māori, but make sure our tamariki and mokopuna benefit from emerging technologies without compromising who they are," says Tarei.


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So far, he has already found that integrating te ao Māori into learning is not as simple as using the language – especially in maths. Rather, he prefers to connect the thinking behind mathematics to the experiences and culture that is meaningful to his Māori students.

"That connection does not mean putting a Māori word into a mathematics problem and calling it culturally responsive. It means considering the context through which mathematics is taught.

"Our tūpuna possessed sophisticated knowledge long before our current education system existed. When students can see themselves and their world within the learning, mathematics becomes something they can own rather than something being imposed upon them."

While students often vary in their level of interest towards mathematics, Tarei has found his 'win their hearts and you win their minds' motto helps him to establish a relationship with students that comes before learning. Getting to know who they are, where they come from, and what's important to them are small steps towards something much bigger.

"A young person needs to know that you genuinely care about them before they are likely to fully engage with what you are trying to teach them.

"Once that relationship has developed, their attitude towards learning often changes as well. They are prepared to take risks, ask questions and make mistakes because there is trust."

Start with whanaungatanga

Tarei's own schooling as a young person had a great impact on the way he approaches his own teaching. Being one of only a few Māori students at his school, he had to work hard to achieve his goals, and he also had to teach himself the importance of identity in education.

His family had a huge influence on Tarei as an educator – and the leader he now tries to be for his students.

"The best part of my journey is my family. My grandmother and great grandmother were humble servants and loving people. Their humility and courage


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are attributes that I try my hardest to emulate. My wife is an amazing person who is always supportive and is just there all the time."

Recently, he has found that some of his favourite teachers are his own students, and he encourages other teachers to start from a place of whanaungatanga.

"Don't begin by asking what is wrong with a student or why they are not achieving. Start by finding out who they are. Learn their name properly. Learn where they come from. Know their whānau."

Teachers don't need to know everything about te ao Māori before they begin, says Tarei. Instead, he advises them to make mistakes and accept that corrections are a valuable part of the process.

"'Win their hearts and you win their minds' for me, sums up teaching. If a student knows that you respect who they are, believe in their potential and will stand beside them when things become difficult, you have created the foundation upon which learning can happen."

"You win their hearts and you win their minds. Every kid just wants to be acknowledged and spoken to in a way where they are respected."

Food is fuel:

How Healthy School Lunches keep ākonga going

Ever wondered what it's like running Aotearoa New Zealand's biggest food programme? *Education Gazette* takes a peek behind the scenes at the challenges and opportunities in feeding learners across the motu.



"The Healthy School Lunches programme is so much more than what you think," says Ministry of Education's general manager strategic programmes, Andrew Gibson.

"While the overall focus is very clearly to feed hungry school children, we're finding that there are so many more positives emerging.

"Lots of schools are telling us they're seeing less 'hangry' behaviour and more positive engagement of students in the classroom. They're also seeing more social literacy develop – a new positive culture coming through when students sit together, have a communal kai karakia, and chat while eating with their school whānau.

"The benefits are more than food."



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Some students are trying new foods they wouldn't have the opportunity to try at home, he continues, listing additional benefits. They are developing a new understanding of how food is prepared, as well as learning about how nutritious food keeps them fuelled and going during the day.

Launched in 2021, Healthy School Lunches has always had a focus on nutrition, says Andrew.

"We're always looking for ways to make sure meals meet nutritional standards but are appealing to our young people; hot meals stay hot, and don't decline in quality before serving.

"The suppliers we work with have chefs, nutritionists and even dietitians on their team. They work really hard to make sure every meal is fit to be put in front of students."

It's no mean feat, with the programme catering such a large number of meals across over 1,020 schools and student preferences every single day – and making sure they're delivered in time for lunch.

Different models and new challenges

What many people don't know about Healthy School Lunches, says Andrew, is that there isn't just one way lunches are prepared and delivered.

Every school week, the programme delivers more than one million meals to over 240,000 students across the country through three different delivery models for schools.

"There's an 'external' model which delivers lunches each day to schools around the country from commercial production kitchens of varying sizes," he explains. "Some suppliers provide thousands of meals each day and some only deliver to a few schools.

The 'internal' model makes lunches in school kitchens of varying sizes, kitchens at the school. Some internal model schools also make lunches for neighbouring schools and deliver them each day.

