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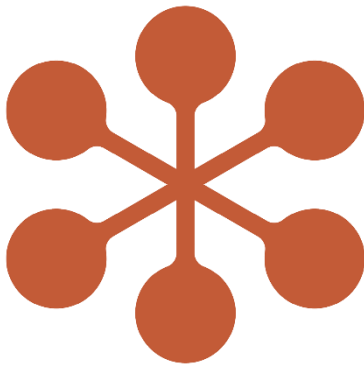
Engaging with tamariki and whānau to inform the Physical Restraint Rules and Guidelines

Prepared for Ministry of Education

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

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Summary

This report presents the voices of 78 tamariki and whānau talking about what helps tamariki feel safe and included at school, and what supports tamariki when they are upset and distressed at school.

The Ministry wanted us to talk with tamariki and whānau across Aotearoa. They especially wanted to hear from Māori and those with disabilities or learning support needs, as they are more likely to experience distress and physical restraint than other school students.

These lived experiences will support strategies and practices that promote well-being, prevent distress, and inform the new Rules and Guidelines on using physical restraint in schools.

What feeling safe and included at school means for tamariki with disabilities

Tamariki and whānau spoke about the importance of feeling welcome and accepted when enrolling at school and kura, and at the start of every year and term. Feeling welcome and accepted fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion for tamariki.

Many tamariki with disabilities, learning support needs, and their whānau talked about feeling unwelcome at school. As a result, they talked about often missing out on learning and not having a strong sense of belonging at school.

Our discussions uncovered that tamariki feel included and have a sense of belonging at school when they are respected and understood and can participate in learning. Tamariki with disabilities and learning support needs feel a sense of belonging when they can celebrate their cultures, talents and differences. They also feel supported when other tamariki know that everyone has their way of learning and engaging with others. Some tamariki and whānau with disabilities and learning support needs reported having fair access to learning resources to participate in learning. However, many more tamariki and whānau reported having inequitable and poor experiences of learning support.

Whānau talked about the need for friendships and supportive social environments are important for tamariki to feel safe and included at school. Tamariki said having friends makes school fun. Tamariki also said they feel more engaged when they learn with their friends.

What helps tamariki with disabilities to feel safe when they experience distress

Whānau told us that they felt schools need a better appreciation of the factors that can lead to distress in the classroom. These include transition, learning, social and health and disability-related stressors.

Tamariki experience distress differently, and different things help tamariki to feel better when they feel distressed. Knowing what helps individual tamaiti in specific situations is therefore essential. Whānau we talked to believed that if distress is not understood and responded to well, this can cause further harm to tamariki. Tamariki and whānau provided many examples of things that can help tamariki when they are feeling distressed. These include:

- kaiako staying calm, providing reassurance and helping tamariki access what they need to feel better
- involving the whole class rather than singling out the tamaiti in distress
- doing different and fun activities like LEGO, playing on the computer, looking at nature outside
- giving tamariki responsibility for something or a helpful task
- giving tamariki an exclusive toy or achievable task
- using fidget toys, squeeze balls or other tactile objects
- having a back rub or a firm hug
- chilling out in the sensory room
- using noise-cancelling headphones
- going outside for fresh air, a run around the field or having a drink of water
- going Perspectives of tamariki and whānau Māori and Pasifika with disabilities

Tamariki Māori told us they felt a sense of belonging at school and kura when their identity as Māori is acknowledged, and they are accepted and included for who they are. They said this helped them feel safe, accepted, understood, respected, confident, and proud to be Māori.

Pasifika tamariki said they felt a sense of belonging at school and kura when they feel safe, respected, confident, and had what they needed to participate and achieve in learning. They said acknowledging and respecting the identity, languages, and cultures of their Pasifika communities is very important for tamariki and whānau to feel safe and included at school and kura.

Updating the Rules and Guidelines on Physical Restraint

Physical restraint has the potential to cause short-term and long-term harm to tamariki being restrained, their whānau, kaiako and school staff doing the restraining, as well as other people witnessing situations involving restraint. The use of physical restraint is therefore regulated and underpinned by policies and guidance to support everyone's safety and well-being.

The Education and Training Act 2020 (the Act), which came into force on 31 July 2020, included changes to the framework for using physical restraint. This was in response to a range of concerns about the framework, including a lack of clarity about what physical restraint is, when and how it can be used, and what types of other physical contact with students is acceptable.

Under the Act, the Ministry of Education (The Ministry) is required to issue new Rules and Guidelines on the use of physical restraint. Following the changes to the Act, the Ministry set up and worked alongside the Physical Restraint Advisory Group (the PRAG) to draft new Rules and Guidelines to minimise the use of physical restraint in registered schools and kura.

The new draft Rules and Guidelines provide an opportunity for the Ministry to support schools and kura to:

- use strategies and practices that actively promote tamariki well-being and prevent distress
- respond to well-being and distress in relational ways that support and maintain the mana of everyone and that minimise the need to use restraining practices.

The changes in the Act require the Secretary for Education to consult with:

- tamariki, in particular, those who are Māori and those with disabilities or learning support needs
- parents, whānau, and caregivers
- national bodies representing the interests of teachers, principals, governing bodies of schools, parents and the disability community.