"Then we also have local partners providing lunches to 'iwi hapū' model schools and kura."

In Budget 2024, a new challenge was thrown at the programme: it had to look at a new way to deliver lunches and find efficiencies across the programme.

"We had an expert advisory group get to work straight away. They put the existing model under the microscope, examining what might be changed," says Andrew.


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"Lots of schools are telling us they're seeing less 'hangry' behaviour and more positive engagement of students in the classroom."

"They talked to schools, suppliers, stakeholders and members of the food industry about what works well and what doesn't. They researched other school lunch models used around the world."

With this new model needing to be in place by term 1 2025, the Ministry of Education went to market to find suitable meal suppliers while the advisory group was still finalising details of the model.

There was a robust, transparent procurement process, and many wholesalers and suppliers submitted proposals in response," explains Andrew. "Across New Zealand, we found lots of suppliers who stepped up and were willing to meet the challenge.

"There was only three months between the final contract being signed and when the first meal was due to be delivered for planning and working out finer details – including summer holidays and Christmas!"

Never losing sight of the objective

Like any new national-level programme on the scale of the Healthy School Lunches, the first term encountered challenges needing to be navigated in real time.

The per-meal cost was initially scrutinised when it launched, and there were lots of logistical hurdles for suppliers, explains Andrew, reeling off a list.

"They had to consider travel routes, different arrival times at every school, meal orders, speciality student needs. There were changing delivery numbers due to varying school start dates, teacher-only days, illnesses, roll changes, and other school events each term that made delivery challenging."

One of the biggest hurdles for suppliers and schools, however, is the need to balance the familiar with new meals – roughly one in three students only eat meals they recognise and feel familiar with, while some students always want new and different meals.

On top of that, most students want hot meals, especially in colder months, but others prefer cold meals or just snacks.

How does the Ministry know?

"We're always collecting data to give us the information we need to run a food programme at this size and make important decisions," says Andrew. "There is always more to do and we're always working to improve the programme.

"We've learned so many valuable lessons along the way," he adds, "but we never lose sight of the objective of making sure that students in participating schools who need a lunch get one."

Working to reduce surplus and waste

As well as information on what is and isn't wanted on a menu, the Ministry of Education has been working to identify surplus – the number of untouched meals leftover after lunch.

"Measuring this before 2025 was manual and limited and we didn't really understand the drivers," explains Andrew. "We've since learned that surplus is complex. There are many factors that contribute to it."

From feedback, the Ministry of Education now knows that surplus comes from meal order numbers needing to be constantly updated to accurately reflect how many students are attending school. It comes from children getting bored with the same menu items (both how the food looks and tastes), and how the lunches are talked about in school and outside of it.

"Student voice is such an important part of getting the meals right," says Andrew. "All of the suppliers are tuned in to hear what the children like and don't like about school lunches.

"Meals are tested with students before being added to menus and meal providers ask what they could be doing differently to make kai that the students want to eat."

Since early 2025, there have been systems in place to give the Ministry better data. They clearly outline expectations for surplus measurement in supplier contracts and school agreements.

"This helps us to reduce leftover lunch numbers," says Andrew. "In turn, we can put money and resources back into the programme to keep improving it and invite more eligible schools to join."

A similarly tricky thing to keep track of, end-of-lunch waste (partially eaten meals and all packaging) relies on all students to put their waste in the correct bins.

"We ask meal providers to use reusable, recyclable, or compostable packaging, and make sustainable choices by composting food waste, or feeding scraps to animals," explains Andrew.

Always innovating

Started by the idea that if students at school had full stomachs, they could learn and thrive, Healthy School Lunches is always looking ahead to the future.

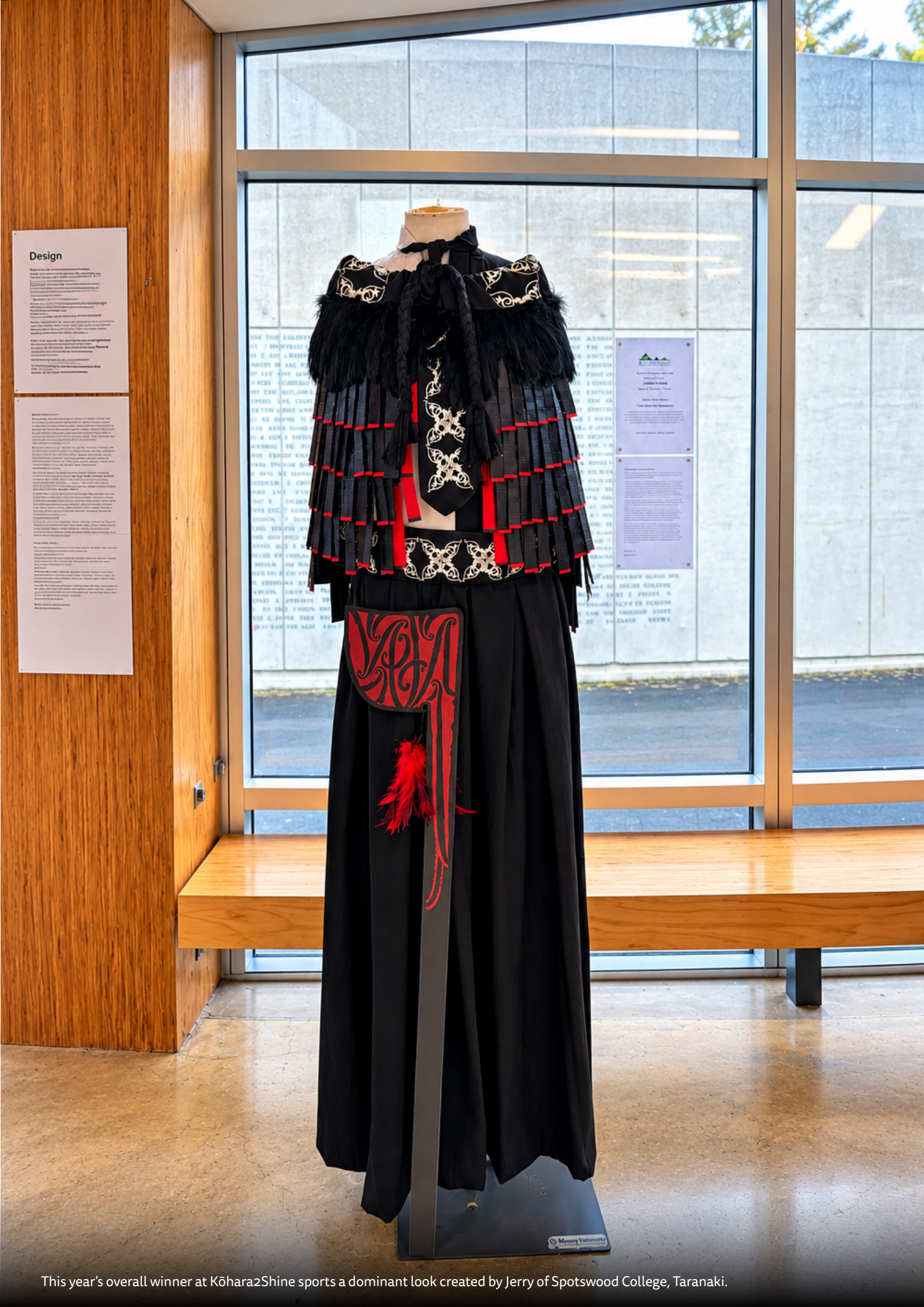
"The programme continues to evolve, and we know that there is lots of work to do to keep our students fed with nutritious food, thriving and succeeding," says Andrew.

The Ministry of Education is working to build a model to find all students in need, no matter what school they attend. It is also piloting different ways to run the programme, so that it can reach even more children living in need.

The programme is always evolving and improving "to achieve our objective of reducing the impact of food insecurity in school", says Andrew.

"Our map for this programme has, and always will have, students at the centre."

"We ask meal providers to use reusable, recyclable, or compostable packaging."



This year's overall winner at Kōhara2Shine sports a dominant look created by Jerry of Spotswood College, Taranaki.

Fashioning a future generation of technology students

From cardboard sculptures and digital fabrication to handmade tivaevae, Kōhara2Shine is giving technology students a public stage for their creativity while opening doors to future study and careers. Founded by Wellington East Girls' College teacher Nan Walden, the exhibition is helping redefine what technology education looks like for a new generation.