The Ministry publicly consulted on the draft Rules and Guidelines through an online survey. The Ministry asked Litmus to conduct research with tamariki and their whānau to ensure their voices on the strategies and practices that promote well-being and prevent distress, and inform the new Rules and Guidelines.

The Ministry will consider the findings from this research with feedback from public submissions and other engagement activities to finalise the Rules and Guidelines. The findings will also inform the training and associated resources for schools and other related Ministry work.

Tamariki and whānau views on what helps students feel safe and included at school

The Ministry wanted us to talk with tamariki and whānau across Aotearoa. They especially wanted to hear from Māori and those with disabilities or learning support needs, as they are more likely to experience distress and physical restraint than other school students.

The research received ethics approval from the Education Ethics Committee.

How we invited tamariki and whānau to take part

We connected with tamariki and whānau through the Ministry's Regional Offices, the Intensive Wraparound Service, qualitative recruitment panels and disability and community networks.

During the invitation phase, we discussed the kaupapa of the research with participants. We also asked participants if they had any cultural, communication, or accessibility requirements to enable them to take part. We answered questions, gained consent to participate and organised a time for the interview. We also provided participants with written information about the research and how the Ministry would use the findings.

Participating in the research was voluntary and scheduled to suit participants. Rangatahi aged 16 years and over and whānau gave their consent to participate in an interview. Whānau gave consent for tamariki under 16 years to participate in an interview. However, to respect tamariki and their autonomy, we explained the research and checked that they were comfortable participating.

Our team and approach

The research team included Māori, Pasifika, European, disabled, and researchers under 25 years of age. All researchers are trained in trauma-informed facilitation and collectively have significant experience undertaking research with Māori, Pasifika, and disabled tamariki. Where practical, we paired our younger researchers with participants of the same age and ethnicity.

We invited tamariki and their whānau to share information about their own lives and their experiences, including:

- what feeling safe, calm and included at school means for tamariki
- what helps tamariki to feel safe and calm when they are upset or experience distress at school
- what gets in the way of tamariki feeling safe, calm and included at school.

We carefully considered the harm that the use of physical restraint can cause, therefore, we used open-ended questions to guide the interviews. Open questioning has been shown to

enrich conversations with children on their perspectives. For example, what helps them feel 'included' elicited comments on their environments and supports that helped their learning. The way we conducted the interviews also allowed participants to choose what they talked about. Strategies and prompts to help elicit further conversations were provided during interviews.

We demonstrated attentive listening to establish a relationship of trust. We listened without interrupting and encouraged tamariki and their whānau to tell their stories. Participants could tell us anything important to them, and we explained that they did not have to answer any questions if they didn't want to. We also used verbal and non-verbal prompting when needed to help elicit answers, as well as visual tools to support inclusion.

We conducted individual and group interviews with tamariki. In group interviews, approximately four tamariki participated of a similar age. We conducted mainly individual interviews with whānau. We also conducted some interviews with tamariki and their whānau together. Participants received a voucher of their choice in recognition of their time and contribution to the research. Interviews lasted up to 45 minutes.

Ensuring participants' safety

All participants were welcome to bring a support person to the interview. If tamariki and whānau felt upset when we talked with them, we stopped the interview, took a break, and returned to the discussion later. We also had a support plan in place should participants require support. This included contacting whānau, the Ministry's Regional Offices, the Intensive Wraparound Service, and disability and community networks.

Equitable inclusion was a central consideration

Fieldwork was undertaken between March and May 2022 during the Omicron Peak. Due to the Government's traffic light settings at the time, fieldwork was conducted online, by mobile phone, email and through a combination of these methods.

We were mindful that virtual interviewing could both facilitate or hinder participation. Therefore, we took the lead from participants to maximise inclusion, as participants had often identified or developed solutions that made online platforms more accessible. We conducted interviews by mobile phone for students and whānau who had limited access to technology and connectivity. We ran virtual videos with the camera off (audio only) for participants with poor connectivity. We also used written and email feedback when interviewing nonverbal students.

Keeping participants' personal information secure

To ensure the privacy, security and anonymity of information collected, researchers uploaded all recordings, consent forms and de-identified transcripts in the Azure AD Cloud (OneDrive). Only the research team has access to the data. We will delete all interview notes and recordings to meet the requirements of the Privacy Act 2020 six months after the interviews take place. We have not supplied any participant data to the Ministry.



We talked with 78 tamariki and whānau

We talked with **48** tamariki (25 females and 23 males) aged 12 to 18 years. Nineteen identified as European, 18 were Māori, six were Pasifika, and five were Asian. Twelve were known to have disabilities and learning support needs, and who had experienced significant distress and physical restraint at school. All tamariki had experienced personal distress or seen distress at school.

We also talked with **30** whānau (27 mothers, two fathers and one grandmother) of tamariki with disabilities and learning support needs who had experienced significant distress and physical restraint at school. While most whānau identified as being European, some had Māori tamariki, reflecting the diversity of Māori households in Aotearoa.

Tamariki were enrolled in different education settings across Aotearoa. Most students attended a state school, including a state-integrated school, Kura Kaupapa Māori, a satellite class, and Te Kura. Around three-quarters of these state school students attended a decile 1-5 school. Some children with high support needs were not attending school full time.