In the audience at this year's World of WearableArt (WOW) show in Wellington, a group of bright-eyed students soak up the creativity and colour on display.

For these young visitors, some from as far away as the Cook Islands, the evening is more than entertainment. It's a glimpse into a possible future.

Their visit to WOW is part of Kōhara2Shine, an exhibition founded by Wellington technology teacher Nan Walden to celebrate student design and creativity.

Nan, a recipient of the Prime Minister's Science Teacher Award in 2025, established Kōhara2Shine four years ago to give her design ākonga at Wellington East Girls' College a public platform for their work.

What began as a small exhibition involving seven Wellington schools has steadily evolved into a significant showcase hosted at Massey University's College of Creative Arts.

At the time she began, Nan says there were few opportunities to celebrate fashion, textile and product design at secondary school level.

"There are competitions for our students, and you can do fashion shows and things, but I find it difficult. Some of the competitions you must send everything away and it's very intensive to do all that.

"I thought, if you just bring your work, we'll put it in Massey, put a sign up and that's it. And it's just grown so much; I can't believe how much people have taken to it."

A possible future

Sponsored by TENZ (Technology Education NZ), this year's Kōhara2Shine featured schools from Taranaki, Hamilton and Wellington, and – for the first time – an overseas contingent from Tereora College in Rarotonga.

A big incentive for participating schools is the chance for students to explore tertiary pathways, with a special tour of Massey's design school.

"It's kind of bridging the gap between secondary and tertiary education," says Nan.

There's also the special thrill in seeing your own work on display. Opening night at Massey's Te Ara Hihiko is special, with cultural performances and a celebration of what ākonga are capable of.

It's clear from the works on show that technology is not what it used to be. Alongside fashion and textiles are digital technologies, fabrication projects, laser-cutting, 3D printing, digital art and digital visual communication projects.

"It's really a future-focused curriculum and making people aware of what we do in schools," says Nan.

"It's not just about fashion or textiles – it's all technology, and just a platform to show it off."

Each year's exhibition begins with a mihi whakatau and whaikōrero (welcome and speech), with responses from participating schools.

Performances from Wellington East Girls' College's kapa haka group and a cultural dance by the Cook Islands visitors followed, and then a korowai (cloak) made by Nan was gifted to schools in the region for their use.

Pride of place this year was a group of handmade tivaevae quilts, only given or displayed on special occasions.

The quilts were made by Year 13 Tereora College students, with designs reflecting their culture and environment.

"I just think if I can have a place for my students to shine, then I'm helping to create the next generation of wearable artists as well."



Nan Walden says WOW is her inspiration.

Curriculum 'hooks'

In terms of pedagogy, the purpose of Kōhara2Shine, and design in general, is to ask the 'why', says Nan.

In this case, the 'why' is exhibiting work at Massey University, a real-world context that taps into project management skills.

"That's the hook. It makes it high stakes, and ākonga are so into it. When I tell them to pack up, they complain. They're so locked into their projects."

Their unit is about using sustainable materials and in Nan's class, students selected a fantasy theme, using mannequins, brown bags and cardboard boxes.

"Some of the students have got those old inner tubes from fabric rolls and they're making an octopus and others have used them to make Maleficent wings. Another has used the box to make this old crinoline from Medieval times.

"Our next unit will be creating a pair of pyjama pants using really standard sewing techniques, elastic hems, zigzag, neatening – the theoretical side of sewing," says Nan.

"This unit is all about really unorthodox materials testing and pushing the boundaries of creativity, thinking outside the box. It's about [letting their imagination] go crazy."

WOW's influence

It's no coincidence Kōhara2Shine coincides with Wellington's World of WearableArts (WOW) show, giving students exposure to next-level wearable design. And this year Nan is a finalist with her mother, with an entry that turns a bra into teacups.

"I really take inspiration from WOW, and the lady who started WOW 30 years ago," she says.

"I just think if I can have a place for my students to shine, then I'm helping to create the next generation of wearable artists as well."

Rarotonga calling



Tauira and Shamara perform a cultural dance at the opening of Kōhara2Shine.

For Tauira and Shamara, travelling from Rarotonga's Tereora College for Kōhara2Shine was a rare opportunity.

"This is my first time in New Zealand, and it's been overwhelming," says Tauira.

"My highlight during the exhibition was the haka, the cultural part felt so incredible."

Both students plan to study at Massey next year, but as well as touring the Massey design campus, they visited Toi Whakaari, Te Papa's Pasifika collections and Whitecliffe art school in Auckland.

Tauira discovered a passion for design in Year 10.

"I like to be creative and inspired by natural things like flowers, and I came to love it so much," she says.

Her tivaevae features tipani flowers and her favourite colour, orange, reflecting "the tropical side of Rarotonga".

It also uses a traditional Cook Islands pattern. "There's a specific design called tikitiki tangata which is an image of people holding hands together, and it stands for unity."

While Tauira hopes to pursue interior design, Shamara has fashion design in her sights.

Sewing has been Shamara's passion since Year 10 and she credits both school and family for developing her skills.

"We had embroidery class, and that's where I learned it from. And also from my grandmother."

Shamara spent eight weeks creating her tivaevae, which centres on the gardenia flower and is finished with hand and machine embroidery.

Her performance costume features "everything from the environment" – tropical colours, shells, seeds, nuts, and the kiri'au (dance skirt) was made with fibre from the hibiscus tree.

The students were accompanied by technology teacher Kirsten Le Bon, a New Zealander teaching in Rarotonga.

Kirsten first met Nan while helping develop the New Zealand technology curriculum, and the trip was generously funded through Nan's Prime Minister's Award winnings.

Kirsten says the visit was a wonderful opportunity.

"It was like gifting [the students] to New Zealand for all the support and connection that they've given me in their country."

Kirsten's own passion for textiles began early. "I was the two-year-old who used to play with fabric at a very young age.

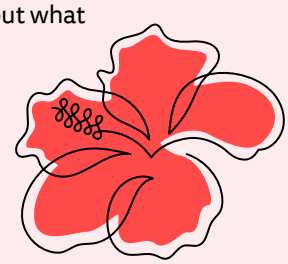
"I was on a sewing machine at six years old. I was on a farm and I didn't want to be a farmer, and I always wanted to make clothes, but my passion is sustainability so I went to India and studied cotton and silk and women's education."

She sees no gender stereotypes in technology education.

"I'm a very staunch advocate for empowerment for people to be able to sustain their own creativity.

"We brought up four shirts of my Year 11 boys that printed their own fabric and made their own tailored shirts."

Gender, materials, style: "It doesn't matter to me as long as you're thinking about what fibres and designs you are creating and it's an expression of a person," says Kirsten.



The Tauranga trust helping rangatahi reconnect with learning

At Tauranga's Youth Central, keeping rangatahi connected to education starts with listening, trust and a belief in their potential. Through strong partnerships with local schools, the Bay of Plenty Youth Development Trust is helping young people build resilience, confidence and a pathway forward.

Every rangatahi has potential, no matter the challenges they may be facing. This is the core message of Tauranga's Youth Central.

Run by the Bay of Plenty Youth Development Trust, its facilitators work alongside schools across Tauranga to keep rangatahi connected to education, training and employment.

"Sometimes all it takes is one person who genuinely believes in them, listens without judgement and creates an environment where they feel safe, valued and supported," says facilitator Henry Fa'afili.

"Supporting rangatahi isn't about having all the answers; it's about showing up consistently, building trust and helping them recognise their own strengths."

The trust, launched in 2017, runs seven programmes for young people: Imagine Believe Achieve; Te Ara Kaha; the Tauranga Boxing Academy; Aiga; Te Hono; Healthy Active Learning kaiako during PLD in Pāpāmoa.

and the newly launched Whakamana Ngā Rangatahi. Up to 350 rangatahi, from age seven to 24, pass through Youth Central each week.

Henry heads the Boxing Academy and Pasifika programme Aiga. He believes young people today are battling with external pressures that prevent personal growth.

"Many rangatahi are doing their best to make positive choices, but they're navigating the challenges that exist in society and often show up at home, such as financial pressure, unstable living situations, or limited access to positive role models," he says.

While the trust's programmes are diverse, two core practices define all: genuine listening and choice.

"Before we can help them make positive changes, they need to feel heard, respected and know that someone believes in them," says Henry.

Discovering their brilliance

Rangatahi must want change to meaningfully engage with it, says Te Ara Kaha programme facilitator Jonah Dobson.

"We show them they are brilliant by presenting opportunities for them to discover it themselves."