Thematic analysis

We used Microsoft Excel to code individual and group interviews. We looked for patterns in the interview data for students with disabilities, social, emotional, behavioural, and learning support needs, including separate themes for Māori and Pasifika participants with disabilities. Māori and Pasifika researchers reviewed these themes to ensure we did not miss or misinterpret any cultural nuances.

We noted emerging themes from individual and group interviews concerning the intersectional experiences of safety and inclusion based on different aspects of students' identities. These identities included disability, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age and class. At the same time, given the focus of our questions, we explored intersecting identities of disability and ethnicity more than others.

We used thematic analysis to identify common themes around experiences and expectations of safety and inclusion for tamariki at school. We also identified themes for factors that cause and alleviate distress for students, attitudes towards and experiences of physical restraint at school, and how effective partnerships between schools and whānau can help keeping students safe. Researchers all contributed to the writing of the report.

The researchers conducted sensemaking workshops with the Ministry to confirm the themes before submitting the final report.

Glossary

Ākonga - student

Hei tiki - pendant representing the human form of one's ancestors

Kaiako - teacher

Kaiāwhina - teacher aide

Kapa haka - Māori performing arts

Karakia - prayer

Kaupapa Māori Kura - Māori-language immersion schools

Kura - school

Manaaki - to support, take care of, give hospitality

Pounamu - jade or greenstone

Powhiri - welcoming ceremony

Rangatahi - teenager/youth

Rumaki Reo Kura - school with total immersion in te reo

Tamaiti - child

Tamariki - children

Taonga - treasure

Te ao Māori - Māori world view

Tikanga - values

Tuakana-teina - older-younger

Waiata - a Māori song

Wairua - spirit

Whānau - family

Whanaungatanga - relationship, kinship

Findings



What feeling safe and included at school means for tamariki with disabilities and learning support needs

When I feel welcome and accepted from day 1

'We talk about it. How do we want our class to be? When you come to class and have a good time, what does that look like? Mana enhancing. Doing it collectively and designing it together from the start.' (Whānau of rangatahi Māori)

Tamariki and whānau spoke about the importance of feeling welcome and accepted when enrolling at school and kura, and at the start of every year and term. They said this helps tamariki and whānau feel like they are part of the school community and that they belong there.

Many tamariki and whānau shared good experiences of feeling welcomed and accepted into their school and kura communities. These schools and kura were "whānau centred" and involved the whole whānau.

However, many tamariki with disabilities, learning support needs, and their whānau reported feeling unwelcome at school. Some talked about situations where they could not bring their whole selves to school, feeling like they had to conform, learn and participate in a certain way. For example, they were unable to finish a task in their own time or were asked to sit quietly when they needed to move and release energy. They said that not feeling welcome often leads to tamariki feeling misunderstood, confused and frustrated and reacting in ways that can be challenging for some school staff.

Whānau reported feeling excluded when mainstream schools suggested another school or specialist school might be better able to support their tamariki. In some cases, whānau said they moved away from a 'mainstream' school to a Kaupapa Māori Kura or a Rudolph Steiner school, which they considered more supportive and nurturing.

Whānau also reported feeling excluded when schools requested that they reduce the hours that tamariki are in the classroom or take an extended break from school. In addition, whānau shared they felt sad and frustrated when their tamariki were excluded from participating in school trips and celebrations because of the extra resources and support required to ensure their safety.

'Be inclusive, so it is not just one person that knows how to communicate—encourage the class to use other accessible ways to communicate.' (Whānau of rangatahi Māori)

Things that help me feel included from day 1

Tamariki and whānau spoke about the importance of whakawhanaungatanga -the process of getting to know whānau, their expectations and what they want for their tamariki. Tamariki and whānau gave the following examples of what makes them feel welcome and accepted at school:

- attending pōwhiri to welcome tamariki, whānau and new school and kura staff
- having a buddy or a tuakana for the teina (i.e. an older tamaiti to orientate the new tamaiti in kura kaupapa)
- receiving briefings on what to expect for the year/term
- attending 'get to know your school community' events for the whole whānau, for example. Easter Galas, picnics, event days
- receiving learning tools and resources
- having accessible classrooms and spaces from day one
- doing fun activities to make friends
- knowing where tamariki will be sitting or picking their seats
- receiving something to commemorate their first day.

When I am respected and understood

'The school is built for children who can go to school, do their reading and writing, and interact with each other without needing help. If you bring someone in who needs a bit—well, a lot—more help than the others to do the basic interactions, they don't know how to deal with it.' (Whānau of tamariki European)

Tamariki with disabilities and learning support needs talked with us about how they viewed and inhabited the world in their own way and that sometimes that is different to how others might. This includes how they interact with others and what kind of environments make them feel comfortable. These tamariki shared what helps them feel respected and able to bring their whole selves to school. Tamariki talked about having a sense of belonging when:

- we celebrate different cultures in class
 - we celebrate our differences, talents and uniqueness
 - I can be proud of who I am
 - school is a safe space
 - I am supported to learn in my own way
 - I feel confident to ask for help when I need it
 - other tamariki understand there are different ways of learning and engaging with others
 - there are different options to communicate with kaiako, kaiāwhina and other tamariki.
-

'We found that letting the children know that he has autism has been huge. We celebrate autism. We're very proud that this is who they are. We've always said in each class, "It's okay to have a discussion and explain what autism looks like and why it looks like this in some people and different in others.' (Whānau of tamariki Asian)

Some tamariki with autism said they felt it was okay (so long as the kaiako checked in with them beforehand) to have a classroom discussion about autism and why it can look and is experienced differently for different people.

Things that help me feel included

'When we start we start in groups, depending on our reo level and how well you can speak, you're stuck with that group, and you go through high school with them and I feel that's cool. I'm not so uncomfortable. **I'm always with the same people. We have a bond.**' (Tamaiti Māori)

All tamariki said they feel included and have a sense of belonging at school when they are respected and understood. Tamariki said they feel respected and understood when kaiako and kaiāwhina:

- know our names and how to pronounce them
 - celebrate our differences and value us and our ethnicities, disabilities, gender identities, sexual orientation, and faiths
 - include me in classroom activities without putting me on the spot
 - spend time making personal connections with us and our whānau
 - listen to what we have to say
 - respect us and have our interests at heart
 - acknowledge our talents and interests
 - ask for and value our opinions and input
 - deal quickly and positively when I am being bullied
-

'**My teachers are my biggest supporters.** I have a weird way of doing work. I have to talk to be able to do my work. If the room is quiet, I can't focus. **They understand my way of learning.**' (Rangatahi Māori)

When I can participate in learning

'She makes me comfortable being who I am. She doesn't judge me. I can be myself around her. Because I'm pretty slow to understand something, she will take her time and won't make me feel like I'm stupid or dumb because I don't get it as fast as everyone else.' (Rangatahi Pasifika)

Tamariki with disabilities and learning support needs and their whānau talked a lot about participating in learning and how this helped them to belong. Many had an experience of missing out on learning and activities. Many whānau said advocating for their tamaiti is a full-time job, and some had to give up paid employment or work-part time to care for their tamariki.

Some tamariki and whānau shared their experiences of accessing the right learning resources to participate in class. However, many more tamariki and whānau said they had inequitable and poor experiences of learning support.

When we asked tamariki what participating in learning looked like for them, they said they want to feel like they can achieve and that no matter what support they might need, it is available.

Things that help me participate in learning

Tamariki shared that they felt supported in their learning when kaiako and kaiāwhina:

- are kind and funny and put me at ease
- take time to explain things or give me extra time to complete activities
- use different ways to help me learn, for example talking, reading, writing, drawing, playing
- help me to catch up when I am behind on school work
- know how I like to take part in the classroom even though I'm shy, for example writing down questions instead of having to speak in front of the class, having the option to do class presentations in front of my kaiako only
- let me learn around things that I'm interested in, for example a movie or technology
- let me have breaks to move around
- praise the things I've done well by giving me social time and rewards.

When I have friends and am part of a group

'During the breaks, my friends and I usually just sit and hang out in the same spot. **It feels like you are part of a group and part of the school.**' (Tamaiti Māori)

We were told that friendships and supportive social environments are important for tamariki to feel safe and included. Tamariki with disabilities and learning support needs told us that they often feel lonely and isolated at school. Many have also experienced bullying at school. The tamariki we spoke with said that having friends at school makes it fun. They shared that they also feel more engaged when they can learn with their friends.

Tamariki spoke about strong friendships and peer support helping them to feel they belong. They said good friends help them undertake tasks they are less confident doing, support them in managing and working through challenging situations, and help reduce their stress.

Tamariki with disabilities said they often find it more challenging to make friends than other groups of tamariki. They, therefore, said they need extra support to build relationships

When schools involve us [whānau] in supporting the learning needs of our tamariki

'For my child to feel calm and safe at school, he needs to have a good relationship with his teacher aide. He needs to feel comfortable that he will be met at school when he arrives, supported during the day, and provided with positive reinforcement. Knowing that someone will help him in his classes with his feeding and toileting is essential.' (Whānau of rangatahi Māori)

Whānau told us they believe open communication between kaiako and whānau ensures schools and kura can create a classroom that will benefit tamariki. Whānau said they have confidence in school leaders and tumuaki who work with them to understand how their tamaiti learns best and what support is required to thrive.

Things that support tamariki learning needs

Whānau also shared that for their tamariki to be able to participate in learning, they need:

- a good relationship with their kaiako and kaiāwhina
- consistent access to kaiāwhina to help them navigate school life and make the most of learning opportunities
- accessible classrooms and school spaces, for example ramps, wheelchair-accessible doors, and adaptive desks close to their friends (not where is convenient to the kaiako). Tamariki said they feel more supported and learn best when classrooms and school spaces are ready before the term begins. Tamariki and whānau said want to be involved in this process
- access to communication tools and equipment, for example sensory toys, adaptive technology, and noise-cancelling headphones. Tamariki said they feel more enabled when they can access these resources without asking the kaiako and kaiāwhina
- free access to sensory rooms to meet their emotional and sensory needs. Tamariki suggested these spaces should be safe and fun, easy to access, and close to their classrooms, so they feel included
- to be included in school trips which are well planned and resourced, safe with full participation from tamariki and whānau.