As general manager Paul Conrad says, a huge part of the trust's mahi is "the work before the work".

"Learning outcomes cannot be met to the standards expected until the hauora of the rangatahi is stable. It's wraparound support, like providing breakfast clubs and mentorship. Alongside this and the programmes, Youth Central is a hub of socialisation," says Paul.

Not a replacement to school or alternative education, the trust's purpose is to build and support young people so they re-engage with education.

"Because the longer a rangatahi remains in education positively, the greater the outcomes are for that young person," says Paul.

Connecting through culture

The trust is working to weave young people struggling to stay connected to school with the teachers and leaders who are trying to engage them.

Elena Whinney, Pasifika student mentor at Tauranga Boys' College, brings students to Aiga each week.

"It also has a cultural element that brings together cultures from different schools to bond and create new and stronger connections," she shares.

Student Cruz says the most valuable part of Aiga has been meeting new people and learning about newcultures.

"The students have formed bonds with other students from other schools. These bonds have helped broaden their perspectives," adds Elena.

For Tim, it's helped him find confidence in himself, and "be more resilient and proud of my culture".

The role of schools

The biggest challenge for the trust is that, while they can provide rangatahi with support and positive experiences at Youth Central, they often return to negative environments in their everyday life.

"We may not be able to change every circumstance they return to," says Henry, "but we can help them build the tools and mindset to make positive choices and know there are people who genuinely care about their future."

Schools play a massive part in providing positive environments for rangatahi, where they can continue to believe in their own potential.

"A strong pastoral relationship with someone outside of the immediate whānau is one of the greatest indicators of success in youth development," says Jonah.

The trust works closely with Tauranga Intermediate School. About 20 students take part in Te Ara Kaha, the outdoor education programme, each term.

"Growth is not linear. I've worked with a rangatahi for four years now, and his journey on paper would look like a pretty fun rollercoaster."



Bay of Plenty Youth Development Trust staff and Le Va representatives at the annual Fia Fia night celebrating Pasifika culture.

A teacher aide, who specialises in pastoral care, carries the teaching and kaupapa back onto the school grounds.

"This means young people are getting consistent messaging both at school and when they're engaging with us," says Paul.

Ōtūmoetai Intermediate partnered with the trust because they realised that traditional classrooms alone aren't always enough to reach every student, explains principal Blake Carlin.

"We saw an opportunity to connect our young people with positive role models outside the school gates who reinforce the same core values we uphold inside the classroom," he says.

Sense of purpose

Since sending its students to Youth Central, Ōtūmoetai Intermediate has witnessed a noticeable boost in their self-confidence, emotional regulation and self-discipline.

"Students who previously struggled with focus or attendance are turning up with a renewed sense of purpose," says Blake, who also explains that meaningful changes take time.

"We need to give young people the space to absorb the culture, build trust with their mentors, and apply those lessons at their own pace."

It's all about meeting students where they are. Through working with the trust, Blake says he and his teachers are reminded to take a holistic view of student success.

"We're looking beyond academic grades to character, emotional wellbeing and personal growth."

Jonah says that patience is key.

"Growth is not linear. I've worked with a rangatahi for four years now, and his journey on paper would look like a pretty fun rollercoaster.

"All the interventions in the world can't account for what life may throw at these youth. If we're asking them to trust the process, then we must believe in it ourselves."



Left and right: Te Ara Kaha in settings demonstrating Te Taiao and the cultural settings of whenua.



Classroom space at Youth Central, displaying the iconography and values inherent within all programmes.

"Sometimes all it takes is one person who genuinely believes in them, listens without judgement and creates an environment where they feel safe, valued and supported."