When we [disabled whānau] feel included in the school community

'You have a generation of parents who have had such a horrible time in their schooling. If their kid struggles - which is more likely because autism is genetic—**it makes it harder for them to go into the school and feel like they can talk up and get things sorted.**' (Whānau of tamaiti)

Many whānau with disabilities reported having had their own negative experiences of school. These whānau told us that schools are not welcoming or accepting of them. They said schools' attitudes and behaviours towards them make them feel excluded from the school community and less confident advocating for their tamariki.

What makes me feel upset or feel distressed at school?

'Be really mindful that **it's not naughty behaviour, it's because they're not coping in the situation they're in.** They're heightened. They're stressed. They're confused. Then afterwards, they're embarrassed. Another thing that teachers do is, "Right, you need to apologise", sometimes they don't even know what they've done wrong at that moment.' (Whānau of tamariki European)

Tamariki with disabilities told us that when they feel upset and distressed, it affects their confidence, self-esteem, learning, and their relationships with kaiako, kaiāwhina and classmates. It also affects the wairua of the classroom. Tamariki are likely to notice when a classmate feels distressed. While older tamariki and rangatahi try to support an upset classmate, others think there is nothing they can do.

Whānau said they think schools need a better appreciation of the factors that can lead to distress in the classroom. The factors whānau and tamariki shared can be grouped into four themes.

1. Disability and health-related stressors:

- school staff lacking an understanding of specific disabilities and health-related needs of each tamariki, including what to do to prevent distress from occurring and how to support them when they feel distressed
- experiencing sensory, emotional, and social overstimulation
- not having enough movement breaks
- feeling unwell, physically uncomfortable or needing changing.

2. Transition and change-related stressors:

- transitioning to a new school or classroom
- experiencing a change in learning routine, for example a timetable change
- having a last-minute change in kaiako or kaiāwhina
- challenges with remote learning (less engaging, issues with technology and connectivity).

3. Learning-related stressors:

- not understanding what kaiako are asking them to do
- feeling pressure to prepare, complete and do well in assignments, tests, and exams
- feeling left behind with their learning
- feeling “put on the spot” and asked to speak up in class or to present something to the class
- feeling “pushed” to finish a task before they are ready.

4. Social-related stressors:

- feeling no one is listening to or believing them
- feeling lonely or excluded from other tamariki during learning and at lunch and intervals
- experiencing bullying on the school grounds away from kaiako, so no one intervenes
- not understanding what they are being told off or punished for.

'To be asked - instead of someone assuming there is a behaviour issue—what is going on? Too much time focussed on behaviour and not enough time spent on talking and understanding and asking, **"What is going on for you?" "How can we help?"**. (Whānau of rangatahi Māori)

What helps me feel safe when I'm feeling upset and distressed?

'The best thing the teachers have done is to have a set space [when my daughter needs quiet] and **have an actual plan in place before something happens**. One of my daughters has taken off and been lost, and they've taken a few hours to find her because there was no set space. That didn't work out at all. They found her three hours later in a cupboard. **Later, they had a sensory bucket when she was in the senior classes, and she had a space in the art cupboard**. It had some blankets on the floor, and she could have the door open or the door shut, and **she knew where to go.**'
(Whānau of tamaiti Māori)

Things that help me

Tamariki reported experiencing distress in a number of different ways, and that different things help them to feel better when they feel distressed. They said knowing what helps individual tamaiti in specific situations is therefore essential.

Whānau said they believed that if distress is not understood and responded to well, this can cause further harm to tamariki. Tamariki and whānau spoke about the following things that help tamariki become less distressed or feel better when they experience distress at school:

- kaiako staying calm, reassuring me, offering me things that we know will help me (not a blanket approach or one size fits all), and letting me access the things that make me feel better
- when the whole class get the chance to have a break for water or fresh air, instead of singling me out when I'm upset
- letting me do different and fun activities like lego, playing on the computer, and looking at nature outside
- giving me responsibility for something or asking me to help with something so I can focus on that
- giving me a toy or task that I know is mine
- using fidget toys, squeeze balls or other tactile objects

- having a back rub or a firm hug
 - chilling out in the sensory room
 - using noise-cancelling headphones
 - going outside for fresh air, a run around the field or having a drink of water
 - going somewhere cosy and quiet for a powernap
 - talking to friends that I trust
 - knowing I can call my whānau if I need to.
-

'Giving her responsibility will help calm her down. She just loves doing anything for anybody. And distraction.' (Whānau of tamaiti European)

Listening and acknowledging me when I feel upset and distressed

'One thing that makes me **feel safe** and calm would probably be **if you have good teachers or people you go to school with**. I have one teacher, and she's constantly checking up on me.' (Rangatahi Pasifika)

Some tamariki shared with us that they felt supported by their kaiako, kaiāwhina and classmates when they felt upset and distressed at school.

However, other tamariki said they felt blamed, punished, and scared when they were upset or distressed at school. Tamariki felt this way when kaiako focused on the actions of the tamaiti without considering environmental factors and other contributing stressors. For example, in cases where tamariki take medication, it became easy for kaiako to assume they had missed a dose, or the dose was insufficient. Additionally, whānau reported being made to feel they were doing something wrong if their tamaiti had a bad day.

Tamariki shared with us that they feel confident when kaiako and kaiāwhina acknowledge when they are upset or distressed and assure them that they will be okay. Likewise, both tamariki and whānau spoke of the importance of reassurance and listening to their needs when they are feeling upset and distressed.

Tamariki said it is easier for them to ask for what they need to feel better when school staff have already set up different ways to communicate with them. For example, using a colour card system, signs, or visual pictures gives tamariki options to express how they feel and what they need when they are distressed. Another tool that worked to mediate communication between tamariki and kaiako includes using a box where students can discretely put in their written worries or concerns.

Tamariki also spoke of the importance of feeling empowered to make their own decisions when upset or experiencing distress—for example, taking their fidget toy out of their bag or going to the sensory room without asking.

In addition, tamariki described using a 'traffic light' system to help them express different emotions quickly. For example, one tamaiti spoke about being able to identify if they felt calm (green) or anxious and upset (orange and red). The kaiako could then implement a pre-determined plan of what would help, such as going for a drink of water or getting fresh air.

'What was good in primary school was **they used a coding** where he could say, "I'm at green" or, "I feel like I'm orange, I need to calm down". **So they know either take him outside or get water.** He still does that at high school.' (Whānau of rangatahi Pasifika)

We [whānau] want to be involved in supporting our tamariki

'We have that dialogue already with the teacher and the teacher aides. They know that they can just come to us or text us or call us at any point to discuss the situation. **We come up with a plan together.** If it goes through the proper channels before it gets to us, we're losing so much time developing a solution for everybody. So I've always made a point of getting to know the teacher aides and the teachers more personally so that there's a **comfort level of them coming to us directly about anything.**' (Whānau of tamaiti Asian)

Whānau spoke about wanting strong partnerships with the schools so they could work together to identify, minimise and respond appropriately when their tamariki feel upset and distressed. Whānau believe they have valuable insights into the needs of their tamariki and they spoke about wanting to assist kaiako and kaiāwhina so they are better equipped to create and support a classroom environment where their tamariki will flourish.

Whānau we spoke with believed that when strong partnerships between the school and them have been developed, communication flows easier. Whānau reported they often hear about distress incidents too long after the event or from their tamaiti, resulting in their inability to ensure their well-being when they return home from school. Whānau also did not think schools always appreciate or listen to their input. They also reported schools blaming them when their tamariki has had a challenging day or is distressed.

Some whānau did not think their school is impartial and fair when completing incident reports. They perceived an imbalance of power because schools hold the resources, including confidence, knowledge and time. As a result, whānau said they feel pressure to accept findings in incident reports.

Importantly, whānau spoke about how things that help destress or de-escalate a situation can look different for each tamaiti. They said that, when kaiako know what helps tamariki, what triggers distress and the context in which it occurs, they can better support them. Whānau believed they could help paint the picture of specific factors that cause and reduce distress and tools for effective de-escalation, however, for tamariki with autism, these tools and techniques can change frequently.

Whānau told us that a strong partnership with the school and kaiako means:

- working together to understand the specific needs of their tamaiti and what helps them to learn best
 - being involved early on and co-creating a support plan suited to their tamaiti
 - feeling confident to call or talk to the school and kaiako with any concerns or questions
 - schools telling them if their tamaiti has had a bad day and asking for any contextual information when writing reports about escalating distress
 - having confidence that they will be alerted if an event occurs so they can offer advice or come to the school if needed.
-

'It's all about planning. So having a very clear plan before anything happens, you know, "When you feel this way, try this". Maybe go and find a squeeze ball or something like that. "I can see you're getting agitated; let's find your squeeze ball." **Have a very clear plan about what you do to de-escalate because the kids don't want to be like that.**' (Whānau of tamaiti Māori)

We [whānau] think schools need more resources and training to support tamariki

'Having educated teachers aware of how things like ADHD and ODD and Autism impact the kids and what it looks like means they will have empathy. Training will also give them the tools to deal with that.' (Whānau of tamaiti European)

While whānau acknowledged it is not always possible for kaiako to recognise factors that may trigger their tamaiti to feel upset and distressed if classrooms are large, they think schools need access to training and support to be able to identify early and respond to stress factors.

According to whānau, kaiako workloads, tamariki-kaiako ratio, and lack of resources for kaiāwhina contribute to schools' inability to support tamariki effectively when they feel upset and distressed. Those whānau whose tamariki are at a school with smaller classrooms believed this can make a difference in the level of support they receive.

Whānau of neurodiverse tamariki also said a lack of training for kaiako and kaiāwhina to support neurodiverse learners means that staff cannot effectively support their tamaiti when they're upset and experience distress at school. Additionally, they observed that, when kaiako do not understand that some conditions differ from tamaiti to tamaiti, they are not equipped to notice and respond to early signs of distress.

'The meds are not a magical thing that fixes everything. They still need help. "Oh well, his meds must need reviewing because he's struggling", and actually, sometimes it's the school and what they're doing or the level of the school work or something, but they like to just go, **"Oh okay, he's on medication, oh well we need the medication fixed", rather than looking at themselves.'** (Whānau of tamaiti European)

Physical restraint in schools has a place but must be done in partnership with whānau

Tamariki and whānau considered the physical and emotional safety of tamariki in schools and kura as paramount. Most tamariki and whānau thought that physically restraining tamariki has a place in schools if there is imminent harm and so long as it happens with the utmost care and dignity.