Practical advice for schools

Five things the Bay of Plenty Youth Development Trust team would ask school leaders to consider:

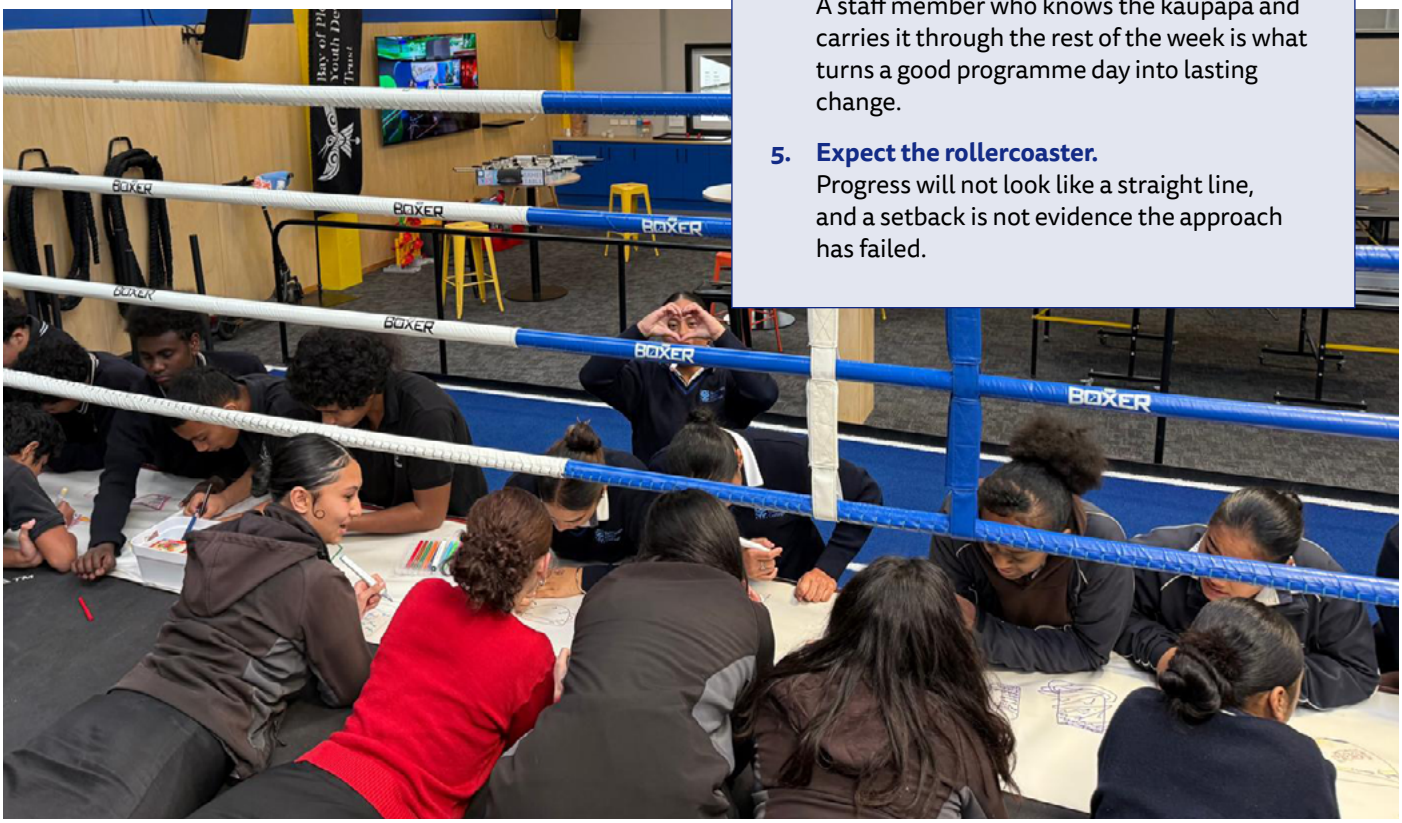
1. **Get senior leadership into classrooms.**
   "Upper management must spend more time in classrooms to understand the need for individual engagement and interventions," says Jonah Dobson.

2. **Stabilise hauora first.**
   Paul suggests breakfast club for tinana, EOTC for whenua, mentoring for hinengaro and wairua – the groundwork that makes learning possible. He challenges schools to identify issues their students are facing and investigate how to address them. For example, if a student is late, instead of punishing the young person, acknowledge that they are still showing up. Investigate the barriers the student faces to getting to school on time and ask how they can be removed.

3. **Don't carry it alone.**
   Know which organisations in your community can take some of the load, before you need them.

4. **Give the partnership an anchor person.**
   A staff member who knows the kaupapa and carries it through the rest of the week is what turns a good programme day into lasting change.

5. **Expect the rollercoaster.**
   Progress will not look like a straight line, and a setback is not evidence the approach has failed.



Aiga students collaborating with students from a range of schools at Youth Central.

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