Some whānau did not think the school was proactive or comfortable physically restraining their tamariki when they thought their tamariki was in danger. Whānau thought this was due to school staff lacking confidence and unclear policies and procedures around physical restraint.

Whānau expressed the importance of schools seeking guidance from them on how to physically restrain their tamariki safely by using similar and familiar physical restraints they use at home. For example, one whānau shared that their tamariki felt safe when given a firm and tight hug when they were feeling distressed.

'What he needed was a hug, a firm hug, and you could feel his body relax, which would de-escalate him. He would still cry, but the violence would de-escalate the longer somebody held him. But they weren't allowed to do that. That was deemed restraint.' (Whānau of tamaiti Māori)

Some whānau thought the use of physical restraint in schools was happening too frequently. They also spoke about schools using physical restraint punitively, controlling movement (for example putting breaks on a wheelchair), or performing physical restraint unsafely. They talked about tamariki with disabilities having diverse support needs, including aversions to being touched. Whānau said these specific needs must be included when developing the Guidelines and Rules.

'I would like to see some record of when my child has a meltdown, or whether a kid is having some sort of meltdown or upset, whether they want to be held. You

know, some kids just like to be held close. Other kids can't stand being touched.' (Whānau of rangatahi European)

Some whānau said misuse of physical restraint causes harm and further distress for their tamariki, particularly if used regularly or if they have never been restrained.

Whānau noted that poor communication between schools and whānau about an incident of physical restraint leads to distrust and whānau not feeling included or having a sense of belonging at the school. Some whānau spoke of hearing from their tamariki that they had been physically restrained or learning of the physical restraint some time after the event. The poor communication was an example of a lack of whānau-school solid partnership and made them feel unwelcome and undervalued.

'The staff just didn't know how to de-escalate things, and they didn't know how to—they didn't know enough about autism spectrum to know that he couldn't do the things they were asking of him. So, it was just putting this impossible pressure upon him. To the point where he'd absolutely explode, and then restraint was required.' (Whānau of tamaiti Māori)

Perspectives from tamariki and whānau Māori and Pasifika

Tamariki and whānau Māori and Pasifika have made significant contributions to the earlier sections of this report from their perspectives of having a disability and learning support needs. Tamariki and whānau Māori and Pasifika also gave the following important feedback from their perspectives and experiences as Māori and Pasifika.

Being Māori

'They have a rule that you can **wear cultural things in class**. We have an English and a Māori person in the front office, we have Māori teachers and English teachers and lots of different teachers from different cultures. **They really understand people from different cultures. They show cultures, and they don't hide it away.**' (Rangatahi Māori)

Tamariki Māori reported having a sense of belonging at school and kura when their identity as Māori is acknowledged, and they are accepted and included as they are. They said this helps them feel safe, accepted, understood, respected, confident, and proud to be Māori. They added that, when their learning and support needs are met and reflect their identity, language, and culture, they feel empowered and able to thrive. To achieve this, tamariki said it was crucial that they have input into how the school and classroom is run.

'Being able to go to school, knowing that no one is going to be negative towards you, **knowing that no one's going to target you** for things that are just about you. And to feel calm, knowing that.'

Tamariki Māori spoke about the importance of having kaiako Māori in schools. Not only were kaiako Māori viewed as role models for tamariki in non-Māori schools, but there was also an immediate connection as Māori. Kaiako Māori are also nurturing and helpful with learning and meeting the broader needs of tamariki.

'Kapa Haka lets me express myself. It lets people know that I'm not just a basic white girl.' (Rangatahi Māori)

Tamariki Māori also said they felt included when Māori and non-Māori kaiako set clear expectations and embedded a culture of embracing diversity and inclusion and zero tolerance for racism. Tamariki Māori told us that a sense and belonging and inclusion at school means:

- learning and doing Māori practices and tikanga such as kapa haka, waiata, powhiri, karakia
 - being encouraged and supported to learn and korero in te reo Māori
 - seeing my culture celebrated
 - being allowed to wear taonga Māori for example pounamu or hei tiki.
-

'When children have input into the classroom structure, it ensures it is mana enhancing, and helps them feel safe and included.' (Whānau of rangatahi Māori)

Whānau Māori told us they feel a sense of belonging and inclusion at school through:

- knowing and having input into the plans for their tamariki learning
- receiving good communication from the school about the progress of their tamaiti
- being asked advice for how to best support their tamaiti.

Tamariki who attend kura spoke positively about belonging

Tamariki (both Māori and Pasifika) who attend a Kaupapa Māori Kura or a Rumaki Reo kura spoke positively about their sense of belonging and inclusion. They noted that these kura offer a holistic approach to learning and well-being. They said being immersed in tikanga Māori and te ao Māori helps tamariki feel grounded and connected to their language, knowledge and culture.

'Being at a Māori kura definitely helps a lot because you're surrounded with kids that are your nationality, **they get you**. It was my first week at kura, and I noticed how big it is, like a whānau. **We call them matua and whaea; it's a very whānau environment**, and I like that. Going over to the mainstream, I feel very different, because they give us stares even though we're the same school, it's just different' (Rangatahi Māori)

Tamariki noted that in some kura, classroom sizes are smaller and kaiako are able to adjust to the needs of each tamaiti. Some tamariki said they enjoy the small class sizes as they are more fun and kaiako can spend more time with them.

'He just like makes me **feel included** and just having fun with everyone in class. We have a small class which means we get a lot of attention (interaction). **It is a beautiful environment to be Māori in**, and they do teach a lot of waiata.' (Rangatahi Māori)

Tamariki and whānau spoke about a tikanga “tuakana-teina” used in Kaupapa Māori kura. This is where older tamariki orientate, mentor and support newer tamariki into the Kura. This fosters whanaungatanga, belonging and inclusion and a safety net for newcomers.

'There are always eyes on him. So, whether it's one of the older kids or one of the other teachers that's sitting by the door, they'll turn and make sure that they can see him.' (Whānau of tamariki Māori)

Whānau spoke of how the support needs of tamariki improved when they came to Kaupapa Māori kura from mainstream schools. They observed that Kaupapa Māori kura operate in a holistic way where all tamariki and kaiako offer manaaki and take responsibility for tamariki. Whānau also liked that Kaupapa Maori kura offers a level of flexibility in adapting to the needs of the tamariki rather than the other way around.

Being Pasifika

'People that look like me make me feel included. I went from a white intermediate. Now there are a lot more islanders at my college, and that **makes me feel included because they look like me.**' (Rangatahi Pasifika)

Pasifika tamariki told us they feel a sense of belonging at school and kura when they are safe, respected, confident and empowered to participate and achieve in learning. Therefore, they said it is essential for Pasifika tamariki and whānau that their school or kura respects, celebrates, and embraces their Pasifika identities, languages and cultures.

Tamariki and whānau stressed that schools and kura that instil important Pasifika concepts such as whānau, religion, leadership and service into school and kura life help Pasifika tamariki and whānau feel included and accepted.

Other enablers of inclusion in school and kura mentioned by Pasifika tamariki and whānau included:

- having the familiarity of being with other Pasifika and Māori students
 - having Pasifika and Māori kaiako who they could talk with and relate to
 - schools and kura having a culture of no tolerance for racism and discrimination.
-

'I have one teacher, and I feel like school is a safe place for me **because she always makes me feel like I'm heard. She's constantly checking up on me and making sure I'm alright.**' (Rangatahi Pasifika)

Pasifika whānau also shared the importance of having learning support services that are individualised and responsive to the needs of tamariki and whānau. Those who said this felt support services were too generic and mainstream.

Conclusion

This research aimed to hear from tamariki and whānau about what helps tamariki feel safe and included at school, what supports tamariki when they are upset and distressed at school, and what can get in the way of this. These lived experiences will support strategies and practices that promote well-being, prevent distress, and inform the new Rules and Guidelines on using physical restraint in schools.

Tamariki reported feeling a sense of belonging and inclusion at school when they can bring their whole selves to school. This includes being welcome, respected and understood, being enabled to participate in learning, and have friends. Whānau reporting feeling a sense of belonging and inclusion in the school community when their tamariki are happy, belong and are included at school.

Tamariki and whānau offered a number of things that can help tamariki when they are feeling upset and distressed. Importantly tamariki want to be acknowledged and listened to and whānau want to be involved when their tamariki are feeling upset and distressed.

Tamariki and whānau considered the physical and emotional safety of tamariki in schools and kura as paramount. Most tamariki and whānau thought that physically restraining tamariki has a place in schools if there is imminent harm and so long as it happens with the utmost care and dignity.

Tamariki and whānau welcomed the opportunity to participate in this research and be heard. We are thankful for everyone who took the time to share their experiences and views with us.

Appendices



Table 1: Participation by ethnicity

We purposefully recruited more Māori children and young people than the proportion of Māori enrolled in education. We wanted to hear from Māori children and young people because they experience more physical restraint than children of other ethnicities at school.

| Ethnicity | Child | Adult |
|-----------|-------|-------|
| European | 19 | 22 |
| Māori | 18 | 4 |
| Pasifika | 6 | 2 |
| Asian | 5 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 48 | 30 |

Table 2: Participation by sex

We spoke with a roughly even number of female and male children. We did not explicitly gather gender identities. We mainly spoke with female whānau members, recognising that women tend to be in caring roles.

| Sex | Child | Parent |
|--------|-------|--------|
| Female | 25 | 27 |
| Male | 23 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 48 | 30 |

Table 3: Participation by the Ministry of Education area

| Ministry of Education areas | Number of children and young people | Number of parents, caregivers, family members |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Tai Tokerau | - | 2 |
| Auckland | 19 | 14 |
| Waikato | 4 | - |
| Bay of Plenty | 2 | 3 |
| Hawkes Bay Tairāwhiti | 4 | - |
| Taranaki, Whanganui, Manawatu | 1 | 2 |
| Wellington | 7 | 5 |
| Nelson, Marlborough, West Coast | 1 | 2 |
| Canterbury, Chatham Islands | 7 | 2 |
| Otago, Southland | 3 | - |
| Unknown | - | - |
| TOTAL | 48 | 30 |